

From: Warren Ormerod <warren.ormerod@leisureunited.com>

Sent: 22 August 2024 09:29

To: clerk@ecclesfield-pc.gov.uk

Subject: Pitch Hire Charges at Sheffield Thorncliffe

Hi Andrew

Thank you for getting in touch regarding the pitch hire pricing. I would be happy to discuss over the phone and answer any further queries you may have but hopefully the below gives you some detail for your meeting.

I'm not sure if you are fully aware but Leisure United operate 4 hubs in Sheffield that include Thorncliffe, Graves, Westfield, and Woodbourn Road. The first two sites at Thorncliffe and Graves opened in October 2016 and the last site to open at Woodbourn Road opened in late 2023. Leisure United is a charity and operates the sites on behalf of its parent charity, the National Football Trust whose trustees are made up from the principal funding partners alongside independent Trustees.

Whilst many leisure facilities came under extreme pressure during the Covid pandemic, we were able to trade successfully via a hybrid operation and ensure that the opportunity to play football and use the hub for other community engagement was maintained throughout. Our pricing policy is set in consultation with Sheffield City Council with input from a city wide Local Advisory Group that has representation from Local stakeholders including the Pro-club football foundations, the Football Foundation and the local County Football Association.

In the first 4/5 years since the openings, we didn't have any price increases and the need to review this was born directly from the legislative demand on the increase of the National Living Wage and the huge rise in costs of utilities. We also had the impact of inflation on goods and services that were unforeseen post the pandemic. With this in mind, the first material price increase took place in September 2021 and the quarter pitch rate for partner clubs was increased by 5% to £27 per hour. The opening price was £25 in 2016 (not set by Leisure United) and is now £31.50 for the 2024/25 season – equal to an increase of 3.25% each year since 2016, which is below CPI inflation for the same period. To provide some context, a quarter pitch can accommodate several junior teams and in many types of bookings or user formats, provides a full hour's activity at less than £1 per head. In September 2021, an adult quarter hire pitch also went up by 5% to £39.50 and depending on the number of attendees per pitch offered a floodlit pitch at under £3 per player. For comparison, Goals Soccer in Sheffield charge £81 for a pitch half our size for the same activity. All affiliated match play rates are set by the Local Authority and we charge the same amount for a grass pitch albeit we are able to provide 3G pitches.

Football in Sheffield has increased substantially since the significant investment from Sheffield City Council alongside the match funding from the FA, The Premier League and Sport England. The hubs are operated by a fully employed team and you will know that National Living wage increases have been more than 11% year on year since the pandemic. In real terms, the wage costs of the site have increased 24% between March 2022 and April 2024. We are fully behind trying to keep costs to a minimum but the recent increases were necessary to ensure that we maintain the facility standards and ensure that these facilities are available for many more generations to come. Leisure United doesn't receive any revenue support – so we must ensure the sites are financially sustainable through their operations. The Football Foundation have recently helped us secure funding to swap all of our floodlight bulbs to LED which we hope will mitigate the running costs and ensure that we can keep playing fees to a minimum.

Whilst it is easy to focus on the football element of the business, the hubs provide so much more for the wider community and many of these activities are delivered at no or minimum costs. We have also generated the equivalent of 65 full time jobs across Sheffield and we provide an educational pathway for 16–18-year-olds who haven't normally got on with mainstream education. As mentioned in my opening paragraphs, we are a charity and operate with 100% transparency. There is no distribution of any profits to shareholders and any decisions taken on pricing are done with full consultation and support of the stakeholders.

I hope this gives you some background as to the pricing historic position but unfortunately the increases have been unavoidable but at least kept to a minimum. If any of part of the local community are having difficulty accessing the facilities then I would be more than happy to see if we can facilitate some free or discounted use outside of the peak operational hours.

Kind regards



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