

Meeting of the Environment & Leisure Committee

Monday 15 April 2024

Agenda Item 5.3

TO CONSIDER AND APPROVE THE HIRE OF SPORTS FACILITIES IN 2024/25

1.0 Overview

- 1.1 Each year as part of the budget setting process, the Town Council is required to review its fees and charges. This includes the fees and charges for allotments, hire of recreation grounds such as Luxford Field for events, and sport pitches/pavilions – cricket, football and stoolball.
- 1.2 At the Environment and Leisure Committee meeting on 9 October 2023, members initially considered placing an increase on the fees and charges for sport facilities by 5% in 2024/25. However, there were various complexities in the charging of sports hire outlined in the report and the structure of the fees and charges therefore needed to be reviewed in further detail to reflect the current circumstances.
- 1.3 It was agreed that a full review of the maintenance costs would be helpful to understand what it costs the council to maintain the sports pitches now (annual maintenance and more substantial renovations), and looking longer term at the standard we wish to achieve.
- 1.4 The Sports and Facilities Working Group met on 4 January, 14 March and 26 March 2024. The initial meeting considered the current complexities with the charging schedule and the ways in which the sports clubs use the pitches. A survey was designed and circulated to the main four clubs (three football and one cricket) wishing to use the pitches in Uckfield that are owned by the Town Council. The feedback from this and the terms for hire were discussed before a more detailed analysis of the current maintenance costs and income received, was undertaken at the end of March.
- 1.5 This report sets out the full considerations of the working group and their recommendations.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The official football season is 40 weeks (August to May) and the Cricket season is approximately 20 weeks (April to September). The football clubs were tending to extend the use of the pitches however for training or friendlies (in June and July).
- 2.2 It could be said that the year for football therefore runs from July to May/June. For cricket the season will remain from April until September.
- 2.3 Full renovations of the football grounds are usually undertaken the second half of May after the Sussex Sixes tournaments at West Park, and the pitches should be left for two months from this date. The Town Council didn't undertake full renovations in 2023, and plan to hold off again in 2024, before doing very thorough renovations in May/June 2025.

2.4 Uckfield Town Council currently has four football grounds in use (Victoria, New Barn, West Park and Harlands) and these are in high demand.

Name of football pitch	No. of pitches	Facilities	Usage
West Park	3 x pitches	Pavilion	Uckfield Grasshoppers seasonal league fixtures and training
Victoria	1 x adult	Shared use of pavilion Dug outs which need refurbishing Fencing suitable for advertising hoarding Drainage works have been undertaken. Currently the best of the four pitches and meets league requirements.	Uckfield AFC – Reserves, U18s and Ladies
New Barn	1 x adult	Shared use of pavilion. No other facilities	Uckfield Grasshoppers U15 and U16
Harlands	1 x adult and 1 x junior	No pavilion or facilities. Needs toilets at least	Uckfield Grasshoppers training
TOTAL	6 adult and 1 x junior pitch to maintain		

2.5 The working group were aware that a number of planning applications were being submitted for major developments on the periphery of the town. It was therefore important for the Town Council to understand how the facilities could be improved to support future growth.

2.6 Members were also reminded of the increased use of the pitches especially with the reconfiguration of football pitches at West Park to accommodate more teams. Victoria was in high demand, as it was the highest standard of the four football grounds, and met Sussex FA league requirements.

3.0 Consultation and feedback

3.1 A survey was shared in early February with the four main sports clubs: AFC Uckfield, Uckfield Grasshoppers, Ridgewood Football Club, and Anderida Cricket Club. This was useful to understand the views of the sports clubs currently using, and wishing to use the pitches owned by Uckfield Town Council.

3.2 The survey asked for their feedback on the current charging schedules and their thoughts on alternatives methods of charging. The clubs were asked to think longer-term and consider what was needed to support the future of their sport in Uckfield. A copy of the survey results are available in appendix A of this report.

3.3 It was clear from the overall feedback received that charging by season for the football clubs worked well and aligned with the requirements of the Sussex FA, in terms of their leagues, forward planning and attracting grant funding. And they

were happy with the use of the changing rooms/pavilion being included in the package for the season. Additional charges were preferred for training/tournaments.

3.4 The Cricket club suggested that the current charging system did not align with their way of working and they needed support from the Town Council with the growth of their juniors. This would therefore need to be considered separately.

4.0 Expenditure (pitch maintenance, man hours and materials)

4.1 The working group considered the annual costs to the Town Council over the last three years, to maintain and prepare the pitches. They looked at the calculations provided by the Head Groundsman for ongoing maintenance, not full renovations. Members also looked at examples of charging elsewhere and compared this to our current charging schedule. However, this had proved difficult as in some towns and villages, clubs maintained their own football or cricket wicket and the standard of the pitches was unknown.

4.2 The annual costings included regular maintenance works (not full renovations) such as grass checks, spiking and splitting with regard to irrigation, water and moisture levels, and robot line marking and mowing.

Football grounds maintenance	Mowing	Line marking	Spiking/Splitting
Weekly (mowing for about 25 wks)	1 day 1 person £99.36	1.5 day 1 person £149.04	N/A
Monthly (helps to allow drainage)	-	-	1 day 1 person £99.36 (8 months Aug to April)
Yearly	-	Initial marking out: 2 persons 1 week to measure (5 x £200 = £1,000) Cost of robot to line mark: (£1,065)	-
TOTAL	£2,484.00	£5,791.00	£794.88

Plus cost of line-marking paint: £4k per annum (paint prices are increasing)

Plus costs of fuel vary: £200 per annum

4.3 In the working group meeting it was calculated that the estimated annual cost for Uckfield football pitches (without renovations was £12-13k) which allowed for some equipment maintenance and re-marking (lost lines etc). But in actual fact, the approximately So in actual fact, the costings in the table above come to £9,069.88 plus line marking paint and fuel costs which would account for £13,269.88. So annual maintenance is currently costing the Town Council in the region of £13.5k before we take account of the maintenance of equipment and line marking every week (the above calculation is for around 25 of the 40 weeks).

- 4.4 If full renovations are undertaken every three years at a cost of £25k, it costs in the region of £20-22k per annum to maintain the football grounds and that's in their current state.
- 4.5 With increased demand for these pitches and a wish by the clubs to extend the season to allow for training and friendlies, these costs will further increase.
- 4.6 The Town Council has had to spend substantial funds on upgrading grounds equipment to ensure the grounds team have safe functioning apparatus to undertake frequent cuts of the sports grounds and open spaces since bringing this in-house in 2022.
- 4.7 In terms of income, the Town Council received approx. £13.2k in 2022-23, £11.1k in 2021-22, and £10.1k in 2019-20 (year before the pandemic) and this was for both cricket and football.
- 4.8 It was evident that the hire charges did not align with the various costs to maintain and manage our pitches.

5.0 Proposed fees and charges

Football

- 5.1 In order to cover the Town Council's basic costs for annual maintenance of the pitches, the working group recommended that we needed to increase the fees and charges for football hire by a capped 25% increase each year over the next four-year period (see figure 1 below). This could be reduced if the clubs were to propose any pitch improvements during that period from various funding options that were to become available.

Four-year plan

	NOW	YR1	YR2	YR3	YR4
IN	£10k	£12.5k	£15.63k	£19.53k	£24.41k
OUT	£20k	£21k	£22.05k	£23.15k	£24.31k
VAR	£10k	£8.5k	£6.42k	£3.62k	£-0.1

Figure 1 – 25 percent increases for sports fees and charges over a 4- year period

5.2 For clarity, the working group included a quick spreadsheet overview showing where they got those numbers from (see figure 2 below):

In 1000s (k)	2023-24	Yr1	Yr2	Yr3	Yr4	
25% uplift	10	12.5	15.6	19.5	24.4	
Costs 5% inc.	20	21	22.1	23.2	24.3	Total var. yr's 1 to 4
Variance	-10	-8.5	-6.4	-3.6	0.1	-18.4
In 1000s (k)	2023-24	Yr1	Yr2	Yr3	Yr4	
0% uplift	10	10	10.0	10.0	10.0	
Costs 5% inc.	20	21	22.1	23.2	24.3	Total var. yr's 1 to 4
Variance	-10	-11	-12.1	-13.2	-14.3	-50.5
Actual	2023-24	Yr1	Yr2	Yr3	Yr4	
Example - Seasonal hire of Victoria per Adult team	999.9	1,249.875	1,562.344	1,952.93	2,441.162	

Figure 2 – spreadsheet version

Cricket

5.3 We have committed to replacing the cricket nets, and undertake improvements to the artificial wicket. Members also suggested that it might even be cost effective to outsource the maintenance work for the cricket pitches.

5.4 Members recognised that more investment was required to maintain the cricket pitch and outfield. Town Council staff and the Cricket Club were planning to work closer together this year to increase the frequency by which the cricket wicket, artificial wicket and practice areas were being rolled, and it was therefore felt useful to monitor the costs and manpower required during 2024, before considering in detail the calculations for cricket maintenance for the 2025 season. It might be prudent to create a licence between the Town Council and the Cricket Club, but for 2024, the working group recommended that seasonal fees be increased by 4% due to inflation, and the junior charges be reviewed.

5.5 This chart over the page set out the proposed charges for both football and cricket for Year 1 (2024-25).

Hire charges for football including pavilion facilities per season per team (40 weeks Aug - May)		Senior	+ 25%	Junior	+ 25%
Football	Victoria	£999.90	£1,249.88	£432.30	£540.38
	New Barn Farm	£849.20	£1,061.50	£432.30	£540.38
	West Park	£849.20	£1,061.50	£432.30	£540.38
	Harlands	£545.60	£682	£282.70	£353.38
	Mini Soccer	N/A	N/A	£294.80	£368.50
Hire charges for cricket including pavilion facilities per season per team (20 weeks Apr – Sept)		Senior (Bear in mind senior season – 20 wks)	+4%	Junior (Junior season only 10 wks at present)	+4%
Cricket	Victoria (grass wicket)	£1,415.70	£1,472.33	£720.50	N/A
	Victoria (artificial wicket)	£849.20	£883.20	£432.30	£449.60
	One off game	£70.79	£73.62	£43.23	£44.96
Hire charges for Stoolball per season per team				Adult	+4%
Stoolball	Victoria and West Park			£247.50	£257.40
	Harlands			£198.00	£205.92
	Tournament			£83.60	£86.95

Figure 3: showing proposed uplift in 2024-25

5.6 It was also suggested that this pricing pattern be reviewed annually as market forces could change.

6.0 Still to be considered

6.1 Anderida Cricket – growth of junior section

The juniors have a shorter season of ten weeks, and the training session lasts approximately 1.5 hours on a Sunday morning. They only use the outfield or practice nets, and the artificial wicket is used for matches/fixtures.

6.2 The figures for the hire of the facilities for the juniors does need further consideration and the maintenance arrangements between the Town Council's Grounds team and the Cricket Club do need reviewing over the course of 2024, to establish a clearer charging schedule or licence for 2025 onwards.

6.3 West Park pitch licence - next year

A proposal was made to look into the possibility of creating a licence for the longer-term pitch hire of West Park for the Grasshoppers, to complement their current lease for West Park Pavilion, which is for a term of five years (four years remaining). This would enable all the costs for the year can be incorporated into that licence including the additional costs of setting up the Sussex Sixes Tournament and they could then pay the Town Council in quarterly instalments rather than having lots of individual hire invoices for additional training sessions and tournaments.

6.4 Recognising the variety of hirers

The office had also been approached by various users for commercial use such as personal trainers/keep fit outdoor activities and classes on the outer pitch area.

Apart from seasonal fees for adults/juniors, enquiries were received for training or friendly matches outside of the season for football and cricket.

Therefore, the fees and charges for one-off and successive hire also needs to be discussed by the working group and those recommendations added to the price list.

7.0 Recommendation

7.1 The fees and charges would need to be set in time for the Cricket season commencing in April 2024 and for the new football seasons in August 2024, so it is important to get these fees and charges established.

7.2 Members are asked to consider the proposed increase in fees and charges:
- football (Year 1 – 25%)
- cricket and stoolball (4%)
- one off hire charges and event hire of grounds (4%)

Appendix: Appendix A: Response from survey with sports clubs.

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