

A PÉTANQUE COURT FOR ELMS PARK?

A proposal for a BOULES COURT in Elms Park, Thame.

on behalf of Thame & District u3a

The Vision

Those who have visited rural France will doubtless have come across locals playing a game of pétanque – or boules. Images of sunlight filtering through shady trees and the crack of colliding boules may come to mind. Why not the same here? Imagine a pétanque court in Elms Park, for example? Some advantages:



- *Cost:* Setting up a piste is relatively low cost and low maintenance, certainly compared with many other highly structured sports facilities.
- *Equipment:* All you need is a portable set of boules plus a rake to level out the surface.
- *Space:* A plot of 15 x 12 yards/ meters is enough to house at least three pistes/games at the same time.
- *Fresh air and exercise:* The game is not strenuous but gets people out and about.
- *Sociable:* It's inclusive and leisurely, suitable for all levels, and can be highly sociable.
- *Suitable for all ages:* Forget the visions of a gang of older men in berets; this can be something for all ages and genders, and all the family. (Even if you have trouble bending there are special magnets that can be purchased to pick up the boules!)

Overheard at our first meeting "So good to be outside not just another day in my chair!"

Thame Town Boules Piste

The pétanque court would be surrounded by a band of prepared ground within, it's suggested, a suitable enclosed area and a low hedge. Ideally it would have a couple of benches and a picnic type table or two. Nearby there would be a small shed with a combination lock where maintenance items such as a rake and extra boules are kept for general use.

Once people pick up on this, it's likely to encourage further courts around Thame.

Research

This included visits to and discussion with:

Ken Birkby of **Cuddington** (Parish Chair) who explained the logistics and costs involved.
Adrian Aldred of Pétanque **Wallingford** at the Sports Centre at Hithercroft.

Both Ken and Adrian were enormously helpful, welcoming and keen to support Thame in establishing its own court and club (Wallingford seems the only one in Oxfordshire at present!)

Thame & District u3a

One of Thame's largest organisations, the u3a has just set up an interest group, Social Pétanque, which met on 18th January in Cuddington. 24 members (near equal men and women) came along on a frosty morning and enjoyed a hugely successful morning of boules.

The Method and Costs

- In *Wallingford* the cost of the court and surrounds in **2017** was £6,800 of which £1,200 was for fencing (net of VAT.) Current costs may be some 10% or more than this.
- At *Cuddington* the cost was around £4,300 plus sundries of £800 in **2011** (These were figures for work carried out mostly ad hoc by local tradespeople.)
- A small wooden or metal shed for maintenance materials can be purchased at modest cost and secured with a combination lock.
- The court is low maintenance needing occasional weeding and regular raking and mowing of the surrounding grassed area but little other regular "housekeeping" which those playing can take on.

Funding

Both Ken and Adrian suggested *SportEngland* as a potential source for a grant, with Wallingford also obtaining grants from Waitrose and *Tesco Bags of Help*. There are other sources available for grants, which would generally require a club with a constitution. No doubt being under the auspices of Thame Town Council would help.

Other factors

- What level of *fencing* or similar would be necessary to protect the court: e.g., from dogs, children, and others?
- Nearby *toilet facilities* would certainly be a desirable addition.
- *Parking* could be an issue for some. Adequate *bike racks* and stations for mobility scooters would assist. Are these within the refurbishment plans?
- *Refreshments* are not far away as this is central Thame with pubs and cafes nearby.
- Onsite *litter bins* would help.
- A *club* of regular members would help manage use.

The key question perhaps is what sort of park does TTC wish Elms Park to be? How can potentially conflicting demands best be reconciled? Will it be suitable for a relaxed Boules Court?

Following this theme, could we look further at additional or alternative sites? Could we encourage developers to include a boules court within their schemes? Persimmon Homes, for instance, have a lively CSR policy for green and recreational support for communities they build alongside.

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