

TENNIS IN THE BOROUGH

Head of Service:	Ian Dyer, Head of Operational Services
Wards affected:	(All Wards);
Urgent Decision? (yes/no)	No
If yes, reason urgent decision required:	
Appendices (attached):	Appendix 1: Proposed Fees and Charges for new operating model

Summary

This proposal is about modernising the way parks' tennis courts are operated and presents a clear opportunity for the Council to optimise the impact and value of its existing assets to benefit residents. This proposal relies on grant funding from the Lawn Tennis Association.

Recommendation (s)

The Committee is asked to:

- (1) Grant permission for officers to apply for a non-repayable grant from the Lawn Tennis Association to install gate technology to all tennis courts in the borough as set out in section four of this report.**
- (2) Agree to income received for use of tennis courts to be placed in the Council's reserves and used solely for the ongoing maintenance need of the courts.**
- (3) Agree that £10,330 identified from section 106 funding is used to carry out maintenance and improvement works on tennis courts across the borough ahead of implementing the charging scheme.**
- (4) Agree the fees and charges for tennis provision for 2023/24 as set out in appendix 1.**
- (5) Agree that the fees and charges will be reviewed annually and align to the LTA guidance and market testing of neighbouring authorities.**

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1 Reason for Recommendation

- 1.1 After exploring several funding opportunities from the Lawn Tennis Association, the recommendations presented in this report offer the Council a cost-effective operating model to provide a sustainable, well-maintained tennis provision in the Borough.
- 1.2 The five-year funding agreement from the Lawn Tennis provides for access to the ClubSpark online booking software, and installation of a gate access system to each of our tennis courts.
- 1.3 In contrast to other funding opportunities this option does not require any match funding and any income generated will be reinvested to maintain the courts.

2 Background

- 2.1 The Council currently provides and maintains 12 public Tennis Courts across the borough at 5 sites. All the courts are available for commercial bookings but generate minimal income. The courts are also available free of charge to recreational players, and as such can be seen to support the 'Tennis for Free' schemes that became popular in c2008; an ethos adopted by many Councils at that time. The courts have therefore become a community resource for both professionals and residents of the borough.
- 2.2 It is of note however, that whilst a 'Tennis for Free' approach has its benefits, there is a missed opportunity for income generation, with the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) acknowledging that a lack of income, coupled with a reduction in public sector finances had resulted in a lack of investment in facilities. This has caused participation in the sport to drop.
- 2.3 The LTA are now keen to work with Councils to help improve the current facilities and assist with promoting a sustainable operating model which will reinvigorate an interest in tennis and provide an income to support the on-going maintenance of facilities.
- 2.4 Of note, the courts in Epsom and Ewell were recently inspected by the LTA and deemed to be in reasonable condition.

3 Current position

- 3.1 The current tennis offer is low profile, providing both residents and professionals/coaches/clubs with limited information in respect of how, and when the courts can be used and booked, when they are available and the fee's required.
- 3.2 The consequence of the current operational model, is that courts are accessed primarily on a no fee basis, representing a missed opportunity to generate income to fund the on-going maintenance and improvement of the courts.

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- 3.3 As such, Council officers have been working with the Lawn Tennis Association and local tennis providers, to explore opportunities for improving the use of our tennis facilities.
- 3.4 The discussions resulted in a report being taken to the Community & Wellbeing Committee on 17th March 2022 and proposed that a grant application be made to the LTA to meet the cost of refurbishing and upgrading the borough's tennis courts.
- 3.5 Whilst members supported the initial proposal, the availability of grant funding from the LTA has since reduced significantly leading officers to explore other options and operating models.

4 Proposal

- 4.1 This report seeks permission from Environment Committee to pursue a non-repayable grant funding opportunity with the LTA for funds to install a new gate access system and explore options for managing the tennis courts in the future, if the application is successful.
- 4.2 This proposal is that the LTA fund the gate access system only. In this instance the Council would apply to the LTA for £20,000 non repayable grant, to fund the secure gate access system. The LTA will also provide free access to the Clubspark system which allows customers to see court availability and make online bookings.
- 4.3 An annual subscription of £2,380 for a 5-year period will be required for the yearly servicing and general maintenance of the gates and use of the software.
- 4.4 This subscription fee will be frozen from increase for the 5 years of this agreement, after this period is over the increase will be in line with inflation. At the end of the 5 years. EEBC will have the option to roll the agreement over with CIA (the gate access company) and enter negotiations or look for alternative suppliers.
- 4.5 Although match funding or upfront capital is no longer required, the £10,330 previously approved by the Community and Wellbeing Committee can be ringfenced specifically for tennis across the borough for future maintenance or to offset the annual subscription fee for the gates.
- 4.6 Should the Council adopt this approach to managing the tennis courts across the borough, existing staff would be utilised to support with bookings and any FAQ's that arise. This would take approximately 4 hours per week, or 0.1 FTE based on a G8 SCP5 costing £3,910 based on the 2023/24 salary budget. An equal portion of tennis income will be set aside to fund this staffing requirement.
- 4.7 This provides minimal risk for the Council and generates income, allowing tennis to become more sustainable in the borough.

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- 4.8 The agreement will ensure that court availability for casual play is protected, the core purpose of the parks. This will include restricting the coaching providers 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.
- 4.9 If members support the recommendations in this report, the current estimation to complete the funding agreement, install the gate access system and implement and promote the new online booking system is September 2023.

5 Risk Assessment

Legal or other duties

5.1 Equality Impact Assessment

- 5.1.1 It is important to ensure that our tennis facilities cater for all members of the community

5.2 Crime & Disorder

- 5.2.1 Engaging people, especially young people in physical activity and organised sports is an effective tool to help reduce boredom, improve mental health, and create a diversion from antisocial behaviour, violence, crime, and drug use.
- 5.2.2 There are no measures that can stop people from booking one court and then occupying more courts during quieter times of the day however the benefit of this system, is that all usage can be tracked, and users contacted should you have reports that some users are taking advantage of their access rights. In other boroughs court users have policed the facilities and reported misuse to the authorities that manage these facilities.
- 5.2.3 Well-maintained and well-used sporting facilities promote a vibrancy in our parks and outdoor spaces which helps to reduce the fear of crime and disorder.

5.3 Safeguarding

- 5.3.1 Tennis coaches will need to be approved through the LTA portal, as a standard, this means coaches will be DBS checked, first aid trained, and will attain public liability insurance through the LTA.
- 5.3.2 Coaches will be expected to have attained a minimum of Level 3 Tennis coaching qualification. Either as a independent coach or as a lead coach for an organisation.

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5.4 Dependencies

5.4.1 Progress of this Item is dependent on a successful application to the LTA parks investment fund.

5.5 Other

5.5.1 There is a risk that if we don't pursue this opportunity the funding pot available will be depleted and an opportunity to implement the gate system to help the sustainability of our tennis courts will be missed.

5.5.2 Some residents might be reluctant to pay for a scheme that was previously free, but this can be negated with a good marketing campaign and explaining that the investment in the gate system will aid in building a sustainable operating model for the future. Our marketing strategy will comprise of a communication plan devised by our in-house communications team and a wider campaign promoted by the LTA, who have worked closely with other Boroughs to ensure a successful launch.

6 Financial Implications

6.1 The LTA helpfully conducted a feasibility study, and confidently ascertained that the introduction of a 'pay to play'/subscription operating model will return a healthy income to support future renovations and sustainability.

6.2 To ensure inclusivity, a discounted annual subscription will be offered to households on low incomes or those receiving benefits. All annual subscriptions will be limited to one booking per day for a maximum of two hours and applicants will need to adhere to a set of terms and conditions.

6.3 The table in paragraph 6.5 details the level of income we might expect to receive through the introduction of a £40 annual subscription for households in the borough. From their extensive knowledge of operating a subscription-based model in other boroughs,

6.4 The LTA estimate the uptake of an annual subscription will be 1400 households in the borough. Of the 1400 household the figures also assume that, 5% will pay £6 per hour to take advantage of the option to make an ad-hoc 'pay to play' booking. Please note, the figures paragraph 6.5 do not include any allowances for discounted subscriptions for low-income households or coaching packages which are outlined in Appendix One, both which could bring in a significant amount of additional income.

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6.5

	Estimated annual income
Pessimistic outturn	£24,643
Realistic outturn (+10%)	£27,107
Optimistic outturn (+30%)	£32,036

* based on 1400 households taking out a regular £40 annual subscription and 5% choosing to pay £6 per hour for an ad-hoc session. It does not include discounted subscriptions or coaching packages

6.6 Fees and Charges

- 6.6.1 The scheme will offer residents two simple payment options, both of which provide good value for money, when compared with the cost of other sporting activities in the borough.
- 6.6.2 It's proposed that the park tennis subscription will cost each household (of up to five people) £40 per annum which means all occupants living at the same address can use the same subscription. £40 is the average across Surrey with surrounding boroughs charging similar amounts.
- 6.6.3 The benefit to the subscriber is that once the payment has been made, all subsequent court bookings are 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.
- 6.6.4 A play and pay option will also be available to residents, likely a preferable option for those that wish to play on an occasional basis. Pay and Play courts will be bookable 3 days in advance and sold at a standard fee of £6 per court per hour (£1.50 per person for a group of 4)
- 6.6.5 The modest subscription charge reflects that the tennis courts are in public space and reasons for implementing these charges is primarily encourage recreational players to the sport and providing a sustainable operating model to ensure the courts are well-maintained. Our customers are simply paying for court access unlike a tennis club where members have access to more facilities such as a club house, toilets, and showers.
- 6.6.6 The only additional cost subscribers and ad-hoc users will be expected to pay is for booking a floodlit court at Court Recreation Ground. The online booking system (Clubspark) will be pre-programmed to automatically apply an additional charge of £6.00 per hour charge to booking made on the floodlit courts during the winter months after dusk. This additional income will be used to offset electricity costs.

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6.6.7 It is expected that the proposed fees will be frozen for the first three years to allow the scheme to establish. However, it is recommended that annual review by this committee should take place to monitor uptake and review charges. Should an increase be applied, this should be aligned to the LTA recommendations, and should be benchmarked with surrounding local authorities.

6.6.8 Income will be coded to a separate budget code set up specifically to fund ongoing costs and be reinvested back into the tennis provision. Expenditure budgets will be set for the costs related to this scheme, including staffing, maintenance, electricity and LTA subscription payments.

6.7 Tennis Coaches

6.7.1 To 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 a proposed set of charges have been outlined in appendix one.

6.7.2 To ensure consistency with regular subscribers and ad-hoc bookings, tennis coaches will be expected to pay an additional rate on top of their annual subscription for the use of floodlit courts.

6.7.3 The LTA will assist with the recruitment of professional coaches to ensure that all coaches meet stringent criteria with regards to quality, qualifications, safeguarding, first aid and insurance.

6.7.4 Coaching places will be limited to ensure court availability for regular subscribers. If necessary, Coaches may need to apply and be appointed through a formal competitive procurement process and will be required to hold and maintain LTA accreditation for the duration of the subscription period.

6.7.5 Tennis coaches are NOT allowed to use a household subscription or book ad-hoc 'pay to play' sessions for coaching purposes.

6.7.6 All coaching packages contain a clause which commits the coach to providing a one-hour free community coaching session each week.

6.7.7 Offering coaches, a reduced rate on a block booking basis generates additional income for the Council and helps to encourage and improve engagement in the sport.

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6.8 **Section 151 Officer's comments:** The financial implications are contained within the body of the report.

7 Legal Implications

7.1 At this stage a pro-forma has been signed to register interest and to allow funding to be set aside ready for a formal bid, however at this stage of the process there are no legal implications to consider as the council is not committed to accepting any funds awarded.

7.2 If the application is successful, legal assistance will be required to assess the terms and conditions of the LTA funding agreement and provide the advice necessary to proceed.

7.3 Legal advice will also be required at a later stage in the process to help draw up terms and conditions for the annual household subscription and coaching packages.

7.4 **Legal Officer's comments:** None for the purpose of this report

8 Policies, Plans & Partnerships

8.1 **Council's Key Priorities:** The following Key Priorities are engaged:

- Safe & Well
- Opportunity & Prosperity
- Smart & Connected
- Effective Council

8.2 **Service Plans:** The matter is not included within the current Service Delivery Plan.

8.3 **Climate & Environmental Impact of recommendations:**

None for the purpose of this report

8.4 **Sustainability Policy & Community Safety Implications:**

8.5 A key benefit of this proposal is that it secures the financial and operational sustainability of the council's park tennis courts and to that end is compatible with in-house retention.

8.6 **Partnerships:**

This project is partnership between the Council and the LTA.

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9 Background papers

9.1 The documents referred to in compiling this report are as follows:

Previous reports:

- Report to Community & Wellbeing Committee on 17th March 2022

<http://th-modgov-01/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=23152&ISATT=1#search=%22tennis%22>

Other papers:

- None