

Consultation on the Future of Middleton Park Golf Course

ABOUT THIS CONSULTATION

We would like to hear your views even though you may not play golf or be familiar with Middleton Park Golf course as the impact of this consultation is considering alternative land use for the golf course.

The Council continues to face serious budget pressures and has experienced cash funding cuts of £94m from central government between 2010/11 and 2013/14 with a further £81m required by 2015/16. This is a reduction of £175m with further reductions expected in 2016/17 and 2017/18, all in addition to internal budget pressures that the council faces. This has also impacted on the Parks and Countryside service, with a £2.7 million budget reduction between 2010/11 and 2014/15. This equates to a reduction of 23% and further reductions are expected to be required in 2015/16 and 2016/17. In meeting these challenging budget targets there are a number of service areas under review, including golf and given the availability of private golf facilities in the city, the Council is considering reducing the number of operating sites from 4 to 2, ensuring that the city retains a municipal golf provision.

It is recognised that participating in golf has many benefits – to health and wellbeing, social interaction, education and learning as well as fostering sporting talent, and golf courses like Middleton provide such benefits. Leeds City Council provides 4 golf sites, namely Gotts Park Golf Course in Armley, Middleton Park Golf Course, Roundhay Park Golf Course and Temple Newsam Golf Course.

During the last century municipal golf enabled access to the sport for the whole community, offering 'pay and play' opportunities at a reasonable price and served as an important way to introduce people to golf. Conversely, private golf clubs were often 'member only' facilities with waiting lists and excessive annual membership fees. Such private courses often did not offer 'pay and play' and if so this option was at restricted times, generally commanded high green fees or only available when accompanying an existing member. However, there are now 24 private golf sites in the Leeds area some of which now offer competitive membership rates with opportunities open to everyone, along with pay and play green fees similar to those charged by the council (1 provider offers 18 holes for a fee of £5).

A report to the Council's executive board in December 2012 contained a proposal to close Middleton Park and Gotts Park golf courses and convert nearly 80 hectares to semi-natural parkland which would allow access to a greater number of visitors. This was due to the fact that numbers using the courses continued to decline and courses were making a cumulative loss of around £190k each year. A decision was deferred for a further year to examine alternatives to secure the sustainable future of both golf courses. No decision to close the golf course has been made at this point.

This consultation specifically refers to Middleton Park golf course and provides information on what has happened since January 2013. A similar document has been produced for Gotts Park golf course which can be obtained using the contact details below.

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

- Fill in the form starting on page 8 and send it to **Middleton Park Golf Course Review, Parks and Countryside, Farnley Hall, Hall Lane, Leeds LS12 5HA.**
- Fill in the form starting on page 8 and e-mail us at parks.golf@leeds.gov.uk
- Provide feedback via <https://consult.leeds.gov.uk/>.

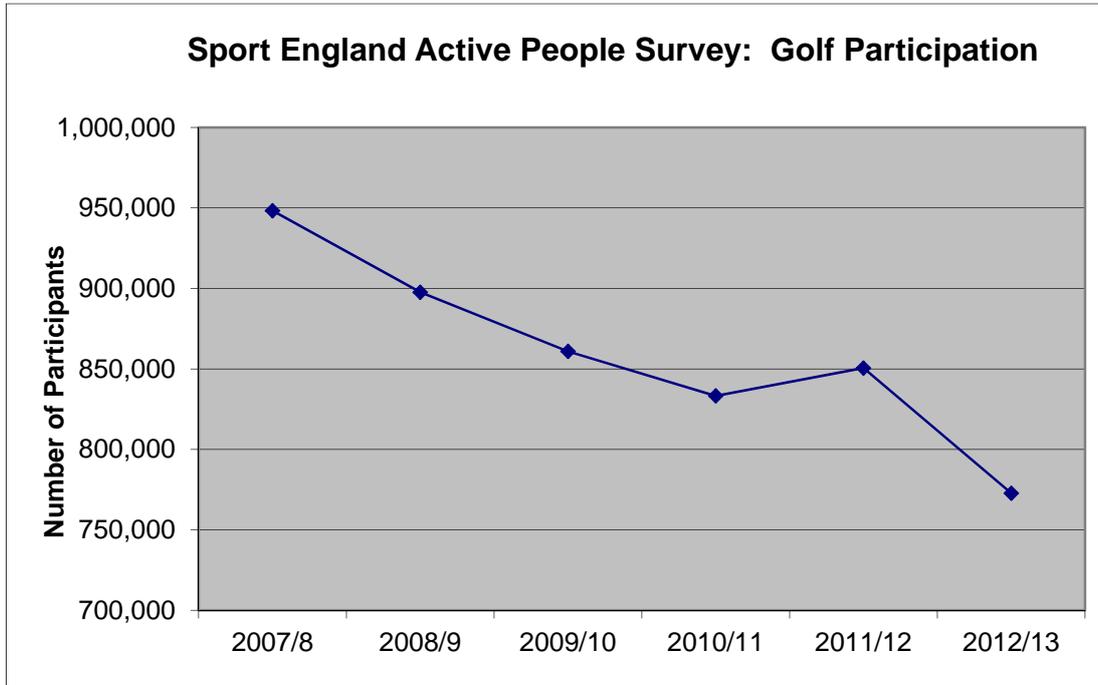
TIMESCALE

The consultation period will close on **Friday 4th July 2014.** Following this, detailed proposals will be formulated and brought to the council's elected Executive Board for final decisions to be taken.

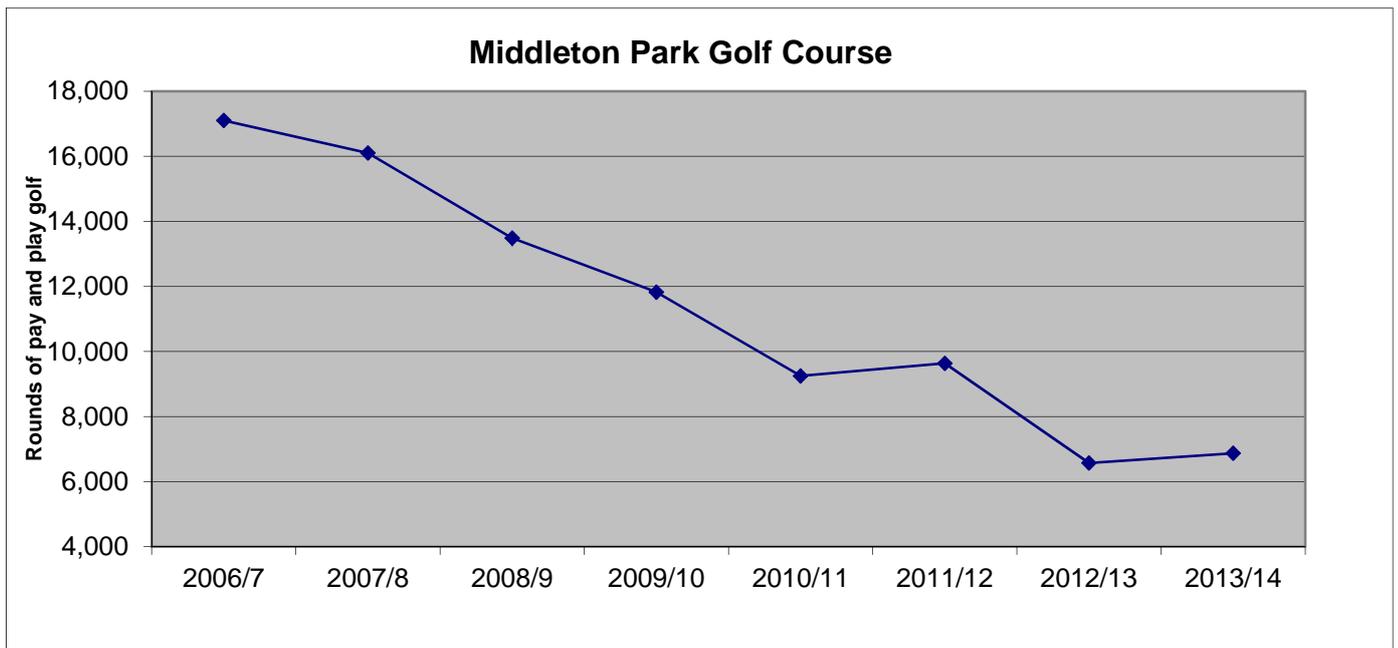
THE CURRENT PICTURE

Participation

There is evidence of a decline in adult golf participation at a national level. The Sport England active people survey conducted over a number of years demonstrates that adult participation has declined from 948,300 in 2007/8 to 772,800 in 2012/13 – a reduction of nearly 19%, as shown in the following graph:

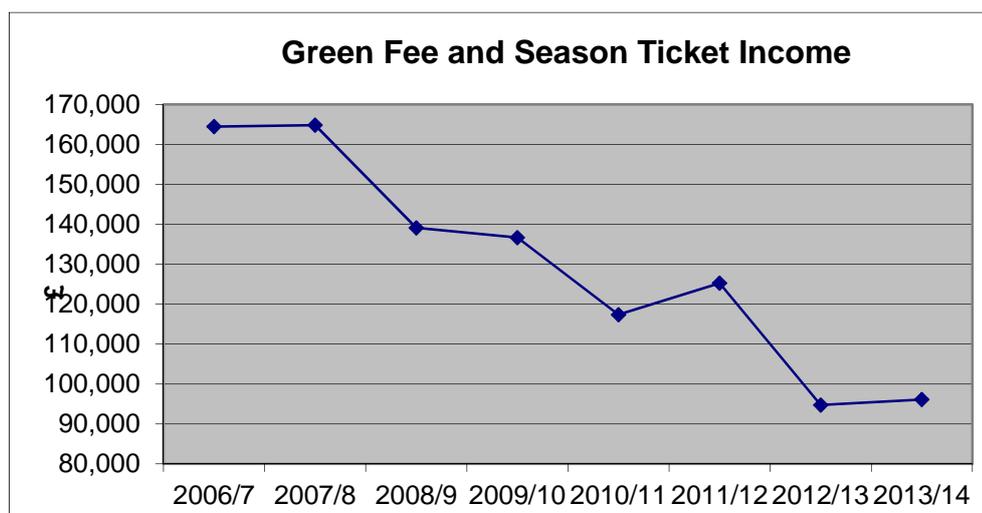


At Middleton, there is a similar pattern, and the following graph illustrates the number of pay and play rounds played on a year by year basis.



There has been a considerable decline in pay and play rounds of golf played from 17,101 in 2006/7 to 6,873 in 2013/14 – a reduction of nearly 60%.

The overall income from green fees and season tickets is a pattern of decline as illustrated in the following graph:



The golf course is also supported by 66 members of Middleton Park Municipal Golf Club founded in 1933. Membership is open to all and supports users of the Middleton Golf Course, and the club hold regular competitions to allow members to build their handicap.

Financial Position

The following table shows the overall financial position for Middleton Park Golf Course in 2011/12 and 2012/13.

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
	£	£	£
Income			
Golf pay and play / season tickets	-125,266	-95,163	-96,105
Café and retail	-30,921	-19,221	-21,435
Other income	-98	-955	-140
Total	-156,285	-115,339	-117,680
Expenditure			
Direct management and supervision	18,122	18,122	18,173
Staffing at point of sale	45,669	44,715	43,442
Premises costs	11,548	11,535	7,102
Supplies and services	32,014	17,795	19,645
Transport apportionment	768	792	752
Total	108,121	92,959	89,114
Net Position	-48,165	-22,380	-28,567
Estimated Horticultural Maintenance			
Staff assigned to golf courses	102,129	81,986	81,986
Horticultural machinery	31,736	31,736	31,736
Fuel	8,137	8,137	8,137
Irrigation	4,000	4,000	4,000
Materials and disease control	4,856	4,856	4,856
General expenses	592	592	592
Total	151,450	131,307	131,307
Net Operating Loss	£103,286	£108,927	£102,741

As indicated, the cost of horticultural maintenance is estimated based on an assessment of resources deployed. One of the green keeping staff assigned to the golf course left and this is reflected in the reduced cost of horticultural maintenance from 2012/13. It should be noted that no account of inflation has been made year on year so cost of materials and machinery may actually be higher than those indicated.

It is acknowledged that the 2012 season was particularly difficult due to the weather over the summer and this is reflected in the level of income, which actually fell by 26% compared to 2011/12. The summer in 2013 has seen considerably better weather with a slight increase in the level of 'pay and play' income, however, income in 2013/14 has not recovered in comparison to the level in 2011/12.

ACTION TAKEN DURING 2013

A task group was formed in January 2013 who have met monthly with representatives from Middleton Park Municipal Golf Club, Parks and Countryside, the Deputy Executive Board Member for Environmental Services and Parks, friends of Middleton Park, representatives from Wades Trust and local ward members. The purpose of this group was to establish if a business case could be made to ensure the sustainable municipal golf provision at Middleton. During initial discussions, 4 options were considered as follows:

- Option 1: That Middleton Park Municipal Golf Club undertake the running of the golf course
- Option 2: To seek a third party provider to run the golf course
- Option 3: Explore potential partnership with a third party golf provider
- Option 4: Reduce cost of provision and focus on promoting municipal golf at Middleton

Option 1.

During discussions held with the club, they have made it clear that they would not be in a position to take over the management of the course. This option has therefore not been considered further.

Option 2.

With regard to a third party provider running the course, two organisations were identified and approached, one of which was a commercial provider and the other a charity based organisation. The commercial provider felt that in the current economic climate and the intense competition in particular of the golf market in Leeds, they felt that a business case could not be made for them to run the course on a profitable basis. With regard to the charity based organisation, on examination of the financial position they felt that the deficit was too great for them to take on such a risk.

Option 3.

The same commercial provider was approached to consider a partnership approach, but did not consider this appropriate or a viable option given the level of deficit and competitive nature of the golf market in Leeds in the context of an overall decline.

Option 4.

Some ideas were considered to reduce cost, but the primary focus was on seeking to develop ideas to promote the golf offer.

Ideas for reducing costs included the following:

- **Adopt seasonal working patterns.** This has been introduced for Parks and Countryside operations in April 2014 following consultation with staff and trade unions, and is also applicable to the maintenance of golf courses with an estimated saving of less than £1k each year at Middleton.
- **Sharing equipment across all municipal courses.** This was not considered a cost viable as it would require large plant and equipment being transported across the city and reduce the level of availability of machinery when most required.
- **Reduce staffing levels.** One of the green keeping staff retired early in 2013, and was not replaced thus reducing the overall net deficit.
- **Sponsorship.** Whilst there may be opportunity for small levels of sponsorship for scorecards or tee signage, it has not been possible to secure a sponsor willing to provide a significant level of funding.

A number of ideas to improve the promotion of the golf offer were considered as follows:

- Introduction of a catering offer using facilities already available in the existing building
- Advertising and promotion to encourage more people to participate

With regard to the introduction of a catering offer, the Council invited expressions of interest from potential catering providers using the existing facility, however whilst there was some interest, no tender proposals were submitted. The working group decided to trial the operation of a small catering facility for a 4 month period to supplement golfing promotional activity. After 2 months it became evident that this venture was not economically sustainable with an operating loss of £201 and therefore the facility was withdrawn.

With regard to advertising and promotion, a number of activities have taken place.

- 2,000 A5 leaflets were distributed within the local community to coincide with key dates in the international golfing calendar. These leaflets were also distributed electronically via email and contacts and social media. From this activity, 196 rounds were played in July, of which 65 people had seen the promotion and 18 new golfers who had not played at Middleton before were identified.
- In addition to the above leaflet distribution, a number of promotions were aimed at people who have never played golf before. However, these did not prove successful as only a limited number of participants came forward as a result.

WHAT WOULD HAPPEN TO THE LAND OCCUPIED BY THE GOLF COURSE IF IT CLOSED?

The Council's Executive Board would take a decision to close the golf course, and agree in principle that the land is developed into semi-natural parkland. The exact layout would be subject to detailed consultation with local residents, the Friends of Middleton Park and other community groups, schools, Wades charity and ward members.

In order to illustrate what the landscape could look like, the Council has prepared a draft outline plan attached to this document. The draft proposal is to create Leeds' first park arboretum with a 42 hectares site containing interesting and diverse tree species along with educational and interpretation information. This would become a city destination in its own right with the potential to become a regional attraction enjoyed by many more visitors to these new facilities, which would now be free and open to the public as part of the wider Middleton Park estate. Furthermore, developing the site in this way would complement the existing estate attractions and infrastructure recently improved as part of a £2 million heritage lottery project. Parts of the golf course would also be converted to natural habitat for example wetland, natural grassland and wild flower areas. Woodland and conservation grants would be used for planting and habitat improvement to encourage biodiversity.

Savings of £76k would be made by withdrawing formal maintenance as a golf course from April 2015 to March 2016. These savings would be used to establish the park, and as match funding for grants as appropriate. It is anticipated work would commence during the autumn of 2014 with the park established by March 2015. Annual maintenance costs are estimated to be £20k per annum, for which there would be a full-time gardener based at the site.

Should the Council's Executive Board decide to close the course, the building would continue to be used as a Parks and Countryside operational depot.

CONCLUSION

There has been a decline of nearly 60% of pay and play rounds played at Middleton Park Golf Course since 2006. Income took a severe dip in 2012/13 following poor weather experienced over the summer; however income levels have not recovered in 2013/14.

A number of alternative options were explored by a task group with a view to establishing a long term business model to secure the future of the golf course. Despite efforts to reduce the cost base and a range of promotional golfing offers, it has not been possible to identify a sustainable basis to continue golf provision without a subsidy from the Council.

Should a decision be made to close the golf course, the Council would create a park arboretum and semi-natural parkland managed as part of the Middleton Park estate fully accessible by the public. This would become a city destination in its own right with the potential to become a regional attraction enjoyed by many more visitors to these new facilities, which would now be free and open to the public as part of the wider Middleton Park estate. Annual maintenance costs are estimated to be £20k per annum, and based on the 2012/13 financial position; an overall annual saving of £76k is anticipated assuming the building is retained as the estate depot accommodation.

MIDDLETON PARK GOLF COURSE - WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Thank you for reading this document. Now please let us know what you think about the future of Middleton Park Golf Course in Leeds by filling in and returning the following form.

Please tick

1. Please indicate where you live by stating your postcode:

2. Do you currently play golf?

Yes No

3. The Council cannot afford to continue to run Middleton Golf Course at a loss of £103,000 each year. However, if you think that the Council should continue to subsidise the course please state your reason below:

4. Do you support the idea that the Council establish a park arboretum with semi-natural parkland accessible to the public which would become part of the managed estate of Middleton Park, saving around £76,000 each year?

Yes No

5. If you have any comments on the initial draft landscape proposals attached then please state them in the box below:

6. Are there any other options that you think have not been considered in this consultation document?

Yes No

If you have answered 'Yes' to question 6, please indicate which further option should be considered in the box below:

The closing date for consultation is **Friday 4th July 2014**. You can respond in the following ways:

- Print off this page and send it to **Middleton Park Golf Course Review, Farnley Hall, Hall Lane, Leeds LS12 5HA**.
- e-mail the filled in document to parks.golf@leeds.gov.uk
- Provide feedback via <https://consult.leeds.gov.uk/>.



Examples of Trees for Arboretum



As the woodlands, wildflower meadows and wetlands mature native species to Great Britain can thrive.



Existing tree belts to be enhanced with planting of more native trees and wildflowers which will create suitable habitats for local wildlife.

Mown paths cut through existing grass areas and woodland clearings provide a clear link through the park for visitors. Areas where water naturally collects can be developed into wetland habitats.



Picnic areas will be placed in a variety of settings within the Park.



Information Boards will be incorporated within the design of the Park



Middleton Park Extension & Arboretum

Key		Key		Key	
	Proposed Mown Grass clearing		Proposed individual Tree Specimens		Proposed Arboretum
	Proposed Mown Walkway through Grass (5 m width)		Proposed infill Woodland Planting		Existing Trees
	Proposed Mown Walkway through Grass (2m width)		Major Focal Points		Proposed Wetland Habitat
	Proposed Long Grass / Wildflower Meadow to be cut twice yearly (5m - 15m in width)		Proposed Picnic Area		Existing Woodland / Vegetation

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Revision 1
09.10.13
Amended Photographs, hatch, title and key

Environment and Housing Parks & Countryside 7th Floor West Merrion House 110 Merrion Centre Leeds LS2 8DT			
Project: Middleton Park Golf Course			
Title: Site Plan - Draft Proposals			
Drawn: CW/CAJ	Scale: 1:2000@A1	Date: 09/10/13	Checked: AJ
Drawing Number: LD/416/03	Revision: 1		