

Council meeting:	18 th April 2024	Agenda item:	24/0450.d
Action:	The Cricket Club and cricket ball problem		

1. The Cricket Club (Club) has been a feature of village life for 100 years and plays on the sports field which is owned by the Parish Council (Council).
2. For some years the Council has been aware that a small number of residents in Vicarage Rd and Vicarage Gardens have concerns about the risk of damage to property and personal injury from cricket balls entering their properties over the existing safety net. For the last two seasons about 30 balls have cleared the safety net each year.
3. All the houses concerned were constructed and bought by their present owners in the knowledge that there was a cricket club nearby. The Council is satisfied that there is sufficient uncertainty about whether residents should be able to enjoy their property without fear of being hit by a cricket ball to constitute a risk which is unlikely to be resolved either without incurring significant legal costs, or through the courts, and quite possibly both.
4. Notwithstanding the assurances received from the Council's insurers, it is likely that any claim would be pursued against the Council as well as the Club.
5. Whilst insurance will cover damage to property, some councillors are concerned about their personal liability, and more importantly of their moral liability in the event of a serious injury caused by a cricket ball to someone whilst in their property.
6. A specialist consultancy recommended that a longer and higher safety net than currently exists along the southern boundary of the sports field¹ would significantly reduce the risk. Such an installation would cost at least £35,000. However:
 - a. The Council is not convinced that residents would accept a construction of this scale, but if they did:
 - b. The Council does not believe that it would be a reasonable use of public funds for the Council to fund either all or even a large percentage of the cost of the proposed safety net given the small number of residents affected either by the risk or as members of the club.
 - c. The Cricket Club are unable to raise the funds.
7. Other solutions have been considered but the Cricket Club does not believe that they are viable. Options considered include:
 - a. Changing the rules to disincentivise the hitting of 6's.
 - b. Turning the pitch through 90 degrees.
 - c. Moving the pitch further away from the southern boundary.

¹ 10m high x 84m long vs the current 6.5m x 55m

8. The Cricket Club's right of tenure of the sports field is complex and resolving it in the event of a dispute could incur significant legal costs:
 - a. The Club is of the view that the conveyance under which the sports field was gifted to the Council secures the Club's right to use it; the Council is satisfied that this isn't the case.
 - b. The Club has a fifty-year lease on the site of the pavilion renewed in 2017 but there has never been a formal agreement for the Club's use of the playing surface.
 - c. Historically the Council has accepted the Club's right to determine when football can be played to avoid damaging the playing surface.
9. The Council has been wrestling with the conflicting claims of residents and the Club trying to find a solution that meets everyone's needs and has been unable to reach a consensus.
10. The Council would welcome resident's opinions.

Andrew Farrow

Parish Clerk