

Belhus Cricket Club

Established 1960

Headquarters and Main Ground: The Village Green, North Stifford, Grays, Essex RM16 5UG
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6th January 2022

Councillor R Gledhill
Leader of the Council and Chair of Cabinet
Thurrock Council

Dear Councillor Gledhill

***Proposed Introduction of additional Pay and Display Car Parking sites within Thurrock
Charging Period – Seven Days Per Week and 24 Hours Per Day
Ockendon Recreation Ground, Cliff Place, South Ockendon, RM15 6QR***

The members of this club wish to strongly object to the proposed introduction of car parking charges at Ockendon Recreation Ground and we urge Cabinet not to adopt the proposal for this venue for reasons set out below. For your ease of reference, we attach a copy of the relevant report, dated 7th December 2021.

We have a significant interest in this matter as our second, third and fourth eleven teams play at this venue. The sports pitches and pavilion are maintained by the sports clubs themselves, which includes extensive contributions from this club.

Our key reasons for making this representation are that:

- (1) It creates an unfair tax on outdoor sport and lifestyles;
- (2) Appears contrary to HM Government's sports strategy;
- (3) Appears contrary to objectives of DCMS Culture Renewal Taskforce;
- (4) Appears contrary to Council's own Active Place Strategy;
- (5) Appears unfair when measured against similar recreation grounds in Thurrock;
- (6) Lack of consideration given to clubs such as ours who self-maintain the sports pitches and pavilion;
- (7) Incorrect nomenclature of venue given in report as reported in National Media;
- (8) Incorrect assumption that car parking regulation would reduce Anti-Social Behaviours;
- (9) Report not yet scrutinised by Council committee;
- (10) Perceived Contradiction of Funding Objectives within the report;
- (11) Uncertainty and lack of confidence in car parking permit scheme;
- (12) Likelihood of parked vehicle congestion in neighbouring streets.

We would like to expand on these twelve points as follows:

Unfair Tax on Outdoor Sport and Lifestyles

We believe that our local parks and recreation grounds contribute to healthy living and residents should be encouraged to visit them and should not be deterred by car parking charges. It is our understanding that Council policy is to encourage outdoor activity as part of a healthy lifestyle.

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Affiliated to the Essex County Cricket Board and the Club Cricket Conference
Member of the Hamro Foundation Essex Cricket League
Youth Section Member of the Essex Boys and Girls Clubs



Our concern is that the car park charging will drive away organised sport from the venue as our members may choose to participate elsewhere at one of the six other non-Belhus CC venues where cricket is played in Thurrock and where it is free to park. Or they may choose not to play at all. We do not pay for car parking when we play 'away' fixtures and it is likely this club will be ostracised by leagues and competitions, potentially leading to our expulsion.

Essentially, Thurrock Council is proposing that a very small sub-set of the population of Thurrock, which uses Ockendon Recreation Ground very frequently, will be paying a very heavy price for repeated visits as Council looks to gain additional revenue to recover the reported £34.3m funding gap and we would suggest that contributions to close this gap are made across the whole Thurrock community, not via these proposed car parking charges, so that an unfair and disproportionate financial burden on our membership can be avoided.

We wish to point out that the statutory guidance for local authorities on enforcing parking restrictions from HM Government, section 2.1, states that 'Enforcement authorities should not view it in isolation or as a way of raising revenue'.

HM Government's Sports Strategy

The report appears to be contrary to HM Government's Sports Strategy, published in December 2015, with the mantra of 'a new strategy for an active nation'. The first key heading for a series of 23 performance indicators is 'More People taking part in Sport and Physical Activity'. We suggest that, in Thurrock, this objective will not be met if Council erect pay and display equipment in the car parks of local recreation grounds, such as that planned at Ockendon.

Objectives of DCMS Renewal Taskforce

On 20th May 2020, the DCMS announced the creation of this taskforce, chaired by The Right Hon. Oliver Dowden CBE MP, with the view of ensuring that sport and culture can re-open successfully in the post-covid era. We believe this is part of HM Government's pledge to 'Build Back Better'. We suggest that charging to park vehicles at Ockendon Recreation Ground is contrary to the objectives of HM Government, the DCMS and its renewal taskforce.

Thurrock Council's Active Place Strategy

This strategy was adopted by Cabinet at its meeting held on 13th January 2021. A Council member in recommending the report for adoption, said: "Sports will be at the centre of the new local plan and this report will help to increase sport uptake across the Borough". We ask the current Cabinet members to consider that introducing car parking charges at Ockendon Recreation Ground will not meet the expectations of the Active Place Strategy and participation of outdoor sport at Ockendon will diminish as a result.

Similar Recreation Grounds in Thurrock

We are of the opinion that to introduce car parking charges at Ockendon Recreation Ground would be unfair. It is the only playing field of its type which is earmarked for charges; all other venues remain free of charge. How can this be fair? For the avoidance of doubt, we are not suggesting that charges should be inflicted across the area.

Self-Maintenance of Sports Pitches at Ockendon Recreation Ground

Thurrock Council had previously advised us that, due to budgetary constraints, sports clubs would have to maintain their own sports pitches with effect from April 2021. We have fully delivered at this venue. It should be recognised that our actions will save hundreds of thousands of pounds over the next two decades or so, yet our members are paying a heavy price for the costs of our own grounds maintenance equipment to replace the equipment previously used by Council operatives. We consider it an insult for our members who stay at the ground to carry out this work on a daily basis to then be charged to park their vehicles.

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Incorrect Nomenclature of Venue

The report initially refers to “South Ockendon Recreational Centre” and this incorrect naming was recently reported as such on a BBC News website item. We consider this to be highly misleading and indicates potential concealment of the proposal. We wish to point out that clarity of proposals to the public is referenced within section five of the statutory guidance for local authorities on enforcing car parking restrictions issued by HM Government.

Further, part 2.7 of the report encourages ‘a large turnover of vehicles’. We consider this to be wholly inappropriate for Ockendon Recreation Ground which is a small, basic public park and not in any way a ‘Recreational Centre’, which implies multiple single visits from across the region.

Reducing Anti-Social Behaviours

We reject the notion of part 2.4 from the report which states that ‘the lack of parking enforcement also means these car parks do not receive regular patrols leaving these areas more prone to abandoned vehicles, fly tip, traveller incursions, ASB and nuisance behaviour’. Insofar as Ockendon Recreation Ground is concerned, we believe that the reverse is true. We say that a car parking charge would deter proper usage of the park leading to more problems, not less. The vigilance of our members has, in the past, resulted in successful outcomes from their reporting of a wide range of occasional anti-social behaviour at our venues, such as racist chanting and graffiti, drug use, fly-tipping, vandalism and motor bike incursion, most of which would otherwise have been unreported.

Report not yet Scrutinised

It is our understanding that the report was due to be scrutinised by the Planning, Transport, Regeneration (PTR) Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 7th December 2021, but for technical reasons, understood to be the failure of wi-fi, the matter was deferred until that committee’s next meeting, scheduled for 1st February 2022.

If Cabinet are considering the issue of car parking at Ockendon Recreation Ground at its meeting on 12th January 2022, we ask that the matter is fully considered by the PTR Overview and Scrutiny Committee prior to Cabinet decision(s) to ensure due process is properly applied.

Perceived Contradiction of Funding Requirements

We note that there appears to be a contradiction with the proposal document. On page one, it is clear from the Executive Summary that Council needs to remedy the funding gap over the next two financial years as a basis for introducing additional car park charging. However, on page seven, a senior management accountant has recorded that car parking income can only be used for car parking purposes and has to be ring-fenced for that sole purpose. But we question whether the estimated annual income of £159,964 is far in excess of what the actual maintenance costs are for each of the four venues highlighted in the report.

Lack of Clarity over Issuing of Permits to Sports Clubs

We recognise that there is a reference to members being able to obtain permits, but it is unclear at this stage how this would be organised and our enquiries have not found any evidence that such a scheme is being planned. We also have our visiting ‘away’ teams to consider, as well as umpires, scorers, caterers, coaches and maintenance staff. Our match day captain certainly has enough to do, without trying to organise car parking permits. We do not believe that the issuing of permits will be satisfactory.

Vehicles Parking in Neighbouring Streets to avoid Car Parking Charges

We believe that charging for car parking at Ockendon Recreation Ground will only lead to congestion and inconvenience for local residents where road parking is allowed and uncontrolled.

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We thank you for your careful consideration of the points raised in this letter and of the damaging impact that chargeable car parking at Ockendon Recreation Ground is likely to bring. We look forward to receiving your response in due course.

Yours sincerely
Cliff Cansdale

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "C. Cansdale".

Hon. General Secretary

ccansdale@hotmail.com

cc Members of Cabinet, Thurrock Council
cc Senior Democratic Services Officer, Thurrock Council
cc Officers and Delegates of Thurrock Sports Council