

Agenda item 5

For decision - Whether to incur costs in an attempt to reduce the number of stray balls coming from the MUGA into the Frome Selwood Bowls Club

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Summary

This report outlines the concerns and frustrations of the Frome Selwood Bowling Club, who continue to report stray balls coming over their boundary from Mary Baily.

It identifies and costs some options that could address their concerns.

Background

Prior to construction, the multi-use games area (MUGA) at the bottom end of Mary Baily Playing Field was subject to a planning application. This included public consultation and direct consultation with neighbours that included the bowls club.

The MUGA was finished in late 2014. Since then, it has been well-used; especially so in better weather and during the school summer holidays.

Over the hedge at the bottom of Mary Baily Playing Field, the bowls club has reported stray balls coming over their boundary; something they feel is the direct result of the MUGA and orientation of the court.

In an effort to help with this, we increased the height of the fence to three metres nearest the shared boundary in spring 2016 at a cost to FTC of £3,300. The bowls club has acknowledged that this has reduced, but not stopped, the problem.

The bowls club maintain that their fence has been damaged by young people retrieving their balls. Our Ranger team has mended the fence and, as far as we know, the number of “break ins” has reduced substantially. The bowls club is also repaired holes in the boundary. Even so, the bowls club is concerned that “break ins” could lead to vandalism.

The Club were asked to record the incidents of balls coming over earlier this year and between 22 April 2018 and 3 July 2018, the club has recorded balls coming over their boundary on 27 days out of 73; adding up to a total of 36 balls (with more than one ball coming across on some days). On average this is about three balls a week.

A member of the club has also contacted us to report that a ball, likely coming from Mary Baily, hit them on the head. This accident is being addressed separately but is being mentioned here because it has evidently left other members of the club fearful of a similar accident.

Currently, the Rangers have a key for the bowls club and will retrieve the ball if asked. In addition, some bowls club members throw the balls back over or return the balls to the Rangers.

The bowls club are increasingly frustrated by the number of balls coming over the boundary. They fear that the more people force their way into the site, the more chance there is for vandalism.

Peter Macfadyen and I have met with the bowls club and they have requested we do something to stop balls coming over the boundary rather than reinforcing the boundary at ground level to prevent people accessing the club to retrieve their balls.

Frome Selwood Tennis Club

It's also worth noting that the tennis club has reported that footballs occasionally end up on the new tennis courts on Mary Baily; again, very likely coming from the MUGA. MUGA users will also experience stray tennis balls coming from the courts. The tennis club hasn't reported any stray balls ending up on the club courts, however.

Like the bowls club, the Rangers have a key to the tennis courts in Mary Baily and are able to retrieve balls for users.

Ideas & Options

1. Circa £250

We could invest in a set of balls that would be kept at the court. This would include footballs and basketballs.

These would be freely available to anyone wanting to play. Balls that ended up over the fence of the bowls club (or ended up on the tennis courts) would not need to be immediately retrieved since there would be other balls available. Signage could advise users of what to do if a ball went over the hedge.

The Rangers could collect the stray balls each morning (Monday to Friday) returning them to the court.

The estimated cost of £250 would allow for replacement balls during the financial year (to a point, at least); and a fixed net or container to keep them in. This would also allow use of the MUGA by those who came without balls of their own.

This is the recommended option.

2. Circa £5,000

We could increase the height of the (back) fence closest to and running parallel to the boundary of the bowls club. It is impossible to know to what extent this will solve the problem, although it can be assumed that it will help.

3. Circa £10,000

We could fit a rigid mesh or taught net across the entire court creating a kind of cage. This would be high enough to allow for basketball and football to be played and designed to ensure that items balls thrown on from the outside would roll off.

As with 2. above, this option may result in people climbing up the fence or on to the “roof” of the cage. The safety aspects of these arrangements would need to be carefully thought through, although, to the best of our knowledge, we are not aware of anyone having climbed up the existing fences.

Budgets and funding

Although we can fund either option two or three from our main parks budget this year (4033 500), doing so will almost certainly mean forgoing other works and projects.

This early in the financial year it’s difficult to identify exactly what we wouldn’t be able to do, but it would without doubt mean less non-essential repairs to play equipment, non-essential tree work, planned new floral planting and replacing benches and bins.

Alternatively, we could meet some or all of the costs from the General Reserve or to propose to MDC that this project comes from the Garsdale S106.

If Cllrs decide to incur cost, it is recommended that the General Reserve is used.

Discussion

Spending £5k - £10k, in addition to the £3.3k already spent in 2016, to reduce or remove in the region of three balls a week being kicked over is a hard decision to take.

Cllrs could take the view that enough has been spent on trying to prevent balls going over the fence and that there is also no allocated budget to fund options two or three. We could carry on as we do now, working with the bowls club to fill gaps in the hedge as and when they appear, with both parties returning balls as described above. We could also trial option one at the same time.

Recommendation

Continue to work with the bowls club to repair any holes in the hedge as they arise, to return balls to the Ranger team on a regular basis, adopt option 1 above and install appropriate signage at the MUGA requesting that balls are not to be retrieved from the bowls club.