
Agenda Item: Cricket at the Leys Recreation Ground

Meeting Date: Monday, 4th November 2024

Contact Officer: Town Clerk/CEO

The purpose of this report is to consider a request via Oxfordshire Cricket Board (OCB) regarding the future of cricket at the Leys Recreation Ground.

Background

At the meeting held on 4th March 2024 the Committee agreed a resolution to defer the decision *to no longer maintain a cricket wicket at the Leys Recreation Ground until Spring 2025* (minute PR123).

Cricket clubs were notified that the Council would cease maintaining the wicket next year unless a club commits to using it for the 2025 season. Clubs with junior or amateur teams interested in the wicket were requested to contact the Council by February 2025.

Current Situation

On 20th June 2024, the Committee Chair, Vice Chair/Leader, Operations Manager, and Town Clerk met with Swifts Cricket Club members and Oxfordshire Cricket Board (OCB) officials at West Witney Sports Ground.

Following this, the OCB contacted the Town Clerk about future cricket options at the Leys Recreation Ground, highlighting discussions with Henry Box School, which had previously used the facilities. The school's concerns over rental costs had limited their use, but they were now open to installing an astro pitch at the Leys. This would involve an agreement with WTC, potentially allowing the school free access if they/OCB fund the pitch.

The OCB Operations Director views this as strategically beneficial for expanding junior, women's, and girls' cricket through Witney Swifts and has asked if WTC would support the proposal.

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 – promote equality by ensuring all community members have fair and equitable access to such facilities – in particular inclusivity shown towards girls, women and those with disabilities.
- b) Biodiversity – the Leys is a green open space for the enjoyment of all. By undertaking inhouse grounds maintenance the Council has a greater control over reducing the use of harmful chemicals which may counteract biodiversity. The installation of an artificial pitch may require levelling or clearing natural grass, which could disrupt habitats. There may be drainage issues because artificial grass may not absorb water as well as natural grass.
- c) Crime & Disorder – by ensuring areas have good lighting, open sightlines, and the added benefit of CCTV at the Leys help mitigate ASB, along with proactive youth engagement and enforcement.
- d) Environment & Climate Emergency – there may be some environmental issues around the type of materials used for an artificial cricket pitch – such as microplastic, which can degrade over time.

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.

Artificial surfaces can be vulnerable to vandalism or unintentional damage from misuse, leading to additional repair and replacement costs. These could be significant.

Potential H&S concerns around surface hardness and risk of certain injuries. The council would need to ensure it meets all relevant safety and environmental regulations.

Social Value

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

The provision of an artificial cricket wicket could offer significant social value to the community, particularly around health and wellbeing, with both physical and mental health benefits. Gatherings to watch cricket matches present social cohesion, fostering a sense of community. Provides an opportunity for teamwork and social skills. Cricket often appeals to a wide age range allowing cross-generational interaction.

Increased footfall would have economic benefits by indirectly supporting local businesses such as the Courtside Coffee Shed.

Financial implications

Whilst an artificial wicket is typically cheaper to maintain than a natural grass wicket, installation costs can be high. At this stage the costs are unknown and whether grant funding would be forthcoming from the OCB/ECB and/or if Henry Box would fund it.

However, it would need regular cleaning, repairs, and eventual replacement – all of which would need an additional budget.

At this stage the Town Clerk does not have any costings.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and consider whether Officers should continue to discuss the possibility of an artificial cricket wicket at the Leys Recreation Ground, working with the OCB and Henry Box School.