

POLICY, GOVERNANCE & FINANCE COMMITTEE

Date: 22nd March 2021

Title: Football Season Extension & Training – Financial and Policy

Contact Officer: Operations and Estates Advisor – John Hickman

Background

At the meeting of the Sport & Play Committee on 1st March members were made aware that the FA had agreed to extend the football season until the end of June. There had also been requests from clubs to train on the Town Council's pitches throughout the summer. With requests for events, cricket and annual maintenance, the Operations and Estates Advisor was tasked to create a flexible plan to accommodate the competing demands (minute SP101 refers).

The purpose of this report is to update Members on the current situation regarding the FA's extension to the football season and Club's request for training facilities.

Current Position

The Operations and Estates Advisor has spoken with the Oxfordshire FA regarding the request for the Football season to be extended and has suggested the following provision is made for Clubs:

West Witney

- All pitches available until to 30th April.
- Cricket will start on 1st May and pitches 1, 4, 6 and 8 will be taken out of play leaving just 2, 3, 5 & 7 available for play.
- No football will be played when West Witney is booked for Cricket.
- End of Season Renovation works to all pitches will commence from 31st May.
- No football will be played at West Witney from this date until the start of the 2021/22 season on 1st September 2021.

Burwell

- All pitches will remain marked in until 30th June, area will only be available for use after that for football training only, and Football tournaments until 8th August.
- All football will then stop at Burwell until 2nd October so end of season renovations can be carried out and the pitches given chance to recover so the 2021/22 season will start 1 month late at this site on 2nd October 21.

King George's Field

- Will remain marked in until 8th May, pitch renovation works will start from 31st May or earlier if possible.
- No Football will be played at King Georges from this date until the start of the 2021/22 season on 1st September.

Leys Recreation Ground

- All pitches will remain Marked in until 30th April.
- Cricket will start from 1st May.
- Pitches will remain marked in until 30th May.
- Renovation works to pitches will commence on 31st May.
- No Football will be played until the start of the 2021/22 season on 1st September 21.

Teams will be able to train by appointment at their relevant locations by booking only until 30th May then any training must take place at Burwell QE2 Field by booking only until 8th August when all football will stop until commencement of the 2021/22 season.

It should be noted that the FA expect Clubs to book training at the all-weather pitches and ATP before looking to book Witney Town Council's grass pitches.

The Council should also note that it will not be possible to support this out of season pitch usage as it will prevent proper pitch renovation works going forward and will lead to a deterioration of pitches. This should be a specific one season only with the maintenance and football and cricket seasons being returned to at the start of the 2021/22 season. Cricket 1st May until 31st August and Football 1st September until April 30th annually.

Clubs will need to work together and stagger their playing times if there are a lot of matches, playing weekday evening matches as well as Saturday and Sunday matches.

Charges will be made as normal for matches however Council may wish to set a small charge for use of the facilities for training as well.

As well as the pitch renovations Witney Town Council does need to remember all its other users of the areas football pitches are on, Cricket, general members of the public after a long period of being locked down and most likely only allowed to meet outside in groups it should be expected that the publics use of these facilities and space will be high, especially with the warmer weather as well to meet up with people again and for group exercise etc.

Continental Landscapes has already ordered the materials and equipment required to be able to complete the pitch renovation works at West Witney, the Leys and King Georges Field.

Andrew Earnshaw, Oxfordshire Football Association Business and Facility development Manager has stated that, with the huge financial impact of Covid on everybody, the most important thing is not to rush everything back into the detriment of next season and that obviously includes pitches. **He would hope to see clubs only considering grass pitches when the Witney ATP and 3G pitches, which tend to be underused as the evenings become lighter, are fully booked rather than rushing to grass as the cheaper alternative.**

Continental Landscapes has already ordered the materials and equipment required to be able to complete the pitch renovation works at West Witney, the Leys and King Georges Field.

It should also be noted that Andy Earnshaw pointed out to Officers that the FA are still yet to receive the guidance from DCMS as to what is required to be in place for a safe return, which may also impact on what can be provided and when, as even the 29th return remains provisional and subject to government approval based on the data.

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.

Financial implications

The associated additional costs to council of the extra pitch maintenance and marking to council will be approx. £1,889.76 + VAT.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and how the Council will accommodate the extension to the football season, requests for football training not to compromise other users such as Cricket teams and the general public and consider charging teams for the use of its facilities for training sessions.