

**FOR: (COUNCILLOR ANDY SMITH - CABINET MEMBER FOR RECYCLING AND LEISURE)**

**Date: 24 January 2020**

**Contact Officer: John Smith  
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**KEY DECISION: NO**

## **THE LEASE OF BOWLING GREENS IN BEACON PARK TO BEACON PARK BOWLS CLUBS**

### **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 Lichfield District Council owns and manages 2 bowling greens in Beacon Park facilitated by an adjacent Community Hub building.
- 1.2 Beacon Park Bowling Green's Maintenance Company Ltd (BPB) is a charitable organisation registered at Companies House and is a not-for-profit constituted group with the ambition of developing opportunities, accessible to the entire community, for bowling related activities in Beacon Park.
- 1.3 BPB are willing to take on the management and maintenance of the bowling greens from LDC and promote and increase opportunities and use of the bowling greens for the benefit of Lichfield district residents.
- 1.4 This provides the council with an opportunity that retains its existing facility, provides continued access and allows the bowling groups to significantly improve their membership at a more agreeable annual subscription for their members.
- 1.5 The transfer of the bowling greens to BPB will also free up an average of 550 working hours per year that will allow existing staff to undertake additional works including maintenance of new public open space adoptions that will significantly help to reduce budget pressures.

### **2. Recommendation**

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Cabinet Member for Recycling and Leisure agrees a 25-year lease at peppercorn rent - £1p/a (with 5-year break clause) with Beacon Park Bowling Green's Maintenance Company Ltd for the operation and management of both bowling greens in Beacon Park.

### **3. Statement of Reasons**

- 3.1 Bowls has been played in Beacon Park since the early 1900's, with a flat green installed in 1922 and a crown green installed in 1962. In 2011, the original flat green in Museum Gardens was replaced with a new green and a new club house (Discovery Hub) alongside the crown green.
- 3.2 Two clubs regularly use these greens for match play; Lichfield Museum Bowling Club and Lichfield Crown Green Bowls Club. Both greens remain available for use by the general public except for match days and official club practice sessions.
- 3.3 The council currently operates a seasonal membership fee for individuals, which is collected by each club and paid to the council. This covers full use of the greens for a season from April until September.
- 3.4 The Discovery Hub is a popular and well-loved shared use community facility with priority use for club matches during the bowls season and is used for educational/meeting/hire use during non-

match days and the winter period. Any other income from hire of the discovery hub will remain with the council.

- 3.5 The average cost to maintain the two Bowling Greens is approximately £7100 per year which includes materials, overheads and external contractor costs. The income budget for the Bowling Greens is £7100, over the past 3 years income has been slightly higher at between approximately £7600 and £8300.
- 3.6 In 2016, the council met with both bowls clubs seeking the development of a bowls forum, looking for greater support and involvement and asking for consideration of a lease for the greens.
- 3.7 In 2018, both clubs developed the Greens Maintenance Project with a view to being able to undertake their own greens maintenance effective from the start of the 2020 bowling season.
- 3.8 Subsequently, Beacon Park Bowling Green's Maintenance Company was registered at Companies House. The Company has eight directors (four from each Bowling Club), company number of 12311107. The company has a Memorandum of Association and Articles of Association and has a working group consisting of four representatives of each bowling club.
- 3.9 The working group has already secured a company to do the greens maintenance work such as scarifying, winter maintenance, weed and fungicide control, aeration, and fertilisation application and the mowing will be undertaken by a retired Head Groundsman with assistance from club volunteers.
- 3.10 BPB has already raised all the grant support in order to purchase a new suitable mower and other equipment.
- 3.11 BPB has indicated that their membership subscriptions will be considerably less than the existing fees charged by the Council and also less than the subsidised subscriptions currently paid by members of the two Bowling Clubs and be positive for community use by increasing club membership, new people getting involved and usage of the bowling greens.
- 3.12 Draft Heads of Terms (Appendix A) have been prepared between LDC and BPB for a 25-year lease for the bowling greens so that BPB can provide low-cost bowling and grow its user base for the site. The draft Heads of Terms outline the continued requirements from LDC for this operational support.
- 3.13 The Council will assist the bowling clubs by providing financial support for legal costs, providing a storage facility for mowers and other equipment and any other help which may be needed. Usage of the Discovery Hub will continue as at present and the Council will be responsible for maintenance of the paths around the green and the hedges.
- 3.14 There would be an expectation and requirement that BPB would properly maintain the bowling greens and continue to offer a public play facility similar to that already in place. BPB will also take over the annual cost of maintaining the irrigation system. The council would continue to manage the Discovery Hub and hedgerow boundary to the greens and assist the club with green waste recycling. The financial cost of this support from the council is de minimis.
- 3.15 There would be one off costs linked to facilitating the transfer process (legal (£1500) and infrastructure (£2000)), but no other savings as a result of the transfer because the net cost from materials and external contractor costs would be offset by the loss of budgeted income. The parks and grounds maintenance budgets would need to be re-aligned to reflect the loss of income from fees, set against the savings from materials and agency costs.
- 3.16 The transfer of the bowling greens to BPB will also free up an average of 550 working hours per year that will allow existing staff to undertake additional works including maintenance of new public open space adoptions that will significantly help to reduce these budget pressures.
- 3.17 Our Strategic Plan 2016 - 2020 sets out our vision to be a strong, flexible council that delivers good value, quality services and helps to support a vibrant and prosperous economy, healthy and safe communities and clean, green and welcoming places to live.
- 3.18 This proposal reflects our strategies for the health of our communities because: "We want local people to have access to opportunities to be active and live healthy, fulfilled lives. We want to prevent social isolation and loneliness, particularly in older members of our community. We want our communities to be safe and for people to be less worried about crime and anti-social behaviour.

We want to encourage and support people to volunteer and help shape their communities, and be an active part of local life”.

- 3.19 Any forms of exercise is good for your health, no matter how gentle it maybe. Participating in team sports, such as bowls, delivers significant benefits including social, physical and mental wellbeing. Bowls is particularly popular in Lichfield with older adults.
- Currently the two bowling clubs that use the facilities have approximately 100 members playing bowls on a regular basis.
  - The average age of members is between 65-85 years old.
- 3.20 The provision of bowling greens in our district supports the delivery of this strategy by contributing to several outcomes including:
- More people will be active and healthy
  - More people will be involved in volunteering and community activities
  - More people will use parks and open spaces

#### 4. Any Alternative Options

4.1 The District Council has 2 options detailed below, with option 2 being the recommended option:

- 1) To keep the management and maintenance of Beacon Parks’ bowling greens in house.
- 2) To transfer the bowling green to BPB on a 25-year lease.

1) To keep the management and maintenance of Beacon parks bowling greens in house	
Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Control of the facility remains with the council.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LDC continue to maintain the bowling green facilities in Beacon Park</li> <li>• The bowls groups are not able to have control over their facilities</li> <li>• It’s unlikely that bowlers will see any reduction in their fees.</li> <li>• Green are not accessible to more people.</li> </ul>

2) To transfer the bowling green to BPB on a 25-year lease	
Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This reflects positively when considering the council’s health and wellbeing strategy and physical activity and sports strategy.</li> <li>• The transfer would free up an average of 550 working hours per year to help reduce the impending grounds maintenance pressures due to existing commitments of open space adoption agreements.</li> <li>• The council will no longer need to maintain the greens.</li> <li>• The bowls groups have control over the greens and more importantly the fees for their players.</li> <li>• Members of the bowls clubs are likely to see a reduction in their playing fees.</li> <li>• More people are likely to play bowls.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loss of income, however this will be fully offset from savings on materials, external contractors and agency staff support.</li> <li>• LDC passes control of a public facility to a third party.</li> <li>• LDC would incur one off costs associated with facilitating the transfer of up to £3500.</li> </ul>

#### 5. Consultation

5.1 The Council has discussed the proposals with Ward Members and the Friends of Historic Parks who are supportive of the proposals.

## 6. Financial Implications

- Income from the Bowling Greens over the past 3 years was 2016/17 £7,811, 2017/18 £7,683 and 2018/19 £8,339. The income budget for 2019/20 onwards is £7,100.
- The average grounds maintenance cost for the two bowling greens is approximately £7,100 per year. This includes agency staff cost (£4,600) and material costs (£2,500).
- One off costs of transfer include £1,500 as a contribution to the bowling clubs legal fees and the installation of a storage facility on site for equipment £2,000. These costs will be covered from additional income generated throughout the year by the parks and streetscene teams.
- The parks and grounds maintenance budgets would need to be re-aligned to reflect the loss of income from fees, set against the savings from materials and agency costs.

	2020/21	2021/22 Onwards
	£	£
Income From Fees Lost	7,100	7,100
Agency Costs Saved	(4,600)	(4,600)
Material Costs Saved	(2,500)	(2,500)
One-off Costs of Transfer	(3,500)	0
Net	(3,500)	0

## 7. Strategic Plan Implications

7.1 The provision of well-maintained publicly accessible sports facilities helps achieve the following:

- More people will be active and healthy
- More people will be involved in volunteering and community activities
- More people will use parks and open spaces

The lease of the bowling greens will protect and enhance them because BPB is constituted from active playing members from both clubs and is accountable to those actively using the facility for this purpose.

## 8. Community Benefits

8.1 The benefits to the community and the council have been identified as follows:

- Both bowls clubs can strengthen in numbers and offer more opportunities for local residents to engage with and join them.
- The opportunity for clubs to control the rates and types of membership - this could include reducing membership prices, having social member rates, junior memberships, and couples memberships.
- Opportunities to grow participation in sport and increase usage of the greens.
- BPB is more likely to be able to secure external funding to invest in its playing facilities; for instance grant aid towards installing floodlighting.

Enhancing the fine turf quality leading to an increase in the satisfaction of the sporting experience for users.

## 9. Human Rights Issues

9.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed which suggests that the transfer of the bowls greens would have greater benefits for the community, which include:

- A club can continue to strengthen and thereby offer more opportunities for local residents to engage with and join the club
  - The opportunity to control the rates of membership prices - this could include reducing membership prices, having social member rates, junior memberships, couples memberships
  - Opportunities to grow participation in sport and increase usage
  - A club is more likely to be able to secure external funding to invest in its playing facilities; for instance grant aid towards installing floodlighting
  - Improving the quality of the asset leading to an increase in the satisfaction of the sporting experience for users
  - An increase in the ability to generate income and create a more sustainable financial position
  - The opportunity to create a firm base and identity for purposes of self-determination
- (See Appendix C).

## 10. Crime and Community Safety Issues

10.1 Physical Activity plays a vital part in supporting cohesive communities. Diverting people into properly organised positive activities is an effective way of stopping people, especially young people, falling into crime.

## 11. Risk Management Issues

	Risk Description	How We Manage It	Severity of Risk (RYG)
A	The district council cannot agree terms with BPB.	Negotiations and discussions have taken place at an appropriately senior level with both parties and HOTs for a lease have been agreed in principle.	Green
B	Adverse reaction from users and residents	A communications plan will be prepared and implemented to explain why these proposals are in the best interests of the site, users and taxpayers.	Green
C	The other party fail to manage the sites properly and associated reputational issues	The lease agreements will commit BPB to maintain the Bowling Green's to a decent standard.	Green
D	Loss of a publicly available facility on a regular basis	Last year the bowling greens were access 45 times on play as you go. The club will be able to engage with those that want to play outside of competition and offer a different type of club membership.	Green
E	BPB cease to exist within the next 25-years.	The Bowling Green's would revert back to LDC, in similar condition to present. LDC would generate income from that point.	Green
F	A rateable value might be incurred due to a transition between an LA run facility and a charity run facility	We have asked our professional body their advice as to whether it would be rated as public use remains. If it is rated, it should be quite a low RV and the Bowls clubs would get mandatory 80% charity relief, which LDC can top up to 100%.	Green

**Background Documents:**

Appendix A – HOTS for a 25-year lease.

Appendix B – Plan of bowling green's and lease area.

Appendix C – Equality Impact Assessment