

## SPORT AND PLAY COMMITTEE

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**Date:** Monday 22 June 2020

**Title:** Witney parkrun - Request for a Hogging Pathway

**Contact Officer:** Operations and Estates Officer – John Hickman

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### Background

The Witney Parkrun started in March 2018 and has been a huge success, average attendance is 242 per week, and it has wide ranging benefits to all ages. When Council agreed to Witney Parkrun the agreement was that it would have no financial cost or implications to the Council other than providing occasional small loads of topsoil in order for Witney parkrun to maintain the course. Witney parkrun would maintain the course spiking and levelling to maintain in good condition.

At the time it was pointed out that parts of the course were unsuitable for this type of event due to the ground conditions in wet weather. Consequently, due to the popularity of parkrun, damage has been caused particularly in the wet areas due to inclement weather conditions – this has also affected other users of the field, and quite early on the Council did receive some complaints from other users. Routes were therefore adapted to try and spread the wear on the ground with up to 4 different routes for use on different weeks in bad wear areas, however the wear in certain areas, particularly narrow parts of the course, is still quite substantial given the numbers running along the same line.

Recently Council has spent £3,995 + VAT removing the dead wood through the tree belts in order to avoid runners being injured by possible falling dead wood in winter months and windy conditions.

The Operations & Estates Officer has spent time dealing with other issues over toilets, refreshments, requests to alter routes, installation of a storage container, tree works etc.

### Current Situation

From the annual report attached Members will note that parkrun had to cancel 13 events between November 2019 and the start of lock down compared to only 1 during the same period in 2018. However, 2018/19 was a very dry winter whereas 2019/20 was a very wet one. From experience of the area concerned it is normal on most years for us to lose the football pitch in this area between November and March due to waterlogged conditions. It is unusual when this is not the case, which is why Councillors and parkrun were advised initially that the area was unsuitable for this type of event particularly in the winter months.

At the request of parkrun, the Operations & Estates Officer met with the Event Director to discuss adjusting the route and also winter proofing the site.

The Operations & Estates Officer discussed putting a hogging path in and suggested this should run right across the eastern side of the field as well as the southern side as the eastern side can become extremely wet as well. The route along the southern side would need to be moved from between the tree belt to between the trees and the boundary fence as it would not be possible to have a hogging path between the trees in the tree belt.

The Operations & Estates Officer also advised that the hogging path should not use wood chip as used in the woodland area as this would give severe issues later if used in this situation, and would not resolve the issue in the long term. He advised that a compacted gravel or stone should be used to form any hogging path within path edgings of either wood or concrete.

Subsequently the attached request/proposal was received.

It should be remembered Councillors and Officers are currently trying to make large changes to the sports facilities at West Witney 4G pitch etc. Any works carried out now may not be appropriate if or when the other associated alterations to pitches etc. on site are carried out.

It should also be noted winter proofing the course in West Witney Grounds is not going to winter proof the other areas outside of WTC control that are also issues in wet weather I.E. the verge alongside the main Road which is badly damaged every time the weather is wet. So even if West Witney's parkrun course is winter proofed, several areas of the rest of the course will not be and events may still get cancelled due to wet conditions.

### **Footpath Construction**

Officers will need to design the footpath accordingly and it will need to be constructed in a suitable manner in order to withstand the level of use by parkrun for years to come. The path will need to be a minimum of 1.500mm in order for runners to run alongside one another and also to allow a wheelchair and person walking alongside to use the path.

The ground will need to be dug out to a minimum of 150mm with ground stabilisation material placed underneath wooden or concrete edging to either side, a suitable base stone compacted 100mm deep with a compacted gravel top layer of 50mm. Spoil will need to be suitably disposed of.

The Operations and Estates Officer would suggest the path sits approx. 50mm above existing ground level in order to try to prevent future flooding of the path and that the ground is sloped up to the top off path edge and reseeded to give a easily maintainable edge to the path and field.

It is not simply a case of spreading gravel on the existing ground and compacting.

Care will need to be taken to avoid damaging tree roots within the existing tree belt in order to prevent loss of trees that are protected under the covenant on the site.

The path should also be suitably strong enough to sustain the weight of any equipment used to maintain the field.

### **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.

Members should be mindful of the impact projects have on all its resources, including staffing especially at this time of COVID-19 when Officers are already extremely busy working through government guidance to enable its own facilities to re-open and operate safely.

### **Financial implications**

The Council receives no income from parkrun, and it has no specific budget for these types of works.

It would appear from parkrun's funding statement included in the proposal, Parkrun cannot permit them to raise funds for course maintenance.

- But can from its community support council in finding solutions to improve the ground conditions.
- Parkrun can help identify funding opportunities and support council in applying for them.
- Parkrun can also assist by encouraging local donations of equipment materials and labour.

Funding: The parkrun HQ policies do not permit any parkrun to raise funds for course maintenance. Witney parkrun can, however, utilise good will from within its community to support the Council in finding solutions to improve ground conditions for all. Representatives of Witney parkrun can help the council identify possible funding opportunities, such as GLL Community Grants, and support the council applying for the funds. The Witney parkrun community can also assist the Council in encouraging local donations of material, equipment and labour.

Witney parkrun proposes the council's direction to ensure services and contractors are approved by the council.

There would be a cost implication from Officers/Staff time initially, and could be considerable cost implications to council if sufficient funding or donations are not gained for the associated works.

## **Recommendations**

Members are invited to note the report and consider the proposal from Witney parkrun for winter proofing the parkrun course, and if in agreement consider how it would be funded and the other resource implications.