

The Future of Burnley Parks' Tennis Provision**Report to the Executive**

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PURPOSE

- To inform members of the current position in terms of tennis provision across the Council's Green Spaces.
- To provide details of the Lawn Tennis Association's (LTA) Capital Parks Funding proposal for Burnley, including operating models for future management/maintenance of courts.
- To propose a way forward for sustainable tennis provision across Burnley in the future.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive:

- a. Notes the position in relation to the Council's current tennis offer.
- b. Notes the detail of the LTA's Capital Parks Funding offer for Burnley.
- c. Approves the suggested way forward for tennis provision across Burnley's Green Spaces as outlined in the 'Next Steps' section.
- d. Notes the current situation at Barden Gardens and Towneley Park in terms of the future of tennis provision at these sites and agrees with the proposed way forward set out in their respective 'Next Steps' sections.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- To improve the quality of parks courts across the borough.
- To increase participation and playing opportunity to all.
- To provide a sufficient income at each site which will contribute significantly to covering operating costs and ensuring self-sustainability.
- To provide a tennis delivery operating model that will enable a range of LTA endorsed products and programmed activity to be run across park sites.
- To provide a way forward for Barden Gardens and Towneley Park

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

LTA's Capital Park Funding

In October 2021, the LTA announced that over £30 million was to be invested into public park tennis courts across Britain to bring back to life poor or unplayable courts for the benefit of their local communities.

Park tennis court facilities are owned by local authorities and are vital community assets that can help widen the impact of the physical and mental health benefits that being active through tennis can bring.

There are currently 1.7 million adults and many more children who play tennis in a local park every year with park courts being particularly important in providing affordable, engaging and accessible opportunities for all sections of the community.

Unfortunately, there are many areas of the country where park courts remain dilapidated and unappealing with 45% of park courts categorised as being in a poor or unplayable condition. Critically, half of these are in the most socially deprived areas of the country.

The LTA's ambition is to drive participation across park tennis sites as well as ensuring the future sustainability of these facilities. Subsequently, they have committed capital funds to pay for the refurbishment of public park courts but will also assist and advise on the implementation of sustainable operating models for each facility, to ensure courts are both affordable and utilised.

Burnley's Current Tennis Provision

The Council has four sites that currently provide 11 tarmac tennis courts for the public to play on year-round. These are located at:

- Queens Park – 4 courts (floodlit)
- Park Road, Padiham – 3 courts
- Scott Park – 2 courts
- Ightenhill Park – 2 courts

The courts are not bookable and there are no charges associated with the use of them.

Towneley Park

There used to be 3 courts at Towneley but due to health & safety concerns over the surface quality (red-gra) and the stability of the surrounding fencing, the courts have not been used for over 10 years and the site is now more or less derelict. The red gra surface is overgrown with vegetation. Costs were sourced in recent years for re-developing the courts and providing floodlighting as part of the project. This came in at circa £130,000.

There are no immediate plans from Green Spaces & Amenities to resurrect the courts (mainly due to finance but also due to lack of demand) although this has not been discounted in the future if funding did become available. Burnley Leisure have expressed an interest in developing adventure golf on the former courts site. In addition, there is interest in developing a petanque (boules) arena in Burnley and the old courts at Towneley have been identified as an ideal location for this as well as an idea from the Friends Group for a secure dog exercise and agility area.

Next Steps

Due to the range of ideas that have been put forward for consideration for the former tennis court site, the options will be considered as part of the Towneley Park Vision.

Barden Gardens

The two courts at Barden Gardens have not been used since 2019 due to issues with anti-social behaviour (ASB) resulting in the tennis nets/posts persistently being vandalised. This, along with the fact that we were also having ASB problems on the two bowling greens adjacent to the courts, resulted in the courts being taken out of operation. The remaining tarmacked area was left open for youths to use as an extra kickabout area (diversionary tactics) in the hope that they would stop using the bowling greens for playing Football and Cricket on.

Next Steps

We are reticent to re-establish the courts at this site for the time being but because of some impending Section 106 monies being made available for recreational/play improvements, we have plans to undertake some consultation over the next year with local people to establish what facilities they want at this site in the future.

The Way Forward for Burnley Park's Tennis Offer

The LTA has surveyed Burnley's courts and identified that £66,300 capital investment is needed to bring existing facilities up to at least a good standard. The courts at Queens Park were rated as 'Good' with the remaining 3 sites at Scott Park, Ightenhill Park and Park Road in Padiham all rated as 'Average'.

Capital funding has recently been approved by the LTA and is a mixture of resurfacing, repainting, new posts/nets, and replacement of existing gates which will allow a new gate access system.

The main capital investment would be at Scott Park (circa £38,000) where re-surfacing, line marking, a replacement gate and a new gate access system is proposed. Park Road (circa £17,000) is down for repainting, new posts/nets, and a new gate access system. At Queens Park, a new gate access system is outlined which is slightly different to the rest due to the advent of floodlights at this venue. Finally, a new gate

access system is to be installed at Ightenhill Park. The more detailed LTA project summary pro-forma is provided in Appendix 1.

However, funding will only be granted on the condition that the Council agrees to a sustainable operating model with gate access in place. The operating model will include tennis programme delivery, be it internally or through an external agency/organisation, delivering a number of LTA participation programmes. This is so that upgraded courts see a real growth in usage and local authorities can continue to invest in their courts over the long term.

LTA Rally, ClubSpark & Gate Access System – LTA Rally is a nationwide tennis booking website to help people search for tennis activities in their area and make it easier for people to book a court. Acting as an aggregator, LTA Rally collects all booking and coaching information via partner venues booking pages and displays it for participants in one easy to view page.

For the online booking of courts in Burnley, ClubSpark would be used. ClubSpark is an online venue management booking system that gives the general public and coaches access to book and pay for courts, classes and other resources online.

It is a funding pre-requisite from the LTA that we sign up to LTA Rally and ClubSpark for promotion and management of our tennis court sites. There is no cost associated with doing this due to it being part of the LTA funding offer.

Both systems have been developed to work hand in hand with gate access systems, where participants receive a pin code when a booking is made to access courts. New gates, with electronic key pads, will be installed at the four venues. LTA are providing funding to cover gate installation at all our sites. There is a £500 maintenance fee per annum for the gate access system.

Burnley Park Operating Models

Once the capital works have been completed and the new gate access and online booking system is in place, the Council needs to have an operating model to manage the four sites. There are a number of different models that the LTA recommend dependent upon each Council's position. The models available to Burnley are:

Model 2: Local Authority owns court booking opportunities and outsources the provision of a coaching programme

Option 1 – The Council manages bookings and outsources coaching to Burnley Leisure Trust.

Option 2 – Burnley Leisure Trust manages bookings and outsources coaching to a national operator such as 'We Do Tennis'. We Do tennis are the LTA's Coach Development Centre for Lancashire which will be of benefit when growing the community tennis workforce.

Option 3 – Burnley Leisure Trust manages bookings and outsources coaching to local club Burnley Tennis Club.

Burnley Tennis Club are a strong, community focused club but we are unclear whether they would have the desire and capacity to activate all the parks at the levels required from the LTA.

Model 3: Local Authority outsources the booking opportunities and the provision of a coaching programme.

Option 1 – outsource to a National Operator.

Bury Council are considering this option and are looking to put in place an initial 12 month pilot across their sites while they go through their procurement process for the tender for a long term operator.

Option 2 – outsource to Burnley Tennis Club.

As above, there would need to be some discussion with the Tennis Club to explore this option further.

Recommended Option

The preferred and most viable option for the Council would be Model 2, Option 1. This would be dependent upon Burnley Leisure having the capacity and resources to be able to deliver the programmes prescribed by the LTA.

As part of this arrangement, an annual fee or a percentage of bookings income would need to be negotiated between the Council and the Leisure Trust.

The other models and options have been considered but disregarded due to capacity issues, and the fact that we only have a limited number of public sites and courts across Burnley so outsourcing the booking and coaching programmes to national operators would not be the most economically advantageous.

Subsequently, we would recommend that the Executive endorse Model 2, Option 1.

Introduction of fees for Tennis and Charging Mechanism

At present, all Council managed courts in Burnley are free to use and are not gate access controlled. As such, if we were to progress with installing gate access systems at the four sites outlined then this would represent a huge change in the use of tennis courts across Burnley and we would need to introduce charging at all sites. We are aware that this could be seen to be prohibitive and may put some people off playing tennis but we are proposing that we continue to have some free use (using the Clubspark online booking system) at certain times dependent upon the venue as well as charging a fee for use of courts the rest of the time. These fees would be kept to a minimum to ensure all sections of the community can still access tennis if they so desired.

Case Studies clearly evidence that Gate Access enhances participation levels and the customer experience for residents, and provides access for more players, contributing to Burnley health and well-being objectives. It also shows that affordable pricing is not a barrier and helps to raise court quality in a sustainable way.

It will also provide some assurance to tennis players that they can book a court prior to playing safe in the knowledge that there will be a free court for them to play on when they arrive at their respective site. In the past, at peak times particularly and popular

sites particularly, it has come down to potluck as to whether a court would be free. The new gate access and online booking system will make this more seamless and stop any issues.

It should be noted that Park Rangers are on hand, especially during the evenings up to 9pm in the summer months, to help ensure any issues arising around access to courts are dealt with as well as any teething problems with the gate access system.

The Council would need to have an income target per site to ensure that we cover annual maintenance costs for the gate access systems, the upkeep of the courts (and floodlights at Queens Park only), Burnley Leisure fees for delivering LTA prescribed coaching programmes and have the requisite amount to put into a sinking fund (50% of income).

The sustainable charging mechanism will need to be flexible with all sites having times where free play is available with a proposed standard charge for pay and play of £3 per session and season tickets (that can be used at all sites) charged at £35 per annum to achieve the income target outlined above.

The suggested Burnley charging mechanism is provided in Appendix 2. This also includes details of the annual costs for each site highlighted above.

The Council will be expected to sign up to a long-term agreement, likely to be 10 years, which will detail the terms and conditions of the funding offer and an overview of expectations in terms of the operating model, sustainability plan and the rollout of the LTA tennis programmes delivery.

Next Steps

The LTA are looking to start projects in August 2022 with a completion date of September 2022. As such, timescales are very tight so we would need to confirm that we would like to go ahead with the LTA's Park Capital Funding offer by mid-June.

Subsequently, we are asking members to approve the following in principle:

- To approve the proposed charging mechanism for Burnley as outlined in Appendix 2.
- The Council manages tennis court bookings but outsources coaching to Burnley Leisure Trust (Model 2, Option 1).
- That we formally accept the LTA's Park Capital Funding offer for Burnley.
- Additionally, that authority be given for the Head of Green Spaces & Amenities to complete a long-term agreement with the LTA, which includes terms & conditions of the grant funding, subject to consultation with the Head of Legal.
- Authority for Green Spaces Officers to pursue the next steps for Barden Gardens and Towneley Park as outlined in the report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS AND BUDGET PROVISION
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The capital investment at the four sites will be financed by the LTA.

Appendix 2 shows the proposed charging mechanism and the income targets for each site to ensure all costs are covered and 50% is added to a sinking fund for future investment purposes, e.g. surface upgrade, new fencing, etc.

If we achieve the income targets for each site, then there should be no extra cost to the Council as we are looking to be self-sufficient utilising a sustainable charging mechanism. We need to at least cover costs highlighted in Appendix 2 (£1,500 in most cases apart from Queens Park which is £2,000) although if we want to ensure we have enough in each sinking fund for larger capital investment in 5-10 years then we need to be looking to reach our income targets from year 2 onwards.

Burnley Leisure fees are subject to change as these are only estimated at this stage as further discussion on the operating model will need to be pursued once approval from members has been granted.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The upgrade of existing tennis courts, the introduction of gate access systems and online booking, and development of operating models for public park courts through partnership working with the LTA are all objectives that are detailed in the 2016-2026 PPS, specifically:

- Aim 2 Recommendation F – enhance outdoor sports facilities through improving quality and management of sites. Work in partnership with stakeholders (including NGB's) to secure funding.
- Support the LTA in working to improve accessibility to tennis in order to help delivering its Strategy. The LTA is keen to encourage parks and clubs to make use of technology solutions, which includes online court booking and fob access to courts and facilities.

DETAILS OF CONSULTATION

There have been numerous meetings with the LTA to discuss the capital investment and how Burnley can improve our tennis offer in the future utilising the operating and income generating models suggested.

There will need to be further consultation with Burnley Leisure, Burnley Tennis Club, Burnley & District Tennis League, the respective Friends Groups and general users in the short term too.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

FURTHER INFORMATION

PLEASE CONTACT:

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ALSO:

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