

The 15 year story behind White Street Sports Field, North Curry

The need for a new cricket ground for North Curry really began in 1996 when conflicts resulting from the dual use of the same pitch for both football and cricket and increasing Health and Safety issues resulting from the proximity of residential property lead North Curry Cricket Club to abandon the use of the Greenway field.

During 1995/96 the Greenway Playing Field Management Committee, in parallel with making plans to construct a new pavilion on the site, started exploratory discussions with adjoining landowners in the hope of being able to extend the site and enable the re-introduction of cricket. Discussions continued for the next five years on the basis of extending the existing Greenway field or finding land sufficiently close to use the Greenway pavilion. Unfortunately the aspirations and demands of landowners resulted in a continuing inability to secure a suitable site.

By 2001/2 it became increasingly clear that a Greenway-based solution was not going to materialise. The Playing Field Management Committee began to explore some completely new site options elsewhere in the Parish. In July 2002 North Curry Cricket Club, frustrated by lack of progress, sought North Curry Parish Council's active involvement in resolving the land issue. In response the Council set up a Cricket Ground Advisory Committee with representatives from North Curry Parish Council, the Cricket Club and the Playing Field Management Committee charged with *"...the task of identifying suitable land within the Parish and approaching landowners to enquire if such land can be made available, and if so, on what terms...."*. A comprehensive survey of all prospective and potentially available sites in the Parish was undertaken. Discussions took place with several landowners. The first meeting between members of the Cricket Ground Advisory Committee and the Tacchi Morris Centre, the owners of the White Street land, took place in December 2002, and by March 2003 the White Street option seemed to be the clear favourite.



From this

In April 2003 North Curry Parish Council passed a resolution *"...that it is in the interest of the Parish generally to support, in principle, the development of the land between Thatchers and White's Barn in White Street, as shown on the attached plan, for residential development on a basis to be approved by Taunton Deane Borough Council in return for the balance of the land etched on the attached map being conveyed to the Parish Council for £1 to be used as recreational land, primarily cricket and football, by the Parish...."*

In June 2003 North Curry Parish Council representatives met with West of England Developments Ltd, with whom Tacchi Morris Centre had agreed to negotiate the sale of part of the White Street site for housing development. This was to be part of a deal which would result in the remaining 12 acre site being given to North Curry Parish Council for recreational purposes. At that

meeting West of England Developments agreed in principle that they would provide changing facilities, car parking, an access road and a basic sports field at no cost to North Curry Parish Council.

In August 2004 North Curry Parish Council representatives met Taunton Deane Borough Council planning officers to explore the likely outcome of any planning application to undertake the proposed development. Support was lukewarm as the proposed construction was outside the development limits. North Curry Parish Council was told it would need to demonstrate community support. To achieve this North Curry Parish Council prepared a survey which, during 2005/2006, was discussed by Football and Cricket Club representatives and Councillors face to face with 449 households in the Parish, representing 62.5% of the total. This survey showed unreserved support from 95.3% of respondents.

In the background negotiations between West of England Developments and Tacchi Morris Centre finally lead to a tripartite agreement between those two parties and North Curry Parish Council. The Tacchi Morris Centre would sell 8 building plots to West of England Developments and give the remaining 12 acre field to North Curry Parish Council for recreational purposes. West of England Developments would provide a pavilion, access road, car park and basic sports fields at no cost to the Parish Council. All of this would be subject to Taunton Deane Borough Council approving the change of use from agricultural land to recreational use and approving the development of 5 detached dwellings and 3 low-cost ownership dwellings on the West of England Developments plots.

In June 2006 North Curry Parish Council made a Planning Application to Taunton Deane Borough Council to undertake the proposed development supported by the results of the community survey. After much lobbying and debate, and despite a recommendation for refusal by the Planning Officer, planning consent was finally granted by the Planning Committee in November 2006

The scene was now set to proceed with the development, but for North Curry Parish Council and the Cricket and Football Clubs one major problem remained. The agreement reached with the developer only provided basic facilities. Funds were going to be needed to provide hopefully an enhanced pavilion, a cricket square, equipment storage, and many other items beyond the basics. In December 2006 North Curry Parish Council set up White Street Working Group bringing together Parish Councillors and members of the Cricket and Football Clubs to prepare a detailed development plan and budget for the new facility and to identify sources of funding. After initial research it was soon concluded that the only likely source of any substantial grant funding was going to be the Football Foundation. Initial discussions with the Foundation were very positive and the Working Group was encouraged to apply for a grant for facilities far more ambitious than it had planned for and at far greater cost. Negotiations with the Foundation and initial work on a Business Plan and formal grant application continued throughout 2007 and into 2008. In February 2008 a formal submission was made to the Foundation for a grant of £249,698 representing 44% of a total project cost of £566,715. The major portion of the balance of the funding (98%) was to be represented by the contribution in kind of the basic facilities by West of England Developments as described above, with small additional contributions from the Parish Council and the Cricket Club.

In July 2008, to the astonishment of all involved, the Football Foundation rejected the grant application. The main reason for this was that their rules did not permit match-funding of the kind being given by West of England Developments as it was effectively "in kind" and not a cash contribution. This reason was given despite the Working Group receiving assurances from the Foundation in early 2007 that these arrangements did not present a problem. The team was now in real trouble. The Sports Field had already been handed over to North Curry Parish Council in March 2007, construction work had commenced, money had been spent, and there was minimal funding. A major retrenchment became necessary.

The first thing necessary was to scale back the project specification to something less ambitious than the "Rolls Royce" approach which had been encouraged by the Football Foundation. The Foundation, somewhat embarrassed by their *volte-face*, agreed to give favourable consideration to a new grant application under their "under £20,000" scheme. This resulted in a grant for £16,610 being offered and accepted early in 2009. In addition North Curry Parish Council agreed to provide additional funding. West of England made a generous interpretation of their liabilities under the joint agreement. The Cricket Club agreed to fund the cricket square, nets, and various other amenities and in addition to this members of the Cricket and Football Clubs contributed many hours of their time undertaking manual tasks directed towards ground preparation and site improvement.



.....to this !!!!

In parallel with the development of the sporting facilities, it was agreed to create a small area of community woodland in one corner of the field. This was prepared and planted by another team of volunteers.

The Pavilion construction was completed in August 2009 and a formal handover ceremony from the developer to North Curry Parish Council took place in September of that year. It was agreed to name

the housing development Morris Way in recognition of the significant part the Tacchi Morris Centre played in bringing this project to fruition.

As a successor to the White Street Working Group in April 2009 North Curry Parish Council set up North Curry Sport Ltd., a Company Limited by Guarantee, to manage the facility. In April 2010 North Curry Parish Council granted a 20 year Lease to North Curry Sport Ltd for the White Street amenities at a rent of £10 per annum.

The cricket nets commenced usage in the late spring of 2010, followed in August 2010 by the commencement of regular use of the field for football. An opening charity match against a team of celebrities, supported from the sidelines by the singing star, Katherine Jenkins, was followed by a highly successful evening social event. The first cricket match took place over the 2011 Easter weekend after many months of preparation of the wicket by volunteers.

There is still work to be done and money to be spent so fund-raising by the Clubs remains a high priority to cover both amenity development and ongoing running costs.

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