

## **Consultation on the Future of Gotts Park Golf Course**

### **ABOUT THIS CONSULTATION**

We would like to hear your views even though you may not play golf or be familiar with Gotts 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 Gotts 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 Gotts Park golf course and provides information on what has happened since January 2013. A similar document has been produced for Middleton Park golf course which can be obtained using the contact details below.



If you want to help shape the future of Gotts 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 9 and send it to **Gotts Park Golf Course Review, Parks and Countryside, Farnley Hall, Hall Lane, Leeds LS12 5HA.**
- Fill in the form starting on page 9 and e-mail us at [parks.golf@leeds.gov.uk](mailto:parks.golf@leeds.gov.uk)
- Provide feedback via <https://consult.leeds.gov.uk/>.

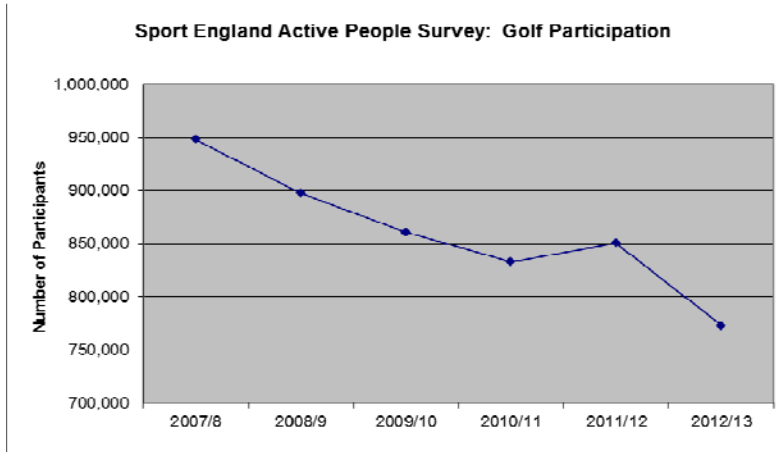
## **TIMESCALE**

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

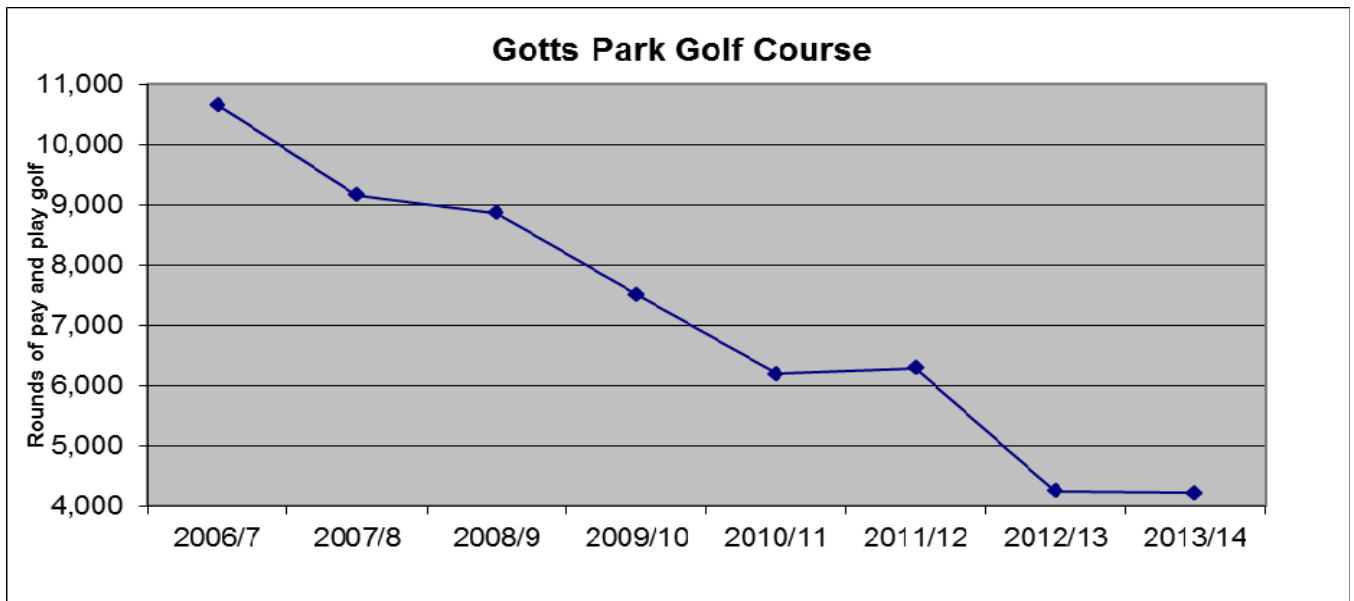
## THE CURRENT PICTURE

### 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:

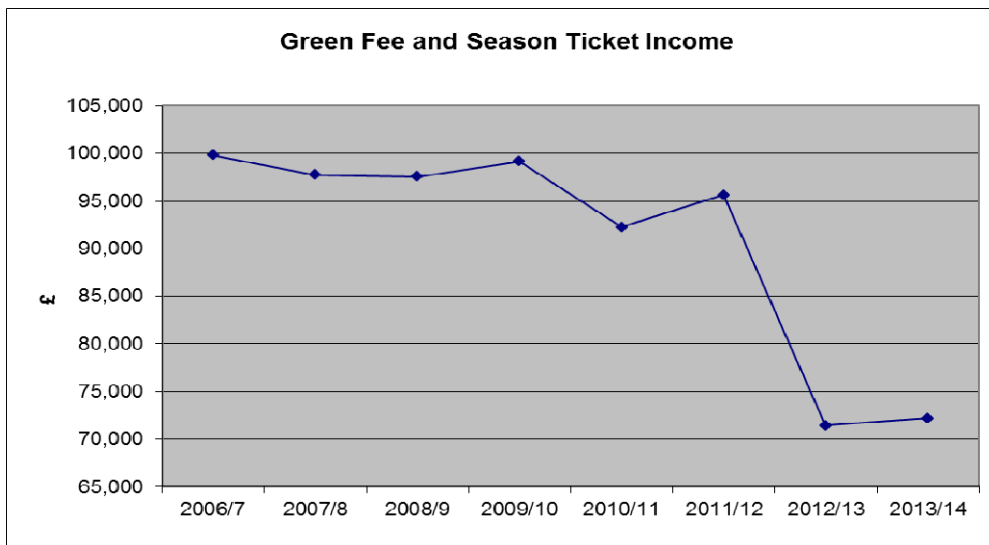


At Gotts, there is a similar pattern, and the following graph illustrates the number of rounds played on a year by year basis.



There has been a considerable decline in pay and play rounds of golf played from 10,662 in 2006/7 to 4,213 in 2013/14 – a reduction of over 60%.

The overall income from green fees and season tickets, whilst remaining stable for some years has seen an overall decline since 2009/10 as illustrated in the following graph:



The golf course is also supported by 164 members of Gotts Park Golf Club.

### Financial Position

The following table shows the financial position for Gotts Park Golf Course between 2011/12 and 2013/14.

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
	£	£	£
<b><u>Income</u></b>			
Golf pay and play / season tickets	-95,618	-71,521	-72,214
Café and retail	-9,144	-5,254	-6,351
Other income	-121	-77	-125
<b>Total</b>	<b>-104,883</b>	<b>-76,852</b>	<b>-78,690</b>
<b><u>Expenditure</u></b>			
Direct management and supervision	18,122	18,122	18,173
Staffing at point of sale	33,779	33,645	38,958
Premises costs	13,455	13,551	15,513
Supplies and services	12,629	6,427	6,923
Transport apportionment	768	792	752
<b>Total</b>	<b>78,753</b>	<b>72,537</b>	<b>80,319</b>
<b>Net Position</b>	<b>-26,131</b>	<b>-4,315</b>	<b>1,629</b>
<b><u>Estimated Horticultural Maintenance</u></b>			
Staff assigned to golf courses	76,157	76,157	76,157
Horticultural machinery	23,968	23,968	23,968
Fuel	3,043	3,043	3,043
Irrigation	2,174	2,174	2,174
Materials and disease control	5,735	5,735	5,735
General expenses	1,423	1,423	1,423
<b>Total</b>	<b>112,499</b>	<b>112,499</b>	<b>112,499</b>
<b>Net Operating Loss</b>	<b>£86,369</b>	<b>£108,184</b>	<b>£114,128</b>

As indicated, the cost of horticultural maintenance is estimated based on an assessment of resources deployed. It should be further 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 'pay and play' income, which actually fell by 25% 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 regularly with representatives from Gotts Park Golf Club, Parks and Countryside, the Deputy Executive Board Member for Environmental Services, 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 Gotts. During initial discussions, 3 options were considered as follows:

- Option 1: That Gotts Park Golf Club undertake the running of the golf course
- Option 2: A third party provider to work in partnership with the club to run the golf course
- Option 3: Reduce cost of provision and focus on promoting municipal golf at Gotts

#### **Option 1.**

During discussions held with the club, they confirmed that they do not have the capacity to take on the management of the golf course but would consider this if the council made the decision to close the course.

#### **Option 2.**

With regard to a third party provider running the course, there may be a possibility that the club would work in partnership, but this would not include taking on any responsibility for Gotts mansion. The golf club have confirmed that they would only consider this as a last resort.

#### **Option 3.**

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 Gotts.

- **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.
- **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.

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, 136 rounds were played in July, of which 98 people had seen the promotion and 13 new golfers who had not played at Gotts before were identified.
- In addition to the above leaflet distribution, two large banners were erected - one at the corner of Armley Ridge Road, and the other along the Stanningley bypass. In addition, for the month of July, a billboard advertisement went on display at the main junction along the Stanningley bypass. A number of promotions were also 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, 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 the Benjamin Gott's Country Park that would be free and open to the public with 37 hectares of interesting and diverse habitats along with educational and interpretation information on the flora, fauna and history of the site. This would enable many more visitors to enjoy these new facilities from the local community as well as across the city. The site will make use of the outstanding vistas across the Kirkstall Valley with viewing and picnic areas complementing the adjacent Armley Park and giving access to the wider West Leeds Country Park. Habitats include for example woodland, natural grassland, wild flower areas and open mown areas for families to play games and explore. Woodland and conservation grants would be used for planting and habitat improvement to encourage biodiversity.

Savings of £94k 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.

Gotts Mansion is the home of Gotts Park Golf Club. It provides changing facilities, a bar and café, the club room, a kitchen, toilets and storage for the club. In addition there is a residential flat on the top floor that is used by the tenant from the Parks and Countryside

service. If the Council's Executive Board takes the decision to close the golf course, the future use of Gotts Mansion will need to be reviewed. Consideration will need to be given to what the building could be used for, taking account of the listed status and how the ongoing running costs of a building such as this will be met. In the interim, the mansion would retain a service tenant in the living quarters to ensure security of the building. A longer term aim is to work with Wades Trust (who own the building) to find an alternative use for the building, which would either be for residential purposes, office accommodation or commercial use.

## **CONCLUSION**

There has been a decline of over 60% of pay and play rounds played at Gotts Park Golf Course since 2006. The overall income from green fees and season tickets, whilst remaining stable for some years has seen an overall decline since 2009/10, with an overall deficit which increased in 2013/14 to £114k.

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 the Benjamin Gott's Country Park which would contain 37 hectares of interesting and diverse habitats along with educational and interpretation information on the flora, fauna and history of the site. Furthermore, this would enable outstanding vistas across the Kirkstall Valley enjoyed by many more visitors to these new facilities from the local community as well as across the city.

It is estimated that the annual cost of maintenance as semi natural parkland will be £20k each year, with an overall saving each year of £94k, however costs associated with retaining the mansion would need to be met until a suitable use is found. The mansion would retain a service tenant in the living quarters to ensure security of the building. A longer term aim is to work with Wades Trust to find an alternative use for the building, which would either be for residential purposes, office accommodation or commercial use.



**GOTTS 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 Gotts 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 Gotts Golf Course at a loss of £114,000 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 the Benjamin Gott's Country Park accessible to the public, saving around £94,000 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:

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

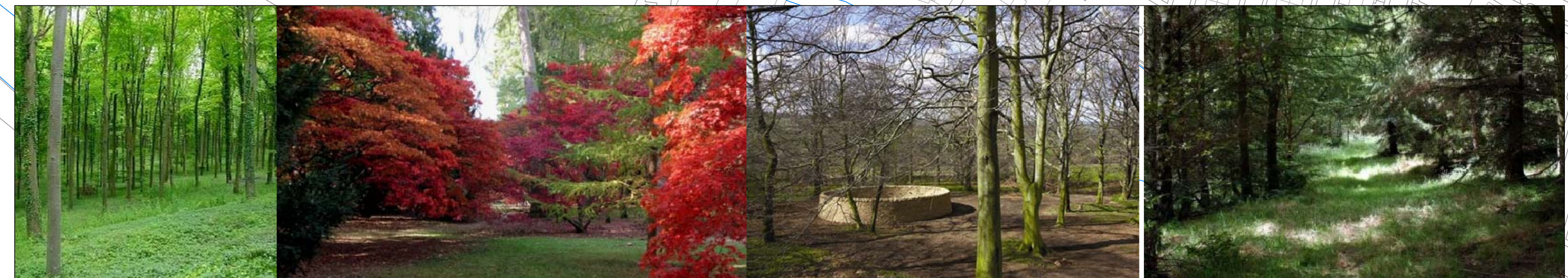
Yes

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 4<sup>th</sup> July 2014**. You can respond in the following ways:

- Print off relevant pages and send them to **Gotts Park Golf Course Review, Farnley Hall, Hall Lane, Leeds LS12 5HA**.
- e-mail the filled in document to [parks.golf@leeds.gov.uk](mailto:parks.golf@leeds.gov.uk)
- Provide feedback via <https://consult.leeds.gov.uk/>.



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.

Incorporated within the design of the Park will be Information Boards



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



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

**Key**

- Proposed Mown Grass clearing
- Proposed Mown Walkways through Grass (5 m width)
- Proposed Long Grass / Wildflower Meadow to be cut twice yearly (5m - 15m in width)
- Proposed individual Tree Specimens
- Proposed Infill Woodland Planting
- Proposed Picnic Areas
- Existing Trees
- Existing Woodland/ Vegetation
- Gotts Mansion Boundary
- Proposed Cycle Route at improved gradient

Revision 1  
09.10.13 Amended Photographs, hatch, title and key  
27.05.14 Improved gradient Cycle Route added



**Benjamin Gott's Country Park  
Draft Proposals**

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Parks & Countryside  
7th Floor West  
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LS2 8DT

Project Benjamin Gotts Country Park

Title Site Plan - Draft Proposals

Drawn CAJ	Scale 1:1250@A0	Date 01/10/13	Checked AJ
Drawing Number LD/422/02	Revision 2		