

TITLE OF REPORT: Rationalisation of Bowling Greens

REPORT OF: Paul Dowling, Strategic Director, Communities and Environment
Darren Collins, Strategic Director, Corporate Resources

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek approval to implement the proposed rationalisation plan for bowling green provision in Gateshead as outlined in the report.

Background

2. Cabinet approved the Gateshead Sport Strategy documents on the 13 December 2016 (minute no. C141) which clearly defines the strategic need of sports facilities across the Borough. Since then officers have progressed the implementation of the recommendations specifically relating to the provision of Football Pitches and Bowling Greens.
3. In relation to bowling green provision, the Sport Strategy documents recommended the rationalisation of bowling greens with a reduction from 26 to 13 Council maintained greens across the Borough, however the specific greens were not identified. This approach would also support the Council to achieve the proposed 2017/18 budget saving of £75,000.
4. A rationalisation plan was initially developed for the purpose of carrying out a local consultation exercise with ward councillors, the league, and clubs affected. This plan and the specific proposals can be found in Appendix 2, with the response to the consultation provided in Appendix 3.

Proposal

5. Following completion of the consultation exercise a revised rationalisation plan is now proposed as set out in Appendix 4.
6. It is proposed that the Council proceeds with the recommendations to rationalise the current bowling green provision in line with the Gateshead Sport Strategy recommendations, and the 2017/18 budget proposals.
7. It is therefore, proposed to withdraw subsidy from 12 bowling greens and pavilions as detailed in Appendix 4, resulting in 14 bowling greens across the Borough to continue to be maintained by the Council. The proposals would maintain an accessible and equitable level of provision across the Borough.

Recommendations

8. It is recommended that Cabinet:

- (i) Approves the proposals to rationalise the bowling green provision outlined in Appendix 4.
- (ii) Approves the deferment of the proposals to the 1 April 2018, to enable a number of feasibility studies regarding asset transfers, outlined in Appendix 4 to be assessed. If it is deemed not feasible, then the Council will stop maintaining these facilities.

For the following reason:

- (i) To achieve the budget saving identified as part of the 2017/2018 budget setting process.
- (ii) To maintain an accessible and equitable supply of bowling greens across the Borough.
- (iii) To support the development of longer term sustainable bowling provision.

Policy Context

1. The proposal supports the overall vision for Gateshead as set out in Vision 2030 and the Council Plan: In particular, supporting the development of a sustainable provision of bowling green facilities, which support conditions for volunteering and community cohesion, and promoting a healthy and active Gateshead.

Background and Proposal

2. In 2015 Gateshead Council began the process of developing the Gateshead Sport Strategy documents to provide strategic direction in terms of current and future need of sporting facilities across Gateshead. Within the scope of this process the following three key strategic documents were produced;
 - i. Gateshead Built Sports Facility Strategy
 - ii. Gateshead Playing Pitch Strategy
 - iii. Gateshead Football Plan
3. In order to develop these strategic documents, the Council procured external expertise to help undertake the consultation studies and develop the strategy documents. Knight Kavanagh and Page were commissioned in 2015 to undertake this work.
4. Cabinet approved the Gateshead Sport Strategy documents on 13 December 2016 (minute no. C141) which clearly defines the strategic need of sports facilities across the Borough. Since then officers have progressed the implementation of the recommendations specifically relating to the provision of Football Pitches and Bowling Greens.
5. In relation to bowling green provision the Sport Strategy documents recommended the rationalisation of bowling greens with a reduction from 26 to 13 Council maintained greens across the Borough.
6. Implementing this approach would support the Council to achieve the proposed 2017/18 budget saving within Waste Services, and Grounds Maintenance, of £75,000.
7. A rationalisation plan was initially developed for the purpose of carrying out a local consultation exercise with ward councillors, the league, and local clubs. This plan and the specific proposals can be found in Appendix 2, with the feedback in Appendix 3.
8. Following completion of the consultation exercise a revised rationalisation plan is now proposed.
9. It is proposed that the Council proceeds with the recommendations to rationalise the current bowling green provision in line with the Gateshead Sport Strategy recommendations, and the 2017/18 budget proposals. It is therefore, proposed to withdraw subsidy from 12 bowling greens and pavilions as detailed in Appendix 4, resulting in 14 remaining bowling greens across the Borough. Appendix 5 provides

a location map of all of the bowling green provision in Gateshead with the proposals identified.

10. The proposals would maintain an accessible and equitable level of provision across the Borough.

Consultation

11. In preparing this report, consultations have taken place with the following individuals, groups and organisations;
 - i. Cabinet Members
 - ii. Ward Councillors
 - iii. Bowling Clubs
 - iv. Northumberland and Durham Bowling Association (NDBA)
 - v. All Councillors consulted are supportive of the proposals, however local clubs and the NDBA have voiced concerns over the proposals.
12. Appendix 3 provides a list of all of the bowling club contacts and consultation dates including the specific feedback at each meeting. The Northumberland and Durham Bowling Association were invited to all of these meetings. The following provides an overall summary of the feedback received;
 - i. Generally disagree with the proposals, due to the health and social benefits that the sport of bowls provides for older people, but understanding of the financial position of the council and the declining numbers within the sport.
 - ii. The proposals would conflict with the current culture of competition days/times.
 - iii. Changes and reduction in Bowling Green provision mid-season would be problematic for current league fixtures, and the end of September would be more appropriate, as this would provide more time for the clubs and leagues to consider a different approach to fixtures.
 - iv. Some members may not move to other greens following closure.

Alternative Options

13. The option of retaining all of the bowling greens proposed to close will result in the Council not achieving the agreed 2017/18 budget saving, and not support the direction of travel towards a sustainable model of bowling green provision.

Implications of Recommended Option

14. **Resources:**
 - i. **Financial Implications** – The Strategic Director, Corporate Resources confirms that the proposals will result in the deferment of the 2017/18, budget savings proposals, which will now not be delivered until 2018/19. It is also confirmed that reducing the bowling provision by 12 greens rather than the original 13 proposed, will result in an underachievement of £9500 from the original £75,000 proposed.
 - ii. **Human Resources Implications** – There are no implications arising from this recommendation

- iii. **Property Implications** – The rationalisation of Bowling Green provision will result in some unused bowling greens and pavilions, which the Council will need to evaluate the future use of.
15. **Risk Management Implications** – There are no implications arising from this recommendation.
16. **Equality and Diversity Implications** – There are no implications arising from this recommendation.
17. **Crime and Disorder Implications** – There are no implications arising from this recommendation.
18. **Health Implications** – The proposals will result in fewer Bowling Greens for local residents to take part in physical activity opportunities (predominantly older people), however an accessible and equitable provision of greens will still be maintained across the Borough.
19. **Sustainability Implications** – The proposals will result in an increased percentage of members per bowling green (assuming some members move greens), which will improve the opportunity of those remaining greens to be more sustainable in the longer term.
20. **Human Rights Implications** – There are no implications arising from this recommendation.
21. **Area and Ward Implications** – The proposals have implications upon the following wards; Birtley (South), Blaydon (West), Chopwell and Rowlands Gill (West), Dunston and Teams (Inner West), Felling (East), Lamesley (South), Pelaw and Heworth (East), Saltwell (Central), Wardley and Leam Lane (East), Whickham South and Sunnyside (Inner West).
22. **Background Information** – None.

Appendix 2 – Proposed Rationalisation of Bowling Green Provision

Gateshead Council currently maintains and manages 26 bowling greens across 20 sites. The borough also has two privately owned bowling clubs and an indoor bowling centre.

The table below shows the proposed rationalisation which is based on location, and green card numbers (based on 2016 membership). Those shaded are directly affected by the proposals.

Table 1; Proposed Rationalisation Plan (April 2017 – Pre-Consultation)

Location	Greens	Pavilion	No Cards	Proposal	Ward
Chopwell	1	Y	0	Stop Maintaining	Chopwell & Rowlands Gill
Rowlands Gill	1	Y	17	Continue to Maintain	Chopwell & Rowlands Gill
Crawcrook Park	1	Y	20	Continue to Maintain	Crawcrook & Greenside
Ferndene Park	1	Y	36	Continue to Maintain	Ryton, Crookhill, & Stella
Greengates Park	2	Y	30	Stop Maintaining 1 x Green	Blaydon
Greenside Park	1	Y	22	Continue to Maintain	Crawcrook & Greenside
Chase Park	1	Y	45	Continue to Maintain	Whickham North
Marley Hill	1	Y	17	Stop Maintaining	Whickham South & Sunnyside
Dunston Park	2	Y x 2	38	Stop Maintaining 1 x Green and 1 x Pavilion	Dunston & Teams
Saltwell Park	3	Y	32	Stop Maintaining 2 x Greens	Saltwell
Ravensworth Park	1	Y	62	Continue to Maintain	Lamesley
Birtley Town	1	Y	26	Stop Maintaining	Lamesley
Birtley Welfare	2	Y	28	Stop Maintaining 1 x Green	Birtley
Barley Mow	1	Y	27	Stop Maintaining	Birtley
Kibblesworth Park	1	Y	20	Continue to Maintain	Lamesley
Felling Park	1	Y	12	Stop Maintaining	Felling
Heworth Park	1	Y	26	Continue to Maintain	Felling
Cotgarth	1	Y	0	Stop Maintaining	Felling
Oliver Henderson	2	Y	40	Stop Maintaining 1 x Green	Wardley & Leam Lane
Bill Quay	1	Y	16	Stop Maintaining	Pelaw & Heworth

Appendix 3 – Consultation Feedback

1. All ward councillors have been consulted with the proposals that effect greens within their wards, with the feedback as follows;
 - I. Birtley Ward & Lamesley Ward – Councillors have requested that the following two greens be retained; Birtley Town Green, and one at Birtley Welfare Ground, meaning a reduction of 2 greens rather than 3 as originally proposed.
 - II. Chopwell & Rowlands Gill Ward – Agree with the proposals regarding the alternative management of the sports pitches (football and cricket pitches) and to stop the maintenance of the Bowling greens. Ward Cllrs have requested, however, that wider community development work is undertaken to consider the feasibility of a local community group taking responsibility of the Bowling Pavilion to develop a community facility.
 - III. Blaydon Ward – Agree with the proposals to reduce from 2 to 1 bowling green at Greengates park.
 - IV. Felling Ward – Agree with the proposal to close the green at Cotgarth, however, it was proposed to undertake further consultation work with Heworth Park bowling club, Felling Park bowling club and Friends of Felling Park to consider the potential of retaining one of these greens and consideration of an asset transfer of Felling Park facility.
 - V. Pelaw and Heworth – Agree with the proposals, however Councillors have requested that the feasibility of asset transfer be considered.
 - VI. Wardley and Leam Lane – Agree with the proposals.
 - VII. Dunston and Teams – Agree with the proposals.
 - VIII. Whickham South and Sunnyside – Agree with the proposals, however have requested that the feasibility of asset transfer be considered for Marley Hill.
 - IX. Saltwell – Agree with the proposals.
2. All clubs affected by the proposals were engaged through the consultation process, and the following tables confirm the club, officials involved, and the dates of the meetings convened.

Birtley Vets and Unity – Birtley Welfare Park – Mr W. Scott and representatives 25th April 17

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Impact would be a reduction from 2 to 1 green.• The top green is the best quality.• Issues with fixtures and the way they are currently run, a reduction in greens would not accommodate the league.• Concern over who would take on the responsibility of rearranging / changing fixtures.• Concern of mid-season changes.• Fixtures are done before Christmas so need to ensure any changes could be within this timeframe.• Preferred option by the attendees is to retain the 2 greens. |
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Barley Mow – play at Birtley Welfare Park – George Lingwood and representative

25th April 17

- Impact would be to close Barley Mow Green and pavilion.
- Barley Mow club in attendance however they play at the Welfare Park.
- Cheshire Avenue isn't being used although the Ladies occasionally have a bowl out (further to this meeting it was highlighted that Barley Mow vets play at Cheshire Ave – a subsequent meeting was held with the Vets).
- Concern that fixtures won't work with closure of greens and merging of clubs.
- Leagues are on specific nights, mainly Monday and Wednesday.
- They usually have an open tournament every year in June where both greens are used.

Barley Mow Vets – Ann Philipson and Bill Thompson**15th June 17**

- Impact would be to close the green and pavilion.
- They currently have 23 members and play socially.
- Birtley Town green is the best quality in the area and Birtley Welfare has issues regarding access to the pavilion and carrying equipment up and down the stairs. This would probably result in a loss of members.
- The reduction in greens would result in fixture clashes and league issues.
- It would be preferable to keep two greens, although Birtley Town has parking issues.
- Could an asset transfer for Cheshire Avenue be considered ?
- In its current state (access and stairs) it would not be acceptable from an H&S– would the council invest in a ramp if this was to be the only green to remain? Also the Ladies toilets are not in a good state.
- The club appreciate Cheshire Ave couldn't accommodate all in Birtley.
- Feel that 4 greens to 1 is too great a difference.

Birtley Town – Ray Stafford and representatives**25th April 17**

- Proposal to close the green and club to potentially use Birtley Welfare.
- The pavilion is larger and the condition of the green is better at Birtley Town.
- The site is secure, on a bus route and is better positioned for publicity.
- The clubhouse at Birtley Welfare has stepped access and are generally not as good as Birtley Town.
- Could have home and away fixtures but this would be onerous on the fixture secretary.
- Car parking is an issue at both sites.
- Could the Council double check green card figures?
- If a green requires 60 members to make it sustainable how likely is it that the second green would need to be brought back into play?
- Any changes should be made in September when the season ends and before the new fixtures are done.
- Birtley Town could accommodate additional teams.

Saltwell Park Bowling Clubs - John Meldrum and representatives
25th April 17

- Impact on proposal would be a reduction from 3 to 1 green.
- The preferred green to retain would be the bottom green.
- There are two teams – the Borough and Avenue, the third folded.
- A perception that the general maintenance has decreased and if two greens weren't maintained would the weeds spread?
- Concern over security as the greens are often used as picnic areas or for football.
- How would events such as World Transplant Games be accommodated?
- Main discussion was around maintenance.

Leam Lane – Maureen Newton and representative
28th April 17

- Impact would be to reduce from 2 to 1 green.
- They understand the proposals.
- Couldn't do the bigger competitions however.
- The club have a large social side and are applying for grants.
- The local club, schools and community groups are involved with enhancing the park.
- Would this reduce green fees?

Felling Park, Cotgarth and Heworth
Derek Smith, Tom Younger and representatives and Cllr Dickie
28th April 17

- Impact would be to reduce from 3 to 1 green in the Felling area. Cotgarth is not used so would be 1 of the 3 to close.
- Felling has 12 green card members and Heworth have 26.
- Consolidation would have an impact on the leagues and it would be difficult to get a worthwhile game if two merge. League logistics would be an issue.
- From a capacity point of view this could be accommodated on the Heworth green.
- The facility at Heworth is good although has some issues with vandalism.
- Felling members would be likely to move to Heworth whereas Heworth members would probably not move.
- Heworth is a social club and has a ladies team.
- Would be disappointed if Felling closes due to the money recently spent.
- Felling has a proactive 'friends of group' and could work together with potential to take responsibility of maintenance of the green and park.
- This could be instrumental in accessing funding, although they are just starting out, it has potential to replicate Chase Park.
- John Gibson is secretary of Friends of Felling Park and the bowling club.
- A further meeting will be arranged with both groups to progress ideas.
- It was noted that Tommy stated that the discussion was very positive.

Bill Quay – John Sutherland

14th June 17 and subsequent meeting on the 21st August with John Sutherland and numerous club members and Cllr Ian Patterson

- Impact would be to close the green and the pavilion.
- Pelaw is the best green in the area. Suggestion to close Heworth, Holly Hill and Leam Lane. If Pelaw closes this will take away the sporting facility from the Pelaw, Bill Quay and Wardley areas of Gateshead. Heworth is already struggling for members and combines with Holly Hill currently.
- Felling Park green can only play one way and only has 4 lanes.
- Communication channels are via the NDBA.
- South Tyneside greens are better quality and if club members were to move it could likely be to South Tyneside.
- There are 3 greens within 1.5 miles of Bill Quay in South Tyneside.
- 20 clubs on 13 greens would cause clashes with fixtures. They currently have a rota system so everyone can play, but not sure how this would work with 60 members and only 12 per team.
- Pelaw is a really active club and is maintained well with little or no vandalism.
- Would prefer to close Heworth and retain Pelaw due to the quality of green at Bill Quay
- There is a real health and social benefit of the sport
- Following the consultation an enquiry has been received and responded to from an MP in the Jarrow constituency.

Dunston – Bill Cookson and representatives

26th April

- Impact would be to reduce from 2 to 1 green and one pavilion.
- Friday night representative is missing from meeting.
- The best green and pavilion is the lower rink.
- The Ladies pavilion received funding from local councillors for a new kitchen area and tables and chairs, however is the smaller of the two.
- The larger pavilion only has one gents toilet and no ladies, which is in poor condition – toilets would be a concern.
- Fixtures could cause an issue, but could look at different ways of running the fixtures but would need support to do this. Keen to work together with the Council, club and League.

Marley Hill – John McGee and representatives
28th April 17

- Impact would be to close the green and pavilion.
- Burnopfield green has also closed.
- Rowlands Gill and Whickham bowlers are playing at Marley Hill.
- Whickham used to play at Marley Hill as it is a better green.
- Discussion around it being a welfare ground, the club suggested if it was given to them and they owned it they would maintain it.
- Asset transfer could be an option although the club were then slightly reluctant, however they will take this back to the members.
- 4 clubs are already playing from Whickham and Marley Hill think they would be reluctant to share the green.
- Fixtures would be an issue.

Greengates – Susan and Alan Spoors and representatives
8th May 17

- Impact would be to close one green.
- The bottom green has steps which are a problem.
- 90% of all play is currently on the top green.
- Issues with bins not being emptied and some of the roof tiles.
- People other than the bowlers use the building.
- If any changes were to be made could this not be done mid-season.
- Closure of greens could cause league problems as they all play on similar nights.
- Club asked if there were any redundant machines and if there was an option to self-manage or for the club to use an outside contractor for maintenance.
- Bowls need to be flexible with the programming of the leagues.
- Understand the proposal and the bottom green isn't used now anyway.
- The park is generally well used.

3. The following comments have been received from the Northumberland and Durham Bowling Association (received 31st August 2017);
- I. Can Cabinet defer any implementations on the following greens, Barley Mow (Play at Birtley Welfare Park), Birtley Unity (Play at Birtley Welfare Park), Gateshead Avenue (Saltwell Park), Gateshead Borough (Saltwell Park), Heworth, Holly Hill (Play at Felling Park) and Pelaw.(Bill Quay) until April 1st 2019.
 - II. We are happy with Proposals for following clubs, Cotgarth, Chopwell, Chesire Avenue (Barley Mow).
 - III. We are happy with proposals surrounding Bleach Green (Greengates) however can further discussions take place as to which green is to close, as the top green is in a poor condition.
 - IV. Outdoor bowls keeps our members fit and active, many are senior citizens if the proposals are implemented this would have a serious impact on social care. Has enough thought gone into the impact this would have not only on our members wellbeing but on social care.
 - V. We set fixtures in November for season 2018, changes and reduction of greens would be problematic for our members is it possible to defer implementations until September 2018 so we can determine which greens will be available.
 - VI. Agree with proposal to retain one additional green, Birtley Town bowling green and pavilion
 - VII. Can Cabinet defer any implementations regarding Dunston Bowling Green proposal until April 2019. This would give officials and sub-committee of the N&D the chance to discuss the implementation and agree which green and pavilion would close, as there are limited toilet facilities in one of the pavilions.

Appendix 4 – Final proposed Rationalisation of Bowling Green provision (revised following the consultation process)

1. Following the detailed consultation process it is proposed to implement the following rationalisation plan detailed in Table 2; which reflects the plan in Appendix 2, with the following exceptions;
 - a) Retain one additional green, Birtley Town Bowling Green and pavilion.
 - b) Delay the proposal relating to Felling Park and Heworth Park bowling greens, pending the outcome of the feasibility to consider an asset transfer of Felling Park.
 - c) Explore the feasibility of asset transfer for Bill Quay, Marley Hill, and Chopwell Park facilities. If not feasible, then the Council will proceed with the original proposal and stop maintaining.
 - d) Where there is a proposed reduction in greens at a particular site, further local consultation will be undertaken to agree the specific green which will not be maintained in future. This affects, Dunston Park, Saltwell Park, Birtley Welfare Park, Oliver Henderson Park, and Greengates Park.

Table 2: Final Rationalisation Plan (September 2017 – Post Consultation)

Location	Greens	Pavilion	No Cards	Proposal	Ward
Chopwell	1	Y	0	Explore the feasibility of asset transfer. If not feasible, then the Council will proceed with the original proposal and stop maintaining.	Chopwell & Rowlands Gill
Rowlands Gill	1	Y	17	Continue to Maintain	Chopwell & Rowlands Gill
Crawcrook Park	1	Y	20	Continue to Maintain	Crawcrook & Greenside
Ferndene Park	1	Y	36	Continue to Maintain	Ryton, Crookhill, & Stella
Greengates Park	2	Y	30	Stop Maintaining 1 x Green	Blaydon
Greenside Park	1	Y	22	Continue to Maintain	Crawcrook & Greenside
Chase Park	1	Y	45	Continue to Maintain	Whickham North
Marley Hill	1	Y	17	Explore the feasibility of asset transfer. If not feasible, then the Council will proceed with the original proposal and stop maintaining.	Whickham South & Sunnyside
Dunston Park	2	Y x 2	38	Stop Maintaining 1 x Green and 1 x Pavilion	Dunston & Teams
Saltwell Park	3	Y	32	Stop Maintaining 2 x Greens	Saltwell
Ravensworth Park	1	Y	62	Continue to Maintain	Lamesley
Birtley Town	1	Y	26	Continue to Maintain	Lamesley
Birtley Welfare	2	Y	28	Stop Maintaining 1 x Green	Birtley
Barley Mow	1	Y	27	Stop Maintaining	Birtley
Kibblesworth Park	1	Y	20	Continue to Maintain	Lamesley
Felling Park	1	Y	12	Delay the proposal relating to Felling Park and Heworth Park bowling greens, pending the outcome of the feasibility to consider an asset transfer of Felling Park.	Felling
Heworth Park	1	Y	26	Delay the proposal relating to Felling Park and Heworth Park bowling greens, pending the outcome of the feasibility to consider an asset transfer of Felling Park.	Felling

Cotgarth	1	Y	0	Stop Maintaining	Felling
Oliver Henderson	2	Y	40	Stop Maintaining 1 x Green	Wardley & Leam Lane
BillQuay	1	Y	16	Explore the feasibility of asset transfer. If not feasible, then the Council will proceed with the original proposal and stop maintaining.	Pelaw & Heworth