

TITLE OF REPORT: BANCROFT GARDENS – HITCHIN LAWN TENNIS CLUB

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF LEISURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To update the Area Committee on the agreed proposals to undertake improvements to Bancroft Recreation Ground.
- 1.2 To inform the Area Committee of the outcome of meetings with the Hitchin Lawn Tennis Club.

2. FORWARD PLAN

- 2.1 This report does not contain a key and has not been included in the Forward Plan.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 On the 20th October 2009 the Council adopted a new strategy for Green Space. The strategy includes comprehensive action plans for improvements to green space. At the 22nd September 2009 meeting of the Hitchin Area Committee, Members resolved that “the comprehensive and inclusive nature of the Interim Green Space Management Strategy and supporting Action plans be welcomed”.

3.2 Bancroft Recreation Ground

- 3.2.1 Bancroft is a small town centre park with limited publicly available green space. The Councils adopted Green Space management Strategy identifies the importance of town centre parks and a refurbishment programme is due to commence at Bancroft in the Spring of 2010. This will be looking at the site as a whole including the existing built environment.

3.3 Issues to be addressed

- 3.3.1 The Bowls club have indicated they wish to give up one of the bowling greens, we have a disused toilet block adjacent to the park, a community hall that is coming to the end of it’s economic life, an unused wing of the bowls pavilion and the remains of a tennis pavilion burnt down earlier this year. There are also large tarmac areas that are used for car parking, four public tennis courts that are in a very poor condition and three private tennis courts.

3.4 Aims of the Refurbishment Process.

- 3.4.1 Improvements are aimed to increase the availability of green space in a Town Centre Park and maximise the community benefit of the facility. To achieve this a process of consultation with existing park users (casual visitors and Clubs) along with the wider community will take place in the spring of 2010 with an aim to have

the project complete within 12 months. For the refurbishment process to be effective it is important that we look at the site as a whole and engage with all current users and the wider community. Experience has shown that by adopting this approach we are more likely to maximise long term community benefit and increase opportunities for external funding. Detailed below is an outline project plan:

Task	Date Due
Engage Groundwork Hertfordshire to consult with existing users and the wider community	May 2010
Hold workshops with interested parties	June - July 2010
Develop draft proposals	August - September 2010
Public display of proposals	October 2010
Produce final designs	November 2010
Fund Raising	November 2010 – February 2011
Tender works	February 2011
Construction phase	May 2011.

3.5 Hitchin Lawn Tennis Club

- 3.5.1 It is extremely unfortunate that the existing Hitchin Lawn Tennis Clubs pavilion suffered an arson attack at this time. Whilst appreciating the clubs desire to re-build as soon as possible the loss of the current building provides a timely opportunity to develop a co-ordinated approach for new developments that best meet the needs of all park users and potentially reduces the built environment within this small town centre Recreation Ground.
- 3.5.2 On the 8th December 2009 the Strategic Director of Customer Services and the Head of Leisure & Environmental Services met with the Tennis Club to discuss options.
- 3.5.3 The need to regenerate the Recreation Ground was explained to the club along with the anticipated time scale. The Club were concerned that unless new facilities were provided by spring 2010 they would risk losing membership. The Council is very keen to support the club both in the short term to help with their immediate problems and in the longer term to enable them to provide facilities for the community within a refurbished recreation ground. An offer was therefore made for temporary free use an existing building within the Recreation Ground. This would allow the club to continue to operate while future needs of the club were considered in the wider regeneration programme. This offer was not acceptable to the Club.
- 3.5.4 Whilst the club generally accepted that the amalgamation of built facilities would have economic, social and environmental advantages; time was the most important factor for the Tennis Club and for this reason was not acceptable.
- 3.5.5 The Club have indicated that they intend to seek landlords consent and subject to planning permission will continue to build even if an extended lease period beyond 2015, was not agreed.
- 3.5.6 If the club were to rebuild a pavilion in advance of the refurbishment programme it would limit the available options for future enhancements to green space and maximisation of community use. This would seriously impinge on the viability of the refurbishments process.

4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Terms of Reference for Area Committees under the Council's constitution provides that Area Committees may act as a forum for discussion on matters of local interest.
- 4.2 Under the terms of the existing lease of the tennis club, the tennis club are obliged to keep the premises in a good and substantial state of repair and condition although the Council could if it wished waive this requirement. The lease also requires the tennis club to obtain the Council's consent as landlord for any alterations to the premises (such consent not to be unreasonably withheld or delayed). The tennis club's lease expires in 2015.
- 4.3 The erection of a new pavilion may need planning consent and building control approval.
- 4.4 Once specific proposals are developed, the legal implications arising from the leases affecting Bancroft Recreation Ground will need to be considered.

5. FINANCIAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The existing capital programme, linked to the Green Space Strategy identifies £35,000 in 2010 and £60,000 in 2011 for Community improvements to Bancroft Recreation Ground.

6. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There is a risk that if the Hitchin Lawn Tennis Club rebuild a pavilion under the terms of the current lease the building may not align with the future agreed plans for improvements to the Recreation Ground.

7. HUMAN RESOURCE AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no human resource or equalities implications relating to this report.

8. CONSULTATION WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS AND WARD MEMBERS

- 8.1 The Portfolio Holder for Leisure has been kept regularly updated.
- 8.2 Consultation with the community forms an essential element of the regeneration process.
- 8.3 Regular update reports will be made to the Hitchin Committee throughout the regeneration process.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Members note the report and forward any comments on the proposals to the Head of Leisure & Environmental Services and the Portfolio Holder for Leisure for their consideration.

10. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 To provide Hitchin Members with an update on the refurbishment programme for Bancroft Recreation Ground.

11. APPENDICES

- 11.1 None

12. AUTHOR

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