

TRAFFORD COUNCIL

Report to: Executive
Date: 24.07.23
Report for: Decision
Report of: Executive Member for Leisure, Arts, Culture and Heritage

Report Title

Parks Tennis: Updated Investment and Sustainability Programme

Summary

This report provides a summary of the consultation responses conducted as part of the Tennis Improvement Programme and presents an updated options appraisal.

Recommendation(s)

It is recommended that the Executive

1. Approve the implementation of a 'pilot' of the sustainable operating model as set out in Option 3 C of this report, which includes the introduction of access gates, charging policy and the procurement of a specialist operator.
2. Delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Place to procure an operator and to agree the terms of the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) funding and finalise the terms of any funding agreement
3. Delegate authority to the Director of Legal and Governance to agree and enter into any documents required to implement the above decisions.

Contact person for access to background papers and further information:

Name: Tom Hewson-Haworth

Extension:

Background Papers:

Implications:

Relationship to Policy Framework/Corporate Priorities	This report supports the corporate priority to reduce health inequalities
Relationship to GM Policy or Strategy Framework	This report supports the outcomes of GM Moving's 'Moving in Action' and the outcomes of Sport England's 'Uniting the Movement' Strategy
Financial	The report includes costs highlighted by the LTA to address up front improvements to all courts in Trafford, to bring them up to a good condition (£587k). This report also highlights the annual budget that would be needed to cover the ongoing maintenance (£46,500k pa). The recommendation in this report provides a fully self-financing model for investment and maintenance for a pilot (14 courts across 4 sites) including the introduction of access gates, a charging policy and the procurement of a specialist operator. This pilot is expected to cost £499k funded the LTA and section 106, with income from charges covering ongoing maintenance in full.
Legal Implications:	Legal advice will be required to review the terms and conditions of the LTA funding agreement and delivery agreements with an operator
Equality/Diversity Implications	The outcome of the report seeks to make these assets available and attractive to all residents, any programmes of provision will also seek to increase access to tennis provision. An EIA will be completed based on any future approval of a borough wide programme.
Sustainability Implications	The LTA capital investment will support the sustainability of these assets.
Carbon Reduction	If approved, the investment in Trafford's Tennis Courts could lead to an increase in court patronage with associated travel to / from the locations. The courts are in public parks which have existing public transport connections, are accessible by walking and cycling and there are no proposals to enhance carparking facilities which might increase car use. Provided marketing of the courts is combined with adequate low carbon active travel information this proposal should support the Council's Priority on Addressing the Climate Crisis.
Resource Implications e.g. Staffing / ICT / Assets	The scheme will reduce demands on staffing and capacity as a provider will be procured
Risk Management Implications	Risk – do nothing option – closure – see wording at bottom of report. Risk of pilot not succeeding doesn't meet footfall / revenue
Health & Wellbeing Implications	The scheme will increase positive health and wellbeing outcomes for residents in Trafford. A tennis provider will programme activities to reach all levels of ability and support access to the sport.

Health and Safety Implications	Health and Safety of the facilities will be considered as part of the park's estate. In the long term, investment to improve court standards will reduce any current health and safety risks. Do nothing – impact of health and safety
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1. Background

- 1.1 Enabling residents to move more, every day is the aim of Trafford Moving, the borough's physical activity strategy. One of the key outcomes of this strategy is reducing the number of 'inactive' people in Trafford. Based on the latest Active Lives Survey (2022) 23% of residents in Trafford are inactive, which means these individuals engage in less than 30 mins of activity per week, in some cases doing no physical activity at all.
- 1.2 Through stakeholder and resident engagement and data collected by various partners including Sport England, it's been highlighted that having the right spaces and places to be active is a contributing factor to positive behavior change. Having access to facilities that are clean, affordable, fit for purpose and safe enables individuals and communities to be more active. Active spaces and places is a key aspect of the Trafford Moving Strategy. The Trafford Moving partnership, through the borough's Playing Pitch Strategy, is seeking opportunities to improve, maintain and sustain spaces and places to be active in the borough.
- 1.3 This report focuses on the borough's parks tennis courts. Following COVID 19 and the various lockdowns, it was evidenced that parks and open spaces became a popular way for residents to engage in activity which, remains so today. Following the lockdowns, the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) was able to leverage £22 million from government to invest in parks tennis courts, alongside their invest of £8.5 million. This paper is seeking approval from the Executive to secure LTA investment for courts in Trafford and develop a sustainable model for future operations and maintenance.

2. Parks courts in Trafford: Current Position

2.1 Currently there are 31 courts across 11 sites in Trafford. The quality of these courts varies across the borough as indicated by a desktop and technical survey carried out by the LTA in 2018/19. Table 1 lists these sites and the number of courts at that site

2.2 Table 1.

Site name	No. of courts
Abbots Field Park	3
Riddings Road*	2
Victoria Park	3
Longford Park	6
Walton Park	2
Ashton Park	2
Dayhulme Park	3
Halecroft Park	1
John Leigh Park	3
Pickering Lodge Park	3
Stamford Park	3
TOTAL	31

* The Riddings courts are currently unusable

2.3 Five of these sites (Longford, Ashton Park, Dayhulme, Walton Park and Stamford Park) are available to book on a booking app called 'Rally', which is managed by the LTA on the Council's behalf. These courts generate approx. 2-4000 bookings per season (May-Oct)

which highlights the courts' popularity, with no proactive promotion carried out by the Council/LTA. Between 2017 and 2019, 4 of these sites also hosted Tennis 4 Free, a charitable programme that offers free coaching and equipment to 5–12-year olds. However, this scheme hasn't restarted post-covid but is looking to return this summer.

- 2.4 Data underpinning the LTA Parks Investment programme, suggests that there is considerable latent demand for Tennis in the borough. Approximately 23,000 people could be engaged through a structured model and program, that includes a proactive campaign to improve, promote and market these facilities, which the council does not have the capacity or budget to currently undertake.

3. Maintenance and Investment

- 3.1 There has been limited investment into the borough's stock of courts over the past decade, Open courts, without structured maintenance and activity, have also become areas used for nuisance and anti-social behavior. Friends of groups do their best to maintain courts on a day-to-day basis, but they have limited capacity.

- 3.2 Based on LTA guidance a park court needs a collective maintenance and sinking fund of £1,500 per annum. This equates to £46,500 per/annum to cover all of Trafford's courts. In addition to these running costs the LTA have highlighted that courts identified as poor and standard, require some upfront investment. The cost of this capital works is £211,919. More recent assessments by the LTA as part of this project have indicated that the courts at Longford need a full resurface as well, which is estimated to cost £375,323. This means an overall budget of £587,242 is required for repairs in addition to the required sinking fund and maintenance costs.

- 3.3 The council does not have funding available to finance the capital investment, the approved capital programme is provided on the basis of a self-financing model supported by external contribution and a charging model.

- 3.4 The council has a s106 contribution of up to £250,000 for tennis, due to the previous redevelopment of the Darley Lane Tennis courts at Longford Park. This budget has been referenced as part of the council's match funding for the Heritage Lottery Fund to support the redevelopment of Longford Park This leaves a further funding requirement of £337,242 to meet the improvement of all courts to a good standard.

4. Review of Consultation and Engagement

- 4.1 As per the recommendation of the Tennis Investment Paper reviewed by Executive in February 2023 an engagement and consultation process were undertaken to ascertain the views of residents and Friends of Groups. A summary of the responses are detailed below.

- 4.2 Between October 2022 and March 2023 council officers engaged with Friends of Parks groups from the parks effected. This was primarily in the form of meetings via Teams and site visits to Stamford Park and Wythenshawe Park. Most of the feedback from these sessions was unsupportive of the scheme, the concerns primarily focused on...

- Affordability – it was suggested that this scheme would exclude some residents
- Create an unnecessary barrier to access
- Remove the capability of spontaneous use

- 4.3 Friends of John Leigh Park, Abbotsfield Park and Victoria Park and Walton Park rejected all

aspects of the sustainable model. Friends of Ashton Park, Davyhulme and Longford following further engagement were supportive of the concept, no response was received from Pickering Lodge. There were also challenges from the groups on the accuracy of the quality of the courts at the parks they support and some scepticism of the need for the model and the intentions of the LTA, although more were supportive of aspects of the programme such as outreach and coaching. Engagement with groups also highlighted issues with the frequency and efficiency of the current maintenance scheme.

4.4 The council conducted a Citizen Space Survey between 6th February to 23rd March 2023 and received 830 responses, the headlines of the survey were as follows...

- 80% respondents not willing to pay a fee
- 57% of respondents would have an issue with access gates
- 43% of respondents were supportive of a specialist operator

It is also important to note that 53% of respondents considered there were issues with maintenance as indicated by the responses below. A breakdown of sites and localities is included in appendix A.

4.5 *“The general state of tennis courts in Trafford's parks is in markedly poor contrast to Manchester, where courts have already received LTA funding. The condition of playing surfaces, nets and fencing in Longford Park is very poor”.*

“Have been left a long time without much investment or maintenance from the Council”

Excerpts from the consultation responses

4.6 Some respondents to the survey stated that maintenance and replacement should be covered by the council so a fee would not need to be introduced. 48% of respondents indicated they would consider playing tennis at their local park, indicating free coaching and improved courts as the things that would encourage them to use park courts.

4.7 Of those that did respond positively to the question of price it was suggested that £3 per court was the most people were willing to pay for usage. Respondents indicated their key concerns with access gates were accessibility and safety. Regarding a specialist tennis operator only 43% of respondents were in favour of this proposal.

4.8 In addition, two public meetings were held on the project, in Altrincham at the Town Hall and at Victoria Park, across both meetings there was only about 20 attendees. There was a mixture of feedback to the proposed operating model.

4.9 *Those in favour*

- Understood the need to develop a sustainable operating model
- Saw the benefit of an operator to reach new audiences
- Understood the need to access gates and would support their peers and children to access the system

4.10 *Those against the proposal*

- Believed courts should remain free and open for all
- Saw access gates and a fee as barriers to use that would exclude young people and

- anyone who could not use the booking system
- Consider and operator to be too commercial and exclusive
- Were concerned about the inclusivity of the engagement process and timing of the process as well

4.11 It's clear from the engagement undertaken so far that opinions of the proposed operating model are mixed and there is currently limited support for the model as it stands. This could be balanced with more discussion and local place-based engagement with residents that would engage families, school, tennis clubs and younger residents whose voices so far have been unheard. Options are set out below including a pilot approach that could enable the effectiveness of the model to be tested and generate important data on levels of usage and revenue.

4.12 The LTA have been engaged throughout this process and have agreed to be flexible with their approach to funding. The amount of funding agreed by the LTA is £267,176. This funding covers the installation of access gates, fencing improvements, repairs and a contribution towards the resurfacing of Longford Park. The LTA funding is a one-off investment, which the LTA are aiming to allocate a majority of in the first year of the fund.

5 Options Appraisal

5.1 As a result of the feedback from the public consultation and engagement, the Council has developed a number of options to be considered by executive, including a proposed pilot scheme. This next section of the report details the options considered and the detail of the proposed pilot scheme.

Option 3C is the recommended option.

5.2 **Option 1 - Reject the Funding from the LTA** – this option was considered by the Executive in Feb 2023. This is, in effect the do-nothing option which would not resolve the medium to long-term issue of investment, maintenance and repair of courts.

Positives	Negatives
1. No change required 2. Courts remain open access.	1. Doesn't address the funding to bring the courts to a good standard and maintain them. 2. Provides no baseline to track usage 3. Will continue to serve those that already use tennis and not engage new users 4. Provides no mechanism to promote courts and drive-up usage by more residents

5.4 Within this option an operator could still be commissioned to deliver coaching and outreach, this may provide more opportunities for residents to engages in tennis, but it will not address the issue of funding for investment to improve standards and ongoing maintenance as stated in 3.2. This model will not generate sufficient revenue, which will ultimately lead to courts falling into further disrepair and closure over the medium term, reducing opportunities for residents to use these spaces.

5.5 **Option 2 – Adopt the sustainable operating model across all courts in Trafford as originally proposed** - This option was proposed to the Executive in Feb 2023. Whilst this model provides the potential to address the investment and maintenance costs, it doesn't reflect the consultation and engagement feedback to date detailed in this report, in particular the requirements to introduce charges.

5.6

Positive	Negative
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Enables the council and LTA to quantify usage 2. Council can generate sufficient revenue to cover investment and maintenance 3. Create a better value proposition for courts 4. Enables outreach and coaching to attract new users 5. Provides a mechanism to effectively promote and market courts to residents 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Could create barriers to access 2. It doesn't support the feedback provided via public consultation.

5.7 This option would enable the council to secure the LTA investment, which would provide the infrastructure to generate and sustain the maintenance and improve the courts that need investment. This option would require the utilisation of the s106 fund and would also generate revenue to fund additional capital investment from the council to cover elements that cannot be funded by the LTA. Based on recent information provided by the LTA's contractors the project would cost £587,242. The LTA's investment would be £292, 983. The contribution from the council would need to be £294,259. Of this figure £250,000 would come from the s106, leaving £44,259 funded from the council's capital budget, financed from the revenue.

6. Option 3 – Pilot Options

6.1 To address the balance of the concerns raised in the consultation and engagement and the need to secure medium and long-term maintenance funding, it is proposed to operate a 'pilot' scheme. This scheme would focus on a reduced number of courts. The sites have been selected as this provides a pilot offer in each locality across the borough. Three of these locations also received some positive support for the sustainable operating model. The pilot would operate for an initial 24 months, with a quarterly review process that can monitor and analyse key performance indicators such as user numbers, revenue, outreach engagement and user feedback. On conclusion of the pilot period a paper will be submitted to Executive to detail the impact of the pilot and provide recommendations on next steps. On conclusion of the pilot, the option to expand the model to other courts can be considered. It is proposed to deliver the pilot at the locations below...

1. Longford Park
2. Pickering Lodge
3. Davyhulme Park
4. Ashton Park

6.3 **Option A - Access Gate, no charge and no operator**

Positives	Negatives
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Impact of this change is less overall 2. Enables the council and LTA to quantify usage 3. Counteracts ASB and nuisance use (dog walking) 4. Enables users to get used to using the access gate 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Could create barriers to use 2. Doesn't create a revenue to address maintenance and investment. 3. Will continue to serve those that already use tennis and not engage new users 4. Provides no mechanism to promote courts and drive-up usage by more residents 5. Sites not included in the pilot could feel disadvantaged.

6.5 This option would not address the budget required, as detailed in 3.2 & 3.3 to improve courts and cover their maintenance costs. Neither would it provide outreach and engagement to attract new users into the sport and promote court usage.

6.6 **Option B - Access Gate, a charge and no operator**

Positives	Negatives
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Enables the council and LTA to quantify usage 2. Council can generate sufficient revenue to cover investment and ongoing maintenance. 3. Create a better value proposition for courts 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Could create barriers to use 2. Will continue to serve those that already use tennis with no mechanism to promote courts and drive-up usage by more residents 3. Lack of usage would negatively impact revenue and increase risk of full cost recovery to the council 4. Sites not included in the pilot could feel disadvantaged.

6.8 Whilst this model would generate some revenue there is a risk it will not be sufficient to meet the funding requirements of the initial capital investment and/or the ongoing maintenance. It would also not provide outreach and engagement to attract new users into the sport and promote court usage.

6.9 **Option C - Access Gate, a charge and an operator**

Positives	Negatives
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Enables the council and LTA to quantify usage 2. Council can generate sufficient revenue to cover investment and 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Could create barriers to use 2. Option doesn't fully address feedback from public consultation. 3. Sites not included in the pilot could

<p>ongoing maintenance.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Create a better value proposition for courts 4. Enables outreach and coaching to attract new users 5. Provides a mechanism to effectively promote and market courts to residents 	<p>feel disadvantaged.</p>
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6.11 This model is expected to generate sufficient revenue to meet the funding requirements of the initial capital investment and the ongoing maintenance of the courts included in the pilot. It would also provide outreach and engagement to attract new users into the sport and promote the use of the courts.

6.12 Ongoing maintenance of the courts is a condition of accepting the LTA grant. Any decision to remove or reduce charges after the 24-month pilot period would create a revenue budget pressure, as the charging element of the model is generating the income to cover the required maintenance. Failure to maintain the courts in line with the grant conditions may hence result in clawback of the investment by the LTA.

Option C is the recommended option.

6.13 Option D - Access Gate, with an operator and no charge

6.13	Positives	Negatives
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Enables the council and LTA to quantify usage 2. Operator would be expected to cover its own costs. 3. Create a better value proposition for courts 4. Enables outreach and coaching to attract new users 5. Provides a mechanism to effectively promote and market courts to residents 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Doesn't address all the budget pressures of investment and maintaining courts 2. Sites not included in the pilot could feel disadvantaged.

6.14 Whilst this model would generate some revenue to fund the operator, it will not be sufficient to meet the funding requirements of the initial capital investment and/or the ongoing maintenance. It would provide outreach and engagement to attract new users into the sport and promote the use of courts.

6.15 All pilot options include the introduction of access gates, as it is a condition of the LTA grant. Users would need to pre book a court using an online app. This could create barriers to use, but would also ensure residents have better access to the courts and would support a behavior change when using the courts. Access gates will also help protect the improved courts and enable the council and LTA to monitor footfall to inform usage and outreach

6.16 Although the pilot options secure investment into the 14 courts across the 4 sites identified. There remain 17 courts across the additional 7 sites without any investment for required upgrades. Any future roll out of the pilot would require further capital investment which is not guaranteed at this point from the LTA.

6.15 The responses to the engagement process and consultation have been discussed with the LTA, so we can draw on their experience of how these types of models work, and address some of the issues raised by residents. These elements are detailed below and will be included within the option approved by executive if needed...

- Access to courts can be managed to provide free slots throughout the day
- Access codes can be requested to enable free use – for certain users
- Friends of Groups will be issued a code they can provide and use
- Courts will be free to use on Saturdays across the Pilot
- Children on the DfE funded Holiday Activity Fund will be provided a family code that provides free access
- Timetables for sites will include access for schools and other target groups
- The operator can still deliver at courts not in the pilot
- Clubs engaged to support the scheme

7. Indicative Financial Model

7.1 The section below details an indicative financial model for the pilot option recommended.

7.2 Based on a pricing model of £3 per court/per hour, with a billable period of approximately 10 hours per day and season operating from May to September these courts can generate the revenue detailed below. With an occupancy rate of 40-80% a surplus can be generated; if the occupancy was at or below 20% there would be a deficit. The price per court would equate to £1.50 per person for two people and £0.75 per person if playing doubles.

Table 2

		Priced at £3 per court (10 hours of billable time per day)											
		Day	Week	Year	Day	Week	Year	Day	Week	Year	Day	Week	Year
Location	Courts	80%			60%			40%			20%		
Davyhulme Park	3	72	360	£10800	54	270	£8100	36	180	£5400	18	90	£2700
Ashton Park	2	48	240	£7200	36	180	£5400	24	120	£3600	12	60	£1800
Longford Park	6	144	720	£21600	108	540	£16200	72	360	£10800	36	180	£5400
Pickering Lodge	3	72	360	£10800	54	270	£8100	36	180	£5400	18	90	£2700
Revenue				£50400			£37800			£25200			£12600
Maintenance and sinking fund				£22500			£22500			£22500			£22500
Surplus				£31500			£15300			£-2700			£-9900

7.3 Table 2 demonstrates the revenue that could be generated by the pilot model if the recommended option is approved. Across the 4 sites there are 14 courts, based on LTA guidance £22,500 is required per annum to cover the sinking fund costs and maintenance for all 14 courts. Based on the modelling in Table 2 the scheme is at a breakeven point at about 40% occupancy. At the optimal occupancy of 80% the scheme will generate a surplus of £31,500.

7.4 The recommended option (pilot option C) will cost £499,771. Of this the LTA are contributing £261,576. This covers access, gates, and contributes towards painting, fencing, repairs and the resurfacing costs at Longford Park. The council's contribution for this model would be £238,195 funded from s106

8. Summary

8.1 Enabling residents to access spaces and places to be active comes at a cost, which needs to be met and sustained. Without a structured and sustainable plan for the borough's parks tennis courts they will deteriorate and become unusable. Whilst the response to the consultation and engagement to date was not overwhelmingly positive to all aspects of the model, the recommended pilot scheme enables the council to strike a balance, draw on the implementation experiences of other authorities and the expertise of the LTA to test the effectiveness of the model.

8.2 The recommendation is to approve option 3C proposed in this report, and approve entering into a funding agreement with the LTA for a reduced funding package to support the pilot and procure an operator

9. Other Options

9.1 Do Nothing

9.2 The network of courts remains as they are, and the investment isn't sought or made. Given the status of the courts based on the condition survey in point 2.2 it would be safe to assume that overtime, without intervention that more courts would become unplayable and that even those rated as 'good' at this point in time, would also deteriorate.

9.3 If the Council chose this option there is a risk that as courts deteriorate more, opportunities to be physical activity are taken away. The assets also do not become drivers to encourage more residents into parks and those that currently do book and use the courts, will migrate to courts in other boroughs. Also, as these spaces deteriorate, they become more inviting for nuisance and anti-social behaviour which generates other issues.

9.4 Maintain and improve the current network

9.5 The Council would need to cover the maintenance costs needed, estimated at £48,000 per annum. In addition to this the LTA have highlighted that courts in Trafford require upfront repairs of £587,242, that would also need to be covered by the council.

Other Options

10. Consultation

10.1 A consultation and engagement process has been conducted and informs this report, further engagement will be undertaken depending on the recommendations of Executive

11. Reasons for Recommendation

11.1 To secure the provision of good quality tennis facilities in parks in the borough and demonstrate the efficacy of the sustainable operating model in Trafford

Key Decision (as defined in the Constitution): Yes

If Key Decision, has 28-day notice been given? Yes

Finance Officer Clearance *PC*

Legal Officer Clearance *TR*

[CORPORATE] DIRECTOR'S SIGNATURE (electronic) 

To confirm that the Financial and Legal Implications have been considered and the Executive Member has cleared the report.