Annual Town Council Meeting

Watton Sports Association can confirm we are back open for business following the third lockdown.

We didn’t receive any funding for the first period of closure but were fortunate to qualify following the November and January closure, including the receipt of the restart grant which has been invaluable. Breckland District Council should be commended for their efficiency and information they have made easily available for local businesses and facilities.

It is no secret that WSA has been struggling for a few years and found itself at breaking point early into the financial year 20-21. We are pleased to report that we have made some progress and covid roadmap allowing we will be working hard to put the Sports Centre back at the heart of the community. We are open for outside sport, the Gym and also a takeaway service, including a brand new menu for the Tom Pettitt Bar.

We have received offers for some new committee members and are looking to co-op them on in the next few weeks and decide a date for the AGM so that information will be public shortly. We hope the TC will provide a new representative to attend our meetings to provide input on relevant matters also.

We have undertaken a financial review of our overheads to improve our efficiency going forward, specifically for the cost of maintaining the outside. Our grounds service will now be grass cutting and general tidy only. The football clubs will be marking their own pitches .

There has been a longstanding conversation re the upkeep of the memorial playing fields, we ask for help from the Town Council towards the costs and the Town Council turns down the request.

We would, respectfully, once again, like to ask the Town Council if they can help us with this cost.

Our new contract is £525 plus vat per month. As a Charity we are exempt from paying VAT so we are unable to reclaim the vat on this billing. Lockdown has highlighted the need for our open spaces to be available to the community and we have provided many with a space to walk their dog, exercise and in recent weeks socialise outside.

The majority of residents use the space and respect others, but, we are extremely concerned with the amount of vandalism and anti- social behaviour including underage drinking that has grown up on the site whilst shut. We have a floodlight pulled down, fences smashed, drainpipes ripped off the walls, broken windows to highlight a few costly repairs.

The bill will be considerable and we now are dealing with broken glass everywhere, including on the junior and senior grass football pitches. We have people sitting on the benches at the Loch and on the fields smoking drugs very openly. It’s shocking and extremely worrying when we have a lot of Junior sport sessions at the centre. We are talking with Tescos and the Police for any measures we could put into place to identify any adults repeatedly purchasing alcohol for U18s and the Police are going to try and step up their walk arounds after dark.

At this point we would like to thank Phil Kibler and the Loch Neaton Charity for helping us deal with the mountains of rubbish we have left at the site on a daily basis. We are looking at provision of more bins but money is tight at the moment until we can get trading underway. Both of our charities bear the cost for removal of this rubbish and dog waste and speaking for the Sports Centre that cost is considerable and growing. Our aim will be to continue to work with the Loch to address future problems or opportunities to help strengthen each charity in turn.

There is an expectation from the community for the Sports Fields to be accessible for dog walking and socialising. It is also expected that the car park is to be open and free for all to park. This also has a cost to us and the carpark is in need of pothole repairs. We have faced abuse on the Watton community page when the gates were closed in Lockdown (as per our licence agreement), by a minority but nonetheless damaging to us.

Our questions are: -

***What can the Town Council do to help improve this attitude/communication in the Town.***

***Do you have a plan or any initiatives ?***

We have some real issues with drink and drugs, people sleeping rough and real lack of facilities as the town grows, as a council where does your responsibility start and end with providing the town and surrounding area to improve its reputation.

***Is the council reflective of the diverse community in Watton now?***

Lockdown will have exposed many failings but hopefully as we come out, provide a better understanding of demand and different ways of delivering goods and services to the community. If this can be better achieved perhaps that will contribute to a better co-operation between generations and nationalities living in our Town.

The centre will continue to try to improve facilities and deliver a service and place for the community to gather and enjoy the open space for all residents.

We are endeavouring to take a new approach and come away from a nostalgic way of running the centre and are looking forward to seeing the community return and make use of the facilities. We will have new squash courts by the end of April and toilet facilities refurbished.

In summary, we feel there needs to be some positive policy and initiatives put forward for Watton and the surrounding area and maybe the TC can take the lead and solve some of these social problems.

Trustees WSA