

UDNEY PARK COMMUNITY FIELDS FOUNDATION

Councillors J. Millard and J. Neden-Watts

London Borough of Richmond upon Thames
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By email to:

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Date: 27 August 2026

Dear Jim and Julia,

Udney Park Playing Fields – (“UPPF”) Request for Compulsory Purchase Order

I read in The Times (page 11, 24 August 2026) that Udney Park Playing Fields are now a frozen, sanctioned asset of Leisure Focus, a company controlled by Mr Wu (aka Hu Xiaowei, Chen Xiao'er and Hu Shi). It appears that Mr Wu has been arrested in Japan on the charge of falsifying paperwork. Clearly, given the imposition of sanctions, that cannot be the only crime he is suspected of having committed.

I note that the Council is quoted as saying that it would “*welcome the Fields returning to wider community use*”. Munira Wilson MP has said “*It is a scandal that Udney Park Playing Fields have been lying all but derelict for over a decade now when grassroots local community sports groups are crying out for pitch space. It's time to explore all viable legal and planning avenues to ensure we can return these precious fields to community use.*”

With Mr Wu sanctioned, and the unwinding of the sanctions, or sale of his asserts, likely to take many years, if not decades, that “*return to wider community use*” is not going to happen by way of any normal market transaction.

The Council must now exercise its powers to purchase UPPF by compulsory means. That is the only viable legal and planning route available for the present and the foreseeable future. This letter sets out a pathway with this aim in mind.

Does the Council have the Power to Compulsory Purchase the Fields?

The Council undoubtedly has the power under Section 226(1)(b) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, Section 13(1) of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976, the Acquisition of Land Act 1981 and Section 125 of the Local Government Act 1972.

Charity number: 1195005;

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Can the Council Afford to Purchase the Fields?

As with the exercise of all CPO powers, the Council will need to show that the CPO will not be a Capital Cost on its books.

This can be achieved with a “pre-agreed” onward sale to a pre-determined entity. The Udney Park Community Fields Foundation is a Charity set up with the specific purpose to acquire and run UPPF for sporting purposes alone. There will be no building of residences on any part of the Fields to fund the purchase or make private profit.

As with all Charities, the Charity will not be permitted to “overpay” for any asset it acquires. However, the “true” worth of UPPF is very much less than the £3.5m Mr Wu paid for it. Quantum bought the Fields from Imperial College in 2015 for £6m and had to take a loss of £2.5m on those Fields when they sold them to Mr Wu’s BVI vehicle. The only other potential purchaser for the Fields at the time was the Foundation who offered the true “playing field value”. There was no other potential purchaser, and it is clear that there is no commercial speculative value in the Fields as no other bona fide purchaser offered to buy. The sale to Mr Wu’s vehicle was rushed through by Quantum with only days left in the sale window before the Asset of Community Value (“ACV”) moratorium kicked in again.

Mr Wu himself then attempted to sell the Fields but refused to sell them to the Foundation for their true value and once again the ACV restriction on sale is now in place. Even the £3.5m paid by Leisure Focus to Quantum is many times the true value of the Fields as sports fields, particularly when noting the poor condition of the fields and the lack of up to date changing and support facilities.

Obviously if Udney park were to be considered to have any development/ building potential whatsoever then its value would skyrocket, and this is clearly the speculative gamble which Quantum hoped to fight and win when they took their application to build 105 residential flats on the Fields to appeal. They comprehensively lost that appeal. Udney Park Playing Fields do not carry any residential planning permission, nor is this going to change given the layers of protection surrounding the Fields. They are “Local Green Space” (equivalent to “Green Belt”) as well as being an ACV. If anything the protection is likely to increase if it is granted status as a “Sporting Asset of Community Value”. The only thing standing in the way of that status seems to be that the Government has yet to bring into force the legislation it passed only this summer. I understand that Munira Wilson is actively pressing the appropriate Minister to enact that legislation swiftly. We should expect Udney Park Playing Fields to become a “SACV” as soon as the legislation is in force.

UPPF is in desperate need of significant remediation (the fields need refurbishment, the cricket table has already been lost, and tree roots have rendered one of the three tennis courts unsafe). The 1922 war memorial pavilion which once provided changing rooms and a community centre demands significant investment to make the building fit for purpose in the twenty-first century. Clearly, much will need to be spent on the Fields, so reducing the true capital value of them still further.

Notwithstanding the expenditure required to bring Udney Park Playing Fields up to standard, the Foundation remain prepared to acquire them for true, sports field, value.

The Council should therefore have no concerns over any “capital charge” to its books – this can be dealt with in the usual manner with binding pre-agreements for immediate – likely simultaneous - onward sale to the Foundation once legal title is acquired from Leisure Focus by the Council.

Can the Council Afford to Run the Fields?

As stated above, following the CPO and the instantaneous onward sale to the Foundation, the Foundation would own and run the Fields, so the short answer is that the Council will have no revenue expenditure on UPPF once it is transferred to the Foundation.

However, the Council may, for CPO purposes, need to show that there would be no revenue cost to it should the Fields stay on their books.

This exercise has already been done on behalf of the Foundation who have engaged a respected independent consultant showing how Udney Park Playing Fields can be revenue neutral.

The fields can operate going forward without recourse to the council purse.

Does the Council have the Political Will to CPO the Fields?

12.5 acres of formerly prime playing fields have been almost entirely out of use for much more than ten years now. They are owned by a BVI company whose beneficial owner is apparently the second in command of an international criminal gang who commit atrocious crimes.

I am asking the council the council to take the action available to them to unlock the gates and return community sport to Udney Park.

Yours faithfully

Jonathan Dunn

Trustee and Chair

For and on behalf of

Udney Park Community Fields Foundation

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