

REPORT TITLE: PROPOSED UPGRADES TO ARTIFICIAL TURF PITCH AT
NORTH WALLS RECREATION GROUND

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REPORT OF CABINET MEMBER: COUNCILLOR KELSIE LEARNEY, CABINET
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WARD(S): ST BARTHOLOMEW

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with details of the required upgrades to the tennis courts and artificial turf pitch facilities at North Walls Recreation Ground including financing options. These upgrades relate to the fencing for the artificial turf pitch and floodlighting across the artificial turf pitch and tennis courts. The report covers all required capital works currently programmed including the resurfacing of the tennis courts in future years. It is recommended that Town Forum approves spending for these works to ensure the facilities are adequately maintained, operational for the community and function with environmental sensitivity.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Town Forum, subject to Cabinet and Council approval of the overall town account budget in February:

1. Approves a budget and expenditure of £99k for the fencing and floodlighting improvement works required in 2021/22 financed by the Town Community Infrastructure Levy, subject to any necessary approvals through the CIL process.
2. Delegates authority to the Natural Environment and Recreation Team Manager to undertake the procurement process and appoint the relevant contractors to enable the improvements work.
3. Approves a budget and expenditure of up to £150k in 2022/23 for the resurfacing of the tennis courts financed from internal borrowing.

IMPLICATIONS:

1 COUNCIL PLAN OUTCOME

- 1.1 Tackling the Climate Emergency and Creating a Greener District
- 1.2 The existing floodlights across the artificial turf pitch (ATP) and tennis courts use outdated technology and are therefore not the most sustainable option for lighting the facility. By replacing the existing lighting system with an LED system, Winchester City Council would make an annual CO₂ saving of 26000kg and an annual forecast cost saving of £8,536. This is equivalent to a three year payback on this specific element of the scheme.
- 1.3 Vibrant Local Economy
- 1.4 The proposed improvements at North Walls Recreation Ground would address user concerns in regards to security and safety of the facility and will encourage both new and retained custom. Promotion of the works will be advertised with opportunities explored to utilise hire during all available times.
- 1.5 Living Well
- 1.6 The ATP and tennis courts support the council plan aim to maintain and enhance open spaces and parks that support good mental and physical health for residents of all ages. The pitches host regular sessions with local sports clubs, schools and organised leagues and the proposed works will enable the existing facilities to continue to support health and wellbeing through exercise and increased activity.
- 1.7 Anecdotal feedback from current users shows that many are concerned that the facility is becoming neglected and these improvements would reassure residents of the council's commitment to providing high quality sports provision at North Walls. It would also provide the opportunity to explore more community initiatives, enabling the council to maximise use of the facility whilst simultaneously engaging with groups who currently use the site illegally and not for its intended purpose.
- 1.8 Your Services, Your Voice
- 1.9 The proposed improvements are based on concerns raised by hirers of the facilities and Osman Tennis, the current lease holder for tennis provision and coaching. Commitment to improve these facilities demonstrates the Council's willingness to engage with users and other partners and act on their feedback, as well as addressing faults and issues identified as part of the council's routine facility management.

2 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 2.1 Additional one-off budget of £249,000 is required in order to deliver the proposals contained within this report.

- a) It is recommended that the £99,000 of enhancements for the fencing and floodlighting improvement in 2021/22 is funded from Town CIL as the facilities are used by residents from across the town area and they will provide significant improvements for users.
- b) It is recommended that the cost of up to £150,000 for resurfacing the tennis courts is funded by the town account. Given the current town account reserve balance and expected future pressures, it will be necessary for the town to internally borrow this sum, paying it back via a revenue contribution over the expected life of the asset (20 years). It is estimated that the annual sum will be approximately £9,000, commencing in 2023/24, and this will feed into the town budget paper as a new budget requirement.

- 2.2 The table below details the income and revenue expenditure forecasts for the tennis courts and ATP over the next five years. It should be noted that this is a budget extract to show the financial estimates for the courts and pitches only, any surplus shown does not reflect an overall budget surplus for the town account.

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Income Forecasts	80,000	80,000	90,000	90,000	90,000
<u>Revenue</u>					
<u>Expenditure</u>					
Annual maintenance	-23,939	-24,298	-24,298	-24,298	-24,298
Utilities / NNDR / Ad-hoc works	-16,680	-10,000	-10,000	-10,000	-10,000
Open Space Support Officer	-22,500	-22,500	-22,500	-22,500	-22,500
Annual costs of resurfacing			-9,000	-9,000	-9,000
(Shortfall) / Surplus	16,881	23,202	24,202	24,202	24,202

- 2.3 The following table shows the one-off expenditure required over the next two years in order to upgrade the facilities ensuring they are safe, fit for purpose and contributes to reducing carbon emissions.

2.4

	2021/22	2022/23	TOTAL
<u>Non-recurring Expenditure</u>			
Fencing	57,000		57,000
Lighting	42,000		42,000
Resurfacing		150,000	150,000
TOTAL	99,000	150,000	249,000

3 LEGAL AND PROCUREMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 All works will be procured in line with the council's contract procedure rules. Quotations have already been received for the fencing and lighting works which have been evaluated based primarily on cost but with considerations for lead time and impact on users from facility closure times.
- 3.2 The procurement of the resurfacing works will be carried out by the Estates Team in 2022/23.
- 3.3 Risk assessments were conducted resulting in a low risk verdict for both contracts due to the availability of similar companies who could provide the same service in a relatively short space of time if necessary.

4 WORKFORCE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The procurement and delivery of the improvements works will be met within the existing resources of the Natural Environment and Recreation Team and Estates Team.

5 PROPERTY AND ASSET IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 North Walls Recreation Ground, including the tennis courts and ATP, is owned and managed by Winchester City Council.
- 5.2 The management of maintenance of the courts and artificial turf pitch will be managed through existing resources.
- 5.3 The assets form part of the council's corporate portfolio, and future planned maintenance will be incorporated within the Asset Management Plan.

6 CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

6.1 There has been a programme of engagement at North Walls Recreation Ground in relation to delivery of the Park Plan which commenced in March 2019 with the second phase in May/June 2021. This consultation showed the importance of the tennis courts and ATP with residents and users expressing their desire for it to be retained.

6.2 Recent events, resulting in damaged fencing, illegal access and lighting faults, have increased communication with regular hirers to provide updates on the progress of the improvement works and to reassure them that the council will address their concerns. Once dates for the works have been finalised, the council will be engaging with users to provide details on the operational elements of the works including facility closure times.

7 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

7.1 Considerations have been made to support the council's commitment to achieving carbon neutrality by 2024 and the wider district by 2030. It is proposed to upgrade the floodlights to a LED system, thereby addressing energy as one of the three biggest sources of carbon emissions, and achieving an estimated annual reduction of 26,000kg in carbon emissions.

8 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

8.1 Officers have had regard to the council's duties under the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Equalities Act 2010. A scoping equality impact assessment will be carried out as part of the tendering process and a more detailed assessment undertaken if needed.

8.2 The proposed improvements to the ATP will maintain and improve accessibility and usability for all users.

9 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

9.1 None required

10 RISK MANAGEMENT

Risk	Mitigation	Opportunities
Financial Exposure	The risk that income does not reach expected levels is mitigated by the annual surplus which provides cover of 18-25k	Opportunities for increased usage and additional income will be explored.
Exposure to challenge	The need for improvement works has been raised by numerous regular hirers who are supportive of plans to address ongoing issues	Users of the facilities have been kept updated with how WCC intends to improve the site from a health & safety and operational perspective.

	by these proposals. Procurement regulations to be followed in accordance with the councils contract procedure rules.	
Innovation	The facilities that require improvements have been in place for 20+ years and are no longer fit for purpose through both extensive use and damage sustained over time.	The brief that was set out within the quotation process required the inclusion of materials and technology which is more advanced than that currently in place. This provided the opportunity for environmental and cost savings to be made.
Reputation	Since taking over management of the facilities in April 2021 WCC has experienced defective lighting and security breaches on the site. Work is ongoing to maintain relationships with existing customers and to ensure the causes of these failings are being addressed.	Investing in the facilities will ensure the reputation of WCC is both repaired and enhanced through its interest shown in promoting health and wellbeing for the local community.
Achievement of outcome	All elements of the improvement works will be co-ordinated to limit closure time and impact on users. Contracts will be managed in accordance with the council's contract management framework.	The enhanced facilities will be heavily promoted to encourage further use and maximisation of all available playing time.
Property		There is an opportunity for WCC to improve the safety, security and operation of the facilities.
Community Support	WCC to continue to communicate plans regarding facility improvements with existing users.	Ensure that WCC engages with known users and wider groups who may wish to use facility for community

		initiatives.
Timescales	Works orders for the fencing and lighting to be placed in 2021/22 financial year. The Project is likely to be completed in two phases and will require an approx. 6-8 week closure. Resurfacing works will take place in 2022/23.	
Project capacity	Specialist contractors required for each element of the works. A risk assessment will be undertaken prior to procuring each work element to further understand risks and mitigate as part of the procurement / contract management process.	Quotation process followed in accordance with the councils contract procedure rules. .

11 SUPPORTING INFORMATION:

Background

- 11.1 Since taking over management of the outdoor sports facilities at North Walls Recreation Ground in April 2021, there have been frequent reports of anti-social behaviour including incidents of illegal trespassing, disabling electrical systems, damage to the gate, fencing and surface of the ATP, misuse of the pitch once inside and verbal abuse of legitimate users of the facilities and officers. Reports of inappropriate behaviour and substance abuse have also been investigated. One minor injury sustained from a section of the fence has been reported.
- 11.2 As a consequence, the condition of the fence that surrounds the ATP has significantly deteriorated to its current state. Daily inspections and reports from users have identified areas of the fence that have been cut and warped to allow easier access and sections of the automated gate that have been removed using both tools and force which have disabled the mechanism completely. These acts have compromised the security and safety of the facility and have now left sections of the fence unfit for purpose and in need of urgent replacement. Remedial works have been carried out to remove any immediate threat to the safety of users and to reinstate the automated gate, however, the pitch can no longer be kept secure.

11.3 Immediate steps have been taken to minimise the problem as detailed below:

- Manage the current level of anti-social behaviour by challenging the threatening and unpleasant behaviour, with the aim of reducing the acts of vandalism and ensuring the site is playable by legitimate users.
- Respond to any instances of vandalism and make temporary repairs to the facilities until a longer term solution can be found.
- Safeguard officers, users and others at North Walls Recreation Ground.

11.4 This occupies a significant amount of officer time and, while having limited success in the short term, the anti-social behaviour quickly resumes. Despite attempts to engage with those who misuse the site, interactions generally result in abuse being directed at officers or other users of the facilities. The continued misuse of the facilities and behaviour of those involved has begun to impact the perception of regular users which in turn jeopardises guaranteed income during off peak times. It is necessary to continue to respond to reports in this way to maintain a positive relationship between the council and hirers, providing reassurance and support to people using the facility. The impact that this is having on officer time, the facility itself, in terms of damage and repair costs, as well as council reputation indicates that this is not a long term option.

11.5 It became apparent in late autumn that there were operational problems with the lighting system. A number of bulbs began to fail on a regular basis and required replacing to allow the courts to be used during the evening. One light still remains out of action and requires extensive repair work due to damaged wiring from years of use. This damaged light can also cause all power to the facility to cut out and trip the entire circuit. Given the cost of remedial works and the options for floodlights with greater efficiency, the best option is now a complete replacement which will also provide cost and carbon savings to the council.

Details of the proposal

11.6 In order to provide a permanent solution and ensure the site is safe and fit for purpose, it is necessary to upgrade the facilities including replacement of the existing fencing around the perimeter of the ATP and upgrading all floodlights to a new LED system servicing both the tennis courts and the ATP.

11.7 Due to the outdated nature of its design and its current poor condition, it is not possible to repair the existing fence. A replacement using 4m high double wire mesh which provides a tough and durable alternative to the easily manipulated option currently in place is proposed. The fencing would include rebound mesh to the lower section as well as a 1m lean over arm on the near side which will make it harder for people attempting to climb over and will act as a deterrent. The life span of the proposed fence is circa 20 years and it is a bespoke design specifically for Multi Use Games Areas, school playing fields, ball parks, play areas and tennis courts.

- 11.8 It is proposed to upgrade the floodlights to a LED system, thereby increasing reliability and reducing repairs, as well as achieving an estimated annual reduction of 26,000kg in carbon emissions and an estimated annual cost saving of £8536.21 with a 3-year ROI. The lifespan of the new LED system would be 12 – 15 years.
- 11.9 The tennis courts and ATP are key facilities within the town, supporting users from across the whole town area. An analysis of site usage since Winchester City Council took on its management shows that 51% of users live within a 1km radius of North Walls whilst 49% live in the wider town area or further afield.
- 11.10 To continue to support this important facility, it is recommended that the required enhancements be funded by town CIL.

Future Improvements

- 11.11 Prior to the council taking back management of the tennis courts and ATP, an independent assessment was commissioned in July 2020 to assess the condition of the tennis court surfacing. The report concluded that courts 1 & 2 would require resurfacing in the next 12-18 months and courts 3 & 4 in the next 2-3 years on the basis of surface erosion at a cost of circa £150k. The condition survey includes 4 possible options and at the time the works are due for commission the exact requirements will be reviewed and the most suitable option implemented. If works can be completed for less than £150k, the level of borrowing will be reduced.
- 11.12 The resurfacing works are in the Asset Management Plan and scheduled to take place in financial year 2022/23, Town Forum is asked to approve the requirement for future expenditure and to include this in the 2022/23 budget. It is recommended that this work be funded through borrowing.
- 11.13 The courts and pitches will be promoted to maximise usage and income. We will continue to monitor the facility at key times using existing data of when illegal use takes place. Work will also continue with partners from the Winchester anti-social behaviour panel to engage with community groups.

12 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

- 12.1 **Option 1 – Leave as is.** The option to leave the existing fence and floodlight system in place has been discounted due to the health and safety risk that it poses. The fence is continually repaired with temporary measures but, as more damage is created so are the potential hazards to users from injury through insufficiently lit areas and protruding wires. The anti-social behaviour, as a consequence of the damaged fencing, is also impacting other users, significantly sports coaches who operate from the tennis courts who are becoming disheartened with daily interruption from the adjacent pitch and the illegal users.

- 12.2 **Option 2 – Remove fencing and lighting.** Removing the fencing from the site would accelerate the deterioration of the equipment and remaining facilities. There are incidents currently of the area being misused e.g. bikes ridden across the ATP, littering etc. and without security measures this would likely increase. The removal of the lighting would also significantly reduce the opportunity to use the facilities safely at certain times of the year. In addition, the site would not be usable for football without a protective boundary.
- 12.3 **Option 3 – Closure of facility.** Closing the ATP at North Walls Recreation Ground would prevent a significant source of income to the council and would be unlikely to remove the issue of people accessing the facility. The closure would also deny many the opportunity to participate in physical activity and to gain from the associated health and wellbeing benefits. There is a significant risk of damage to the council reputation as the site has been used successfully for many years with the majority of users being regular hirers from clubs/organisations in the local area.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:-

Previous Committee Reports:-

Briefing note presented to Town Forum, River Park Tennis Court and ATP Briefing Note, 10th November 2021

WTF283, PARK PLAN FOR NORTH WALLS RECREATION GROUND, 19th March 2020

Other documents

River Park Leisure Centre Project – the renovation of 4 existing outdoor tennis courts and associated works.

APPENDICES:

None