



Kings Hill Parish Council

Enhancing the lives of the Kings Hill Community

PRESS RELEASE

Despite a tough year of cost cutting at Kings Hill Sports Park, the parish council has been left with no choice but to take a firmer approach with public spending at the facility. The parish council leases the sporting facility and manages the day to day operations.

The facility has been maintaining a level of pitch maintenance that far exceeds its intended levels of community 'grass roots' football and the council has decided this cannot continue. When the facility first opened in 2014 it was managed to a standard equivalent to other local authority grass pitches.

In 2016, the parish council secured a contract with Ebbsfleet United which saw the non-league team train at the facility several days a week throughout the season. This was a welcome injection of income to the facility and in order to service this contract the parish council took on the services of a full-time groundsman and purchased the associated equipment required for this level of semi-professional football.

The proceeds from the contract were invested into improving the quality of the pitches to an extremely high standard for which other semi-professional teams used on an ad-hoc basis, giving additional income to the facility. When Ebbsfleet United decided to leave Kings Hill Sports Park in 2018 the parish council continued to maintain the same level of quality for its community hirers. The council tried to secure regular bookings with other semi-professional clubs but to no avail. It was difficult to find a club without an already established training ground. Attempting to continue this level of service with no additional income has inevitably left the Sports Park with severe financial implications, as the community hire fees have just not been able to cover the costs of such maintenance. Under pressure from hirers to maintain this quality, the parish council continued with the superior maintenance plan in 2019 however this is no longer financially viable for a public body to sustain.

In 2018/19 the Sports Park carried a financial deficit of £150,000 and as at the half-year point in 2019/20 is running at a deficit of £70,000. The parish council agreed that measures must be taken to prevent future losses.

A variety of measures are being introduced to mitigate the effect of these ongoing costs to the tax payers of Kings Hill, whilst keeping the community hire fees at a reasonable amount for local groups to afford. Council decisions include

returning to a contractor maintenance plan, with lower level turf care, reducing the subsidies offered to specific hirers and removing the priority bookings system, to allow the maximum amount of bookings at the facility.

The council is aware that some hirers will be disappointed with these decisions however it must alleviate the costs to the tax payer.

These decisions will regularise the financial position of this local authority run facility and bring it in line with the other similar footballing facilities in the area.

Cllr Sarah Barker, Chairman of the Parish Council said 'we are the custodians of public money and we must ensure that it is spent fairly and wisely. The Sports Park was set up to be a community facility and we must adjust our operations to suit its intended purpose. We will be expanding the sports available at the park to include rugby, tennis and netball. All of which will be available to all and will contribute to the running costs of the facility. Groups can still apply for subsidies from the parish council but this must be through the proper channels and assessed against the criteria and budget available.'

Notes to Editors:

Kings Hill Parish Council was formed in 1999 and now consists of 12 elected parish councillors serving the local community on a voluntary basis. Parish Council officers undertake the work of the Council representing the community and delivering community benefits throughout the village. We are consulted on planning applications in the parish and work closely with local community groups serving Kings Hill and the local area.

About Kings Hill Sports Park:

Kings Hill Sports Park, Kings Hill includes 4 full-size grass football pitches, a full size floodlit 3G pitch and a pavilion with 8 changing rooms. A Sports Bar operates from the pavilion, serving food and drink to both visitors and passing public. Kings Hill Sports Park is operated for the benefit of the local community by Kings Hill Parish Council. In addition to football the Parish Council hosts running events, rugby and American Football at the facility.

The Sports Park was provided to the community by the development partnership, Liberty Property Trust and Kent County Council, under S106 planning obligations and has been operated by the Parish Council as leaseholders since April 2014.

For further information please contact the Clerk to Kings Hill Parish Council on 01732-870382 or council@kingshillparish.gov.uk.

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