



Botus Fleming Parish Council

REPORT ON THE PROPOSED PURCHASE OF THE RECREATION FIELD AT HATT

Botus Fleming Parish Council (BFPC) wish to purchase the recreation field in Hatt (PL12 6PS) in order to secure it for the parish and future generations. We feel that if we do not purchase it now, the field could be lost to us forever. It is our belief that there are no other suitable sites in the parish that could replace the recreation field.

The field has been leased by the parish for over 20 years. We have for some time been in negotiations with the owners of the field and they recently agreed to sell the field to the parish. The field is 3.95 acres (1.60 hectares) and is currently valued at £70,000. BFPC have had two independent surveys carried out and both surveys concur with the valuation. The recreation field forms part of a much larger parcel of farmland. The current landowner intends to sell the farm and land, but has agreed that the recreation field be separated from the general sale and be available for purchase by the parish.

The parish does not own any green spaces for sport or leisure activities. This is almost unique in Cornwall. In 2018 Cornwall Council's Sustainability Appraisal declared that the parish did not meet the standards for sustainability. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) confirmed that the parish did not meet the economic, social or environmental conditions for a sustainable community. The parish has very little in the way of infrastructure or services for the existing residents and unless we work together it will slowly become unviable. We fear that without some drastic changes our community may become a mere dormitory village devoid of the renewed spirit and vibrancy that has been in evidence for the past few years.

The purchase of the recreation field is in our view a real opportunity to inject some energy and enthusiasm into our community. Once owned by the parish, we would then install some up-to-date play equipment for our children and young people. Our long-term aims are to build a community centre on the site. Once again we are uniquely disadvantaged in not having a publicly owned community centre or hall. At present the only meeting space in the parish is St Mary's Church Hall which belongs to the church, but not the community. The new community centre, once built, would be almost exactly in the geographical centre of the parish, and within easy walking distance of the main centre of population.

Once we have purchased the recreation field we intend to apply for several grants, arrange crowd funding and to seek sponsorship and donations from businesses and philanthropists in Cornwall allowing us to build a community centre of which all can be rightly proud. The community centre would be the hub of our parish. From educational or vocational classes to keep fit to bingo to film nights and a live music venue, its uses would be as wide ranging as our imaginations would allow.

For the past three years the Events Team has organised our 'Big Event' (this year's 75th celebration of VE Day is the fourth). The events have been exceptionally well attended, and have demonstrated what our community can achieve given the opportunity. Without the secure and permanent tenure of the recreation field we are not optimistic that our community will have the opportunity it so deserves to thrive and flourish.

BFPC does not have the £70,000 in its reserves to purchase the field outright. We as a parish would have to borrow the money. Should the parish agree to this course of action, BFPC would apply to the Public Works Loan Board for the full amount.

By careful and prudent financial management we are confident that utilising the Parish Council's financial reserves along with the current level of precept income, we could settle the loan in approximately 15 years. A small increase in the level of precept may be required in future years.

BFPC is also actively applying for grants and seeking to obtain the money elsewhere. Unfortunately this is a long-term exercise and we don't feel that we can risk losing the opportunity to purchase the field as soon as possible. The owners have told us that they require a firm commitment from us in the next two months. Should our endeavours prove successful we would be able to use any money obtained to either pay off some of the loan or to settle it in full.

The most cited feedback during our Neighbourhood Development Plan consultations revealed a strong desire within our community to improve and enhance the Hatt Recreation Field. In fact the majority of residents wanted parish ownership of the recreation field as the Parish Council's number one priority. The main reasons were the complete lack of facilities for children and young people and the genuine desire to make the recreation field the very heart of our community. Parishioners also told us that they would like to see improved play areas and equipment, a community centre, a better-kept football pitch, and the provision of dog walking areas.

As a first step, the Parish Council reviewed the grass-cutting program and agreed a new maintenance contract that has produced an immediate improvement. As detailed on Botus Fleming Parish Council's website, a new specification was drawn up, and following a public tender process, we appointed BMS Landscaping who have:

- Cut the grass more regularly and picked up excess cuttings
- Paid special attention to the football pitch and play areas
- Managed the top field and developed some "pathways" for dog-walkers.

We have already seen more people using the fields and have had positive feedback from parishioners and the football teams.

Saltash United (Juniors) Football team utilise the recreation field for all of their home football games and for training sessions. It is their preferred option for football facilities and we are proud to both support young people's sporting activities and the long-term support benefits to our nearest town. Saltash Juniors pay a monthly fee for the use of the field, which helps to pay for the maintenance. Parishioners are also assisting us to maintain the area by ensuring litter and dog waste are disposed of responsibly.

Before we can apply for the loan we need to supply evidence that our parishioners support the purchase of the recreation field. We will therefore ask parishioners to help us by providing evidence of their support. We shall consult our parishioners on the purchase of the recreation field and of our intention to apply for a loan from the Public Work Loan Board. We intend to deliver a flyer to each household in the parish outlining our proposals for the purchase of the recreation field. There will be an opportunity for parishioners to respond to on an online survey. For those not wishing to use IT or those that don't have access to IT there will also be an opportunity to write a letter or comment by telephone.

Time is imperative and we do not want to miss this once in a lifetime opportunity to purchase the recreation field.

We believe that the recreation field is an essential resource for the improvement of our health and well-being, and will give us all a local and accessible green space. The purchase is an exciting opportunity that will allow us to plan for our future and the addition of a community centre will make us a stronger and more vibrant and sustainable community. We hope that residents will support us in this endeavour.

Botus Fleming Parish Council

20th February 2020