

Report of Recreational Development Manager

Report to Chief Parks and Countryside Officer

Date: 17th March 2021

Subject: Outdoor Bowls

Are specific electoral wards affected?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
If yes, name(s) of ward(s): Adel and Wharfedale, Ardsley and Robin Hood, Armley, Beeston and Holbeck, Bramley and Stanningley, Burmantofts and Richmond Hill, Calverley and Farsley, Chapel Allerton, Cross Gates and Whinmoor, Farnley and Wortley, Garforth and Swillington, Gipton and Harehills, Guiseley and Rawdon, Harewood, Horsforth, Kippax and Methley, Kirkstall, Middleton Park, Moortown, Morley North, Morley South, Otley and Yeadon, Pudsey, Rothwell, Roundhay, Temple Newsam.	
Has consultation been carried out?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Will the decision be open for call-in?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, access to information procedure rule number:	
Appendix number:	

Summary

1. Main issues

- A report to Executive Board in October 2020 identified a proposal for a 50% reduction in the number of public outdoor bowling greens managed and maintained by the council with a saving of £83k. Consultation was undertaken over a 4 week period ending on 14th December 2020 with 797 online and 302 paper responses (a total of 1,099), as well as 88 items of email feedback from councillors, MPs and their constituents.
- From the responses given, there is potential to review the current season ticket fee and explore some form of community asset transfer with clubs who might be willing and able to take responsibility for management and maintenance of outdoor bowls facilities.
- It is proposed that a season ticket fee increase to £40 is implemented along with exploring some form of community asset transfer. Once this exercise has been completed then an interim report will be considered to assess the potential financial impact before considering any further measures that might be necessary.

2. Best Council Plan implications (see the [latest version of the Best Council Plan](#))

- An Efficient, enterprising and healthy organisation – making the best use of our resources.
- Inclusive Growth - supporting the city's economic recovery from COVID-19 and building longer-term economic resilience.

3. Resource implications

- The subject matter of this report concerns the potential to achieve annual budget savings with respect to outdoor bowls provision.

Recommendations

The Chief Parks and Countryside Officer is recommended to approve the following:

- a) To increase the season ticket price to £40 from April 2021 with anticipated additional income of £12.5k in 2021/22.
- b) To explore the option of some form of community asset transfer to gauge interest from bowling clubs and evaluate the impact by autumn 2021.
- c) To note that the Recreation Development Manager is responsible for implementing these recommendations in the timescales stated.

1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1 This report summarises the recent consultation exercise undertaken in respect of outdoor bowls provision and considers future options in the light of these findings and the Council budget position.

2. Background information

- 2.1 A report on revenue budget saving proposals for 2021/22 to the October 2020 Executive Board meeting contained a proposal to 'stop maintaining 50% of bowling greens and allow asset transfers to clubs willing to take responsibility'. Information provided in the report highlighted that since the introduction of a season ticket fee in 2014 the number of paying members has reduced from 1,829 to 1,386 in 2019, a decline of over 24%. The season ticket fee is £31 per annum and this has not increased since 2016.
- 2.2 There are 62 outdoor bowling greens on 48 sites that are managed and maintained by the council's Parks and Countryside service. From analysis of bowling green data it is possible to conclude the following:
- There are 53 'summer' greens used over the main playing season with 5 sites that have 2 summer greens (although as indicated 1 site is used by 2 clubs).
 - There are 9 'winter' greens used for practice and some competitions over the autumn and winter period.
 - 26 out of the 33 wards in the city contain outdoor bowling green sites
 - 9 out of 10 community committees contain outdoor bowling green sites
 - 16 wards have more than one bowling green site accounting for 47 of the 62 greens across the city

3. Main issues

3.1 Summary of Consultation

- 3.1.1 The consultation period commenced on Monday 16th November 2020 and closed on Monday 14th December 2020. Information about the consultation and a link to the online survey was sent to elected members and paper copies of the survey were sent to all bowling clubs. The consultation questionnaire is included at Appendix One. A link to the consultation survey was included on the Parks and Countryside consultation webpage on leeds.gov.uk and information was widely circulated on social media to encourage as many responses as possible. As a result, there were 797 online and 302 paper responses (a total of 1,099), as well as 88 items of email feedback from councillors, MPs and their constituents. A detailed consultation analysis is provided at Appendix Two.
- 3.1.2 In terms of demographic data, 58% indicated that they were male with 41% female, with most respondents in the 64+ age group (49%), following by 29% aged 45-64 and 22% who were 44 or younger. Nearly 95% of those who responded stated that their ethnicity was white British with 89% identifying as heterosexual/straight, with nearly 14% stated that they have some form of disability. Over 73% of those who responded play outdoor bowls, with each club in Leeds represented in the responses given and 89% indicating that they played at a Leeds bowling club.
- 3.1.3 Introductory information was provided about the consultation followed by the first question which asked respondents to rank 6 potential approaches to achieving the

budget saving, starting with 1 for their most preferred and 6 their least favoured approach. The following table aggregates all responses made with 6 points awarded in each case for the most favoured option down to 1 for the least in order to aggregate a score to measure the respective choices made.

Item	Total Score	Overall Rank
Allow clubs to take responsibility for managing and maintaining the bowling green site	3,767	1
Reduce the number of summer greens on multi-green sites	3,729	2
Remove winter greens from the maintenance schedule	3,685	3
Base green closures on the number of paying members	3,162	4
Focus outdoor bowls provision on key 'hub' sites spread throughout the city	2,647	5
Reduce the number of sites to 1 in each ward	2644	6
	Responses:	978

- 3.1.4 Whilst the choices made might represent the 'least worst' option for many people who responded, some form of community asset transfer ranks the highest and there appears to be some potential for selective green closures from the responses given. Whilst there is some acknowledgement that clubs with limited members might be more of a priority over those with higher numbers, it is clear that there is little appetite for the idea of 'hub' sites or a reduction to 1 site for each ward.
- 3.1.5 Respondents were then given the opportunity to state if they believed that there is another viable approach that could be considered. The following table summarises analysis of the 301 relevant suggestions made:

Suggestion	Percentage
Greater promotion to recruit new members	36.5%
Increase in membership fees	27.9%
Seek funding opportunities	16.6%
Further discussion with clubs and Leeds Parks Bowling Partnership	14.3%
Cost reductions	4.7%

- 3.1.6 The final question gave respondents the opportunity to state any other comments. It is fair to state that in response to this question (and many comments on the previous question) there was overwhelming disapproval of the proposal. From the 1,102 separate comments made it is possible to identify themes which are summarised in the following table:

Theme	Percentage
The significant benefits to health and wellbeing	38.8%
The social and community benefits that outdoor bowls provides	33.8%
Closures would have a disproportionate effect on the elderly	13.8%
Outdoor bowls is for all ages and abilities	7.6%
The council spends money unnecessarily on other projects	5.8%

- 3.1.7 In addition to the survey responses 88 items of email feedback were received from residents, bowling clubs, sports organisations, MPs and elected members. Analysis of the comments made is as follows:

Theme	Percentage
The significant benefits to health and wellbeing	34.6%
The social and community benefits that outdoor bowls provides	28.1%
Outdoor bowls is for all ages, abilities and spectators	11.1%
The proposal does not represent a value for money saving	7.2%
Further consultation is required	5.9%
Closures would have a disproportionate effect on the elderly	5.2%
Long term impact on the NHS and social services	4.6%
Consider accessibility and transport	3.3%

- 3.1.8 The Leeds Parks Bowls Partnership (LPBP) was established in 2014 following consultation ahead of the season ticket fee introduction alluded to above and represents the interest of bowlers in Leeds. They provided a separate response which put forward a combination of proposals based on limited green closures (a maximum of 4), increased income (including a potential season ticket increase up to £40 and potential match fee levy) and sources of funding.

3.2 Proposal for Future Management

- 3.2.1 The consultation results emphasis the health and wellbeing benefits along with the importance of bowling clubs for community and social interaction. There is however scope to consider a fee increase to £40 from April 2021. If a 3% inflationary rise had been applied since 2016 then the rate for 2021/22 would be £36 so £40 would represent a relatively modest increase above inflation in this context. If this was put in place then based on 2019 membership a saving of around £12.5k could be achieved.
- 3.2.2 The number one ranked alternative from the consultation findings was to consider some form of community asset transfer. Given the timescales involved it would not be possible to implement this without an offer being drawn up for clubs to consider and the opportunity for clubs to express an interest. There would then follow a period of discussion with clubs to determine if some form of asset transfer would be viable.
- 3.2.3 In their response the LPBP also modelled a 4 green closure option so it is reasonable to assume that some discussion could also take place as to how this could be achieved.

3.3 Conclusion

- 3.3.1 The consultation findings show some support for implementing a season ticket price increase enabling £12.5k to be included in the budget for 2021/22. There is an appetite for some form of community asset transfer and scope to explore this option in more detail. Until this was explored fully it would not be possible to determine whether any further measures might be necessary such as green closures on multi-green sites or considering minimum member thresholds to assess financial viability.
- 3.3.2 It is therefore proposed that a season ticket fee increase to £40 is implemented along with exploring some form of community asset transfer. Once this exercise has been completed then an interim report will be considered to assess the potential financial impact before considering any further measures that might be appropriate.

4. Corporate considerations

4.1 Consultation and engagement

4.1.1 Appendix One contains the consultation questionnaire for reference. A summary of the consultation analysis is contained above in section 3, with detailed analysis attached to this report as Appendix Two.

4.2 Equality and diversity / cohesion and integration

4.2.1 An equality, diversity, cohesion and integration screening has been completed and is attached to this report.

4.3 Council policies and the Best Council Plan

4.3.1 The recommendations in this report link to the Best Council Plan in particular the following:

- An Efficient, enterprising and healthy organisation – making the best use of our resources.
- Inclusive Growth - supporting the city's economic recovery from COVID-19 and building longer-term economic resilience.

Climate Emergency

4.3.2 There are no specific implications for the climate emergency resulting from this report.

4.4 Resources, procurement and value for money

4.4.1 The subject matter of this report concerns the potential to achieve saving in line with a report to Executive Board in October 2020.

4.5 Legal implications, access to information, and call-in

4.5.1 This could be considered as an administrative decision however in the interests of openness and transparency is considered as a significant operational decision. This decision is not subject to call in.

4.6 Risk management

4.6.1 The recommendations in this report reflect the outcome of the consultation exercise undertaken and are considered achievable with no significant risks identified.

5. Recommendations

5.1 The Chief Parks and Countryside Officer is recommended to approve the partial implementation of option 4 as follows:

- To increase the season ticket price to £40 from April 2021 with anticipated additional income of £12.5k in 2021/22.
- To explore the option of some form of community asset transfer to gauge interest from bowling clubs and evaluate the impact by autumn 2021.
- To note that the Recreation Development Manager is responsible for implementing these recommendations in the timescales stated.

6. Background documents¹

6.1 None.

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.

Appendix One

Consultation Questionnaire

Appendix Two

Detailed Consultation Analysis