



**NAG Saturday traffic and car parking challenges on roads adjacent to Laurel Park
Monday 19th June 2023 @ 7:30 pm via Zoom Webinar**

Present

Tim Marsh	Chair & ACER
Phil Marsh	Resident, Marefield
Ian Jobson	Laurel Park Football Club & Resident Trusthorpe Road
Mike Bradshaw	Laurel Park FC Youth Sports Foundation (Charity # 1183357)
Helen Elderfield	Resident, Marefield
Hazel Bell	Resident, Sibson
Sarah Chaplin	Resident, Marefield
Steve Feltham	Resident, Lakeside and MERA Secretary
Al Neal	Wokingham Borough Councillor (Hillside) & Resident
Moses Iyengunmwena	ETC Councillor & Resident
Tahir Maher	ETC Councillor & Resident
Karen Collins	Thames Valley Police & Resident, Pavenham Close

Apologies

Mike Smith	WBC and ETC Councillor & Resident, Northam Close
Pauline Jorgensen	WBC and ETC Councillor & Resident
Melanie De Jong	ETC Councillor

NB: These minutes record what happened in the meeting, what was said, what was discussed, and what action would be taken where appropriate.

Points from the Agenda:

1. Welcome, and Introductions:

Tim welcomed the attendees to the Zoom webinar. The apologies are listed above.

2. Purpose and delivery outcomes:

Saturday traffic and car parking challenges in roads adjacent to Laurel Park have been an agenda item for the Early NAG for many years. This Zoom Webinar has been arranged to bring all invested parties together for a greater understanding of the issue and to discuss potential solutions.

3. Presentation with Q&A

Phil advised that potential solutions #2, *Using the existing car parks at Brookside*, #7 *Chalfont* and #8 *Sol Joel* had been eliminated as they are all in use on Saturdays.

Ian expanded upon LPFC's additional options:

Option 1 – *Development of Laurel Park*. This option looks at the existing facility and redevelopment for the whole community. The existing pavilion needs to be refurbished/rebuilt as it is not sufficient for the 35k residents who live in the area.

Option 2 - *3G Pitch at ME School*. This option is currently on hold as local residents successfully appealed against it. Tim asked whether the FA still require renovation of 3G pitches every 10 years and if they still have to open until 10 pm every day of the week. Ian advised that Wokingham Borough Council has a strong strategy for funding but did not know whether a stipulation to open until 10 pm was in place. Al advised that planning conditions for the existing football pitch at ME is nothing after 8 pm and no flood lights. He also advised that there will be a borough-wide review of all pitches occurring in the summer (Pitch Strategy Report)

Option 3 – *One Way Circular Road with Parking*.

Hazel asked if the new proposed road would be off Rushey way and would the access in Marefield be closed off. The road would be off Rushey Way and the only access (open for everyone). To address the question of safety, speed limits and humps to control speed could be installed. Al commented he was not sure if nearby residents would approve of the circular road.

Solutions #1 *Do Nothing*, #3 *New Car Park off Rushey Way*, #4 *New Car Park at Westfield*, #5 *New Car Park/Changing/Community Facilities*, and #6 *Existing Car Park – Winnersh*, were presented. Al advised WBC is not keen on losing green space to tarmac. Mike confirmed the majority of parking should be utilised by visiting and not local players. At this point, it was suggested that LPFC address the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee to explain the rules and safeguarding regulations governing the football association, the area covered by Berks and Bucks FA and why there is so much traffic on a Saturday morning (See Appendix 1)

4. Breakout Rooms Workshop

The groups were sent into their Breakout Rooms to discuss the proposed solutions.

5 Elected Breakout Rooms Spokesperson to present back to the attendees

Residents – represented by Steve Feltham. The residents were not keen on many of the proposals, but the most acceptable one was #3 *New Car Park off Rushey Way* and LPFC Option 3 – *One Way Circular Road with Parking* followed by #4 *New Car Park at Westfield* and #6 *Existing Car Park – Winnersh* – however, this last option was unlikely due to the issues facing players on public vehicles (not accepting to carry players who were wet, cold and muddy).

Steve also advised that they felt residents and the Earley Environmental Group might object to a new pavilion on the scrubland (AL pointed out that such scrubland consisted of many mature trees). Steve advised that they would not be in favour of the 3G pitch at ME due to the potential traffic issues in Earley. Heavy Duty Grass Reinforcement Mesh would also be their preferred construction material for access and circular roads, not tarmac. So, the look and feel of the grass spaces would be preserved.

Councillors – Al suggested installing cycle racks at Laurel Park and talking to ETC regarding opening up the cycle ways. Moses asked whether games could be staggered. Tahir commented that the councillor's consensus would be against additional car parks as the council wants to minimise the use of cars.(see Appendix 1)

LPFC - Mike advised he will propose a presentation is made to ETC and WBC regarding football to help them understand how it works. This would explain their issues with staggering matches (to accommodate away teams),

safeguarding, etc. Phil suggested that he (experienced in managing Local Grassroot leagues) attend and requested that the Berks & Bucks FA attend such a meeting.

6 Complete a Matrix Summary to analyse options for recommendations to the Authority to consider

The residents' advised that their main reservations were around Marefield and felt the most positive solutions were the direct access from Rushey Way and the circular road as they avoided using Marefield.

The councillors suggested waiting until the playing field review is published before firming up a short list of options for recommended action.

Al suggested asking LPFC to ensure players use bikes and walk when possible (Mike commented that cycling is an unsuitable method of transport for away teams).

Tim commented that there were no short-term options available and preferred by attendees.

Tahir suggested a presentation be made to the Liaison Group and/or the Scrutiny Committee, which is open to the public. He will speak to Mike Smith and get back to Tim.

Karen will speak to Sgt Botham for feedback on the proposals from a policing point of view.

The meeting closed at 9:30 pm.

Appendix 1. – Why have junior/youth football traffic levels increased recently?

In the 1970s and 80's, the major junior and youth grassroots league (u9 to u18) was the South Chilton Minor League which was sanctioned by the Berks and Bucks FA to organise home, and away Sunday League matches only. In 2012 the SCML was absorbed into the new Reading and West Berkshire League, which focuses on teams who wish to play on a Sunday, mainly in the area west of Reading. LPFC confirmed that it's not an option to play on a Sunday, as Leagues in our area operate on Saturdays only.

New Saturday Leagues:

a) In 1992, the league, now known as the East Berks Football Alliance, was sanctioned by the Berks and Bucks FA to organise home and away matches on Saturdays.

b) In 1999, the Berkshire Youth Development League was sanctioned by the Berks and Bucks FA to deliver fixed venues in the Reading area matches to be played on Saturdays.

c) Around 2008, the SCML and EBFA partnered with the Berks and Bucks FA to provide Junior/youth football for girls. Both leagues were sanctioned by the Berks and Bucks FA to organise home and away matches on a Saturday. Some seasons later, the two leagues were amalgamated to form the Berkshire County Football League.

Areas covered by the Saturday Leagues:

a) The Berks and Bucks FA was established in 1878, and even though the government changed the Berkshire County boundaries in 1974, the FA works within the old 1878 area, which includes south Oxfordshire. The B&BFA manages County Cup competitions for all teams in their area. See the link below for more details.

https://footballinberkshire.co.uk/features/in-depth/44039/why-there-are-oxfordshire-clubs-in-the-berks-bucks-county-fa-cup/#google_vignette

b) Also, teams outside the Berks and Bucks FA jurisdiction (based in Bucks, Oxen, Hants, Surrey, and Wiltshire) play in the same leagues as Laurel Park FC. This is why so many away teams travel by vehicle to Laurel Park on a Saturday morning.

c) Finally, many teams are based in rural areas without public transport, so private vehicles are the only practical transport solution providing transport and a safe area for players to wait in a sheltered place for matches to commence.

A potential source of data for planning:

The Berks and Bucks FA have a central database system that is used by some of the Leagues to register all club players/teams called FA's Whole Game System (WGS). WGS supplies data to the FA match scheduling platform, the FA Full-Time system. Alastair Kay of the Berks and Bucks FA can advise on the supply of data from WGS, which could be used to shine a light on team/player movements in the season. A coordinated approach to traffic (generated by travel to football matches) based on WGS data will hopefully deliver good solutions for WBC when appraising its Recreational Grounds facilities.

Also, WGS may provide details on travel patterns for players who play in locally home-based teams to see if walking or cycling to matches is an option for these players. As matches are played between September and May in inclement weather, parents may wish to drive to matches.