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**Agenda Item:** Sports Pitch Update

**Meeting Date:** Monday, 9 September 2024

**Contact Officer:** Deputy Town Clerk

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The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update regarding the Council's current sports pitches and administration of their bookings.

### **Background**

#### Sports Pitch Maintenance

Annual maintenance for the Council's sports pitches took place in May with pitches being top-dressed and overseeded by the in-house team. The cricket pitch at West Witney Sports Ground received seven passes of seeding to ensure the best quality finish possible (traditionally only three take place).

STRI Group (formerly the Sports Turf Research Institute) attended all sites in August to provide an annual assessment. The report from this has yet to be received, but verbal indication was provided that all field pitches continue to improve. The only area where further attention is needed is at the Leys Bowls Green – additional maintenance funds have been allocated to address these issues which were outlined in correspondence to the Council earlier this summer (Appendix A).

#### Overlap of Cricket & Football Season

Historically, the local football season runs from 1<sup>st</sup> September – 30<sup>th</sup> April and the cricket season from 1<sup>st</sup> May – 31<sup>st</sup> August. However, since 2022 the cricket league dictate that Witney Swifts are now required to play home games on the first Saturday in September.

In 2023, the issue caused a problem for the football teams and this year it has for Witney Swifts. As the Council has resolved to enter into a pitch maintenance agreement with Witney Swifts regarding the West Witney cricket wicket, officers will work with the Club to ensure there is a resolution ahead of next September on this issue.

#### Online Bookings System

Point EE10 of the adopted WTC Open Spaces Strategy states the Council will, "*Undertake a review of current sports and facility booking systems used and finesses to benefit all parties.*"

The move to an online bookings system was first discussed by the Council at the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee on 18<sup>th</sup> July 2022 (minute no. F394 refers). At the time

there was agreement in principle to go ahead but the options were deemed cost-prohibitive for such a small part of the Council's service, and the Council would be looking for a more integrated IT service in the future.

At this Committee on 13<sup>th</sup> May 2024, it was agreed that the Town Clerk reviewed the administrative and maintenance resources required as a result of taking on these additional facilities, including a new bookings system [including for online bookings].

## Current Situation

Officers have been tasked with researching an online booking system provider, compiling a brief and gaining quotes to proceed.

An online bookings system would provide a transparent and simple way for hirers to book and increase efficiencies in the Council's bookings processes.

The list below outlines the clubs the Council currently provides pitches for and the number of teams they have for information.

Club	Number of Teams
FC Mills	2
Spartan Rangers FC	3
Tower Hill FC	20-25
Witney Royals FC	2-3
Witney Vikings FC	40
<u>Total: 5</u>	<u>67-73</u>

Although the Council currently only has four bookable sites, the addition of two further sites is expected over the next year, with Deer park pitches imminently for training. The long awaited 3G pitch is also likely to come under town council ownership.

Resource	Facilities
Burwell Recreation Ground	Changing Rooms 8 Bookable Pitches (not playable at once) Burwell (Events)
Deer Park Recreation Ground	2 Bookable Pitches MUGA/MUSA
King George's Recreation Ground	1 Bookable Pitch
Leys Recreation Ground	Changing Rooms*** 5 Bookable Pitches 1 Bookable Cricket Pitch Leys (Events)
West Witney Sports Ground	Changing Rooms (booked via WWS&SC) 8 Bookable Football Pitches 1 Bookable Cricket Pitch (Swifts use) West Witney (Events)
Windrush Place Recreation Ground	Sports Pavilion Changing Rooms ? Bookable Football Pitches

## **Impact Assessments**

The Town Council has a duty to consider the effects of its decisions, functions and activities on equality, biodiversity, and crime & disorder. Consideration should also be given to effects on the environment, given the Council's Climate Emergency declaration in 2019.

- a) Equality – The Council should ensure fairness to all users/prospective users.
- b) Biodiversity – No impact
- c) Crime & Disorder – No impact
- d) Environment & Climate Emergency – None not already covered in previous reports on pitch maintenance.

## **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.

- There is a health and safety risk if two different sports matches are taking place at the same time (West Witney Sports Ground) during September.
- There is a reputational risk should the Council not be able to fulfil bookings required for any reason.
- There is an Operational risk in agreeing to one course of action, which in turn leads to another with further financial implications.

## **Social Value**

Social value is the positive change the Council creates in the local community within which it operates.

Benefits to the Community – the continued and enhanced use of sports pitches allows residents, particularly young people, to take part in physical and social activities.

## **Financial implications**

- There is no budget for an online booking system in the current financial year.
- Quotes are being sourced, preliminary discussions in 2022 indicated a figure of £7-8,000 for this type of software.

## **Recommendations**

Members are invited to note the report and

1. The updates on sports pitch maintenance and overlap of the football/cricket season and,
2. Consider requesting funds from the Council's general fund towards an online booking system in the current financial year, subject to a final quote being presented to this Committee or, requesting funds in the new financial year 2025/26.