

Culture and Communities Committee

10.00am, Thursday, 11 May 2023

Lawn Tennis Association Investment in Park's Tennis Courts

Executive/routine Wards Council Commitments	Executive All
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1. Recommendations

- 1.1 Culture and Communities Committee is asked to note:
 - 1.1.1 The funding opportunity presented by the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) to refurbish four tennis court sites across Edinburgh; and
 - 1.1.2 The requirement to adopt the LTA's Clubspark booking system and the installation of gate access systems in order to allow the investment to be realised at each of the courts.
- 1.2 Culture and Communities Committee is also asked to approve:
 - 1.2.1 Proceeding with development of a funding agreement with the LTA to secure funding of £139,641.61 for investment in four park tennis court venues in the city (Inverleith Park, Leith Links, St Margaret's Park and Victoria Park);
 - 1.2.2 The introduction of online booking for public access to the courts; and
 - 1.2.3 That the Council would retain responsibility for maintenance and refurbishment of the courts, as required, over the next 10 years and would cover the operational costs for the gate locking systems.

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Executive Director of Place

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Report

Lawn Tennis Association Investment in Park's Tennis Courts

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report provides details of a funding opportunity to refurbish four tennis court sites across Edinburgh and the steps the Council is required to take in order to realise this investment. The tennis courts which have been identified for investment are located in the following parks: Inverleith Park; Leith Links; St Margaret's Park; and Victoria Park. The tennis court at the Meadows is not included in the proposal.

3. Background

- 3.1 In October 2021, the UK Government's Department for Culture, Media, and Sport announced a £30 million package to refurbish 4,500 public tennis courts to capitalise on a huge boost for British tennis following unprecedented success at the US Open by Emma Raducanu, Joe Salisbury, Gordon Reid and Alfie Hewitt.
- 3.2 The investment programme will provide funds to refurbish the courts surfaces, fencing, nets, and posts and install gate access technology.

4. Main report

- 4.1 The Council have been in discussion with the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) for several months about investment for tennis venues located in parks across the city. The sites identified by the LTA for potential investment are: Inverleith Park, Leith Links, St Margaret's Park, and Victoria Park. They are all maintained by the Council's parks and openspace team.
- 4.2 In order to benefit from the investment, local authorities have to agree to adopt the LTA's Clubspark booking system as well as the installation of gate access systems at each of the refurbished venues. The booking system is connected to smart gates, so when a customer books a court they are given a PIN code to access the site.
- 4.3 At present, tennis courts in parks across the city have open access (i.e. you do not need to book a court in advance and people can turn up and play for free). The only exception is the Meadows, which is managed by Edinburgh Leisure, where courts

have to be booked and paid for at certain times of the day through the year, but out with these slots open access is also available.

- 4.4 The current condition of the courts varies from site to site but in short, all venues need investment.
- 4.5 If refurbishment is to go ahead using the LTA funding, it would include repainting and / or resurfacing, repair or replacement of fencing and installation of the gate access technology.
- 4.6 The introduction of the booking system and gate access technology is viewed by the LTA as a positive move to increase use of tennis courts across the country. Research carried out suggests the public are more likely to use a tennis court if they can book in advance and know that it will be available to use when they turn up to play.
- 4.7 Use of tennis courts is also likely to increase if they are maintained to a good standard. The investment in the sites would bring the park courts up to a better and more consistent standard.
- 4.8 The introduction of booking systems and gate technology would also allow data to be collated on usage of tennis courts across the city.
- 4.9 The LTA require the Council to confirm that it would retain responsibility for maintenance and refurbishment of the courts (as required) over the next 10 years as well as covering the operational costs for the gate locking systems.
- 4.10 The Council's parks and openspace team will also provide the administrative support required to maintain the Clubspark booking system.
- 4.11 To support the cost to the Council for operating the booking system, place value on a court booking and to limit courts being booked and not used, a small administration charge will be placed on every booking. This charge will be in the region of £1 per booking.
- 4.12 The Council may consider introducing charges for the hire of courts in future. Usage data would be analysed following the refurbishment programme and if charges were considered appropriate, a report would be presented to the appropriate Committee. If charges for court hire were introduced, there would be times (probably off-peak) when access would be free.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 If Committee approve the recommendations in this report, officers will complete the funding agreement with the LTA, agree the timetable of refurbishment works across the tennis courts and plan the introduction of the Clubspark booking system.
- 5.2 The Council will also liaise with the LTA on press releases, public communications, and photo opportunities to publicise the investment and new access arrangements.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 The Council are currently responsible for the maintenance of the tennis courts at Inverleith Park, Leith Links, St Margaret's Park and Victoria Park. The smart gates have an annual maintenance cost of £500 per annum per gate and this would be met from the Council's Neighbourhood Environmental Services budget. Income from the administration charge to customers would contribute to this cost.
- 6.2 The Council will also contribute £9,000 to improve the specification of fencing proposed for one of the sites. All other capital costs for the refurbishment of the tennis courts will be covered by the LTA funding.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 The Council has engaged with Friends of Inverleith Park to discuss the investment opportunity, the improvements and the changes that would be introduced if the project proceeded. Officers have engaged with community and stakeholder groups at the remaining park sites about the proposals.
- 7.2 Users will have to book tennis courts on-line in order to access the facilities. This is a change to the current operation model for the four sites at Leith Links, Inverleith Park, St Margaret's Park and Victoria Park.

8. Background reading/external references

- 8.1 None.

9. Appendices

- 9.1 None.