

## SPORT AND PLAY COMMITTEE

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**Date:** Monday 7 September 2020

**Title:** Sports Pitches Availability and Update

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

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### Background

The purpose of this report is to update Councillors on the current position of WTC pitch provision and pitch conditions.

### Current Situation

The annual STRI sports pitches advisory inspection was carried out on 12<sup>th</sup> August, *attached for information*, the report notes the continued improvement in their condition, it also makes some advisory recommendations for future maintenance.

### Bowls

Bowls games have been limited this season due to Corona Virus with West Witney Bowls and Witney Town Bowls only able to re-start limited play in July, Winey Mills Bowls Club has not played at all this season.

The STRI report notes the improvements to the bowls greens with the improved maintenance to the greens and the recent tree removals and hedge thinning at West Witney Bowls Green.

Once again, this year there has been issues with West Witney Bowls Greens irrigation system, there has also been an issue with the Leys Bowls Green irrigation system with a complete breakdown of the system. The continuous issues with irrigation systems not only prevents the greens reaching the standard expected for the level of maintenance and cost WTC put into Bowls Greens. It also makes it extremely difficult for the contractors to maintain the green and causes many issues, additional renovation works and additional costs to maintain the green.

The STRI report recommends that the irrigation systems are in the full control of WTC and the Grounds Contractors in order that they are kept properly maintained to ensure break downs and repairs are minimalised to an absolute minimum by proper maintenance/repairs by professional companies.

The Operations and Estates Officer would recommend that the clubs are advised to place each of their irrigations systems into WTC control and WTC make an additional charge on the clubs rent to maintain and look after these systems.

## **Cricket**

The Swifts have now moved from the Leys to West Witney this year play has been limited due to Corona Virus with matches only re-starting in July, since the re-start the Swifts have managed to play most Saturdays and occasional Sunday matches. Only one match has been played on the Leys this year.

West Witney Cricket Square does not currently have a summer rope and post system to protect the Square, a temporary system has been provided and the works team will address making a suitable system over this winter in preparation for next season.

The STRI report suggests reducing the maintenance on the Leys Cricket Square and suggests that the West Witney square requires urgent attention to restore the level and uniform platform for the establishment of consistent wickets. This will require additional top dressing of approx. 3 tonnes around the edge of the square for several years to level and uniform out the square and the field at end of season renovations. The Operation and Estates Officer is discussing with grounds contractors if the reduced maintenance on the Leys square will cover the additional costs to the West Witney Square to address the issue.

There has also again been an issue with the water pressure at the Leys cricket square being insufficient due to lack of pressure to provide enough water to keep the square sufficiently watered. Grounds contractors have had to back up the watering by bowser to keep the green hydrated to a basic level.

The irrigation provision for the Leys Square needs to be addressed going forward by provision of additional water.

## **Football**

There are a total of 43 teams playing youth and adult football on WTC pitches this season, Spartans have currently only requested one team to play at King Georges Field at the time of writing this report.

WTC has not been able to take on Woodgreen Pitches in time for this season, due to COVID-19, so has the same issue as last year regarding the Spartans two other teams that would normally play on the Leys pitch one.

There is a total of 10 teams playing on the two 11v11 pitches at West Witney with a team playing every Saturday and Sunday morning and afternoon if the weather is wet this winter pitch 2 at West Witney will certainly be lost. Should this happen it may be possible to play some of the matches at King Georges but not all.

The Operations and Estates Officer is in discussion with Henry Box school, about using any pitches they have available on their field, initially for the Spartans two teams but possibly to assist with some of the other matches should this winter be wet. But it should be noted that there is no community use agreement in place and this would be private use.

Consideration has been given to using the Leys pitch one as there has been no events on the field this year if earthquake de-compaction was used pre-season. However, having walked the field the grass sward is still very poor despite the rest this year and it is felt that earthquake decompaction will not be sufficient to bring this pitch back to a safe playable surface this year. Associated works that would de-compact the area sufficiently for play would most likely make the pitch unplayable for most of the season.

Verti quake works will be carried out at West Witney Pitches one and two pre-season using the funds from pitch re-instatement works at the Leys pitch one that were not under-taken this year as it was changed to an events field.

These earthquake works should help to reduce the effect of water logging during the season at West Witney pitches one and two.

WTC currently provides as many 11v11 pitches on its grounds currently 5 in total as is possible to fit however this is clearly insufficient for the 16 teams requiring 11v11 pitches. It should also be remembered that the two 11v11 pitches at Burwell are also overmarked with 1 x 9v9 and 2 x 7v7 pitches.

It should also be noted that most youth clubs expect most of the teams to play at the same time as each other and state that this is what the Witney and District Football League expect. With most youth teams playing at 10:00am-10:30am on a Saturday morning with very occasional youth teams playing at 12:00noon on a Saturday and a few on Sunday mornings 10:30am or afternoons 14:00pm.

Most adult teams expect to play on a Saturday afternoon 14:00pm with Ladies and Occasionally reserves playing on a Sunday afternoon 14:00pm.

The STRI report for football has recommended that every other year an Earth Quake Operation is carried out to football pitches during end of season renovations in place of the Earthquake Operation to complement a single use of the verti drain operation during the playing season. The Operations and Estates Officer has requested any associated additional cost from the grounds contractors for councillor's information.

### **Football Training**

Council should be aware that Tower Hill and Vikings have been using WTC sports pitches for training throughout the summer since early July.

We have large number of teams training at our sites 74 weekly sessions this season.

This is the first-year clubs have requested to carry out training sessions previously they have trained at the all-weather pitches etc. clubs pay for the use of these facilities. Training was allowed this year as the pitches had been able to rest more than normal and the renovations more time to establish due to lock down and the shortened football season.

It is not standard practice for WTC to allow its pitches to be used for training during the summer months and could not be sustained in future years, pitches do require to be

renovated at the end of each season and also require several weeks for this to be able to establish and the pitch to rest from the previous season.

Many of WTC's pitches are already severely overplayed as it is, without adding the issues of training as well. Constant overplay will result in damages to the pitches that will result in poor pitches and additional costs to maintaining pitches to WTC.

Having spoken to the Grounds Contractors and the STRI Agronomist it is advised that pitches are not used for training purposes for a minimum of 8 weeks to allow the renovation works to establish and the pitches to rest.

It should also be noted that WTC does not make any charge for football training sessions on its facilities.

Charges should be considered if training sessions are to be allowed to continue in any form, these sessions do cause damage to the ground, they create work for the officers taking and making the bookings, they affect the possibility of the land being used for other events/activities etc. They can also cause issues with cricket outfielders and cricket play and training.

### **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 on Officer time taking on anymore projects at the present time as there are significant capacity issues that need to be addressed – particularly given the additional work COVID-19 has generated.

### **Financial implications**

Pitch renovations are included within the current years budget.

If the Council took on the responsibilities of the bowls green irrigations systems there may be some financial implications – but it is hoped that these will be recovered from the bowls clubs, but if in the Council's control this will hopefully reduce the additional costs currently incurred when the irrigations systems are out of use.

### **Recommendations**

Members are invited to note the report and consider the following:

1. Bowls Green Irrigation Systems, requesting Bowls Clubs handing full control and maintenance over to WTC and Grounds Contactors and council making an additional charge to the clubs rent to offset additional cost to council.
2. Football pitch provision within the Town particularly 11v11 pitches.
3. Replacing one x Verti drain operation for one x earthquake Operation every other year.
4. Football Training sessions should not be allowed on WTC sports facilities as per previous years.
5. Football training should be allowed between 1<sup>st</sup> May and 1<sup>st</sup> July to allow renovation works to establish and pitches to rest before the next season.
6. A charge should be made for football training sessions of £15.00 per session.