

Northstowe bowls green and management and maintenance options

Background

Longstanton Bowls Club was formed in 1985. Their bowls green is situated between the tennis courts and the Pavilion on Longstanton's recreation ground. The Longstanton bowls green is only big enough for 5 rinks in one direction and is constrained on all sides, meaning there is little scope for expansion. By contrast, the Northstowe bowls green is full-sized with 6 rinks allowing play in both directions (North/South, East/West) which reduces the wear on the ends of the green. It also means bowls league matches which consist of 4 rinks of triples and 2 rink pairs could be played on the same evening. Having a full-sized green will enable more people to enjoy the sport of lawn bowls at any one time.

Vision for the future.

Longstanton Bowls Club has a future vision of forming a combined Northstowe and Longstanton Bowls club (name TBC) as a community asset for both Northstowe and Longstanton residents. They have already attracted a few new members from Northstowe through their stall at Northstowe Day and subsequent open day. The Head Teacher at Pathfinder Primary School is also keen for some bowls taster sessions for the children.

Longstanton Bowls Club have discussed their idea with members of Longstanton Parish Council who understand the benefits of moving to a full-sized bowls green.

Synergy

Northstowe has built a full-sized bowls green and Longstanton Bowls club have the membership, expertise and most of the equipment to both run a lawn bowls club and maintain the green on a self-financing basis through member subscription, match fees and fund raising. They would need support with purchasing a larger mower costing approximately £10,000 to maintain the green to the required standard.

Options

There are 3 main options for how the bowls green could be maintained:

1. Longstanton Bowls club are fully responsible for the maintenance of the bowls green.
2. Sports Pavilion operator (tbc) pay a contractor to maintain the bowls green and the costs are not passed to the operating bowls club (could be Longstanton Bowls Club)
3. Sports Pavilion operator (tbc) pay a contractor to maintain the bowls green and some costs are passed to the operating bowls club (could be Longstanton Bowls Club).

Longstanton Bowls Club offers a realistic self-financing management and maintenance solution; without this the bowls green would fall within the management of the Sports Pavilion and the maintenance costs would need to be covered.

Currently L&Q spend £18k a year on maintaining the Sports Pavilion which includes:

- Spring 'kick start' (top dressing, scarifying to remove moss, fungicide treatment to prevent/cure any disease, hollow tining to relieve any compaction, overseeding any bare patches and fertilisation)
- Cutting the grass once a week
- Monthly application of a fertiliser
- Two hollow tining treatments per year
- Checking the irrigation system and maintenance of this as required. Drain down of the irrigation system in Winter and start up in Spring
- Clearing out the concrete channels
- Sweeping the paths
- Weed control and overseeding bare areas as they arise

Longstanton Bowls Club moving to Northstowe brings the benefits of a pre-existing members; which would likely take a while for a bowls club to become established (and particularly so given the demographic at Northstowe) and in the meantime the bowls green would need to be maintained and paid for in some form.

If Longstanton Bowls club still moved to Northstowe but did not manage and maintain the bowls green this could result in friction particularly if the bowls green was not maintained to their standards. The bowls green would need to be cut 3 three times a week during the bowling season which would become very costly.

If the town council (or any other body) were to assume management of the bowls green as part of the wider Sports Pavilion offer, a requirement for on-going subsidy of the bowls green could be reasonably predicted.

Delivery plan

The outdoor bowling season runs from late April to early September. A mid-season move is unfeasible as matches are being played most evenings and club events scheduled for the weekends. This means any move would need to take place between September and the following March. Completion of the Northstowe Sports Pavilion and car park would be a pre-requisite to the commencement of bowling on the Northstowe bowls green, as bowlers require both access to toilets and changing rooms and safe access to the green.

Were Longstanton Bowls Club to assume maintenance of the green, this could start in September 2023, provided two conditions are met. Firstly, secure storage is provided for their bowls green maintenance equipment. Secondly, a commitment is made that the Sports Pavilion is ready for use by the following April, the start of the bowling season.

Things to resolve

Longstanton Bowls Club would need access to the Sports Pavilion facilities including toilets and the club room to serve match teas. They are prepared to pay a small fee for these but the costs of these need to be agreed once the governance arrangements are determined.

An agreement with Longstanton Bowls Club could require provision of taster sessions/engagement events with Northstowe residents to build in an assurance that Northstowe residents will benefit from this arrangement and that full participation from the new community is supported.