MYTH - Rotherham Titans are leasing part of the playing fields from the council

FACT – The proposed lease is between RMBC and Rotherham Rugby Club Ltd not Rotherham Titans. Rotherham Rugby Club Ltd is a not for profit company whose primary objective is “To promote the playing of and the active participation in amateur rugby union football within the local community”. The company is entirely owned by its members and is run entirely by volunteers. Rotherham Titans are owned by a totally separate company Rotherham RUFC (2004) Ltd. There are no directors of RRCL who are also directors of Rotherham RUFC 2004 Ltd.

MYTH – The lease might be with RRCL but we all “know” that it’s really for the Titans

FACT – Absolutely not true! The facility on Herringthorpe would primarily be for the amateur rugby teams of Rotherham Phoenix RUFC - mini-juniors, colts and seniors. In addition the lease allows for 12 hours per month of free usage by the councils Sport Development Team. The facility will also be available for hire by other groups (e.g. amateur sports teams and schools). Rotherham Titans have little need for floodlit training facilities as they train during the day. If the Titans do want to use the facility it will be on the same basis as other groups.

MYTH – This is the thin end of the wedge. Once the precedent is set where will it stop!

FACT – It seems somewhat unfair to burden RRCL with the responsibility for the future of Herringthorpe Playing Fields. Any further development on the fields by other parties would presumably be subject to the same process of consultation and oversight that has been applied to the current scheme. Each scheme must be judged on its own merits.

MYTH – How can the council afford this when they are making so many cuts!

FACT – The simple fact is they don’t have to afford it. All of the costs of the facility would be met by RRCL with the aid of grant funding and loans from the RFU. RRCL are also paying the legal costs incurred by RMBC and for the relocation of the existing pitches in the affected area (2 football, 1 rugby). RRCL will be responsible for all maintenance and running costs associated with the facility. Basically this facility will not cost the council anything.

MYTH – Why should a “private company” make money out of the playing fields

FACT – While it is true that RRCL is a private company, it is as previously mentioned a “not for profit” organisation. It has no shareholders and no paid employees or directors. Any charges made for use of the facilities will be used to meet the running costs (electricity, ground maintenance) and to service the loan. In the unlikely event of there being any surplus after these costs are met, that money will be ploughed back into the development of amateur rugby union in the area. Any charges made for the use of the facility will be in-line with those for similar facilities in Rotherham. This scheme is definitely not a license to print money!
MYTH – The floodlights will create an unacceptable level of illumination on adjacent properties

FACT – The proposed floodlight installation has been designed to minimise light spillage outside of the fenced area. The planning application included a detailed “lux plan” produced by professional lighting engineers showing that the illumination from the floodlights at the nearest residential property was 1 lux. This is about a tenth of the lux level due to the streetlights at that location. The original report by RMBC’s planning officer stated that the floodlight installation would comply with all relevant environmental and public health legislation and would not have an undue impact on neighbouring properties. This view was confirmed by the independent planning inspector in allowing the appeal. Furthermore the lights would only be used during the winter months and would be subject to a 21:00 curfew.

The athletics stadium has been floodlit for years – the lighting columns used there are far higher than the ones proposed for this scheme and the lighting was much less technically advanced. Prior to the demolition of the leisure centre, the all-weather pitches were also floodlit.

MYTH – The fencing will be an eyesore and will be visually intrusive.

FACT – In an ideal world the fence would not be necessary. However the reality is that we have a duty of care for the health and safety of our players and provide safe playing conditions. The fields are regularly used by dog walkers and fouling of the pitches is a real problem. Littering is also a problem – empty drinks cans and broken glass are not uncommon. Furthermore we would be investing a considerable sum of money not only on the floodlights but also on improving the standard of the playing surface. This investment needs to be protected and it is also a condition of the grant funding that the area is fenced off.

The proposed fencing is probably the least intrusive type around – dark green steel weld mesh which is widely used around schools, parks, playgrounds etc. Additionally the fence would only be 1.8m high.

There is already fencing around the athletics stadium – as were the now defunct all weather pitches at the old leisure centre site. Rotherham Hospice (which stands on ground leased from the council) is also fenced off.

MYTH – They will build toilets/changing rooms/a club house on the fields

FACT – We have no intention of erecting any buildings on Herringthorpe Playing Fields. The simple fact is that any building on the fields is going to be a target for vandalism and would create a headache we don’t want or need. We have use of a perfectly good club house at Clifton Lane which is only a few minutes’ walk from the playing fields. The clubhouse already has toilets and changing rooms.
MYTH – This development will lead to massive parking problems
FACT – No-one denies that there are major parking problems around Clifton Lane when Rotherham Titans are playing at home. Amateur rugby matches however don’t generate massive crowds, and training sessions even less so! There is also parking for 40 cars at Clifton Lane. The fact is that Rotherham Phoenix senior and colts teams already play their home matches either at Clifton Lane or on Herringthorpe so there would no difference in parking requirements. There would be additional traffic and parking on training evenings but we are confident that this can be managed in such a way that it doesn’t cause a problem.

MYTH – Other users of the fields will suffer because of this development
FACT – If the development goes ahead the existing pitches in the fenced area (2 football pitches plus one rugby pitch) will be relocated (at RRCL’s expense) to another area of the fields. There will be the same number of council owned pitches available for hire as at present.

The area to be fenced off is approximately 2.8 hectares (about 1/8th of the area of the playing fields - not 1/5th as claimed by opponents of the scheme). There will be plenty of space left for dog walking and other casual use.

It should also be mentioned that the area to be leased to RRCL includes possibly the worst drained section of the fields which is unusable for much of the winter period (hence the planned ground improvements).

MYTH – Rotherham Rugby Club don’t care about Herringthorpe Playing Fields
FACT – RRCL considers itself to be as much of a “friend of Herringthorpe Playing Fields” as anyone else. We value the playing fields as a vital resource which allows sport and recreation to take place close to the centre of the town. However we do have a realistic view of the fields – they are not perfect and beyond improvement. The pitches are of variable quality – some of them are very poor. There are problems with littering and dog fouling – there have also been occasions when coaches have had to protect young players from dogs that are being walked off the lead. The proposed development will enhance, not despoil the playing fields.

MYTH – If Rotherham Titans move grounds then so will the amateur club
FACT – Should Rotherham Titans move to a new stadium then in all probability Rotherham Phoenix RUFC would stay at Clifton Lane and would still use the leased area of the playing fields. Clifton Lane Sports Ground itself is owned by Rotherham Athletic Company – there is no question of it being sold off if the Titans move out. Clifton Lane is our home!

Bob Finch
Director and Secretary
Rotherham Rugby Club Ltd