



COMMITTEE TITLE: Finance, Assets, Investment and Recovery Committee

DATE: 13 September 2023

REPORT TITLE:	Hutton Poplars Lodge and Hutton Poplars Bowling Club
REPORT OF:	Phoebe Barnes, Director of Assets and Investments

REPORT SUMMARY

A report went to the Community Environment and Enforcement Committee on 19 September 2022 which set out a number of recommendations in regard to utilisation of Hutton Poplars Lodge by Hutton Poplars Bowling Club, opportunities to share facilities at King George's Playing Fields and for any decisions on the Lodge building element would need to be referred to the relevant Committee. One of the options was to continue to accommodate Hutton Poplars Bowling Club in the Lodge for 2023 season and giving the club the opportunity to raise external funding to support the club. A letter was submitted to the bowls club on 22 March 2023 detailing the amount of funds required to build a pavilion and officers are still waiting for a response that the Bowling Club have been able to secure these funds by September 2023.

RECOMMENDATION

R1: The Council does not renew the lease on Hutton Poplars Lodge with the Bowls Club.

R2. The Council gives the Hutton Poplars Bowls Club three months to explore and secure the funding for Option 2 as set out within the report.

R2: The Council looks to market Hutton Poplars Lodge for commercial vendors

SUPPORT ING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

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

2.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2.1 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.

- 2.2 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.
- 2.3 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.
- 2.4 In December 2022 there was serious water damage to the building from a burst water pipe which meant that the building from a health and safety perspective could not be opened for the club while repairs were carried out.
- 2.5 As a result Hutton Poplars Bowling Club had to move out while the repairs to the building were undertaken.
- 2.6 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.
- 2.7 The decision of the future of the Lodge will be determined at Committee tonight as an asset decision. As already identified part of the lodge was 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.
- 2.8 Hutton Poplars Bowling Club was using 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.
- 2.10 The membership of the bowling club has been declining and presently their membership total is approximately 40.
- 2.11 The income that the Council receives from the Bowling Club for season tickets in 2022 was £3,908 (35 season tickets).
- 2.12 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.
- 2.13 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 capacity for more members or a club.
- 2.14 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.
- 2.15 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.

- 2.16 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.
- 2.17 The Council are working with Hutton Poplars Bowling Club to identify alternative options in order that the club can still continue at an alternative bowling facility.

3.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 3.1 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
- 3.2 The following options set out below have been identified for Hutton Poplars Bowling Club:
- 3.3 **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.
- 3.4 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.
- 3.6 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.
- 3.7 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.
- 3.8 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.
- 3.9 **Option Two:** To cease using the Lodge and purchase a modular type building with 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 £60,000 - £110,000. 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.

- 3.10 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.
- 3.11 Officers and Members of the Council met with the club to understand their financial position given that they have had time to look at external funding if this is the option that the Council agrees to.
- 3.11 **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.
- 3.12 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.
- 3.13 The Council has met with the bowls club who are interested in exploring Option 2. As the current bowls season has come to an end, the Council is able to offer the club 3 months to determine whether they can secure funding to purchasing a building to sit alongside the wooden pavilion adjacent to the bowling Green. A further report would then have to be presented to members at a future committee on a new lease arrangement with the club once the club can demonstrate secured funding,
- 3.14 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.

Future options for Hutton Poplars Lodge

- 3.14 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 the Council's intention to place the Lodge on the open market as a commercial opportunity. It would recommend that the asset was placed on the market.
- 3.15 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.
- 3.16 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.
- 3.17 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.
- 3.18 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 an 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.

4.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 4.1 If the club are unable to secure the required funding, then there is the potential loss of the club and the bowls facility itself.

5.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

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.

A follow up meeting was had Officer and Members was held in August to understand if the club had managed to raise any external funding to support the development of their facilities.

6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Name & Title: Tim Willis, Director – Resources & Section 151 Officer

Tel & Email: 01277 312500 / tim.willis@brentwood.rochford.gov.uk

The income that the Council receives from the Bowling Club for season tickets in 2022 was £3908 (35 season tickets). Brentwood Leisure Trust when it managed Hutton Poplars Lodge received £300pa.

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.

The current income and expenditure do not make the lodge or the bowling currently viable. The Lodge could be marketed commercially for a lease for the building.

Mass & Co provided a market rental report to officers on 1 January 2022 where they state that a freehold value would be in the region of £520,000 with an estimated market rental value (ERV) of £28,500 p.a. Given the date of this report and the UK current economic climate, it would be prudent to place an ERV of £20,000 p.a. on the asset, with the aim of achieving a higher figure.

7.0 LEGAL/GOVERNANCE IMPLICATIONS

Name & Title: Claire Mayhew, Acting Joint Director – People & Governance & Monitoring Officer

Tel & Email 01277 312500 / Claire.mayhew@brentwood.rochford.gov.uk

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

8.0 EQUALITY & HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Name & Title: Kim Anderson, Corporate Manager - Communities, Leisure and Health

Tel & Email 01277 312500 kim.anderson@brentwood.gov.uk

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.

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).

Although the Bowling Club offers a sporting facility for older people, there are other facilities that can be used in the Borough by club members.

9.0 ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

Name & Title: Phil Drane, Director - Place

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

REPORT AUTHOR:

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APPENDICES

BACKGROUND PAPERS

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Community, Environment and Enforcement	19 September 2022

