

Goring Robins FC

Goring Robins is a key part of our local community. With the support of parents and wider volunteers, the club continues to thrive: we currently have 28 teams spanning age groups from U7 to U17's and encompassing 350 boys and girls, this in addition to our foundation offering for the U6's. In addition to this we have over 50 coaches.

The club's objective / development plan is to provide access to the beautiful game for as many people as possible, and with this in mind, the aim is to reach 36 teams over the coming years increasing the numbers of players to 450 and coaches increasing to over 70. This would be 3 teams per age group including boys' and girls' team. It's worth noting the growth we've seen over the last few years and predicted growth is all due to local demand which is fantastic.

With growth and success comes challenges, notably including:

Pitch capacity issues

A dilapidated football pavilion at Sheepcot Recreation Ground which does not do justice to the village or the club; and

The issues posed by a lack of winter training venues, leading to significant annual costs for venue bookings, and the adverse environmental impact of journeys outside of the village.

All four proposals provide a new pavilion and additional parking capacity, both of which are most welcome, addressing point 2 above.

[Goring Robins FC Continued]

The club's priority is to ensure that we maximise the number of pitches available for our teams to use, and to improve the training facilities available to the club all year round. So, this means Option 4 offering a 3G pitch answers points 1 & 3 (above).

A 3G pitch would mean the following advantages to the club and the village:

All 36 teams could use Sheepcot for home fixtures

We have been advised the location (running alongside the fence and next to the tennis courts) could be out of the way and not in the middle of Sheepcot

An 11 aside 3G pitch can be split into 4x 5v5 pitches or 2x 7v7 pitches and 1 9v9 pitch.

We are in early discussions to set up a "walking football team" for the over 50's - <https://thewfa.co.uk/>

Between Goring Robins & Goring United we have future aspirations to provide football for the disabled

An all-weather pitch would mean fewer games postponed due to frozen or waterlogged pitches

The pitch can be used throughout the day, staggering kick offs helping the car park congestion

There are two Goring Vets teams. An over 35's team and an over 50's. Both teams train and play matches outside of the village.

The 3G pitch could be used for other sports

Goring Robins FC Cont.

All our current 28 teams leave the village each week for winter training between the end of September and end of March. Venues include Wallingford (Hithercroft), Pangbourne College, Langtree School (indoors and astro turf pitch) and Bradfield. Winter training facilities are hard to find and travelling 15-25 minutes for training means we come up against other clubs trying to book the same space. This also has a huge environmental impact with so many people travelling to these venues every week.

Bourdillon

For me and a lot of parents I've spoken to, a 9v9 football pitch at Bourdillon wouldn't be a suitable option for many reasons. Not enough space, being far too close to neighbours' fences, parking, toilet facilities, the ability to offer refreshments to name a few.

In the short term we're currently in need of a 2nd 9V9 pitch in addition to the one we use at The Oratory school. Could we explore adding one at Gardiner's Rec? Well away from the cricket square and we would be finished in time for cricket to start at the beginning of May.

Tennis

I was pleased to see that the Open Spaces Strategy report is addressing the need for more parking and that it includes options for GTC to be part of a new pavilion on Sheepcot which would also house Council offices and have space for 'community use'. For me there are two factors that must be addressed if we are to use a combined facility:

1. We must have our own space; in addition to the challenges we have with the toilet in the footballers' pavilion, we see at other clubs (e.g. North Oxford) how detrimental combining wet and dry sports can be.
2. The facility must be located near or next to the courts. Any further and we introduce safety issues with juniors moving between the clubhouse (e.g. for toilet trips) and the courts. Also, for the clubhouse to feel like it is ours, it needs to be physically close.

Regarding the second point, as discussed we will find out what the safeguarding guidelines say and reach out to the membership to gain their view on whether an extension to the footballer's pavilion would suffice

Croquet Club

Since I founded the Goring Gap Croquet Club last Spring our membership had grown to about 30 in 2022, and already in 2023 we have gained 3 more. There is huge enthusiasm for the sport but establishing the club was only possible because we had use of the fine bowls club lawn at the Gardiner. We are now a fully established sports club and a member of both the Croquet Association and the Southern Croquet Federation.

We play at least 5 times per week, all year round, subject only to the weather. That makes good use of the green. Additionally, although the Bowls Club as such has folded, bowls will still be played under the aegis of the Croquet Club.

Play is not limited to club members. For example we accommodate the U3A Croquet group weekly, and, new for 2023, we've agreed a weekly croquet session for dementia residents from a local care home (each accompanied by his/her carer). Later in the year we plan to offer a Saturday junior session and we already have a safeguarding officer in place.

Club croquet offers good physical exercise and fresh air in a friendly social context. The rules and complexity of the game, and its tactical nature, exercise the mind. This makes the sport particularly appealing to the less active player (and Goring has almost double the national average percentage of residents aged 65+), but it is very suitable for all age groups and abilities.

Our croquet activity draws a lot of interest from the many passers-by, and indeed many of our members joined after just seeing us there. In 2023 we plan to significantly enhance the garden borders of the green, improve the club signage and bench seating, all in the interest of becoming more open and welcoming to the community.

[Croquet Club Continued]

Comments on the Open Spaces Strategy

I strongly support OPTION 1 for the Gardiner, which retains the bowls and croquet green at the Gardiner. And this is because...

The fine green with its built-in irrigation system takes up only about 3% of the Gardiner field. To sacrifice it in favour of new cricket practise nets, which could equally be sited where the existing nets currently stand, would be desecration of this valued asset and a tragedy for the village community.

Bowls and croquet ("club" croquet, not garden croquet) both require fine level large lawns (as seen at our nearest three neighbouring croquet clubs: Blewbury, Henley's Phyllis Court and Harwell), with an appropriate irrigation system. Constructing an alternative facility elsewhere would cost upwards of £250K, so for croquet and bowls in Goring, it's play at the existing green or cease to exist.

I also support OPTION 1 regarding the improved and extended children's play area and the replacement of the cricket nets but in their unchanged position.

Cricket Club

Updates since original proposal

Goring-on-Thames Cricket Club (“GCC”) submitted a formal written proposal and presentation in March 2022 to build a state-of-the-art new enclosed artificial turf cricket practice facility (also known as a “cricket nets facility”) on the bowling green footprint.

This proposal arose following the news in 2021 that Goring Bowls Club had merged with Goring Heath Bowls Club and was re-locating from its bowling green site (the “former bowling green”) adjacent to the Gardiner Recreation Ground (where GCC has been based and played its home matches since 1888), to the Almhouses bowling green in Goring Heath.

At the council meeting on 21st March 2022, Goring Parish Council took the decision to provide use of the former bowling green to GCC from 2024 onwards.

However, actions to move forward with the nets facility project (planning, formal tenders and funding activities) were soon paused due to further developments with Goring Bowls Club (subsequently known as Goring & Almshouses Bowls Club) – namely that their permanent move to Goring Heath was now considered unlikely, with the Bowls Club moving all matches back to the Goring site for the 2022 season.

Due to these unforeseen developments, GCC agreed to investigate an alternative option for the new nets facility – to build a replacement facility at the location of the existing nets. Both these options were set out within the Goring Open Spaces report – with the replacement at the existing site being titled option 1 and the former bowling green location being option 2.

In December 2022, Goring & Almshouses Bowls Club announced it had formally dissolved – publicly citing dwindling numbers and the facilities at Goring being barely adequate. Therefore, the situation has now returned to be in line with that in place in March 2022.

GCC has a very strong preference for option 2, believing it to be a far better outcome for both the cricket club and the wider community. Option 1 is in any event simply not feasible from a space perspective for the reasons summarised below.

We therefore request confirmation from Goring Parish Council that the original decision to award the use of the former bowling green to GCC from 2024 onwards remains in place, so that we can move forward with the project to ensure it can be completed in Spring 2024.

[Cricket Club Cont.]

This short document sets out the key reasons why a new nets facility is required and why the former bowling green site is by far the most suitable location.

Why a new nets facility is required

A Nets Facility is critical for the operation of a cricket club, in particular for the purposes of an academy for young players. The current 2-lane facility was self-built over 30 years ago and is in pressing need of replacement. The key benefits of a new 3-lane net facility are:

- 1) Safety for users and villagers – fully enclosed facility with reinforced netting resulting in zero safety risk to anyone in the adjacent areas outside of the Nets Facility. The existing facility is open-ended so poses a risk to any users of the recreation ground who are passing by in the proximity of the nets.
- 2) The current self-built open-ended facility has reached the end of its useful life and is in much poorer condition than comparable facilities at similar (and smaller) local cricket clubs. As it is open-ended the time it can be used is limited due to the safety risks arising from usage whilst matches are ongoing on the ground.
- 3) Primary purpose of the facility is for usage by our 250+ academy members (local girls and boys) – however we currently have waiting lists across a number of our age groups due to lack of capacity with the 2-lane existing facility, so many local children are missing out.
- 4) Many thousands of local children and adults will benefit from a new facility over the coming decades.
- 5) Significant increase of quality of training facilities – providing long term benefits to cricketers of all ages.
- 6) Wider community benefit as facility will be available to non-members free of charge – with extra capacity this will provide more access to non-members.

[Cricket Club Cont.]

- 7) Self-funded by the cricket club, but providing benefit to the community as a whole. The project will represent a significant investment (circa £70k) in the facilities of the village.
- 8) This will be a state-of-the-art facility for the village to be proud of, built by one of the most experienced and highly regarded cricket net construction companies in the UK, who are familiar with, and sympathetic to, aesthetic and other similar concerns. The facility will not be floodlit.
- 9) 36-year warranty provided on all-weather Nets Facility and minimal ongoing maintenance required.
- 10) Sustainable, recyclable materials used in construction of modern facilities – GCC will only use suppliers with sustainability at the heart of their business models.

Why the bowling green site is the optimal location for GCC and the community

GCC have an extremely strong preference for locating the new nets facility on the former bowling green site (option 2) rather than the existing location (option 1). Indeed option 2 is the only viable option from a practical perspective. Augmented images (provided by the same supplier, Total-Play Limited) of the two options are set out in the appendix.

We believe this is a once in a generation opportunity for the cricket club and the wider community for the following reasons:

- 1) The location on the bowling green is widely considered the perfect location for a nets facility by cricket facility specialists – in terms of orientation, flatness, proximity to pavilion and technical basis for building a new facility.
- 2) Option 1 is not feasible because the available area is not large enough for a full 3-lane enclosed facility. In order to create sufficient space, removal of trees and/or existed planted areas would be necessary, but even then it would significantly reduce the usable area of the cricket/recreation ground and seriously compromise the ability of the cricket club to play on the ground at all due to the reduced space and related safety issues (for example, the cricket boundary would need to be moved a substantial distance in from its existing position to provide enough distance from a new nets facility).

[Cricket Club Cont.]

3)Option 2 is a self-contained site and does not require usage of additional public space footprint. As per the graphics in the appendix, the visual impact of a facility on the bowling green site is much preferable to that of a replacement on the existing site. It would also help to mask the steel railway gantries along that side of the site.

4)Provides opportunity to invest further in Girls and Women's cricket – proximity to the pavilion and changing areas providing a welcoming, inclusive and safe environment that is simply not possible in the current location.

5)A 3-lane facility on the former bowling green allows space for an elevated public viewing area across the long end of the site. We will arrange for low maintenance and sympathetic landscaping, providing a significant enhancement to facilities for the public.

6)Replacement of a 'barely adequate' non-public bowling green with a best-in-class cricket nets facility that is accessible to all local people of all ages.

7)Creation of a community hub – providing social benefits due to proximity to the pavilion.

8)The existing facility will be fully removed – providing an additional area of the recreation ground for the Parish Council to consider as part of their Open Spaces Strategy.

9)Revenue generation opportunity for Parish Council – a state of the art facility by the pavilion would be highly sought after for hiring purposes, so this avenue could be explored if the council was interested in incremental revenue streams to benefit the local community.

If you have any questions on this document or the original proposal, please do let Jonny Russell know. We would be enormously grateful for Goring Parish Council's approval for GCC to move forward with planning, tender and funding activities so that we can be ready for construction of the Nets Facility on the bowling green site by February 2024.

Goring United

The 2 areas that affect Goring United are the Gardiner and Sheepcot.

We have consulted with our members and the overwhelming feedback from them and ourselves as a committee is summarised by the following:

The proposals for the Gardiner appear very well thought out. The improvements to the drainage and gradient would be very welcome and with some fairly minor changes to the changing facilities I believe that this would give our club the opportunity to progress to Step 7 of the FA pyramid when we win promotion from our current division.

Whilst it does not affect our adult club, the possibility of using the far side of the field for children's football might partially assist with the chronic problem of there being insufficient pitches and facilities in the village to cater for all the u18s who wish to enjoy a healthy recreational opportunity.

The situation concerning Sheepcot is very different, we believe that there is now a once in a generation opportunity to pursue the possibility of a full size all-weather pitch. This would be a prestigious development for the village and would mean far greater inclusivity as well as considerable environmental benefits. Some of these would include:

- Providing flexible pitches for the 350 children who are registered with Goring Robins, alleviating the problem where many children have to leave the village to train and play. This would also solve the problem of the large number of children whose participation in sport is prevented by the lack of local pitches, Goring Robins could then provide for the extra 100-150 children who are currently on waiting lists.

[Goring United Cont.]

- Goring United currently run 5 adult teams, these include 2 men's Saturday teams who use the Gardiner, 2 women's Sunday teams and a men's Sunday team who use Sheepcot. This causes a situation where often games have to be cancelled due to the limitations of grass pitches
- There is an appetite within the village for walking football, this would provide an excellent opportunity for the older generation, over 50s to any age, to participate in competitive sport with all the associated health and mental welfare benefits. At the moment there is no pitch available where this could take place.
- Goring United hope to soon run a women's veteran teams however there is no pitch in Goring to support this.
- Goring United aspire to have a disabled football team which would mean that many more people would have the opportunity to enjoy sport. Apart from there being insufficient pitches available grass surfaces are not suitable for many of the disabled, an all-weather pitch would give a flat and accessible surface that could be enjoyed by people of all ages and physical capabilities.
- There are currently 2 Goring veterans football teams for those over 35 as well as teams for over 50s and over 60s. None of these teams train or play in the village, they mostly use a venue at Abingdon as their games take place during the evenings in midweek.
- There are 125 Goring United players as well as the 350 Robins children and associated coaches and parents who leave Goring once a week to train in various locations such as Wallingford, Woodcote, Abingdon and Reading. The number of car journeys that could be prevented by having a suitable facility in Goring would be astronomical and would have great environmental benefits.

[Goring United Cont.]

- Half-term and school holiday workshops are held at Sheepcot giving a large number of children the opportunity to be active when not at school and are of great assistance to working parents, during the winter months Sheepcot can be wet or frozen which limits the activities that could be undertaken.
- Whilst Goring United's prime concern is football there are of course numerous other activities that could take place on an all weather surface and would benefit many of the villages population, hockey, rugby, netball and possibly bowls and croquet are some of the pastimes that could benefit from a new facility.
- Local schools have very limited facilities for the children to play sport, a new facility with multiple uses would alleviate the current restrictions and be of great benefit to children's health, both physical and mental.
- Improvements to the current pavilion at Sheepcot would hopefully allow further and more congenial changing facilities for players and officials as well as the opportunity to improve storage, catering facilities, toilets and viewing areas.