

Football on the Recreation Ground – SMRA report to August 2024 PC meeting

Formal league football use of the Rec pitches

- SMRA hosts 3 league teams on the Rec (including two teams involving village residents). Pitch hire income contributes, currently, around £3,000 towards maintenance costs that would otherwise have to be funded by resident's council tax.
- Most similar Swindon pitches now remove their goalposts to allow the goalmouth grass to recover. We cannot do that as the posts are cemented in. There is now a regular influx of formal teams from the Swindon area arriving on our Rec for out of season training without booking and without paying any fee, further impeding grass recovery.
- £30,000 of the cost of the recent Rec upgrade (drainage, paths etc) was funded because we have active football and playable pitches on the Rec. It came from the Magdalene Close builders' planning obligations for sports usage. As a result, we were able to do all the Rec improvements at no cost to village residents' council tax. If we stop hosting league football teams, that kind of investment may no longer be available.

Maintenance of the Goalmouths

- This is a year-round problem. League matches are cancelled by the referee if the pitch is not in good repair and pitch hire income would be at risk. Our RoSPA annual safety inspection also covers the state of the football pitches.
- Informal use of the pitches does add significantly to the goalmouth damage from April onwards until the start of the season in September as the grass is in constant use rather than just at weekends during the football season.
- The contractor's quote for a repair of each one of the goalmouths is £500 and the goalmouth would need to be cordoned off for a few weeks for it to work. Roping off has not been a success in previous years. Rather than use resident's council tax to pay a minimum of £2,000 per year, every year, a more permanent solution was sought. The goal protectors cost £2,175 and were funded by the remainder of the Magdalene Close S106 sports money.
- With the goal protectors in place, volunteers have been willing to spend considerable time reseeding, returfing and watering the goalmouths to avoid expensive repair costs.

Informal football use of the Recreation Ground

- The goal protectors are not to prevent informal goal practice by villagers or anyone else. The design of the protectors allows use from the reverse side and we have now had appropriate pitch marking done to support that.
- We intend actively using the goal protectors to avoid damage and to enable the grass to recover by:
 - Regular inspection
 - Protect when damage is seen
 - Repair as required
 - Rotate the goal protectors to cover goalmouths that need them.

In a normal year, we hope that we should not need to protect all four goals at the same time. However, given the damage and subsequent repair required this year, all four goal protectors are currently in place for a short period.

- Should there be a request for a full marked pitch to be made available for a special village event that does not clash with league fixtures or bookings, we would not charge for its use provided sufficient notice was given.