



CITY OF LONDON BOWLING CLUB

In accordance with the specifically stipulated parameters upon which we have been permitted to submit a written business case (i.e. such proposal not to exceed three sides of A4 in length), please see below on behalf of the City of London Bowling Club, established 1924, which had always been located at Finsbury Circus until being forced to vacate by Crossrail.

We set out below the specific information that the Committee has requested (which is true to the best of the Club's knowledge):

Number of currently active members: 25

The level of activity/participation over the past 6 years (i.e. since vacating the Circus): the members of the Club meet up on a regular basis to either play amongst themselves, play opposing teams, or just to meet up socially. The Finsbury Circus location is key to the continued existence of the Club, as its central location has historically enabled its members, some of whom live close to Finsbury Circus and some of whom live several miles away on the various train links that service the Finsbury Circus area, to easily get to and from the Club. Many of our members have joined other bowling clubs since the Club vacated Finsbury Circus, such other clubs invariably simply being closer to where the relevant member lives or works. In short, the vast majority of our members continue to bowl for other clubs on a regular basis.

Mr. Rodman made clear to Mark Mansell at a meeting at Mr. Mansell's offices on 11 August 2016 that there were two primary reasons why the Committee had decided not to reinstate the bowling green at Finsbury Circus. Those reasons were:

- (i) the cost involved in maintaining the bowling green; and
- (ii) the need to make available more 'green space' for City workers.

For the remainder of this submission, we will seek to show that the Committee made an uninformed decision when deciding not to reinstate the bowling green at Finsbury Circus by reference to (a) the above two factors, and (b) general observations. As the Committee will appreciate, this submission could easily have extended to dozens of pages (which could include letters of support from various sections of society and business).

The cost involved in maintaining the bowling green

The Club disputes the figures provided by Mr. Rodman as to the costs involved in maintain the bowling green. For example, out of a total estimated cost of £50,000 per year, we make the following (non-exhaustive) observations:

- (1) a cost of £6,979.20 per year is attributed to watering the bowling green. Quite frankly, this is absurd. Countless bowling greens across the country install a programmable watering system that comes on automatically. We suggest that the initial outlay of such a system would cost far less than the projected one year's watering cost of £6,979.20, and

then going forward would reduce the annual maintenance costs by approximately £7,000 (or, put another way, approximately 14%);

- (2) a cost of £2,181.00 (saving approximately a further 4% of the projected annual costs) to clear leaves if absurd. The bowling green is not in use when the leaves begin to fall, so there is no need to spend this money/time;
- (3) a cost of £4,187.52 (saving approximately a further 8% of the projected annual costs) to cut slope banks can instantly be removed by making the banks concrete/plastic, so that there is no grass to cut;
- (4) a cost of £1,512.16 for brushing seems absurd, especially given that Mr. Rodman's document states that "The green officially opened for play from 10am, but the majority of play took place at lunchtime and in the evenings (close at 9.30pm height of summer)."
- (5) additional staffing costs of £16,100 seem excessive. The statement that "*throughout the season, the green has to be staffed late into the evening and at weekends to ensure that someone is available to take payments and to monitor usage of the green*" does not ring true. None of our members have ever seen any member of the public paying to play on the weekend. In addition, whenever a member of staff is there late into the evening, they are either also attending to other gardening works – i.e. they do not just sit there, which reduces the need to a certain amount of work to be done at other times. On a conservative estimate, we suggest that the true cost is half of the stated £16,100 amount (saving approximately a further 16% of the projected annual costs);
- (6) our understanding is that in the final year the 'pay-to-play' element raised £14,500 for the Corporation, in addition to the £3,000 paid by the Club. We suggest that with events like Barefoot Bowls, the Corporation could raise several thousand more pounds every year from hiring out the green. All of this cost clearly should be directly applied against the supposed £50,000 per year running costs; and
- (7) the Club would be willing to discuss increasing the annual amount which the Club has historically paid for use of the bowling green. This further off-sets the running costs.

The need to make available more 'green space' for City workers.

The Committee has not considered whether there is any other way to increase 'green space' at Finsbury Circus other than simply not reinstating the bowling green. The bowling green has been at Finsbury Circus for a hundred years and, indeed, is evidently the reason that Finsbury Circus has received so many visitors over the years (as the public love to spend time watching the bowling). The Club and its members find it completely perplexing that the option of reducing the size of the bowling green was not explored in any way (as was admitted by Mr. Rodman when he met with Mr. Mansell).

We suggest that the Committee explores the option of having a 3, 4 or 5-rink bowling green as opposed to the 6-rink bowling green which was previously located at Finsbury Circus. For information, each 'rink' is 18 feet across. Please note that anything smaller than a 5-rink green would mean that you would not be able to turn it around to even out wear of the green through natural usage. Smaller than a 5-rink green would not be ideal, but several clubs do manage with just 3 or 4 rink greens and this could be a compromise at Finsbury Circus.

Obviously any decrease in the total square footage would have an impact upon the costs involved to maintain the green.

Canvas of opinion

We have seen no evidence that relevant groups have been asked their view as to whether the bowling green should be reinstated. We strongly suggest that the Committee undertakes this study as we believe that would be incredibly informative. The Committee and related departments will no doubt be better placed than us to determine exactly what groups should be canvassed for their opinion on this issue, albeit we would suggest that the following groups are consulted:

- (a) residents that in fact live within the City of London;
- (b) workers that work in the immediate area of Finsbury Circus (including all businesses that are located at Finsbury Circus – indeed, I would expect that some of these businesses may be willing to ‘sponsor’ the green in exchange for corporate usage one or two evenings a year);
- (c) commuters that walk from either Liverpool Street or Moorgate stations (e.g. just canvas at the stations for a couple of hours on any work-day);
- (d) Crossrail – as there have been various press articles/television episodes where representatives of Crossrail have definitively stated that the bowling green will in fact be reinstated; and
- (e) the Evening Standard and other similar enterprises.

General comments

The bowling green at Finsbury Circus serves many purposes and could serve many more going forward (and this should be fully explored before making any final decision). The green provides an outdoor sporting activity for all generations, especially those of advancing years who are unable to pursue more energetic activities. Such facilities are extremely limited in the City. Also, the bowling green could be used to introduce school children to the sport. Given its location, we expect that the Committee could easily source details as to whether local schools would be interested in exploring this idea. We note that we are aware of a number of bowling greens that work in partnership with schools in this manner, and such ventures are very successful and mutually beneficial. If possible, the Club could seek to assist in any such project.

The Committee could seek to work with Bigfoot Bowls and similar outfits to encourage use of the green by people of all ages and nationalities. Indeed, Sophie Fernandes (Cllr) has noted that Bigfoot Bowls successfully operates sporadically at Finsbury Square. We suggest that this could be replicated at Finsbury Circus and this would both broaden the appeal/usage of the area and also raise funds for the upkeep of the green and Finsbury Circus in general.

We can genuinely say that we have never seen Finsbury Circus so full that there is no space for additional people. Indeed, the vast majority of the time there is an abundance of space, and we suggest that the reason Finsbury Circus does become very busy from time to time is a combination of good weather and a not insignificant factor being that people come because they enjoy watching the bowls.

In short, we humbly request that full consideration is given to the issues summarized above. The Club is happy to discuss any of these issues at any time and is willing to compromise and work with the Committee, if we are allowed to do so.