



Syston Bowling Club

Company Limited by Guarantee Reg No: 6495115
At the heart of the local community for more than 80 years
Registered Community Amateur Sports Club. Reg No: CASC 05278



PRESS RELEASE



Dateline: 08 April 2014

SYSTON BOWLERS BEAT “SENSELESS” BAN

Making a mountain out of a molehill (or ramp)

The issues leading to the locking - and unlocking - of the Park gates.

Members of Syston Bowling Club were appalled and angered by a decision of the Town Council to ban vehicular access to Central Park following the installation of a disabled ramp running between the clubhouse and green. In seeking to justify their actions, the Council argued that the installation of the ramp was illegal and, in any case, the ramp represented a serious risk to public safety! The decision by the full Council, at their meeting on 25th March was taken in spite of assurances from the Club that the access ramp, which had been designed and installed by the County Council Highways Department with full planning permission from Charnwood Borough Council, is fully covered by the Club's public liability insurance. And the Club has a legal obligation to provide disabled access to its facilities.

At the subsequent meeting of the Development Committee held on 1st April, the Club pointed out that without access, it would be impossible to maintain the green and the future survival of the Club was thereby threatened. While accepting that the Council had been right to raise the issue of safety, the Club claimed that the Council had no rights unilaterally to deny vehicle access for the purposes of servicing the clubhouse and green - a right enshrined in the Club's lease agreement. *(The Club has a long-term lease on the green and the adjacent land, on which their clubhouse stands, from the Council.)* They argued that continued lack of access, caused by changing the locks on the Melton Road gates and withholding a spare key from the Club, would also cause the Club to be in breach of its obligations under planning law and building regulations, which require the Club to ensure adequate means of access to the emergency services at all times while the clubhouse is in use.

Central Park, in which the Club is situated, is registered as a Village Green, which places a number of restrictions on vehicular access to the whole park area. *“We have no interest in challenging any of the provisions of the law,”* says Club Chairman Colin Grimes. *“Regrettably, however, the Council have been consistently misled about the true nature of the appropriate law by a vocal and unrepresentative minority faction.”*



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The Club received a grant from the Lafarge Tarmac Aggregates & Concrete UK Landfill Communities Fund, through the Derbyshire Environmental Trust, to cover the cost of the installation. The view of the County Council is *“that the ramp does not physically impose on the Village Green itself, notwithstanding that its construction constitutes works for which the consent of the Secretary of State is strictly speaking required. The ramp has otherwise been constructed lawfully and in accordance with a Licence granted by the County Council and is of benefit to the public.”* and indicate that they foresee no difficulty in arranging for retrospective approval of the Secretary of State to be obtained.

In a highly critical and forceful presentation, made to the Development Committee by Club Chairman, Colin Grimes, seeking an immediate return to the *status quo*, the Club also challenged the manner of adoption of the decision at the full meeting of Council in March, claiming that the motion was invalid since, contrary to the requirements of the Council’s Standing Orders, no advance notice of the motion had been provided to Council by the sponsor, Councillor Nick Gee. Under those circumstances the Club reserved the right to take any action it deemed appropriate to sustain its legal rights of access.

Grimes pleaded with the Council to concede that the Club had done nothing irregular or illegal and urged them to recognise the Club’s good intentions. He invited them to commit to join with the Club in a supportive partnership, based on mutual respect, recognising the special needs of the disabled, elderly and infirm in the local community, and to work towards the continued development of the Club as a top-quality recreational resource of which Syston, as a whole, can be proud.

At the conclusion of an extended debate, during which the Club’s position received especially strong support from Councillors Lilley and Vardy, it was agreed that, provided the Club delivered a copy of the indemnity insurance cover certificate and a copy of the licence issued by the County Council, they should be supplied with a key for the Melton Road gate to permit resumption of their normal activities.

In spite of an overnight/early morning attempt to overturn the Committee’s decision, with the approval of the Chairman of Council, the key was eventually handed over to the Club and the Park gates were re-opened at 2.p.m.on Wednesday 2nd April.

In a statement issued after the re-opening, by the Club says: *“It is specially ironic that our future operations should have been compromised when we are in the process of putting the finishing touches to a clubhouse extension with the help of a £40,000 grant from Sport England.*



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It is clear to us that the installation of the ramp has been used as an excuse to attempt to manipulate the Council into a complete ban on vehicles in the Park which has been the long-time declared aim of an unrepresentative minority within our community.

In any case, the two issues of ramp installation and access to vehicles should never have been linked. Any vehicle used in the course of maintaining the green or servicing the clubhouse rarely penetrates as far as the ramp area. As we and the County Council have now clearly demonstrated, the ramp presents no risk or inconvenience to pedestrians using the footpath between Melton Road and St Peters Street. It presents the most convenient, aesthetically pleasing and cost-effective solution to the problem of disabled access. No-one but certain members of the Council can see any logical and reasonable grounds for concern. One has to ask whether those protesting do have the best interests of the community at heart – particularly those of the elderly, infirm and disabled.”

Syston Town Council has had a very troubled year. Seven Councillors, all of whom were experienced and had given many years of service, including the immediate Past Chairman, have resigned over the way in which the Council is currently run . The Town Manager also left, eventually reaching an out of court settlement with the Council which had presented his departure as being on grounds of ill health. A major clash with a respected local institution would hardly have been helpful to their cause.

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Notes to Editor: For further information about this Release, please contact:

Colin Grimes, Chairman, Syston Bowling Club

T: 0116 2608412 **E:** systonbowling@btinternet.com

Further information about the Club can be downloaded directly from the Club web site at www.systonbowlingclub.org

