

Repairs and improvements

The priority over the last 12 months has been to carry out a range of repairs and small improvements in the pavilion and on the field. This included a new cooker, repairs to the building and roof, improving the showers and heating and some electrical work. Basically the pavilion and field are now reasonably safe, secure and everything works reasonably well.

Finances

The field belongs to the village so the money to run and improve the facilities must be raised mostly from within the village. Annual running costs are around £6,500p.a., not including repairs and major maintenance. Annual revenues are around £7,500 (excl. grants). Main income items are pitch hire fees from football, tennis club rental and the 100 Club who have raised over £57,000 over the years. Other income comes from bridge club, table tennis and other village organisations and individuals hiring the pavilion. Events like the scarecrow festival and scouts fireworks evening make a useful bar profit.

However this small surplus is soon used up on miscellaneous items, usually on unplanned repairs. The PC pays for grass cutting and provides a grant for repairs and small improvements. ParkLife, which is part of HFA and provides and maintains facilities for the young people of Houghton also receives a PC grant.

The field is there for all to enjoy and use. The money from the PC grants comes from the Houghton council tax payers, which I think is right as then most households in the village contribute something towards the upkeep of the field which all can enjoy. HFA and the Parish council will be working together to see how this source of revenue can be maintained. However with public finances being squeezed we cannot rely on this entirely.

Increasing revenue

We can carry on as we are now for a few more years but this would not be sufficient to prevent the facilities deteriorating slowly but surely. The committee believes we need to generate another £3K of annual revenue so we can steadily invest in the facilities and put money into a sinking fund. We are working on a number of ideas to launch in 2016 to achieve this.

Grant Funding

There are other sources of grant funding especially where our sport and recreation activity qualify us for consideration. We have been granted £44K from Sport England to improve drainage on the first team football pitch which became virtually unusable from November to January this season due to being waterlogged. However the £44K proved not to be sufficient for what was needed. After further negotiations we believe we can now find the difference and hope to confirm a go ahead by the end of May/mid June. Work on the pitch itself will take 2/3 weeks but it will be fenced off and cannot be played or walked on for up to a year. This will not interfere with the Scarecrow Festival.

We shall be looking into other grant sources but most grants have to be for specific projects, so we still need to raise the extra £3K of revenue.

Pavilion

The current pavilion has probably lasted longer than expected when it was built. We can continue to patch up, make do and mend, but inevitably something big will need doing involving spending significant money on an old building. Whilst replacing the pavilion is a

big undertaking there are sources of funds that could make such a project financially feasible, at least to build. The committee believes that the existing building will inevitably need replacing, but the question is with what?

Space

The population of Houghton will grow steadily as a result of housing development, so might we need a bigger playing field in the future? I don't know whether we could obtain use of land adjacent to the existing playing field, or if we could afford it, but I am raising the matter now to see what ideas might be forthcoming on this.

Help

Frankly we could do with all the help we can get. Here are some ways to get involved:

- Join the committee and/or volunteer to help with fund raising events. We welcome any ideas for fund raising events but we need the people resources as well to make them happen.
- Some really helpful people already pick up litter on their own initiative. If more of us did this when we visit the field we could keep it much tidier.
- If you are not a member then join the 100 club. It only costs a £1 per month with the chance of winning much more than you pay in. If all the households in Houghton who are currently not members were to join, we would have our additional £3,000 p.a. (to join contact Sue Sutton at houghton100club@gmail.com tel:01162417322)
- Any offers of practical help, a bit of painting in the pavilion for example.
- If you need a venue for a meeting, party or similar event consider hiring the pavilion. (Contact Steve Goodman at steve.goodman@zen.co.uk tel: 01162418229)

Remember the playing field belongs to the village and if we all do a bit to keep it tidy, maintain and improve it, it will remain a real asset for us all for years to come.

Steve Goodman - Chairman HFA