

## **Urgent update: Collaboration between Elmbridge and Wisbech Town FC**

PRESENTED AT PARISH COUNCIL MEETING HELD, 12<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2024 – AGENDA ITEM 17 (MIN.REF. 42.24). FOR INFORMATION PURPOSES ONLY – NO RESOLUTION ON ACTION PERMITTED.

ATTACHED AS APPENDIX 1 TO THE MINUTES.

### **Current Status**

Elmbridge FC is a name developed from Fridaybridge to be more relevant to potential players from the local area. The first season turned out to exceed all expectations. The club, as expected, had a poor start to the season but as Christmas approached the results starting to become more competitive. The New Year exceeded all our hopes. We ended the season with three wins 3 draws and a couple of remarkably close loses. The team has become more competitive in the 9v9 format of the game, and we have even beaten Leverington, a team with five years' experience and is extremely competitive in focus.

The club recently had a meeting with the FA to help with developing the club and it soon became apparent that the facilities at Begdale are extremely limited. The park offers facilities up to the age of thirteen but to progress into youth and adult football the club would be required to have dressing rooms with shower space, toilets and potentially a kitchen if the club progressed into adult football.

To provide these facilities, it has become clear that the club would need to raise a minimum of £100K and hope to get further grants from the FA, Lottery funding, local councils, and corporate sponsorship. This is clearly an unrealistic target for the club to achieve within the next two years.

### **The Opportunity**

Recently, current coach (Paul Proberts) was appointed as Coach for Wisbech Town FC and Wisbech Town Men's reserves team with a view to help develop a strong pathway to develop the boys/ youth teams into the adult first team.

However, it soon became clear that Wisbech Town did not have a boy's section (5 thru to 14 years old) due to the lack of current available space at the club. The club currently needs players from Leverington and Wisbech St Marys to cross over to the club which has proven a challenging task.

During discussion with Town, it became abundantly clear there was an opportunity for both clubs to develop a pathway from five to adult without the need for significant investment from both teams and indeed the PC.

This is an ongoing situation. The opportunity was confirmed in principle on Friday 07 June and a meeting between Paul and the chairmen of the club to fine tune the association will take place this week.

Elmbridge have requested help in pitch management, grass cutting, playing and travel wear, winter facilities and a pathway for the U13s to join the main club for the adult sized pitch leagues. At this moment it is unclear what the option for grass cutting will be. We have said, as we have said on a numerous occasion, if we can get access to a ride on mower with ability to attach roller, scarifier, seed hop etc. then the club will happily cut the grass on a weekly basis. Indemnities and insurance will be covered by Boom construction.

In return, Wisbech have only asked for the boy's section to become part of the Wisbech Town family and an association between the two clubs to be agreed.

### **Conclusion**

Sadly, it has become clear that the required investment for the club to progress to adult football would be impossible to achieve in time for the current squad to participate in accordance with FA requirements.

The club has started to attract a number of players from within the Elm area and it is not beyond reasonable expectation that the club will have two U11 sides as well as an U8s, under 12s and we would like to start a girl's section to join Ruby and Lilly in U11s. This will open funding for the club to develop the Begdale offering further.

The association will not directly impact the PC, other than the potential for the club to cut grass to an acceptable level, sadly something that has been lacking in our first year.

In terms of use of facilities. The club would time matches to cause minimum disruption to residents. For example, U10s and below play on a Sat whilst U11s and above play on a Sunday.

The field will need to have one 7v7 pitch, one 9v9 pitch (potentially growing to two pitches if the club grows significantly) a small area for U8s to play in and if we have enough ground a separate training pitch to avoid excessive wear on match pitches. Training will be split depending upon age groups into a separate day. For example, current U11 is a Tues, U12s could be a Weds etc.

Car parking, due to staggered match times should not exceed current usage (approx. 20 cars per game with the local farmer agreeable to use his farm as an overflow car park if needed.

Some existing young trees at the far end of the pitch will be replanted in the winter to the right side (a promising idea of the pitch to provide space for the U8s to play and give the main playing areas some shelter from the weather (this was originally suggested by the local FA and is a really good idea).

The youth provision at Begdale is managed by Cllrs Probets and Johnson alongside volunteers from the club to ensure everything runs smoothly.

This is a once in a lifetime opportunity for both the club and children within the Parish Council Boundary. In addition, we will attract families from the Wisbech area to further help develop the club. Finally, we would look to get a local business to deliver a stall/ van and provide refreshments to players and supporters on matchdays. A fantastic opportunity for the PC to capitalise upon the development of the clubs and engage directly with Parishioners in fund raising events etc.

Budgetary impact on the PC will be reduced if the association is in place. However, if the PC is willing to provide a financial grant to the club for maintaining the pitch, the club could use that along with whatever help the club can provide to ensure the pitch is maintained to satisfactory level.

In the short term, Wisbech Town has agreed to provide a heavy roller to allow us to flatten the playing areas as the current ground is too bumpy from a lack of care over the years for a fluid passing game to be developed by the coaching staff. Once again insurance etc will be covered by Wisbech Town or Boom construction.

A finished proposal will be available by the July meeting, I will circulate any agreement between the two clubs as soon as I have it.

Any questions should be directed to Cllr Probets as I am the one at the sharp end of this negotiation.

Should the PC decide not to allow the clubs to progress with the field, then sadly Elmbridge will have a limited shelf life as recruitment would be greatly enhanced utilising the Wisbech Town Name and marketing routes. However, allowing the association to grow will deliver a strong commitment from the PC towards the development of children within and just outside the Parish and help raise the profile of the PC in general.

Cllrs Probets and Johnson.