

REPORT FROM: ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OPERATIONAL SERVICES

TO: NELSON, BRIERFIELD AND REEDLEY COMMITTEE

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CRICKET PROVISION AT EDGE END PLAYING FIELDS, BRIERFIELD

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To update Members on Cricket provision at Edge End playing fields.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) That Members decide whether to reinstate cricket provision at the Edge End playing fields or to leave as a football only site.
- (2) If the decision is to reinstate the cricket facility, that funding be provided by the Committee to carry out the works required and to fund the additional annual maintenance costs required (less income generated).

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) Cricket provision at Edge End was withdrawn in 2021.
- (2) The cost of reinstating the cricket facility to a good standard is substantial as are the costs of maintenance / annual refurbishments.

ISSUE

1. It was requested by Members of the Nelson, Brierfield and Reedley Committee on the 6th June 2022 that a report be produced on the current state of the cricket facilities at Edge End playing fields. A refresh of this report was requested on the 22nd January 2024.
2. Currently within the Borough, cricket facilities are only provided at Bulhome and Swinden playing fields.
3. A report was submitted to the Management Team by Pendle Borough Council's (PBC's) Greenspaces Manager on 10th November 2020 regarding rationalisation of sports facilities across the Borough. Following further discussion from this meeting, it was agreed in March 2021 that the cricket pitch at Edge End, and also Victory Park should no longer be maintained owing to declining usage and financial constraints.

4. To reinstate the Edge End cricket wicket and square in traditional grass format would be in the region of £6000, alternatively an artificial concrete wicket would cost between £9000 and £9500.
5. Edge End as a cricket facility suffers due to it being mixed usage as the cricket field is sandwiched in between two football pitches. The site is very wet and waterlogged during the winter months. This is likely to result in indirect damage to the square / wicket during the football season.
6. Edge End is also a location prone to anti-social behaviour, a traditional grass wicket is liable to be vandalised. An artificial wicket may also be vandalised/cut/ripped etc. which would result in high replacement cost. Historically the fencing has been broken on a couple of occasions as has grass damage caused by bikes and physical attack on the fine turf. Security of the site could be improved by repairing fencing and altering gates to anti climb versions etc. This is liable to cost an additional £1500 - £2000.
7. During the winter months Edge End is used for both junior and senior football matches. Edge End is unfit for play for a majority of the season due to poor drainage and the ground being unfit for play.

Discussion

The main users of PBC cricket facilities are the Pendle District Cricket League (PDCL) that currently use the existing wickets at Bullholme and Swinden most Sundays during the cricket season of April to September.

The League comprises 9 senior teams of 15-20 players between 18 and 50 years old. PDCL have stated that more teams may be interested in joining, but there is no capacity to cope with this demand on just 2 sites.

Throughout the year there are also occasional requests from other cricket organisations and private clubs regarding occasional hire. These are mostly turned down to lack of availability.

Swinden is also used by a tape ball cricket club, they do not book matches or pay any fees.

Income from Cricket on PBC Sites

2016 £1293

2017 £1096

2018 £1014

2019 £376

2020 £0 – Covid 19 Pandemic

2021 £605

2022 £2326

2023 £1880 (The Club has had an agreement with Barrowford CC in 2023 to use their pavilion to reduce cost of hire at Barrowford)

The PDCL have varied hire between pitch only and pitch with attended pavilion.

The charge for pitch hire only is £25 plus VAT.

The charge for pitch hire complete with staff attendant and pavilion is £80 plus VAT.

Costs associated with providing an attendant average £49 plus sundries such as cleaning materials and paper towels, waste disposal and utility charges etc.

Costs to maintain a single site of 4 cricket wickets, square and the associated outfield to an acceptable standard, including high rates of mowing, dressing, renovations, rolling and line marking are £8029 per annum.

Currently the Edge End site is not in a playable condition and would need remedial works to make it fit for purpose.

Option One

To reinstate Edge End as a traditional grass field would cost in the region of £6000.

This is to include killing off the existing sward, scarifying, the addition of several tons of loam, seeding, fertilizers and intense watering and mowing regimes for several months, labour and machinery costs.

If funding were to be provided for this, it would be most likely the wicket would not be ready for usage until the season of 2025.

The construction would need to be fenced off with Heras fencing until it is very well established to reduce the risk of vandalism.

Option Two

To reinstate Edge End with an artificial wicket would cost £9000 and would need to be carried out by an external specialist contractor. Although this is a higher initial capital cost option, the regular maintenance costs would be reduced to approximately £4400 per annum. This surface could be prepared ready for the 2024 season, but allowing for healing of the surrounding grass following construction works it is likely to be the second half of the season.

Lifespan of an artificial wicket is expected to be approximately 7 years before needing replacement, this is dependent on usage conditions and vandalism that may occur.

- Both options will require works to the perimeter fencing to improve security, estimated at between £1500 and £2000.

IMPLICATIONS

Policy: Contributes to corporate priority 4 - Develop a wider sustainable leisure offer, to enhance health and wellbeing for those who live, work and study in Pendle.

Financial: Increased annual maintenance liability costs to PBC for both options of restoration as detailed above. Partly counteracted by additional pitch hire / pavilion income charges.

Legal: None arising directly from this report.

Risk Management: None arising directly from this report.

Health and Safety: None arising directly from this report.

Sustainability: None arising directly from this report.

Community Safety: None arising directly from this report.

Equality and Diversity: None arising directly from this report.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Management Team report on sports rationalization dated 10th November 2020

Appendix 2 - Photos of site currently at Edge End.

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS: None.



REPORT FROM: ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES MANAGER

TO: MANAGEMENT TEAM

DATE: 10 NOVEMBER 2020

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Review of the provision of Sports Pitches/Courts/Greens

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide Management Team with detail of the current position in terms of Sports Pitch provision across Pendle.

To outline a way forward to ensure the service meets the needs of users now and in the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) To approve the proposed way forward outlined for each Sport/Outdoor Recreation discipline

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) Rationalisation of resource (staff, budgets and maintenance) to enable greater concentration on a smaller number of key pitch/court/green sites will enable quality and efficiency to improve in the long term.
- (2) To meet the needs/demands of the service users.

BACKGROUND

Football

In recent years, adult team demand for Pendle Council managed pitches has decreased significantly in line with national trends/figures. The decrease in teams can be attributed to a number of reasons which include teams folding due to lack of players, teams moving to 3G pitches or other private facilities with better quality pitches such as Fisher More High School

or players who previously played competitive 11-a-side Football preferring to play 5/7-a-side during the week. In the 2015/16 season, we had 14 adult teams using Council owned sites on Saturday afternoons. This season (2020/21), we have 9 adult teams.

The Pendle Charity Sunday League have traditionally used a variety of Council sites and pitches for their games. This season, the league has shrunk to 13 teams and as such they only demand on average 5 pitches per weekend for their fixtures (at least 1 game per weekend is played on a private pitch). In 2015/16, they had on average 10 matches per weekend meaning that in 5 years the number of pitches needed by the league has halved.

On the flip side, junior (under 16's) and girls football demand has increased. We now cater for 5 a-side, 7-a-side, 9-a-side and 11-a-side fixtures in accordance with the Football Association's (FA) Youth Development Review which was brought in to ensure that young players were playing on pitches that were more suitable for their age/physicality.

In addition to the above changes in demand, the quality of pitches has suffered in some aspects at certain sites where play is sporadic. In the 2019/20 season, we had a number of sites that were used for approximately 10-15 matches throughout the season which made it difficult to keep on top of maintenance and ensure that when they were needed for match play that they were of a decent standard and ready to be played on.

Due to budget and staff cuts, as a result of austerity over the past 10 years, we now do not have the resources to be able to have good quality pitches available at all traditionally used sites across the borough. In the past, we have provided single pitch and multiple pitch sites for use by teams but due to resource being stretched and a reduction in Football grounds maintenance capacity, the feasibility of us being able to provide good quality pitches at all sites has somewhat diminished.

We have in recent years tried to reduce the amount of times we use single pitch sites unless there is a high demand for a certain site by multiple teams or a junior club. For example, Springfield Playing Fields in Earby is the home base for Barnoldswick Barons Juniors who use the site for their academy on a Saturday morning and for a number of matches on a Sunday.

We also have to factor in the use and cost of attendants to manage buildings at these sites whilst Football is on. We acquire staff through an external recruitment agency with back up if needed from our own emergency out of hour's team.

Hodge House, Sough Park and Barrowford Road are not being used this season due to lack of demand. These are sites that have in recent years been used sparingly and as such maintenance of these pitches has been reduced as a consequence. Teams tend not to want to play at these sites due to the fact that they have poor drainage, the pitches are of a low quality they and do not have good (or any) ancillary facilities, e.g. parking, changing rooms, toilets, etc.

The Pendle Playing Pitch Assessment was introduced in 2016 with the main findings being that there was an overall deficiency in pitch provision for junior and youth football. These shortages primarily derived from the inadequacies of the pitches (especially poor drainage and over play) that meant that the ability to play matches was heavily limited.

Since 2016, in line with the decrease in adult football and the increase in youth football trend, we have changed the use of some of our senior pitches to junior to offer a solution to this deficiency. We are now able to accommodate more junior football at our multiple pitch sites such as Swinden, Holt House, Bullholme, Victory Park and Edge End. We still have to mark

out smaller pitch dimensions within larger pitches at most sites but this has been reduced significantly.

Pendle's Local Football Facility Plan (LFFP) was completed in September 2019. The Plan was primarily developed in co-ordination with Lancashire FA, Sport England, Active Lancashire and Burnley FC in the Community with the purpose being to identify priority projects for potential investment in Pendle. Although the LFFP is the go to document for football facility investment in Pendle, it does not however guarantee the success of future funding applications as each priority project identified must still follow an application process to show how it will deliver key participation outcomes, be a good quality, sustainable facility and demonstrate suitable match funding.

The plan does not just concentrate on Pendle Council owned facilities but also includes school, private clubs and college facilities. The LFFP is provided in Appendix 1. The Plan recommends that the future football development priorities for Pendle are:

- Development and support for grass pitch improvement.
- Development and enhancement of facilities to grow futsal, disability and women's and girls' participation.
- Development and investment of 3G facilities for match play and training.
- Support and enhance recreational football with facility development.

The following projects have been identified to assist in achieving these aims:

- 2 Full size 3G FTP's
- 18 Improved grass pitches
- 3 Changing rooms/pavilions/clubhouses
- 3 Small sided facilities

The use of 3G facilities has become more prevalent in recent years as these can be played on year round whatever the weather and can accommodate multiple pitch dimensions and teams simultaneously. The FA are keen to develop more 3G sites across the country and in Pendle we have been identified as having a shortfall for some time. Although the Council does not manage any sites directly, a number of junior teams that use our grass pitches for some parts of the year migrate to these facilities during the winter when the grass pitches become too wet to play on. Some adult teams have also transferred match play to 3G sites too. This has had the knock on effect of some pitches not being used as much as in previous years but is something that is happening across all regions. As with the Fisher More High School development, we will continue to work with, and support, local schools and Clubs to develop more of these facilities in future years as these are vital facilities that cater for organised matches and training needs and will ultimately improve football provision across Pendle.

In terms of grass pitch improvements, it was highlighted that there were poor quality pitches at a number of sites in Pendle. This was due to poor initial condition and the fact that they have to consistently accommodate high levels of play. Of the 6 prioritised sites, three are Pendle Council owned (Bullholme, Swinden and Holt House). Prioritisation was based on a rationale of selecting sites that were, or offered the potential to be, best utilised by local football clubs.

There were no building improvements identified for Pendle Council managed sites due to the fact that most of our multi-pitch sites have adequate Clubhouses with DDA compliant, child protection friendly changing rooms, toilets, etc.

The three projects included in the Small sided facilities section are all Pendle Council related and include the upgrade or movement of existing Multi-Use Games Areas (MUGA's). Informal football play requires facilities that are open and free to access as this enables play

opportunities that are often spontaneous. In each case, the rationale is based on them being able to service an area of significant population and a relatively high proportion of people from lower social economic groups.

The LFFP has suggested a need for the existing MUGA at Regent Street in Nelson to be transferred to Hodge House Playing Fields. The current facility is under-used and is in a poor location to access. The move would increase the utilisation of the facility and ties in with Bradley Big Local Partnership's desire to develop a small sided football facility to encourage informal/recreational football on site.

It also highlights Victoria Park as an opportunity to refurbish and extend the existing ball court in to a larger MUGA. The current ball court is very small and suffers from poor drainage. The plan would be to re-orientate it and provide a MUGA that is fit for purpose.

Finally, the LFFP steering group flagged Heyhead Park as a site where a MUGA would be beneficial for informal/recreational football use as it sits within an area of high deprivation. At the moment, there is a makeshift ball court on what used to be a tennis court but this facility is desperately in need of an upgrade. Fortunately, this facility is due to be upgraded during the next year as money has been set aside as a result of the Section 106 agreement for the former Lucas Sports Ground in Reedley to re-develop the middle tennis court and install a MUGA.

Burnley Football in the Community highlight that all three sites, if improved, would be sites from which they could deliver a range of grass roots programming to cater for the local community.

As a result of the LFFP, specifically the grass pitch improvements section which identified Holt House, Swinden and Bullholme as priority sites for investment, the Council was invited to submit 5 sites to the LFA for the Pitch Improvement Programme (PIP) scheme. The FA commissioned a representative from the Grounds Management Association (GMA) to visit the sites and appraise the current conditions of the pitches. He then produced a Grounds & Natural Turf Improvement Programme report that provides detail of how support can be offered in improving the standard and playability of football pitches and the level of maintenance across the area.

The 5 sites included were:

- Bullholme, Barrowford
- Swinden, Nelson
- Holt House, Colne
- Edge End, Nelson
- Trawden Recreation Ground

In addition to the three sites already identified as part of the LFFP, we incorporated Edge End and Trawden due to the fact that both sites have pitches that suffer from waterlogging, uneven surfaces and postponements due to poor drainage.

The report is attached in Appendix 2. The document has been shared with our Sports Grounds Maintenance Supervisor and we have begun to implement some of the recommendations. Since the visit, I have been in contact with the LFA regarding any funding that may be available to help us improve individual sites as per the PIP recommendations. They came back to us in August 2020 regarding the Football Foundation's (FF) Enhanced Grass Pitch Maintenance Programme Fund.

They have invited us to apply for two sites, Bullholme and Trawden Recreation Ground. The application for funding has to come from the junior Football club that uses the site as their

home base, in this case Barrowford Celtic (Bullholme) and Trawden Celtic (Trawden Rec), with authorisation and backing from the owner of the fields (us).

The additional maintenance would be over and above what we already do and it would be a 10 year programme. In the first 2-3 years, the FF pay for the majority of the cost to do the work but over time it becomes a sliding scale so that by the sixth year and onwards the majority of the cost is taken on by a combination of the Council and Club.

We are now working with both clubs to complete the applications as we feel that this could provide significant benefit to both sites football pitch quality levels. The cost contribution would be mainly taken from existing R&M budgets for those specific sites in addition to a small contribution from the clubs themselves.

Financial Implications/Situation

The amount of income derived from Football pitch hire fees has decreased in recent years due to the fall in demand for adult pitches. We do not charge for under 16's and below matches. This has been the case since September 2009 when a decision was made by Councillors to provide outdoor sports facilities free of charge to under 16's. The rationale for the decision was to provide young people with the opportunity of leading a healthier lifestyle at no cost to them or the clubs/teams they were associated with.

A proposed re-introduction of pitch fees for Junior Football matches was put forward as part of the income review proposals in 2016/17. Charges of £5 (inclusive of VAT) for matches on 5 and 7-a-side pitches and £7.50 (inclusive of VAT) for matches on 9 and 11-a-side pitches were proposed. Letters were sent out to all local Junior Football Clubs asking for their thoughts on the proposed fees and whether they would be willing to pay these if introduced.

The response was mixed although most teams/clubs said they would be open to paying for them again but this would be on the premise that existing pitch quality improved as a result. Although the proposal did not gain approval by Councillors we could not at that stage have promised that pitch quality would have improved due to no extra resource being available to help pitch maintenance.

Income from Football pitch hire in 2008/09 (prior to the introduction of free outdoor recreation facilities for Under 16's) was £27,473.85.

Income for the last 5 seasons:

2015/16 – £18,385.82

2016/17 – £18,868.99

2017/18 – £18,487.39

2018/19 – £13,461.58

2019/20 - £5,214.54 (the season was cut short by 2 and a half months due to coronavirus)

We estimate income to be around £10,000 for the 2020/21 season.

As shown in the above figures, the amount of income derived from football pitch hire has reduced significantly over the last 10 years due to the initial 'no charge' introduction for Under 16's in 2009 then more recently as a result of the reduction in adult matches being played on Council pitches.

The introduction of a modest charge based on the 2016 proposal would generate a fairly small contribution (£2,500) towards the cost of providing the facilities (comprising both the pitch and, where applicable, changing accommodation).

The Council, along with Hyndburn Council, are the only other nearby Local Authorities who provide junior pitches for free. Burnley, Ribble Valley and Rossendale all charge for junior pitch hire.

The Way Forward

Taking all of the above in to consideration, and after a number of discussions with officers, the Sports Grounds Maintenance Supervisor and the Environmental Services Manager we feel that it would be better for us to concentrate on improving quality at our multi-pitch sites and key single use sites (Springfield and Earby Recreation Ground) and to rationalise the amount of sites we have previously provided through sacrificing sites such as Hodge House, Sough Park, Ringstone and Barrowford Road in the long term. These sites would not be maintained for organised football matches but would still be available for informal use and play.

If demand for some reason increased again and we desperately needed more pitches, the option would be there as a last resort to bring Sough Park and Hodge House back in to operation.

By reducing time/resources spent on these sites we will be able to concentrate our efforts on improving pitch quality and capacity at the key pitch sites in accordance with the PPS and PIP recommendations.

In terms of putting the re-introduction of charges back on the agenda, this would need to be done on the understanding that pitch quality improvements would be forthcoming. The income we would derive from charging junior teams/clubs would be minimal (if we were to go with the 2016 charging mechanism) and this would have to be weighed up against the argument of the council encouraging healthy lifestyles through free play and whether it would be worth it for a few thousand pounds.

We are keen to pursue the funding opportunities and recommendations highlighted as part of the PPS, LFFP and the PIP documents and we feel that if we can achieve make the changes outlined in the main body of this report that the long term sustainability and quality of the pitches across Pendle Council owned sites will be secure.

Cricket

Adult Cricket has sadly gone the same way as adult Football in that the amount of local amateur teams has decreased significantly in recent years. Consequently, demand for Council pitches at our four sites (Bullholme, Swinden, Victory Park and Edge End) has also reduced.

We have not had any Saturday play on our pitches for over 3 years and only have the Pendle District Cricket League, who play their games traditionally on Sunday afternoons, using our pitches now. They have on some occasions used the pitches on Saturday to catch up on fixtures cancelled earlier in the season.

In 2015, the league had 12 teams but for the past two seasons (2019 and 2020), the League have been struggling for teams and the number has reduced to 6. As such, only Bullholme and Swinden have been needed for organised matches. The League use Barrowford Cricket Club's ground (which is adjacent to the Bullholme pitch) for 1 match per week. This has made things difficult for us in terms of the upkeep of the other two Cricket facilities as Cricket pitches need a lot of maintenance and attention on a weekly basis to keep them prepared for play.

Due to not knowing if these pitches would be needed or not in the future, we have had to keep maintaining them on a weekly basis even though both sites have very rarely been used over the past two years. This is frustrating for the Grounds Maintenance Team as a lot of resource is needed to maintain Cricket pitches and we do not want a situation whereby the League come to us next year wanting all four sites for organised matches and then we have an enormous task of getting the pitches back to a level they were a couple of years ago.

The 2020 season was decimated by the coronavirus situation and as a result there has been no play this year on our facilities. We are unsure what the future holds in terms of the Pendle District Cricket League but are working on the basis that they will want to continue to use Bullholme and Swinden in the future.

We feel that a decision needs to be made on the future of the pitches at Victory Park and Edge End as due to limited resources and a drive to be more efficient and ensure we have at least a couple of sites that are of good quality.

Tape ball Cricket (or street Cricket as it was first called from its origins in India) is played at Swinden throughout the year on the concrete wicket which is adjacent to the grass square. This is for informal use and no official matches are played. This has become very popular in recent years and we have worked with local players/users to provide them with a concrete wicket and container for their equipment on site. There is no maintenance associated with this form of Cricket and as such this will continue as per the existing status in the future.

Financial Implications/Situation

The Cricket League are only charged £16.37 plus £3.27 VAT (Total cost of £19.64) per game as they do not use the pavilions at the sites. This is an agreement that was established a number of years ago.

In 2015, the income from pitch hire fees was £1,375.08. Last year (2019), the income was £376.61. Although income from Cricket has always been low, it has drastically decreased in the last 2-3 years due to the amount of teams playing in the league reducing.

Maintenance of Cricket pitches, including the square and outfield, is a fairly intensive process and one that takes up a lot of time and resource not just during the season but before and after when a great deal of preparation and reparations have to be done.

For the Victory Park and Edge End sites, approximately £4,200 per site (£8,400 in total) is accounted for in the Grounds Maintenance contract.

The Way Forward

Similar to the Football situation, we feel that we should concentrate on making the pitches at Bullholme and Swinden the best they can be and that our efforts, from a grounds maintenance point of view, should be put towards these two sites.

We are proposing that the pitch at Victory Park is not maintained as a Cricket facility in the future. At this juncture, it would be sensible to keep Edge End on standby with a view to making a decision on this site in March/April 2021 when we know how many pitches the League needs for the 2021 season.

If the League do not need the pitch at Edge End, then a decision will need to be made on whether we keep maintaining the pitch at this site going forward. We would suggest not.

Victory Park is owned by Barnoldswick Town Council now who pay us to maintain it on their behalf. If the site wasn't maintained as a Cricket pitch during the summer period, some budget would need to be taken off the Grounds maintenance schedule. This in turn would need to be reflected in a reduced cost for the Town Council when paying their annual fee to PBC.

This would free up more time for the Sports Team to ensure Bullholme and Swinden are of good quality and will reduce the amount of time wasted in keeping the pitches at the other two sites at least in an adequate state.

As shown in the financial implications section, an awful lot of maintenance and cost is assigned to keeping the Cricket pitches to a level that they can be played on and if we did start to reduce the maintenance the square in particular would be very hard to bring back if needed.

Demand has reduced to such a level that it would not be feasible to keep four sites in operation just in case demand suddenly increased. We have in recent years kept four pitches going when in reality only two of these have been played on, on a regular basis. We have done this in liaison with the Cricket League in the hope that team numbers may start to turnaround and increase but this sadly has not happened.

Bowling

Like Cricket, the maintenance of Bowling greens is a fairly intensive process that involves a great deal of staff time and resource. We currently still exclusively manage and maintain the following greens:

- Heyhead Park, Brierfield x 1
- Marsden Park, Nelson x 2
- Sough Park, Earby x 1

We also manage two greens at Thomas Street in Nelson (which has one green that is floodlit) but maintenance is split between Council ground staff and Thomas Street volunteers. We assist, and provide materials for pre and post season preparation/renovation works with the thrice weekly fine turf grass cutting being done by the volunteers during peak season. Initially, we provided them with a mower but in the last year we have helped them to secure their own mower and other equipment via Sport England funding. This has allowed them to undertake more intensive work on the greens which we would not have been in a position to do.

Barrowford Park green is now under the ownership of Barrowford Parish Council due to the Park being transferred to them earlier this year as part of the transfer of services work. They pay us to manage and maintain the single green and associated building on an annual basis. Again, we have a similar partnership agreement in place with the Bowling Club whereby we assist, and provide materials for pre and post season preparation/renovation works with the thrice weekly fine turf grass cutting being done by the volunteers during peak season.

The two greens at Alkincoats Park in Colne were also transferred over to Colne Town Council at the end of 2019. Management and maintenance of the greens is undertaken by the Philip Wright Crown Green Bowling Association.

Both partnership arrangements work well although this is down to the fact that both Clubs have willing (and able) volunteers who can undertake the manual work necessary. Due to reductions in basic maintenance of bowling greens in recent years as a result of staff and budget cuts, the quality of the green maintenance has suffered. We still do a decent job with

a small dedicated Sports team but unfortunately the weekly grass cutting of three times a week was reduced to two. In reality, we are now only able to cut the greens twice every 10 days.

Luckily, we have formed good working relationships with the Bowling Clubs over time and they realised that we were struggling to carry out the maintenance programme previously employed. As such, they approached us to help with the maintenance to ensure that their greens kept more or less the same. Informal agreements were drawn up to reflect the work both partners would carry out. The associated buildings are still managed and maintained by Pendle Council and we continue to provide R&M budgets for materials, building issues and vandalism.

This works at Thomas Street and Barrowford but at the other three sites, the Bowling Clubs do not have the requisite volunteers to be able to do some of the mowing work themselves. A lot of the members are retired and elderly and as such the mowing of greens, etc. is too much for them.

We have toyed with the idea of rationalising the number of greens at Marsden Park and Thomas Street in recent years but due to the change in circumstances at Thomas Street and the fact that there is still demand for the two greens at this site, we have not pursued this and do not feel this is necessary with current arrangements in place.

At Marsden, the situation is different as we maintain both greens. The Club has a number of teams that play organised matches on the lower green. The top green is used more for casual informal bowling by members and the public. It was used by the Borough Band Club for matches but they ceased to use it approx. 2-3 years ago.

Financial Implications/Situation

The Bowling greens are public facilities and as such are free to play on for casual and formal use. The greens and associated buildings at Sough, Marsden, Thomas Street and Heyhead Park are still owned by Pendle Council and are managed and maintained for the most part by us. Maintenance of the greens at all of them, apart from Thomas Street, is paid for by the respective Town or Parish Council.

No income is derived from the Bowling Clubs and no contribution is forthcoming from them towards the upkeep of the associated buildings or greens except through an in-kind contribution (volunteer work) highlighted at Thomas Street and Barrowford Park.

Annual R&M budgets are set aside each year for each building and green for any additional works needed. The clubs liaise with the Green Spaces Manager regarding any issues with the buildings such as vandalism and utility faults, etc. We then organise repair work via Liberata's Property Services. This arrangement works well although as the budgets are relatively small we are unable to do much else other than maintain what we have got. Some of the buildings are in desperate need of upgrading but due to the high costs of doing these bigger jobs we try to spend the budgets wisely and prioritise any work based on cost effectiveness and need.

At Sough Park, Earby Memorial Bowling Club decided to take a 6 year lease agreement for the building and a 6 year licence agreement for the green in 2013. This was done as a proactive measure to secure external funding for the club (most funders will fund clubs who have lease/licence arrangements over 5 years). At that time, they were looking for funding to erect floodlights around the green but this fell through due to a number of issues but also unfortunately due to the main person driving the development at the club dying. Consequently, momentum was lost.

The Club have recently agreed a further 6 year lease/licence. The lease fee is £200 per annum with a peppercorn rent for the green licence. The £200 fee is paid for from a percentage of each member's annual club membership fee. Having some control over the building and the green allows them to tap in to small funding streams and provides them with some sustainability in the long term.

The Way Forward

Bowling green sites have naturally reduced over the last 10 years. We have lost greens at Victory Park (x 1), Victoria Park (x 1) and Alkincoats Park (x 2) for one reason or another. Usage numbers are steady but on the whole numbers using public greens has fallen markedly during this time. There have been a number of initiatives in the past to get more young people playing bowls which have worked at some of the Clubs (Alkincoats and Thomas Street) but have not at others. The demographic of players is still predominantly elderly and retired people. The Clubs have continued due to having a number of dedicated volunteers who work with the Council to ensure the greens are kept open and are maintained to an adequate standard for recreational and match play use.

There is still demand for greens at all current sites. Subsequently, it is incumbent upon us to ensure that we provide bowling facilities that encourage healthy lifestyles and cater for a more low intensity recreational activity if demand persists. Although we do not have as many staff to maintain the greens we have had previously, the number of greens for them to look after has reduced. We should look to maintain the status quo at least to enable bowling to continue in Pendle in the short-medium term and support any initiatives from the Bowling fraternity to increase formal and informal bowling green usage.

Another factor to bring in to the equation is the fact that Nelson Town Council and Brierfield Town Council now pay Pendle Council for the maintenance of Marsden Park and Heyhead Park (under the Grounds Maintenance Schedule) which includes the bowling greens (under Park Games). Brierfield Town Council are only paying for 50% of what the schedule was originally in 2016/17 with Nelson only paying 44%. As such, the reduction in maintenance across the Parks in recent years has included cuts in bowling green maintenance, e.g. reduction in aeration, weekly cuts, etc.

As such, unless the Town Councils decide to increase the amount they spend on the Parks in the near future, it may be worthwhile exploring similar agreements with the Clubs at both Parks to the ones successfully employed at Thomas Street and Barrowford or look at a lease/licence type agreement similar to what Earby Memorial Bowling Club have done at Sough. This would bring in a small annual income for the Council to offset costs but more importantly would provide both clubs with a greater opportunity to secure external funding to improve the facilities at their respective parks as well as ensuring their long term sustainability.

The potential rationalisation of the two greens at Marsden could also be investigated. This would need to be done in co-ordination with the Bowling Club and Town Council and would need to take in to consideration the implications of what the area of land would be used for if the green was stopped being maintained as a bowling facility. We would be reticent to just stop maintenance and leave the green and surrounding area to become overgrown without any plans for its replacement.

Tennis

We have 9 hard surfaced tennis courts at three parks across the borough. These are at:

- Heyhead Park, Brierfield x 2
- Marsden Park, Nelson x 5 (1 currently not in use)
- Sough Park, Earby x 2

Although there are currently 2 courts at Heyhead Park, this will change in 2021 to only one as one of the courts is to be changed in to a MUGA (as detailed in the Football section). The fifth court at Marsden has been out of operation for at least 12 months now and there are no plans at present to bring it back in to play unless we secure funding to upgrade the tarmac surface which is in a very poor state.

Demand for organised match play tennis has reduced significantly in recent years as exemplified by the enormous drop in teams who now play in the Burnley & District Tennis League (which includes teams from Pendle). In 1995, there were 17 divisions comprising 153 teams but unfortunately since then there has been a steady decline. Last year, the league had shrunk to 5 divisions comprising of only 42 teams.

Traditionally, teams from Pendle utilised a large number of Pendle Council managed tennis courts for matches. These courts were set aside by the Council for weekly Tennis League bookings with fees paid to the attendants on duty at each site.

As a result of the introduction of free Tennis at all Council owned courts in 2009 and a noticeable drop in demand, the use of attendants at Tennis and Bowls facility sites ceased with no booking systems in place. In addition, the quality of courts provided by the Council has deteriorated over time due to limited investment in them and as such some people/teams have transferred usage to private courts where the courts are of better quality.

People can use the courts for free on an informal basis or for matches and just turn up and play. We do not lock the courts so access in to them isn't a problem.

Usage of our remaining courts is sporadic. They are obviously busier around Wimbledon and the summer holidays but for most of the year they are not really used.

The surface quality at Sough Park is good – these were upgraded in 2009. The remaining court at Heyhead Park is very poor although this will be rectified when the surface will be upgraded in 2021 as part of the Section 106 agreement for Lucas. At Marsden, 4 of the 5 courts are in desperate need of investment and are currently not really fit for purpose. We have in recent years applied for funding from the Council's Capital Programme to upgrade two of these (above the play area) but have been unsuccessful.

In July 2020, we were contacted by the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) about their new LTA Rally initiative. They recognise that local authorities face significant financial challenges, particularly in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the pressures this presents around ongoing delivery of sport, leisure facilities and opportunities for local communities.

As such, they have developed some cost-free initiatives to help drive participation at park tennis venues and ensure park courts are financially self-sustainable for the future. Park tennis courts are vital in helping open up the sport and the mental and physical health benefits associated with playing tennis to more people, with nearly 1.5 million people playing on park courts in the last 12 months and almost half of those from lower socio-economic groups.

Whilst there is a huge latent demand to play tennis, the key barriers to participating are finding and booking a court, and someone to play with. To address this, they have launched LTA Rally which is a new free digital platform to help people search for tennis activities in

their area and make it easier for people to book a court, group coaching, play a match or find free tennis events.

The LTA want us to adopt LTA Rally (which is free). The system works in hand in hand with gate access systems, which the LTA are willing to fund in target parks. They have identified Sough Park as a potential pilot project for the booking system and further down the line for a gate access system.

They are also interested in Marsden Park as it has a number of courts so some could utilise the gate access system for bookable use through LTA Rally with an option for some courts to be left as they are for people who just turn up for an informal game. This is to ensure that the tennis courts are accessible to all.

In view of the poor state of the majority of courts at Marsden, we would need to upgrade at least two of the courts for us to be able to offer good quality courts via this initiative going forward.

The Green Spaces Manager has met with LTA representatives about the scheme and highlighted the challenges we face in Pendle in terms of Tennis provision. They have suggested that we float the idea of LTA Rally with senior management and members particularly as if we went down the gate access system, this would mean the re-introduction of a charging policy for tennis for certain courts.

Leeds City Council operate in a similar way to us (admittedly on a grander scale!), i.e. no charging policy so the online booking is run on a free 'self-policing' basis and has proved very successful for both users and the Council to obtain usage data.

The system works on a free, self-policing basis with a simple step by step guide:

- Visit www.pendleparkstennis.co.uk
- Choose a park
- Register for free online
- Select a time & book
- Bring your email/phone confirmation as this is a self-policing system.

The reservation system makes it easier for the public to arrange a game and guarantee they have a court on arrival rather than having to wait. The LTA provide the software, banners and court numbers for free as part of any partnership arrangement.

This could also include the tennis courts at Alkincoats Park if the Town Council were interested in getting involved in the initiative.

Financial Implications/Situation

The courts are public facilities and as such are free to play on for casual and formal use. The courts at all existing sites are still owned by Pendle Council and are managed and maintained solely by us.

There are hardly any costs associated with the maintenance of tennis courts due to cut backs. As part of the Grounds Maintenance schedule, we used to sweep and mark out the courts annually and then erect and remove nets at the start and end of the season. We do not do any of this now at Marsden Park due to budget cuts and we only sweep the courts once a year at Heyhead Park and Sough Park respectively. The erection and removal of nets is still in the schedule for Sough but this is something that we have stopped doing and nets are left up year round now.

In recent years, and in light of the poor state of the courts, the Environmental Action Group (EAG) have undertaken the following work three times a year:

- Moss removal (power washing)
- Weed spraying
- Leaf clearance
- Litter picking
- Sweeping

Unfortunately, this came to an end in September 2020 when the EAG was disbanded as a result of further cuts. Going forward, apart from one annual sweep as per the schedule, there will be no maintenance forthcoming on any of our courts.

The Way Forward

For us to improve usage of the courts at our three sites, some proactiveness and investment is needed. The quality of courts at Sough (and from next year Heyhead) is good and as such it is now a case of ensuring they are looked after and maintained as best they can. For us to ensure they are kept to a decent standard, we must look at implementing some kind of maintenance schedule, as detailed above. At the current time, there is hardly anything in the respective GM schedules for tennis court maintenance and something needs to be done to change this so that longevity of court quality can be obtained.

If we want to pursue the LTA Rally initiatives, we realistically have to have courts that are of good quality, have a regular maintenance schedule in place and ultimately are attractive to people in terms of them wanting to use them.

At Marsden, it is imperative that we look to at least improve and upgrade at least 2 if not 3 of the existing courts to ensure we have 4 courts that are of good quality and can be used as part of the LTA Rally scheme if we decide to pursue this initiative.

As part of The LTA offer, they offer an interest free loan scheme for court upgrades such as resurfacing and fencing. Other than this, capital funding or external funding would need to be sought.

Note should be made that as part of the Nelson Town Deal submission, a 'Nelson Parks' Project bid was made which included the resurfacing of 3 tennis courts including new perimeter fencing (at a cost of £80,000) at Marsden Park.

The 'Nelson Parks' project has made the shortlist but to make it more strategic in nature the Board have agreed that it should be developed as part of a wider health and well-being proposal, incorporating a project concept put forward by PLT and a couple of other health related schemes. This scheme will be developed over the next month where some of the individual parks projects will be scaled down. As the theme is health & well-being, I am keen to keep the tennis court improvement in the final plan.

If investment is forthcoming for the Marsden Park courts, be it from the Nelson Town Deal or via other avenues then I feel we would be in a much better position to increase usage numbers and pursue the LTA Rally initiatives.

The gate access system can only really be looked at once we have good quality courts at our disposal. Once these are in place, it would be worthwhile having a look at this as a charging policy for use of certain courts would help with longer term sustainability of the tennis courts in parks.

Conclusion

It is fair to say that we are at a critical point in terms of re-evaluating our position and making the necessary changes to move forward in providing sports/outdoor recreation facilities that meet the current and future demands/needs of our users and community.

The advent of coronavirus has brought about so much misery and negativity but on the flip side it has highlighted the fact that local green spaces including sports pitch sites and parks are appreciated by people and have been recognised (through increased user numbers during this period) as very important assets for Pendle.

Good quality recreation facilities and parks can have a significant impact on the economic life of urban areas; increasing their attractiveness as a place to live and visit, increasing local house prices and positively impacting upon the health and well-being of local residents.

During the last 6 months of the pandemic, sports pitch sites along with parks have been heavily used by the local communities they serve as places to get fresh air, relax and to be active be it for informal or formal activity. This has been extremely satisfying to see and highlights the fact that good quality facilities are needed now more than ever for our physical health, mental well-being and community connections.

For us to effectively provide good quality sports provision, we need to follow the national and local trends and move with the times, concentrating resource, time and effort on satisfying demand and supplying facilities that are wanted by the residents of Pendle.

The rationalisation of sports pitches is definitely something that we must look to implement in the short term with the ethos of trying to provide a smaller number of good quality multi-pitch (with some exceptions) sites that have decent playing surfaces but also good ancillary facilities such as car parks, changing rooms, access, etc. This approach would lead to an improvement in the provision of a greater whole site experience for the public.

IMPLICATIONS

Policy: The suggested way forward for the different sports/recreational disciplines are in line with recommendations outlined in the 2016 PPS, specifically:

- To **enhance** outdoor sports facilities through improving quality and management of sites. (General)
- Work in partnership with stakeholders to secure funding. (General)
- Where pitches are overplayed and assessed as standard or poor quality, prioritise investment for pitch improvements and review maintenance regimes to ensure it is of an appropriate standard to sustain/improve pitch quality. (Football)
- Remark adult pitches exclusively used by youth teams (u13s-u16s) in order to better accommodate demand and where possible transfer remaining youth teams to utilise spare capacity on other existing sites. (Football)
- Priority should be placed on improving current facilities, with particular focus placed on improving the tennis courts at Marsden Park. (Tennis)
- Support the LTA in working to improve accessibility to tennis in order to help deliver its Strategy. The LTA is keen to encourage parks and clubs to make use of technology solutions, which includes online court booking and fob access to courts and facilities. (Tennis)
- Investigate further the need for two greens to be accommodated at one site. Explore opportunities to combine play on to one green, for example, at sites such as Thomas Street and Marsden Park. (Bowling)

- Support clubs which plan to attract younger people through hosting events such as family days as well as establishing links with local primary schools. (Bowling)

Financial: If charging for junior football was re-introduced, there would be a slight increase in income (dependent upon the fees agreed upon) going forward.

In addition, a modest income would be derived from introducing charging for tennis court usage via the LTA Rally gate access mechanism model.

The above would be dependent on senior management team and members agreeing these and in consultation with potentially affected users.

If we were to pursue the FF's Enhanced Grass Football Pitch Maintenance Programme, we may need to increase the R&M budgets for Trawden Recreation Ground and Bullholme for years 6-10 due to the majority of the costs being taken on by the Council and the respective clubs during this period. This would be minimal additional cost.

To ensure Tennis courts continue to be maintained appropriately and any upgrades are sustainable, additional budget to undertake work previously carried out by the EAG as detailed on page 13 needs to be made available. Without extra resource, tennis courts (even if newly resurfaced) will quickly become unplayable, unsafe and deteriorate much quicker.

Legal: None

Risk Management: None

Health and Safety: Unless some improvements are made at Marsden Park, a number of the existing courts will be unfit for use in the near future and as such may have to be closed until they are safe. The courts need resurfacing with improvements also made to perimeter fencing in the short-medium term.

Sustainability: The proposed way forward for each sport/recreational activity, if acted upon, should ensure the sustainability of the respective facilities and meet the needs of the service users.

Community Safety: None

Equality and Diversity: None

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Pendle's LFFP

Appendix 2 – Pitch Improvement Programme (PIP)

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS: None

Edge End Fields Current Site Photos





Artificial Wicket Example

