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**Agenda Item:** Football Club Training Fees

**Meeting Date:** Monday 1 September 2025

**Contact Officer:** Operations Manager

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At its last meeting (Minute No. PR394), the Parks & Recreation Committee considered the costs associated with maintaining football pitches and discussed the pressures created by high levels of demand, particularly at Burwell. Members noted concerns about unofficial training sessions taking place on recreational grounds without permission, which was hindering pitch recovery and compaction management. In response, the Committee resolved that consideration be given to the introduction of an annual fee for out-of-season training and requested that a further report be brought forward.

This report has therefore been prepared at the Committee's request to provide further background on the current arrangements for training use of match-day pitches.

### **Background**

Training on pitches intended for match day use is discouraged. It is instead recommended that clubs book alternative facilities, and the grass pitches are only to be used as a last resort. If the pitches are required for training, clubs can book them at half the cost of a match booking.

Clubs can book pitches for training purposes on weekdays during the football season only. It is discouraged because these training games can ultimately risk the pitches for matches on the weekend. Over the last five years, the Council has received a total of 43 bookings for training purposes from all clubs. The majority of which occurred in 2021 and 2022. This limited but concentrated use highlights the ongoing need to balance pitch availability with long-term maintenance and quality.

### **Current Situation**

There have been a number of unbooked training sessions taking place on pitches by clubs. These have been verified by officers and parents of the teams, making enquiries to the council. The size of the training sessions makes them hard to regulate. And the impact may not have been seen as damaging, however the simple act of disturbing the soil and seed in a goal mouth can prevent the recovery of that area.

There is a requirement for clubs to offer their teams training sessions, the facilities in Witney are limited and a contributing factor to why training is taking place unregulated on council pitches. As training has always been discouraged, teams haven't acquired floodlights, so the training in the wintertime is not possible when it could do the most damage. The FA actively

discourage teams from training on match pitches, and will not consider a grant request for floodlights where training is in place on such pitches.

For the reasons stated above, it would be detrimental to open up training on council pitches further. Instead, officers have looked at all viable locations to offer teams such as Oxlease Field, the boundary of King Georges, the west side of Burwell and Deer Park and Raleigh Crescent. All these areas could be marked with some form of pitches and offered to teams exclusively for training purposes. They could then also make a grant request for floodlights to help them with training requirements over the winter.

The above proposal is suggested along with the intent to completely restrict training on match pitches. This training offer to clubs, along with a reaffirmed message for the reasons why training is not permitted on pitches, should help clubs work with the council on their requirement and help protect pitches.

There are a few options on how to charge for these sessions, the first would be to continue with the 50% of the match free rate. It has been hard to enforce, and ultimately, as the booking history shows, teams have stopped booking and paying for training.

A second option could be to include the training fees with match bookings. This would ensure income is received against training, so there would be no requirement to enforce and manage training sessions. This would be hard to offer to teams as the amount of training facilities on offer wouldn't match the amount of match bookings, also during the winter months, grass training facilities without floodlight provision wouldn't be usable.

Setting a fixed annual fee for clubs to use training facilities. There are many options to charge this concept to clubs. An annual fee to use training areas, although this could cause issues between clubs on overlapping training. So instead, each area is set an annual fee based on square meters, and clubs can book those areas annually. Or this could be amended slightly to reflect an annual fee per day.

A final option would be to remove training fees altogether. However, the added wear on the areas identified will need some level of basic maintenance, and the training fees collected will help with the cost of that maintenance. As reported to the Parks and Recreation Committee on the 30th June 2025, football is subsidised by around 70%.

## **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 – Both junior clubs in Witney have female teams which has helped boost interest in the women's game.
- b) Crime & Disorder – Football attracts low levels of disorder, smashed bottles in changing rooms, excessive litter and bad language being reported but the situations are rare.

## **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.

Some of the areas mentioned in the report, especially King George and Oxlease, are not accustomed to seeing football training, and therefore its introduction with the inevitable vehicle movements and especially the use of floodlights could generate complaints from neighbouring residents.

## Financial implications

As reported to the Parks and Recreation Committee on the 30th June 2025, football is subsidised by around 70%.

Below is the current schedule of charges for football matches:

WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL	
SCHEDULE OF RECREATIONAL CHARGES	
Effective from 1st April 2025	
	£
FOOTBALL	
ADULTS /OVER 16S	66.50
JUNIOR TEAMS (UNDER 16)	33.50
MINI TEAMS (UNDER 10) SMALL PITCHES ONLY	22.50
HARDCOURT PLAY AREA- BURWELL - LIGHTING CHARGE	27.50
DEPOSIT FOR HIRE OF EQUIPMENT	10.25

## Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and to consider the options for the provision of football training facilities and the associated charging arrangements, namely:

- Continue with the current approach of charging 50% of the match fee rate for each booked training session;
- Incorporate an element for training within the match fee rate, thereby ensuring income is received without the need for separate enforcement;
- Introduce a fixed annual fee for clubs to use designated training areas, with the structure (per area or per day) to be determined;
- Remove training charges altogether, whilst requiring all training sessions to be booked, noting that the additional wear on training areas would still require a level of maintenance subsidy from the Council.