

New eco-friendly bowls clubhouse aims to be a boost for community

By Stuart Flitton

WEST Byfleet Bowls Club has been given permission to replace its 55-year-old clubhouse with a new eco-friendly facility with indoor greens.

Robin Webb, the club chairman, said Woking Borough Council has given written approval of its plans that will allow for all-year bowls and provide short-mat bowling, which requires less energy to play than outdoor bowls, and can be used by people in wheelchairs or walking with sticks.

Robin said the current building that was built when the club started in 1967 will be demolished and replaced with one three times longer and much more energy efficient.

“We lease the land from the council for a peppercorn rent but are totally responsible for the building which is becoming dilapidated and we’re having to spend a lot of money in repairing it,” Robin said.

“It’s also very poorly insulated. Building regulations were entirely different to now and the new building will be fully insulated and use far less energy.”

He said the new building will have solar panels and possibly an air source heat pump for the water.

The green will be fed from rainwater stored in a tank under the carpark.

“At the moment we pour gallons of tap water onto the green,” Robin said.



An artist's impression of the new building. Image courtesy of Heritage Architecture

“Rainwater is far better for grass because it has nitrogen which tap water doesn’t. Tap water also has all sorts of chemicals to purify it for drinking which aren’t beneficial to grass.”

Robin said the new building will have facilities and access for the disabled and attract new members from current and planned local housing for the elderly.

“Indoor bowling is much easier to play than outdoor bowling. You don’t have to worry about the weather and it is much easier to roll a bowling ball on a mat, which is effectively what it is.

“This opens it up to a much wider range of people, including elderly people who aren’t so able, the fully disabled and children.”

Robin said the expanded facilities will help the club to host big events.

“Two officials from Bowls England and Bowls Surrey have joined our club and want us to host big regional events.”

Food is prepared by Peter Charlton, a former professional chef, in a kitchen that has new equipment.

“His food is absolutely superb and the new hobs and ovens means he’s been able to be a bit more ambitious with the cooking,” Robin said.

“One of the benefits we see, in addition to the physical wellbeing, is the mental wellbeing”

“But he is a bit constrained with size of the kitchen and he will be able to do a lot more with the bigger one.”

The estimated cost of the new building is £750,000 to just over £1 million and the club has quotes from several local builders.

It has committed £20,000 and is holding fundraising events, including a boot sale last weekend. It is applying to county and borough council-controlled funds and the National Lottery Heritage Fund for the rest of the money.

It has consulted the local community about the plans and held an open day last year with another at the end of this month on 29 April.

Robin said he hopes the funding bodies will see the environmental and long-term benefits of the plans.

“The existing building has lasted nearly 60 years but the new one will be built to much higher standards with much better materials and should last 100 years,” he said.

“One of the benefits we see, in addition to the physical wellbeing, is the mental wellbeing,” he said.

“There is the camaraderie of being with other people. Some of the people in the club are elderly and some are widows or widowers. They come along and suddenly they have a new range of friends.”

Robin said the club has 80 members,

including 12 who joined this year.

He said that, originally, the idea was to put an extension onto the clubhouse.

“But now our plans are to build a brand new, much larger clubhouse using state-of-the-art materials for top-class insulation and low-energy usage.

“The roof will house several solar panels to enable us to use green energy and we will capture rainwater from the roof and car park to use for irrigating our bowling green.”

Robin said a full set of architect’s plans has been submitted to Woking Borough Council with a preliminary meeting with officials scheduled to take place soon.

The club will apply to Your Fund Surrey, run by the county council, to pay for the building.

“They have been involved in other projects for the community, such as a new swimming pool.

“They have funding to hand out, provided you can put up a very good case, which we can, provided that you’ve got the support of local councillors, which we have, and you have the support of the local community.”

Robin said the project has the support of a cross-party group of councillors, the chairmen of two residents’ associations, and a GP practice manager.

“We hope GPs will refer people to us if they think bowling will help, particularly indoor bowling.”

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