

**9 March 2022**

<b>Report of</b>	<b>Assistant Director of Corporate and Improvement</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Alistair Wilson Alistair.wilson@colchesteramphora.com</b>
<b>Title</b>	<b>West End Sports Ground, Eudo Road</b>		
<b>Wards affected</b>	All wards		

## Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report seeks decisions on the future operation of the West End Sports Ground at Eudo Road with a plan to retain and enhance it as a sports facility and seek to improve facilities on the site. It provides details of a process that has been commenced to market part of the site as a leasehold opportunity, which could secure external investment to improve sports facilities and provide a new income stream for the Council.

## 2. Recommended Decisions

- 2.1 To resolve that The West End Sports Ground including the Tennis Centre should remain as a sports facility for the Borough and be further developed as such to maintain and enhance facilities available.
- 2.2 To approve that the area of the site as shown in the plan at Appendix 1, excluding the rear grass courts, forward six hard courts, bowls greens and indoor bowls centre, should be leased, for a third-party operator to develop, and run as a sports facility with Colchester Borough Council (CBC) retaining the freehold and to delegate authority to the Portfolio Holder for Resources in consultation with the Assistant Director for Corporate and Improvement to take all steps necessary to agree and issue a lease.
- 2.3 To resolve that other sources of external funding and support should be sought to enhance the site including from the Lawn Tennis Association.

## 3. Reason for Recommended Decision

- 3.1 The site provides access for all to hard court tennis facilities, and it is important for wider health and wellbeing benefits for residents that it is retained as a sporting facility.
- 3.2 The LTA in its Tennis Supply Analysis recommended that Eudo Road Tennis Centre should operate a minimum of six floodlit tennis courts and has the potential to operate a sustainable and affordable model for community tennis, both via accessible pay and play and associated programmed/coached tennis activity. This insight continues to support CBCs previous statement in the 2015 PPS Colchester report stating that 'This site is integral to the development of a tennis development plan within the Borough'.
- 3.3 The Tennis Centre relies on financial support from Colchester Borough Council as it operates with a net loss each year. Whilst there have been previous initiatives to reduce costs, these may not have encouraged enough use of the site and the current model of operation is financially unsustainable.

#### **4. Alternative Options**

- 4.1 The site could be continued to be operated without any changes by Colchester Borough Council but this would not be financially sustainable for the reasons explained in this report.
- 4.2 There is sufficient land, see Appendix 1, to introduce additional or alternative sports to the site to increase usage and therefore revenue. This could be to complement tennis or alternate sporting use altogether and could be considered in a later phase of developing the site as a sports facility.

#### **5. Background Information**

- 5.1 The site is a mixed-use sports facility in the Shrub End Ward of Colchester. It hosts both indoor and outdoor bowls and hard and grass tennis courts. There is a small clubhouse providing changing facilities for club members and a car park for users.
- 5.2 It is currently allocated for use as open space in the local plan. The site has been considered for development for both housing and a health centre. The previous uncertainty over its future has hindered any significant investment of resources to improve tennis facilities and services at the site.
- 5.3 The tennis facilities now require investment to bring them up to date and to encourage greater usage. There are four hard tennis courts and three grass tennis courts that are unfit for use and this space would require significant investment to bring back into use should demand increase to such an extent to warrant this.
- 5.4 The Council has received interest from external parties who would be interested in investing in the site to enhance facilities if they could lease part of the site. Discussions have also been undertaken with the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) and there is an opportunity to seek funding from the £30m DCMS / LTA Parks Tennis fund for the hard courts and to provide digital access to the courts. This funding opportunity can still be pursued in conjunction with third-party operators.
- 5.5 The strong interest in investing in the site from external parties demonstrates a recognition of its potential as a Tennis Centre assuming Cabinet resolves that the site should continue to be utilised fully as a sports facility.

The marketing to date has created three specific expressions of interest and two other general enquiries.

- 5.6 If part of the site is to be leased, the Council has a statutory obligation to achieve best value for the site. This would require the opportunity to lease and operate part of the site to be marketed for any sporting use, subject to necessary planning and statutory consultee approval. Marketing of the part of the site concerned (see Appendix 1) commenced on 14 February 2022 and will end on 14 March 2022. Once expressions of interest are received these will be evaluated and due diligence completed with respect to the preferred bidder.
- 5.7 If Cabinet approves the proposal in this report, delegated authority is also requested so that Portfolio Holder for Resources can complete all other steps necessary to issue a lease to the preferred bidder after appropriate due diligence checks.

#### **6. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications**

- 6.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act.
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

6.2 The recommendations will have no disproportionate impact on any protected group.

## **7. Strategic Plan References**

7.1 This proposal supports the strategic priority in Creating safe, healthy and active communities

## **8. Consultation**

8.1 Consultation has been undertaken ahead of marketing of the site given the complexity and extent of current users both formal and informal.

The consultees included:

- Lexden Hills Lawn Tennis Club
- All residents with annual memberships to use the hard courts
- All casual pay and play users
- Residents in Fitzgilbert Road, Eudo Road and Shrub End Road
- Ward Councillors
- Both the Lawn Tennis Association and Sport England
- NHS
- Garrison and University of Essex, as strategic sports partners

8.2 A summary of the consultation responses is shown at Appendix 2.

## **9. Publicity Considerations**

9.1 Wider publicity has been undertaken ahead of marketing the site in line with consultation outlined above.

## **10. Financial implications**

10.1 Dependant on expressions of interest and scope of proposals received there is an opportunity to reduce expenditure as operating costs would be the responsibility of third-party operator, and with reduced grass tennis courts there would be a reduction in CBC's grounds maintenance costs. There is potential to save circa £10k p.a.

10.2 The Eudo Road Tennis Centre relies on support from CBC as it operates with a significant financial loss each year. The operating costs are Circa £38,200 in 21/22 with forecast income from grass and hard courts forecast to be £15,500 in 2021/22 resulting in a net loss of £22,700 for the year.

10.3 There are four hard tennis courts and three grass tennis courts that are unfit for use and this space would require significant investment to bring back into use should demand increase to such an extent to warrant this. As stated previously there is an opportunity to seek funding from the £30m DCMS / LTA Parks Tennis fund for the hard courts and to

provide digital access to the courts. This funding opportunity can still be pursued in conjunction with third-party operators on the site.

- 10.4 By seeking a third party for part of the site there is an opportunity for CBC to reduce the net costs for operating this site but also receive a sustainable rental income through a lease to a third-party operator.
- 10.5 Until expressions of interest have been received and lease terms negotiated it is not possible to assess the overall financial impact but given the cost avoidance and potential lease income the net position would be favourable to CBC.

## **11. Health, Wellbeing and Community Safety Implications**

- 11.1 Health and wellbeing are influenced by several factors, many of which fall under the responsibility of the Council. However, the provision of sporting facilities does not have to be provided by the Council and securing additional facilities with third-party operators would still provide the opportunities for communities to improve their health and wellbeing.
- 11.2 We will also work with partner organisations including the LTA and any operator that leases part of the site to maximise the involvement for those on low incomes and remove barriers to participation across all facilities. Data shows two areas of Shrub End Ward fall within the top 1-3 [most deprived LSOA's in Colchester](#), with Rayner Road being close to the Tennis Centre itself. This will further strengthen communities and help make them more resilient.

## **12. Health and Safety Implications**

- 12.1 The matters herein do not have any health and safety implications, in fact by securing investment in improving and developing facilities for sport will enhance the health and safety for end users.

## **13. Risk Management Implications**

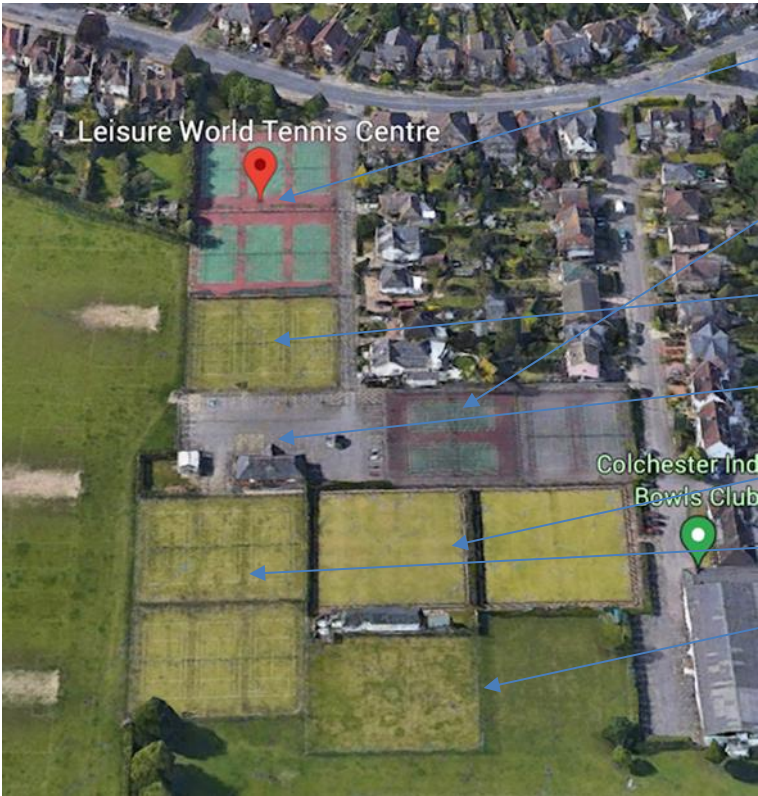
- 13.1 There are no risks identified at this stage.

## **14. Environmental and Sustainability Implications**

- 14.1 The Council has declared a Climate Emergency and has committed to being carbon neutral by 2030. The retention and development of sporting facilities on an economic sustainable basis will enable local residents to access facilities within walking and cycling distances and will support a wider health and wellbeing of residents encouraging more active lifestyles.

Appendix 1:

Plan to show Tennis Centre area of Sports Ground



- 6 no. Existing Hard Courts to be operated by CBC
- Redundant Hard Courts not in use, space included in marketing
- 3 no. Existing Grass Courts, space included in marketing
- Existing Car Park and Club House, space included in marketing
- Bowls Greens not in scope
- 6 no. Existing Grass Courts, to be retained
- Redundant Grass Courts not in use

Area of Tennis Centre that has been Marketed



## Appendix 2: Summary of Consultation Responses

A total of 19 email and 2 written responses were received following the consultation, the majority from neighbouring residents but also from interested parties across the Borough who were made aware of the marketing of the site through the wider publicity.

The comments submitted which will be reviewed alongside the expressions of interest can be summarised as:

- Pleased the site is being retained for Sport and Leisure use
- Would like to see community facilities such as outdoor gym, basketball, boule etc
- Would like to see the pavilion developed as a community hub / café
- Would like to see access to tennis courts improved, better booking system and coaching being made available and affordable
- Concern on impact to local residents in terms of levels of use, floodlights, noise and litter
- Would like to see padel introduced and practice wall

Specific questions seeking further information were received :

1. What are the annual user numbers? Particularly as tennis is not popular on schools curriculum and after school clubs provision.

Answer: There are 135 annual members, 300 casual users and circa 4,000 bookings per annum

2. What are the total running costs to maintain the whole site per year versus income?

Answer: As outlined in the paper, forecast income for 21/22 is £15,500 with cost forecast to be £38,200.

3. What are the net losses of the site per year and over time?

Answer: Net loss forecast in 21/22 of £22,700

4. For any investment there has to be a need and a strategy to grow users/players. What is that strategy? Is there a market for maintaining a tennis centre? What plans are there to develop links with schools to grow young players?

Answer: In seeking to develop part of the site to enhance facilities with a third-party operator the expected output is an increase in participants. In particular the LTA funding application seeks investment to both improve the hard courts but also improve access through digital booking systems which enables individuals to seek opponents which where implemented has increased usage.

The aims of the LTA investment is to achieve:

- Consistent venue signage with LTA, Council and operator brand. Linked to LTA Play platform for players residents to find and book a court (3 step process)
- SmartGate linked to ClubSpark online booking system with automated floodlight switch on. Ability to create booking 'rules' to suit needs of the site.
- ClubSpark Dashboard showing usage and income data

- Ability to generate income to provide a sustainable operation for tennis. Provide greater value and access via a 'season ticket' and 'play & play' price.
- Colchester Tennis Centre web presence, linked to online booking for courts and coaching
- Create a range of offers at the venue that drives interest and demand for tennis, including weekly Tennis for Free, Cardio Tennis, Tennix Express, LTA Youth

The LTA in its Tennis Supply Analysis recommended that Eudo Road Tennis Centre should operate a minimum of six floodlit tennis courts and has the potential to operate a sustainable and affordable model for community tennis, both via accessible pay & play and associated programmed/coached tennis activity.

5. The grass courts are only operational for approximately 4 months of the year given the weather and slippery surface. How much do they cost to maintain given maintenance is all year round? Are there other plans to maximise use of those grass courts all year round?

Answer: As a separate but linked matter there are discussions with Lexden Hills Lawn Tennis Club on the arrangements for the continual use of these courts. The costs are included in the overall financial figures outlined in this paper.