

**Report on the Sustainability of Community Activities currently supported  
by HWMT and how the JPC might impact on it.**

In preparing this report, the authors met with all relevant HWMT Affiliate Groups and the HWMT Trustees and had access to up to date financial information for the Trust.

### **Introduction;**

Since its formation in 1947, the HWMT has been at the core of H in A's sporting and leisure activities through its provision and maintenance of the Memorial Hall and Town Playing Fields. It has always been run on a voluntary basis with the maintenance and support work carried out by the facility users, organised and managed by a small group of Trustees.

This model worked extremely well for a long time but, with life style changes in recent years, it has become increasingly difficult to engage residents in this vital support work and in particular to recruit new blood to the Board of Trustees. The result of this change is that the running of the Trust's facilities has been falling on a small, dwindling and ageing group of residents. This in turn means that the sustainability of the Trust's activities will become progressively more at risk.

Whilst in many towns and villages the equivalent facilities are managed by the local Town or Parish Council - this has not been necessary in H in A because of the existence of the HWMT. As a result the JPC's contribution has been limited to small annual grants.

In light of the HWMT's developing sustainability problem the JPC has resolved to review options for their further involvement, including the possible takeover of the facilities. This report outlines the findings of this review.

### **Summary of Findings;**

The activities most at risk are those using the Playing Fields' grass pitches and Pavilion. It is unlikely that these activities can survive in the medium term without much greater JPC support. It is considered that sustainability is best achieved if this support is in the form of an operational takeover of all the Playing Fields & Pavilion facilities by the JPC.

It is therefore the strong recommendation of the authors that the JPC proceed to a second stage of review as outlined in the final section of this report. In particular attention is drawn to the need to fully understand the potential liabilities associated with the Pavilion and the need to get community support for a takeover.

In the longer term and depending on the outcomes from this second stage, the eventual takeover of the Memorial Hall should be considered.

## **Detailed Findings**

### **The Memorial Hall;**

The Memorial Hall is well maintained and well used, its facilities allowing for flexibility of use. It requires no major maintenance work in the near future and at the current level of utilisation it operates at an annual surplus of circa £5000. This surplus is sustainable currently but dependent on

long term arrangements with the Merrydays Montessori School and tenancy of the residential flat in the building.

The Hall is fully managed by one of the Trustees on a voluntary basis.

### **The Playing Fields;**

The Playing Fields are a 10.5 acre site located 0.25miles out of Henley on the Stratford Road. They are not available for general public use but are used by a number of clubs who are formally affiliated to the HWMT. This affiliation agreement makes clear the rules and responsibilities that apply to the use of the facility and provide the Trust with both control and liability protection. These agreements are long term and open ended and some of the clubs have taken advantage of this to invest in permanent and semi-permanent buildings and sports facilities. The Clubs themselves are wholly responsible for the maintenance, safety and security of these facilities whilst the Trust maintains the common areas including rates, insurance and utilities as appropriate. The Trust then charges these costs back to the Affiliates using an historical formula based on membership and usage and which takes account of the fact that not all affiliates use the Pavilion any more.

Underpinning these arrangements has been the assumption that Affiliates would provide grass cutting, cleaning and minor maintenance on a voluntary basis. Over recent years this has proved unsustainable and the Trust is now planning to fully outsource these tasks.

Affiliates using the Playing Fields are as follows;

#### **Bowls Club;**

The Club currently has 45 members including 8 female members. Most members are retired people. 35 of the members are Henley residents. The club has its own green and clubhouse.

The Club is a Crown Green Bowling Club and whilst this style of bowling is strongly supported in the North of the country, there is only limited support in this region. As a result the Henley Club and others in the area are finding it hard to sustain membership levels. It currently puts out two league teams but is finding it increasingly difficult to put two teams out and may have to drop one. They play two mornings, two evenings and one afternoon throughout the summer. The club is financially stable and has reserves of £5000.

#### **Scouts;**

The Scout group in Henley is well supported with around a 100 boys and girls aged 6 – 18, nearly all of whom are resident in Henley. There is no Girl Guide group in Henley, the nearest being at Wolverton. There are other Scout Groups at Tamworth, Bearley and Studley but like Henley they are heavily subscribed and limited by the availability of supervising volunteers.

They operate from an ex- Severn Trent Water site hut, located on the Playing Fields site, and which has capacity to allow indoor activities for 60-70 members. The planning permission for use of this hut runs out in the next two years and the Scout group is currently trying to raise funds for a new and more permanent replacement.

They operate at breakeven financially although this relies upon the JPC giving a grant to cover the HWMT Affiliate charge.

#### Tennis Club;

The Tennis Club has excellent playing facilities – 7 floodlit hard courts – and Club House. The Club has over 200 members half of whom are juniors. They operate a very open policy regarding membership meaning that players of all ability are welcomed. The Club has a number of qualified coaches and has a number of annual events designed to give opportunities for more people of all ages to try the sport. They are financially stable.

#### Rifle Club;

The Club has 30 members, mostly in the older age range, most of whom are not Henley residents. They operate in an ex- Army barrack building based on the Playing fields site. They have been in existence since 1985 and there has been no real interest shown by local residents to get involved – although the Club has not tried extensively to create such interest.

Notwithstanding that, the Club's members have good record of supporting the Trust in the running of the site.

#### Table Tennis;

The Club has 6 members, two of whom are Henley residents, and they have one table which they set up on the first floor of the Sports Ground Pavilion. With both matches and practice they use the facility around 20 times a year. For this they pay the Trust £233 per annum.

The Club does not actively seek to recruit or develop the sport in Henley.

#### Football Club;

The Henley Forest Football Club has 35 adult members and 39 junior members. Nearly all the juniors are resident in the Henley area as are two thirds of the adult members. There are two full size pitches marked out on the Playing Fields and one junior pitch. The club runs two senior teams and three junior teams. Currently one of the full size pitches is out of use due to a flooding problem. Thanks to the support of one of the members with the appropriate capital equipment and a successful insurance claim this pitch should soon be reinstated. The Club rents an Astroturf pitch from Warwickshire College on Thursdays for training. The Club has a small financial reserve and believes it can breakeven during the year. Historically the Club has struggled to meet its budgeted financial commitment to HWMT and has also failed to provide sufficient support for groundwork and care of the Pavilion. Use of the Pavilion is important to the Club because although the juniors don't require changing facilities, the adult players do and it is a requirement that changing facilities are supplied for all match officials. The Club has requested that it has a "pay & play" relationship from this season and the Trust has agreed to this. This means all groundwork and cleaning will be done by the Trust who will recover some of the cost through the fees per pitch used.

#### Cricket Club;

The Cricket Club, in common with many village cricket clubs, is suffering from falling membership and currently has only 20 members only 4 of whom are Henley residents. The club runs one team. They remain financially viable mostly as a result of their popular Annual Cricket Dinner.

Encouragingly, a recently formed junior section has 35 members. This section, separately run from the

main club, runs weekly through the summer and, with a JPC grant, provides professional coaching. If the junior section can be kept going the Club hopes it will eventually feed players into the senior team, although this some way off at present.

The Playing Fields provide a single pitch and whilst the outfield is maintained as part of the general groundwork, the wickets are prepared professionally and this work is paid for by the club.

### **The Pavilion;**

The Pavilion is a flat roofed two storey building. On the ground floor there are both Ladies and Gents toilets, a small changing room for match officials, a shower room and four changing rooms. Upstairs is laid out as a meeting room/lounge with a bar and a separate kitchen. The changing facilities do not provide for female changing and the building has no accommodation for wheelchair usage.

Originally the Pavilion was used as a social centre, taking advantage of the first floor facilities but in recent years this practice has ceased and the first floor is now only used for Table Tennis.

In the meetings with Affiliates held in preparing this report, a common theme was the state of the Pavilion where its general condition is poor and both décor and fittings need updating, and a general feeling that in its current state it had a negative effect on the sites users and potential users.

The decline of the Pavilion appears to be primarily as a result of attitude changes in the community – the social use of the building being effected by the changed attitude towards drink/driving and its location outside of the town and more importantly an ever increasing reluctance from users to get involved in the cleaning and maintenance of the building on a voluntary basis. As a result of the gradual decline of condition some users have treated the facility with less and less respect and thus hastened its decline.

Within the Trust a number of schemes have been discussed to improve, expand or rebuild the Pavilion but these schemes have generally been prohibitively expensive – circa £300-500K – with no obvious route to funding.

### **Playing Fields & Pavilion Finances;**

Assuming that grass cutting, minor ground works and cleaning are outsourced the running costs for the site would be in the order of £17000 per annum. The Trust currently plans to collect in the order of £7400 per annum from affiliates. The significant gap between income and expenditure is expected to be made up from JPC grants, fund raising and transfers from Trust reserves. If the Trustee co-ordinating and managing the facilities were to stop doing so, a further cost of between £3000 and £5000 per annum would be required to pay someone to carry out the same function.

With the exception of the Tennis Club, all the other activities reflect a very low level of facility utilisation which reduces the Trusts ability to raise fees. It is also worth noting that if the Football and Cricket Clubs were considered purely as “pay to play” customers then they are paying market rates or better.

Further rough analysis of the income –v- expenditure suggests that the Trust’s fees for those costs per annum that apply to all users will amount to £5100 against a predicted cost of £6000 whilst for the users of the Pavilion and grass pitches will pay £2300 of a predicted £11000. This reflects the fact that the Tennis, Bowls, Shooting and Scouts look after their own facilities, through voluntary work and self-

funding, whilst the Football, Cricket and Table Tennis are, in effect operating on a pay to play basis and the Trust now has to outsource all grass cutting, minor maintenance and cleaning.

In the last two years the JPC has given grants to the HWMT of £4000 and £6000.

Even when factoring in the Memorial Hall surplus of circa £5000, **the Trust can no longer achieve self-sustaining financial viability.**

At the year-end 31 Aug 2017, the HWMT had cash reserves of £40000 (£9000 of which was spent in Sept 2017 on upgrading the Memorial Hall kitchen).

### **Community Participation;**

The two common themes running through the meetings with the Affiliates were; firstly, the advancing age of the core nucleus of their members and secondly the difficulty of engaging members in the management and maintenance of the Clubs. Whilst there is some cause for optimism with the health of the junior activities in Tennis, Cricket and Football, there seems to be a disconnect that stops junior participants progressing on to senior level and even when they do it seems that, with today's pressures of work and family, they are not interested in committing non playing time to support their Clubs. Several affiliate representatives expressed doubt over the future of their Clubs in the medium term because of these issues.

The Affiliates were generally positive about the idea of transferring the running of the facilities over to the JPC.

### **Trust Options;**

i) Do nothing different. The most likely outcome of this strategy is a continued decline until the current Trustees end their participation. At this time and faced with the complete demise of the Trust's activities, a new generation of Trustees may come forward – or as seems likely, they may not.

ii) Discontinue the provision of facilities for Football Cricket and Table Tennis. The remaining Affiliate activities can be operated at breakeven with some limited fund raising or fee adjustment. This has the advantage of removing the Pavilion from use but does have a negative impact on some of the junior activities that the Trust has continually sought to promote.

iii) Seek to get the JPC to agree long term funding both of the deficit and a part time Manager to oversee the running of the Playing Fields and Pavilion. This would be a significant financial commitment by the JPC with limited control and accountability and still requires an ongoing and effective body of trustees to oversee the Manger. Recruitment of an appropriately skilled and experienced manager, for what could be only 3 -5 hours a week, could be problematical.

iv) Seek to get the JPC to take over the Playing Fields and Pavilion, with the Parish Clerk taking over the running of the Facilities. The advantage of this idea is that the Clerk, as Executive Officer for the JPC is already equipped for a management role and currently is not engaged full time. Furthermore, Parish

Clerk is an ongoing position and guarantees continuity as does the statutory requirement to maintain a JPC.

It should be noted that neither of the last two options specifically address the issue of the condition of the Pavilion.

**Next steps if iv) above is to be considered;**

- \* The Trust Deed allows for the disposal of assets in situations like this but such transactions do require Charity Commission agreement. Legal advice on this should be sought by both the Trust and the JPC and soundings should be taken with the CC.
- \* Visits should be made by the Working Party to Parishes or small towns who already run these types of facilities in order to understand the issues and best practices involved.
- \* A menu of low cost options for improvements to the Pavilion should be prepared. These should include; changing the first floor layout to include female changing, making the building fully wheelchair friendly – including a lift to the first floor, recovering the (flat) roof.
- \* Hold discussions with an appropriate consultancy to try to bring into focus any realistic opportunities for gaining grants for the Pavilion works.
- \* Factor in actual costs being incurred as a result of outsourcing maintenance and cleaning at the Playing Fields and Pavilion.
- \* Produce a fully costed proposal for a takeover including running costs, capital costs, management costs, potential liabilities and professional fees.
- \* Consider a town referendum or some other means to gain consensus for JPC taking over HWMT facilities.