

Statement from the Parish Council relating to the use of part of the Churchill Close
Green by Sturminster Marshall Football Club

Sturminster Marshall Parish Council is disappointed to note the recent communications and social media posts from Sturminster Marshall Football Club and would like to explain the ongoing commitment to supporting the use of this valued public open space by not only the football club, but the broader community of Sturminster Marshall.

Prior to 2020, Churchill Close Green was owned by Dorset Council and leased to the Parish Council, who in turn sub-let the Green to the Sports Association. The Parish Council took ownership of Churchill Close Green from Dorset Council as part of an asset transfer programme in 2020 and the Sports Association disbanded in 2022 so the responsibility for liaison with the Football Club was passed to the Parish Council.

The request for a licence agreement was initially raised by the Football Club in order to formalise the use of the pitches and this was supported by the Parish Council who felt that, without a more formalised approach, both parties were at risk. A licence is therefore important, as it protects the community, Football Club and the Parish Council in relation to the use of the open space now and in the future.

The Parish Council has employed O'Hara's solicitors to ensure that the licence is lawful and clear for parties that may be subject to the terms contained within. The licence will also enable the Parish Council to protect this valuable community space for years to come.

The licence offers the Football Club use of part of Churchill Close Green for £1 for the entire 11 months of the football season. The Parish Council also pay the grass cutting for the Green, which is a cost of almost £2,500 for the year. This shows significant support for the Football club and all the excellent work its volunteers do. When the licence is signed, we will be able to move forwards with FA funding opportunities in order to help the Club with the pitch improvement costs.

The licence was first drafted in September 2023 and negotiations on wording for this licence have been taking place for the last 9 months. The Parish Council have compromised on various aspects of the licence and clauses have been adapted several times to meet the needs of the Football Club balanced with the rights of the wider community of Sturminster Marshall and all relevant legislation affecting it. Prolonged negotiations only serve to increase the cost to the Parish Council which is being met with public money. The wording of the licence is fair and reasonable and there has to be a point where the Club must accept that their many requests for amendments have been carefully considered by the Council with the assistance of legal advice from their solicitors and the licence is now in a form which both parties should sign. There has to become a point where further negotiation becomes counterproductive and the Council takes the view that, after nine months, that point has now been reached, particularly as the football season is about to start.

We look forward to concluding matters so as not to jeopardise the use of this valuable community space owned and managed by the Parish Council which is a voluntary public body working to support our community, making it inclusive for all.