

World Cup Winning 'Keeper Banks on Stoke's New £700,000 3G Pitch Being a Success

Tuesday 15 July, 2014

Gordon Banks, England's 1966 World Cup winning goalkeeper, officially opened a new state-of-the-art £704,633 third-generation (3G) artificial grass pitch (AGP) in Stoke-on-Trent on Saturday, thanks to a £366,633 grant from the Premier League & The FA Facilities Fund, which provides grants towards developing new or refurbished grassroots football facilities.

The project, which also includes the refurbishment of two smaller AGPs, is based at Dimensions Leisure Centre, Burslem. The pitches there can cater for five-a-side, seven-a-side, nine-a-side and 11-a-side games and will be used extensively by the public and various community groups, like StreetGames Stoke-on-Trent, a national charity dedicated to developing sport in disadvantaged communities.

Also, Staffordshire University will use the site for league matches, while a number of existing partnerships with local leagues – Staffordshire County Minor Sunday Youth League, Milton Youth League and North Staffs Junior Youth League – will be strengthened as a result of the new surface.

The council worked in partnership with the Staffordshire FA to secure a £366,633 grant from the Premier League & The FA Facilities Fund. Additional funding came from Sport England's Improvement Fund which provided £300,000 towards the project.

Funded by the Premier League, The FA, and the Government, via Sport England, the Premier League and The FA Facilities Fund is delivered by the Football Foundation, the country's largest sports charity. Since it was launched in 2000, the Foundation has awarded around 12,000 grants worth more than £490m towards improving grassroots sport, which it has used to attract additional partnership funding of over £651m – over £1bn of investment into the grassroots game.

Since 2000 the Football Foundation Funding Partners' investment has provided 77 grants worth £11.3m towards grassroots sports projects worth over £18m across the whole of Staffordshire.

By providing more high-quality facilities, coupled with coaching at the appropriate age group, the Premier League & The FA Facilities Fund aims to improve the experience for regular players as well as attracting new players to the game.

Many of the new state-of-the-art facilities will serve to strengthen the connection between professional football clubs and their local communities, particularly in the most deprived areas of the country, through the professional clubs' community trusts' outreach work.

Gordon Banks, who won 73 caps for England and made nearly 200 appearances for Stoke City, said: "As someone who was fortunate enough to spend a large part of my playing career in Stoke-on-Trent, I know just how important football is to the people of the city. It's very pleasing to see the council and its partners investing in new facilities like this, which are certainly a world apart from the pitches I grew up playing on.

"Having top class facilities like this can only encourage more people to play football and sport and enjoy all the associated health benefits that come with it. I am sure this pitch will be very well used for years to come."

Councillor Adrian Knapper, cabinet member for health and wellbeing, said: "As a council, we are committed to encouraging and helping everyone to become more physically active and lead healthy lifestyles. Having top-class facilities in the city which make people want to get involved in sport and enjoy all the associated benefits is a big part of that and these pitches at Dimensions will do just that."

Sport England Property Director, Charles Johnston, said: "We know people have a better experience of sport when they have good facilities to play on. Our investment in the artificial grass pitch at the Dimensions will have a big impact on sport in the local community."

Paul Thorogood, Chief Executive of the Football Foundation, added: "The Football Foundation is responsible for managing and delivering the Premier League & The FA Facilities Fund, which is funded by the Premier League, The FA and the Government, via Sport England. These outstanding 3G AGPs are an example of the positive impact that this funding is having on our grassroots game. First-class

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facilities like this are crucial to creating more opportunities for local people to enjoy regular sport.

“Aided by the Staffordshire FA, Stoke-on-Trent City Council deserves huge credit for taking a vision and turning it into a reality, using funding provided by the Premier League & The FA Facilities Fund. Sport has the power to make a positive impact on the health of communities and this wonderful new facility will improve the sporting experience of local people and encourage them to be more active.”

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