

Rother District Council

Report to: Cabinet

Date: 4 September 2023

Title: Lawn Tennis Association Tennis Foundation Grant

Report of: Deborah Kenneally, Head of Neighbourhood Services

Cabinet Member: Councillor Timpe

Ward(s): Central

Purpose of Report: To seek approval to accept a Lawn Tennis Association grant to deliver resurfacing of tennis courts and access gates in Egerton Park, Bexhill.

Decision Type: Non-Key

Officer

Recommendation(s): **Recommendation to COUNCIL:** That subject to Cabinet approval, funding of £104,070.50 be included in the Council's Capital Programme for 2023/2024;

AND

It be **RESOLVED:** That the £104,070.50 grant from the Lawn Tennis Association Tennis Foundation be formally accepted to deliver five refurbished tennis court surfaces and two controlled access gates for public use in Egerton Park, Bexhill.

Reasons for Recommendations: By accepting the grant and improving the courts, the Council commits to working with the Lawn Tennis Association and other partners to develop parks tennis, through making the courts more accessible, welcoming and enjoyable for members of the public.

Introduction

1. This funding programme is a nationwide investment totalling £30m, announced by the UK Government in October 2021 to refurbish tennis courts that are open to the public across the United Kingdom. The initiative is supported by investment from the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) Tennis Foundation and delivered by the LTA. The fund does not support private courts or tennis courts that are leased to clubs.
2. The funding programme is a key part of the LTA vision of "tennis opening up" and their mission to 'grow' tennis by making it 'relevant, accessible, welcoming, and enjoyable'. Park tennis courts are seen as vital for providing accessible and affordable opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to pick up a racket, get active, and enjoy playing tennis.

3. The funding is directed at bringing derelict or poor-quality park sites back into use, and improving existing facilities where there is potential to support growth in player numbers. Egerton Park tennis courts has been identified as one of the latter sites.
4. The funding will include court refurbishment and new gate access technology. The project does not require match funding from the Council, but the Council must give a commitment to maintain the courts and provide members of the public with access to tennis coaches to provide development programmes and achieve a sustainable increase in the use of the courts. The funding is only applicable to 'open access' public courts available to the public and used for tennis.
5. Increasing outdoor physical activity and promoting an active lifestyle is the main focus of Rother District Council's *Health and Wellbeing: Leisure Facilities Strategy* and tennis plays an important part in this outcome.

Details of the project

6. Egerton Park in Bexhill has eight tarmac courts and are the only courts owned by the Council in Rother District. Of the eight courts, two are leased to Bexhill Tennis Club and one is used as a general 'kick-a-bout', with the remaining five courts available to members of the public as tennis courts. The 'kick-about' court is popular with a wide range of children and young people, and their parents, and so should be retained.
7. As mentioned in paragraph 4 above, the funding criteria will only support courts that are used for tennis and open to the public. Officers have discussed this opportunity in detail with Bexhill Tennis Club (BTC) and after due consideration they have decided to apply for a new lease, and therefore BTC's two courts will not qualify for this funding. Options were explored by BTC to fund refurbishment themselves, including obtaining a quote from the LTA contractor, but are unable to cover the cost at this time. It is not known if other contractors could complete their court refurbishment at a lower cost so BTC may seek to progress this in the future through alternative contractors and funding avenues. Although historically the club has been granted three-year leases, longer leases may be possible and officers will work with BTC to seek an appropriate length of lease that will support BTC with future funding initiatives.
8. Council officers have worked with the LTA to progress an application to the Lawn Tennis Association Tennis Foundation for funding to refurbish five tennis courts and install two new access gates and have been successful in being offered a grant offer of £104,070.50.
9. The new gate access system will link into the existing ClubSpark system, and after booking and paying, members of the public will need to input a unique gate code to enter a court. This will support the Council's ability to ensure an income stream, and therefore a sustainable facility is developed.
10. The use of gate access technology has been piloted successfully through the LTA for the past three years across the UK, and the evidence from sites across the country is that installing gate access technology increases participation. This is because it means people can book a court online, in advance, and know it will be available when they arrive to play with friends and family, meaning it is

easier to get on court. It also means that free tennis sessions and coaching can be scheduled on the courts at specific times. Finally, it also helps reduce anti-social behaviour and vandalism which has been a problem on some courts in the past.

11. In return for this funding, the Council is required to maintain a 'sinking' fund to meet the LTA criteria for surface refurbishment in 15 years, equivalent to £1,200 per annum. The Council will also be committed to enabling tennis coaching and the continuation and evolution of weekly 'tennis for free' and LTA tennis initiatives for all ages and playing abilities.
12. It is important that park tennis court facilities are sustainable, and money can be set aside for repair and maintenance, to ensure courts do not fall into disrepair in the years ahead and are available for generations to come. Otherwise, there is a risk that this transformational investment into refurbishing the courts will be wasted, and the courts will not be maintained to the high standard that this investment will ensure. Retaining a small fee to book a court, which the Council already does, will help to build up a sinking fund to repair courts in future years, when they inevitably need further maintenance.
13. Local authorities are working with the LTA to ensure that there will be weekly free tennis sessions on courts, including the chance to borrow equipment. This means nobody in the local community will be excluded from the chance to pick up a racket and start playing. Additionally, a range of options are available for people to get on court, including an individual court hire fee; an affordable season pass; and targeted activities for all.
14. Proposed work to five courts (excluding gate technology works):

Apply double court markings in white water based acrylic paint to prepared asphalt surfaces
Power wash, apply moss treatment, pierce at 450m centres, fill pierced holes with pea shingle, vibration compact existing asphalt surface, application of bitumen emulsion 'tack' coat, installation of 25mm consolidated depth of 6mm asphalt surface course and application of two tone colour coating slip resistance of 60 wet or dry including raising existing pedestrian access gates
Break out and dispose off site existing perimeter kerbs & installation of new precast concrete kerbs 150mm x 50mm with associated insitu concrete bed and haunching

15. Three operating models for the five courts were considered with the LTA as part of the grant criteria as follows:
 - RDC to manage the courts 'in-house' and only outsource the coaching programme (current model) - the Council would benefit from all surplus revenue generated and retain court maintenance responsibilities.
 - Outsource operation to regional/local dedicated tennis operator via management arrangement. The Council would receive a guaranteed income from Operator and possible profit share but retain court maintenance responsibilities.
 - Outsource to regional/local tennis operator via a full repairing lease arrangement - the Council would agree a lease to include all operational aspects including maintenance making this a potentially cost neutral arrangement.

16. Future devolvement of the parks' services may impact the management of the Egerton site and so the funding application was submitted as an 'in-house' operation but this model can be reviewed and changed in the future if desired.

Conclusion

17. Officers recommend the Council accepts the grant offer of £104,070.50 to allow five courts to be refurbished and two gates installed. In seizing this opportunity to improve the quality of the courts at nil cost to the Council, residents will have sustainable opportunity to participate and develop tennis skills in a healthy and safe outdoor environment.

Financial Implications

18. No match funding is required for this grant award.
19. There is a requirement to maintain a sinking fund of £1,200 per annum per court over 12 years to meet the funding criteria of the cost of court re-painting in year 6 (c£3k per court) and court resurface in year 12 (c£11k per court). This can be managed on an annual basis by transferring income each year to a reserve account.
20. There is a cost to maintain the two gates of £1,072 per annum. The LTA will waive the current venue registration cost of £300 per annum.
21. Current usage data for the site within ClubSpark:

Total unique users/contacts (since system was introduced) = 703

2022 (Jan-Dec) Court usage

- 563 individual bookings = 856 court hours booked
- £955.25 income

2023 (Jan-to date) Court usage

- 316 individual bookings = 428.5 court hours booked
- £803.75 income

Legal Implications

22. As part of the funding conditions RDC must use LTA Framework Agreement to complete the work. The LTA are procuring the contractor for the project and procurement team are happy with the process LTA has followed.
23. Consideration should be given to the commitment to refurbish the courts to the same standard in 15 years and implications if the service/tennis courts were to be devolved or leased to another party or town council. Legal will support with the compliance with subsidy control requirements.

Human Resources Implications

24. The operation of the courts will remain in house so no impact on staff resources.

Equalities and Diversity

25. There will be improved accessibility for users through the new gate access technology system as they will be able to have equal opportunity to book a court. Although it is felt most residents will wish to be able to self-serve and book their court on-line as they do now, the Council will offer an alternative for those people who may not have access to the internet. This will be via customer services sports bookings, or in the future may be through a coaching provider.
26. The new gates will support easier access for wheelchair users.

Risk Management

27. There is a risk that the 'sinking fund' of £1,200 per annum per court will not cover future refurbishment costs in 12 years. A separate code should be set up in accounts to track the fund.
28. There is a risk that revenue from use of the courts will not generate sufficient income to meet the £1,200 per annum per court 'sinking' fund. Fees and charges to be closely monitored to ensure revenue covers planned expenditure.
29. There is a risk that the Council is unable to source a suitable tennis coach.
30. As one gate will allow access to three courts, and the second gate will allow access to two courts, there is a risk that one unique gate access code will enable use of any of three courts, or any two courts for the one hour booked. During peak season and busy times this will become self-policing.

Crime and Disorder

31. The new gate system which requires a unique code to gain entry to the courts should reduce misuse and vandalism on the courts.

Environmental

31. The LTA will ensure the contractor adheres to environmental considerations when completing the works.

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

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