

**OTTERBOURNE PARISH COUNCIL
PUBLIC MEETING ON THE SPORTS CLUB PROPOSALS
FOR OTTERBOURNE RECREATION GROUND**

OTTERBOURNE VILLAGE HALL 19 APRIL 2005 8.30 PM

Chairman, MH Warne introduced the meeting and welcomed parishioners.

The Chairman reaffirmed the position of neutrality taken by the Parish Council. In principle the Parish Council supports the provision of a football club within the village. By means of the Public Meeting it is seeking to determine parishioners' views on the new proposals.

No decision would be taken on the matter until after the Parish Council meeting on 17 May 2005.

The Chairman then handed over the meeting to Ian Ritchie, Chairman of Otterbourne Sports Club for his presentation, to be followed by a Questions and Answer Forum.

Clerk
20 April 2005

**Otterbourne
Sports Club
Presentation to
OPC Assembly 19th
April 2005**

Regarding Wessex League requirement for upgraded facilities at Otterbourne Recreation Ground

Good evening and welcome. I am delighted to see so many people here. My name is Ian Ritchie, chairman of Otterbourne Sports club, I am joined by my colleagues, Jack Goodchild and, Ray Phillips, fellow committee members of the club.

When it first became apparent to us that we would need to obtain planning permission for floodlights in order to maintain the standard of football that we currently compete in, we immediately consulted the Parish Council and suggested to them that we hold a public meeting as inevitably, there would be concerns of local residents, and we obviously wish to address these.

We therefore thank Council chairman Mike Warne and his fellow parish councillors for inviting us to the parish assembly, to outline where the club finds itself, and how we propose to address the issues.

Very briefly, let me give you a brief history of how we got to where we are today, why we are in a position where we have to apply for permission for lights, and what our options are, should we fail to obtain permission.

Quick show of hands please. How many here lived in the village of Otterbourne 10 years ago, in 1995?

Keep them up if you lived in the village of Otterbourne 20 years ago, in 1985?

Another quick show of hands. How many here present live in either Oakwood Avenue, or in a road (eg Greenacres Drive) that is only accessible by road from Oakwood Avenue.

And now a show of those who don't live in or off Oakwood Avenue.

A quick bit of history. Back in 1985, your then Parish chairman John Green, and Cllr Bill Harris had a vision to convert the bit of land that we now know as the Recreation Ground to a sports facility for the village to enjoy. I am delighted to welcome Bill's widow Kath Harris, to the meeting tonight.

At that time, the football club was playing behind the Otter ph at the southern end of the village, under its original name of North end Old Boys, taken from the original North End School in Eastleigh, which is now the Fire Service office. The club was about to lose its ground as a result of the M3 extension and link road down to Allbrook, and was approached to take part in an initiative to bring sporting activity to the heart of the village.

At the same time, a cricket team was developed, many of you here will know people like Adie Evans and Ron Emery (Top of the Hill Cricket) who have given many hours of their time to helping youngsters particularly, and senior cricketers over the years.

The original plan was to combine football and cricket on the recreation ground. This did not happen, as cricket league rules require that cricket wickets run north south rather than east

west to avoid problems of sun in batsmen's eyes. That would not been possible, together with two football pitches on the recreation ground field.

Hence the cricket section has always operated from the adjacent SWA cricket field, which already had an established wicket so consequently football has been the only organised activity to take place on the recreation ground.

Back in those days the Parish Council had accumulated some £25,000 or so from the precept towards a vision of a sports pavilion. The sports club, through officials who were employed in the building trade professions managed to have plans drawn and the work carried out within a budget of a further £30,000 or so.

That £30,000 was paid for by the Sports Club raising a 15 year mortgage, with committee members jointly and severally liable in the event of the club defaulting, and that mortgage, both capital and interest was paid by the club.

Let me make it clear that the club has no financial interest in the building. It is a wholly owned asset of the parish, and since the mortgage was repaid, some 5 years ago, the sports club have been paying rent to the parish council for the continued use of the facilities.

The only money that your parish council pays, which is as per the lease between is, is for the grass to be cut, all other expenses are met by the club.

In addition, the sports club also pays the business rates of the premises. I know there is a popular misconception amongst some within the village that the football or sports club is an expensive burden on the parish, and I just wanted to dispel that.

Let me now turn to the present day and the issue that faces us. We run 3 mens football teams, where the age range runs from 15/16 year olds coming into adult football, typically for those players, in the 3rd team in the junior league. That team competes in junior one, the reserves compete in the premier division of the Southampton senior league, and are the only reserve team to do so, all the others are 'first teams' and our first team competes in Wessex league Division 3.

Incidentally, the first team are currently 3rd in the league, are playing a league match away tonight, and have reached the semi final of the Hampshire intermediate Cup and are playing Eastleigh Reserves on Thursday evening, at Eastleigh kick off 7.45. So on the playing side, we can consider ourselves a reasonable successful outfit.

Now the issue is 'Wessex League'. Until the end of last season we were in the Hampshire League division 2, and the Wessex League, which had one division, sat above the Hampshire League within the pyramid system that exists within the FA.

The Wessex league then achieved what has been its ambition almost since it was formed back in 1986, and that was to marginalise the Hampshire League, without getting too political.

In local football then, we now have a situation where once you step outside of the city leagues, Southampton league, Winchester League, Portsmouth League and so on, the options are either election to the lowest division of Wessex, which is where we are currently, or to apply to join what is now known as the Hampshire League 2004.

We chose to take the Wessex route, as (1) when we took the decision there was no guarantee that there would be a Hampshire League and (2) there is no promotion or relegation from the Hampshire League, it is a sidelined competition.

A third option would have been to revert to Southampton League, whence we came almost 20 years ago, but again that was considered a retrograde step, and would effectively been a death knell for the club.

Now, long term, to remain in the Wessex league, we have to have a floodlit pitch. You will see from what I have said that this is not out of choice, the standard in which we have been playing for the last few years remains the same, the opposition, subject to promotion and relegation remains the same, but the new name above the door means that in due course we have to have floodlights.

We have been in regular consultation with the parish council over this, and kept them fully informed of the issues. One of the problems we have, is that dates and deadlines and requirements change, and we do our best to understand what is actually required of us.

The Water Authority, who own the land have confirmed that they have no objection to the erection of floodlights. They raised certain specific water soakaway and precise location issues with us, which we have dealt with, but they have no objection, as landowners.

Let me remind you that there is no financial gain in view here for anyone. The people here tonight and others give freely of their time because we are 'football people'. The combined service to this football club of Jack Goodchild, Ray Phillips, Robin Broom and myself is 124 years. We are faced with a situation not of our making, as I have said earlier we provide 3 teams, and give an opportunity to play football to some 60 or so people over the course of a season, of all ages and abilities.

We have given the matter considerable thought, and have ultimately come up with the plan that you see on the board.

This means the loss of one of the playing pitches, as turning to north south means that only one pitch could be accommodated.

Consequently, we are actively looking for a reasonably local alternative venue where the 3rd team can play, if the plans go ahead.

Our view is that by turning the pitch, a greater area nearer to the car park ceases to become a football pitch, and becomes 'public free space'. It was the view of Cllr Gray when we met the Council last week that there would be less resistance to leaving the pitch in its current position, and we will be pleased to take the views of the meeting on this, as whatever we do, there needs to be a consensus before we move forward.

However, on the assumption of our initial plan, the league rules require us to provide covered accommodation for 50 seated and 100 standing spectators. That is not indicative of numbers that might attend our matches, and I will talk about that in a moment, it is merely what the rules state we have to provide.

Again, our view was that any covered stand that we erect would be best placed at the far end of the playing field, the intention being that it be coloured green, and as unobtrusive as possible.

Yes, there will be 6 floodlight pylons. The floodlighting will be of the most modern type, which limits leakage of light to surrounding areas. I am no expert on the technical aspects of this, but as part of this process, we will provide information that will clarify this point. Basically, floodlights that face each other manage the light in such a way that the light is contained within the lit area. This is unlike the present situation with the training lights, where the light from the lights at the far end are visible from outside the recreation ground.

Just dealing with the numbers of spectators. This is a concern, and we understand that. As I have said earlier, we are not moving into a higher grade of football, we are playing the same teams as before, whether it be evening or on Saturday afternoon.

Currently, and this would of course continue, when the first team play at home there are some 30 players, maybe 10 officials, and perhaps a further 15 or 20 people who turn up to watch, making a total of about 60 people in attendance. Some of the more local spectators may come on foot. I have no stats. I also have no stats for how many home or visiting players double up or car share. Some do and some don't.

Currently, when the second and third team play at home simultaneously, the number of players immediately rises to 56, maybe 12 to 15 officials attached to the sides, and maybe 10 or 15 spectators over the two games.

That makes a total, on a Saturday afternoon of 80 or so people visiting the rec. With only one team ever playing, as there will only be one pitch, we will have the lower number.

The Wessex league publish attendances for First division matches. They don't for 2nd and 3rd division (where we are) as the numbers are considerably lower.

In recent weeks for example, some attendance figures have been at Totton v Cowes 31, Bournemouth v BAT 42, Vosper Thornycroft v Downton 40. Winchester City get attendances of over 100, but bear in mind that they reached the final of last year's FA Vase, the national competition, and indeed won the trophy at Villa Park. And they are the leading team in a city of 30,000 residents.

So our view is that the status quo will be maintained, and as I have already said, we are 3rd in the league and in a cup semi final and it has not really affected numbers who turn out.

Pete McCormack's note and I quote states 'relocate their main pitch to a more central position' and I know what I would conclude from that. However, as you have seen, the pitch would be hard up against the eastern boundary fence, and what is not said in Peter's note is that there will be a reduction of 50% in the number of pitches.

A permanent barrier. Yes, the Wessex league rules say that you have to have a permanent fence around the pitch. As users of the recreation ground will know, currently we rope the lower pitch off, and that now has to be a metal barrier. Again, we took the view that the impact is minimised by locating the pitch against the far boundary, which means only one pitch length side coming in to play, and there will be adequate space for dog walkers to walk around the perimeter. In addition, there will be large gaps in the corners, so people will not be denied access to that area of the rec.

Peter has helpfully provided photos of what he considers to be a club of similar size, Westbury United. Westbury play in the Screwfix Western League, and are in a higher position in the 'football pyramid' than ourselves. When looking at these photographs, I think you need to bear in mind that at the time of the 2001 census, the population of Westbury was 11,135 and consequently, the football team bearing the name of the town would be likely to attract higher numbers of spectators. Otterbourne I believe is a village of some 1500 souls.

Noise, bad language, parking and light pollution, all emotive stuff.

Noise, well, we think there may be the prospect of about 8 games taking place under lights during the course of a season. At present, all our games take place in daylight, including early evening at the beginning and end of season. As I mentioned earlier, the club are playing

tonight, and again on Thursday evening, as well as last Saturday and next Saturday. 4 games in 8 days.

Some of these games would take place in the dark (floodlights), during the months of September through March, and the scenario would be no different to training nights where people can and do still walk their dogs.

There would be no more games, only a more equitable spread through the season.

Bad language – well, I can state categorically that we have no plans to sign Wayne Rooney! We make it clear to referees, that it is for them to control language, and we do not condone it. In addition, we have notices in all the dressing rooms and in our matchday programme imploring players, officials and spectators to ‘mind their language’. However, as I have already said, these games would be taking place when people would be less likely to be out and about, as opposed to the current situation Saturdays and early evenings.

I also have to say that some of the disaffected youth who frequent the recreation ground in the evenings, be they from Otterbourne or elsewhere, use some pretty tasty language, but I am sure that none are the progeny of anyone at this meeting.

Parking, I have already mentioned, but happy to take questions on.

Light, again I have mentioned, but I think we need to produce some technical information for you, and I will see that this is done.

In closing, can I just make a couple of final points. Football, and Otterbourne Football Club for some reason, seem to get a bad press from certain people within this village.

On reviewing the Otterbourne Village plan, which I am sure many of you are familiar with, the two most popular sports mentioned as interests by those who responded are golf ... and football. Clearly there is a groundswell of interest in the village. We can only draw the conclusion that people either leave the village to watch or participate, or are armchair watchers, courtesy of Sky.

All we want to do is run a football club which we have done for over 40 years, 20 of them at our current home. We perform a valuable service for all villagers who use the recreation ground from time to time. We contribute to villagers and in particular their children not suffering from toxicariasis. Anyone know what that is?

Toxicariasis is an infestation of humans, usually children, with the larvae of *toxocara canis*, a small threadlike worm that resides in a dog's intestine. A dog harbouring the small round worm causes large numbers of worm eggs in its faeces, which can then contaminate the soil. Children who then play with an infested dog or with soil contaminated with its faeces can then inadvertently put their fingers in their mouths and can swallow some of the worm eggs. The swallowed eggs hatch in the intestine of the child to liberate larvae, which then travel towards the liver, lungs, brain and eyes. Here they can trigger off allergic reactions such as asthma, and they also have more serious effects such as loss of vision at least partially. Children generally run a much greater risk of coming into contact with *toxocara* in public parks where there is no guarantee that the dogs which are allowed to roam free there are all wormed.

That is that we clear the playing and adjacent areas of dog excrement every week, prior to matches taking place. You may laugh, no doubt those of you who are dog owners religiously carry your poop scoops with you, and place the stuff in the bins provided. Until the bins were provided the parish council paid us the princely sum of £5 per week for this unpleasant task.

Their view was that once the bins were provided, that would no longer be necessary, as of course all upstanding citizens would act in a responsible manner. Wrong. Enough said.

And finally, many of you attend the Old Tyme Music hall and the Pantomime each year, which are marvellous examples of what village community should be all about. However, you may not be aware that the Football Club supplies the bar staff for the 11 or so nights that these events run over, staffed by ourselves, voluntarily, and once the dust settles over each event, Terry Revell comes calling, seeking a decent donation from the money that we take, towards the funds of the society. We are happy to stump up as a contribution towards village life.

Just to conclude, I just want to cover the situation should we fail to obtain planning permission.

We will lose our manager, as he will be unable to retain and attract players of the standard required. For the same reason we would find it very difficult to attract a replacement of similar quality.

Once you become a lame duck, no one wants to know. We would face decline, and frankly the option of Hampshire League with no promotion or relegation, holds no attraction, likewise a return to local football in either the Southampton or Winchester leagues would not hold any attraction. We would be turning the clock back 20 years.

The reality is, *and please do stifle a cheer*, is that the club would fold. The enjoyment of football for some 60 or 70 people would go. The maintenance of the pitches and removal of dog excrement would go. The presence of a club on site every week would go, with I would suggest the likelihood of petty vandalism, and the clubhouse becoming an eyesore.

I have heard it suggested from within the parish council that there would be little concern. That the revenue coming from the sports club could be made up by a small addition to the local rate.

One thing is certain. It would be very unlikely that another football club would be able to come and play here, and be able to afford the cost that the parish council would have to charge to make it viable. And that would be without the routine maintenance and management of the area that we undertake as a matter of course. We do this, because we feel a sense of responsibility for the facilities for which we are tenants, carrying out much routine maintenance that is technically the responsibility of the parish council.

Again, from within the Parish council, I have heard the suggestion that the club premises could be put to other uses quite readily.

If that is the subplot, then fine. We will work with the people of Otterbourne to try to find acceptable solutions to all the issues, but if there is a behind the scenes plot for other interested parties to acquire use of the premises, then so be it.

Bear in mind that a derelict sports field may attract those who choose the itinerant life. An unused sports field will soon fade into the memory, and the owners of the land may ultimately take the view that the land may be better put to other uses. Not now, but maybe 5 or 10 years hence.

I am not trying to scaremonger, but I would have thought that the upgrade to our facilities, that we have to seek to satisfy the demands of the competition in which we operate, might actually secure the long term future of a valuable area of green space for the village of Otterbourne. Thank you for listening, my colleagues and I will endeavour to answer any questions you may have.

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Questions and Answers Forum

Questions submitted by Parishioners and Answers by Ian Ritchie

Q The Club could play in a lower division or different league and therefore not need the floodlights, etc. The clubs ambitions to progress are imposing requirements upon parishioners.

A The Club has been in existence for twenty years and has come out of the Southampton league, it would be a backward step to return to this and not one which the club would accept. The Club has done well in Division 3 of the Wessex League and it needs the possibility of progression to give a sense of competition and to keep the interest of the Manager and players.

Q The value of property backing onto the recreation ground will decline if floodlights and the other requirements are established.

A This is a possibility, but there is already a football pitch and some floodlighting. The value of property might also decline if the recreation ground falls into disuse or development takes place.

Q How many sports club players live in the village?

A As many as want to play. 5-6 at present, however many who have passed through the club have left the village or chosen to play elsewhere.

Q How much is done to recruit youngsters to play?

A Notices, word of mouth. Sunday afternoon play was disbanded for 15+ because it was the only time they were allowed to play but Parishioners did not want Sunday matches

Q There are already parking problems around the area and emergency access into Greenacres Drive is almost impossible.

A There will only be one pitch, not two as at present. There will only be one match going on, not two as at present. The number of players will be less and the number of supporters is not expected to increase. The overall number of cars is expected to decrease.

Q What is the position of Southern Water?

Southern Water is the freeholder and does not have to take residents views into consideration.

Q Why can't the youth teams continue to play at Otterbourne and the Wessex League team look for other premises?

A The Wessex team has not found an alternative site and these sites are more difficult to find, whereas sites for youth teams are more plentiful.

Q Why can't you have ground sharing arrangements elsewhere?

A This is not possible because of reserve teams playing

Q Should the Parish Council be encouraging football within the village?

A Football was identified as one of the most important sports reported by villagers in the Parish Plan. It also gives members of the village the possibility of joining a team if they want to.

Q If the structures proposed go into the Recreation Ground then it will no longer be a Recreation Ground, but a football pitch.

A It will always be a recreation ground on which football is played. Losing one of the pitches and turning the other pitch around will increase the overall amount of area not required for games.

Q If these requirements are agreed, there may be future incremental requirements as the Wessex League introduce new rules or the club wishes to progress further.

A It is unlikely that the Club would progress beyond Division 2.

Q The Wessex League might even introduce new requirements without the football club progressing up the league. Parishioners will then be at the decision of the Wessex League.

Q If this development goes through, how far could you progress before the next requirements?

A The Club could go up one division to Division 2, but not to Division 1 because of the cost of players.

Q Is Otterbourne in this unique position?

A Approximately 15 clubs are in a similar position.

Q Is there a similar village to Otterbourne to view the structures?

A Netley, Laverstock, Locks Heath

Q What will be the size of the floodlights and stand required?

A Floodlights 6.5 m or 19 feet. Six of modern design placed opposite one another such that the light from opposite lights cancels each other out to reduce emission splay. Size of stand approx 2.4 m painted green

Q How often will the floodlights be on?

A Approx 8 times per season for games.

Q Will the current training floodlights be removed?

A Unknown at this stage.

Q You paint a very pessimistic view of what will happen to the ground if it is not used as a football club.

A If the ground is not put to profitable use there is a possibility that Southern Water might sell it off.

Q When does the lease expire

A (Chairman MH Warne) The lease must be re-negotiated next September for 21 years.

Q What was the point of the voting slip? If it is a voting slip to be used for giving the Parish Council an indication of residents' views, it should be distributed throughout the Parish to all residents. The Recreation Ground is for the whole of Otterbourne village. The voting slip was not distributed to all areas of the Parish.

Summation by Chairman MH Warne inviting further comments from parishioners to be sent to the Parish Council.

Show of hands. The number of hands cast against the proposals was considerably more than those in favour or abstaining. Meeting closed 22.05.

Clerk, 20 April 2005

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Analysis of Objections/Support

Tear-off forms received **objecting** to the proposals:

Meadowcroft Close	15 signatures
Oakwood Close	6 signatures
Oakwood Avenue	22 signatures
Greenacres Drive	29 signatures
Waterworks Road	12 signatures
Other areas in the village	14 signatures

Total: approximately 100

5 letters of objection received

Tear-off forms received **supporting** the proposals: 1

Clerk
25 April 2005

