

Croydon Parks Update April 2022

The background is that 7 clubs in Croydon have poor greens because the council is bankrupt and has reduced green maintenance down to the bare minimum and they were also not communicating with the clubs.

The clubs have combined and put together a proposal to seek a 2-year period of grace during which time the council would aim to get the greens up to a good playable standard and the clubs would endeavour to increase membership. The clubs accepted however, that if, at the end of the two years, membership hadn't increased sufficiently individual clubs would consider closure and amalgamation with another club.

The proposal was sent to the council prior to a meeting that was held last on Wednesday 30th March. The meeting was online and attended by Croydon's Programme Manager of Parks and Green Spaces and Head of Grounds Maintenance. There were 3 representatives from the Croydon Parks Bowling Association along with Colin Homes. At least one councillor would have been there but because of impending local elections he was under purdah rules, meaning he couldn't take part.

They were informed that parks are a non-statutory function and therefore a target for cost savings. There have been reductions in staff including officers that has made it difficult to manage the service. Parks services have lost £100k worth of staff and a further £250k of seasonal staff. Parks staff no longer lock/unlock parks, plant bedding plants or aim for green flag status.

Parks have an overall budget of approximately £3 million. In this financial year ending in April parks have lost £360k and they have a further target to reduce another £80k in 22/23 that is specifically bowls related. However, because the council failed to engage with clubs last summer the Director has agreed to hold on the £80k reduction allowing the engagement to happen this summer.

It was clear that there would be no increase in staff and the greens maintenance would be similar to last year and potentially worse the year after.

The clubs were keen to investigate if they could take on any manageable maintenance tasks to make some savings. The council indicated that they might be able to get some capital funding to purchase whatever equipment and storage was needed, if clubs' take on some of the work.

It was agreed that there will be a meeting, in the next 2 weeks, between each club and council parks representatives. The aim will be to assess and agree what can be done and what cost savings the Council can achieve. Subject to the outcome parks could go back to the budget holder and get funding for a staff increase.

Colin Homes