



COLWICH PARISH COUNCIL

Colwich Parish Council Disclosure Log

Request: CPC FOI 5/17

Subject: Use of the JPF Playing Field for football and similar.

Question

As a resident of Great Haywood, I have some concerns about the development work undergoing in the local area that I feel requires further investigation that are itemised below.

1. In 2016 Staffordshire County Council took the decision to surrender its Shugborough Estate lease with The National Trust at a cost of circa £6.8m per annum for three years. This resulted in the loss of the football pitches and cricket field due to redevelopment work undergone by The National Trust. At this point it is important to note that The National Trust offered Great Haywood FC a lifeline by extending its licence to continue playing football there until December 2017, which was greatly appreciated by all involved. However, Ian Parry stated the following when the decision was made;

“This agreement will save £35m of taxpayers’ money over the next 50 years. It will enable us to invest more in supporting communities to be active and independent, and caring for the most vulnerable in society.

This agreement will bring great benefits for the Shugborough Estate, Staffordshire residents and the National Trust; it is also the best option to secure the future of the Shugborough Estate.”

This strategic decision has the aim to save taxpayers significant funds over the next 50 years and will allow further support for communities to become “active and independent”. With the loss of three football pitches, and the Jubilee Playing Fields not having a football pitch like in the past, where is the financial support to deliver a project that could engage so many within the Parish on a site that has hosted senior and junior football? At the time of the transition this gained national attention with over 700 signatures opposing the decision to close the sporting facilities, which have yet to be supported by the local council by opening an alternative. This seriously affects the stability of the club in both the short and long term, which has the potential to leave the community without a football club whose history is over 30 years old. I for one would be disappointed in knowing my leadership led to the fall of one of the local clubs keeping a level of positivity and enjoyment.

2. As part of the national housing shortage, Stafford Borough Council has approved several planning applications for the development of substantial housing estates within the Parish. Although out of the control of the local council, I do not oppose these developments as I believe it further diversifies an already strong community and only helps bring in further talent from a football perspective. As we are aware these housing developers will pay a significant fee to Stafford Borough Council that is to be utilised by the local community to develop the local area to ensure the community is rewarded for such developments. This is another superb reason to provide stability to Great Haywood FC so that they can offer football to a range of ages for the years to come.

3. The construction of HS2 is another project that affects the Parish and is strongly opposed by the community. Unfortunately, this is a national project that we can have little impact on but a football club is about bringing something positive to the area, which can help give people of all ages purpose and enjoyment.

4. It was reported by the Staffordshire Newsletter that £150,000 was to be made available for the development of Jubilee Playing Fields, which has since finished. Although the park equipment is of sub-standard and could be investigated for its safety, I do believe the BMX track, skate park and multi-use game area were of great benefit. Sadly, the drainage issue has put any work on hold due to poor workmanship by the company used. This company was not a local based business and this is disappointing when such businesses are available in the Parish alone. The subsequent legal battle is an additional cost to the community and is a further setback for a football club that must provide disappointing answers to the questions raised by its ever-increasing support.

5. During the June 2017 Finance meeting held by Colwich Parish Council point 9/17 details the transfer of £10,000 from the Changing Room Block Reserve and does not go into further detail the fund remaining in the reserve or why it was transferred. It is feared that a grant has been returned or the funds originally available are no longer required. This will raise the question of the council's integrity when stating their desire to support the football club with a new home.

Although Colwich Parish Council's support has been vocal for the football club and there has been assistance in extending the licence with The National Trust it is becoming increasingly apparent that work will not commence on the Jubilee Playing Fields and that empty promises have been made. With the issues raised around the housing developments by passionate and dedicated people of the community we hope something positive can be concluded. I hope; the residents, those who signed the petition, Staffordshire County Council, Stafford Borough Council and the press will be reading exciting news about the plans already promised by the council rather than further disappointment.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and I look forward to your quick response regarding these points via email before an open letter is issued publicly later this week.

Response

1. You may be aware that football was played at the JPF previously. Unfortunately, the field was frequently waterlogged and so teams looked for alternative venues and the Parish Council sought funds to undertake a drainage project which was carried out in 2009. Unfortunately, whilst the land drains have provided drainage they have not been a success in providing a suitable playing surface. Indeed, the surface has been declared unfit for use as a football pitch by several authoritative bodies. Consequently, the Council has been working for many years to rectify this situation.

The Great Haywood Football Team (GHFT) has been more than content to use the field at Shugborough and, like the other football and cricket teams, are only looking for an alternative venue due to the National Trust's decision to close the pitches. The Parish Council, following the announcement from the National Trust that football and cricket would no longer be allowed in Shugborough, worked closely with the National Trust and GHFT. It was through the efforts of the Parish Council that the National Trust has agreed to a short extension to the football team's use of the site. When the Parish Council agreed that GHFT could use the JPF field it was on the understanding that the Council was still working to have a playable field and that this might not be available for the 2017/18 season. To further assist the team, the Council agreed, in January 2017, to

consider a grant to the football team to hire a pitch elsewhere until the JPF is usable. The GHFT has identified an acceptable pitch in Hixon.

2. Under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, as amended, contributions can be sought from developers towards the costs of providing community and social infrastructure, the need for which has arisen as a result of a new development taking place. Contributions may be sought when planning conditions are inappropriate to ensure and enhance the quality of development and to enable proposals that might otherwise have been refused to go ahead in a sustainable manner. This funding is commonly known as 'Section 106'. It is important to note that S.106 monies may therefore only be spent on facilities where the new development has, at least in part, contributed to the need for the facilities. S.106 funding is available for capital projects only. Revenue funding towards on-going running costs is not available. Planning obligations may be used to:-

- Require a sum or sums to be paid to Stafford Borough Council on a specified date or dates periodically;
- Restrict the development or use of the land in a specified way;
- Require specified operations or activities to be carried out on the land;
- Require the land to be used in a specified way.

They provide a means of ensuring that developers contribute towards the infrastructure and services that Stafford Borough Council believe necessary to facilitate proposed developments. Contributions may be either in cash or kind. A portion of the S.106 monies are allocated to support leisure provision. The Parish Council is able to bid for a percentage of these funds providing it is able to provide fully costed project proposals to the Borough Council and justify the need for the project. These monies are not targeted at one particular sport but rather for open spaces across the area in general. A further obligation is always required to offset the increased numbers using the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (Cannock Chase) within the Stafford area. The Council is working with Stafford Borough Council, through the local Ward Member to access these funds.

3. The Council is looking to meet with HS2 to discuss, amongst other issues, whether they will have a community fund directly available to parish councils. Again, any monies the Council are able to obtain from HS2 Limited will be used to enhance open spaces and leisure facilities across the parish and not specifically targeted at one sport to the detriment of other activities. Sports specific funding would need to be obtained from the national body of that sport e.g. the Football Association as even Sport England would likely insist on multi-sport provision. Moreover, funding would need to be used in line with the Equalities Act 2010 which would prohibit support for an activity which might be considered to be excluding people on the grounds of age, gender, disability or ethnicity.

4. The Parish Council has spent £218,400 on the new equipment at the JPF over the last few years. In 2014/15 it spent £157,400 on the MUGA, Skate Park, BMX Track, Youth Shelter and a new footpath. These monies had been acquired over time and their expenditure depleted the Council's reserves. In 2016/17 the Council, therefore, made a charge on the Council Tax, known as the precept, to cover the £61,000 spent on the new younger children's play equipment. The Council has, additionally, invested in a CCTV system, with night vision, to protect this investment. The previous children's play equipment was showing its age having been in place for over 20 years. Numerous of the wooden posts were starting to rot, the top bar of the swings was starting to warp and the roundabout was a trap hazard. The new equipment was well over due and is fully RoSPA compliant. The Council utterly rejects your assertion that the equipment is sub-standard. The Council is committed to providing an array of leisure facilities for residents, primarily at the JPF. I

would hope that residents would agree that the equipment which has been installed at the JPF is very popular and well used.

The contract for the drainage system was let in 2009 using companies known to Stafford Borough Council at that time. The company selected is Stafford based. The legal process to address the issue with the drainage system commenced in 2014 i.e. a long time before the decision was taken to close the Shugborough estate to football and cricket. As mentioned above, the football team were made aware of this legal process at the outset of our discussions with them and have been supportive of what the Council is trying to achieve.

5. The Council decided, in its 8th June Full Council meeting, to amend its Changing Room reserve and reduce it from £30,000 to £20,000. Until the decision to close the football and cricket pitches at Shugborough there was no urgency to 'finish' the changing rooms. Nevertheless, the Council planned ahead and had funds ready with the intention to complete the changing rooms once the field issue was resolved. The Council is now looking to work on the changing rooms this winter with the works being undertaken by the Council's two lengthsmen, hence an amount for labour costs is not required. These funds were all Council monies and no grant was returned to any funder. On the contrary, the Council will be looking to bid for funds from Sport England and/or the Football Association to help cover the cost of the changing room refurbishment so enabling the Council to reallocate some of the £20,000 elsewhere in its budget.

6. The Council were very clear that the use of the field was subject to a satisfactory conclusion of the legal case and agreed to consider funding towards the hire of pitches for GHFT elsewhere in the meantime. The Council continues to work towards providing a field which is safe for football and similar, but until that time the Council cannot authorise its use. The management of the football team have been kept informed, as best we can, and they are fully supportive of what the Council is trying to do. The Council agreed, at the 27th July Extraordinary Full Council meeting, to co-opt some of the management of the team onto its JPF working group.

The Council has many calls on its funds, as is the case for most Parish Councils, the overwhelming majority of which comes from the charge on the Council Tax. The Council values the football team and appreciates that it is very important to its players and supporters. However, in all its dealings, the Council needs to balance the requirements of all sections of the parish community. The Council actively works with an array of community groups, who are not directly part of the Council, not the responsibility of the Council, for example the Council hosts the answerphone for the Voluntary Transport Scheme. I am sure you appreciate that it is important that the Council stands independent from these groups so that it can make fair and balanced decisions for the greater good of the parish.

Date Received: 18th July 2017

Date Full Response: 11th August 2017

Responded within 20 working days: YES

Estimated Cost to Council: £250