

LEIGHTON-LINSLADE TOWN COUNCIL
ASTRAL PARK TASK AND FINISH GROUP
MONDAY 11 NOVEMBER 2019 AT 0930 HOURS

Present: Councillors R Berry
 A Dodwell
 S Jones – in the Chair
 V Harvey

Also in attendance: M Saccoccio (Town Clerk)
 I Haynes (Head of Grounds & Environmental
 Services)
 S Sandiford (Head of Democratic & Central
 Services)

Members of the Public: 0
Members of the Press: 0

7/AP APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence had been received.

8/AP DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Members were asked to declare any interests, including the nature of those interests, which they had in any of the items under consideration at this meeting. No declarations were made.

9/AP MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Task and Finish group received the draft minutes of the meeting held on 21 August 2019.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Astral Park Task and Finish group meetings held on 21 August 2019 be approved as a correct record and were signed accordingly.

10/AP FEES AND CHARGES FROM 1 APRIL 2020

The Task and Finish Group firstly received an update confirming that the previous recommendations made to Committee had been endorsed and therefore the draft budget for 2020-21 included the agreed changes (deletion of bar/catering income, amalgamation of Astral Park costs with other pavilions, CCTV cost moved to Community Safety). The pavilions hire income figure

incorporated an anticipated reduction of 7.5% in Astral Park hires to reflect the change in operating procedures.

In recent years it had been agreed by Committee to apply an annual increase in fees and charges of the September RPI, rounded up to the nearest 50 pence. The RPI for September 2019 was 2.4%.

The Task and Finish group received the list of current fees and charges for venue hire, use of parks and use of sporting facilities.

At present, hire fees for Pages Park Pavilion were lower than those for Mentmore Pavilion, reflecting its condition. Despite the refurbishment and the large size of the building, it was proposed that no significant increase be made to either fees or predicted income, until such time as the car parking and external lighting had been improved.

Following its refurbishment, Pages Park Pavilion would now be a VAT-able asset with VAT charged to hirers.

The Task and Finish group receive the list of current fees and charges for the Astral Park Sports and Community Centre. It was noted that the charging structure was far more complex than for other venues, depending on the type of use.

Discussion took place regarding promotion of the Astral Park Sports and Community Centre as a wedding venue. The cost of the wedding licence was significant and when compared to the number of wedding services booked, was not covering its cost. Furthermore, use of the venue for weddings precluded other uses of the site for a whole day and often also for part of the night before and following day. Following a number of staff changes over time, the Centre had not had dedicated catering staff for some time and there was an element of risk involved in the use of outside caterers. The complexity of weddings also meant significant planning and organisation, but the Town Council was not in a position to justify an events co-ordinator for this purpose, unlike dedicated venues such as hotels.

Overall, it was agreed that the Council should not be subsidising private functions and recognised that the venue was not ideal for wedding ceremonies, although was still a good venue for celebration functions. It was suggested that the current wedding licence would not be renewed upon its expiry and that any future hires for wedding receptions would be on the basis that the hirer would organise any external services required themselves (catering, decoration, flowers, marquee hire etc).

RECOMMENDED to the Grounds and Environmental Services Committee that the wedding service licence for the Astral Park Sports and Community Centre not be renewed upon its expiry.

For the two wedding services already booked for 2020, prices would be honoured and the functions serviced by Town Council staff.

It was noted that costs for maintenance of the kitchen equipment were embedded in the revenue budget. However, at such time as decisions were needed on replacement of kitchen equipment, careful consideration could be given to the necessity of such equipment.

Discussion took place regarding the different existing fees for different uses of the Astral Hall and the question of subsidising private hire fees even if the use was for community benefit, for example exercise classes. Further discussion took place regarding whether a charity rate should be established, similar to the discounted rates for the other pavilions. It was noted that the financial circumstances of charities could vary greatly and that some groups, which were not registered charities but were voluntary/not for profit groups, might have very constrained finances.

Due to the complications involved in trying to determine differential fee structures for different groups and uses, it was suggested that a simpler way forward might be to consider one standard rate and one off-peak rate. This would help to maximise community use during the quieter periods of the day. Not for profit organisations could potentially apply for a discount on these rates, subject to meeting certain criteria.

It was agreed that officers should undertake some financial modelling based on this approach and that a further meeting be scheduled in order for the Task and Finish Group to consider recommendations.

Discussion took place regarding sporting fees. It was suggested that fees for Sunday football be amended to reflect Saturday fees, as the current higher fee was a legacy arising from historic overtime costs, which were no longer applicable in the current structure of the Grounds and Environmental Services team.

The Task and Finish group discussed the cricket fees and the costs of maintaining two cricket squares within the parish. It was noted that only one of the squares was used by a local team; the other was being used by a team from some distance away. The majority of cricket needs were met by the three local cricket clubs and therefore the demand was limited.

RECOMMENDED to the Grounds and Environmental Services Committee:

- (i) To adjust the fees for Sunday football to bring them in line with Saturday fees.**
- (ii) To consider reducing from two to one cricket squares to reduce the high maintenance costs, in view of the reduced local demand from within the parish.**

A next meeting would take place on Tuesday, 19 November.

The meeting closed at 10:56 hours.

I HEREBY CONFIRM THAT THE FOREGOING IS A TRUE AND ACCURATE RECORD OF THE MEETING HELD ON 11 NOVEMBER 2019.

Chair

19 NOVEMBER 2019.