



St Albans Shirley FC – Submission in Support of the Capital Programme Sports Field Network Plan for Ōtautahi Christchurch

SASFC members, coaches and committee stand firmly behind Mainland Football in urging Christchurch City Council to reconsider the current proposed investment timeframe within the 2024-34 Long Term Plan (LTP) to bring forward the majority of this much-needed capital investment as a matter of priority.

We as a club recognise our city has undergone a significant transformation since the 2011 Canterbury earthquakes and commend Council on the work which has been completed at our home ground at St Albans Park, providing us with a quality sand-based, natural turf playing surface.

However, our experience has been one of restricting use of the park, rather than satisfying the considerable (and growing) demand from local community teams as well as our own coaches and players to use it. We have come to appreciate that natural sand-based turf will not tolerate repeated use during the winter months, so we have been forced to accept that, in order to preserve the playing surface for an entire season, we must limit use of the turf to tolerable levels. In effect, this means denying use to a growing number of players. This is a serious issue for us when looking to satisfy the burgeoning demand for participation in winter season football.

The current Sports Field Network across the city is under significant strain and this has been worsening steadily for a number of years. Our sport was growing significantly even before the impact of the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup and we anticipate participation rates will continue to expand in the short-to-medium term. Crucially, this growth will be thwarted unless we are able to properly accommodate demand for quality playing surfaces. In 2024, our club is already beyond capacity in this respect, even as Elmwood Park returns online.

The obvious solution is the provision of much more resilient, floodlit all-weather turf across the city. SASFC are fortunate to have English Park on our doorstep, which we have been able to secure on Friday afternoons for our First Kicks and Fun Football (under-5 to under-8) programmes. These programmes have delivered consistent, high quality results and an extremely enthusiastic membership. As a result however, they have been consistently over-subscribed at every enrolment since 2021. Crucially, we are unable to expand the programme due to the massive demand for the all-weather, floodlit pitch on English Park from other clubs across the city, largely because it is the only all-weather, floodlit pitch in the city of Christchurch. It is effectively impossible to meet this demand if we are to maintain the standards that have been key to its success.

Of course, we strongly support the \$85.6m set out in the LTP for the ***Sports Field Network Plan for Ōtautahi Christchurch***, in so far as this includes the establishment of up to 12 floodlit all-weather turfs, supported by improved and well-maintained grass playing fields. This is precisely what the sport needs right now. However we were disappointed to learn that this investment is largely phased towards the back-end of the LTP 10-year period. We submit that this would be ten years too late for many young participants and could seriously impact uptake in the sport.

SASFC supports Mainland Football in urging Council to recognize the pressing need to prioritise the capital investment in the Sports Field Network Plan within the Long Term Plan.

Sincerely,

Matt Holmes

General Manager cc SASFC Committee

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ST ALBANS SHIRLEY FC