

Protecting Playing Fields



Bexley Cricket Club



PROJECT SUMMARY

Facility name	Bexley Cricket Club
Lead organisation	Bexley Cricket Club
Location	Manor Way, Bexley, DA5 3QG
Sports	Cricket (The Club also leases land to Burnt Ash Hockey Club, and has two tennis courts and a dance school which all operate independently of the Club)
Protecting Playing Fields funding	£52,553
Start and end date	Work started in September 2012 and fields were open for use in April 2013

Introduction

Bexley Cricket Club was established over 200 years ago and the present ground located near to Bexley Village has been in use by the Club for almost 150 years. Bexley Cricket Club is one of the top ten clubs in the county and its main side plays in the Kent Cricket League Premier Division. Over the last decade, the quality of the Club's ground has deteriorated as certain areas of the outfield were subsiding making it increasingly unsafe to play on. The subsidence has been exacerbated by the gravel soil, dry weather and a nearby water pumping extracting station. The ground also suffers from compaction and a poor grass sward. Although efforts have been made to patch the affected areas, the problem has remained. If the outfield continued to subside the Club could have been at risk of failing to meet the League's playing criteria.

The Project

The project sought to improve the safety of the ground for players, retain its League status, and maximise the potential use of the ground by levelling the entire outfield to facilitate training. The Club's outfield was last levelled nearly 50 years ago. Eight years ago, the club had the square levelled and there was also a need to level the outfield, although the Club was not able to finance it from their own reserves or find a suitable grant aid programme to apply for. Prior to PPF, the club was only aware of Sport England's Small Grants fund. Under PPF, the club received a grant of £52,553 towards the project and the Club contributed approximately £10,000 of partnership funding from their own reserves. The club covered the costs of the turf agronomist consultant to undertake the feasibility study, specification and tendering process along with site visits and contract management on behalf of the club. Without PPF funding the project would not have gone ahead. The Club would have continued to patch the worst areas of the outfield; however, in the long term it would have ended up being more expensive and caused further levelling problems between areas which had and had not been patched.





(Early grass growth / reseeded work)

Benefits

The Playing Field

As a result of this work, the outfield is now a high quality and safe playing area which meets League standards and the club and in which its members can take great pride. The project also improved the ease of maintenance, as it included the installation of new water supply to the square. Previously they had to run hoses some distance in order to water the square.

"It's come out pretty well. Everyone that will use the ground will benefit from a facility which is of better quality... It's much safer, so there has been a very positive reaction from the players."

(Committee member)

Sports Participation

The Club has six senior league sides and has a thriving Colts section (approx. 150 junior players). Currently, it does not have enough capacity at the ground to accommodate all home fixtures, so the Club has to hire additional grounds outside of the borough at Dartford Grammar School and Bexley Park Sports Club in Dartford. Now that the entire outfield has been levelled the Club can maximise the use of the grounds.

Although, the club has only had two seasons' usage it has highlighted a number of positive effects. At a senior level, the new outfield has helped the teams to perform better and avoid injuries from either trips, falls and hazardous balls, as an uneven ground can make a ball take off in unexpected directions.

At junior level, the club has been able to accommodate more Colts activities on its ground. They have coconut mats which they lay down and now that the outfield is flat they can utilise areas which they could not use before and have multiple games played at the same time, therefore reducing the need to hire additional grounds elsewhere.

In addition to cricket, the ground is used by Burnt Ash Hockey Club outside of the cricket season and since the outfield has been levelled the Club was approached by the Leigh Academy in Dartford to host a Lashings World XI event in 2013 and in July 2014. The Lashings World XI has been successful in attracting retired test match players from around the world to promote the game of cricket. Many youngsters benefited from these events as they were inspired by and able to play against some of the world's best cricketers.





Places People Play



(Reseeding work / installation of new water supply to the square)

Lead Organisation and Partners

The newly levelled outfield is also helping the club financially, by reducing maintenance costs, including patch repairs to the ground, and reducing the need to hire additional grounds elsewhere outside of the borough. There are no other facilities in the borough to hire which meet the needs of its senior and junior players. At the same time, the newly levelled outfield has given added impetus to the club's partnership working. The Club has worked in partnership with a local disability charity to apply for grant aid to develop an indoor facility for disabled users to play Table Cricket. Table Cricket enables young people with severe physical and learning disabilities to enjoy cricket and represent their team on a competitive basis. This was not the club's first experience managing funding bids and projects, and key members were able to apply the experiences from previous projects this time around. The Club has Club Mark accreditation from the ECB and is a Focus Club for cricket in Kent. The club's priority is now working towards securing an additional ground close to their current ground to accommodate more of its senior league sides and its thriving Colts section.

Local Community

The newly levelled outfield is a great asset to the Club's members and the local community, one of very few good quality sporting facilities and attractive green spaces in the borough. The club is working hard to engage female players, disabled groups and waive match fees or subs for local players who are financially constrained. A girls' section opened at the club five years ago which will be extended to increase the number of females participating in the sport (currently there are 30 girls in their Colts section). The local disability charity has also used the Club's ground for its disabled players to play Kwik Cricket.

"We'd like to expand our facilities to more sections of society. It has also allowed the Club to continue to provide quality sport to the local community." (Committee member)





Places People Play



Lessons

A number of factors were key to the project's success. This includes a committed membership base, continuity amongst the key members of the Planning and Development Committee leading the project and previous experience of managing funding bids and projects. The Club felt it had the necessary expertise both to respond to the PPF opportunity to secure the funds and to effectively manage the project.

The Club had a high regard for the TGMS consultant who was appointed to oversee the tendering process for the contractor. Although there were delays to the project due to adverse weather conditions, the Club felt that the successful contractor could have done more to adhere to the Club's timetable and taken steps to minimise the delays to the project. As a result the Club had to pay for additional seeding and sanding work to be done.

The main challenges the Club encountered were legal or bureaucratic, specifically issues around VAT, solicitors' fees and management fees, which the Club needed further clarification on from Sport England. Sport England has resolved this issue with the Club and has improved the clarity of its guidance for subsequent rounds.

