

AN OPEN LETTER FOR PUBLICATION FROM THE UDNEY PARK COMMUNITY FIELDS FOUNDATION AND OTHER SPORTING CLUBS AND ORGANISATIONS

London Borough of Richmond upon Thames

And by email to:-

Paul.Chadwick@richmondandwandsworth.gov.uk

Date: 20th June 2022

Dear Mr Chadwick,

Udney Park Playing Fields, Teddington Request regarding Compulsory Purchase Order

AHH Group Limited (“AHH”), the company that is de facto the present owner of Udney Park Playing Fields (an “Asset of Community Value (“ACV”)), announced on February 16th, 2021, that it was their intention to sell Udney Park Playing Fields. An ACV moratorium period then commenced and expired on August 16th, 2021.

During this ACV period AHH were required to engage with any interested community group with proposals to purchase and manage the fields. A single such group emerged - The Udney Park Community Fields Foundation. This charity made a generous offer to purchase the fields based on playing field value. The charity also set out detailed proposals for capital investment and returning the fields to multi-sport use by community clubs. This proposal was rejected.

Instead AHH engaged Savills to sell the site to a third-party commercial interest at the expiry of the ACV period. After an extensive local and national campaign marketing Udney Park as an “investment opportunity” not a single substantive bid emerged, as is demonstrated by the fact that 12 months since this sales campaign was launched no sale has been concluded.

AHH’s ownership has now extended for 7 years - they acquired Udney Park in August 2015. During this time the site has not been managed responsibly.

1. The playing fields have been allowed to deteriorate with no maintenance.

2. The cricket square has not been maintained since 2015 and is now in such a condition that a recent English Cricket Board report concluded that it would need to be dug up and reconstructed.

3. One of the three tennis courts is now unsafe to use due to tree roots lifting the playing surface and the other two courts will fall out of use within a couple of years if not resurfaced.

4. The war memorial pavilion has been subject to extensive vandalism, and water ingress now threatens the structure of the 1922 building which is protected by Building of Townscape Merit local heritage status and recognised as a War Memorial. Thus, there are now no changing and shower facilities available at Udney Park even were the playing pitches brought back in to use.

AHH have sub-let one third of the site to Teddington Rugby Football Club for Sunday use and evening training under temporary floodlights. Teddington RFC also sub-let the two remaining tennis courts that can still be used. All other use by community sport has been rejected by AHH - indeed it is not viable due to the state of the fields and changing rooms. Teddington RFC use last generation floodlights that spill both light and noise. Understandably they are reluctant to invest in environmentally friendly modern sports lights as their long-term tenure remains uncertain whilst AHH are actively attempting to sell the site. A properly considered solution for the responsible use of sports lights therefore remains on hold against this backdrop. Nevertheless, the proper maintenance Teddington RFC have delivered for their leased portion of the site demonstrates the continued potential of the whole site for wider community use, as does the success of their sub-lessee running the community tennis activity.

The stakeholders listed below request that AHH provide immediate written proposals as to how they intend to return the playing fields and facilities to full community use. It is not acceptable to continue the present policy which allows these facilities to deteriorate year after year.

The minimum requirements of responsible management of the playing fields going forward should include -

1. The access to the playing fields and Pavilion should be restored for community sport, and at reasonable rates reflective of those chargeable for community sport within the Borough.

2. The fields should be marked out, with posts, pads and nets provided.

3. There should be a proper maintenance regime put in place.

4. The cricket square should be reconstructed and maintained from mid-April to end September

5. The pitch layout should broadly be as the proposal from the Udney Park Community Fields Foundation as shown on their draft business plan (ref website <https://www.udneypark.co.uk/the-plan>), or else as is agreed with the community clubs to suit current needs.

6. A plan should be put in place to restore the tennis courts - commencing with remedial work to the third court where the surface has lifted.

7. Reinstatement of the external fabric of the pavilion making the building weather-resistant again, and the changing rooms and showers should be brought back in to use and properly managed

It is suggested that AHH are given 14 days to respond with proposals to either show how they propose to restore and manage Udney Park playing fields responsibly or alternatively to agree to engage with the charity set up for this specific purpose to ensure that ownership of the fields transfers to the Charity, as the ACV legislation contemplates.

Please confirm that LBRUT will act upon this request as a matter of urgency, writing to AHH in terms outlined above, and if no satisfactory response is received within the timescale set, then that a CPO be immediately considered to break this impasse.

It should be noted that in the event of a CPO, the capital funding would be provided by the Foundation and the annual maintenance of the playing pitches and facilities would likewise be funded by the Foundation, so that there is no demand on the public purse going forward.

We are copying in Councillor Robin Brown, who along with his Liberal Democrat colleagues was recently elected on a mandate to defend Udney Park from development and to press the owner to accept the community plan.

The Richmond Local Plan also confirms the purpose of Udney Park is a community playing field, where there is deficit of supply. Hopefully both Councillors and Council officers will consider these commitments and agree to this proposal to break the impasse.

I am happy to meet with any party to help move things forward towards a positive resolution.

Yours sincerely,

Jonathan Dunn
Trustee
For and on behalf of

Udney Park Community Fields Foundation

Over the last 72 hours the following have endorsed the contents of this letter. I only distributed the draft to a limited group and had universal support from all. There are lists of high-profile supporters on the Charity website, but those listed below are players and supporters of local clubs, local community groups and charities, and residents who have taken a keen interest in the future of Udney Park –

Friends of Udney Park Playing Fields
Teddington Society
Thamesians RFC
Hearts of Teddlothian FC
Teddington RFC
Udney Park Playing Fields Trust
John Blakewell – Chair Fullerton Court Ltd
Sarah Robbie – CEO of Active Women and Girls Foundation
Natalie Raja / Mark Amery/ Shelly Micklethwaite – Bushey Park Girls Cricket Club
Rex Stonehouse – St Aggies FC
Steve Hill – Director of Rugby at Richmond RFC
Andrew Osbourne – Founder of Surplus for Supper
Chris Kennedy – Pioneer Minister, Activatechurch
Jat Mistry – Chair of Hearts of Teddlothian FC
Sam Burge – Chair Molesey CC
Graham Smith – President of Hampton Wick CC
Sue Martineau - Local resident who established Wasps RFC's women's section in the 1980's
Adrian Alexander – former Thamesians, Harlequins captain, Barbarians player
Stuart Higgins – Founder of SporTedd
Bart Redmond – President of Thamesians RFC
Bob Mordell – former Thamesians and England rugby union player
Giles Ward – Coach Thamesians women's team
Jack Marfleet
Mike Stepan
Kate and John Bason
Ron Stanley
Tony Bendelow
Simon Iliffe
Alan Mitchell

Stephen Newman
Stephen and Debbie Marfleet
Geoff Harrison
Tracy Munro
Martin Carr
Alex Hall
Roger Waddelow
Mark DeBrett
Anthony Lipmann
Ian Wimbush
Ben Pegna – Thamesians Head Coach
Martin Carr
Tracy Munro
Alix / Tabby/ Emelia/ Sarah on behalf of all the players of Thamesians women's team
Arlind/ Mark Slater/ Kieran Morgan/ Rajan/ Baily Ferdous/ Hugh Brayshaw/ Sibby on
behalf of all the players of Thamesians men's team
Ken Gibson and George
Sue Cocoran
Kath Ezzeldin
Orla Dunn
Richard Sharples
Gareth Bullock
Harry Mann
David Hogben
Mark Smith
Bill Glassup
David and Christine Chiltern
Ollie Smith (Leicester, England and Thamesians player)
Dave Munby
Ivor Powell