

TRAFFORD COUNCIL

Report to: Executive
Date: 23.01.2023
Report for: Decision
Report of: Executive Member for Leisure & Culture

Report Title

Parks Tennis: Investment and Sustainability Programme

Summary

This report provides an overview of the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) Investment and proposed sustainable operating model for park tennis courts in Trafford.

Recommendation(s)

It is recommended that the Executive

1. Approve the implementation of a sustainable operating model as set out in this report, including the introduction of a charging policy.
2. Delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Place to procure an operator and to agree the terms of the LTA funding and finalise the terms of any funding agreement
3. Delegate authority to the Director of Legal and Governance to 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: None

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	This report highlights the current costs of repair to parks tennis courts to a good standard of £125k. This can be funded directly by the LTA should the recommended options in this report be approved. The recommendations also provide for a self-financing model for maintenance and lifecycle replacement of the courts, and the procurement of a specialist operator to manage the service.
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 if a detailed report is approved by Executive.
Sustainability Implications	The outcome of the project will make these assets self-sustaining financially.
Carbon Reduction	
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	n/a at this stage
Health & Wellbeing Implications	The scheme will increase positive outcomes for residents in Trafford
Health and Safety Implications	Health and Safety of the facilities will be considered as part of the park's estate. .

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 30 mins of activity per week, in some cases doing no physical activity at all; inactive residents are more likely to suffer from health inequalities. Research in this area also indicates that inactivity is more prevalent in certain population groups, and in particular communities in the borough.
- 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 boroughs 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 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 this 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 34 courts across 12 sites in the borough. Based on a desktop and technical surveys by Lawn Tennis Association (LTA), the quality of courts varies across these sites, with only 2 being rated as good, 5 being rated as standard and 5 being rated as poor, with at least 2 of these being unplayable (Moor Nook Park & the Riddings).

2.2

Site name	No. of courts	Audit visit	Condition
Abbots Field Park	3	Complete	Poor
Riddings Road	2	Complete	Poor
Victoria Park	3	Complete	Poor
Longford Park	6	Complete	Poor
Moor Nook Park	2	Complete	Poor
Walton Park	2	Complete	Standard
Ashton Park	2	Complete	Standard
Davyhulme Park	3	Complete	Standard
Halecroft Park	1	Complete	Standard
John Leigh Park	3	Complete	Standard
Pickering Lodge Park	4	Complete	Good
Stamford Park	3	Complete	Good

2.3 5 of these sites (Longford, Ashton Park, Davyhulme, 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. In 2017 – 19, 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.

2.4 Data underpinning the LTA Parks Investment programme, suggests that there is considerable latent demand for Tennis in the borough. Approx. 23,000

people, could be engaged through a structured model and programme, 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 their input is limited due to their role and capacity.
- 3.2 Based on LTA guidance a park court needs a sinking fund of £1,200 per annum to ensure general and scheduled maintenance can take place. £42,000 per/annum would be needed to cover all of Trafford's courts. A recent technical survey conducted by the LTA indicated up-front investment is needed to bring them up to a 'good' standard, which covers small remedial works to full court resurfacing, in the case of Moor Nook Park.
- 3.3 To ensure Trafford's courts can continue to serve future generations it is essential that the council secures this investment from LTA and develops a programme to sustain their quality and usage through the introduction of a charge. The charge will cover the general and scheduled maintenance, including the introduction of a specialist operator to increase and sustain usage.

4. LTA Park Investment Programme

- 4.1 As part of the Parks Investment Fund, the LTA have assessed all the courts in Para 2.2. This assessment has identified the costs needed to bring courts up to a 'good' standard, is £125,000, this figure includes the installation of access-gates, which is a condition of the funding offered by the LTA. The LTA have indicated they would provide 100% of the funding at this stage. If this position changes budget is already included in the existing capital programme to cover any shortfall, and this will be repaid through the charging model.
- 4.1 Officers alongside colleagues from the LTA have reviewed the options for parks courts which included the following three scenarios
1. Do nothing
 2. The council maintains and improves the current network at its own cost
 3. The council obtains the investment form the LTA and implements a sustainable operating model, which includes access gates, charging and an operator
- 4.3 Option 1 would likely see the current networks continue to deteriorate with no direct investment in maintenance, overtime courts would become unplayable which would reduce opportunities to be active, this would not deliver on the council's priorities to reduce health inequalities. Option 2, whilst leading to an immediate improvement, cannot be sustained without a revenue and maintenance budget. Option 3 provides a self-sustaining and self-financing option, the introduction of access gates and a charge across the whole network, based on the LTA projections, will generate sufficient revenue to cover the sinking fund. The introduction of an operator alongside this model will

improve and sustain usage and provide access to coaching, capacity and delivery that is currently unavailable in the borough.

5 A sustainable Operating Model

- 5.1 Delivery of a sustainable operating model consists of three key components which are essential for securing these assets for future use. The model includes access gates, introducing a charge and commissioning a specialist operator.
- 5.2 Access Gates are a condition of the funding, so if the council secures this investment all parks' courts will be fitted with an access gate, this in turn enables the management of bookings, paying for courts use and tracking usage data, which will in turn allow the council and its operator to target provision to suit usage and local demography. Access Gates are already in operation across several other Greater Manchester authorities.
- 5.3 Introducing a charge is the key mechanism for sustaining these assets for future use, given constrained finances of the authority this is only viable option for securing the budget needed for the sinking fund and cyclical maintenance of parks courts. Charges will be scalable across the network with a cost between £3-5 for court hire, with options to subsidise and provide free access where appropriate.
- 5.4 A specialist operator is required to ensure there is good engagement with the community and that courts and programmes are promoted to meet local need. Appendix D provides an example of how an operator can enhance a borough wide community tennis offer. Detailed below is a summary for three models to be developed through the procurement process. The model will be funded through a combination of revenue for coaching and or revenue from the pay n play charging scheme being recommended as part of this report:
- a) In house - the council directly manages bookings and coaching programmes;
 - b) The council manages bookings and procures an external provider for a coaching programme on a self-financing basis.
 - c) The council procures and external provider for both bookings and coaching on a self-financing basis.
- 5.5 Of the above options the recommended approach is option c. There isn't sufficient capacity internally to consider option a. and there would be costs involved in developing a coaching offer, that a provider can easily introduce as they have access to a trained workforce already. Whist option b provides some control to the council it will require capacity to manage the booking system. Option c, provides the council with the cleaner approach, which can be controlled through the agreements put in place through the procurement process.

6. LTA Process & Timeline

- 6.1 If approval is granted the LTA will carry out a detailed site assessment across all the courts included within the funding proposal. This will require the council to procure the LTA's recommended supplier.

- 6.2 Upon completion of the survey the LTA will provide the Council with a formal funding offer. The Council will then be required to commission the works as recommended, which may include planning permission in the case of a full resurface.
- 6.3 Based on current timelines and demand the works will take place before Spring 2023.

7. Summary

- 7.1 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.
- 7.2 The recommendation is to seek LTA Investment and move to a sustainable operating model LTA investment along with the of introduction of a charge, access gates and specialist providers will require significant change and engagement with residents. Given the demand data provided by the LTA, good quality courts and a structured programme of activity and promotion will drive more residents to these courts and into the parks that host them, increasing the opportunity for residents to engage in other activities in the borough's parks.
- 7.3 The Parks Tennis Investment programme provides the Council potentially with a one-off opportunity for significant investment into parks courts and to holistically consider the best way to offer tennis now and for future generations.

Other Options

Do Nothing

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.

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 behavior which generates other issues.

Maintain and improve the current network

The Council would need to cover the costs of repairs (£125k) indicated through the LTA technical survey. Whilst this may address the immediate issue of court condition it would not cover the sinking costs and life-cycle costs needed, estimated at £42k per annum. Based on current guidance from the LTA, 5-year post investment is when major or minor repairs are needed. In theory this could

generate a total liability of £210,000 from around year 6. The Council currently has no budget to cover either the capital or revenue works/sinking fund required, other than minor maintenance undertaken under Amey contract (sweeping, making safe etc.).

Consultation

A comprehensive communication and engagement strategy will be undertaken to connect with current users including clubs, schools, community, and friends of parks groups. There will also be a citizen space survey produced for residents. The insight obtained will be used to inform the programmes for each locality

Reasons for Recommendation

To secure the provision of good quality tennis facilities in parks in the borough.

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.