

Rother District Council

Report to: Cabinet

Date: 27 June 2022

Title: New cricket facility for Sidley Cricket Club at St. Mary's Recreation Ground

Report of: Deborah Kenneally, Head of Neighbourhood Services

Cabinet Member: Councillor Timpe

Ward(s): Sidley

Purpose of Report: To grant permission for Sidley Cricket Club to develop a new cricket facility at St. Mary's Recreation Ground, Bexhill-on-Sea.

Decision Type: Non-Key

Officer

Recommendation(s): It be **RESOLVED**: That:

- 1) officers be authorised to enter into a 5-year management agreement with Sidley Cricket Club for the laying and maintenance of a cricket square and artificial wicket, and in return to grant the club exclusive use of the facility and waive the associated booking fees;
- 2) officers be authorised to enter into a 5-year lease with Sidley Cricket Club for a container, purchased at their cost, to be sited on the recreation ground, at a peppercorn rent and otherwise on terms to the satisfaction of the Director – Place and Climate Change;
- 3) in accordance with Section 123(2A) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), to advertise the disposal of public open space for only the land on which a cricket container is to be sited and to report any objections to Cabinet for further consideration; and
- 4) in principle the grant of a 50-year lease to Sidley Cricket Club of a plot of land in the same location at a peppercorn rent, subject to Fields In Trust approval and formal disposal procedures in accordance with Section 123(2A) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) in due course be approved.

Introduction

1. Sidley Cricket Club (SCC) was formed in 1901 and before the closure of the Sidley Sports and Social Club (Gullivers) in 2013, it ran three Saturday sides, one Sunday 11, a mid-week evening league 11 and four junior sides. Closure of the facility left the Club without a home ground and due to the limited availability of cricket pitches in Bexhill, the Club has since had to play in Hastings. As a result of having to travel to a further location, the Club's first and second teams and youth section have all folded.

2. SCC seeks to create a cricket facility at St. Mary's Recreation Ground (SMRG) on St. Mary's Lane, Bexhill where it can re-connect with the Sidley community and develop its youth and ladies' programme to encourage more disadvantaged boys and girls to participate to get back to the highest level of the Sussex League. It aims to achieve the relocation in time to hold a summer of cricket and community field events in celebration of its 125th anniversary in 2026.
3. In previous years, Bexhill Cricket Club created a cricket square at SMRG with the intention in the short term of providing a local ground for their lower senior teams and junior teams to play and train on, and with a view to the site possibly becoming their main ground in the longer term. However, the Club did not have the capacity to carry out the regular maintenance required and subsequently stopped using the site. SCC does have a team of volunteers committed to carrying out the on-going maintenance required and use of appropriate grounds maintenance machinery when needed.

Analysis / Details of the proposals

4. In the short term and subject to securing planning consent and approval from Fields in Trust, the Club proposes to site a container with associated power supply, changing facilities and a toilet on the recreation ground enabling matches to be played from the start of the 2023 season. In the longer term, the Club aspires to replacing this with a permanent brick-built building incorporating other facilities to support the Club's activities and enable it to be sustainable.
5. Approval is sought to enter a 5-year lease with the Club for the site of the container provided by the Club at a peppercorn rent and subsequently, to enter into a long-term lease of up to 50 years in order to attract the level of funding needed to build a permanent facility. A break-clause would enable the initial lease to be terminated in the event that the Club is unable to raise the funds and secure the necessary consents expeditiously.
6. Approval is also sought to enter into a 5-year management agreement with the Club for the laying and subsequent on-going maintenance of the cricket square, an artificial wicket and during the season, the outfield.
7. An annual licence would be granted to the Club enabling members and visiting teams to park on the grass at those times when training activities or matches are taking place. In the longer term, the Club may seek to extend the car park to improve spectator access. This would also be subject to planning and Fields in Trust consents.
8. SCC proposes to fund the facilities through fundraising activities and grants and expects to secure the £12,000 needed to lay the square in time to carry out the work in the late summer or early autumn this year.

Options

9. There are no alternative open spaces in the Council's ownership that could accommodate a cricket facility for SCC. Ground sharing at sites where cricket is already played is not viable.

10. Leasing the site in its entirety to SCC is not considered a viable or desirable option since in addition to the area that would be used for cricket, the site includes woodland and open space which the Club would not have the capacity or expertise to manage and maintain.
11. Enclosing the cricket outfield within a fence in order to lease just this area of the site to the Club is not desirable as it would have a detrimental impact on the amenity and aesthetic value of the site as a whole.
12. The Council does not have the resources at this time to fund and deliver the creation of a new cricket ground and pavilion. The proposal as presented is therefore considered to be the only means of enabling SCC to return to Bexhill in the near future.

Conclusion

13. At present, SMRG does not meet its potential in terms of supporting the community to be healthy and active. The proposed facilities will significantly increase its benefit to the community whilst enabling the existing use and enjoyment of the open space by residents to continue. The site will remain in the ownership of the Council and under the protection of under the Fields in Trust QEII Playing Fields deed of dedication.
14. SCC is a well-organised club with the enthusiasm and commitment to provide much-needed sporting opportunities for the community. Despite not having a ground in Bexhill it is working hard to keep cricket alive in Sidley. Its afternoon sessions for 7-16 year olds last summer were a great success and over 20 of the participants have signed up to be SCC Juniors in the sessions that are being held this summer at SMRG.
15. The proposal to create a cricket facility at SMRG is in-line with the Hastings and Rother Playing Pitch Strategy. The 2016 Strategy is currently under review but working with SCC to support their aspirations of returning to playing cricket in Bexhill remains a priority. At the time of the Strategy's adoption there was a surplus of cricket wickets across the district and Hastings, but there was nevertheless a shortfall of availability of facilities for Saturday afternoon match slots, particularly in Bexhill and Hastings, a situation which is likely to be identified in the review as having worsened. Increasing the number of opportunities for women and girls to play cricket, as is proposed by SCC was an identified goal.
16. The proposal as outlined does not conflict with the recent approvals allowing 1066 RC Racing Cars to set up a small track on the same site. Indeed, the two clubs are keen to work together for mutual benefit where possible.

Strategic Management Team Comment

17. Cabinet is recommended:
 - To authorise officers to enter into a 5-year management agreement with SCC for the laying of a cricket square and artificial wicket and their on-going maintenance.

- To agree to granting the club exclusive use of the facility and waiving the associated booking fees.
- To authorise officers to enter into a lease with SCC for a container to be sited on the recreation ground and subsequently, when funding has been secured, to enter into a longer-term lease to facilitate the construction of a permanent pavilion subject to planning permission.
- To authorise officers to proceed with the disposal of the land to be leased, in accordance with Section 123(2A) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

Financial Implications

18. The Council has part-funded the site investigations needed to get the project off the ground, but all of the costs associated with the purchase of the container and its maintenance, creation of the cricket pitch and ancillary items and their on-going operation will be met by SCC and its funders. In return for waiving the pitch booking fees and implementing a peppercorn rent residents will benefit from an enhanced facility at no additional cost to the Council.
19. Loss of potential income from booking fees are estimated to be £1,100 per annum and are counterbalanced in part by reduction in maintenance costs as above.

Legal Implications

20. Resourcing from Legal Services will be required in relation to considering any covenants that may apply to the land, and preparation of the leases and management agreement.

Environmental

21. SMRG is sited on a former brickworks and the levels were made up extensively with imported material between the 1930s and 1970s. SCC is aware of the potential for ground movements and accepts the implications in terms of future maintenance. The historical filling works represent a potential source of contamination, but site investigations commissioned by the Council have identified the level of risk to users of the outside space as being low. Further investigations are in progress in connection with the potential risk posed by ground gases to the proposed pavilion.

Equalities and Diversity

22. The provision of a more permanent cricket ground in Sidley will support access to people of all ages and abilities, living both within the area and further afield, to improved sports facilities within an area of deprivation.

Other Implications	Applies?	Other Implications	Applies?
Human Rights	No	Equalities and Diversity	Yes
Crime and Disorder	No	Consultation	No
Environmental	Yes	Access to Information	No
Sustainability	No	Exempt from publication	No
Risk Management	No		

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Appendices:	None
Relevant Previous Minutes:	
Background Papers:	None
Reference Documents:	None
