

COUNCIL BACKS WFRF RIGHT TO FLY IN LEASE BIDDING PROCESS

As announced in the recent newsletter, the decision to invite tenders for a long-term lease of Warren Farm Sports Centre has been called in for discussion by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee of Ealing Council. The committee met to discuss the call in on Thursday 12th January.

WFRF was represented at the meeting by Bob & Ann Howard, and by Tom Thomas.

The opposition group had raised concerns that the bidders were to be asked to tender for a lease of up to 200 years. It appears that they had concerns that this would be advantageous to larger bidders (e.g. Premier League football clubs), leaving smaller, community based organisations such as Southall FC at a disadvantage.

Cllr. Sue Emment was invited to address the meeting, and expressed concerns largely in accordance with those of WFRF. She also queried whether acquisition of the site by a large organisation would result in increased charges made to existing users, including local football and cricket clubs and WFRF.

Bob Howard was also invited to address the meeting to express the concerns of WFRF members. Bob's address to the meeting was as follows :-

“May I firstly apologise for the fact that my comments depart slightly from the main point of the call-in, however as a regular user of Warren Farm I feel that I have been rather kept in the dark about proposed developments until last week, and this is the first time I have had an opportunity to comment.

I am the Chairman of Warren Farm Radio Flyers. We are the group who for the last 15 years have been licensed by Ealing Council to fly model aircraft at Warren Farm. We are asking only that all organisations bidding for Warren Farm be asked to give an assurance that model flying will continue with as few changes as possible to our regular pattern of activities.

Unlike many of the other sports which take place at Warren Farm, we cater for a wide age range, from our juniors of around 14 years to people in their 60s & 70s, and even an 80 year old who flies regularly with us. We are also, apart from the sub-standard toilet facilities, able to cater for the disabled, and, until he became too sick to leave the house, even had a member regularly flying from a wheelchair!

We are also one of the few clubs able and willing to provide free tuition to newcomers, using dual control training equipment provided by the club and with instructors approved by the British Model Flying Association.

There are no other flying sites in the borough. If we are not permitted to fly at Warren Farm, our flying ceases altogether.

I should also like to echo the comments made by Cllr. Emment regarding possible cost increases. WFRF have consistently tried to keep our subscription rates as low as possible, as I have no wish to see model flying become a rich man's activity, as it was many years ago.

I have spoken to Mr. Gill from Southall Football Club, who has assured me that, if their bid is successful, our activities will be unaffected, however I am aware that at least 1 other organisation is preparing a bid. Whilst they have indicated that flying should be able to continue, my contact was not authorised to give the same degree of assurance that I received from Mr. Gill. I feel that we can work with Southall FC.

Finally, I should ask the committee to bear in mind that Sport and Recreation do not begin and end with Football and Cricket. Model flying is a recognised sport. We need to ensure that the Warren Farm facilities remain available for people of all ages, interests and physical abilities to enjoy the activity of their choice.

Most of the debate revolved around the question of the 200 year lease, but unfortunately the move to reduce the term of the lease to 125 years was not supported by the committee.

The Chairman, Cllr. Shital Manro, has recommended that :-

“Officers are to note that when expressions of interest are received, current users, including the Warren Farm Radio Flyers, are taken into account and that consultation takes place with all users”.

It appears, therefore, that our future at Warren Farm remains reasonably secure. We anticipate possible benefits from the changes, not the least being that the present disgusting toilet facilities will, without doubt, be replaced with cleaner and more modern toilets. We will work with the new management to ensure that we have access to these toilets.

An added bonus of our attendance at this meeting was that several councillors, from both sides of the chamber, expressed an interest in our activities, and we anticipate that they will be visiting us this during our Saturday morning training sessions in the near future.

Finally, we are grateful to Rick Smith, who was instrumental in uncovering details of the planned changes to Warren Farm. Without his forewarning, we could well have had changes imposed on us without an opportunity to put our case to the council.

Tom Thomas

Field Officer

Fred Dunckley

Vice Chairman

Bob Howard

Chairman/Secretary