

 Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 15th November 2011		Agenda Item No. 9
Title	Bowls Working Party Recommendations	
For further information about this report please contact	Cllr Gerry Guest – Chair of Working Party Cllr Sue Gallagher – Portfolio Holder	
Wards of the District directly affected	Leamington - Milverton	
Is the report private and confidential and not for publication by virtue of a paragraph of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006?	No	
Date and meeting when issue was last considered and relevant minute number		
Background Papers		

Contrary to the policy framework:	No
Contrary to the budgetary framework:	No
Key Decision?	Yes
Included within the Forward Plan? (If yes include reference number)	No
Equality & Sustainability Impact Assessment Undertaken	Yes
Not required at this stage	

Officer/Councillor Approval		
Officer Approval	Date	Name
Chief Executive/Deputy Chief Executive		Andrew Jones
Head of Service		Rose Winship
CMT		
Section 151 Officer		Mike Snow
Monitoring Officer		
Finance		Mike Snow
Portfolio Holder(s)		Councillor Sue Gallagher
Consultation & Community Engagement		
Stakeholder meetings held with: Royal Leamington Spa Bowls Club Bowls England Warwickshire Womens Bowls Association		
Final Decision?	Yes	
Suggested next steps (if not final decision please set out below)		

1. **SUMMARY**

- 1.1 A member working party was established in early 2011 to consider future provision of bowling facilities in the district and the associated costs of providing these facilities.
- 1.2 The working party comprised Cllr Guest (Chair), Cllr Sue Gallagher (Portfolio Holder), Cllr Falp and Cllr Gill. The group were supported by Head of Cultural Services, Sports Parks and Leisure Manager and Sports and Events Officer.
- 1.3 The group met with each of the key stakeholders in order that they had a clear and comprehensive understanding of the current provision, the costs, and the future expectations of the stakeholders.
- 1.4 Following these meetings the Working Party considered a range of options relating to the future delivery of bowling provision in the district and produced a series of recommendations (Appendix 1)

2. **RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 Members note the recommendations of the Member Working Party
- 2.2 Overview and Scrutiny Committee agree what further scrutiny if any, that they wish to see on this service.

3. **REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 The Member Working Party undertook thorough and detailed investigation of the provision and usage of the bowling facilities provided by Warwick District Council in Victoria Park, Leamington. They conducted detailed interviews with the key users/stakeholders of the greens ie Royal Leamington Spa Bowls Club (RLSBC); Bowls England and Warwickshire Womens Bowling Association, each of whom are significant users of the greens and have a long standing history of working with Warwick District Council in the provision and promotion of the game of bowls.
- 3.2 The RLSBC lease expired in 2011 at which point the Working Party had been established and therefore it was considered appropriate to delay the issue of a new lease until the working party had concluded their investigations. Recommendation 7 outlines the proposals for a new lease and associated Service Level Agreement which will ensure the ongoing partnership between the RLSBC and WDC for the life of the lease. The details of the SLA have yet to be agreed with the club, but the overarching principles have been agreed and will be included in an Annex to the Lease. The increase in annual rent payable by the Club reflects an increase in line with the advised commercial value of the property plus a payment to cover the unlimited usage by club members of the greens as an alternative to the seasons tickets required by the "non resident" clubs who use the greens.
- 3.3 RLSBC make their section of the clubhouse available for functions. In some cases these functions require additional space and on these occasions the club request use of the WDC section of the Pavilion. The charge referred to in Recommendation 8 is in respect of this room hire and is in line with other WDC charges for hire of this space.
- 3.4 In recent years there have been many suggestions that Bowls England may consider bringing the mens and womens national championships to one venue,

either Worthing or Leamington Spa. It is now considered that neither venue could host both championships back to back and there is a consensus that the two championships will remain at their current venues for the foreseeable future. It is anticipated that WDC will be asked to sign an agreement to this effect in 2012 at the end of the current agreement. Bowls England have also expressed a wish to retain an office base at Victoria Park beyond the end of this year when their current office manager retires. Consequently it is recommended that the Bowls England Office is retained for their use, but with an increased rent of £2000. This is based on average rental rates for office space in Leamington and includes use of the WDC room for meetings when available. Appendix 1 - Recommendation 5.

- 3.5 The annual Women's National Championships are organised jointly by WDC and Bowls England. The costs of the championships are borne by both organisations as appropriate; the cost to WDC is in the region of £7.5k depending on income generated by the car park, The Member Working Party have recommended that WDC officers meet with Bowls England to consider ways in which the costs could be reduced or the income increased, but have noted that these changes should not be at the expense of the quality of the event which could be a false economy and have an impact on the wider economic benefits of hosting the event in the district. Previous work has suggested that there is an economic benefit to the district in the region of £613k during the 2 weeks of the Nationals and therefore this should not be overlooked when considering the value of the investment that this council makes towards the annual event.
- 3.6 The Working Party were very mindful of the need to see the usage of the greens increased, by a range of groups and by all levels of bowlers. Recommendations 1,2,3,4, and 10 focus on ways that the level of usage could be increased, making the facility a well used and valued community facility. The Working Party were concerned that the wider community have a perception that the greens are privately owned and only available for the RLSBC. Marketing and promotion of the facilities, improved signage and strengthened outreach to community groups and schools have all been suggested as ways of addressing this issue. Recommendation 2 is a longer term initiative which looks to build on the widening reputation of the greens as the home of the National Championships and seeks to establish links with local hotels and other attractions in the district to encourage individuals, groups and clubs to visit Leamington and play their chosen sport on the high quality greens. This will require further officer time and resource, but is considered a worthwhile project for the future.
- 3.7 The Working Party were made aware of the wide range of clubs and associations who currently use the greens and the variable rates of hire that are currently charged. It was agreed that officers needed to develop a clear and transparent scale of charges that could be applied across all users; the charges will need to reflect a range of types of use including practice sessions, club matches, county matches, open competitions and representative national matches.

4. **POLICY FRAMEWORK**

- 4.1 **Policy Framework**– there are no changes to the current policy framework.
- 4.2 **Fit for the Future**– the review of bowls provision was a project within the Sports and Leisure intervention of Fit for the Future.

5. BUDGETARY FRAMEWORK

5.1 The current cost of providing the bowling greens is approx. £108,400 nett pa

5.2 The recommendations proposed by the Working Party have the following financial implications:

5.3 RLSBC

Increased rent	£3,500 pa
Additional income from hire of WDC room	£400

5.4 Bowls England

Increased rent	£500
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5.5 Other Income

Increased income from more competitions	£500
Increased income from casual usage	£500
Increased income from sale of seasons tickets	£300
Potential Extra Income from Championships	£3k – £6k

5.6 Potential savings

Alternative to attendant duties within GM contract - discussions with the Club.	£5k Subject to further
Reduce WDC expenditure of Nationals	£1000

6. ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S) CONSIDERED

6.1 The Working Party considered the reduction of the number of greens at Victoria Park, making an approx. saving of £8k Per annum, and/or the reduction in the standard of playing surface. However the Working Party felt that the benefits of having five high quality greens which allow the National Championships to be hosted in the district, and with the promise of other national level events returning to the greens now that the standard of the playing surface has significantly improved, were too great a price to pay given the wider economic benefits to the district.

6.2 The Working Party considered the option of significantly increasing the annual rent paid by RLSBC to increase the income and reduce the cost to the Council. These initial proposals were met with strong resistance from the club which the Working Party felt could jeopardise future partnership working and have a major impact on the ability of the Council to attract high quality bowls to the district.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1 RLSBC are the resident club at the Victoria Park Greens. The club celebrated its 100 year in 2010 during which time they have made a significant contribution to the local sporting scene. The club have been tenants of the Council since 1968 and worked in partnership with the Council leading up to the construction of the new Pavilion in 1994/95 in preparation for the 1996 World Bowls Championships that were hosted on these greens. The Club have exclusive use of approximately a third of the pavilion which is their club house from which they run a thriving and successful club with approx 150 playing members & a further 50+ social members.

7.2 Bowls England are the national governing body of the sport of Bowls and have for many years had the headquarters of their womens section at Victoria Park, Leamington Spa. Bowls England have over the years developed a close working relationship with the Council, its elected members and officers and with RLSBC. It has been this partnership that has brought 2 world championships to the Victoria Park greens in 1996 and 2004 and the annual Women's National Championships for a fortnight every August. In 2007 Bowls England signed an agreement with WDC to continue to use the greens for the Nationals; this has been honoured despite changes in the structure of Bowls England which has seen the mens and women's sections amalgamated into one unified Association

Appendix 1.

1. **Recommendation.** Retain 5 greens at Victoria Park and agree the standard to be achieved to attract international bowls to Victoria Park.
2. **Recommendation.** Investigate opportunities to promote Royal Leamington Spa as a venue for “bowls holidays”.
3. **Recommendation.** Work with Bowls England, County Bowls organisations and RLSBC to attract more competitions to the Victoria Park greens. Develop a clear scale of charges for such events.
4. **Recommendation:** WDC will work closely with the organising committees for the Mens and Womens Leamington Opens to support these events and help them grow.
5. **Recommendation. *Bowls England*** - WDC to Increase the rent hire for the office to £2000 based on current market value with a discount applied. This charge will also cover the cost of room hire for BE meetings throughout the year.
6. **Recommendation. *Bowls England*** - Consider ways of reducing cost to WDC of Nationals by reviewing opportunities to maximise income and control expenditure without significantly impacting on the event or the benefit to the District of the Nationals
7. **Recommendation.** The lease with **RLSBC** is revised. It is proposed that the new lease will be for 15 years with breaks and rent reviews every 5 years. The annual rental will be:
 - £10,500 pa – offered in association with commitment to a jointly developed Service Level Agreement (SLA)Or
 - £14,000 pa – without RLSBC tying themselves into the SLA

The new lease will allow the Club to have exclusive use of up to 1.5 greens at any one time for fixtures, roll ups & friendly matches involving the club and its members.

Fixtures. RLSBC will notify WDC of all matches & fixtures throughout the season.

WDC will retain the right to request exclusive use of the greens for the 2 weeks of the National Championships each year and any other major events (with reasonable advance notice to the club).

The development of a Service Level Agreement between WDC and RLSBC would seek to encapsulate the joint objectives of the two organisations in promoting the sport and encouraging participation at Victoria Park. As a partnership document it would identify key objectives and actions which will be undertaken by each party in achieving this shared vision for the future and provide a framework against which progress can be assessed and future plans developed.

The SLA is intended to deliver on the following objectives:

- Increase participation in the game of Bowls, increase usage of Victoria Park greens, and to make the Victoria Park bowling greens more accessible to the local community.
- Increase partnership working between Royal Leamington Spa Bowls Club, Bowls England & Warwick District Council.
- Identify opportunities to reduce the costs & unnecessary expenditure associated with the provision of Victoria Park greens and associated facilities.
- Continued investment & development in the quality of the playing surface & ancillary facilities at Victoria Park.

The details of the SLA will be developed between RLSBC and WDC which would then be pulled together into an action plan which can be monitored through 6 monthly meetings between the club and Council to monitor progress towards meeting the above objectives which will form part of the ongoing relationship between Warwick District Council & RLSBC.

8. **Recommendation.** Introduce a room hire fee for RLSBC using WDC room at the Pavilion for functions. These costs could then be passed onto the hirer/function organiser. Charge per function £114 (based on 2pm – midnight). Full day bookings by negotiation.
9. **Recommendation.** Members of all clubs (other than RLSBC) using Victoria Park bowling greens outside of their clubs booked fixtures will be required to purchase a day ticket or alternatively season ticket from WDC at £55.00 for Adults & £35.00 concessionary (valid from April – October).
The season tickets entitle the holder to unlimited use of the greens outside of their club's agreed fixtures & club day providing there are rinks available.
10. **Recommendation.** Promote the greens to members of the public in most appropriate ways. Casual fees will be benchmarked against other authorities/clubs & use that to direct towards the new fees & charges from January 1st 2012.