

[Addressed from Margaret's home address]

Mr P Hartshorn
Trustee of the Rothley Centre Management Trust
c/o The Rothley Centre
12 Mountsorrel Lane
Rothley
Leics LE7 7PR

7th February 2018

Dear Mr Hartshorn,

BRADGATE BRIDGE CLUB

We are writing to you in your capacity as Chairman of Trustees of the Rothley Centre, regarding the proposed increase in the Centre's hire charges from 1 April 2018.

BACKGROUND

Our Club has operated in Rothley since 1969 (initially at the Rothley Court Hotel, then at Rothley Village Hall, and then at the Rothley Centre since its inception in 1981).

We are probably the most active user of the Centre, with over 100 regular bookings per year, including weekly use of the Templar Room on a Monday night (when it was almost always unused).

We have been told that we no longer qualify for discounted room hire rates. We understand that all regular user groups are now being denied this discount.

This change in status will increase our hire charges from £77 (Monday) and £19 (Wednesday afternoons) to £120 and £36 respectively. In addition, we are being asked to pay an optional room set-up charge of £20 (Monday) and £10 (Wednesday) for services which are currently provided as part of the room hire.

Room hire is the Club's largest expense. In the past four years, we have already doubled the hire fees we pay to the Centre (from £2.3k to the current level of £5.2k), because of our increasing use of the Centre as a result of the successful growth of the Club. We estimate that the present proposal would increase our annual room hire and room set-up costs from £5.2k to just under £9.9k.

HIRE RATES

We have been told that the Centre needs to increase its hire rates as they are out of kilter with similar venues. For our part, we know that comparable venues for local bridge clubs charge between £50 and £70 for room hire, and the clubs can set their table money accordingly. We have reviewed the prices charged by other venues, and they seem to average around £60 for what we need for our Monday night sessions.

FAIRNESS

Some other hirers (for example charities and residents making casual bookings) are facing no increase at all in the Templar Room, and negligible increases in the Lounge and Lecture Room.

We find it absurd that our Chairman or Secretary (both Rothley residents) could book the Templar Room for a bridge party as individual users at £77, but if they book in the name of the Club they will be charged £120.

REGULAR USERS

We see that there is no discount for regular users such as ourselves. Regular users provide a bedrock of income for the Centre and allow you to set your annual budgets with confidence. In other venues (eg Rothley Village Hall) we are told that there is a discounted rate for regular users.

ROOM SET-UP

We sympathise with the concept of charging for room set-up. We will consider our approach to this, which may involve arranging our own set-up to reduce the burden on the caretaker, once our future rates are resolved.

CHARITABLE RATES

In common with many bridge clubs, we are eligible to become a registered charity, but have not yet seen the benefit in doing so. We understand that we will automatically revert to the discounted rates when we achieve charity status. We would be grateful if you would confirm this.

However, in the meantime we wish to stay on a discounted charging rate.

ADMINISTRATION

As a regular user, we create a very low administrative burden for the Centre. As a rule, we meet your staff twice a year for an hour or so to agree the bookings for the year. There may then be a dozen emails or phone calls in the course of the year to fine-tune bookings; that is a low administrative burden.

We suspect that this pattern is the same for most regular users.

We note that the Centre makes a healthy surplus from room hire, as the £40k hire income more than adequately covers caretaker and direct costs totalling £28k, and this is before taking into account the Centre's other rental income of £9k. The reason for the Centre showing an accounting shortfall each year is the administration cost of £25k. The costs of administering the hirings of regular users will be a small proportion of this administration cost; as a result we feel that regular users are being asked to bear a disproportionate share of the burden.

Incidentally, the administration costs of another, albeit smaller, local Community Centre are less than 10% of the Centre's £25k. We wonder whether savings could be made if the administration of the Centre was disentangled from the administration of the Parish Council.

WAY FORWARD

Our Monday night table money, which we increased on moving to the more expensive Templar Room, is already the most expensive in the area. We will become uncompetitive if we try to cover the new hire rates from our table money; we will lose members and the most thriving local bridge club will go into decline. This will result in loss of revenue for the Centre as we will probably have to reduce the number of sessions we play, and the size of room that we need

In order that we can give our members a full appraisal of the situation and options available, we would be grateful for the opportunity to meet the Trustees on an informal basis to discuss the proposed increase, within the next two weeks.

Yours faithfully,

for Bradgate Bridge Club

Margaret Butterworth – Chairman