

Rother District Council

Report to: Cabinet

Date: 8 February 2021

Title: Introduction of fees for tennis court bookings at Egerton Park

Report of: Head of Service Housing and Community

Cabinet Member: Councillor Brewerton

Ward(s): Central Ward, Bexhill

Purpose of Report: To agree the introduction of fees for tennis court bookings at Egerton Park

Decision Type: Key

Officer

Recommendation(s): It be **RESOLVED:** That:

- 1) the existing tennis court booking system at Egerton Park be extended to cover all of the public courts at this venue, including the football kickabout court; and
- 2) for booked courts, a charge be introduced of £1.50 per half hour of play to support the on-going maintenance of the courts and potentially contribute to future renovations.

Reasons for

Recommendations: To improve the customer experience and ensure opportunities to meet the cost to the Council of managing the asset are maximised through the income generated.

Introduction

1. Egerton Park has eight courts, seven of which are used for tennis with one doubling up as a pickleball court. The eighth court is used for informal football kickabouts. Two of the courts are leased to Bexhill Tennis Club and the remainder are available for wider public use.
2. The health and social benefits of participation in sport, including tennis, are well documented. The value of the Egerton Park courts and the potential for increasing participation was clearly highlighted following the easing of the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions in the early summer and the subsequent swell of use which was much greater than has been seen for some years.

Operational challenges

3. Systems of booking and charging have been in place at various times in the past, this being most effective when an attendant was employed specifically to oversee the operation of the park games.
4. Since 2017 the courts have been available to use free of charge on a first-come, first-served basis, but this leaves customers with no guarantee of being able to play when they wish. In addition, the cost to the Council of maintaining and managing the courts is not met. Furthermore, the current arrangement means a lack of data to evidence the community value of the courts or inform decisions about future sports development initiatives, funding applications, investment or alternative uses of the courts.
5. A more user-friendly system is needed that will help facilitate greater use of the courts and at the same time generate a modest income to contribute to the upkeep of the courts, without creating undue barriers to levels of participation.

2020 Clubspark trial

6. Clubspark is a simple to use, mobile-friendly on-line system promoted by the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) which enables advance bookings to be made with times, conditions and prices to suit the client's needs.
7. Over the summer, the system was trialled successfully for two of the tennis courts. Courts were available to book free of charge from the end of July and the LTA waived its fee. Up to mid-October, 720 bookings of thirty minutes to two hours duration were made by 157 different registered users with only one customer formally submitting any negative feedback during that period on a matter that has subsequently been resolved.

Proposal

8. It is proposed that from 1 April 2021 the booking system be extended to all of the other public courts for a trial period of six months and that a fee of £1.50 be payable per court, per half an hour of play for those people who choose to use the system.
9. The income generated will be used to cover the cost of the Clubspark system and offset routine maintenance costs, the value of which are approximately £360 and £9,500 per annum respectively.
10. The fee will be seasonal with the courts being free to use during the period November to March inclusive. Those who choose not to take up the opportunity to book will continue to be able to use the courts for free at times when the courts are not booked.

11. It is estimated that the proposed fee of £1.50 will generate an income per annum of £13,088 based on the percentage uptake experienced during the 2020 trial period. Projected income has been calculated for the tennis courts only and based on the assumption that the majority of bookings would be for a duration of one hour.
12. For comparison locally, the fee imposed in Eastbourne is £6-£8 per hour for an automated gated system and Mid Sussex charges £6.55 per hour for a non-automated gate system with discounts for certain groups.
13. It is not recommended that a season ticket be offered at this time as this may adversely affect membership of Bexhill Tennis Club.

Conclusion

14. The ability to book enables participants to plan their visit and arrive in the knowledge that a court will be available. Furthermore, it helps avoid the congregation of people waiting to use the courts thereby promoting COVID19 safe use.
15. A fee will help minimise the incidences of people not turning up to play despite having made a booking or booking for longer than is needed.
16. The system also provides a valuable opportunity to formalise use of courts by tennis coaches who use the public courts free of charge to generate income. Clubspark can be used as a safe-guarding tool to ensure that only qualified, accredited coaches have authorised use, to introduce a maximum number of permitted hours and to impose a higher fee on coaches than for other users.
17. The system will allow the introduction of a modest charge of £1.50 per court, per half an hour to ensure that a financial contribution towards the cost to the Council of operating and maintaining the courts.

Financial implications

18. There is currently no income being generated through use of the public courts. Depending on the level of uptake, the introduction of a modest charge could contribute significantly to offsetting the routine maintenance cost, potentially resulting in it being cost-neutral.

Legal implications

19. Extending the booking system will assist with issues of safe-guarding, liability and risk management in relation to use of the courts by tennis coaches.

Other Implications	Applies?	Other Implications	Applies?
Human Rights	No	Equalities and Diversity	No
Crime and Disorder	No	External Consultation	No
Environmental	No	Access to Information	No
Sustainability	Yes	Exempt from publication	No
Risk Management	No		

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Appendices:	N/A
Relevant Previous Minutes:	N/A
Background Papers:	N/A
Reference Documents:	N/A