

PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE

Date: Monday, 13 May 2024

Title: Sports Pitches

Contact Officer: Operations Manager - Angus Whitburn

Background

Councillors agreed at the parks and recreation meeting on the 4 March 2024 to defer the decision of issuing a lease agreement to Witney Swifts until the spring of 2025. At that same meeting, officers recommended issuing Witney Swifts with a user agreement that would enable them to take over the match preparation works of the cricket square.

Current Situation

Witney Swifts User Agreement

Currently, the full maintenance schedule including match preparation is completed by Witney Town Council. The only tasks Witney Swifts complete are rolling during innings, surface debris removal and outfield inspections.

The proposed user agreement would make Witney Swifts responsible for the entirety of the match preparation excluding the outfield mowing. Witney Town Council would still remain responsible for the post-season renovation, winter maintenance and pre-season prep. This would mean the council could ensure that the square is being sufficiently maintained for other users.

A user agreement has been discussed with Witney Swifts as a way for them to improve the quality of the match preparation required for their league position, help them evolve as a club and offer assurances their home is West Witney Sports Ground.

Grant funding for a pedestrian mower

The Club's current pedestrian mower is not of the standard required for wicket preparation. The cut height required cannot be achieved with their current machine and the quality of the cut could potentially be an issue for the overall condition of the square, tearing the leaf of the grass instead of cutting. However, they have expressed they are happy to use the current mower for match preparation, so the issuing of a user agreement doesn't hang in the balance or procuring a new pedestrian mower for the club.

The club have explored purchasing a higher-spec pedestrian mower however, uncertainties over guarantees that they would be left responsible for the square maintenance meant they didn't purchase it. The purpose of issuing Witney Swifts with a user agreement is to provide those certainties to the club. The club have also asked if the council can help fund the purchase of a higher-spec pedestrian mower.

With issuing a user agreement a reduction in match costs would be necessary, this reduction in cost could mean that Swifts are financially more capable of producing a new mower without assistance from the council.

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.

The risks posed by issuing a user agreement as opposed to a lease are much fewer. The user agreement would still enable other clubs to book the square, one already doing that for the 2024 season and Witney Town Council can still handle the wicket preparation for them. Issues could still be present in overall cricket square damage from poor practices but providing Witney Town Council still carries the post-season renovation, winter maintenance and pre-season prep these risks are low. The agreement will also include minimum standards, season dates, availability for other clubs, storage of equipment etc.

Financial implications

Described here or as stated in the report above.

- The cost to book the cricket square for a single game is £70.00 for the 2024 season, if the Council agree to Swifts taking over match preparation works it recommends this is lowered to £45.50 per match. This is a reduction of 35% which is an estimated percentage cost of the works Witney Town Council will not have to carry out.
- The club have received a singular quote for a greens mower which is £2150.00 ex VAT, however, this is only for a refurbished model.

Having already set its annual budget, the Council does not have any maintenance budgets to support the purchase of a green's mower for the club, therefore Officers would suggest this would need to be met from the grant funding budget 4100/407 in the usual way.

Recommendations

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

1. Delegate to officers to agree on a user agreement with Witney Swifts based on the report above for the 2024 season to be reviewed prior to the 2025 season.
2. Review the cost per match, chargeable to Witney Swifts for the 2024 season.
3. Consider the request from Witney Swifts for Witney Town Council to help fund a new pedestrian mower suitable for Cricket Square maintenance and, if agreeable, request a grant application form to be submitted to the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee.