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| **"The independent voice of sport, representing the interests of Sports Clubs in Enfield"** |

Simon Parkinson

Chair of Enfield Sport,

22 Chase Green Avenue,

Enfield

EN1 8EA

17/11/19

Dear Nesil

The future of the sports clubs based in Enfield

Thank you for your letter dated 1/10/19. I am responding on behalf of Enfield Sport, following a General Meeting that took place on November 4th 2019.

As you can see from the contents below, there are a number of issues and questions that I have highlighted in bold. A number of these issues and questions are also included as an Freedom of Information request, attached to this letter as appendix 1. Can you please provide a direct answer to each of these issues / questions in your overall response to me letter and, separately provide a response to each of the points included in the Freedom of Information request.

I am very pleased to read that you believe “it is imperative that Enfield’s new Local Plan continues to protect such provision” (ie sports grounds and playing fields, as well as open space, recreation and play areas); but until the Plan actually does that we are left with the situation that such provision remains under threat. Enfield Sport believes that the only way to ensure that sports grounds and playing fields are protected is to restate and confirm the commitments that are included in Enfield’s Playing Pitch Strategy, in the relevant policy in the Local Plan (ie in Policy GI1). Enfield Sport has made this point to officers and included it in the comments made in response to the draft Local Plan; but we are unclear as to whether Policy GI1 in the Local Plan will be amended to restate the commitment I have referred to.

**Will you will instruct planning officers to ensure that the next draft of the Local Plan includes reference, in Policy GI1, to the need to protect sports grounds and playing fields, as set out in the Council’s Playing Pitch Strategy.**

**Will you use your best endeavours to protect the future of Bull Lane playing fields, a strategically important site located in a part of the borough where there is marked deficiency in playing fields provision, through the redesignation of the land as Metropolitan Open Space, which could be secured during the process associated with producing the Local Plan.**

I have attached the full set of comments that Enfield Sport submitted, as part of the consultation exercise on the first draft of the Local Plan, so that you are fully aware of our concerns. In summary we believe the draft Local Plan (particularly the Policies) are weak and will not protect sports grounds, playing fields, open space, recreation area and play space in Enfield, given the pressure to develop land and other policies in the draft Local Plan, which encourage such development.

My letter dated 26th August 2019 refers to the increasing commercialisation of parks and the impact that holding commercial events is having on a number of sports clubs in the borough. This links to the massive increase in income targets (which Enfield Sport understand is £500k a year) that was imposed on the Parks Service a couple of years ago. **Could you please clarify whether this was in fact what happened and clarify what the level of increase in income targets for the Parks service has been (in £), in each of the last 5 financial years and in total over the 5 year period.**

Your letter of reply refers to the arrangements that are in place to cover the costs associated with the damage that commercial events cause to sports grounds and playing fields. Enfield Sport welcomes the fact that a Bond is in place to recover costs, but we are not convinced that all costs and loss of income to the clubs is properly taken into account when the cost of damage is discussed with the event organisers.For example, representatives of Saracens Amateur Rugby Club advise me that the Council is ignoring requests for payment to cover damage caused by the recent commercial event at Bramley Sports Ground and, in so doing, the Council is not seeking to recover sums from the event organiser through the Bond arrangement that is in place.

**With this in mind, will you instruct your officers to ensure that a meeting is organised with the affected sports clubs, officers from the Property department and the relevant event organiser, prior to and after all events that take place on sports grounds and playing fields (so that a “before and after” position can be established and agreed).**

Your letter refers to an event that took place at Bramley Sports Ground, as if this was the only event held on sports grounds and playing fields in the borough. In fact two major events were held on Enfield Playing Fields, which impacted on the football and rugby clubs who are based there. There are also the major events at Trent Park which negatively impact on Southgate Hockey Club, the football clubs using the adjoining pitches and running clubs who use the park.

The comments you make in your letter on the Council’s approach to leasing properties (and associated matters) is illuminating. We are pleased to read about your commitment to ensuring “consistency and transparency” but we have no faith that your officers are dealing with sports clubs in this manner, given the fact that they have been and continue to be offered different lease terms and a number of clubs are not clear when the current issues they have been negotiating, in many cases for a number of years, will actually be resolved.

The key issue facing sports clubs is the length of Lease being offered and the level of rent they are being asked to pay in relation to those Leases. Your letter states that proposed levels of rent are “considered alongside social and economic value”; but we have no evidence that this happens in practice. In fact, in discussion with sports clubs’ representatives, your officers refer to the need to agree a commercial rent, despite the fact that the vast majority of Enfield based clubs are either voluntary organisations, trusts or charities (ie. they are not “commercial” organisations). They are not for profit organisations that are providing what could be described as a public service for the local population. I know that you are aware of the wider role that sport plays in addressing various social, community and health issues, so it seems entirely inappropriate for your officers to refer to commercial rents, particularly as applying such rents will put the future viability of many sports clubs at risk. For example, Enfield Rangers Football Club are being told they have to pay a massively increased rent for their use of the land they lease from the Council; even though they are located in a deprived part of the borough, are engaging with a significant number of young people and are contributing to people’s health and well being in the local area. The Club would have to fold if they were forced to pay the commercial rent that is proposed by the Council, depriving many young people of the opportunities to participate in the sport and recreation activities that they currently enjoy.

It seems to Enfield Sport that negotiations on Leases are being driven in a commercial manner by officers in the Property Department and that those Council officers involved in the development of sport in the borough are being sidelined; probably because they are in a different department and not aware of what is going on. **I would welcome your comments on this issue and whether you believe there is anything that could be done to involve sports development officers in the Lease negotiations. I would also welcome your thoughts on how the social value of sport and what sports clubs offer local communities (particularly in terms of health benefits and reducing crime and anti-social behaviour) can be factored into discussions about lease rent levels.**

Enfield Sport and Enfield Council used to refer to an agreed rent formula, when Lease rents were being discussed. Unfortunately that formula lapsed a few years ago and is no longer applied. Enfield Sport would like to discuss a new formula with your officers, so that the wide range of issues I have referred to above can be fully considered, alongside the pertinent financial issues. **Will you please instruct your officers to enter into discussions with Enfield Sport about agreeing a new formula that will help establish appropriate rent levels, where Leases are in place?**

There is one final issue relating to Leases that I would ask you consider. Sports clubs wishing to secure external funding in respect of premises or property that is leased, will need to demonstrate that they have security of tenure for at least 25 years, if the sums involved are significant. However, it can take several years to secure match funding, submit bids and secure grant awards; so there needs to be a period of time built in to the Lease term that accommodates the required work before a 25 year lease term becomes relevant. In my experience, having worked for the Sports Council and in my current consultancy role, a lease Term of at least 30 years would be appropriate, to take account of the issues I have referred to. **Will you please instruct your officers to negotiate Leases that have a term of at least 30 years, where sports clubs indicate they are seeking external funding to improve their facilities?**

In relation to the future of Firs Farm playing fields, your letter claims that “refurbishing the former changing rooms is not a viable option”, yet no evidence is provided to substantiate this claim. I would have expected officers to have carried out a piece of work that has looked at the future viability of the changing rooms and the site as a whole (the two are intrinsically linked in terms of its future as a playing field site). This piece of work should take account of investment needs, the relevant financial issue and the wider role that the site plays in relation to various social, community, health and environmental issues. **Can you please send me the relevant report, or other piece of work, that demonstrates that the refurbishment of the Firs Farm changing rooms is not a viable option.**

In providing a response about the viability of the changing rooms, can you please advise what the level of Insurance cover is for the buildings that have been vandalised and what the cost of refurbishing or replacing the changing rooms is estimated to be; so that I can understand what the funding gap is. It would also be helpful to know what research has been carried out to establish whether external funding bodies (eg Sport England and the London Marathon Charitable Trust) might be willing to provide match funding, to allow the refurbishment costs to be fully covered.

**In relation to the Firs Farm changing rooms, can you please send me details of the Insurance cover, the total cost of refurbishment or replacement and the funding gap.**

Finally, in relation to Firs Farm playing fields, can you please clarify what you mean by the reference in your letter to “the longer term redevelopment of that site”. **What are the Council’s current intentions for the Firs Farm playing fields and are any plans currently being considered that would result in alternative uses of the site and /or the loss of any open space, playing fields or sports facilities?**

In my letter dated 26/8/19 I requested a meeting, to involve yourself, the Lead Member and senior officers, to discuss the future of sports clubs and sports facilities in Enfield. Will you now please arrange that meeting?

I look forward to receiving your response on the above issues and to receiving a direct response on the text I have highlighted in bold..

Yours sincerely

Simon Parkinson

Chair of Enfield Sport

Appendix 1

**FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST**

1. **Will you instruct planning officers to ensure that the next draft of the Local Plan includes reference, in Policy GI1, to the need to protect sports grounds and playing fields, as set out in the Council’s Playing Pitch Strategy.**
2. **Will you use your best endeavours to protect the future of Bull Lane playing fields, a strategically important site located in a part of the borough where there is marked deficiency in playing fields provision, through the redesignation of the land as Metropolitan Open Space, which could be secured during the process associated with producing the Local Plan.**
3. **What has the level of increase in income targets for the Parks service been (in £), in each of the last 5 financial years and in total over the 5 year period.**
4. **Will you instruct your officers to ensure that a meeting is organised with the affected sports clubs, officers from the Property department and the relevant event organiser, prior to and after all events that take place on sports grounds and playing fields (so that a “before and after” position can be established and agreed).**
5. **I would welcome your comments on this issue and whether you believe there is anything that could be done to involve sports development officers in the Lease negotiations. I would also welcome your thoughts on how the social value of sport and what sports clubs offer local communities (particularly in terms of health benefits and reducing crime and anti-social behaviour) can be factored into discussions about lease rent levels.**
6. **Will you please instruct your officers to enter into discussions with Enfield Sport about agreeing a new formula that will help establish appropriate rent levels, where Leases are in place?**
7. **Will you please instruct your officers to negotiate Leases that have a term of at least 30 years, where sports clubs indicate they are seeking external funding to improve their facilities?**
8. **Can you please send me the relevant report, or other piece of work, that demonstrates that the refurbishment of the Firs Farm changing rooms is not a viable option.**
9. **In relation to the Firs Farm changing rooms, can you please send me details of the Insurance cover, the total cost of refurbishment or replacement and the funding gap.**
10. **What are the Council’s current intentions for the Firs Farm playing fields and are any plans currently being considered that would result in alternative uses of the site and /or the loss of any open space, playing fields or sports facilities?**