

Bowls in Leeds: Consultation

ABOUT THIS CONSULTATION

Crown green bowls is a popular sport in Leeds, with over 4,000 club members using over 100 greens. It is a distinctive part of our cultural and sporting scene, and is popular with many older people who do not take part in other active sports. Leeds City Council is the major provider, with 71 greens at 50 sites throughout the city. From surveys conducted in 2001 and 2010, there are signs that the sport is in decline with memberships falling by a quarter from 2001 to 2010.

This consultation concerns outdoor bowling facilities that are managed by the council's Parks and Countryside service. The organisation of the council's greens has not been overhauled for many years, and indeed is still operating under the terms of a lease from 1985. The provision of outdoor bowls is heavily subsidised by the council, nearly quarter of a million pounds each year, and furthermore the council is under acute financial pressure and needs to economise where possible.

Savings are needed and a target of £150k was identified in the recent report that went to the council's executive board. However, the council believes that it will be possible to empower bowls club members to improve the quality of provision for bowls and to help reverse the long term decline of the sport at the same time as reducing the level of public subsidy. This will only be possible with a strategic approach to the sport. It has provisionally identified the following approach to achieving these aims:

- Eliminate wasteful expenditure, by removing surplus greens at multi-green sites to retain only the greens which are well used.
- Withdraw from horticultural maintenance on all other greens, and instead provide a grant to viable bowls clubs to enable them to manage their own facilities.
- Formalise this arrangement by entering into individual agreements between the council and each club.
- Work with the governing body, associations and clubs to promote the sport and attract new members, and to improve the organisation of the sport.
- If a club feels that they are not able to sustain their own green then encourage them to merge with other clubs and share facilities.
- Only consider closure of a site with active bowls members as a last resort.

These proposals are based on evidence that is presented in this document. But there may be other options, and the detail also needs to be worked out. So before taking decisions, the council wants to open a discussion with clubs, associations and individual bowlers to ensure that its plans are shaped to produce a strong and sustainable future for the health of the sport in Leeds.

If you want to help shape the future of the sport locally, please read this document and then let us have your views. You can feed your views back to us in the following ways:

- write to us at **Outdoor Bowls Review, Parks and Countryside, Farnley Hall, Hall Lane, Leeds LS12 5HA.**
- e-mail us at parks@leeds.gov.uk
- Provide feedback via <https://consult.leeds.gov.uk/>.
- discuss your views with your club or association secretary.

TIMESCALE

The consultation period will close on **31st July 2013**. Following this, detailed proposals will be formulated and brought to the council's elected Executive Board for final decisions to be taken.

WHAT DO WE WANT THE OUTDOOR BOWLS REVIEW TO ACHIEVE?

The aim of the review is to agree a way forward for bowls in Leeds which:

- **provides the right number of greens in the right locations**
- **provides good quality and accessible facilities – greens and pavilions**
- **supports thriving clubs and leagues**
- **retains existing and attracts new users**
- **puts the council's provision onto a sustainable financial footing**
- **overhauls the organisation of the council's sites**

THE CURRENT PICTURE

Number of greens

Leeds City Council provides 71 greens spread across 49 sites.

How does Leeds compare with other local authorities? The following table compares Leeds with the large 'core' cities in England:

Core City	Number of Greens	Population	Population per green
Leeds	71	787,700	11,094
Sheffield	36	547,000	15,194
Manchester	33	483,800	14,661
Newcastle	22	284,300	12,923
Liverpool	19	442,300	23,279
Bristol	17	433,100	25,476
Birmingham	16	1,028,700	64,294
Nottingham	12	300,800	25,067

It is evident that Leeds City Council has significantly more greens and a lower green to population ratio than any other core city.

Location of greens.

As already indicated, there are 71 greens spread across 50 sites in the city. There are currently 34 single green sites, 11 double green sites, and 5 treble green sites. There are considerably more sites located in the outer areas of the city with 32 sites, in comparison to 18 in the inner areas. A location plan is attached at the end of this document.

Access and security

Almost all council greens are now fenced, to prevent vandalism. This makes access by non members extremely difficult. Even bowling club members have problems, with 45% commenting that they occasionally had problems accessing their home green.

Users

There are currently 2,830 bowling club members using council facilities. Data from studies since 2001 indicate that demand is falling, with a 27% decline in membership. Users are not typical of the whole population of Leeds, as follows:

Description	Bowlers	Leeds as a whole ¹
Aged 16 and under	3%	21%
From ethnic minorities	0.5%	16%
Consider themselves disabled	3%	5.3%
Male	63%	48%
Female	37%	52%

There is significant under representation from people aged 16 and under, ethnic minorities, and female participants.

From consultation with private clubs, we know that the average number of members is 62.

Management

The current management arrangements have not been overhauled for many years, and the original licence was formed between the Council and the Leeds and District bowls associations for a 3 year period between 1985 and 1988. Under this arrangement, the licensees have the responsibility to only utilise the premises for the playing of bowls and to ensure public access at reasonable times. With regard to maintenance responsibilities, the licensees have a duty to maintain the interior of the pavilions in good condition, and keep the whole premises clean and tidy. Furthermore, the licensees are prohibited from sub-letting the land.

Bowling club members currently pay their membership fees to the club that they bowl at. These membership fees are determined by the clubs themselves and fluctuate across the city. Each affiliated club then pays an annual fee to the association, which is prescribed by the association. In turn, the associations pay an annual fee to the Council for use of the facilities by affiliated clubs. The last payment of £9,937 was received was in 2012 from three associations: Airedale and Wharfedale Bowling Association, Garforth Bowls Association and Leeds and District Crown Green Bowls Association.

Finance

The council incurs direct grounds maintenance revenue costs of £225k each year and subsidises utility costs of pavilions by approximately £30k. This does not include the capital costs associated with acquiring plant and machinery. When the income is set against this cost, there is a net average subsidy per bowler each year of **£86**.

¹ Based on statistics from the 2001 census.

ISSUES AND PROPOSALS

From the 2010 data, the average number of bowlers per green on council sites is 40. However, this varies widely - some single green sites in Leeds accommodate up to 95 members, whilst other sites have around 20. The National Governing Body (the BCGBA – British Crown Green Bowls Association) has indicated that a sustainable membership level is about 60 members per green.

As indicated above there are 16 sites identified with more than 1 green, representing a total of 37 greens. These are set out in the following table along with membership numbers identified in 2010:

Site	Club Name	Existing Greens	Number of Members
Armley Park	Armley	2	48
BarleyHill Park	Garforth Rec	2	80
Burley Park	Burley Park / Negas	3	42
Cranmore Recreation Ground	Cranmore	2	55
Cross Flatts Park	Cross Flatts	2	37
East End Park	East End	2	26
Fearnville Sports Centre	Fearnville	2	54
Harehills Park	Harehills	3	43
Holbeck Moor	Holbeck Moor / Holbeck WMC	3	88
Middleton Park	Middleton Park	2	51
New Wortley Rec	New Wortley	2	34
Potternewton Park	Potternewton Park	3	48
Springhead Park	Rothwell Park	2	80
Western Flatts Cliff Park	Western Flatts Cliff Park	2	58
Woodhouse Moor	Woodhouse Moor Park	3	20
Woodlesford Park	Woodlesford Park	2	42
		37	

There are examples where a single green can support 95 members. It is estimated that the direct annual horticultural maintenance cost associated with maintaining these 21 surplus greens is £66k. The first proposal is therefore as follows:

Proposal 1: eliminate duplication of greens at multiple green sites

At present, each bowling club relies entirely on the Council to provide all the maintenance requirements of each facility. However, as already indicated, the major issue contributing to the subsidy of bowling greens is the horticultural maintenance cost, due to the intense management requirements. In many instances there are a healthy number of bowling club members who could be empowered to take a more active role in managing and maintained each bowling green site. This would however be a difficult undertaking as there are plant and material costs that are incurred in addition to the time taken to cut the greens and carry out other maintenance duties. If a grant was made available however to each club then this would empower the club to take on management of each facility themselves. It is estimated that a grant of £1.9k per site could be allocated. Based on data available, the council believes that there are 27 clubs that could readily enter into an

agreement to manage and maintain their facility on this basis as set out in the following table:

Site Name	Club Name	Existing Number of Greens	2010 Membership
Holt Park	Holt Park	1	95
Manston Park	Manston Park	1	93
Wharfemeadows	Wharfemeadows Park, Otley	1	91
Holbeck Moor	Holbeck Moor / Holbeck WMC	3	88
Roundhay Park	Roundhay Park	1	85
Kippax Common (Green Lane)	Valley Ridge	1	80
Tarnfield Park, Yeadon	Tarnfield	1	80
BarleyHill Park	Garforth Rec	2	80
Springhead Park	Rothwell Park	2	80
East Ardsley Recreation Ground	East Ardsley	1	76
Horsforth Hall Park	Horsforth Hall	1	75
Pudsey Park	Pudsey Park	1	75
Micklefield Park	Micklefield	1	74
Kirk Lane Park	Yeadon	1	67
Meanwood Park	Meanwood Park	1	66
Aberford Bowling Green	Aberford	1	64
Chapel Allerton Park	Chapel Allerton	1	63
Drighlington Park	Drighlington	1	62
Gildersome Park	Gildersome	1	62
Greenbottom Park, Guiseley	Greenbottom	1	62
Scatcherd Park	Scatcherd Park	1	60
Woodside rec	Horsforth Woodside	1	60
Western Flatts Cliff Park	Western Flatts Cliff Park	2	58
Bramley Park	Bramley Park /Bramley Band	1	56
Calverley Park (Victoria Park)	Calverley	1	55
Cranmore Recreation Ground	Cranmore	2	55
Fearnville Sports Centre	Fearnville	2	54
Middleton Park	Middleton Park	2	51
		36	1967

As set out in proposal 1 the intention would be to remove greens to leave 1 green at each site. This would mean additional landscaping and the realignment of the fence line. If the club felt able, they could however agree to take on responsibility for more than green at each site. However, the grant would only be made available for 1 green at each site.

Given that the circumstances in each club are different, each agreement is likely to be specific. However, it would be expected that clubs are correctly constituted, with trustees and an independent bank account in order to ensure funding support is being used for approved purposes. Furthermore, the agreement would expect that clubs continue to offer access to facilities to everyone in the community.

Proposal 2 and 3 are therefore as follows:

Proposal 2: The council withdraws maintenance from each bowling green site and provides a grant of £1.9k per single green each year for the club to administer

Proposal 3: The council enters into individual agreements with each club.

The council is also aware that there are many clubs with fewer members that would struggle with such an approach. Based on data from 2010, the following table outlines those clubs with 50 or fewer members:

Site Name	Club Name	Existing Number of Greens	2010 Membership
Grove Hill Park, Otley	Grove Hill	1	50
Westroyd Park	Westroyd Park	1	50
Armley Park	Armley	2	48
Potternewton Park	Potternewton Park	3	48
Whinmoor Park	Whinmoor Park Coal Road	1	46
New Farnley Park	New Farnley Park	1	45
Stanningley Park	Stanningley Park	1	44
Harehills Park	Harehills	3	43
Kippax Bowling Green / Brigshaw Lane Recreation Ground	Kippax	1	42
Halton Dene - Primrose Valley	Chapel Street	1	42
Hunslet Moor	Hunslet Moor	1	42
Woodlesford Park	Woodlesford Park	2	42
Burley Park	Burley Park / Negas	3	42
Churwell Park	Churwell	1	37
Cross Flatts Park	Cross Flatts	2	37
Tyersal Park	Tyersal Park	1	35
Grove Road Recreation Ground	Grove Road	1	34
New Wortley Rec	New Wortley	2	34
Allerton Bywater Sport Ground	Allerton Bywater	1	30
Acre Close Bowling Green	Middleton Community	1	26
East End Park	East End	2	26
Woodhouse Moor	Woodhouse Moor Park	3	20
		35	863

For these clubs, it may be difficult to sustain their greens and facilities even with the proposed grant. It may be possible however to consider merging with another nearby club, and thus be in a position to develop the club on a sustainable basis. The council will do everything it can to support clubs in seeking to merge facilities in this way. As already indicated, each club is unique and there may be clubs with relatively few members who wish to enter into an agreement. The council will support this. Equally, there may be clubs with more than 50 members who, for whatever reason do not feel they could enter into such an agreement. Proposal 4 and 5 are therefore as follows:

Proposal 4: The council will work with clubs that do not feel able to enter into an agreement to merge with other clubs.

Proposal 5: The council will consider closure of a green with active members as a last resort.

If these proposals are implemented in full, then the council believes it can reduce the level of subsidy by around £150k.

OUTDOOR BOWLS PROVISION - WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Thank you for reading this document. Now please let us know what you think about the future of outdoor bowls in Leeds. We have set out above our current thoughts based on the information we have: but we believe that local people and organisations have a lot to add to our understanding of the issues and the way forward.

We are interested in your views in general, but the following questions may help:

- 1. The current picture** – is there anything important missing from the description starting on page 3 (describing the number, location and condition of greens and pavilions, the current users, and the current management and finance arrangements)? Is it an accurate picture? We recognise that the data is over 2 years old – can you provide us with the latest data on membership?
- 2. Issues and proposals** – what do you think the strengths and weaknesses of the proposals are? Do you have ideas that would deliver the target savings?

The closing date for consultation is **31st May 2013**. You can respond in the following ways:

- write to us at **Outdoor Bowls Review, Farnley Hall, Hall Lane, Leeds LS12 5HA.**
- e-mail us at parks@leeds.gov.uk
- Provide feedback via <https://consult.leeds.gov.uk/>.
- You can also discuss your views with your club or association secretary.