

PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE

Date: Monday, 3 July 2023

Title: West Witney Cricket Rental Agreement

Contact Officer: Operations Manager - Angus Whitburn

Background

Witney Swifts Cricket Club have approached the council requesting a rental agreement on the ground they use at West Witney. They would like a rental agreement that covers the hire of the cricket square and outfield for the cricket season running from the start of May to the end of September.

The club have asked that the rental agreement makes the Swifts responsible for all the maintenance and match preparation of the cricket square and the Council remains responsible for the outfield.

Current Situation

The swifts play all their home cricket games and practice sessions at West Witney Sports Ground between the start of May and the end of September each year. The council maintains this ground and manages all match preparation except for heavy rolling and post-match wicket repairs.

Cricket Square Maintenance

The maintenance of the cricket square can be broken up into two areas, match preparations and cricket square maintenance. The Swifts have requested that they take on all the associated maintenance. At this current time, the swifts would have to procure the equipment to be able to undertake this work, but they have got the members in their club to undertake the actual maintenance.

Match preparations

- Mowing to match height
- Heavy rolling
- Line marking
- Post-match repairs

Cricket square maintenance

- Mowing
- Scarification

- Watering
- Light aeration
- Deep aeration
- Pesticide application
- Postseason renovations

Witney Swifts have recently become concerned that the match preparations from the council are not to the required standard of the league. Although the council are meeting and adhering to the league requirements the club is still concerned the standard could affect their promotion. This is the main reason for their request to take over all maintenance of the cricket square. Where realistic improvements can be identified, these have been implemented, such as supporting Swifts in purchasing a boundary rope and holding trolley and supplying material and equipment for post-match repairs.

West Witney Cricket Square Usage

The cricket square at West Witney currently contains 10 creases but can be made up to hold up to 13. This is enough to maintain a second club on the ground or more teams from Swifts and other clubs. It would be hard to manage this extra space if the square was handed over to the Swifts in a rental agreement.

With the recent report findings from the cricket report from the Independent Commission for Equity in Cricket (ICEC) sexism and elitism, there could, in the near future become a higher demand for cricket at multiple levels. If this demand is required in witney from a new Women's Club, school bookings or more amateur teams being created, there could very well be the need for a bookable facility. Please note the report on the Leys pitches in respect of the cricket wicket there.

A rental agreement would enable swifts to apply for grant funding as they would have security over the tenure. However, it's not sure at this present time what funding is available to help Swifts. For example, the ECB county grants fund is only there to create welcoming environments, enhance playing opportunities for women, girls and disabled cricket and tackle climate change. The rent would only cover the playing ground, with the swifts holding a rental agreement over the ground its uncertain at this present time if this could lock the council out of potential grant money for improvements to the clubhouse and ground.

Environmental impact

Having declared a Climate Change Emergency at its Council meeting on 26 June 2019 – with this in mind Councillors should have due regard to the environmental impact of any decisions they make with regard to its facilities and services it operates.

Risk

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

Handing over an area of vital recreation land to an external user could be problematic as it has no control over.

A second risk would be in the actual maintenance of the square, if incorrect techniques are used it could risk the square for the Swifts and other users and then likely be the responsibility of the council to rectify. The Council has trained operatives with dedicated time to carry out the maintenance, whereas the club do not at the present time.

Although only used by one club, the cricket square at West Witney is bookable by other teams. In handing over the square in a rental agreement to Witney Swifts the council may be removing the facility to other users and reduce the council bookable facilities.

Financial implications

Described here or as stated in the report above.

- The maintenance of the outfield and cricket square cost the council around £2980.75 each season. The income received by the council from Swifts each season is around £1727.00 meaning a total subsidised cost to play of £1253.75. The subsidised cost wouldn't be so high if there were more bookings, or a second club was using the ground.
- To maintain just the outfield during the cricket season cost the council £510.00.
- The cricket hire cost per session is £78.50 (inc VAT).

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and consider the following:

1. Deferring the request for a rental agreement until the 2024 season so it can be fully explored by officers and,
2. Offering responsibility for match preparation to Witney Swifts under a user agreement for the remainder of the 2023 season with a reduced hire fee, but all other maintenance will still be the responsibility of the Witney Town Council and,
3. Reducing the hire fee for the remainder of the 2024 season for Witney Swifts in line with the calculation of the match preparation tasks and,
4. Delegating to officers to negotiate with Swifts on the detail of a potential rental agreement for the 2024 season.