

<b>Committee(s):</b> Community Environment and Enforcement Committee	<b>Date:</b> 19 September 2022
<b>Subject:</b> Hutton Poplars Lodge	<b>Wards Affected:</b> Hutton North
<b>Report of:</b> Kim Anderson, Corporate Manager Communities, Leisure and Health	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report Author/s:</b> Kim Anderson, Corporate Manager, Communities, Leisure and Health Telephone: 01277 312500 E-mail: kim.anderson@brentwood.gov.uk	<b>For Decision</b>

### **Summary**

The Council's Leisure Strategy vision sets out that it will support community groups and leisure, but also make best use of its assets, and deliver best value for money across the borough. Hutton Poplars Lodge is designated as one of the Council's Community Halls which is back under the direct management of Brentwood Council after Brentwood Leisure Trust went into liquidation.

The Council needs to consider Hutton Poplars Lodge in isolation but also in conjunction with other facilities in the locality and what community value the asset has. Presently the building is underutilised with Hutton Poplars Bowling Club occupying only part of the building including toilets, kitchen and meeting room on the ground floor. The remainder of the building including the main hall and upstairs are not hired out regularly now, nor prior to Covid.

The future use of the Hall will be determined by the Policy Resources Economic Development Committee however this Committee needs to consider the present users of the Lodge, which there is one, Hutton Poplars Bowling Club with a present membership of 40.

The following report sets out the considerations of this matter relating to Hutton Poplars Lodge and Hutton Poplars Bowling Club.

### **Recommendation(s)**

**Members are recommended to approve that:**

**R1.**

- a. The club be allowed to continue to use the Lodge and bowling rink and associated land based on the present arrangements for the 2023 season (April to September 2023). And that during this time:

- i. The club will confirm that they will be able to maintain the bowling rink and associated grounds from September 2023.
  - ii. The Club can source and secure adequate funding to create the toilet and kitchen facilities required on site
  - iii. The club can make arrangements with other facilities or secure other means of meeting after games/events.
  - iv. Based on above requirements being satisfactorily met, the Council agrees to negotiate a conditional lease with the club for the use of the bowling and associated events.
- b. Working in parallel with the above recommendation, the Council in agreement with Hutton Poplars Bowling Club and third parties, will explore the opportunity to share all facilities offered at King George's Playing Fields with Brentwood Bowling Club (incorporating South Essex Bowling Club) to incorporate a single Bowling Hub.
- c. Refer the decision of this report to Policy Resources and Economic Development Committee in order for the Committee to consider the asset (i.e., the Lodge) element and for any leases to be determined.

## **Main Report**

### **Introduction and Background**

1. Due to the Brentwood Leisure Trust going into liquidation the five community halls reverted back to Brentwood Borough Council to directly manage. One of those halls is Hutton Poplars Lodge.
2. The Lodge was not left in good condition following its previous contract with Brentwood Leisure Trust (BLT) and the Council has spent £50,324 since April 2019 on the fabric of the building including external repairs to the roofs and windows, decorating externally and full compliance works for gas and electricity.
3. The building will require further investment especially if it is to compete with other facilities in the area. A schedule of works identifies that to bring the Lodge up to a decent standard it will cost in the region of £50,000 considering price increases recently experienced in the building sector.
4. The Lodge is used by one group, the Hutton Poplars Bowls Club and therefore it is suggested that the building is underutilised. There are other contributing factors including the small size of the main hall, the limited car parking and the fact that there are other well used halls that are in the vicinity particularly Hutton Community Centre and All Saints Church Hall.

5. In considering the future of Hutton Poplars Lodge the Council has reviewed the wider estate and in particular Hutton Poplars Hall. The Council in 2021 received interest from an alternative leisure provider solely for Hutton Poplars Hall. However more information is required before a full consideration of the proposal can be made. Therefore, whilst the Council is asked to consider the Poplars Lodge in isolation it must have full understanding that further request on the use of Hutton Poplars Hall may be sought at some time in the future.
6. The Council continues to review its asset portfolio to understand what the best use of them is. The Council has had interest from other parties and groups who could make commercial use of the building such as office use or as a nursery. Based on the information presently available the Council believes that the facility could be better utilised and reduce the burden on the Council's finances whilst providing a commercial and/or community benefit to the area.
7. The decision of the future of the Lodge will be determined by the Policy, Resource and Economic Development Committee (PRED) as an asset decision. However, this is not purely an asset decision. As already identified part of the lodge is being utilised by Hutton Poplars Bowling Club and has done so for a number of years. Therefore, these users need to be considered before the future use of the building is considered.
8. The decision of this Committee will assist a future PRED Committee to make a decision on the Lodge itself.
9. Hutton Poplars Bowling Club use the facility in the bowling season from April to September including the small kitchen, toilets and a meeting room. They also use the facility out of the bowling season for ad-hoc meetings and social events. The income that Brentwood Leisure Trust received from the Hutton Poplars Bowling Club was £300pa.
10. The membership of the bowling club has been declining and presently their membership total was approximately 40.
11. The income that the Council receives from the Bowling Club for season tickets in 2022 was £3908 (35 season tickets).
12. The Bowling Club use the bowling rink adjacent to the Lodge to play its games. The costs for the Council to maintain the bowling green is £9,553.41pa.
13. There are two further public bowling rinks at King Georges which have a bar, toilets and meeting facilities which serve two clubs and 96 members and whom have space for more members or a club.

14. As part of the Council Leisure Strategy under the built facility workstream, the Council is looking at investment in key strategic sites that can provide the maximum benefit to its residents. The Council has delivered a similar approach with the Play Area Strategy across the borough.
15. It is considered that the present situation both with the provision of the lodge and maintaining the public bowling green for 40 playing members is not financially efficient and therefore alternative options are being explored. The Club had hoped that the new care home on Rayleigh Road would create a significant increase in membership and make the club more sustainable. However, this has so far not materialised
16. Initial discussions have been held with the club on the position of the Council and that the present model is no longer sustainable moving forward.
17. The Council are working with Hutton Poplars Bowling Club to identify alternative options in order that the club can still continue whether at the present site or at an alternative bowling facility.

#### **Issue, Options and Analysis of Options**

18. The Council needs to decide on the future of the Lodge, mindful that:
  - The present model is not sustainable and outgoings to maintain the lodge will outstrip any revenue presently created from the bowls club and the green.
  - The reuse of Hutton Poplars Lodge will affect Hutton Poplars Bowling Club
19. The following options set out below have been identified for Hutton Poplars Bowling Club:
20. **Option One:** The Council has two other bowling greens at King George's Playing Fields. This facility can accommodate Hutton Poplars Bowling Club subject to discussions with Brentwood Bowling Club (incorporating South Essex Bowling Club) who presently use the site, to create a Bowls Hub in Brentwood.
21. Creating this Bowls Hub at King Georges would enable the Council to concentrate its funds onto one facility providing better quality facilities for a larger amount of residents
22. The consolidation of bowling provision to King George's Playing Fields would create a bowling hub and assist the authority to spend its budget on bowling more effectively and improve the provision at King George's Playing Fields

rather than spread the budget across different sites which reduces impact and creates lesser quality facilities overall. It will also deliver better value for money for residents

23. This option has been discussed with Hutton Bowls Club and an initial meeting with the involved bowls clubs has taken place. However, Hutton Poplars Bowling Club have aired their concern with travel to the site at King George's Playing Fields as their members reside in Hutton.
24. Hutton Poplars Bowling Club are also concerned with the loss of identity of the club if they were to relocate to King Georges Park and other issues that an amalgamation with King Georges (Brentwood Bowling Club) may cause including the loss of bowling facilities in Hutton.
25. Officers have held discussions with all clubs concerned and will continue to work with both clubs to see if the issues raised by Hutton Poplars Bowls Club can be overcome.
26. **Option Two:** To cease using the Lodge and build additional facilities alongside the wooden pavilion adjacent to the Bowling Green including a small kitchen and a toilet. This would require connections to utilities such as electricity, water, and sewerage. It is estimated that these facilities would cost in the region of at least £50,000. However, this does not provide the club with a meeting room when other clubs visit. The Club could consider using Hutton Community Centre as its location to meet after games with other clubs, this would need to be agreed with the Community Centre Management but is not considered as a major stumbling issue.
27. Investment to create and maintain new facilities would need to be funded by the club. Further the club would need to manage and maintain the green themselves moving forward.
28. **Option three:** continue to accommodate Hutton Poplars Bowling Club in Hutton Poplars Lodge, but the expenditure that the Council will need to invest in the facility and income that will be generated will not cover future outgoings on maintenance and therefore this option is not considered to be sustainable.
29. Hutton Poplars Bowling Club has limited ability to contribute to any funding due to their membership of approximately 40 members. The Council has looked at alternative funding provision such as Bowls England who can provide a loan of up to £20,000, but the club would need to repay this loan within 8 years.

30. The Council has at present not considered Hutton Poplars Hall as a facility for meetings for this club due to the potential options for this facility. A report on this asset will be forthcoming to committee in the future should proposals materialise.

### **Future options for the Hutton Poplars Lodge**

31. The Council has previously received interest from a national nursery operator to take a commercial lease of Hutton Poplars Lodge. However, to sensor check any offer received it would be our intention to place the lodge on the open market as a commercial opportunity. It would recommend that the asset was placed on the market.
32. This type of arrangement could enable the improvement of the facility via a lease which would create a regular income stream that could be reinvested in other facilities. It would also ensure the continued maintenance of the building.
33. The lease of the building to a nursery also complies with the community use set aside for the building and therefore complies with Planning Requirements.
34. There continues to be an appetite to create and provide nurseries within the borough and according to the officers at Essex County Council (Early Years and Childcare) the CM13 area there are 11 providers but only one day nursery. Across all these providers there are 258 place capacity but only 37 places available across them all showing as low as 14% vacancy rate.
35. Mass & Co provided a market rental report to officers 1 January 2022 where they state that a freehold value would be in the region of £520,000 with a estimated market rental level (ERV) of £28,500 p.a. Given the date of this report and the UK current economic climate, it would be prudent to place a ERV of £20,000 p.a. on the asset looking to achieve higher.
36. It is recommended that:
- a. The club be allowed to continue to use the Lodge and bowling rink based on the present arrangements for the 2023 season (April to September 2023). And that during this time:
    - i. For the club to confirm that they will be able to maintain the bowling rink moving forward
    - ii. That the Club can secure funding to create a toilet and kitchen facility required in the bowls pavilion building adjacent to the green subject to planning permission
    - iii. The club hold discussions with other halls to secure meeting space after games

- iv. And that based on these requirements being satisfactorily met, the Council to negotiate and agree a lease with the club for the use of the bowling green and bowls pavilion building.
- b. with agreement with the club the opportunity to share facilities and the bowling rinks at King George's Park with Brentwood Bowling Club (incorporating South Essex Bowling Club) continue to be explored.
- c. Refer the decision of this report to Policy Resources and Economic Development Committee in order for them to consider the asset (i.e., the Lodge) element and for any leases to be determined for the bowls pavilion building and the bowling green.

### **Reasons for Recommendation**

37. The Council needs to ensure that the facilities that it manages are delivering value for money and meet the needs of the residents.

### **Consultation**

38. Officers have had meeting with Brentwood Bowling Club and Hutton Poplars Bowling Club to look at options. Officers have also spoken to Bowls England to get an indication of what NGB funding would be available. They are able to offer a loan of up to £20,000 to the club which would be repayable within 8 years.

### **References to Corporate Plan**

39. The community Halls sits under the Developing Communities strand and are also part of the Assets portfolio. The Council's Leisure Strategy sets out the need to ensure that it has a clear strategic vision for the future of its leisure facilities, so that resources are applied effectively. This will ensure that local people enjoy high quality sustainable leisure facilities that suit their lifestyle and maintain and improve the quality of their lives.

### **Implications**

#### **Financial Implications**

**Name/Title: Jacqueline Van Mellaerts, Corporate Director (Finance & Resources)**  
**Tel/Email: 01277 312500/jacqueline.vanmellaerts@brentwood.gov.uk**

40. There are no direct financial implications at this stage. These will be determined at a future Policy, Resources & Economic Development Committee, when the lease arrangements will be considered.

### **Legal Implications**

**Name/Title: Steve Summers, Strategic Director, Interim Monitoring Officer**

**Tel & Email: 01277 312500/steve.summers@brentwood.rochford.gov.uk**

41. Any lease arrangements and title matters will be dealt with by legal officers on a hall-by-hall basis to ensure that all legalities regarding the lettings have been drafted and reported to on clients.

### **Economic Implications**

**Name/Title: Phil Drane, Director of Place**

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42. The Council should ensure that Hutton Poplars Lodge is utilised to its maximum potential in order to ensure economic viability.

### **Equality and Diversity Implications**

**Name/Title: Kim Anderson, Corporate Manager, Communities, leisure and health**

**Tel/Email: 01277 312500/kim.anderson@brentwood.gov.uk**

43. The Public Sector Equality Duty applies to the Council when it makes decisions. The duty requires us to have regard to the need to:
- a. Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act. In summary, the Act makes discrimination etc. on the grounds of a protected characteristic unlawful
  - b. Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
  - c. Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.
44. The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, gender, and sexual orientation. The Act states that 'marriage and civil partnership' is not a relevant protected characteristic for (b) or (c) although it is relevant for (a).
45. The proposals in this report will not have a disproportionate adverse impact on any people with a particular characteristic.

### **Background Documents**

None