

Refurbishment of Tennis Courts, an Increased Participation Project (Community Services, Anthony Jones)

Synopsis of report:

- **Runnymede Borough Council (RBC) has been giving the opportunity to apply for funding from the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA), to develop park tennis courts across the borough. Funding will allow for improvements to be made to the playing surface, fencing, nets and the installation of access gates. Five venues have been recommended for funding which are Gogmore Farm Park, Ottershaw Memorial Fields, Victory Park, Chertsey Recreation Ground and Heathervale Recreation Ground.**
- **RBC will have to install access gates and use the LTA's ClubSpark booking platform if a funding bid is successful; and will have to ensure the courts are sustainable by introducing a charging model to cover annual and long-term maintenance costs.**
- **RBC will manage court bookings in-house via Customer Services and the Community Development teams. An external tennis provider will be used to deliver coaching at each venue.**
- **RBC will introduce a charging model of £5 for Pay & Play and £36 for an annual household season pass. RBC will be able to offer free tennis to households in receipt of universal credit.**
- **If agreed by Members, the LTA will submit an internal funding application on RBC's behalf.**

Recommendations that:

- i) the Council enters into a partnership arrangement with the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA), in order to secure funding for the refurbishment of the Council's Park tennis courts;**
- ii) Corporate Management Committee be requested to agree a Capital Estimate in the sum of £168,000 for the works to the courts, to be entirely funded from the grant awarded by the LTA;**
- iii) the proposed charging structure be approved and the proposed project budget if funding is successful;**
- iv) Corporate Management Committee be requested to agree to the creation of a new Earmarked Reserve and an annual transfer of any unused court maintenance budget into it to specifically fund the future maintenance works associated with the courts; and**
- v) subject to the proposed terms not requiring the Council to incur any expenditure beyond that approved, this Committee is requested to delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of Community Services Committee, to enter into an agreement with the Lawn Tennis Association once full details have been received and considered**

1. Context of report

- 1.1 The Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) has received £30 million from the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) and the LTA Trust to refurbish 4,500 tennis courts across the country to support a new generation of players into the sport. The funding is available from 2021-2025 and can be used to upgrade fencing, playing surface, nets, and the installation of new access gates.
- 1.2 The LTA's investment is designed to open-up tennis to people of all backgrounds, support the Government's commitment to levelling up sports provision across the nation, and provide greater opportunities for children and adults to be active. Public Park tennis courts in poor or unplayable condition can be brought back to life for the benefit of local communities.
- 1.3 Runnymede has 11 courts across five locations, all courts are free to use with no booking required. It is observed that given the poor condition of a number of the courts, usage is not particularly high. However, as there is no booking or entry process to the courts, this view cannot be supported with data.
- 1.4 In 2019, the LTA conducted an inspection of all park courts across Runnymede. They reported that our courts were in poor condition and in need of significant funding to bring them up to standard. The LTA have proposed the courts at Gogmore Farm Park, Ottershaw Memorial Fields, Heathervale Recreation Ground, Chertsey Recreation Ground and Victory Park to be put forward for funding.
- 1.5 The LTA are providing an opportunity for the Council to apply for funding to refurbish its park tennis courts and implement a booking system that allows for participation to be measured. It also provides a platform for community coaching to be provided, and an opportunity for the Community Development team to develop other initiatives and opportunities for different cohorts of residents.
- 1.6 This report sets out the opportunity and the Council's requirements as a partner with the LTA.

2. Report

- 2.1 Playing tennis in parks is a good way to keep residents physically active over their lifetime. Tennis can be enjoyed by a wide range of abilities, ages, and fitness levels.
- 2.2 In 2021, 3.3 million adults played tennis in the last year, this increased further to 3.7 million as of May 2022. 1.44 million (44%) played tennis on a park court, compared to 600,000 who played in a tennis club.
- 2.3 Runnymede has 11 park courts across five locations: Victory Park, Heathervale Recreation Ground (Heathervale Rec), Ottershaw Memorial Fields, Chertsey Recreation Ground (Chertsey Rec) and Gogmore Farm Park. Only Chertsey Rec has flood lights and the condition across all courts varies with some courts having broken nets, some with holes in the playing surface and poor fencing surrounding the facility. The courts do not have to be booked and have been free to use for the public since 2016 when the Council agreed to waive all charges to stimulate use of the facilities.
- 2.4 Prior to 2016, residents had to pay to use the courts; Pay & Play charges were £5 for adults, £3 for senior citizens or anyone registered disabled and

free for under 16s. Residents were also able to purchase a block of 5 or 10 tickets at three different price points. Further information of previous charges is set out in Appendix 'A.'

- 2.5 Currently there are no community programmes in place for the public to access tennis in the park and promotion of the courts is minimal. We are unable to measure any usage as there is no booking system in place, and the courts do not generate any income that can go towards the maintenance costs. Until now, there has been no long-term plan to improve and maintain these courts for the future.
- 2.6 In 2019, the LTA conducted an inspection of all park courts and highlighted significant investment was needed to bring the courts up to standard. Courts were to receive investment for the playing surface, fencing surrounding the courts and the installation of new access gate technology.
- 2.7 Due to Covid and staff vacancies this funding opportunity was halted until November 2021 when the LTA re-approached RBC to continue discussions. Upon further talks with the LTA, they were now only highlighting potential funding for courts that were in poor condition with a latent demand of 1000+. The courts selected were Gogmore Farm Park, Ottershaw Memorial Fields and Victory Park.
- 2.8 The LTA have been advised that the Council would not have any funding to contribute towards the cost of the repairs. However, if funding is successful, the LTA would be able to meet the cost of the repairs as long as they are within the scope of works the LTA Parks Investment Fund could support.
- 2.9 Given the time lapse of three years since the initial inspection, Officers asked for Chertsey Rec and Heathervale Rec to be re-inspected to determine if their condition had deteriorated further and might therefore be considered as part of this partnership project. The LTA re-inspected all park courts in August 2022 and will now put forward all venues for funding totalling £168,000 worth of investment.
- 2.10 The table below outlines the latest feedback received from the LTA in relation to the Council's Park courts:

Location	No of Courts	Court Quality	Proposed Funding	Demand
Chertsey Rec	2	Average	£16,000	1,107
Heathervale Rec	3	Poor	£41,000	943
Victory Park	3	Poor	£45,000	1,306
Ottershaw Memorial Fields	2	Poor	£41,000	1,613
Gogmore Farm Park	1	Poor	£25,000	1,072

- 2.11 The above table also indicates there is demand for tennis in Runnymede with four out of five venues having a latent demand of 1000+. Heathervale is slightly less than the other venues, but still has potential to attract as much usage as other courts.

- 2.12 Demand in each location is measured using a combination of Sport England, Census and Office of National Statistics (ONS) data, which allows the LTA to calculate a total figure. A ten-minute drive catchment area is then used, as this is the average distance people are willing to travel to play tennis. The LTA then takes 8% of that figure to create demand for that catchment area.
- 2.13 In order to agree the funding with the LTA, the Council will be required to install access gate technology at each site, which will be funded by the LTA (see Appendix 'B' for case study), use the ClubSpark online platform (LTA approved system used across funded projects) to manage customer bookings, and implement a community tennis offer to increase participation. To integrate the ClubSpark booking system onto the RBC website a web-link will need to be added to the RBC webpage which will take customers to the booking portal. Once customers sign up and book, they will receive a PIN number via email to access the courts. ClubSpark uses an inbuilt payment platform called Stripe to process payments, an appropriate RBC bank account will need to be added to Stripe take online payments. Elmbridge Borough Council currently uses this process to manage their court bookings.
- 2.14 The Council will also need to commit to making the courts sustainable by ensuring there is a budget for the courts to be maintained throughout the year, operational maintenance for the gates and locking systems and a budget for future major refurbishments; this is set out in section 2.17 of this report.
- 2.15 Operationally, the courts can be managed in different ways, it can either be managed in house or outsourced to a tennis provider. The In-house option will involve Council management of the ClubSpark bookings and the ability to answer general customer queries by phone and email. As part of this model the required coaching programme, likely to be delivered by a local coaching provider or individual coaches will be organised by the Council. The outsourced option will commission all the above to a national or local external tennis operator.
- 2.16 It is recommended that the Council manages the operations in-house working with Customer Services and the Community Development teams to support telephone queries and bookings for those without access to technology. Marketing the courts would be led by the Council and the Community Development team would lead the procurement/identification of a community tennis provider. This will give the Council more control over the management, charges, and programming at each facility. An example of the requirements of Community Tennis providers can be found in Appendix 'C'.
- 2.17 For ongoing maintenance of the courts and other expenditure, a cost of £24,100 per annum was budgeted by the LTA. This covers all park courts across the borough. A contingency line of 10% is also included to cover any day-to-day maintenance costs. To cover these costs, and for the courts to become sustainable, it is proposed that we introduce a charging model.

Expenditure	Cost per annum
General Maintenance Reserve Contribution	£14,400
Gate maintenance & data contract	£3,007
ClubSpark transaction fees	£1,812
LTA Venue Registration Fee	£660
Marketing budget	£1,000
Contingency budget	£3,221
Total Expenditure	£24,100

- 2.18 Charging for use of the courts will need to be agreed, this will be for customer use and clubs to provide coaching. The LTA has proposed a cost of £40 per year for a family pass (up to 4 bookings per week) and a Pay and Play cost of £7.50 per session. Surrounding boroughs, who have entered into the partnership arrangement with the LTA, charge a similar rate with annual family passes between £36 (Elmbridge) and £39 (Woking) and £5-£8 for Pay and Play.
- 2.19 Officers have considered charging options, based on the information available and propose a charging structure of £36 per annum for a family season pass and a charge of £5 per pay and play session. Against the uptake predicted by the LTA this would result in an income of £32,500 per year. To remain inclusive, we will have the option to add a free or 50% discounted targeted concessionary season pass for those who meet the criteria (e.g., universal credit, disability).
- 2.20 In addition, the LTA projects that an income of £1,500 is likely to be realised from payment by tennis programme providers.
- 2.21 This income, if realised, will allow us to cover all expenditure costs and generate a surplus that can be reinvested back into the community tennis programmes, potentially working with different cohorts of residents including Walking Tennis, Cardio Tennis, parent & child sessions, adult coaching, youth sessions, older resident sessions, wheelchair user sessions etc.
- 2.22 Against the projections of the LTA, it is proposed that two budget lines are included in the expenditure budget to provide resource to support the uptake of tennis across our communities.
- 2.23 It is proposed that a budget of £3,400 is included that will enable tennis rackets and balls to be purchased and given to children who would otherwise struggle to afford to buy their own equipment, and a budget of £5,000 to deliver up to an additional 125 hours of tennis coaching/programmes for target resident cohorts, shared across the identified sites.
- 2.24 The full proposed Expenditure and Income budget for the project is set out below:

Expenditure	Cost per annum
General Maintenance Reserve Contribution	14,400
Gate maintenance & Data contract	3,007
ClubSpark transaction fees	1,812
LTA Venue Registration Fee	660
Marketing Budget	1,000
Contingency Budget	3,221
Tennis Equipment Scheme	3,400
Community Coaching Budget	5,000
Expenditure total	32,500
Income	
Plausible income from Season Pass sales (£36 - 400 sales)	14,400
Plausible income from P&P bookings (£5-3320 sales)	16,600
Coaching profit (minimum)	1,500
Income Total	32,500
Net Cost	Nil

- 2.25 Subject to the approval of this Committee, the regional LTA representative will submit an internal funding application to their funding panel for approval.
- 3. Financial Implications**
- 3.1 Should the LTA agree to fund all the refurbishment works on the identified tennis courts; this is likely to equate to a minimum £168,000 investment into Council facilities.
- 3.2 In accordance with the Council's Financial Regulations, regardless of how this scheme is financed, Members need to approve a Capital Estimate for the scheme to be included in the Capital programme and the Recommendations to this report have been worded accordingly.
- 3.3 If the LTA projections are correct, and price points within fees and charges are affordable, our commitment to maintain the facilities should be able to be completed from within the income realised, meaning a supplementary budget estimate would not be required.
- 3.4 However, it is recognised that the projections may not become firm transactions and the income levels achieved are less than forecast. Should this look to be the case after year one, consideration will be given to revising the budget and charges to reflect uptake, as part of the annual estimates cycle.
- 3.5 The Council does not currently have a budget to invest in the refurbishment of the tennis courts. Whilst the financial position of the Council is recognised, Officers consider that the potential for a small revenue budget in order to secure significant investment would still represent good value. This general maintenance/sinking fund will be funded from the income generated from the scheme as set out in paragraph 2.24 above and will be transferred into a new earmarked reserve to ringfence it for future court refurbishments. The creation of this reserve will need the approval of Corporate Management Committee and the Recommendations of this report have been drafted accordingly.
- 4. Legal Considerations**
- 4.1 Section 19 Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 provides local authorities with the power to provide, inside or outside its area, such recreational facilities as they think fit. Those powers include in particular powers to provide outdoor facilities consisting of tennis courts.
- 4.2 Section 111 Local Government Act 1972 grants a local authority the power to do anything (whether or not involving the expenditure, borrowing or lending of money or the acquisition or disposal of any property or rights) which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to, the discharge of any of their functions. The General Power of Competence (GPC) was introduced by Section 1 Localism Act 2011 and took effect in February 2012. In simple terms, it gives councils the power to do anything an individual can do provided it is not prohibited by other legislation. These two pieces of legislation enable the Council to apply for grant funding from the LTA to fund all the refurbishment works on the identified tennis courts.
- 4.3 Legal advice will be needed to review the partnership agreement with the LTA and also the coaches hire agreement to ensure all terms and conditions are acceptable to the Council.

5. Equality implications

- 5.1 The Council is required to have due regard to its public sector Equality Duty before approving the proposals.
- 5.2 The Council's Duty is stated under the Equality Act 2010 and is to have regard to the need to:
- a) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation
 - b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a Protected Characteristic and persons who do not share it
 - c) foster good relations between those who share a relevant characteristic and those who do not
- 5.3 Improving the park tennis courts is expected to have a positive impact on all sections of the community. The Council will be able to better engage with residents from all backgrounds and abilities using tennis as a vehicle. A full Equality Impact Assessment has been completed to highlight the benefits to the community and is attached at Appendix 'D.'

6. Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications

- 6.1 All refurbishments will be done in accordance with the LTA's [Environmental Sustainability Plan "Securing and lasting future for tennis in Britain"](#).

7. Conclusions

- 7.1 This report sets out an opportunity for the Council to make significant improvement to existing tennis facilities within its parks and local communities, which is recognised as being greatly needed.
- 7.2 Whilst there is a risk around income projections, the modest revenue budget required, in order to secure an investment of £168,000 is thought to represent good value to the Council.
- 7.3 The improvement of tennis facilities meets the priority of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, by providing good quality, low-cost sports and recreational facilities to residents of the borough, whilst developing programmes and initiatives to make tennis affordable to those facing financial hardship and in support of different groups within our communities.

(To resolve)

Background Papers
None stated.

Appendix 'A'

Fees and charges

Parks and open spaces

	From April 2014 £	VAT treatment
<u>Tennis (Includes VAT)</u>		
Chertsey, Victory Park, Heathervale, Ottershaw,		
<u>Courts</u>		
Per hour (adult)	5.00	Standard
Per hour (children's games*)	No charge	Standard
Per hour (senior citizens/registered disabled)	3.00	Standard
Flood lighting (Chertsey Rec) per hour per court	9.20	Standard
Book of 10 tickets (adult)	43.00	Standard
Book of 10 tickets (children's games*)	No charge	Standard
Book of 10 tickets (senior citizens/registered disabled)	26.50	Standard
Book of 5 tickets (adult)	23.50	Standard
Book of 5 tickets (children's games*)	No charge	Standard
Book of 5 tickets (senior citizens/registered disabled)	14.30	Standard

* Number of players under 16 must equal or be greater than number of players over 16

Appendix B: Information re Gate Technology



CLUB SUCCESS STORY

‘PILOTING GATE ACCESS TECHNOLOGY: Rejuvenating park courts sustainably to open up tennis in the community’

St Mary’s Park is situated in Prestwich,
Bury, bordering the north Manchester area.

It is a flourishing public space with extensive facilities including four tennis courts, two bowling greens and outdoor gym. The park is used by diverse age groups, cultures and abilities and attracts youth and sports teams.

BACKGROUND

St Mary’s Park has retained a Green Flag Award since 2005, which recognises excellence in greenspace management, incorporating sustainability, community involvement and health. Bury Council and the LTA have a long-standing partnership with mutual aims. In 2017 Bury Council and the LTA funded a £40k initiative to drive tennis participation at St Mary’s Park where it was identified that interest was high, but courts were run down.



HOW THE INITIATIVE WORKED

As part of the pilot, the four tennis courts were rejuvenated (including resurfacing, repainting and remarking) and a Gate Access System installed. This facilitated a simple online court booking process which was promoted both in the park and online to the local community. LTA Rally, the LTA’s nationwide online booking tool, was implemented in summer 2019.

- Peak time slots are charged at £3 per hour per court and an annual pass is £20
- Some courts are still free to use, subject to booking and availability
- The park’s tennis offer includes a free weekly coach-led activity run in partnership with Tennis for Free to stimulate local interest in the game
- The income from court bookings is invested back into the tennis facilities and coaching programme.

SUCCESSES SINCE INSTALLING THE GATE ACCESS SYSTEM

- The number of registered users has grown from around 200 to over 1800
- Bookings at St Mary's Park have clearly accelerated at a much higher rate than for other parks in the local authority (over 4,000 bookings compared to the next highest of 804 in the same period)
- Over £6k income generated
- There have been 602 Tennis for Free users
- The park has seen other improvements as a result of controlled access including courts that are now free of dog fouling, antisocial behaviour and vandalism
- The Gate Access System has helped build a sinking fund for the site to support sustainability of the tennis courts – essential for continued enjoyment

THE FUTURE

Following the project's success at St Mary's Park, Bury Council has developed a long-term strategy (2020-2022) and sustainable model with the LTA. It will protect the planned £500k capital investment into further court refurbishment including long-term forecasting for their 10 sites (24 courts in the borough), making them "good quality operational parks". Furthermore:

- They are adopting a charging model which will bring revenue to cover sinking fund and future refurbishment
- Court revenue projection for 2022 is £15k
- The LTA is providing capital support for the Gate Access Technology
- The council is currently considering a borough-wide operator-led model to drive sustainability and participation opportunities for parks



"St Mary's Park was chosen for the pilot as LTA data showed that these tennis courts were used the most yet were in greatest need of maintenance. As a result of this joint initiative between Bury Council and the LTA, tennis has been opened up for the community through a new secure online booking process, gate technology, low-cost tennis, free coaching and local tennis leagues. We look forward to rolling out St Mary's Park's success to other Bury parks."

Bury Council




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Appendix C – Coaching Provider Arrangements in Elmbridge Borough

Example Package 1	Example Package 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2-year contract = £875 per year, per site - 10 court hours maximum per week - The coach must provide 1 free hour tennis coaching session per week during school term for a supervised community activity (this will give coaches 11 hours per week for the length of the agreement) - Option to upgrade contract hours at any time but cannot downgrade. - 10 hours split: 70% groups & 30% individuals/private - Signed agreement/contract 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tennis court hire fee is £1000 per year, per site - A maximum of 18 court hours per week. - The coach must provide 2 free hour of tennis coaching session per week during school term time for a supervised community activity (this will give coaches 20 hours per week for the length of the agreement) - Option to upgrade contract hours at any time but cannot downgrade. - Coaches pay the difference owed for the year they upgrade, then pay £1000 for the remaining years on their contract - 18 hours split: 70% groups & 30% individuals/private - Signed agreement/contract with the Council