

Title: Parks Exercise Permit
 Lead Officer: Ann Hill
 Portfolio Holder: Jim Sinnott
 Wards of the District directly affected: Districtwide

Approvals required	Date	Name
Portfolio Holder	7/3/24	Councillor Jim Sinnott
Finance	7/3/24	Betty Gong
Legal Services	7/3/24	Kathryn Tebbey
Chief Executive	7/3/24	Chris Elliott
Director of Climate Change	7/3/24	Dave Barber
Head of Service(s)	7/3/24	Marianne Rolfe
Section 151 Officer	7/3/24	Andrew Rollins
Monitoring Officer	7/3/24	Graham Leach
Leadership Co-ordination Group	25/03/24	N/A
Final decision by this Committee or rec to another Cttee / Council?	Yes	
Contrary to Policy / Budget framework?	No	
Does this report contain exempt info/Confidential? If so, which paragraph(s)?	No	
Does this report relate to a key decision (referred to in the Cabinet Forward Plan)?	No	
Accessibility Checked?	Yes	

Summary

Following a review of the Parks Exercise Permit scheme this report recommends adjustments to the scheme in order to improve its operation.

Recommendation(s)

1. The Cabinet agrees the proposed changes to the Parks Exercise Permit as laid out in the report and adopts the proposed new terms and conditions as set out at Appendix 3 to the report, for use at the following sites only:
 - Newbold Comyn
 - Pump Room Gardens
 - Victoria Park
 - St Nicholas Park
 - Castle Farm
 - Abbey Fields
 - Myton Green
 - Champion Hills
 - Eagle Recreation Ground
 - Myton Fields (April-September only)
 - Tapping Way
 2. That Cabinet reminds Council of the fees ratified by Council in the 15th November 2023 Fees and Charges report as laid out in paragraph 5.5.
 3. That Cabinet delegates authority for any future any minor changes to the scheme can be agreed by Head of Safer Communities and Leisure in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Communities, Leisure and Environment and asks the Council to include this delegation within the Constitution.
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1 Reasons for the Recommendations

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 In 2018 the Council implemented a Pilot scheme for the registration of exercise providers within WDC parks, to help monitor the use of parks and open spaces by physical activity providers. This was intended to be used to monitor the usage of parks and open spaces by organisations and individuals such as fitness groups and personal trainers.
- 1.1.2 The Parks Exercise Permit and Policy scheme was formally introduced in October 2020 following the approval of a report to Executive Committee on 24 August 2020.
- 1.1.3 As part of the application process applicants would provide Risk Assessments, Public Liability Insurance, qualifications and agree to the terms and conditions associated with the scheme. Upon review the permit would be issued confirming the location, activity, and time. As stated in the Terms and conditions the location within the park would be flexible due to events and

maintenance work carried out during the year.

1.1.4 The scheme was introduced to:

- To ensure parks and open spaces are accessible to everyone.
- Businesses are choosing our parks and open spaces to host various activities, which need regulating and should in some cases be chargeable.
- To reflect the change in usage of some of our parks and open spaces through the wider range of group fitness activities (e.g. boot camps, buggy fitness, circuit training, personal training, running groups).
- To support groups/clubs/organisations to deliver activities.
- To promote a varied programme of activities.
- To ensure health and safety of activities.

1.1.5 Overview and scrutiny committee asked for an annual review of the Parks Exercise Permit, which did not occur due to the covid pandemic and the suspension of the scheme pending its review.

1.2 **Current Position of the Scheme.**

1.2.1 A decision was made in August 2022 to temporarily suspend the Parks Exercise Permit, subject to a full review being conducted. This suspension decision was reached due to concerns being raised from officers and users.

1.2.2 The scheme was under resourced and as a result was not being monitored. This was leading to an uneven application and enforcement of the scheme. The scheme also contained loopholes which allowed free permits and exemption from pitch hire fees.

1.2.3 The scheme had initially been expected to generated income of £450 per month. However, this was achieved until 2022/23. As described in the table 1 below.

Table 1:

Financial Year	Permits Issued	Income
2018/2019	5	£6157
2019/2020	3	£3625
2020/2021 (figures from Oct 2020 – October 2021 as this was when the scheme officially started)	5 permits (of this 1 exempt from payment)	£3705
2021/2022	9 permits (of these 7 were exempt from payment)	£1575
2022/2023	15 permits (of these 9 were exempt from payment due to classification of non-profit organisations)	£6984

1.2.4 The Appendix 1 is a discussion paper which outlines the findings of the review, which was used to establish the desired strategic direction, which this report outlines:

1.3 Preferred Option

- 1.3.1 Considering the findings of the review, the preferred option was the continuation of the park permit scheme, with alterations to the scheme operational practises, documentation and terms and conditions. These include the following significant changes outlined in paragraphs 3.2 to 3.5.
- 1.3.2 That the terms and conditions are updated to reflect improvements identified in the review. The current and proposed application form along with the terms and conditions are included as appendix 2 and 3.
- 1.3.3 That the following open spaces are removed from the list of public spaces which were previously used under the scheme:
- Jephson Gardens
 - Harbury lane
 - Priory Park
 - St Marys Land
- 1.3.4 That the following Open spaces are added to the list of public spaces, as they are suited to these types of activity:
- Myton Green
 - Campion Hills
 - Eagle Recreation Ground
 - Myton Fields April-September only
 - Tapping Way
- 1.3.5 That processes and procedures are improved to provide a digital application and payment system, this would highlight what open spaces are available for the scheme and what activity already takes place within the open space.
- 1.3.6 It will be important to promote the scheme to advertise its reintroduction. Current known permit holders/bookers of the park spaces will be contacted directly to highlight changes to the scheme and provide opportunity to continue operating their activities at locations, times and dates registered with the council.
- 1.3.7 The 2024 permit scheme fee was agreed in the Executive Committee report heard on the 24 August 2020. It is proposed that the fee charged is reviewed for 2025 and reviewed following an evaluation of the impact of the changes to the scheme.

2 Alternative Options.

- 2.1 Reduced Scheme – That the scheme was reintroduced with the proposed changes to processes, procedures and terms and conditions. However, the permit scheme would only operate in a reduced number of selected open spaces across the district.

- 2.2 It was felt that this would make the scheme confusing for users and increase the risk of activity providers using alternative locations where the scheme is not in operation, thus creating a significant enforcement issue. A reduced scheme also would not provide the aim of local access to outdoor activities.
- 2.3 Discontinue the Scheme – That the scheme was formally discontinued. The scheme has not operated since August 2022 and there have been no formal complaints. Officers have dealt with information and advice requests in relation to the future of the scheme and current applications of the scheme’s terms and conditions.
- 2.4 This option was discounted as removing the scheme would provide the council with no information with regard to activities offered within our local parks and open spaces. This information has previously been shared with the local community and groups to help increase outdoor activity attendance numbers. The corporate strategy encourages everyone to have a more active lifestyle by using parks and open spaces.
- 2.5 By having the scheme in place, it allows oversight and management of activities that take place within our parks and ensures safe practices are adhered too. It also allows us to monitor usage within the parks and open space to protect against over usage in certain locations.

3 Legal Implications

- 3.1 No implications for legal.

4 Financial Implications

- 4.1 Table 2 shows previous income generated through the scheme. The figures below show a decline in the income generated from 2020-2022 due to the COVID pandemic and an increase following the pandemic in 22/23.

Table 2:

Financial Year	Income Received
2018/2019	£6157
2019/2020	£3625
2020/2021	£3705
2021/2022	£1575
2022/2023	£6984

- 4.2 The below table 3 and 4 shows agreed price structure (as outlined ratified at full council on 15th November 2023, Fees and Charges report) and forecasted income for 2024-2025 based on known operating groups. Copy of the agreed fees and charges for the scheme, can be located in the supporting documents section of this report.
- 4.3 Figures in Table 4 are based on the reintroduction of the scheme. The aim would be to encourage new bookings in addition to previous permit holders. We anticipate these figures to rise as the scheme matures. It should be noted that ‘Not for profit’ organisations where any surplus is reinvested directly into the organisation are proposed to be exempt from all fees and charges relating to

this scheme.

Table 3
2024/2025

1-3 Sessions Per Week	Monthly	Annual
Groups up to 5	£38.00	£392.00
Groups of 6 or more	£109.00	£1105.00
4+ Sessions Per Week	Monthly	Annual
Groups up to 5	£73.00	£742.00
Groups of 6 or more	£181.50	£1833.00

Table 4

Forecast income for 2024-2025	£ 4500.00
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5. Corporate Strategy

- 5.1 Warwick District Council has adopted a Corporate Strategy which sets three strategic aims for the organisation.
- 5.2 **Delivering valued, sustainable services** – The recommendations of the report will assist in implementing a more effective scheme which makes better use of existing resources within the council in order to provide an excellent high-quality service that are responsive and accessible to local needs.
- 5.3 **Low cost, low carbon energy across the district** – No contribution identified by these recommendations of the report. The scheme operates in open spaces providing local exercise/activity opportunities in a low carbon energy use environment.
- 5.4 **Creating vibrant, safe and healthy communities of the future** - The scheme attracts a variety of activities across the district which are open to all and are valued by the local community. It provides a variety of activity opportunities in local open spaces.
- 5.5 The scheme is monitored closely to ensure these are run both professionally and in accordance with the terms and conditions set out upon application. This mitigates unregulated use of the parks, prevents damage to the parks and their ecosystems which generates income to facilitate any remedial works and officer time if required.
- 5.6 Previous feedback for users of the scheme highlighted the community feel of each session and the requirement to offer a variety of different activities which indoor facilities are unable to provide.

6 Environmental/Climate Change Implications

- 6.1 In order to comply with the Council's policies on sustainability and its Climate Emergency Action Plan, officers have considered all potential sustainability and biodiversity features of all parks and open spaces across the district prior to identifying suitable spaces for this activity. In addition will assess each

application on its merits for the allocation of specific locations within those spaces for activities to take place.

- 6.2 Officers will review all applications on submission, each park has a balance in variety of activities provided and ensure the spread of usage is kept across the included parks and open spaces within the district.
- 6.3 Officers will monitor all allocated locations to ensure the mitigation of wear and tear in the spaces and act accordingly. They will also be ensuring the spaces remain available for public usage and are accessible whilst activities take place.
- 6.4 The scheme will permit activities in within a selected list of the district's parks and open spaces. Providing an opportunity for individuals to participate in activities which are lower in carbon usage.
- 6.5 As the scheme is located within the parks and open spaces, participants are encouraged to walk or cycle to their chosen activity.

7. Analysis of the effects on Equality

- 7.1 The parks exercise permit scheme is an open to all scheme, encouraging local activity organisers and community groups, who would like to take up the opportunity to deliver activities in the districts open spaces and parks.
- 7.2 As outlined in the financial section of this report, 'Not for profit' organisations where any surplus is reinvested directly into the organisation are proposed to be exempt from all fees and charges relating to this scheme.

8. Data Protection

- 8.1 Appropriate privacy and data protection procedures will be implemented for the handling of data provided on application forms.

9. Health and Wellbeing

- 9.1 The parks exercise permit scheme will contribute to the health and wellbeing of the residents of Warwick district along with, residents of the wider District and visitors to the area. The scheme will offer opportunity to use and visit our parks and open spaces, increasing social value of the spaces whilst improving environmental, economic and wellbeing of the area. Ancillary facilities within certain parks such as the café and toilets will be open to all at certain times, encouraging people to visit the facility and support local businesses.
- 9.2 Outdoor activities can significantly improve mental health, leading to reduced stress, enhanced mood, increase creativity and improve cognitive function.
- 9.3 Spending time in nature has been shown to improve both physical and mental health and helps reduce symptoms of anxiety, depression, stress, boosting mind thoughts and positive approach.
- 9.4 Safer Parks studies show that Women and Girls can feel unsafe in parks and open spaces, operating the park permit scheme would increase opportunities to participate in organised activities within a secure safe environment, whilst also enhancing the feeling safety for other parks users.
- 9.5 With operating the scheme within the opens spaces and parks it will contribute to improving safety as the presence of organised activities creates a safer atmosphere for all users.
- 9.6 Activities will be located within areas of the parks and open spaces to create a

more inclusive feel for all to use.

10. Risk Assessment

- 10.1 The scheme will generate administration tasks for officers in the form of application handling, complaint and conflict resolution in addition to interventions activities dealing with non-permitted users. We have reviewed all processes to ensure the best use of resources . In addition, staff time will be increased, through the use of established frontline teams, in the monitoring of all open spaces and parks which in turn will help to support unsolicited use, damage prevention and overuse of areas.
- 10.2 The previous scheme only generated a small-scale income and it possible that this continues at a similar small scale. The benefits of having a scheme are thought to outweigh the small scale income. It is proposed that part of this income will be reinvested into the councils' parks and open spaces, money will be spent in supporting biodiversity and maintaining pathways and surfaces, so that these are fit for purpose. Whilst the remainder is used to offset additional unforeseen costs.
- 10.3 The scheme encourages and supports physical and mental wellbeing, without a scheme in place the Council is unable to support communities to be active or make communities aware of the opportunities for range of group activities provided within the open spaces. It also promotes safe and vibrant use of the districts open spaces.
- 10.4 There is a risk that the permit scheme would still have its challenges in terms of its application and management. Therefore, it is proposed that this is reviewed regularly to ensure that these matters are addressed as soon as they are highlighted.
- 10.5 By not having a permit scheme, the parks and open spaces are free to use for commercial activities. This causes conflict with other park users, groups and visitors. The scheme seeks to regularise the use of the councils' open spaces for commercial exercise activity, thus preventing conflicts.
- 10.6 There is a risk that groups running activities on council land are inadequately insured, accredited and training. It is proposed that evidence of these matters is provided as part of the application process.
- 10.7 As the open spaces are council owned and the public are given access to these spaces, inadequate monitoring of the usage of these spaces might expose the council to liabilities associated with the activities of commercial groups using the spaces. Therefore, it is important to ensure the correct insurance, accreditation and training is in place for each applicant during the permit application process but also to monitor the usage of the open spaces by the permitted groups and those choosing to operate commercially in on council land without the correct permissions.
- 10.8 Without a scheme in place, regulated activities are limited to indoor activities only. This could impact on the reputation of the council for failing to provide

opportunities to outdoor group activities, for not offering choice to attendees or offering economic advantage to those who can afford specific parts of the sports and leisure sector.

11. Consultation

11.1 Consultation of previous permit holders has taken place and feedback has been given. Feedback from this can be found in Appendix One of this report.

Supporting documents:

This is not a legal requirement but may assist others in identifying documents you have referred to in producing the report.

Executive Committee report on 24 August 2020.

The report also included various information such as pricing policy, criteria, risks. The report and documents can be found at (item 7):

[cmis > Meeting Dates \(warwickdc.gov.uk\)](#)

The recommendations in the report were approved by members (item 7):

[Document.ashx \(warwickdc.gov.uk\)](#)