

Committee: Cabinet

Date of meeting: 11 January 2017

Subject:	Park Tennis Courts management proposal
Lead Officer:	Head of Leisure and Cultural Services
Portfolio Holder:	Cllr Janet Turner, Portfolio Holder for Leisure & Culture
Link to Council Priorities:	P1, P2, P3
Exempt information:	None
Delegated status:	For Recommendation to Council on 22 February 2017
Key Decision:	Yes

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) is the national governing body for tennis and it launched a new strategy in 2014 with a single focus to grow participation in the sport. The LTA has prioritised the development and expansion of parks tennis as it represents a key opportunity to grow participation across the country.

By prioritising strong partnerships with local authorities, the LTA seeks to secure a sustainable portfolio of quality parks facilities, underpinned by a quality customer experience and journey, thereby delivering affordable, inclusive and accessible tennis provision for all. The LTA is driving this approach nationally and having developed effective technology solutions and evidence based business models, is growing a solid network of local authority partners that are successfully implementing parks tennis management systems.

The Council provides and maintains 29 public tennis courts across the Borough at twelve sites (11 parks and Civic Centre), available free of charge to recreational players. The courts are generally in reasonable condition and used to some extent by the local community and coaches, however;

- these assets require ongoing financial investment yet fail to fulfil their potential in terms of increasing the number of people that play tennis as part of an active lifestyle or as an income generator
- the current tennis “offer” is low profile and outdated and provides residents with a limited customer experience and journey with a lack of clarity about when and how they can use the courts
- the coaching programme currently being provided across the parks by independent coaches is limited, disjointed and varying in quality, presenting a confusing offer to residents
- the income received from professional coaches is minimal and is unlikely to be representative of the court hours used

A rolling programme of capital investment is required to maintain the playing facilities, underpinned by a coherent & simple customer experience and journey, to facilitate an increase in tennis participation across the Borough.

This proposal represents good investment for the future, ensuring that existing Council assets can be maintained to a high standard and become better used by the community.

RECOMMENDED: THAT

- (A) THE RESULTS OF THE PARKS TENNIS CONSULTATION ARE NOTED;**
- (B) THAT THE PROPOSED FEES & CHARGES, AND ONLINE COURT BOOKINGS ARE AGREED ACROSS ALL 12 TENNIS VENUES;**
- (C) THAT THE PROPOSED SYSTEM IS IMPLEMENTED ACROSS ALL 12 TENNIS VENUES; AND**
- (D) THAT THE CAPITAL COSTS OF THE SCHEME AS SET OUT IN THE REPORT ARE APPROVED**

REPORT:

1. Background

2. The Council has committed to enabling residents to become more active, this work underpinned by the “*Elmbridge Active Every Day*” Physical Activity Strategy 2015 - 2020, a comprehensive and wide ranging strategic document that provides direction in the council's approach to increasing levels of physical activity and promoting healthy living through a diverse network.

The strategic vision is: "To work with partners to increase levels of physical activity within Elmbridge by 1% year on year"

The key objectives of the strategy are to:

- a) Increase levels of physical activity throughout the Borough
 - b) Focus on certain areas of deprivation and low levels of physical activity within the Borough
 - c) Promote the benefits of achieving a healthy and active lifestyle
 - d) Widen access to physical activity opportunities for all of our residents
3. In 2004, the Council took a policy decision to remove the fees & charges for casual tennis play because the cost and difficulty of regular fee collection neutralised the benefit. The fee prior to this point was £4.50 per court, per hour. There is currently no booking system nor court access controls in place at any of the sites. As a result, it is highly likely that private tennis coaches are benefiting from the Council's facilities without paying the commercial hire charge.
4. The Council has been working in partnership with the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) and currently has priority status due to evidence of latent demand and potential to increase tennis participation in the Borough. A development plan was produced in 2014 outlining opportunities to drive participation through good quality, sustainable parks facilities and a strong promotions and development programme. The LTA has committed to

providing grant funding in the region of £25,000 in support of this project because it recognises the strong potential to grow participation in Elmbridge.

5. The LTA already has a strong delivery record in this respect having partnered successfully with a number local authorities to implement park court management systems and programmes, of particular note Bournemouth BC, Poole BC, Swindon BC & Norwich City Council. During 2016 the LTA supported the successful implementation of 23 systems in parks and clubs using the specific technology outlined in this proposal. Those partners include London Borough of Waltham Forest, Nottingham City Council, Cheltenham BC, Fleet TC, Horsham DC and Bracknell TC. The LTA predict that by the end of 2017 they will have supported the installation of 100 systems nationwide with key partners including St Helens BC, York City Council, Harrogate DC, Manchester City Council, City of London and other London Boroughs, amongst others.

6. With the development of technology, provision of strong support from the LTA and the inevitable financial challenges facing the Council, it was clear that there was an opportunity to re-visit the way that public courts were being managed. A subsequent application to the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) fund was approved in early 2016 which outlined plans for a single venue pilot project at Elm Grove recreation ground. The £77,000 award was secured to;

- introduce fees & charges through a chargeable key fob system
- introduce an online booking system
- install access controlled gates
- install floodlights*

* please note that the floodlighting element of the CIL funded project is subject to full consultation and planning procedures and will be considered alongside the project outlined below.

7. Further to the CIL award in 2016, after discussion with the LTA, it was considered that a single pilot site posed a significant risk, in that residents preferring to avoid the newly established charge, will simply be displaced to alternative free provision within the Borough. LTA insight states that people will travel up to 10-15 minutes to play at a local facility. Technology advancements and a growing positive evidence base for comparable schemes are such that alternative options that further improve services for customers and address the Council's strategic priorities can now be considered.

8. **Context**

9. In essence, this proposal is about modernising the way the parks tennis courts are operated and presents clear opportunity for the Council to optimise the impact and value of its existing assets to the benefit of residents, both users and non-users. Supported by the Lawn Tennis Association, the reasons for the customer insight led proposals are threefold and interlinked;

1. **Increasing participation in tennis**, ensuring that tennis is contributing proportionately to the Council's physical activity strategy target to raise physical activity levels across the Borough by 1% year on year, through the provision of clear, accessible casual tennis opportunities and high quality programmed coaching activities.
 2. **Providing an excellent customer experience and journey** for residents through the provision of a convenient online booking system that integrates with an advanced yet simple gate access system. Telephone bookings will still be possible via the customer services team for those customers without access to a computer or smartphone.
 3. **Generating a new income stream**, whilst providing great value for money to residents, **for the long-term resurfacing of courts** and contributing to the wider savings agenda of the Council. Reduced fee options for those that can least afford to pay have been included in the proposal.
10. Each year approximately 5 million people pick up a tennis racket across the country, with 32% of these doing so within a park, a higher proportion than in traditional tennis clubs. Participation in parks does not have the same frequency as clubs due to some clear areas of dissatisfaction from players. There is also a general lack of awareness from a third of non-users about the tennis facilities available in their local community.
 11. Over 3,000 adult residents in Elmbridge play tennis in a variety of settings and, significantly, a further 3,000 would like to play tennis, 80% of whom would typically see a park court as their first option (Sport England market segmentation data October 2016). The current parks tennis offer is unlikely to convert that latent demand into active participation.
 12. There is a good geographic spread of public courts across the Borough and provision serving Hersham South, Walton and Molesey North, the Borough's least active wards (Sport England 2016).
 13. **The Proposal**
 14. The proposal across all sites is, by May 2017, to;
 - introduce a Borough wide online court booking system
 - introduce a three strand fees & charges policy
 - 1) pay as you play - £5 per court per hour / £2.50 concession
 - 2) low cost annual household "tennis membership" - £36 per annum
 - 3) coaches license – to be determined through procurement process

The proposal at certain strategic sites is, by May 2017, to;

- install compatible court access controlled gates at eight sites*
- re-paint the courts at three sites

15. *The number of court access gate installations has been determined by a) the quality of the site b) geographic location and c) number of courts at the site. There is an option to install gate access technology at the remaining four sites as and when they are refurbished in the future.

Whilst there is a risk that players will simply move to the sites where there are no access gates, with sufficient coverage (7 sites +) this is significantly reduced because most players will still seek to play at the more prominent venues. The court painting proposal will assist in making these sites more appealing.

A map showing the location of all the parks tennis sites and those proposed to have court access gates can be found at Appendix 4.

16. Proposed eight sites

Churchfields Rec, Weybridge	4 courts
Elmgrove Rec, Walton	4 courts
Coronation Rec, Hersham	4 courts
Hurst Rec, West Molesey	3 courts
Grovelands Rec, East Molesey	2 courts
Long Ditton Rec, Long Ditton	2 courts
Cobham Rec, Cobham	2 courts
Civic Centre, Esher	2 courts

17. The proposal in its entirety will be underpinned by the implementation of an LTA endorsed tennis development plan, communications plan and high profile tennis campaign to promote activity at the public courts

18. **Consultation**

19. Typically, for people who want to play tennis in parks, there is most dissatisfaction with the state and condition of courts, ease of booking and the number of courts available to play (LTA insight data 2016), so to attract and retain players in the sport it is imperative that a positive customer journey and experience is at the heart of the process.

20. Findings from the 2016 tennis consultation, to which 195 people responded (52% males/48% females), clearly indicated that Elmbridge residents value the parks tennis provision and consider the condition of the courts to generally be acceptable. Some key findings included;

21. 62% of respondents who don't play regularly would like to play on Council courts and the top five motivators for encouraging them to play more tennis were;

- 1) Courts available when they want to play (61%)
- 2) Low cost sessions with a coach (47%)
- 3) Ability to book in advance (35%)

- 4) Floodlights (35%)
 - 5) Suitable surface (31%)
22. 62% of respondents thought that the parks tennis facilities could be improved by;
- 1) Better maintenance
 - 2) Improved monitoring of facilities
 - 3) Physical improvements to facilities
 - 4) Affordable coaching programme
 - 5) Booking System
 - 6) Better Promotion
23. Whilst respondents were very clear in their expectations for improvements to the facilities and broader programme, 68% said that they would not play if a charge was introduced, although interestingly,
- Half of those that currently don't play on park courts said they wouldn't play if a charge was introduced, suggesting that the other half would play if a charge was introduced
 - 75% of those that currently do play on park courts said that they wouldn't play if a charge was introduced, suggesting that 25% would
 - Of those that play in private clubs, a quarter said that they wouldn't play on park courts if a charge was introduced
24. It is unsurprising that given the explicit option, the majority of respondents already using the courts would opt to retain the "no charge" policy. A third (30%) of respondents were supportive of an affordable online pay & play booking system and 10% of a membership solution. Affordability is therefore a key consideration.
25. In September 2016, the LTA published findings from a consultation conducted across five local authority areas, to understand the impact of tennis participation growth where an online booking system had been implemented in parks. A representative sample of players were consulted and the key messages from that exercise were;
- Over half of the players consulted had been playing at their park site for less than a year (positive level of "new" parks participation)
 - The vast majority of people had used the online booking system at their park site and satisfaction with the system was high
 - The majority of people said that having an online booking system made it easier to get on court to play tennis
 - Since the online booking system was installed, on average, nearly half of people told the LTA that they play more tennis as a result.
 - Many players love the "guarantee" of playing and no waiting around. Players are increasingly organised and play more. Some say that the cost now prevents them playing more.

- In Waltham Forest and Cannon Hill specifically, where players were more likely to say they play less comparatively (25% and 23% of players respectively), this could partially be attributed to cost. In order to address this issue, the Elmbridge scheme pricing point for the family membership is £36 per annum compared with £45 in Waltham Forest and the hourly pay and play rate for concessions is £2.50 in Elmbridge compared with a flat rate of £5.00 in Waltham Forest.
26. The principle of the scheme, therefore, is to address the needs of the community by maintaining good quality playing facilities and providing a simple, user friendly online booking service and court access with affordable and flexible payment options.
 27. A full copy of the consultation results and feedback will be made available to download from the Council website, and are also available in the Member's Room.
 28. **Online Booking System**
 29. The proposed Clubspark venue management system (includes online booking system) has been developed by the LTA specifically to support the management of tennis venues and is simple and easy for both the administrator and customer to use. The system will be provided free of charge to the Council and can integrate with other systems and the Council website.
 30. The Clubspark system allows customers to pay online which improves the customer experience and journey. A minimal booking fee does apply to each transaction which will be included within the proposed fees & charges.
 31. Clubspark has a comprehensive reporting function which will provide the Council with real time bookings, income and participation statistics and data and can help to identify trends and promote more targeted bookings.
 32. Customers without access to a computer and/or smartphone technology will also be able to book and pay for courts over the telephone via the Council's customer services team. The Clubspark booking system can operate in "shop mode" where the booking & payment can be made / taken on a customer's behalf. It is anticipated that only a small amount of bookings will be made in this way and will have minimal impact on the Customer Services team.
 33. **Court Access System**
 34. Each venue will have a controller which connects to the internet via wifi, 3G or 4G. Clubspark is constantly updating the controller with booking and access information to enable instant access to the courts. Each venue will have a gate fitted, each of which is fitted with a PIN and proximity reader that connects to the controller and lock for the gate. These readers allow access when a PIN number is entered or a contactless device is used. A manual lock is used to exit so there's no risk of being locked in.

35. **Administrative Support**

36. One of the key benefits of the system is that it is automated with little need for administrative input after the initial set up. The Council's Sports Development Officer (SDO) will have overall responsibility for the ongoing development and administration of the scheme, specifically setting up the bookings system and website, supporting the preferred coaching provider to develop and deliver their quality programme and generating necessary reporting information.

37. The SDO will liaise with Sportslabs, the developer managing the Clubspark system on behalf of the LTA, should any issues arise or system upgrades be required. In addition, the LTA will assign a colleague from within their South East participation team to act as our single point of contact for all tennis development matters.

38. General enquiries and occasional telephone bookings and payments will be fielded by the Council customer Services team with support from the SDO as needed.

39. **Fees & Charges**

40. The scheme will offer residents two simple payment options, both of which provide good value for money when compared with the cost of other sports activities, for which the Council charges residents.

41. It is proposed that the "parks tennis membership" will cost each household £36.00 (up to 5 people living at the same address) and can be transferred from one family member to another and renewed annually. The benefit to the holder is that once the payment has been made, all subsequent court bookings are then free of charge. Customers will be able to book up to 7 days in advance and play up to 2 hours every day across all venues in the Borough.

42. Additional membership categories for key community partners such as schools, colleges and local businesses will also be considered and introduced as the programme develops.

Where the courts are marked and available for other formal uses by regular hirers, such as netball at Civic Centre, a booking option and competitive hourly fee for the required configuration for that activity will be developed.

43. A "pay & play" option will also be available to residents, likely a preferable option for those that wish to play on a very occasional basis. "Pay & Play" courts will be bookable 3 days in advance and sold at a standard fee of £5 per court per hour (£1.25 per person for a group of 4 people) and £2.50 per court per hour (£0.63 per person for a group of 4 people) for concessions linked to More! Card.

44. As a comparison, the Council currently supports a charge of £9.55 per court per hour for badminton at the Xcel centre, the equivalent of £2.39 per person

for a group of four people. The cost of a swim is currently £3.95 per adult and £1.95 for juniors.

45. There is a mix of policy across the County in terms of charging for recreational use of parks tennis courts, although where a fee applies, the proposed hourly rate is very competitive when compared with other local authorities in Surrey and nationwide. The proposed pricing point for the annual “tennis membership” is also competitive when compared with other schemes that launched in 2016 (please see table below).

Local Authority	Annual Membership/ fob	Pay & Play hourly rate
Waltham Forest	£30 individual £45 household	£5.00
Horsham	-	£6.00
Cheltenham	£40 household	£3.20
Fleet	£36 household	£6.00
Bracknell	£50 household	£5.10
Woking (Woking Park)	-	£7.30 / £1.90 concession
Godalming	-	£5.00 / U12's free
Guildford (Stoke Park)	-	£6.50 / £5.50 concession
Surrey Heath	-	£5.00 / £2.80 concession

46. The key purpose of the public courts is to provide residents with somewhere to play recreational tennis on a casual basis, however it is proposed to appoint and license a preferred coaching provider(s) to deliver a high quality, inclusive tennis programme for all ages and abilities across the Borough’s courts to encourage even greater participation. The coaching provider(s) will be encouraged to outreach to schools and other community partners and venues.
47. The agreement will ensure that court availability for casual play is protected, the core purpose of the parks courts. This will include restricting the coaching provider to a defined total number of hours to deliver the programme and ensuring that there is always a certain number of courts available for casual play at all times.
48. This will ensure that professional coaches who are making a living from the courts make a proportionate financial contribution whilst providing a coherent and visible community programme. The suggested license pricing point would see a coaching provider pay in the region of £2.50 per court per hour to run their business across the Borough’s tennis venues. Currently commercial coaches are not easy to monitor and control and it is likely that not all fees are being collected.
49. The successful coaching provider will be appointed through a formal competitive procurement process and will be required to hold and maintain LTA accreditation for the duration of the license period.

50. The tennis courts are currently free of charge to residents so the Council will need to carefully communicate the benefits of introducing a charge to residents to achieve support and “buy-in”. A communications plan will be developed for this purpose.

51. As well as ensuring a reduced concessionary rate for More! card holders in receipt of means tested benefits, the sports development team will work with the LTA and preferred coaching provider to provide targeted free and discounted sessions throughout the year. The Clubspark system allows for flexibility within the system so free tennis could be given at certain courts on particular days, whilst retaining the standard fees at others for example.

52. **Precedent**

53. The LTA has shared several case studies where access technology has been used to improve the customer experience and tennis participation. A number of local authorities launched schemes in July 2016, the latter at the end of the summer after the Wimbledon championships, using the approach and technology proposed here, albeit all are one & two site projects. To give a sense of scale and potential, Elmbridge has 12 sites and the income projections outlined in appendix 2 are based on robust modelling formulae provided by the LTA, that being the average number of memberships sold was 16% of latent demand.

54. The first four month’s data for four schemes can be found in Appendix 3.

55. **Sustainability**

56. A key benefit of the proposal is that it secures the financial and operational sustainability of the Council’s stock of park tennis courts and to that end is compatible with “in-house” retention. The system does offer flexibility in terms of future management since it could simply be included in the main leisure contract or managed by another third party, determined through a formal tender process.

57. **Measures**

58. The following measures will be used to gauge success with a provisional year 1 target shown against each measure. These are compatible with those used by the LTA & partners to measure tennis participation growth. Additional local measures will be developed, specifically those relating to the programme delivered by the preferred coaching provider.

Measure	Year 1 target
Number of household memberships sold	343
Number of unique “members”	646 (av. 2 members per membership)
Number of unique “pay & play” players	154
Total number of unique players	800
Total number of court bookings	5000

59. Next Steps

60. Should the proposal be approved by Cabinet, the project will follow the timetable outlined in Appendix 1 to achieve May 2017 completion.

Financial implications:

The net capital expenditure for the proposal is £71,700. This is in addition to the £77,000 CIL funding already agreed for the Elm Grove scheme (please note that £39,000 of this sum is for the floodlights, which will be considered alongside this proposal).

The ongoing revenue costs are £4,165 excluding booking fees (12 - £6,545). Income for the first year based on the sales figures in Appendix B is estimated to be £26,723.

The table below summarises the first year income and expenditure for the 8 site model and shows the variation for a 10% variation;

8 site model	2017/18	
Capital Expenditure	£134,700	
Capital Grant/CIL	(£63,000)	
Net Capital Expenditure	£71,700	
		+/- 10% variation in estimated sales
Revenue Expenditure (including booking fee)	£4,760	+/-£60
Gross Income	(£26,723)	+/-£1,663
Net Income	(£21,963)	+/-£1,603

The 2016/17 budget for tennis court income is £2,200. However, the income achieved in 2015/16 was £3,254 and the outturn for 2016/17 is expected to be approximately £3,500.

The LTA recommend an annual sinking fund of £1,200 per court to accrue sufficient funds for ongoing refurbishment. On that principle, the income in Year 1 would be sufficient to cover sinking fund for 62% of the Borough's stock of courts, with this projected to grow year on year. This represents a good investment for the future.

The cost of resurfacing tennis courts is approximately £10 – 16k (LTA November, 2016) per court depending on condition so important that a sustainable revenue stream to contribute towards the cost of a rolling refurbishment programme is secured.

Costs have been determined on the basis that Elm Grove and Civic Centre aren't included. Elm Grove has already had a CIL award approved and therefore will cover the costs for that site.

Civic Centre is an AMPS asset and it is proposed that the site does not have the full gate access system installed because it is located immediately adjacent to the Council offices and could be managed with a very low cost solution, for example, a key pad that can have an access code manually changed on a regular basis. The court booking system would still be implemented

Partnership Funding

The LTA have indicated that they would be prepared to provide partnership funding for the project, early indications suggest in the region of £25,000, to cover the cost of gate technology and a sum to assist with a promotional campaign. This is on the basis that the scheme goes live during spring / early summer 2017.

Environmental/Sustainability Implications:

As contained within the report.

Legal implications:

The total contract value, taking into consideration all lots, will trigger OJEU procurement process. Potential bidders will be provided with the appropriate level of information and advice to confidently navigate the process.

Equality Implications:

As contained within the report

Risk Implications:

A new risk assessment will be completed prior to the opening of the new facilities.

Community Safety Implications:

None

Principal Consultees:

Portfolio Holder for Leisure & Cultural Services

Local residents

Lawn Tennis Association

Head of Leisure and Cultural Services

Finance Manager

Head of AMPS / Head of Customer Services / Head of ICT

Background papers:

None

Enclosures/Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Project timetable

Appendix 2 – Financial information

Appendix 3 – Local Authority comparable project data

Appendix 4 – Park tennis courts location map

Appendix 5 – Fees & Charges proposal

A full copy of the consultation results and comments are available through this link <http://www.elmbridge.gov.uk/council/consultations/> and are available in the members room or from Leisure and Cultural Services.

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