

TOURISM AND THE VISITOR ECONOMY SCRUTINY PANEL

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REPORT OF	Sharon Wroot, Executive Director Environment, Economy & Resources
SUBJECT	Parks Tennis Funding & Operation
STATUS	Open

CONTRIBUTION TO OUR AIMS

The refurbishment of tennis courts on parks will contribute to priorities across the Council's Outcomes Framework supporting the delivery of our 'Stronger Economy' and 'Stronger Communities'. The specific focus on securing grant funding to invest in quality facilities in parks will support residents to become more active bringing wider economic, health and social benefits, supporting high quality environments, good health & wellbeing, enhancing community interaction, and delivering better quality lives.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The opportunity to apply for grant funding to the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) provides an important opportunity to improve the condition of tennis courts within North East Lincolnshire. To support the grant application, the operation of tennis courts at Barretts Recreation Ground, Haverstoe Park, and Sussex Recreation Ground that are eligible for grant funding needs to change to generate income to reinvest into ongoing court repairs and maintenance. In addition, the investment and future operation will drive court usage and grow participation across tennis.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION

The report is presented to the panel for pre-decision scrutiny and feedback on the opportunity to apply for grant funding and the potential introduction of fees and charges for tennis on public parks.

1. BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

1.1 In October 2021, the Government announced it was investing £22m into public tennis courts across Britain. This funding, together with an investment from the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) of £8.5m is aimed at bringing public park tennis courts in very poor or unplayable condition back to life, for the benefit of their local community. The initiative is also aimed at engaging 1m more players in tennis, supporting health and wellbeing outcomes.

1.2 LTA national insight shows that just 16% of park users are happy with the ability and opportunity to book tennis courts and 40% of people are unaware of where their nearest local park tennis facility is. Nearly three quarters of park players, however, report that they would be keen to play more often, if barriers around

court quality, booking journey and programming were addressed.

1.3 Since early 2022, Officers have engaged closely with the LTA to discuss the potential for investment. There is an opportunity to work with the LTA to invest in and radically improve the quality of the tennis offer in parks across the borough. Developing tennis courts aligns with priorities within the Council's outcome framework including residents enjoying good health and wellbeing, and a high-quality environment.

1.4 In working with the LTA, the following parks across the borough were identified as locations that qualify for potential funding and investment. This assessment was based on a combination of current court quality, latent demand analysis and Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) ranking. LTA demand analysis is based on participation insight from potential recreational players, within a ten-minute drive time catchment of the identified sites. The penetration number below provides a strong evidence base that there is significant interest for social tennis and would therefore support the courts to run sustainably.

Venue Name	Existing No. Courts	Penetration
Barretts Rec Ground	8	1472
Haverstoe Park	2	871
Sussex Recreation Ground	7	1114

1.5 In July 2022, the LTA engaged a Technical Services Consultant to conduct site visits to locations targeted for capital works. The purpose of these visits was to confirm current court quality, advise regarding upgrade works required and provide an estimated project cost. The technical reports have been assessed by Officers and LTA, with the highlights included in Appendix 1.

1.6 The Authority will need to look at implementing an operator model, to drive tennis activity and bookings across the borough. There are number of different options to do this ranging from retaining the management in-house to fully outsourcing the management of the court bookings and on court activities. The change in operation will consider the introduction of fees & charges for court bookings.

1.7 The limitation of in-house capacity and tennis specialism points to exploring options for outsourcing the operation of the courts. The core advantages of this approach are:

- Income – agreed income through an operator agreement that can be reinvested back into court repairs and maintenance.
- Technology support – operators will be responsible for uploading courses, managing sign up, booking communications etc.
- Marketing & communication support – expertise on how to market tennis to park users to drive sign up and, where relevant, income etc.
- Workforce development – operators are responsible for identifying coaches with capacity to deliver the agreed programme.

1.8 The LTA can support with developing an operator agreement, identifying potential operating partners in line with the Authority procurement process.

Operating agreements may include conditions around maximum court charges, maximum number of courts used for coaching, programme expectations around free tennis sessions and taster days etc, as well as any financial arrangements between the operator and Council. An example of charging model below based on national benchmarks:

- Pay as you go £6 per hour
- Household annual pass £42
- Online booking & self-access keycode gate

1.9 It should be noted that in the case of Haverstoe Park and Sussex Recreation Ground, there are existing agreements in place with established partners for the use of pavilions and amenities within the park. Any operating agreement for Tennis will be developed with engagement from existing groups.

2. RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

2.1 The application for grant funding from the LTA provides an opportunity to secure external investment into the borough. The alternative is to do nothing, the existing courts are in a poor condition and based on existing budget, without external grant funding, current conditions are likely to remain or deteriorate further, see images in Appendix 2.

2.2 Tennis courts on parks are currently free of charge with no booking system in place. Therefore, existing users and wider residents may raise concerns around the potential change in operation including the introduction of online booking and charges. There are national examples of where this has been introduced successfully with options around free use programming to be considered as mitigation.

2.3 The grant investment will place an obligation on the authority to maintain the courts and the appointment of an operator that develops a sustainable model with appropriate fees and charges to fund future repairs and maintenance will be key.

3. REPUTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATIONS

3.1 There is the potential for both positive and negative reputational implications for the Council if successful in applying for grant funding, as this would bring improvements to parks tennis, and the refurbishment of courts would be seen as a positive. However, it should be noted that there may be concerns raised around the introduction of charges, although the need for a level of income to support ongoing repairs and maintenance provides reasonable justification.

3.2 It is important to highlight that there have been ongoing concerns raised by residents around the condition of tennis courts and anti-social behaviour with particular focus around Barretts Recreation Ground. Securing external grant funding can support in addressing these challenges.

3.3 To support in positive delivery, an action plan will be agreed with the Council's communications service, covering communications requirements and channels to be used.

4. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

4.1 Total cost for works is estimated to be £211,000 (final costs subject to contractor quotes obtained through LTAs procurement framework). Subject to successful grant funding application and criteria, there is the opportunity for this to be funded fully through the LTA investment programme.

4.2 If successful, the grant funding includes an obligation period for repairs and maintenance, the income generated from introducing a charging model for bookings, membership, and coaching on courts will support this, delivering a sustainable approach.

4.3 It is important to note that if unsuccessful with the grant application, then the scheme would not be able to progress.

5. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IMPLICATIONS

If successful, the grant investment and subsequent refurbishment of tennis courts will improve opportunities to play tennis across the population. This will include improving sporting opportunities for children and young people across tennis courts in parks. The LTA is focused on tennis operators introducing programmes that cover all ages and standards of players at an affordable price and this is supported through both the LTA Youth Start programme and an element of free tennis offer within programming on parks.

6. CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

If successful, the grant investment and subsequent refurbishment of tennis courts will consider environmental implications and opportunities to ensure sustainability and low carbon initiatives are incorporated at every opportunity. This will include contributing to priorities such as developing active environments and promoting active travel to facilities.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 If the funding bid is successful this would result in an estimated £211,000 of investment into the Council's Tennis facilities.

7.2 Any revenue implications will depend upon operator agreements that will be put in place following the investment, though it is hoped that these will be largely neutral, without any additional cost to the Council.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Any grant funding is likely to be subject to conditionality around application of funds and delivery timetables. Constitutionally, Scrutiny is able to make recommendations to Cabinet and it is a matter for Cabinet as to what weight is afforded to those recommendations.

9. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct HR implications

10. WARD IMPLICATIONS

If successful, the grant funding would have an impact on tennis court refurbishment and operation in the wards of Haverstoe, Park, and Sidney Sussex.

11. CONTACT OFFICER(S)

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Appendix 1 – Technical Survey Highlights

Venue Name	Project Scope	Approx Cost
Barretts Rec Ground 4x Courts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resurface & Paint Courts 1-4, possible areas of rebuilding • New kerbing • New Perimeter fencing • Lite Gate Access system (link to online booking) • Net nets and Posts x 4 • Southern 4 Courts removed for tennis use due to high renovation cost 	£88,000
Haverstoe Park 2x Courts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resurface & Paint Courts 1-2, possible areas of rebuilding. • New kerbing • Retain existing fencing • Lite Gate Access system (link to online booking) • New nets and Posts x 2 	£43,000
Sussex Rec Ground 5x Courts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resurface & Paint Courts 1-5 • New fence line to enclose courts. • Lite Gate Access system (link to online booking) • New nets and Posts x 5 • Far 2 courts in the worst condition (containing the 360m² root damaged area) 	£80,000

Appendix 2 – Site Images

Barretts Recreation Ground:



Haverstoe Park:



Sussex Recreation Ground:

