

POTTERS MEDE FACTS

HISTORY

Potters Mede was purchased in 1978 from Frank "Mac" Oliver, who lived in the adjacent Potters Mead bungalow, for £12000, funded by a Ministry of Works Loan to provide sports facilities for the village. The Portakabin Hall was Cementation's site office when they built the M26, and was purchased for £2000 to provide changing rooms and a hall. It was initially intended as a cricket field, but the demand faded and it was used for football instead.

A post and rail fence was installed between the carpark and the field, with a vehicle access gate and a kissing gate to allow pedestrian access. This fence was frequently vandalised, sometimes to allow access to the field by "boy racers". We replaced it in 2011 with a steel version that cannot be vandalised, but it is exactly the same format that has been there for 40 odd years. There is full disabled access for hirers.

It has always been a sport venue, and was never a Public Open Space, although informal access was allowed.

In 2007 the hall suffered from an arson attack, and was burnt to the ground.

THE NEW HALL

In 2011 the newly elected Parish Council put plans in place to replace the building, and to bring the pitches up to a proper standard. The pitches had always suffered from water-logging because of heavy clay.

In 2012 the PC project managed the building of the new hall for £320,000 funded entirely from the generous insurance payout for the arson. No public money went into that build. The pitches were re-laid with proper drainage for about £140,000, funded by a PWLB 10 year loan and some grant/Section 106 money. The hall is currently valued at £750,000, an indication of the huge savings made by the PC's very hands-on approach to construction, and the insistence on using tried and tested local builders.

WROTHAM SCHOOL

There has always been significant damage to the carpark because of heavy use by Wrotham School parents and 6th Form car owners, and boy racers in the evening. The PC realised that a tarmac surface would be a solution, but at £50,000 was unwilling to spend public money on surfacing that would only benefit unauthorised users. The PC approached the school and KCC suggesting shared funding. The School refused point blank.

BGPC arranged a meeting with the school and Planning Officers and agreed that a Lawful Development Certificate could be used to convert Whitegate Field between the 3G pitch and the road, into an auxiliary carpark for the school within Greenbelt Recreation use. The school refused.

The Parish Council reluctantly took the decision to close the carpark to general public use. The existing surface is more than adequate for the parking needs of the hall, and since closure the maintenance cost has been £160 for a load of planings, and occasional shovel work by the staff. Whilst the existing surface can best be described as adequate, it has never generated a complaint from a user, nor does it seem to lose prospective hirers - the benefits of the facilities far outweigh any quibbles about the carpark. All hirers have keys to access all the gates.

We are not responsible for providing parking for the school, for the Highway Authority, for local businesses, or for the skatepark. (it is presumed our local skateboarders are too young to drive)

By sheer luck, Potters Mede was spared traveller incursions over the past few years because of the locked gates, although we twice found traveller "markers" at the entrance.

POTTERS MEDE SUPPORT GROUP

The carpark closure created a lot of complaints on Social Media from school parents and dog walkers, and whilst it is accepted that these complaints were largely from those outside the village and a minority of our electorate, it made sense to call a public meeting in Nov 2017 to allow people to make their case.

One idea that was floated was to set up a group (PMSG) to work with the PC to generate enough extra funds to pay for resurfacing. Two popular and well attended summer fairs were held in 2018 & 2019, and we did see a significant uplift in bookings, so the overt purpose of PMSG was successful.

BGPC agreed to an experimental part time opening with the gates operated by PMSG volunteers. The signs were purchased. We wrote to PMSG asking when they wanted to start the experiment, but there has never been a reply. However, we see a renewed campaign to open the carpark, again only on social media, with some appalling lies, some actionable, promulgated against individuals and the Parish Council in general.

In actual fact the seeming firestorm is only a very few people, about 16, and some of them do not live in Borough Green, and hence have no vote on how we run our facilities. We have not had a single proper complaint from a resident

However there was one good point raised. Whilst this is not a public space, we do encourage people, apart from dog-walkers, to use the field and woodland walk, but whilst disabled people and Mums with pushchairs can get through the pedestrian access at the main gate, they cannot get through the kissing gate onto the field. We have decided to experiment with removing the kissing gate. If we get the motorbike/quad problem we get in the Rec, we may have to review that decision.

Much of the noise in the campaign is from dog-walkers who want to drive to Potters Mede to walk their dogs. Whilst we do not want to ban dog-walkers, we should not be encouraging them. Why are they driving past public footpaths and open spaces to let their dogs foul a sports field? Even conscientious dog walkers who clear up and bin their mess, are still contaminating the ground.

PMSG are again saying they could manage a daily restricted opening of the carpark, but can we really trust them to open and close it on a regular basis if they couldn't find the volunteers last time to even start the scheme. And as volunteers, what do they do with cars who do not want to leave at lock up time? Even now Barry, Rob, Bernie, Phil Garland and I are often called out to release drivers who have sneaked in and got locked in when legitimate hirers leave, and the abuse we get when we do let them out.....

RUNNING COSTS AND HIRE FEES

All local authorities have a duty under Public Health law to provide and maintain sports facilities for public well-being. Any hire fees generated offset the running cost, so apart from financial prudence there is no requirement for the venue to "make a profit".

You will hear an oft quoted figure of £50,000pa as the running costs of Potters Mede. It is true that the accounts do show that figure, but that figure is being wilfully misinterpreted. That cost rolls the building and the pitches into one figure without any differentiation, and the pitches are the major proportion of those costs, with mowing, aeration, weed killing and fertiliser. And it neglects the fact that our accounting rules mean we have to apportion our establishment costs across all assets. So a major proportion of staff wages and pensions, office costs, the van etc are all included in that gross figure.

The pure running costs of the building are miniscule - solar panels and air source heating with high spec insulation keep electricity bills very low, recycled grey water keep water and sewage charges low. And a £160 carpet clean every 6 months.

There have been accusations that we overcharge - absolutely totally false. Our hall at £16 is sized and priced between the VH small hall at £13 and the large upstairs hall at £19. We have always pledged that the publicly funded PM will not undercut local venues that depend solely on hire revenues.

A careful study of the minutes for 2018 shows that the PM Hall costs £7097 pa against hire fees of £13,000pa.

Borough Green Football Club.

Borough Green used to have a very good village football club based in the Rec, indeed Tim used to play for them. Over the years behaviour deteriorated, and they were eventually banned from the Rec and Stonehouse field. They were allowed to play at Wrotham for a while, until they were banned for the state the changing rooms were left in, and public complaints. They contributed to the earlier campaign because they wanted to play at PM, which we refused. There are moves to restart BGFC. Of course these will be different people, but our pitch hire is at capacity. BGJFC use the top pitch exclusively, and PFC share the main pitch with BGJFC, who currently use it for a female team. There is an element of emotional blackmail here - "we want a real village football club" We have one- Potters FC