



## **Communities Scrutiny Group**

**Thursday, 25 July 2024**

### **Use of Community Facilities and Managed Spaces**

#### **Report of the Director of Neighbourhoods**

##### **1. Purpose of report**

- 1.1. The Community Facilities service co-ordinates the operation and public use of Rushcliffe Borough Council owned and managed community buildings, sports pitches and amenity open spaces. These facilities provide space for a range of activities including meetings and events, physical activities and parties.
- 1.2. This service was last reviewed by the Community Facilities Member Group in January 2020. Subsequent to that review, an options appraisal was carried out in 2020 on the management of Lutterell Hall, formerly known as West Bridgford Community Hall. This resulted in The Rock Church taking over operational management of Lutterell Hall in 2021. The management of Lutterell Hall will therefore not form a part of this scrutiny.
- 1.3. This report and officer presentation will give the Group an update on current facilities operated by the Council, including management arrangements, their present occupancy and income generated. This will enable Councillors to scrutinise this information and make comment on their operation.

##### **2. Recommendation**

It is RECOMMENDED that the Communities Scrutiny Group considers the contents of the report and presentation and makes comments on the provision of community facilities operated by the Council.

##### **3. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 3.1. As the Council continues to face financial pressures, it is important to review all services to ensure that they are delivering efficient, value for money services balanced against delivering community benefits and social value.
- 3.2. This report will enable Councillors to scrutinise the current performance and consider making recommendations on the future operation of these facilities.

##### **4. Supporting Information**

- 4.1. For the purposes of this report, the Community Facilities in the scope of this scrutiny have been split into two distinct service areas - community venues for hire, and playing fields, parks and open spaces owned and managed by the Borough council.

- 4.2. Community venues and managed spaces fall within the scope of the Council Leisure Strategy and Playing Pitch Strategy. The Council recognises the critical role such facilities can play to inspire residents to come together in their local area to further their social wellbeing and take part in sport, physical and wellbeing activities. This in turn links directly to the Council's Corporate Strategy "quality of life" priority for the significant social value they provide to their users.

### **Community venues for hire**

- 4.3. The community venues which are available for public hire are as follows:
- Rushcliffe Arena
  - Sir Julian Cahn Pavilion
  - West Park Sports Pavilion meeting room
  - Gamston Community Hall
  - Rushcliffe Country Park Education Centre conference room.
- 4.4. These venues are managed by using the Switch Digital Management Booking System.

### **Playing fields**

- 4.5. The Council has three bookable areas for outdoor sports. These are: Gresham Sports Park which includes the playing fields, two artificial turf pitches and ancillary pavilion; Alford Road including playing fields and ancillary pavilion; and West Park cricket pitch provision.
- 4.6. These playing fields and ancillary buildings are managed by the Pitchbooking Digital Management Booking System.

### **Parks and open spaces**

- 4.7. The various parks and open spaces are predominately managed by the Switch digital management booking system except for the Council's tennis provision which is managed by a third-party provider called Active Ace. Bridge field, the Croquet Lawn and Rushcliffe Country Park are the primary open spaces which the council hire to external users. We have the ability to hire other open spaces but review each request on a case-by-case basis to ensure the appropriateness of the request and don't adversely affect the ecology of the site or impact on residents.

### **Financial performance against financial targets**

- 4.8. Table one shows the income against target for each community venue for hire for a 12-month period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. The red text indicates if the venue has not achieved its income target and the green text indicates it has achieved or surpassed its target.

**Table 1**

<b>Location</b>	<b>Target 23/24</b>	<b>Actual 23/24</b>	<b>Target 24/25</b>
Gamston	£56,100	£34,742	£46,400
SJCP	£38,000	£28,718	£43,300
West Park	£15,500	£9,507	£16,000
RCP	£5,500	£4,624	£5,800
Gresham	£13,100	£3,398	£13,500
Arena	£16,500	£20,653	£17,000
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>£144,700</b>	<b>£101,642</b>	<b>£142,000</b>

- 4.9. Table two shows the income against target for playing pitches, parks and open spaces for a 12-month period 1 April 2023 to March 2024. The red text indicates if the venue has not achieved its income target and the green text indicates it has achieved or surpassed its target.

**Table 2**

<b>Location</b>	<b>Target 23/24</b>	<b>Actual 23/24</b>	<b>Target 24/25</b>
<b>Gresham Sports Park pitches and AGP</b>	£108,300	£167,612	£108,300
<b>West Park Sports pitches</b>	£8,000	£9,166	£8,000
<b>Alford Road</b>	£6,700	£4,386	£6,700
<b>Rushcliffe Country park</b>	£70,800	£66,689	£72,200
<b>Bridgford Park</b>	£27,100	£27,327	£27,900
<b>Total</b>	<b>£220,900</b>	<b>£275,180</b>	<b>£223,100</b>

- 4.10. Fees and charges for community facilities are benchmarked against equivalent local facilities and increase annually typically in line with inflation. Whilst every effort is made to provide comparable fees to other providers, the individual offering at each venue is unique and not comparable to all community venues. This exercise is easier for sports pitches as the sizes of pitches are standardised and therefore directly comparable. The current list of fees and charges can be viewed online at <https://www.rushcliffe.gov.uk/about-us/about-the-council/fees-and-charges/>.
- 4.11. The Team Manager for Communities in conjunction with the Communities Manager and Senior Finance Business Partner have commenced a series of fees and charges reviews. This work has aimed to consolidate and simplify the fees and charges offered to customers. Due to the Gresham

redevelopment, this work initially focussed on playing pitches to remove a number of price points, and peak and off-peak options, to simplify the customer experience and improve service delivery. The community venue fees and charges are currently being reviewed to simplify the range of fees and charges available, removing variable rates at weekends to ensure that the fees are easily understood, and work consistently with our digital platforms but at the same time not adversely impacting existing bookings or income recovery.

- 4.12. In the financial year 2023/24, fees and charges for the Community Venues and managed spaces rose by 10% as inflation was predicted to be at this level as the Council aimed to achieve cost recovery for delivering the service. This also came at a time when venue operators were struggling to return to post Covid user numbers and associated cost of living crisis. As a result, the Council lost approximately 13 regular bookings from venues with some retiring, closing their businesses or finding alternative venues. Table three below provides a summary of these booking cancellations.

**Table 3**

<b>Venue</b>	<b>Booking</b>
Sir Julien Cahn	Dramatots
Gresham	First Class Learning
Sir Julien Cahn	Jo Jingles
Sir Julien Cahn	Slimming World
West Park Sports Pavilion	Stretchfit Pilates
Gamston Community Hall	Mini Athletics
Gamston Community Hall	Total PH fitness
Gamston Community Hall	Zumba
Gresham	Pro-Direct/SCL
Gresham	Yoga
Sir Julien Cahn Pavilion	Lullababy
West Park Sports Pavilion	FTM Dance
Sir Julien Cahn Pavilion	Dance Equation

- 4.13. In the financial year 2023/24, the Communities Manager, in consultation with the Senior Finance Business Partner, also commenced an audit review of the community venues and managed spaces income undertaking a significant reconciliation process and seeking to address historical discounts to ensure that booking aligned with published fees and charges. The audit made several recommendations which have been implemented to ensure that there are robust policies in place to deal with discount requests moving forward.

### **Occupancy of community venues**

- 4.14. The calculation of occupancy levels was traditionally based upon facilities being available for hire for 13 hours per day from 9.00am to 10.00pm for seven days a week. There is a reduction of two hours per day, which equates to 15% availability, when the venue is not available for hire to reflect the

changeover of bookings, cleaning and set-up. This is now calculated by the digital booking platform and provides a rich form of data to better understand down time, create efficiencies and improve productivity on how venue occupancy and income can be optimised.

- 4.15. The average weekly percentage occupancy for each individual facility is calculated. These are added together for the month to provide an average occupancy figure per facility which is then used to calculate an average occupancy percentage across all facilities. Monthly occupancy averages are used to calculate a rolling cumulative figure.

Venue	Monthly Occupancy 22/23	Monthly Occupancy 23/24	Monthly Occupancy Qtr 1 24/25
Gamston Community Hall	35%	33%	23% *
Sir Julien Cahn Pavilion	48%	38%	29%*
West Park Sports Pavilion	32%	29%	33%
RCP Meeting Room	40% (from October 2022 onwards)	43%	41%
Rushcliffe Arena	29%	42%	66%
Council Chamber A	26%	34%	48%
Council Chamber B	24%	29%	56%
CR 1	12%	29%	53%
CR 2	22%	21%	55%
CR 3			
Cumulative	29.4%	33.1%	45.3%

\*Reduced occupancy Qtr 1 due to school holiday periods in April and May and reduced usage by children’s activity providers.

- 4.16. The Council’s community venues have a target usage rate of **50%**. This target has not been achieved since pre-Covid. The outturn for April 2023 to March 2024 was 33.1%. The comparable outturn from April 2022 to March 2023 was 29.4%. Covid-19 recovery has been further impaired by the cost-of-living crisis and loss of several regular hirers due to financial pressures upon small businesses.

### Changing trends and customer expectations

- 4.17. The locations with the highest usage in 2023/24 were the Council Chamber at Rushcliffe Arena and the RCP Meeting Room with 42% and 43% usage respectively. Both locations offer AV services and WIFI connections thereby attracting daytime business usage as well as community usage at evenings and weekends. It is anticipated that the Sir Julien Cahn Pavilion’s capital

refurbishment in early 2025 will see growth in daytime business usage as there has been a trend of moving away from wedding and adult parties at our community spaces to more meeting and group activities. In addition, weekend related parking issues at West Park associated with mini football have impacted on Sir Julian Cahn bookings and plans are in place to address this below.

### **Occupancy of playing fields (sport pitches for hire)**

- 4.18. From 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, 3,414 bookings via the Pitch Bookings digital platform with a value of £181,164 were received. There are 383 registered users of Pitchbooking. 589 grass pitch match bookings were hosted, of which 331 were for West Bridgford Colts/ Score.

### **Gresham Sports Park**

- 4.19. The primary site for sports pitches is Gresham Sports Park which offers two full size artificial football pitches, with 15 different pitch combinations, and four full size grass pitches and one mini grass pitch. The installation of the second artificial turf pitch at Gresham Sports Park in 2022 supported a strong financial outturn in 2023/24. Year to date summer usage, with touch rugby and holiday activity football camps, is seeing significant growth on site. The Council is also delighted to host the East Midlands Pan Disability League every month with requests for additional hours being considered.
- 4.20. Peak demand for pitches at Gresham is at evenings and weekends, and there are opportunities for growth of weekday daytime usage which is currently being discussed with a higher-level education provider. The Council has also been successful with a grant application to the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) for the installation of a non turf cricket wicket which will enable cricket matches to be played on site.

### **Alford Road Playing Fields**

- 4.21. Alford Road playing fields, currently offering three adult football pitches, one adult rugby pitch and two mini 5v5 pitches, have been significantly impacted by surface water flooding and Severn Trent related attenuation tank issue following construction in 2019/20. This resulted in 1/3 of bookings requiring weather related cancellation in the 2023/24 football season. Using Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding, a programme of pitch improvement works is currently underway at Alford Road over the summer to mitigate the climate related surface water flooding issues. In addition, an investigation has been opened with Severn Trent to understand what is causing the attenuation tanks to overtop and flood the playing fields and road beyond.
- 4.22. The pitch improvement works will also reconfigure the pitches to provide two adult pitches, two overmarked 9v9 junior pitches, five 5v5 mini pitches, relocated from West Park, and one adult rugby pitch. It is, therefore, imperative that the pitch improvement is successful to cater for the increased

demand for pitches across all our sites. It is anticipated that this will also address the under recovery of income due to pitches needing to be called off.

### **West Park Sports Playing Field**

- 4.23. A series of pitch improvements have taken place at West Park since April 2023 to improve the pitch quality with the strategic ambition of becoming a dedicated cricket facility to reflect the history of the site but also to meet the increased demand for cricket facilities. This work has included grass pitch treatments and a grant from the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) for the replacement of the Non-Turf Wicket.
- 4.24. Officers have been in discussions for several months with Nottinghamshire County Cricket Club (NCCC) to explore opportunities regarding a deeper collaboration with a focus on women's and girls, and to support Nottinghamshire's Cricket vision from community all the way up to elite level.
- 4.25. To support this transition and to mitigate the impact of mini football over the winter months on the cricket pitch, mini football at West Park has now ceased and will transfer to Alford Road in September to enable West Park to become a dedicated cricket ground for the 2025 season. This will also mitigate the impact of parking at the weekends and is hoped to have a positive impact usage of the Sir Julian Cahn Pavilion. For the 2024 season, cricket usage is currently at 90%.

### **Capital improvements since 2020 and current capital programme**

- 4.26. There have been several capital enhancements since 2020 to the community venues including, the installation of a second artificial turf pitch, refurbishment of the existing artificial turf pitch, floodlight replacement, grass pitch improvements, EV charger installation, Changing Places toilet and changing pavilion internal refurbishment at Gresham Sports Park. The complete masterplan refurbishment of the RCP Education Centre, creation of a dedicated workshop and creation of a Café kiosk, dining shelter, toilet improvements, Changing Places Toilet and EV charger installation. Gamston Community Centre has benefited from a post Covid internal refurbishment throughout and creation of a solar EV charging station. A light touch painting refurbishment of West Park Sports Pavilion and Sir Julian Cahn Pavilion has taken place in addition to the grass pitch improvements previously mentioned. The tennis provision at both Bridgford Park and West Park has been cleaned and repainted and added to a regular maintenance schedule.
- 4.27. The West Bridgford play areas improvement programme continued with complete refurbishments taking place at Alford Road play area, Abbey Park play area, Adbolton Lane play area, Boundary Road bike track replacement, Boundary Road play area refurbishment, Greythorn Drive play area refurbishment and Rushcliffe Country Park play area refurbishment.
- 4.28. The current capital programme for the financial year 2024/25 will focus on the decarbonisation of Gamston Community Hall with the replacement of the gas

boiler with air source heat pump alternative and the complete refurbishment of the Sir Julian Cahn pavilion including an air source heat pump alternative, installation of modern technology and WIFI which is a key customer requirement. Both projects have been successful in receiving £132,000 Salix funding to support this decarbonisation work.

- 4.29. Bridgford Park play area and Bridge Field teen provision have been identified as the play schemes to be improved in this financial year and improvements will be informed by the refreshing of the Council's Play Strategy with a focus around inclusion and making space for girls.
- 4.30. The team is also working with the England and Wales Cricket Board on a grant for the installation of five cricket nets at West Park to support the further development of cricket on site which is subject to a live planning application.
- 4.31. A further and significant capital project that the team are leading on is the creation of a new community building to serve the Edwalton/Sharphill development. Work on the construction of this building is scheduled to commence in the autumn when the topsoil clearance on site has taken place.

### **Venue marketing and data intelligence**

- 4.32. A programme of work has been undertaken to improve venue marketing and identify opportunities for growth by better utilising customer data. This includes publicity of videos and other content regularly on social media and other media channels to ensure there is a constant focus on the venues and the ease with which they can be booked. The content is reviewed as much as possible to capture material that can showcase their multi-use advantages and how they can be adapted to host many different types of occasion.

Activities include:

- Creation of a Facilities Marketing Action Plan with monthly thematic priorities for communications activity
- Production of promotional video content for social media for all venues
- Improvements to facilities promotional assets: updated photography for each location, and in-venue signage and branding
- Dedicated website landing page which leads to the booking platform
- Review of the Council's online presence for facilities, search engine optimisation and social media reach
- Collecting data from digital platforms for current and past bookings to undertake targeted marketing particularly for customers who may have made enquiries but not progressed with the booking for whatever reason.

### **Service improvements**

- 4.33. Since the last scrutiny, a series of community facilities service improvements have taken place. The below bullets are not an exhaustive list and will be covered in more detail in the presentation on the evening, but key changes are as follows:



- Initiation of online booking platforms – Switch and Pitchbooking, with the ability for customers to view, book and pay online
- Use of Stripe for payment processing
- Improvement financial reconciliation and reduced arrears
- Improved online presence – dedicated web presence
- Ability to take damage deposits and make refunds for cancellations
- Improvement in management oversight and performance monitoring with formalised processes and protocols and new training packages
- Investment at venues – AV/ Wi-Fi and hybrid tech at Arena, Gresham second ATP, pitch improvements at Alford Road, Gamston refurbishment etc
- Staff development and competency framework for individual staff members
- Seeking opportunities for commercial growth – new tournaments and events pricing system, Big Parking contract, potential education partnership at Gresham, faith groups and public sector partners at our community venues.

4.34. Looking ahead, to the future of our community venues and managed spaces, each venue and space needs to be reviewed to ensure that income generation and social value factors are balanced. The Council is seeing an increased demand for high quality sports pitches and community venues with modern technology as standard. The traditional demand for bars in venues has decreased in the same way it has done across the leisure estate. There is also a growing awareness, and expectation, that are community venues have green technology and are decarbonised, and that our green spaces have more trees, more wildflower meadows and no-mow areas as standard which contrasts with the more formal public park maintenance regimes of the past.

## **5. Risks and Uncertainties**

- 5.1. There is a risk that the use of facilities in the current economic environment could see income reduce and therefore place additional pressure on Council budgets. To mitigate this risk, the Council will continue to respond to changing customer demands.
- 5.2. As part of the financial audit, the number of hirers on outdated preferential or discount rates was reduced. There is a risk, therefore, that there will be a period where income and usage will decrease. This lost business will need to be replaced with customers aligning with the published fees and charges. The new booking system monitoring will be used to ensure new arrangements are monitored and reviewed on a regular basis, and corrective action is taken as necessary.

## **6. Implications**

### **6.1. Financial Implications**

Costs associated with running community venues and income generated from their use are included in existing budgets. Paragraphs 4.8 and 4.10 show the

income for the 2023/24 financial year against target. The expectation is that income from community building, and managed spaces, should cover the costs to run them, and this should be carefully monitored. Should any alternative options be considered, the financial implications of these will need to be understood.

All the Council's built estate will be included in a planned Corporate Asset Review and the work undertaken above will inform this review to ensure that venues are fit for purpose, value for money and continue to meet the needs of the community.

## 6.2. **Legal Implications**

There are no legal implications associated with this report.

## 6.3. **Equalities Implications**

Equality Impact Assessments are carried out when alterations are made to sites. This has resulted in improvements with PAN, Changing Places toilet provision, Inclusive Play provision, and hard to reach groups on Friday nights at Gresham with Notts County Foundation

## 6.4. **Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 Implications**

The provision of community facilities and managed spaces often provide and facilitate a range of diversionary activities which help to reduce the risk of crime and anti-social behaviour.

The team has undertaken a series of targeted hardening measures particularly in relation to our car parks and open spaces to reduce and mitigate the risks of illegal encampments and anti-social behaviour (ASB). This work has included new height restriction barriers, knee rail barriers and strategic planting of trees in some encampment and ASB hotspot areas. New security cameras and alarms were installed as part of the RCP development, and a business case for the installation of security cameras at Gresham Sports Park is currently being worked on.

## 6.5. **Biodiversity Net Gain Implications**

Several biodiversity net gain projects have taken place on the Council's managed parks and open spaces including additional tree planting, and swale improvement at Gresham Sports Park. No-mow sites across the estate, and the creation of wildflower meadows to increase the ecology and biodiversity, have all been introduced whilst still providing a balance with the need for amenity opens spaces for wellbeing activities.

## 7. **Link to Corporate Priorities**

The Environment	The Environment priority is a core element of service delivery of community venues and managed spaces, from
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	decarbonisation of our community venues, increasing the ecology and biodiversity opportunities on parks and open spaces and by exploring projects to transfer vehicles to EV alternatives the environment touches all aspects of service delivery.
Quality of Life	Delivering high quality community facilities that support community events and gatherings at affordable prices will have a positive impact on residents' quality of life.
Efficient Services	This review is intended to ensure that the Council is getting the best value for money from community facilities by managing them efficiently and effectively.
Sustainable Growth	The management of community venues and managed open spaces need to meet the growing population in the borough and ensure that adequate community infrastructure is in place to meet this demand

## 8. Recommendations

It is RECOMMENDED that the Communities Scrutiny Group considers the contents of the report and presentation and makes comments on the provision of community facilities operated by the Council.

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<b>Background papers available for Inspection:</b>	NIL
<b>List of appendices:</b>	Scrutiny Matrix