

Announcement from ORA and Rams RFC

Old Bath Road Sportsground

This announcement by the Executive bodies of the ORA and Rams RFC is intended to bring the members of both organisations up to date with regard to an initiative to boost the sporting and educational opportunities available to our local communities, especially youngsters.

The Problem

Rams RFC is a flourishing community rugby club. Its youth section has grown to over 430 and comprises mainly children from local state schools.

Rams also provides the opportunity for adults to play a terrific team sport. Non-players form a key part of the Rams community which comprises a large number of volunteer helpers and supporters.

In addition to the large youth membership, Rams runs five senior men's sides and a senior ladies' team. This provides opportunities for players striving to be competitive at the elite end of rugby, as well as those that simply want to play socially. Rams welcomes all comers, irrespective of their levels of skills or aspirations.

The OBR (Old Bath Road) sportsground comprises just over eleven acres upon which are placed a club house with changing rooms, three grass pitches and limited car parking.

Having bucked a national trend of declining numbers, Rams finds itself constrained in a way that will mean it is unable to meet demand. In a 2014 report entitled "Going The Extra Mile" the then Chief Inspector of Ofsted, Sir Michael Wilshaw, pointed out that there was a chasm between opportunities afforded to privately educated children and those educated in state schools. One of the remedies that Ofsted advocated was greater cooperation between state schools and local sports clubs. Rams has whole-heartedly embraced this concept, which is one of the main reasons for its growth in numbers. The rugby club has increased student participation and achievement with its Rams Academy at Reading University and it will shortly open the new Rams Academy at Forest School which will provide state educated youngsters with the opportunity to build their rugby skills and enjoy being part of a team whilst gaining success academically.

The rising numbers of children and adults that are now playing rugby at OBR has taken its toll on the pitches. It has also begun to create difficulties at weekends when there can be up to 2,000 people at the ground at any time. This has created challenges in terms of access and traffic management at the entrance to the ground and parking on site. Despite best efforts to manage the traffic congestion, unfortunately, it can spill over onto the busy A4. The club's continued success and growth only exacerbates the issues. Wokingham Borough Council is aware of these issues and when Rams submitted a planning application to install an AGP (Artificial Grass Pitch), which was granted in the summer of 2017, it was conditional upon the club creating an event traffic management plan.

Despite gaining planning permission for a new AGP the installation has not taken place and the project has been discontinued by the RFU, which has been forced to tighten its belt following an unforeseen overspend on the newly renovated Twickenham East Stand. The installation of an AGP at OBR, whilst enabling Rams to grow its numbers further may, in any event, have provided no solution to the traffic congestion. Steps are taken during the season to manage the traffic issues by staggering training and kick off times for youth and women's rugby on Sundays and, where possible, limiting the number of home fixtures on Saturdays. But with the club's 1st XV now playing in the third tier of English rugby it is expected that crowd sizes will increase both home and away supporters. Whilst home supporters are encouraged to use other means to travel to the ground, it is not possible to dictate to visitors. The continued growth of the youth section is reflected in growing traffic to and from the ground.

The New Project

The ORA is a registered charity which directs its resources to advance the education of the pupils of Reading School (a state school) by providing or assisting in the provision of educational, recreational or other charitable facilities for their use. Its interests are aligned with Rams RFC and so a meeting was convened to ascertain whether the ORA could work with Rams to overcome the constraints it faces with regards the facilities at OBR.

Rams' Executive now believes that an AGP, even if fundable, would not solve the club's problems. It would alleviate grass wear but it is likely to result in more people visiting OBR, which will add to traffic congestion.

The ORA has asked the Rams what can be done to help alleviate the problems. Rams Executive believes that Rams needs a new and considerably larger ground on a site that comprises over 20 acres, and is located somewhere that provides easy access to the multitude of youngsters that attend the club from the local schools. A site of such size would allow for the anticipated growth of the club and the possible installation of an AGP in the future.

With the full support of the Rams Executive the ORA is promoting the current site for 100 dwellings through Wokingham Borough Council's emerging Local Plan process.


It is important that both sets of members understand that there is no commercial motive in this project. Rams is a "not for profit" community sports club (registered under the Co-operative and Community Benefits Societies Act 2014) and ORA is a registered charity whose beneficiaries are young people that need assistance with their education in the state sector.

Every penny made from a sale of OBR would be ploughed back into the local community. Rams would take ownership of a significantly improved ground with equivalent facilities and more pitches. The ORA would be able to reinvest proceeds, under its charitable objectives, to advance the education of local youngsters and provide educational, recreational and other facilities for their use.

Whilst the ORA and Rams RFC are optimistic about the opportunities for the future, the Executives of both organisations are mindful that a considerable amount of work will be needed to achieve the positive outcomes that both bodies envisage. This is not a straightforward project and will take years of careful management and delivery.



John Short
President, Old Redingensians Association



Andy Lynch
Chairman, Rams RFC