

## **PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE**

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**Date:** Monday, 6 September 2021  
**Title:** Football, Cricket, Bowls & Park Run Update  
**Contact Officer:** Operations & Estates Advisor - John Hickman

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### **Background**

The purpose of this report is to update Members on the current position of Sports Provision provided by Witney Town Council.

### **Current Situation**

#### **Football**

Tower Hill FC

This season Tower Hill football have requested pitches for 20 teams 18 of which will play at West Witney and 2 will play at the Leys.

FC Mills Have 1 team that will play at West Witney

FC Royals have 2 teams that will play at Burwell QE2 Field

Spartan Rangers have 1 team that will play at King Georges Field

Vikings have 20 teams playing at Burwell QE2 Field, 7 teams playing at the Leys Recreation Ground and 4 teams playing at King Georges Field

This makes a combined total of 55 teams playing on the pitches this year.

#### **In 2020**

Tower hill had 16 teams

FC Mills 1 team

Royals 2 teams

Spartan Rangers 1 team

Vikings 22 teams

A total of 42 teams an increase of 9 teams in one year.

Youth team numbers have risen year on year in recent years, however the growth between 2020 and 2021 is larger than in previous years.

Pitch 2 at West Witney will not be marked for play this season. This pitch is invariably unusable after the end of November until late March due to waterlogging and the 2 teams that were to use this pitch have been moved to an available 9v9 pitch at the Leys.

Tower Hill have been given permission to use the pitch 2 area at West Witney for training during the football season on the lighter nights as this is not in use for play this season and Vikings have been given permission to use an area that is off the pitches as above.

### **Council Officers & Councillor, FA Meeting with Football Teams 12<sup>th</sup> August**

This meeting was well attended by all clubs using Witney Town Council pitches, Andrew Earnshaw, Business & Facility Development Manager for the Oxfordshire Football Association, Councillor V Gwatkin & Officers of the Council.

Items discussed were future provision of pitches, making better use of existing pitches, future pitch provision training provision, storage, funding and grants, dog faeces, dog bins and signage at Burwell.

The OFA also presented some useful information regarding funding currently available from the FA.

It was suggested that this should be held as a regular meeting every quarter in future.

### **Cricket**

#### **Swifts West Witney**

The Operations and Estates Advisor has been informed that Swifts are hoping to be promoted into a higher Cherwell league again at the end of this season, this will again mean they need to improve their facilities further for this league. The Operations and Estates Advisor has asked that if they are promoted, they provide a list of what additional items they may require and their approx. cost to see if Witney Town Council can assist in the purchase or provision of any items in time for this meeting. At the time of writing this report the list has not yet been provided.

The club are asking if it is possible for the existing artificial practice base to be reinstated, this would be beneficial to the Council as well as there would then be no requirement for council to provide a practice wicket on the Square removing the associated cost for that. The Operations and Estates Advisor is looking into the possibilities of reinstating the surface of the artificial practice wicket, the associated cost and if any ongoing maintenance cost at present.

Witney Swifts have reported that the square plays really well now and they are receiving lots of good comments from visiting clubs.

## **Leys Cricket square and outfield**

Although the square has been maintained throughout the season and end of season renovation works are planned, the cricket square has not been used this season by the school or any teams. If not maintained, then this square would be lost and should a club wish to make use of it in the future then it would cost substantial sums and time to bring it back to a usable condition again.

To cost savings to the council, the Operations and Estates Advisor has requested that Continental provide details of the cost reduction in the grounds contract if the Council decided not to maintain this Cricket Square and outfield.

A third option might be to offer it at a reduced rate, if a club can be found that would at least make some use of the facility. The current charge is the same as West Witney for adults £69.50 and £35.50 Junior U-16s, however there is also an additional cost of £37.50 per changing room at the Leys whereas it is understood that West Witney were only charging £10.00 for changing rooms. The Leys is also smaller outfield with a shorter boundary on one side than the other and a smaller square as opposed to West Witney which has a full-size boundary that can if a boundary rope is used which can be adjusted to suit which wicket on the square is being played on. Witney Swifts had been speaking about running a thirds team at this location in previous years although it's not known if they are in the position at this moment to still do that. They had also spoken about setting up a junior's team but no further information has been received on this. The Operations and Estates Advisor was contacted prior to Covid by Newland cricket club about running a team from the Leys however they may not be wishing to do that now.

It should be noted that in order to maintain cricket squares in good condition they not only need to be maintained well they also do require to be played on.

## **Bowls**

The bowls green end of season service users meeting is planned for the 7<sup>th</sup> October and Officers will update councillors following that meeting.

The final day of the bowls season 2021 is the 26<sup>th</sup> September. Renovations will hopefully commence before 1<sup>st</sup> October.

At this meeting Officers will again request that the irrigations systems are handed over to Witney Town Council by the bowls clubs, so that full control of the watering system, its maintenance and upkeep can be looked after by the council and the contractors. It should be noted that again this season the West Witney Bowls green irrigation system has not been covering an area at the centre of the green, however this has not become a large issue due to the wet summer we have had. There were also issues with the Leys Bowls green irrigation system at the start of the season the system was not usable for some time until the club

arranged for the system to be repaired. There also appears to be a leak on the Leys bowls green system currently by the old bowls pavilion that the club say will be looked at end of season. Charges previously agreed for this by council provided separately.

There will be an additional cost to council to move the Irrigation system controller from inside Witney Town Bowl club to the outside of the building in a cabinet to allow full control by grounds contractors as previously done with the West Witney Controller.

### **Park Run**

Park run is now operating again every Saturday.

### **Annual STRI Inspection**

This was carried out on Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> August with the grounds contractors, Witney Town Council Officers, a Witney Swifts representative and an Agronomist from the STRI carrying out the inspection. Michael has attended Witney on at least the previous 5 inspections so knows the facilities well.

The representative from the Swifts was present so he could give the clubs impression of how the square at West Witney has played this year and understand the how the wicket is maintained in particular during the end of season renovations. He reported that the square had improved throughout the season and was playing very well.

The STRI inspector had also brought along the Clegg Hammer device to inspect the compaction of the ground on football pitches. Pitches at West Witney were within the acceptable range for football.

The Operations and Estates Advisor also requested if the STRI inspection could be carried out at Burwell recreation ground on the football pitches in that location. Burwell pitches require fertilising - they currently have limited root zone this will be carried out soon after the start of the season as programmed in the specification. The Clegg Hammer reading was close to the top of the range for football at this site despite the fact it was recently vertidraind. It was decided that the verti-draining that would normally be carried out to all pitches in October would be changed to verti-quake for this year which breaks up compaction much more than verti-draining. The cost being offset by carrying out verti-draining in next Mays's pitch renovations instead of the verti-quake that was planned then.

The current pitch maintenance specification states verti-draining to all pitches will be carried out once per year in October and verti-draining and verti-quake and verti-draining carried out alternate years during pitch renovations.

Going forward it would be beneficial in the new grounds contract specification to be drawn up to use verti-quaking annually at pitch renovations in May every year and verti-draining in late October every year.

The STRI report will hopefully be available by the time of this meeting for councillors.

## **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. The increased numbers of teams using the councils football pitches could lead to an increased usage of chemical fertilisers and mechanical maintenance to maintain pitches in a good condition.

Improved control of irrigation water usage on bowls greens with direct control of the greens irrigation systems reducing water usage.

## **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**

Possible additional costs at end of football season for increased football pitch renovations.

Additional costs to Council regarding the Bowls Greens irrigation systems to be recoup from clubs via additional sums agreed by council added to the clubs annual rent.

## **Recommendations**

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

1. Increasing verti-draining vert quake alternate years to verti-quake annually at football pitch renovations within the new grounds contract specification currently being drawn up.
2. Moving Witney Town Bowls irrigation controller from inside club house to external wall inside a secure cabinet on wall as at West Witney.