

**Manchester City Council  
Report for Information**

**Report to:** Neighbourhood and Environment Scrutiny Committee – 3  
January 2018

**Subject:** Review of Public Bowling Greens

**Report of:** Director of Neighbourhoods

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**Summary**

A review of the bowling provision across the City has been undertaken, along with an assessment of how the maintenance of the greens can be most efficiently provided, in order to deliver the £100k savings proposed from April 2018.

Consultation has been undertaken with the users of the bowling greens and recommendations reached which will continue to ensure provision across the City to meet the current level of demand.

The recommendations will deliver the majority of the savings required and maintain provision at all sites where there are active clubs and well as a winter green facility within the City.

**Recommendations**

To consider and comment on the content of the report.

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**Wards Affected:** City Wide

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**Background documents (available for public inspection):**

The following documents disclose important facts on which the report is based and have been relied upon in preparing the report. Copies of the background documents are available up to 4 years after the date of the meeting. If you would like a copy please contact one of the contact officers above.

None

## **1.0 Introduction**

The purpose of this note is to provide additional information for the committee in relation to the savings option put forward and the work undertaken to evaluate future operational delivery models and costs savings to bowling green maintenance.

The budget saving agreed from the provision and maintenance of bowling greens was £100k, this was based on the high level of subsidy and relatively low usage of some of the facilities.

An Our Manchester approach has been adopted to the process used to determine how the savings can be delivered. This has involved ongoing conversations with the stakeholders where we have worked through the available options together to come up with the proposed solution.

## **2.0 Background**

Bowls featured in responses to the Parks Strategy Consultation, 10% of respondents said they regularly used pavilions in Parks and 2% said they used bowling greens.

The health and social benefits of bowls has been reported by a wide range of health bodies and websites. The benefits include:-

- Improved fitness
- Improved coordination and skill development
- Increased confidence and self esteem
- Enhanced mental well being.
- Community connectedness and support.

## **3.0 Current Service Provision**

At the start of 2017 the City had 27 bowling greens provided across 17 locations. This includes Heaton Park, which has 4 greens, and is not impacted by the proposals as these are already maintained by a third party.

Of the 17 locations, maintained by the in house team there were 7 sites with 2 greens. The total maintenance costs of the greens is £175k per annum which equates to an average of £7.5k per green.

### **Usage and Income**

The current usage statistics for the greens are based on the number of registered members at each of the greens and are based on information provided by the clubs. This will not equate to the actual usage of the green as this is dependent on how often the members play.

The number of recorded members is currently 962 across the City. The number of members varies from 0 (Wythenshawe) to 145 (High Bank Park) with an average of 38 members per site.

Income is received from the clubs based on the number of members, charges are based on three bands:-

- 1-50 members = £153.47 per annum
- 51-100 members = £202.91 per annum
- 101 – 150 members = £246.17 per annum

The total income received for the service, excluding Heaton Park, is £2,587 per annum across all sites.

This equates to an annual net subsidy of £177 per member.

### **Maintenance Costs**

A number of operational service delivery changes were introduced in 2017 which were focussed on stress testing the in house operational service capacity, measuring any resultant reduction in service quality, and providing a position to measure costs directly with external providers.

Service standard adjustments were introduced as part of the stress testing of operations at the start of the 2017 maintenance season. These included; treating as amenity grass the two greens with no usage at Crowcroft Park and Wythenshawe Park. Other adjustment included the introductions of a reduced maintenance regime to a number of the second greens. These changes enabled the service to trial a reduction in the number of operatives dedicated to bowls from 6 down to 4.

Overall the process worked well and the new teams managed to maintain all the greens, but with a reduced number of cuts. During the spring grass growing spike and when operatives were unavailable there was an impact on service quality.

The costs of the new delivery model was in total £128k. An average of £6,100 per green, inclusive of labour costs vehicles and machinery.

To further test the cost of maintenance, a soft market testing exercise was undertaken for the delivery of the equivalent 21 greens to an equivalent specification. The costs received equated to an average of £6,050 per green.

## **4.0 Consultation**

In 2017 as part of the review process MCC bowling clubs were consulted regarding how best to position the maintenance of crown green bowling in the future. To aid discussion the consultation focussed on how to make best use of a nominal maintenance funding allocation, which for the purpose of the consultation was nominally set at £75k per annum. The in house and

indicative external contractor service delivery costs were shared as part of this exercise.

Clubs were asked how they thought maintenance funding should best be allocated and what support their individual clubs were able to offer to help deliver services more economic or effective way.

A number of indicative options showing potential future operational models were also shared. Clubs were asked to identify their preferred option or to suggest any other operational ideas they may consider would improve the long term success of bowling whilst continuing to seek efficiencies.

- Future Delivery Model Draft Option 1 - Close all second greens, and greens with no formal use.
- Future Delivery Model Draft Option 2 - Close the greens with the lowest usage.
- Future Delivery Model Draft Option 3 - Individual clubs be allowed to manage their own maintenance requirement. A grant fund to be supplied from the available budget allocation.
- Future Delivery Model Draft Option 4 - Invest in the maintenance, with an increased specification of a number of strategic bowls hubs located at key sites geographically around the city. The remaining facilities.

Approximately fifty percent of the clubs within the city offered a verbal or written response to the consultation process. The general consensus from clubs representatives during consultation was that were willing to help with minor maintenance tasks, though the age and makeup of the user profile severely limited what work could be effectively undertaken.

No facility indicated during the consultation process that they had the capacity, even if supported, to fully maintain their own greens.

One club did suggest that it may be possible to pay an increased fee in the future to support the cost of provision.

### **Response to draft service delivery options**

Future Delivery Model Draft option 1 – a number of clubs supported the possibility of closing the second greens at sites across the city. Requests were also forthcoming to consider that a minimum winter green provision be maintained as part of this process.

Future Delivery Model Draft Options 2, 3 and 4 - received little encouragement though the question of how any grant funding package would be proportioned to a club was asked by a number of clubs.

No additional delivery models were suggested by any representative of the clubs.

### **Structural Club Concerns**

Discussions during the consultation process indicated that the majority of engaged clubs wished to maintain the existing club structure. The closure of greens without necessitating the closure of clubs was a preferred option. It was recognised that if a club is left without a green for a period of time it often eventually leads to closure of the club and the loss of its members to the sport.

## **5.0 Proposal**

To ensure the integrity of City's public crown green bowling club and league structures it is proposed to maintain the existing facility base, but at the same time reduce the number of greens at each facility. Where two greens exist at present this will be reduced to one in future. Where there is no formal bowling being undertaken it is recommended that the green be closed, and a review will be undertaken as to the future use of the pavilion. The impact of this is summarised in Appendix 1.

Undertaking this approach would result in the closure of the following second greens:-

- Hollyhedge Park,
- Didsbury Park,
- Highbank Park,
- Debdale Park,
- Brookdale Park.
- Delamere Park
- Close the remaining unused green at Wythenshawe Park

It is proposed that one of these second green continues to be maintained as a winter green for all clubs to access. The proposed location of this green is still to be confirmed and would be determined in consultation with the users, taking into account the condition of the available second greens and expected usage.

Officers will also work with the Greater Manchester Community Parks Crown Green Bowling Association to explore the opportunity of altering the use of one or more of the existing four flat green bowling greens at Heaton Park to crown greens. This will increase accessibility in this part of the City and any costs incurred would be met from within the Heaton Park business plan.

The greens that are closed will be maintained as amenity grass, if there is no long term likelihood of them reopening then there is a potential opportunity for re-purposing of the space. Any re-purposing is likely to require additional investment and would be considered on a case by case basis.

Should a subsequent vibrancy develop within the bowls community leading to a requirement to re-establish one or more of the closed greens, it would take

an estimated 3 to 4 months to re-establish the green at a cost of approximately £6k in addition to the ongoing maintenance costs.

It is proposed that the Parks service will continue to work closely with individual clubs to both promote participation and develop their capacity to potentially self-manage the maintenance provision of their individual facilities.

## **6.0 Summary**

The proposals will result in ongoing maintenance costs for 14 greens and 1 winter green of £92k. This would deliver a budget saving of £83k, £17k short of the original target. It will also significantly reduce the subsidy per member to around £97 per member, assuming the current levels of membership are maintained.

This option does however maintain a good level of provision across the City and supports the integrity of the current club structure. It is therefore proposed that the shortfall in savings is found from within the overall Growth and Neighbourhoods budget for 2018/19.

**Appendix 1**

**Summary of current and proposed provision**

Facility Name	Area	2016 membership	2016 Provision	2017 Provision	Proposal	Commentary
			No. of Greens	No. of Greens	No. of Greens	
Broadhurst Park	North	102	1	1	1	
Brookdale Park	North	48	2	2	1	Reduce to one green
Clayton Park	North	60	1	1	1	
David Lewis Rec	North	120	1	1	1	
Delamere Park	North	71	2	2	1	Reduce to one green
Philips Park	North	24	1	1	1	
Simpson Memorial	North	54	1	1	1	
					1	Introduce one winter green. Location to be confirmed.
<b>North - Total</b>		<b>479</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	
Crowcroft Park	Central	0	1	0	0	Closed during 2017
Debdale Park	Central	80	2	2	1	Reduce to one green
Greenbank Park	Central	80	1	1	1	
High Bank Park	Central	145	2	2	1	Reduce to one green
<b>Central - Total</b>		<b>305</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	
Didsbury Park	South	41	2	2	1	Reduce to one green
Fog Lane Park	South	22	1	1	1	
Hollyhedge Park	South	60	2	2	1	Reduce to one green

Ladybarn Park	South	40	1	1	1	
Wythenshawe Park	South	0	2	1	0	Closed one green during 2017. No usage of remaining green. Close 2 <sup>nd</sup> green.
<b>South - Total</b>		<b>163</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	
<b>Totals</b>		<b>947</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>15</b>	