

## Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING/ DECISION MAKER:	<b>Cabinet</b>	
MEETING/ DECISION DATE:	<b>22<sup>nd</sup> July 2020</b>	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
		<b>E 3201</b>
TITLE:	<b>Future of Entry Hill and Approach Golf Courses</b>	
WARD:	All	
<b>AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM</b>		
<p><b>List of attachments to this report:</b></p> <p>Please list all the appendices here, clearly indicating any which are exempt and the reasons for exemption</p> <p>Appendix 1 - Consultation Report</p> <p>Appendix 1 (a) - Addendum to consultation Report</p>		

### 1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 Use of Entry Hill golf course has declined over the past several years and the council wants to attract a larger number of people to enjoy open-air activity at this important site that forms part of Bath's World Heritage Site designation. The site operates at a financial loss to the Council.
- 1.2 A consultation has been completed which welcomed opinions on a range of options including but not limited to a family cycle centre, a community growing space, outdoor education or continuing to provide a golf course. A number of parties have expressed an interest or submitted proposals for managing and operating the site during and following this consultation. A way forward now needs to be agreed for the site.
- 1.3 The Approach golf course also operates at a financial loss to the Council and has had links to the running of Entry Hill since at least the beginning of the Aquaterra contract in 2005. There are potential economies of scale and benefits to potential contractors to operating both sites so any decision on the future of Entry Hill needs to consider how the Approach will be managed as well.
- 1.4 It is intended to retain the 18 hole golf course at Approach with the 12 hole course offered for other potential sporting/community uses. Discussions with

providers have indicated that this is the most efficient business model for the site, controlling costs while retaining income to ensure the service is viable.

- 1.5 Since the consultation process for Entry Hill has been completed Covid-19 has had a significant impact on the Council's finances the leisure sector as a whole. This has impacted decision making because there is a greater need to ensure financial viability for all leisure sites. This situation has led to the Approach golf course being review and included in this paper.
- 1.6 A comprehensive report on broader leisure provision will be presented to Cabinet in September, however the golf courses have been brought forward to July Cabinet in recognition of the consultation that has been carried out and the desire to make a decision on these facilities as they currently remain closed. Further to this we are not expecting either golf site to require a subsidy from the Council in the future so a decision can be made outside of the wider strategic decision on leisure facilities.

## **2 RECOMMENDATION**

### **The Cabinet is asked to;**

- 2.1 Agree the next steps for the future uses of Entry Hill and Approach golf courses
- 2.2 Note the results of the community consultation exercise in relation to Entry Hill
- 2.3 Recommend that an open procurement exercise is undertaken that allows all proposals to be properly considered and evaluated against an agreed set of criteria. Proposals for community and sporting provision only will be considered. Ensure that bidders are able to tender for one or both of the sites as desired.
- 2.4 Delegate to the Director of Environment authority to appoint a contractor in accordance with the Council's prescribed governance and procurement process in consultation with the Cabinet Members for Finance and Communities

## **3 THE REPORT**

### **Background**

- 3.1 Entry Hill Golf Club is a 9-hole course which opened in the 1980's and is set on a steeply sloping hillside located c1.6 miles south of the centre of Bath. The 30 acre site consists of a shop/café, changing rooms and a car park for approx. 30-40 vehicles, is dotted with trees and enjoys views across the City. The golf course is a former landfill site, previously known as Lower Barrack Farm. The Lower Barrack Farm landfill is recorded as having accepted all types of waste from 1970 to 1989 comprising industrial, commercial, household and liquids/sludge waste. The club currently has around 70 members.
- 3.2 The Council recognises the ecological and heritage value of the site along with the proximity of the site to the communities of Southdown, Odd Down, Fox Hill and Twerton and Whiteway.

- 3.3 The Approach golf course is a pitch and putt facility in Royal Victoria Park in Bath. There are 2 courses - a 12 hole course and an 18 hole course.
- 3.4 While the course has a greater number of uses than Entry Hill with c.15,000 visits per year it still operates at a loss to the Council.
- 3.5 There are clear operational links to Entry Hill golf course and as such if the management of Entry Hill changes then the future operation of the Approach needs to be considered as well.
- 3.6 Golf nationally has been in decline for a number of years. From 2008 to 2016 Sport England's national survey 'Active People' captured participation data in a range of sports. The survey was changed in 2016 and there is no comparable data from beyond that point. The graph below shows the number of people participating in golf over this time period.

## Active People Interactive – your analysis



Your selection:

Dataset

Age 16+

Wave

2007/08 (APS2)

2008/09 (APS3)

2009/10 (APS4)

2010/11 (APS5)

2011/12 (APS6)

2012/13 (APS7)

2013/14 (APS8)

2014/15 (APS9)

2015/16 (APS10)

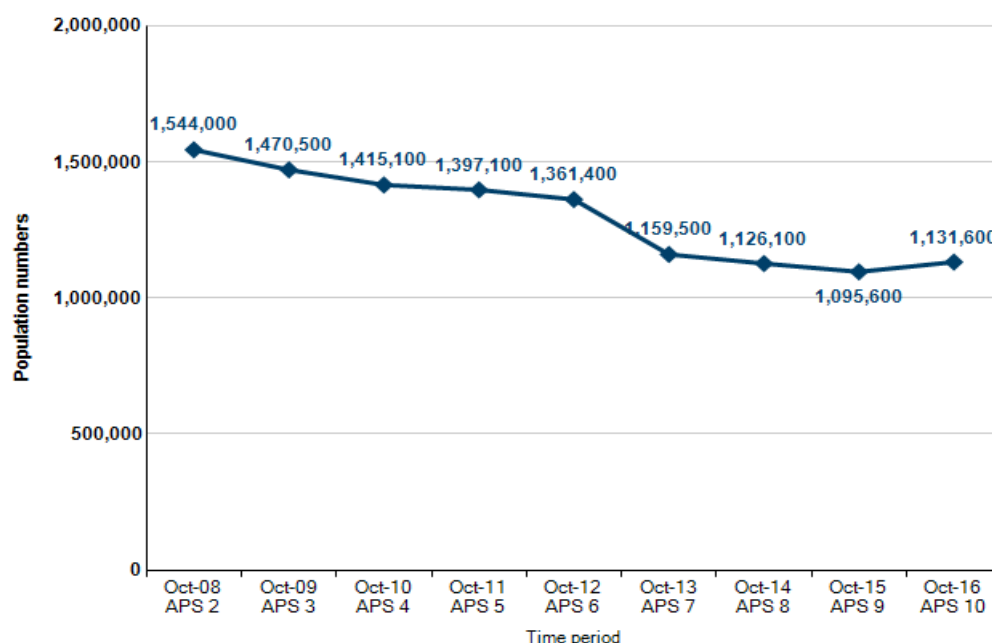
Sport

Golf

Geography

England

■ England



- 3.7 This matches the decline seen in usage at Entry Hill which was at c.14,000 uses per year in 2010 and is now around c.10,000.
- 3.8 Golf was offered as a separate lot in the procurement for the new leisure contract in 2015. This decision was made to ensure that specialist golf providers or other local providers that were not in a position to operate leisure centres were able to bid solely for the golf element.
- 3.9 Unfortunately, no bids were received at the final stage despite dialogue with providers and interest at the initial stages. It was clear through discussion that none of the providers felt that the site had the potential to operate on a profitable basis

3.10 Greenwich Leisure Limited were the successful bidder for the leisure centre contact and as part of the process agreed to operate the golf courses on behalf of the Council on an open book basis for a fixed management fee which is how the course is currently operated.

## **Costs**

3.11 Entry Hill course is making an operating loss at present based on the 3 years that GLL have year data (the contract started in June 2015 so they have no data for the first 2 months of that financial year) this has been as follows:

- 16/17 - £39,792
- 17/18 - £46,873
- 18/19 - £38,460

3.12 In addition to this operating loss the Council's Parks department carries out the repairs and maintenance of the golf course at a cost of £35k - £40K per year. The course requires extensive tree work to prevent the constant narrowing of the fairways and needs improvement works to the greens over the coming years in order for them to remain playable. This work is expensive and difficult to justify.

3.13 The GLL management fee is £7.5K pa and is included in the figures above plus there is around £2.5k pa of management costs for the Council (Leisure Officer and Parks Team).

3.14 This loss means that the Council is in effect subsidising the site to the value of at least £80k pa.

3.15 This led to a community consultation to consider potential future uses of the site that would help more people to be more active more often, contribute to the climate change agenda and improve the financial position for the site.

3.16 The Approach golf course has run operationally at a profit or close to break-even over the same time period. Again it carries maintenance costs of c.£28k per year as well as a £7.5k management fee to GLL (again included in the figures below) as well as the management costs for the Council meaning that the site is also subsidised by the Council. Last 3 years operational figures are as follow

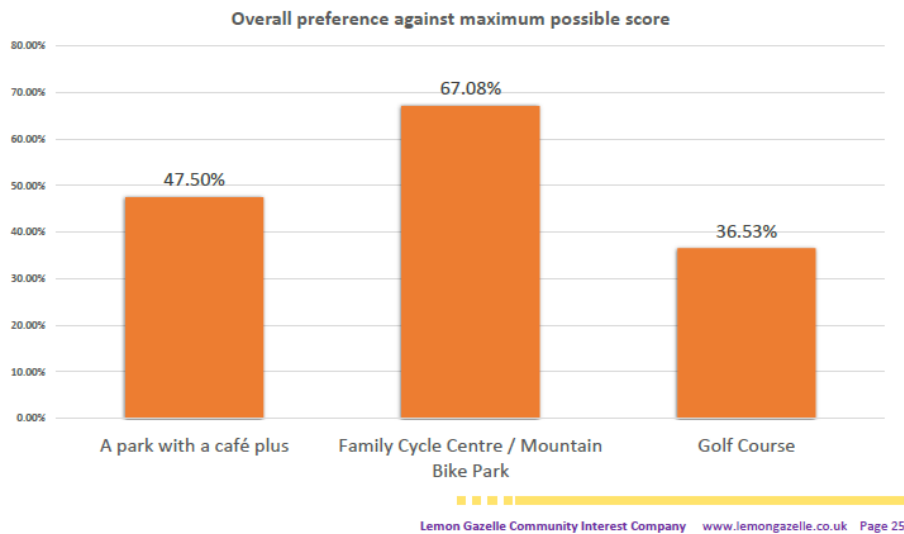
- 16/17 - £19,539 profit
- 17/18 - £3,988 loss
- 18/19 - £1,636 loss

## **Consultation for Entry Hill**

3.17 The community consultation was undertaken between December 2019 and March 2020 and involved carrying out substantial stakeholder engagement to understand the views of residents, golf course users and those who would like to use the site.

- 3.18 Stakeholder engagement comprised online and paper survey; One-to-one conversations and follow up email dialogue plus two drop-in events
- 3.19 A total of 3,215 individuals responded to the survey, of which 3209 responses were provided via the online survey and 6 on paper. These individuals made over 4,800 long answer comments, as well as providing quantitative answers to indicate their preferences. The data from these answers has been analysed.
- 3.20 The consultation and engagement process have provided a wide range of data which can inform the future use of Entry Hill Golf Course.
- 3.21 The methodology utilises a Multi-Criteria Decision Tool to assess future uses of the site in an open, accountable and easy to understand way. It is designed to assist discussion and assessment and provide a recommendation to decision-makers.
- 3.22 In considering the options, it is necessary to evaluate those which require a significant user of the space. Some of the other options which require less space, and certainly not the whole site, could be included alongside those options. For example, Trails for Walking, Forest School and Play Spaces would not be excluded by the by the more significant utilisers of space. These uses could be integrated to a greater or lesser extent into whichever options were under consideration.
- 3.23 Bath and North East Somerset Council's objectives informed the criteria against which options are measured. The scores of each option were set against these criteria.
- 3.24 As an addendum to the main report, Lemon Gazelle also tested how the local statistics compare to the wider analysis in the Main Report., See Appendix 1 and 1(a).
- 3.25 This mapped those residents who stated that they were a Bath and North East Somerset Residents and show the preference chart for those. Using this Constituency Demographic, the preference Survey reflected the global result.
- 3.26 The consultation and engagement process have shown the strength of opinion from the community and stakeholders who use and would wish to use this valuable asset in Bath.
- 3.27 From the primary, significant use options available, the strongest is the Family Cycle Centre/Mountain Bike Park. This option stands out for best fulfilling the objectives and being the most highly supported option (78% either supported or strongly supported this option) within the consultation and also offers the opportunity to be combined with a number of the less space intensive uses as appropriate.
- 3.28 The graph below shows the results of the decision tool. The full report is available in Appendix 1.

#### Options Summary Graph



3.29 It should be noted that a number of the regular golfers have also been campaigning to keep the site as a golf course and have submitted a petition with 1000 signatures to this effect.

#### Covid-19

3.30 Since the completion of the consultation the process has been delayed by the events surrounding Covid-19.

3.31 The virus has had a significant impact on the leisure sector with operators unable to generate income while still having significant running costs. This has led to operators nationally seeking financial support from their local authority partners.

3.32 There have also been significant impacts on the Council's finances with the loss in income well documented.

3.33 The need to provide financial support to GLL while under financial pressure has led the Council to undertake a review of the leisure services it provides in partnership with GLL. This has led to the Approach golf course being included as part of this decision as it has such clear links to Entry Hill.

3.34 In the short term there are costs associated with re-opening the golf courses following the enforced closure due to Covid both to make them Covid Secure and also to service the irrigation systems for the courses. This combined with the fact that they operate at a loss has led the Council to make the decision to delay re-opening until the future of the courses is clear following this decision.

#### Expressions of interest and proposals submitted by interested parties

3.35 The Council has received a number of expressions of interest and some detailed proposals from parties that have been engaged as part and as a result of the consultation process. These are not included as part of this paper to ensure fairness to all parties through the procurement exercise.

- 3.36 In line with the Council's policies and procedures the most appropriate way to assess and evaluate these is to run an open procurement process with an agreed set of criteria for evaluation to ensure all potential bidders are treated fairly.
- 3.37 The procurement process will only consider bids of a sporting or community provision nature. The Council is **not** considering any changing of use away from this type of provision.
- 3.38 It is anticipated that tender documents will be drawn up over the summer with the procurement exercise starting in the Autumn.
- 3.39 Following the strong preference from the consultation for a family cycle centre the Council has explored potential funding opportunities and availability of providers to deliver this type of use.
- 3.40 There is a very small marketplace of providers who would be able to fund, design, build, operate and maintain such an offer.
- 3.41 A more common approach for delivery of a scheme such as this would be for the Local Authority to apply for grant funding and raise the capital to deliver the required works on its land which would then be leased to a contractor to operate.
- 3.42 To ensure this doesn't unfairly advantage or disadvantage this option the Council will use an independent 3rd party to develop a shadow business case for the capital works using guidance from Sport England and British Cycling.
- 3.43 This will allow the Council to assess the value of any bid from a cycling operator while still taking into account the cost impact of the capital works. This will ensure that the full cost of the solution is taken into account rather than just the operational benefits being seen without the capital expenditure being taken into account.
- 3.44 The Council is seeking to retain golf use for at least the 18 hole course at Approach golf course, but is open to sporting or community use suggestions for the 12 hole course area.

### **Desired outcomes from future uses to be assessed through the procurement process**

- 3.45 There are 4 key principles that the Council is considering when looking at proposals through the procurement process and the tender documents will be prepared to reflect this:

#### **Criteria 1 – Climate Emergency**

The Council has declared a Climate Emergency in March 2019 and any use needs to make contribution towards improving the climate and helping the Council reach its goal of achieving carbon neutrality by 2030.

#### **Criteria 2 – Health and Wellbeing**

The Council's Fit for Life strategy seeks to get more people, more active, more often. Any use, including continuation as a golf course, needs to give serious consideration to the potential role of the site in terms of increasing physical activity levels and/or improving health and wellbeing.

### **Criteria 3 - Financial**

The sites are currently running at a loss. The Council does not currently subsidise other sports in this way and so any use needs to have a financially sustainable business plan that does not require a subsidy from the Council.

### **Criteria 4 – Consultation results**

Any bid needs to take into consideration the consultation that has been carried out at Entry Hill and how it is responding to the findings of the report.

## **4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS**

4.1 Any lease or contract the Council enters into as a result of a procurement exercise will need to take into account the legislation regarding the transfer of public open space ensuring best value is achieved and restrictive covenants are put in place to protect the future of the sites and limit future development.

4.2 Equalities, natural environment, public health, procurement and inequalities.

## **5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)**

5.1 Detailed business cases for each proposal will be required as part of the procurement process.

5.2 Any business case is expected to remove the current subsidy to the site and become at least cost neutral to the Council.

## **6 RISK MANAGEMENT**

6.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

## **7 EQUALITIES**

7.1 Equalities issues to be assessed as part of the procurement process

## **8 CLIMATE CHANGE**

8.1 To ensure this is addressed fully it has been addressed fully all bids will be assessed on their impact on the climate change agenda as one of the key criteria for the procurement exercise.

## **9 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**



9.1 Given the level of interest in the site an open procurement exercise is the only fair way to resolve this issue.

## 10 CONSULTATION

10.1 Community consultation as described in Appendix 1 and 1(a).

10.2 Cabinet Members, Ward Members, Sport England, National Governing Bodies of Sport, Monitoring Officer, S151.

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<b>Background papers</b>	List here any background papers not included with this report, and where/how they are available for inspection.
<b>Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format</b>	