

THISTLE SPECIAL

WHY THE TENNIS CLUB?

12 September 2008

A Turning Point Decision

The club faces some issues crucial to its future

The Marlborough Tennis Club want to join us but why? Should we be delighted or doubtful? This special edition of Thistle puts the facts before you because in the end it is only with the members' consent that it can happen.



Junior Fun Day

We have been talking to friends from the tennis club, the Town Council and Kennet District Council for some time now exploring how the marriage might work, how it can be financed and if the necessary permissions can be obtained.

Please consider the issues carefully and if possible come to the meeting at the clubhouse at 7.30 on Wednesday 17th (next week)

which is exclusively for members of both clubs. It's a chance to hear the issues discussed and have your say. Clearly, the committee would not have got this far if they were not convinced that this and the associated measures, landscaping and enhanced practice facilities, would help build a more secure future for us. There has to be benefit to us, to the tennis club and to the wider community if this is to be worth doing.

Both clubs face challenging times ahead. We have to get it right.

How Much and Who Pays?

The estimated cost of the tennis aspect of the project is £250,000. It includes six courts, a kidzone, downlights, a small wooden pavillion with loos and running water plus appropriate parking. The whole cost will be bourn by the tennis club who are able to raise the necessary finance so long as they have security of tenure.

We will be responsible for providing the enhanced practice facilities which are described overleaf. They will give public access to golf practice for the first time in Marlborough and are complimentary to the publicly available tennis facilities that are proposed.

Both are part of our joint commitment to community sport and why we are CASC registered.

CASC? What's That and Why Does it Matter?

Both clubs are registered as Community Amateur Sports Clubs (CASC), a formal legal commitment which brings with it certain financial advantages in the form of tax relief. In return membership must be open to all at affordable rates so as to encourage wide community involvement. Should a CASC-

registered club shut down any money or proceeds must be given to the community.

So CASC is not just a title, it's aims are written into the constitution and must be implemented or risk a stinging tax bill and possible prosecution!

The Future of the Club - Make Sure Your Voice is Heard

As well as the meeting at the clubhouse next Wednesday (17th) don't forget the public meeting at the Town Hall on Monday 22nd at 7.00. There is an online opinion survey as well which will help shape future policy. You can pick up a paper copy at the club if you prefer.

THISTLE

It's A Tough World Out There!

We Face Bigger Challenges Than Ever Before

The boom in golf which started maybe 15 years ago gave birth to many new courses - in this area alone we now have twice as many clubs as there were! Add to this the fact that golf club membership is in decline along with society business and the picture is clear: only the best will survive.

We have to compete on quality of course, clubhouse and practice facilities - golfers these days expect to be able to get a basket of balls from the pro-shop and loosen up hitting a variety of shots in the designated area. Ball collection has to be automatic using club machinery.

Whilst we might give ourselves a pass mark for course and clubhouse, we fail when it comes to practice facilities. This is a crucial weakness in our commercial offering which has to be faced if we are to survive and prosper. It is this that has prompted our modest proposals for allocation of an extra area of common (equal to that which we would allocate to tennis) so as to provide a safe environment for practice which stands comparison with that of neighbouring clubs.

Such an area would be open to non-members in line with our CASC philosophy.

A Brief History of Tennis

Where it all began and where we are now

Marlborough Tennis Club was founded in 1911 and began on six grass courts adjacent to the Common.

By 1970 the club had only three courts and no money to convert them to hard courts required to enable competitive tennis in the Swindon and District Tennis League. The search began for a new home.

In 1988 the Town Council offered two courts at Salisbury Road Recreation Ground in return for their renovation and maintenance and availability for public use. After consulting the LTA, who were to provide funds through their grant system, the site was declared unsuitable. However the club still owned the land adjacent to the common so with LTA funding they pushed hard for permission to build new courts but without success.

With no hope of redeveloping their original site, the land was sold in 1996.

Since then sites at the cricket club and Elcot Lane (among others) have also been considered but have not proceeded for various reasons. Which brings us to the present rather unhappy situation in which the club has no permanent home.

Presently they rent courts from the College which allows them to play in the Swindon and District leagues and provide some coaching but with no loos, running water, changing room or even shelter from the weather! Not ideal and an embarrassment when entertaining visiting teams.

Synergies: the Win-Win Situations

So what is it that we think makes our two clubs fit together so well? Lets look at the practical advantages.

- We have excellent contacts with earthmoving contractors. The work needed to create the tennis courts could be done at the same time as the landscaping alongside the A346 keeping overall costs down.
- Sharing the clubhouse and facilities means more customers and an enlivened social programme. The pay and play operation for both clubs can be run from the pro shop.
- The road access and parking already exists (though the tennis complex will have extra parking) and families using one car could have children playing one sport and parents another.
- Grants are available to multi-sport sites that single-sport sites cannot obtain.

Now look at the similarities of the sports:

- Both are played by all ages
- There is a similar mix of men, ladies and youngsters
- Both are played throughout the year
- Because of this, joint coaching is a year round, family option. We think this is a compelling argument for the joint benefits to both clubs.

What About The Common?

Much has been made of our request for a strip of common land to be mowed to the same height as grass on the existing practice area creating a safer hit zone for practicing golfers. That's all it is, no reshaping of the land, fences or floodlights!

This, along with the ball dispensing and collection equipment, will allow us to create a practice facility usable by all. Yes, the dog walking circuit will be slightly re-routed but the proposed new walk will be a little longer.

In addition we are offering to provide information boards at agreed sites around the common giving environmental information about the plants, trees, birds and other wildlife to look out for as well as a bit of the history of the common.

We already allow walkers to use the whole of the golf course (not just the common land) and try to encourage as natural and varied a habitat for plants and wildlife as we can.

