

Surrey Heath Borough Council

Executive

21 June 2022

SHBC Tennis Court Redevelopment

Portfolio Holder:	Cllr Rebecca Jennings-Evans – Leisure, Culture & Community Portfolio Holder
Strategic Director	Nick Steevens – Strategic Director of Environment & Community
Report Author:	Sue McCubbin – Recreation and Business Manager
Key Decision:	Yes
Date Portfolio Holder signed off the report	13 June 2022
Wards Affected:	Watchetts; Frimley Green; Mytchett & Deepcut

Summary and purpose

An update on development plans for Council-operated tennis facilities at Watchetts, Frimley Green and Mytchett Recreation Grounds (including the creation of a mixed-use Tennis and Netball facility at Watchetts).

Recommendation

The Executive is advised to RESOLVE that

- (i) the original scope of the project to be extended to include tennis courts sites at Frimley Green and Mytchett Recreation Grounds;
- (ii) agreement be given to the terms and conditions of the Lawn Tennis Association's funding;
- (iii) a tender process to source and appoint a suitable lighting contractor be undertaken;
- (iv) the completion of project deliverables be delegated to the Strategic Director – Environment & Community in consultation with the Leisure, Culture & Community Portfolio Holder; and
- (v) a corporate contingency of 20% of the capital project budget be set aside from the Corporate Projects Reserve, with authority to spend this fund delegated to the Strategic Director – Finance & Customer Services in consultation with the Finance & Customer Services Portfolio Holder and the Leisure, Culture & Community Portfolio Holder.

1. Background and Supporting Information

- 1.1 The Council's tennis courts at Watchetts Recreation Ground, Frimley Green Recreation Ground and Mytchett Recreation Ground have no records of resurfacing since being laid 20+ years ago and are falling into a state of disrepair. If the Council does not take action, the courts will continue to deteriorate, leading to a greater risk of insurance claims and eventually the facilities being taken out of commission entirely.
- 1.2 A capital project budget of £135k was previously agreed by the Executive for the purpose of redeveloping the courts at Watchetts Recreation Ground to create a floodlit, mixed-use Tennis and Netball facility. The neighbouring private tennis club that is immediately next our public tennis courts underwent a major refurbishment and so to maintain a level of court availability our re-surfacing works were delayed so the two projects were not being undertaken simultaneously. Fortuitously this has then meant that Surrey Heath Borough Council now has a unique match funding opportunity to include resurfacing of the courts at both Frimley Green and Mytchett Recreation Grounds in the scope of the original project.
- 1.3 In October 2021 the LTA committed £8.4 million of funding to refurbish public tennis courts across the UK. While the focus of this fund is generally to invest in areas of highest deprivation, the LTA view Surrey Heath Borough Council as a key partner due to the existing working relationship in place and perceived potential for growth of tennis in the area.
- 1.4 Following a successful stage 1 funding application from officers, the LTA have advised they would be willing to invest a figure in the region of £140k to help Surrey Heath Borough Council bring the playing surfaces at Watchetts, Mytchett and Frimley Green Recreation Grounds back to a playable standard (subject to meeting funding conditions). The LTA's funding would also cover the introduction of gate access technology at each site (successfully piloted at London Road Recreation Ground), along with certain fencing and net post repairs.
- 1.5 The LTA have however advised there are areas they do not have resource to support and consequently these would need to be paid for by Surrey Heath Borough Council. These elements are:
 - Installation of floodlighting at Watchetts (subject to planning) – the LTA suggest estimate a required budget of c.£90,000 including fees for planning, specification drawings, ground works, installation and contingencies.
 - Connection to a 3 -phase power supply estimated at £15,000 (awaiting final quotation)
 - Any netball elements to be introduced with the Watchetts redevelopment such as posts, slots and over markings (estimated £10,000).

The costs above are not newly expected; they were all required within the original scope of works previously agreed for the Watchetts redevelopment.

- 1.6 There are conditions that come with the LTA's funding which SHBC would be required to agree to:

LTA conditions of funding

- Take a Borough wide approach – all parks included in the scheme
- All parks to utilise online booking via ClubSpark and LTA Rally products
- Gate Access System installed on all sites
- Recreational Competition Offer provided via LTA's product 'Local Tennis Leagues'
- 1 hour weekly free coach led activity (TBC) provided at key sites with a coaching offer
- Operational Model and Sustainability plan in place – commitment to a sinking fund or a mechanism with a similar effect

Based on SHBC's existing partnership working with the LTA, the vast majority of these conditions are already being met or will be met following the successful delivery of works. The only exception is a weekly 1 hour free coach led activity, but it is considered this could be easily implemented with minimal financial impact through the Council's current coaching partner, the National Tennis Association (NTA).

- 1.7 The LTA are currently developing a framework for contractors who will undertake their assigned resurfacing projects across the country, including Surrey Heath. The LTA are looking for confirmation that Surrey Heath Borough Council are happy to proceed with these proposals and wish to continue to the final stages of this process. The framework will be in place by the end of June with works to the courts, subject to receiving a signed agreement, being planned for the Autumn (Sept/Oct 2022)
- 1.8 There are five public tennis courts at Watchetts Recreation Ground, while Frimley Green and Mytchett are smaller facilities with two courts each. The expected lifespan of an asphalt tennis court is 10-12 years, as such all courts are long overdue resurfacing works.
- 1.9 There are also Council operated courts at London Road Recreation Ground but these are not included in the scope of this report as they have been refurbished more recently and are in better condition.
- 1.10 As part of the proposed redevelopment, two tennis courts at Watchetts will be converted to 'mixed use' facilities, allowing for the provision of netball. Surrey Heath currently has very limited netball facilities outside of school settings and no local leagues, meaning those who wish to play largely have to travel out of borough. The Council has received criticism for this in the past.
- 1.11 Surrey Heath Netball Club, which caters for residents from the age of 10 to adult, would be of the groups to benefit greatly from the new facility with a number of teams likely to use the courts as a base. Increased opportunities to deliver programmes such as 'Back to Netball' and 'Walking Netball', helping to

increase physical activity levels among women who are statistically less likely to be active than men (Active Lives Survey, 2021).

- 1.12 Gate access technology was successfully introduced at London Road Recreation Ground, which was used as a pilot site to demonstrate the operational model was sustainable. The table below shows usage data since introduction of the system in 2018 and also includes comparison versus LTA latent demand data to show potential for growth at the 3 sites that are currently non-gated:

Venue	Unique Users	LTA Latent Demand	No. of Total Bookings
London Road	710	1,775	7,692
Watchetts Rec	267	1,486	829
Frimley Green	157	1,083	829
Mytchett Rec	106	1,428	530

- 1.13 Tennis demand has increased significantly since the pandemic, having been one of the first activities to be permissible after lockdown and a sport that can be enjoyed outdoors with social distancing. This has been evidenced by the fact usage on Council sites has increased by 131% between 2019 and 2021.
- 1.14 Courts at all of the non-gated locations currently suffer badly from vandalism, with many courts having been out of action for extended periods due to damage to nets and/or posts, and holes regularly being cut into fences. Officers receive numerous complaints at the condition of the courts and in particular the state of the fencing. Fencing repairs and the introduction of gate access technology would greatly help to remove this issue.
- 1.15 The current charging policy at these venues is ineffective due to a lack of ability to police it. While the online booking system has already been introduced at all tennis court sites, it has little use without gate access technology to work alongside it. As grounds contractors do not have a fixed presence in each park, the vast majority of people are able to play without being asked to pay. As a consequence, the Council is missing out on potential income and is very limited in the amount of usage data it can collect.
- 1.16 The gate access system and online booking system 'clubspark' will give customers the ability to self-serve, making booking both Tennis and Netball courts more accessible for customers with low levels of input required from Council staff, and will provide an accurate measurement of usage. Staff will continue to be available to support residents who may not have access to booking online.
- 1.17 Subject to planning approval the redevelopment would incorporate floodlighting at Watchetts, which would allow residents and visitors to use the facilities during the evenings – this is particularly important for residents who are unable to access facilities during weekdays. At present with the exception

of the 3G pitch at Frimley Lodge, there are no Council operated sporting facilities available after dusk.

2. Reasons for Recommendation

- 2.1 This is a unique opportunity for the Council to maximise outside investment to achieve best value for residents. Other opportunities for this level of external funding are unlikely in the foreseeable future, particularly given the financial challenges presented by the pandemic.
- 2.2 This redevelopment will allow a greater range of opportunities for residents to get and stay active with a far more attractive playing experience provided. This will lead to greater public engagement with our facilities, increasing Council income and ensuring the Council continues to meet its health and safety responsibilities.
- 2.3 The terms and conditions attached to the LTA's funding are, in the opinion of officers, fair and reasonable given the level of investment.
- 2.4 Officers therefore recommend that members approve this proposal.
- 2.5 Taking no action is not recommended as a viable option as the courts will continue to deteriorate and in the longer-term will cost substantially more to repair, while the Council will continue to miss out on opportunities in regards to both greater public participation and income.

3. Proposal and Alternative Options

- 3.1 The Executive has the option to:
 - (i) Agree to the revised project scope and terms and conditions attached to the Lawn Tennis Association's funding;
 - (ii) Reject the terms of the Lawn Tennis Association's funding and fund the project from the Council reserves;
 - (iii) Choose not to proceed with the project.

4. Contribution to the Council's Five Year Strategy

- 4.1 Health and quality of life were highlighted as a priority as part of the Council's new five year strategy. This scheme will improve access to quality sporting facilities and help the Council achieve an outcome of a healthier, more active population.
- 4.2 This project will also work towards the Council's 'Environment' priority, in particular to "Enhance the Borough's parks and green spaces, protecting our unique biodiversity whilst also improving public access to green space for leisure, recreation and wellbeing."

4.3 This project will also support objectives related to the Council's new Physical Activity strategy in addition to contributing towards Surrey's "Movement for Change" strategy and Sport England's "Uniting the Movement" strategy.

5. Resource Implications

5.1 The LTA have proposed they would be willing to invest a figure in the region of £140k to help Surrey Heath Borough Council improve the facilities of the courts at Watchetts, Mytchett and Frimley Green. A full breakdown of their expected costs can be found in Appendix A.

5.2 As part of their offer, the LTA's facility project manager and quantity surveyor firm would oversee the quality control, communication with the contractor and link in with the relevant SHBC facilities lead. This would save the Council considerable time and cost as well as providing reassurance of quality given that experience of tennis court resurfacing is not possessed in-house.

5.3 The reduced set of obligations outlined in 1.5 mean the overall cost to the Council is expected to be comfortably within the previously agreed £135k budget despite rising building costs. Officers are currently in the process of getting up-to-date quotes for these aspects of the project.

5.4 The Council's original capital budget of £135,000 for the development of Watchetts is still in place minus £1500 spent on surveys, leaving £133,500.

5.5 Unlike the resurfacing, officers will be required to project manage the floodlighting installation at Watchetts should a planning application is successful.

5.6 If there is any overspend on the project areas the LTA have committed to delivering, SHBC will not be liable with costs being covered by the LTA. Any overspend on the elements not covered by the LTA (see 1.5) will be the responsibility of SHBC.

5.7 In 2021, income from the three sites was as follows:

Watchetts (5 court site) = £212.75
Frimley Green (2 court site) = £471.50
Mytchett (2 court site) = £299

5.8 Comparably the courts at London Road Recreation Ground, which already have a good playing surface and gate access technology, generated £5,448 in 2021 (4 court site, £1,362 per court per year).

5.9 Working on a basis of £1,362 per court per year, after redevelopment works the courts could achieve:

Watchetts (5 court site) = £6,810*
Frimley Green (2 court site) = £2,724
Mytchett – (2 court site) = £2,724

**does not take into account potential additional income from floodlit hours.*

- 5.10 In addition to tennis income, a floodlit site at Watchetts would allow for additional income from Netball. Runnymede Borough Council has similar floodlit mixed use Tennis and Netball courts in Chertsey and by working with an external netball league generate c.£12k income per year. It is hoped that by securing a similar partner the site at Watchetts will be able to achieve a similar level of income by year 3.
- 5.11 There is currently no sinking fund (money set aside for refurbishment) in place for the Council's tennis courts. As part of this capital project, it is proposed to set up a sinking fund so the courts become self-sustaining in a similar manner to the 3G pitch at Frimley Lodge Park, minimising the need for future capital investment in the longer-term.
- 5.12 Subject to the works in this report being completed, there is also an opportunity to outsource operations to the Council's current coaching partner, the National Tennis Association (NTA). The NTA have expressed an interest in paying an annual rent of £18,600 pa to operate tennis across the Council's four sites plus a profit share contribution. This would cover sinking fund contributions, meaning long-term liability to the Council would be significantly reduced.
- 5.13 If agreement is given for the project to proceed, officers will explore this outsourcing possibility further with the National Tennis Association before bringing a formal proposal to the Executive for consideration at a later date.

6. Section 151 Officer Comments:

- 6.1 Previous capital budget will be reprofiled into the current financial year. If the LTA funding is not agreed, then the project will need to be re-evaluated, including the option to close the facilities to prevent potential injury liability.

7. Legal and Governance Issues

- 7.1 Any installation of floodlighting at Watchetts Recreation Ground would be subject to a planning application.
- 7.2 A precedent has been set in this regard as the adjacent private courts at Frimley Tennis Club have recently had planning approval granted for floodlighting on their courts. A planning application for the SHBC operated courts will follow many of the same principle to ensure minimal disruption to neighbouring residents.
- 7.3 All financial matters will be carried out under strict audit guidelines.
- 7.4 The contractor undertaking resurfacing works would be appointed through the LTA's procurement framework.

7.5 The contractor undertaking floodlighting works would be appointed by the Council following a thorough tender process.

8. Monitoring Officer Comments:

8.1 Given total expenditure exceeds 100k, approval of the LTA funding is a key decision and an executive function.

9. Other Considerations and Impacts

Environment and Climate Change

9.1 Power for the gate access system at Watchetts is minimal at 12v with a max 2 amp output. With recent technological advances, gates can now be powered by solar power to provide a renewable source of energy. The gates at Mytchett and Frimley (non floodlit sites) will be the LTA's new 'Lita' gates and powered by battery.

9.2 The project would seek to install modern LED floodlights at Watchetts Recreation Ground which are far more efficient than older halogen lights in terms of light spill and energy consumption. Floodlighting can be operated via the online booking system to ensure lights are only on when paid bookings are active, minimising any wastage when not in use.

9.3 Bio-diversity offsetting principles will be adopted and applied to ensure that, although development takes place, there is a net gain on each site as a result of the improved facilities.

9.4 By providing a number of better quality facilities locally, residents will be less dependent on using their car to access a positive experience, meaning less road journeys and accompanying pollution.

Equalities and Human Rights

9.5 An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out for the Council's wider 'Tennis in the Park' scheme. A full Equality Impact Assessment will be completed for the redeveloped sites when an exact specification and layout of the works has been supplied by the LTA's appointed contractor.

Risk Management

9.6 Officers will not commit any significant spend towards this project until the LTA can make a concrete commitment on its contribution.

9.7 Resurfacing works would not be dependent on the outcome of the planning application for floodlighting. By working with the LTA and its preferred contractor on a court design, appropriate spaces for posts and ducting can be put in place for the installation of floodlighting at a later date. A lack of floodlighting will however stop the ability for residents to play tennis in the

evenings, will severely limit the ability to play netball (primarily played in the evenings) and reduce the amount of potential income that can be generated from this opportunity.

- 9.8 SHBC officers would remain in touch with the LTA's project team throughout the resurfacing works to ensure coordination and minimal disruption to other park users.
- 9.9 Facilities would be improved one at a time (rather than all at once) so there is always somewhere to play while the improvements are taking place.

Community Engagement

- 9.10 The LTA have identified latent demand and have completed extensive research into what would encourage more people to play Tennis in Surrey Heath.
- 9.11 The Council's Leisure team also undertook their own public consultation in summer 2018 to understand the local views and motivations of both existing parks tennis courts but also non-users.
- 9.12 Responses in both cases showed improved court conditions and a clearer, simpler booking system were the main factors that would make people more likely to play at tennis in our parks. These improvements would demonstrate we have listened to public opinion and acted accordingly.
- 9.13 Being able to demonstrate the Council cares about public leisure facilities and the health and wellbeing of its residents is likely to be positively received.
- 9.14 Officers have received a number of complaints and/or negative feedback about their experience when using the existing courts. This redevelopment will support a change in the public perception of Council facilities from negative to positive.
- 9.15 The Council has received criticism in the past for not having community netball facilities available. This project will address those concerns.

Annexes

Annex A – Estimated Cost to the LTA

Background Papers

Watchetts Tennis Court Redevelopment – May 2020

Estimated cost to the LTA

Park Name	No. of Courts	Proposed Renovation / Interventions	Total Cost to the LTA
<i>Watchetts Recreation Ground</i>	5	Resurface 5 courts and Gate Access	£67,750
<i>Frimley Green Recreation Ground</i>	2	Resurface 2 courts, fence repairs, new kerbs and Gate Access	£39,900
<i>Mytchett Recreation Ground</i>	2	Resurface 2 courts, replace and repair fencing, new net posts and Gate Access	£31,860
Total	9		£139,510