



Kings Hill Parish Council

Enhancing the lives of the Kings Hill Community



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PRESS RELEASE

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Press Release about recent issues between Kings Hill Football Club and Kings Hill Sports Park

This press release is in response to the recent changes to the terms and conditions of Kings Hill Football Club's use of the Sports Park, and the subsequent campaign by members of the Kings Hill Football Club, their officers, administrators, coaches, players and players' parents, and the recent development to involve our local MP, Tom Tugendhat, and some Tonbridge and Malling Borough Councillors.

The Parish Council believe that Kings Hill Football Club's current campaign focuses on the loss of Wednesday's training facilities without appreciating the context of why these changes to; remove the priority booking; remove the blanket discount and introduce other football clubs had to be made. Equally, there is an underlying issue that has also strained the relationship between the Parish Council and the Football Club.

To be clear the Parish Council's role is to serve the interests of Kings Hill residents, **all** residents. It is trying to provide services at the Community Centre, the Sports Park and within the community that serves the needs of all Kings Hill residents, as dictated by the terms of S106 obligations, as defined in Kings Hill Parish Council's lease with Liberty Property Trust, the property developers, and as is our responsibility as a Parish Council.

This 'mandate', at the Sports Park, translates into a goal to provide facilities for lots of sporting endeavours, including football, rugby, netball, tennis, etc... and that is what the council is trying to do. Equally, the council is trying to ensure that the Sports Park is self-funding, and is not a drain on the community coffers (which you may have noted from previous press releases, has not always been the case).

These Parish Council's goals have only recently come into conflict with the interests of the Football Club due to the enormous success of the Club, as they continue to grow and dominate the Kent football scene – they now have 48 teams and over 500 players. The Football Club also have league aspirations that require the introduction of seating, turnstiles, etc... It is this success and growth that is part of the issue. The Football Club need

more and more pitches, more and more training slots as the number of teams grow. Unfortunately, this growth has swamped the limited facilities that exist at the Sports Park and, in combination with the priority booking system, has resulted in pushing out other sporting endeavours and other football clubs.

Equally, due to these growth problems, and the perceived negativity of the Council, Kings Hill Football Club's behaviour, lobbying as Tom Tugendhat would call it, has turned into bullying, harassment and personal abuse. The Football Club state that they represent Kings Hill residents, and they do, but only about 20% of them. The Parish Council is trying to provide services to the 100%. The assertion by Kings Hill Football Club that their members are all Kings Hill residents is only partially true. More and more, the Football Club scout for better players from farther afield and, in turn, this pushes out the lesser abled young players to other local clubs, such as Wateringbury, Leybourne, Larkfield, etc.. So, hosting clubs at Kings Hill Sports Park, from the locality, does accommodate other Kings Hill residents.

Equally, the Parish Council has struggled to maintain a breakeven position with regard to the Sports Park, due to a number of factors, but all tied to the growth and dominance of the Football Club.

Pitch Utilisation - Up until this last season, the Football Club had priority booking for all football pitches. The Football Club's booking policy was to pick all the prime slots to suit their footballing schedules, leaving less desirable slots which were hard to sell (understandable given their priority, but not commercially sensible). The recent removal of the priority system permits the Sports Park to assess demand and offer a more balanced schedule (some good slots with some bad). It is this phase that the Sports Park are operating currently with the Football Club, which does have an impact – although mostly on training slots. However, this new process allows the Parish Council to optimise the schedule and achieve better occupancy and revenues – which it must do to balance the books.

Sport Park Finances – the Sports Park finances have not been good for some while, but this is reasonably well documented. There was a period when Ebbsfleet FC trained at the Sports Park, using the largely vacant day time facilities, netting circa £100k per annum, when this fell away, the Council tried to replace them with other professional clubs, to no avail. Ebbsfleet had demanded a 'high-spec' service and the Council hired a groundsman and all the associated equipment, and the Council were slow to cut away this cost burden. This has now been done. It was in this backdrop of poor utilisation, and high costs that the discount was removed. The Football Club's consequent stance with the Parish Council, and their boycott of the café and bar have merely exacerbated the finances of the Sports Park further.

The Parish Council appealed to the Football Club to be patient whilst the new bookings process for next season takes its course. The operational staff are working with the operational representative of the Football Club

to find a resolution to ensure that the teams all have a training slot, albeit on an alternative evening. The process is complex with many teams involved with requests changing on an almost daily basis, however the Parish Council received the threat from the Football Club executive that if they were not given all of their requests in full immediately that they would tell all their members and launch a social media campaign against the Parish Council. This has developed into a negative and, in some cases, foul attack on Parish Councillors and Staff.

In this current dispute, the Parish Council's decision to support the formation of a new Kings Hill football team is at the heart of the issue. A new club is forming that offers our residents an opportunity to have a choice in the football club that they play for. We hear from Kings Hill residents that have been turned down to play for Kings Hill Football Club due to their aspirations for top performance and the Council is keen to support all Kings Hill children to take part in sport, no matter what their ability. The introduction of the new team means that Kings Hill Football Club will have to re-schedule some of their training slots into other evenings, however all of their weekend match bookings are confirmed, with the exception of one that can share a pitch or move its KO time by two hours.

The introduction of a new Kings Hill team to the Sports Park brings with it more pitch hire revenue, more parents and spectators, more away teams and supporters and consequently more footfall in the café. This all leads to more revenue for the facility, whilst providing an alternative sporting option to Kings Hill residents. The revenue in the café on a Wednesday evening has been historically poor and the Parish Council has a responsibility to the tax payer to ensure it maximises its assets. So, this is the position of the two parties – the Football Club and the Parish Council. How do we bring the parties together to live harmoniously once more?

Well, the Parish Council view is fairly simple:

- the Football Club must accept the limitations of the Sports Park to host all of their activities. The Football Club cannot grow unchecked without considering how they provide their own facilities, particularly if those facilities need to be upgraded to meet league standards – the Parish Council cannot, and should not, subsidise this upgrade at the expense of the other sporting endeavours.
- the Football Club must recognise the Parish Council goals to service the interests of all of Kings Hill (100%), and not just the football fraternity (20%), which necessarily must share the facilities at the Sports Park across other sporting disciplines.
- the Parish Council should work more closely with the Football Club to minimise the current disruption to their training slots, whilst recognising the need to accommodate other teams to fill the schedule. This can be achieved by taking up other available evening

slots, but not Wednesday evening. We have asked the operational representative to work with us to do this.

The parish council believe that a frank conversation and a clear understanding by both parties of their diverging needs would be an important step in the right direction, and to that end the Parish Council has written to Tom Tugendhat to invite him to chair such a meeting. Further, more detailed dialogue is required to resolve this matter.

Notes to Editors:

Kings Hill Parish Council was formed in 1999 and 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. The provision and management of allotments, looking after open spaces, maintaining bus shelters and community building, providing facilities for the community, such as the Kings Hill Community Centre and Kings Hill Sports Park, are just some of the responsibilities carried out by Kings Hill Parish Council.

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