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Embargo: Immediate release



Newbury Community Football Group

## **Council left dumbfounded by the apparent theft of over 350 metres of metal barrier fencing from local football ground and is urged by local community group to report it to the Police**

West Berkshire Council were at a loss last week to explain how over 350 metres of metal barrier and 1.1m high chain link fencing had gone missing from the Council owned football ground in Faraday Road, Newbury.

The missing pitch perimeter fencing was first noticed by John Stewart and Lee McDougall from Newbury Community Football Group (NCFG) when they met Cllr Rick Jones at the ground on the 10th December. Cllr Jones, the Portfolio holder for Public Health and Wellbeing knew nothing about the missing fence and promised to look into it and reply. After 2 months without explanation, NCFG posed the question at Public Questions at the Council Exec meeting on Thursday 13th February by asking who from the Council authorised its removal, why it was removed and if it was sold? Cllr Jones said, "*I can't answer that question, I tried to find out, but I haven't been able to do so*". Cllr Jones also said in the same Exec meeting that for Health and Safety reasons it was important for the ground to have a new, perimeter fence around the pitch to protect the public.

After 9 weeks of trying, Cllr Jones was still unable to explain if access was granted to the locked ground to allow the removal of over 350 metres of metal barrier fencing, weighing several tonnes (which had been a permanent fixture of the ground for many years) or if it had been taken without anyone in the Council knowing anything about it.

The scrap value of the missing metal is estimated to be over £6,000 and the cost to replace it, on a like for like basis, could be as much as £20,000

Lee McDougall from NCFG said "*this was a demolition activity that would have needed permits, risk assessments and statements of work for anyone from West Berks Council to have been involved. So, the fact that Cllr Jones can find no record of it within the Council after 9 weeks of looking, it must have been an un-authorised removal. As the site is listed on the Councils register as an Asset of Community Value, we strongly urge West Berks Council to ask the public if they can help solve the mystery of the missing fence or alternatively contract the police to ask them to investigate the matter as soon as possible, especially as Cllr Jones has stated the pitch perimeter fence is important for public safety*"

He also noted "*if thieves did steal the metal barrier fencing, they must have been very conscientious, as they seem to have refilled in the hundreds of holes from the removed fence posts*"

**Newbury Community Football Group**

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The mystery of the missing fencing is yet another step in what appears to be a systematic and deliberate policy by West Berkshire Council to totally destroy the once well-loved and well used football ground that has stood on the site since 1963 and has been used by all ages across the generations. Let's not forget that this ground is an Asset of Community Value and the Council has an obligation to protect it not destroy it. It will soon be 2 years since the ground was prematurely closed and the Council still have no plans in place to either relocate the football ground or any plans to find an alternative (non-sporting) use for it.

The Council's policy regarding the regeneration of the London Road estate is in complete disarray and the town's only football ground is the obvious victim of this Council's blinkered and dogmatic approach. A month ago, the Council's own planning committee approved the NCFG planning application to redevelop the ground at Faraday Road, yet the Council have categorically stated that it is their intended policy not to allow this to happen. If they had a firm timescale and a well thought out plan to provide an alternative facility, of an equal or better standard and in the meantime re-opened the current ground by investing funds to rectify the recent deliberate dilapidation of the ground then everyone would be on board. But sadly, they are not doing what everyone knows they should be doing and they won't concede that the policy they are following may be even slightly wrong and needs to be re-considered by putting front and centre the needs and requirements of the community that they are elected to serve.



The fence around the pitch before West Berks Council took back the ground in 2018



The view in Dec 19 looking across where the stand used to be

## Notes for Editors

- Newbury Community Football Group is a volunteer group formed in 2016 to represent the views and needs of Newbury's local footballing community.

In December 2019 NCFG obtained unanimous support from West Berks Council for their application for the development of the ground into a new Community Football Stadium with 3G pitches, which had over 3,000 signatures of support. In 2017 NCFG conducted the widest survey of community football facilities ever conducted in West Berkshire, which showed an overwhelming level of dissatisfaction of Newbury's football facilities by an extensive range of community football clubs, teams and participants and in 2016 NCFG successfully gained Council approval to list the football ground as an Asset of Community Value

- NCFG passionately believes that football, our national sport inspires young people and provides a focus for personal and physical development from early years into adulthood.
- The footballing community of Newbury consists of hundreds of participants from the ages of 6 for boys and girls to senior football for both men and ladies' teams
- Sport is at the centre of national and local strategies to enhance health and wellbeing.
- One of NCFG's key objectives is ensure Newbury retains a locally accessible properly equipped football ground that can be used by the whole community.
- NCFG is an inclusive voluntary organisation that comprises representatives from the full local community including:
  - AFC Newbury Boys and Girls,
  - Newbury Ladies,
  - Newbury District Primary Schools Football Association,
  - Pro-cision Sports and