

# South Woodham Ferrers Town Council

## Bowling Green & SWF Bowls Club

Report to Policy & Resources Committee

9<sup>th</sup> February 2021

Murrough O'Brien – Deputy Mayor

## Overview

This report is to provide South Woodham Ferrers Town Councillors with some analysis on the potential paths going forward for the public bowling green at Champions Manor Hall, South Woodham Ferrers and it's use by South Woodham Ferrers Bowls Club (The Bowls Club).

## Need

- I. In recent years, The Bowls Club have been struggling to generate enough funds to operate without requiring grants from the Town Council
- II. The bowling green will require resurfacing at some point in the next 5 years, and this represents a significant leisure expenditure for the Town Council.
- III. The membership of The Bowls Club is very low for a town the size of South Woodham Ferrers.

The Bowls Club have produced a business plan. This business plan needs to be combined with an over-all business plan from the Town Council to maximise the use of the facility by both the club and the community going forward.

## Observation and Analysis (Murrough O'Brien)

As a Town Council, we retain the option of shutting down the bowling green and re-using the space for something different. If we were to do this, then I believe we would not be able to do anything with the land for the next two years due to tight budgets. As such, it seems pointless to shut down the facility, to then just let it sit around doing nothing. The earliest we can expect any CIL money from the new development is about 3 years away which, without significant precept increases, would be the only way to fund and complete a change of use.

The Bowls Club lack the resources to properly maintain the public play facility of the bowling green. I suspect this is just as much wanting to control who the public are, and this is understandable, as unsupervised public playing may cause damage to the rinks which then causes issues for the club members on their competition events and may also increase ongoing maintenance requirements.

The business case produced by The Bowls Club, on initial analysis, looks relatively sound with a few issues that may require further clarification, input and analysis in that: -

- a. The first year, they are targeting raising around £225 per member from all income sources including membership fees, fund raising, nights, donations and other such things, so obviously relying on non-member income. This drops to around £180 per member for year 3. This is quite high and a big change from what it is now.
- b. The forecasted membership numbers are disappointing, being only 46 members for the end of year 3 of their plan. This in my view, probably needs further work and investigation.

The sinking fund (earmarked reserves) probably needs another 5 years of contributions (at current rates) before it will cover the costs of re-surfacing the bowling green, if no further grants or sources of funds can be found for this capital expense.

## Approach

I would like to ask the Policy & Resource Committee to consider the following as a potential approach for the bowling green and The Bowls Club, which can be worked on and reported back at the next P&R Committee meeting, passing it through the Leisure Committee as well.

- a) We commit to The Bowls Club for the next 3 years and generally support their business plan. This will give The Bowls Club security from feeling that the Town Council is going to shut them down quickly and without notice.
- b) We have the capacity and the systems to take over and operate the public bookings for use of the bowling green. I do not believe the club actually has this capacity to operate effectively. As such,
- c) Our staff will take over the booking of the bowling green to the general public. I would suggest the public operation is 10am – 4pm Monday to Saturday. They would require flat shoes and we may have to keep a couple of sets of bowls for use. I would suggest an initial charge of £8 an hour per rink.
- d) The public will only be permitted to play on 2-3 rinks, leaving 3-4 rinks under the control of The Bowls Club. Of course, any members of the public who play as guests of The Bowls Club, effectively play as signed guest members of the club. The fundamental aim here is to protect at least 3 rinks for club members, their guests and competitions.
- e) At all other times, the use of the bowling green is controlled via The Bowls Club and the club decides who gets to play, including any members of the public who may want to play outside public hours.
- f) When under the control of The Bowls Club, all 6 rinks are under the control of the club. Although the Town Council would still like to see public playing during these times as guest members of the club, we understand the need for competitions and practice sessions for club members.
- g) The membership targets proposed by the bowls club are low, so I would propose the following membership targets,
  1. End of Year 1: 30 Full Paying Members.
  2. End of Year 2: 55 Full Paying Members.
  3. End of Year 3: 85 Full Paying Members.
- h) The Town Council will need to maintain a list of registered full members of The Bowls Club. This ensures we can check against the public who are paying to play and full club members who obviously do not pay the public charge when they want to play.
- i) At the end of year 3, we can do a further review and decide going forward, whether to resurface the green. If the membership targets are achieved, then there would be little reason to cease the facility and indeed, the 3 years may offer opportunities to seek additional funding for the resurfacing costs.
- j) I would also like to consider the option of changing how The Bowls Club rent is calculated and applied. My thoughts are to base it on a minimum contribution and then a per member cost. The Bowls Club business plan shows a net profit margin of 45% at the end of year three which is quite high, and we have to ensure that we look after the interests of both The Bowls Club, the facility and the council taxpayer.

## Suggested Way Forward

Report back at next P&R after carrying out further due-diligence with both The Bowls Club and the Town Council staff, with a view of offering a 3-year contract based on the provisions set-out above.