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**Agenda Item:** Sports/Football Pitches – STRI Report

**Meeting Date:** Monday, 4 November 2024

**Contact Officer:** Operations Manager

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The purpose of this report is to present the 2024 STRI (Sports Turf Research Institute) report to councillors and update councillors on the condition of sporting pitches (football, bowls and cricket). See Appendix A.

### **Background**

Witney Town Council uses consultants (the STRI group) to advise officers on recommend work required for sporting pitches to help ensure they don't degrade in quality. Every year the recommendations can alter depending on seasonal conditions and levels of play.

The level of play over pitches has become an increasingly challenging factor. This so far has been mitigated by the increased aeration of the pitches from the maintenance team. However, there is no solution to the Leys bowls green until the level of play is decreased.

### **Current Situation**

The renovations programme for Bowls and Football during 2024 has been severely impacted by the relocation of the maintenance team to temporary facilities. Multiple steps were missed in bowls green and football pitch maintenance due to scheduling, parts for machinery being misplaced in transit, and storage of hired machinery and materials were logistically challenging.

Despite the impact of the temporary facilities the majority of sports pitches were restored and improved in time for their playing seasons. The improvements made at West Witney sports ground and bowls green have brought them to the best standard they've ever been at. West Witney is a ground prone to flooding and with the record rainfall in September, it was feared the ground would be out of action for multiple weeks. However the site drained well, and all games went ahead, demonstrating the extra work the council have put into the ground.

## **Leys Bowls Green**

The Leys bowls greens winter & spring maintenance was heavily impacted by the depot move and unlike West Witney maintenance operatives couldn't recover it due to the level of play the green receives. The club, Witney Town Bowls have complained to the Council citing an impact to their membership base, loss of important fixtures with the league and overall damage to their reputation. They requested that the Council bring in a professional bowls green contractor to renovate the green which was organised by officers with work taking place in mid October.

## **Burwell Recreation Ground**

There has been criticism for the condition of the penalty spots and goal areas at Burwell, which are obviously not in a good condition. The 2023-24 football season was extended until the end of May (traditionally ending at the end of April) in order to offer junior teams an opportunity to reorganise games cancelled due to poor weather conditions throughout the season. The extended season meant the annual renovations were delayed by a month at all grounds and as a result the seed in the goal mouths and penalty spots didn't germinate. It is worth noting that the seed in penalty spots at West Witney, King George and The Leys all grew well.

## **Leys Cricket Square**

The square continues to receive a low level of maintenance to ensure the quality of grass and soil structure doesn't diminish.

## **Deer Park and Raleigh Crescent**

Raleigh Crescent and Deer Park have both been inspected by STRI for West Oxfordshire District Council. Although the reports haven't been shared with Witney Town Council yet, the reports back from inspectors are promising. The sites have improved significantly in condition since their last inspection and are fit for play. However, Deer Park does still have a mole issue, leaving mole hills over parts of the playing surface.

## **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.

## **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.

## **Social Value**

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

## **Financial implications**

The cost of instructing the professional bowls green contractor for the works at The Leys was £3,150

## **Recommendations**

Members are invited to note the report.