

Report to: Environmental Services Scrutiny
Committee

Date: 6th October 2010

Report of: Director of Environmental Services

Report No:

Contact Officer: Malcolm Russell

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Report Title: Sports Leisure Facilities and Sports Pitches in Parks

**Confidential /
Non Confidential:**
(delete as approp)

Purpose:

A report to Members explaining the usage and maintenance issues in order to assist Members in their understanding and enable them to recommend possible interventionist measures to the Executive Member.

Recommendations:

The Environmental Services Scrutiny Committee is recommended to :
1. Note the report & comment as appropriate

Decision:

Background Doc(s):

(for use on Exec Rep)

Signed:

Leader / Executive Member

Monitoring Officer

Date:

Summary:

Bolton Council has a number of outdoor sports facilities across the borough's parks and greenspaces, some free to use, others with charges. These include multi-use games areas (MUGAs), tarmac tennis courts, bowling greens and grass pitches for football, rugby and rounders. The report explains that the MUGAs and tennis courts receive little routine maintenance and are predominantly free to use. The report goes on to identify the expenditure, income and subsidy levels associated with the provision of bowling greens and winter sports pitches (football/rugby) along with the related maintenance issues.

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Bolton Council has a number of outdoor sports facilities across the borough's parks and greenspaces, some free to use, others with charges. These include multi-use games areas (MUGAs), tarmac tennis courts, bowling greens and grass pitches for football, rugby and rounders.
- 1.2 The location and quality of those facilities owes much to historical provision under previous local government structures (pre 1974), opportunistic investment over the last 30 years related to funding opportunities (predominantly external) and changes in maintenance and type of provision to reflect available resources, changing demand and industry developments.
- 1.3 The Council has a grass playing pitch strategy which has focused available investment over recent years predominantly towards pitch drainage replacement and improving the quality of playing surfaces to withstand greater usage, especially at those sites with changing accommodation.

2.0 Multi-use Games Areas (MUGAs) & Tarmac Tennis Courts

- 2.1 Across the borough are a number of MUGAs, these are split between those controlled by Environmental Services and those controlled by Children's Services or individual schools. Those controlled by schools are predominantly larger and of the synthetic carpet type with school use during the day and charged community use out of school hours.
- 2.2 Of the MUGAs controlled by Environmental Services only 1 has a synthetic carpet (Heywood Park). The remainder are tarmac surfaces and in many cases were created by the conversion of existing tennis courts. With the exception of Heywood they are free to use at all times and receive little maintenance except an occasional sweep or repair to damaged fences. Heywood Park is open all the time, has floodlights and is available for booking by groups for a small fee.
- 2.3 Refurbishment of existing MUGAs and the occasional construction of new ones has relied on external funding, s106 contributions for play and other sources in recent years. It is foreseeable that the capacity to refurbish sites will reduce in future years with sites deteriorating and potentially having to be closed on health & safety grounds in due course. Fortunately due to investment over recent years the majority of sites should be in use for many years before that potentially becomes an issue. It is likely that when the carpet at Heywood Park is beyond economic repair that the site will revert to a tarmac surface.
- 2.4 The tennis courts controlled by Environmental Services are all tarmac, of varying quality, and free to use. During the summer months the courts are well used. In recent years the traditional, seasonal, tennis net has been replaced on some courts with a permanent metal 'net' which allows play all year round, is resistant to vandalism and allows informal use for other casual games. Maintenance is limited to the occasional sweep, marking as required and the repair of any damage. It is foreseeable that the capacity to refurbish sites will reduce in future years with sites deteriorating and potentially having to be closed on health & safety grounds in due course. Fortunately due to investment over recent years the majority of sites should be in use for many years before that potentially becomes an issue.

3.0 Bowling Greens

- 3.1 Bolton currently has 29 bowling greens. Many greens have been fenced over recent years to improve security and successfully reduce vandalism to the greens. A small number of greens are made available for use, free of charge, outside of the normal summer season.
- 3.2 The level of usage of greens varies significantly, with some sites only having regular use on a handful of occasions each week. From speaking to club representatives it is clear that many clubs have declining membership although some are being very proactive in working with local schools to introduce young people to the game.

- 3.3 Many of the bowls pavilions act as venues for club members to gather in the winter to play indoor games e.g. dominoes, the facility thereby providing a valuable social resource for many older members of the community. The cost of the lighting and heating of these buildings out of season is met by the Greenspace budget with no additional income recovered. This cost is considered to be offset to some extent by relatively low levels of repairs resulting from frost damage and frozen pipes.
- 3.4 Maintenance of the facilities includes pre-season preparation of the greens, regular mowing during the season, end of season renovation works and day to day repairs and maintenance of buildings.
- 3.5 It is not possible through the Council's accounting system to isolate the cost of the provision of bowling greens and therefore to precisely calculate the level of subsidy which bowlers benefit from (because a number of staff who carry out work on greens also work on other fine turf or football pavilions). The level of charges, usage and resultant income are set out below:

| Category | | | 2010/2011 Fee | 2010/2011 Estimated Usage | 2010/2011 Estimated Income |
|--------------------------------|----------|--------------|---------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| Bowls | Standard | Per Team | £185.00 | 35 | £6,475 |
| Bowls | Standard | Single Match | £22.00 | 10 | £187 |
| Bowls Permit | Standard | Annual | £11.00 | 750 | £8,250 |
| Bowls Permit | Concess. | Annual | £5.50 | 275 | £1,513 |
| Estimated Total Income 2010/11 | | | | | £16,425 |

Whilst some bowlers may play for more than one team it seems that there are approximately 1400 bowlers using the Council's 29 greens.

- 3.6 Some work has been done for the preparation of this report to get an estimate of the costs of providing the bowling greens but it is only an estimate. The total estimated cost of maintaining the greens and associated pavilions is £135,394 as set out below:

| Activity | Est. Annual Cost (£) |
|--|----------------------|
| Green allocations/ lettings/ user management | 3000 |
| Green routine maintenance - 3 teams for 30 wks | 109394 |
| End of Season renovation | 15000 |
| Pavilions- Rates, services, R&M, inspection, cleaning (estimated at 10% of all identifiable sports buildings costs, 90% to winter) | 8000 |
| Total Cost | 135394 |

- 3.7 The resultant net subsidy for bowling greens is estimated at £118,969 per annum. An estimate of the subsidy per user is shown below:

| Item | Charge | Comment on charges levied | Approx. Annual Cost Per Permit/ Team | Approx Annual Subsidy per Permit/ Team | Approximate Percentage Subsidy |
|----------------------------------|---------|---|--------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| Bowling (Annual –Team of 10) | £185.00 | Approx £1.42 per player per home match (if 13 home games) | £580.00 | £395.00 | 68% |
| Bowling (Annual Adult Permit) | £11.00 | Approx £0.42 per week (26 week summer season) | £58.00 | £47.00 | 81% |
| Bowling (Annual Concess. Permit) | £5.50 | Approx £0.21 per week (26 week summer season) | £58.00 | £52.50 | 91% |

3.8 Given current levels of usage, costs, income and resultant subsidies it is likely that in the current economic climate a number of actions will need to be considered:

- Rationalise provision across the borough
- Reduce maintenance or end of season renovations
- Self management by teams to reduce maintenance costs
- Significant Increases in fees

4.0 **Grass Pitches – Football, Rugby, Cricket and Rounders**

- 4.1 The Environmental Services Department currently has approximately 55 winter pitches for football and rugby. As with many other outdoor facilities the distribution across the borough is historic.
- 4.2 Community use of School pitches across the borough is managed directly by the individual schools. Environmental Services carries out routine grass cutting and marking of pitches for some schools as part of their Ground Maintenance Service Level Agreements. The Department also provides technical advice to those same schools regarding end of season renovation but it is up to individual schools whether they commission that work from the Department, Contractors or not at all.
- 4.3 The Playing Pitch Strategy approved some years ago and refreshed alongside the Open Space Assessment in 2007 sought to create and improve a number of larger strategic sites across the borough and to encourage the leasing out of smaller sites to clubs who could access external funding.
- 4.4 Of the strategic sites, Harper Green and Newhouse Playing Fields have been upgraded, Hulton Lane is awaiting an opportunity for external investment but unfortunately the funding streams are currently closed to new applications. Scholes Bank is progressing, actually led by a club (Horwich St Marys) who have been able to lease land from United Utilities to make the site big enough come within the strategic framework.
- 4.5 Investment in excess of £200,000 from within the Council in recent years has enabled:
- improvements to the playing surface of all pitches across the borough
 - improved drainage at Doe Hey Recreation Ground, Spa Road & Leverhulme Park
 - new changing facilities at Oxford Grove
 - purchase of specialist winter maintenance equipment
- 4.6 Pitches receive maintenance throughout the winter as conditions permit with the specialist equipment referred to above and end of season renovation using specialist contractors. Pitches are marked weekly and posts provided. Investment in demountable posts has significantly reduced the wear and tear on goalmouths resulting from unauthorised, informal use. Most sites have changing rooms provided.

- 4.7 Unauthorised use of pitches and changing rooms by local teams out of season and during wet weather is becoming an increasing problem. Increasingly locks are being cut off or damaged, leading to facilities being left insecure and a significant cost in replacing them.
- 4.8 It is not possible through the Council's accounting system to isolate the cost of the provision of winter pitches and therefore to precisely calculate the level of subsidy which players benefit from (because a number of staff who carry out work on pitches with tractors also carry out other activities and the marking out team also marks schools). The level of charges, usage and resultant income are set out below:

| Winter Pitch Category | | | 2010/2011 Fee | 2010/2011 Estimated Usage | 2010/2011 Estimated Income |
|------------------------|----------|------------|---------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| Age Group | Grade | | | | |
| Adult | A | Pitch | £300.00 | 20 | £6,000.00 |
| | A | Pavilion | £265.00 | 15 | £3,975.00 |
| | B | Pitch | £235.00 | 16 | £3,760.00 |
| | B | Pavilion | £215.00 | 11 | £2,365.00 |
| | C | Pitch | £205.00 | 5 | £1,025.00 |
| | C | Pavilion | £180.00 | 13 | £2,340.00 |
| Junior | A | Pitch | £150.00 | 28 | £4,200.00 |
| | A | Pavilion | £140.00 | 22 | £3,080.00 |
| | B | Pitch | £120.00 | 26 | £3,120.00 |
| | B | Pavilion | £105.00 | 28 | £2,940.00 |
| | C | Pitch | £100.00 | 15 | £1,500.00 |
| | C | Pavilion | £90.00 | 12 | £1,080.00 |
| 9x9 | Standard | Pitch Only | £110.00 | 21 | £2,310.00 |
| 7x7 | Standard | Pitch Only | £85.00 | 15 | £1,275.00 |
| Total Estimated Income | | | | | £38,970.00 |

Whilst some players may play for more than one team it seems that there are approximately 1800 players in 146 teams using the Council's 55 pitches.

- 4.9 Some work has been done for the preparation of this report to get an estimate of the costs of providing the winter pitches but it is only an estimate. The total estimated cost of providing and maintaining the winter pitches and associated pavilions is £240,653 as set out below:

| Expenditure | Pitch Only | Changing | Combined |
|--|------------|----------|----------|
| Pitch allocations/ lettings/ User Management (incl. Attendants at Harper Green/ New House PFs) | 27156 | 0 | 27156 |
| Pitch marking & maintenance (not incl mowing) | 110386 | 0 | 110386 |
| End of Season renovation | 31000 | 0 | 31000 |
| Changing rooms- Rates, services, R&M, inspection, cleaning (90% of all identifiable sports buildings costs, 10% to Greens) | 0 | 72111 | 72111 |
| Total Cost | 168542 | 72111 | 240653 |

- 4.10 The resultant net subsidy for winter pitches is estimated at £201,683 per annum. An estimate of the subsidy per user is shown below:

| Item | Average Charge | Comment on charges levied | Approx. Annual Cost Per player | Approx Annual Subsidy per Player | Approx. %age Subsidy |
|---|----------------|--|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------|
| Sports Pitch & Changing (Seasonal - Adult Team) | £466.00 | Approx. £2.40 per player per match (15 home games) | £133.99 | £96.94 | 72% |
| Sports Pitch & Changing (Seasonal - Junior) | £235.00 | Approx. £1.09 per player per match (15 Home Games) | £133.99 | £115.26 | 86% |

- 4.11 Given current levels of usage, costs, income and resultant subsidies it is likely that in the current economic climate a number of actions will need to be considered:

- Rationalise provision across the borough
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- Reduce maintenance or end of season renovations
- Elements of self management by teams to reduce maintenance costs
- Significant Increases in fees

- 4.12 Rounders is a summer game which does not require any specialist maintenance. Teams make use of the changing rooms and toilets on site. Any costs would relate only to the cost of managing the bookings and a relatively small cost in relation to the provision of changing rooms.

- 4.13 The level of charges, usage and resultant income are set out below:

| Summer Pitch Category | | | 2010/2011 Fee | 2010/2011 Estimated Usage | 2010/2011 Estimated Income |
|-----------------------|----------|----------|---------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| Rounders | Standard | Per Team | £41.00 | 45 | £1,845.00 |

- 4.14 It is not possible through the Council's accounting system to isolate the cost of the provision of cricket pitches and therefore to precisely calculate the level of subsidy which players benefit from. The level of charges, usage and resultant income are set out below:

| Summer Pitch Category | | | 2010/2011 Fee | 2010/2011 Estimated Usage | 2010/2011 Estimated Income |
|-----------------------|----------|----------|---------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| Cricket | Standard | Per Team | £160.00 | 9 | £1,440.00 |

The Council has two cricket squares at Moss Bank Park and Leverhulme Park which are maintained by staff with other maintenance duties so it is not possible to isolate the costs with any certainty or the resultant subsidy. The activities carried out are considered the minimum required to be able to provide the required facilities.

5.0 Recommendation:

- 5.1 The Environmental Services Scrutiny Committee is recommended to :

1. Note the report & comment as appropriate.