



30.1.26

## **Public Notice**

I know many of you have been asking about the status of the recreation ground following the discovery of glass fragments in the summer and the consequent restriction on use of the ground. I am sorry it has taken a while to provide further clarity but it has been a deeply frustrating and uncertain six months which I hope will shortly reach a resolution. I want to share the full story and current situation so everyone in Bentley understands where things stand.

You will recall that after scarification and re-seeding in April to create the new cricket and sports ground, fragments of glass were discovered on the surface of the ground. The lead contractor, Kestrel Contracts Limited, subsequently confirmed that its soil supplier had provided topsoil for the project that included a quantity of crushed glass. As lead contractor, Kestrel accepted responsibility, apologised in writing and committed to early rectification without cost to Bentley Archers.

However, rather than focusing on rectifying the problem, Kestrel chose to pursue the topsoil supplier, kicking off an insurance process which, to our knowledge, is still not resolved. Inexplicably, Kestrel then ceased communication with us, despite multiple efforts from our side to reach them, and failed to carry out the work in late September, which was their proposed timing. Kestrel wanted to sort the insurance before committing to the work.

Out of desire to move things forward, in November we commissioned a survey of the ground to see if, after several months of growth and rain, the glass was already being consumed in to the earth and the ground could be considered fit for use. The survey, carried out by the Grounds Management Association, took 36 soil samples from across the recreation ground, from which it found just one small rounded glass fragment which posed no risk of injury. The study found nothing that posed a safety risk and concluded that 'the risk would appear to be low and any contamination of the topsoil with glass is likely to be limited'. However, the GMA could not formally declare the ground safe for use simply

because the sample size was not exhaustive and the presence of glass is known. We contacted our insurers, to see if they would still provide third party liability cover in the case of injury, and they told us in December that if an injury could be linked to the glass on the field then the club would most likely be held liable. As you can imagine, as a small club we cannot shoulder that responsibility.

With this knowledge, earlier this month we re-focused on the aggressive pursuit of Kestrel to get the work done. In addition to the parish council we now have the support of East Hampshire District Council, the England & Wales Cricket Board (ECB) and the Football Association (FA), for all of whom the Bentley sports club vision is seen as an important grass-roots project. Thankfully, Kestrel have re-engaged under this pressure. We are now pressing them to confirm that they will carry out work in the spring so that the recreation ground is available for all the usual summer activities carried out by the school and the wider community. We do not yet have that confirmation, but we are going in hard and I am optimistic that we will be successful.

This has all taken a lot of time and has been massively frustrating time for the club, as we want to make the new sports ground available for use as soon as possible. It is also intensely frustrating for you, the Bentley community, who have had very limited access to the village's largest recreation space for several months. We completely understand this frustration and deeply regret the inconvenience it has caused to so many people. As a Bentley school parent I know first hand just how inconvenient this is for everyone and am grateful to fellow parents who have encouraged me to press on during this challenging period.

The club's leadership still strongly believe that the return of community sport to Bentley is a vision worth pursuing and that ultimately we will have a community facility that everyone can use and be proud of. One silver lining is that the new cricket square does not contain the contaminated topsoil, so as we resolve the outfield issue it remains on track to be playable in 2027.

In the meantime I ask you for patience and understanding while we do everything in our power to get things on track. We will keep you posted as soon as we have more. Thank you, your support is massively appreciated.

### ***GO ARCHERS!***

Thankyou on behalf of the Committee.

Jim Hannon (Chairman BACSC)

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