

Rent hike could force borough's oldest club out

Members of Dagenham's oldest club claim they are being "priced out" after the rent on the hall they have used for nearly 60 years doubled without warning.

Chair of the Dagenham & District Cage Bird Society, Richard Wilson, believes the 50-strong group may struggle to continue after the hourly rate for Heath Park Community Hall jumped from £10 to £20 this year.

Mr Wilson says they were given no notice of the change, which was enforced at the Rusholme Avenue

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site in January.

"We are being priced out," said Richard, who lives in Jasmine Road, Rush Green.

"Most of the members are elderly or disabled, this could take away a night out for them."

Richard is concerned that the club, which was formed in 1935 and moved to their current venue in the 60s, will be unable to meet the higher

costs. Currently members pay just £10 a year for the monthly Friday meetings, but that is now set to rise.

The biannual Saturday shows which attract judges from as far as Ireland could also be phased out due to the weekend "public hire" rate swelling from £20 to £40 an hour.

A spokeswoman for Heath Park Community Association, which runs the site, said they had dealt fairly with the club.

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■ Members of the Cage Bird Society claim a rent increase will force them out.

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"It's a shame, we've been going for so many years," explained the dad-of-two who joined the club when he was 14.

"A lot of our members don't deal well with change, changing venue could put them in a spin.

"It's very family-orientated, lots of members' dads used to be in the group.

"We are one of the only clubs that have survived."

With birds from budgerigars to canaries, residents compare the sheen of their pets and enjoy talks with experts, as well as their own Friday shows.

"Some people just want to keep birds, there are people who have got 100 birds and people who have four," added Richard, who says bird keeping is the perfect antidote to the stress of running his own company, Vista Workspace Solutions in Hainault.

"This increase is unnecessary," he said. "We would have been happy to pay a bit more but 100pc more is ridiculous."

A spokesman for the council, which owns the building, said they were unable to comment while the complaint is investigated.

A spokeswoman for Heath Park Community Association, said six to eight weeks notice had been given to every existing user.

She added: "This is beyond the legal requirement as there were no official contracts in place."