



South Holland District Council

Review of

Sir Halley Stewart Playing Field

An Overview and Scrutiny Review undertaken by
Sir Halley Stewart Task Group
on behalf of
Performance Monitoring Panel

(4th July 2023)

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1. Introduction

The original Sir Halley Stewart Task Group was formed in December 2013 in response to a concern raised by the Charity Commission about the perceived level of public benefit derived from the Playing field which is a registered charity. The recommendations of that Task Group have been reported on regularly since then, with the latest update given at the Performance Monitoring Panel meeting on Tuesday 29th November. At this meeting it was agreed that the Sir Halley Stewart Task Group be re-established to investigate opportunities and report back to the Committee.

2. Scope of the Review

The floodlights at Spalding United currently did not meet the FAs minimum lux requirements – failure to upgrade by the end of the season would result in demotion. Spalding United could not access assistance from the FA to pay for the upgrade did not wholly lease the ground itself. The FA stipulated upgrades should not be funded by SHDC and a way forward therefore had to be found.

- To ascertain the position with regard to the deeds of the Sir Halley Stewart Playing Field, what SHDC's responsibilities are, and how the requirements impact on the use of the field by Spalding United;
- To consider a way forward with regard to the required floodlighting upgrade for the pitch used by Spalding United.

3. Membership of Task Group

Councillor C J T H Brewis
Councillor P A Redgate
Councillor S C Walsh (Chairman)
Councillor D J Wilkinson

4. Background to Review

During discussion of an update report on the Sir Halley Stewart Task Group at Performance Monitoring Panel on 29 November 2022, the following debate ensued around the financial responsibility of the playing field maintenance, as outlined at point 2.2 of the report:

- a distinction was drawn between the cost of general ground maintenance relating to health and safety compliance which was covered by the Council; and that of specific Football Association (F.A.) league upgrade requirements which was paid for by the respective football club; in the latter case, the Council offered support regarding the sourcing of contractors; and the Assets team ensured that satisfactory standards were upheld;
- an immediate challenge existed in that whilst the floodlights complied with the FA's minimum lux reading requirements for Pinchbeck United, they did not comply with the minimum requirements for Spalding United, who played in a

different league. Spalding United would be demoted if the upgrade was not completed by the end of the current season. The anticipated cost was £25,000.00;

- Some members were unhappy if the cost of F.A. stipulated upgrades to Spalding's Sir Halley Stewart Playing Field, for the benefit of Spalding United, were met by South Holland District Council; maintenance of playing fields in other areas were funded by Parish Councils;
- The Communities Manager confirmed that conditional league upgrade costs were met by the relevant football club, however the Council worked with clubs to assist with the recovery of costs;

Members were aware that the F.A. assisted with the cost of imposed upgrades where a ground was wholly leased by a football club, but the Spalding and Pinchbeck teams were unable to draw on this resource as the field was a public facility. The lease option could be investigated however this would involve lengthy negotiations with the Charity Commission who would likely insist on the inclusion of a provision that the field remain available for the wider use of the community and not be restricted to one user. The complexities of the issue were acknowledged, nonetheless, some football clubs in similar positions had been successful in

- obtaining grant funding for conditional upgrades and members suggested that options be investigated for the benefit of football clubs and the growth of the town.
- The Chairman suggested that the Sir Halley Stewart Task Group be re-established to investigate opportunities and report back to the Committee in the near future. This was supported by majority vote.

5. Method of Review

- Task Group Meetings were held on:
1st February 2023
16th February 2023
28th March 2023
16th June 2023
- A site visit of Sir Halley Stewart Playing Fields was undertaken prior to the meeting on 16th February 2023
- Informal meetings to seek advice and opinion from Officers, Members and external agencies.

6. Summary of Findings

- External Legal advice was received which confirmed that it would be possible to grant a lease of the facility provided it is leased at the proper market value, certified by a valuer who gives a written report. The lease should be subject to a reservation that meets the requirements of the deeds.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

- Having taken the appropriate legal advice, it is recommended that the Council seek a suitable tenant for Sir Halley Stewart Playing Field and that a lease for

at least 7+ years be agreed with a fully ratified contract which states the tenant must comply with the terms of use as stated in the 1951 Deeds.

8. Financial Implications of Recommendations

There is significant funding available for improving facilities that a tenant could be eligible for but Local Authorities cannot access. Leasing the site could enable investment in the site and improvement in the facilities.

9. Main Sources of Information and individuals contacted during the Review

- The Chair and Lead Officer met with the following:
 - Phil Perry, Assistant Director Leisure & Culture
 - Andy Fisher, Assistant Director, General Fund Assets
 - Steph Powell, Head of Football Development, Lincolnshire FA
- Cllr Gary Taylor was consulted informally as Portfolio Holder for Communities & Facilities

10. Abbreviations

FA Football Association