

Community Committee Meeting	
Meeting Date	1 March 2023
Report Title	Tennis Court Improvement Project
EMT Lead	Emma Wiggins, Director of Regeneration & Neighbourhoods
Head of Service	Martyn Cassell, Head of Environment & Leisure
Lead Officer	Graeme Tuff, Greenspaces Manager
Classification	Open
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To agree to change the designated usage of courts from multi-use to tennis only at Milton Recreation Ground. 2. To agree to a sinking fund commitment and ongoing maintenance responsibility as part of the bid for funding from the LTA. 3. To agree to apply for improvement funding to the Lawn Tennis Association and that any subsequent funding agreement be signed by the Head of Environment and Leisure. 4. To recommend to Policy and Resources Committee and then Council that the relevant fees are included in the Council's fees and charges document.

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out the current usage and condition of the tennis court provision in Sittingbourne. It identifies the Lawn Tennis Association proposal for an improvement project and seeks Member agreement to commit to the funding criteria and for a bid to be submitted.
- 1.2 The LTA have approached the Council with a proposal for funding toward the improvement of tennis facilities at King George's Playing Field and Milton Recreation Ground to the estimated value of £112,000. To enable this to progress the criteria including the designation of the current multi-use court at Milton to be tennis only and commitment to 15 years of future maintenance needs to be agreed. To fund future maintenance from a sinking fund, Officers propose for the courts to be pay and play rather than free.

2 Background

- 2.1 The Council currently provide a 4-court tennis facility at King George's Playing Field, Sittingbourne along with a multi-use designated, 3 tennis court facility at Milton Recreation Ground. The maintenance of these facilities is undertaken via

the ground's maintenance contract alongside adhoc repair and maintenance when required. With limited expenditure over recent years, they are now in need of a significant refresh to ensure they continue to provide a viable sports facility. The Council would therefore be required to spend some existing budget on them anyway.

- 2.2 The facilities are currently free to use, although Sittingbourne Tennis Club have agreement to utilise the Milton Courts on a paid basis and the club continues to grow in strength and membership.
- 2.3 Sittingbourne Area Committee considered and supported the proposed improvement project at their meeting in December 2022 Minute No 517(1)12/22 and resolved that this item should be taken forward and considered by the Community Committee.

3 Proposals

- 3.1 The Lawn Tennis Association have approached the Council as Swale is a targeted area, with an opportunity to apply for funding from DCMS Parks Tennis Investment package for refurbishment of the existing hard surfaced tennis courts at King George's Playing Field, Sittingbourne and Milton Recreation Ground. Ultimately if successful with a proposed funding bid, a formal agreement and commitment to terms and conditions would be required.
- 3.2 The two sites require refurbishment to ensure they are safe and suitable for play and have been surveyed by the LTA, with proposals and the indicative investment values for each of the facilities indicated below:
 - King George Playing Fields (4 Courts) - court resurface and repaint, reconstruction where required, re clad fencing, new nets and posts and lite access gate system. Estimated £68,000
 - Milton Recreation Ground (3 Courts) = court resurface and repaint and premium access gate system. Estimated £44,000
- 3.3 King George's is straight forward as there is currently no established club and the courts are currently free to use, albeit they have a new informal booking system in place via the LTA's ClubSpark.
- 3.4 Milton is a greater challenge as there is a tennis club who currently use approximately 30% of the available court hire. In addition, the courts are currently designated as multi use (tennis/football/basketball), something that the LTA would require removing for their full funding to be agreed, given their tennis focus.
- 3.5 Apart from the Tennis Club where a formal agreement is in the process of being agreed, there is currently little/no demand for other uses, with occasional novice running classes which can continue without affecting any proposed agreement.

As such a specific tennis facility would appear to provide the greatest participation potential.

3.6 In addition to the above the LTA have requested commitment/confirmation of several issues, ahead of taking the project to their funding panel.

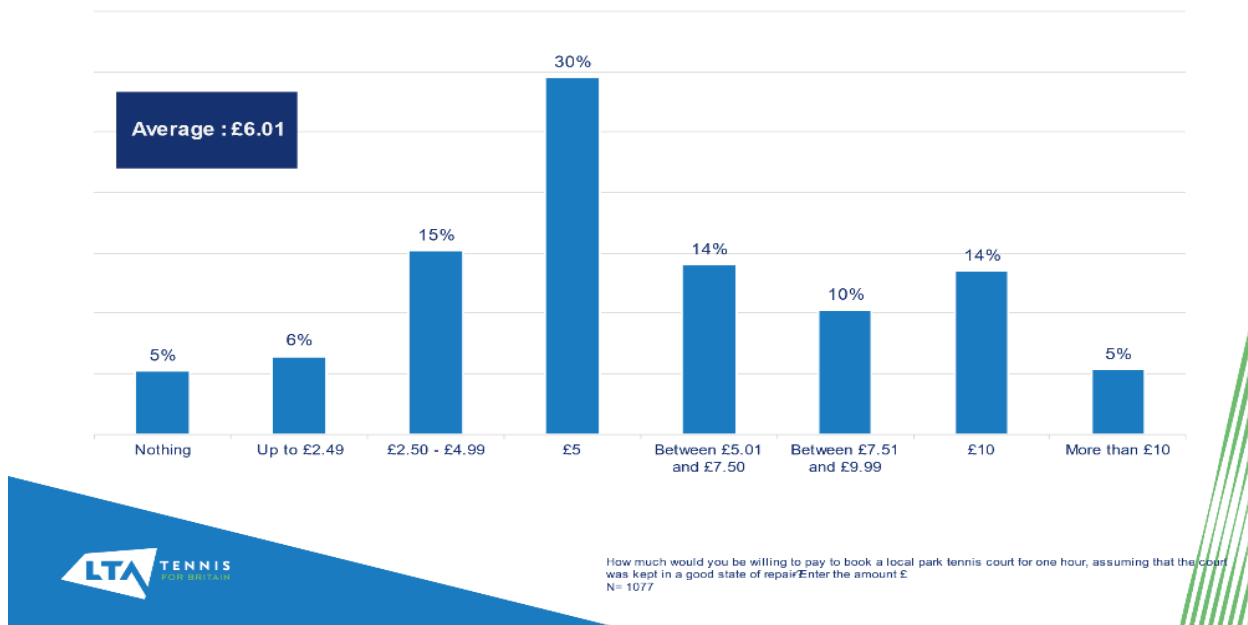
- The Council will be required to commit to maintaining the refurbished tennis courts and a repaint/resurface within the 15-year funding obligation period, with the annual sinking fund recommended by the LTA at £1,200 per court per annum, and a further £600 for each floodlit court per annum.
- Commitment to ongoing sustainability to enable the above. This could be court income generation via an ongoing pay and play / season ticket charge or underwriting the cost of ongoing/future investment and writing into ongoing budgets. It is proposed that the Council introduce pay & play sessions at both venues while retaining some free sessions, alongside income from the incumbent Tennis Club at Milton. Season tickets will be available at both venues and coaching will be available at the Milton venue. More detail is identified below.
- The Council will need to retain all courts as tennis courts once refurbishment works are completed for the 15-year funding obligation period if the LTA. If Members take the decision to change the multi-use designation of the courts at Milton, then all the courts at both sites will be dedicated to tennis.
- The Council will remain responsible for the ongoing control, operation, management, and maintenance of both sites. The Council will then have contracts in place to outsource ongoing coaching/organised activity with local clubs/coaches.

3.7 The Council are already committed to the improvement of facilities and are in the process of £26,000 upgrade of floodlights on courts at Milton Recreation Ground, to include power requirements for gate access technology. It is also expected that future Section 106 funding contributions from nearby development would provide the opportunity to install a ball court that would be more suited to community use and cheaper to maintain than the existing multi-use court.

3.8 In order to consider some of the above issues, Officers have been in liaison with the LTA, researching benchmarking which has been captured by their Insight Team and the findings are displayed in the graph below:

MOST PEOPLE EXPECT TO PAY SOMETHING FOR AN HOUR-LONG PARK COURT BOOKING. £5 WAS THE FIGURE MOST OFTEN MENTIONED, WITH AN AVERAGE EXPECTED FEE OF £6

Amount would expect to pay to book park court for an hour, assuming in good condition (asked as open question)



- 3.9 Having reviewed the benchmarking information, it is proposed to introduce an initial court fee of £6.00 per hour without floodlights, £9.00 with floodlights and £40.00 for a season ticket. Where Local Authorities in the past have moved from a free model to a paid model, the introduction of a targeted free/concessionary season ticket for those low-income households has helped with this transition, especially in the current climate.
- 3.10 The attached financial modelling for both sites, demonstrates the ongoing financial commitment for the ‘sinking fund’ and additional associated costs, as well as the potential income, based on LTA insight and averages from live projects in similar IMD areas.
- 3.11 Officers have utilised the LTA feasibility tool to calculate the projected revenue from each of the facilities and the required sinking funds. Suggested sinking fund of £4,800 at King Georges and £5,400 at Milton. The modelling allows for 5-10% of free court time for those who may not be able to afford £6p/h or a season ticket. The projected % of usage for pay & play is 7% and 23% for Season Ticket usage.

Income	Milton	King George's
• Pay and play	£4,482	£5,298
• Season tickets	£3,316	£2,664
• Coaching	£1,000	
Total Income	£8,797	£7,962

Expenditure	Milton	King George's
• Clubspark and Payment Fees	£372	£417
• Gate access maintenance	£601	£320
• Code lock generator (<i>lite systems only</i>)	£0	£156
• Court sinking fund	£5,400	£4,800
Total Expenditure	£6,373	£5,693
Annual Profitability	£2,424	£2,269

Plausible cashflow for Milton by year 5 is £9,981 and £9,042 at King Georges. Closing cash position after sinking fund can be seen on attached Feasibility Tool, Appendix I.

4 Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

- 4.1 Do not apply or seek external funding from the LTA for the improvement of the tennis courts at King George's and Milton Recreation Ground – The courts need maintenance to ensure they continue to be safe to use and it is a great opportunity to encourage and increase activity and participation.
- 4.2 Submit a funding bid to the LTA, but retain Milton Recreation Ground Courts as a multi-use site – this would result in a lower level of funding available from the LTA and the need for capital funding injection to make up the shortfall and there is little evidence of need from other types of sporting usage.
- 4.3 Submit a funding bid to the LTA for an improvement project with designated tennis courts, but retain the free to play at both sites – While the community would enjoy free to use tennis courts there would still be a commitment to maintain the courts for a 15-year period, but without the pay and play income. As such a commitment to underwrite future maintenance from revenue budgets would be required. This is not recommended with the current Medium Term Financial Strategy challenges.

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 Sittingbourne Area Committee considered and supported an agenda item and agreed that this item should be taken forward and considered by Community Committee.
- 5.2 Sittingbourne Tennis Club are fully supportive of the proposal.

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	The proposal would align to Priority 3 of the Corporate Plan – Tackling deprivation and creating equal opportunities for everyone.
Financial, Resource and Property	<p>If successful, the proposal would provide an estimated £112,000 capital funding toward improvements to tennis facilities in Sittingbourne.</p> <p>Income from pay and play sessions along with club rent estimated at £17,249 pa would balance costs, provide a sinking fund for future maintenance requirements agreed as part of the funding bid and potentially provide additional income.</p>
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	<p>The proposal requires the Council to sign a funding agreement with the Lawn Tennis Association.</p> <p>The Sittingbourne Tennis Club agreement will be handled separately.</p>
Crime and Disorder	None identified at this stage.
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	None identified at this stage.
Health and Wellbeing	Sporting activity and increased participation can improve health and wellbeing.
Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	None identified at this stage.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	None identified at this stage.
Equality and Diversity	There are no differential equality issues raised by the proposals in this report at this time.
Privacy and Data Protection	None identified at this stage.

7 Appendices

7.1 The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix I: LTA Feasibility Tool

8 Background Papers

- None