

Good evening. My name is Ben Reed and I am pleased to speak to you this evening as Chair of the Friends of Bath Approach Golf Course. I want to bring your attention to the ongoing closure of the course - Bath's only remaining public golf facility.

As many of you will know, the closure of the golf course during the first COVID-19 lockdown in March last year was only ever intended as a temporary measure. Since then a procurement process, conducted mid-pandemic in far from ideal circumstances, has unfortunately failed to find an appropriate commercial operator.

I wanted to speak to the Council this evening to report that we have thus far seen worryingly little progress in determining the future of this beautiful and popular green space, which adjoins Royal Victoria Park to the North of the city centre. This is despite a Council commitment last summer for golf to remain on the 18-hole side of the site, known as High Common, and despite a petition which now has close to 5,000 signatures from people across the city, indicating their support for the golf course to stay open.

In view of the difficulties in finding a commercial operator, I and a group of fellow Bathonians and residents have formed a volunteer community group – Friends of Bath Approach Golf Course – which would like to repair and maintain the golf greens, keep the site clean and tidy and raise funds for future improvements. Importantly, we want to do away with the use of chemical pesticides, take some of the maintenance burden off the Council, and work towards reopening the golf course as soon as possible so that everyone can enjoy High Common exactly as they have done since the middle of the last century.

And I do mean EVERYONE. Perhaps the overriding feature that gives the Approach Course its special character and its place in the affections of so many people is the fact that it's a shared space, doubling as a park for those who want to walk, jog, sit down and enjoy the views and all manner of other exercise and recreation. There is ample space for everyone, and no-one should be excluded. It would be a sad and deeply unpopular unintended consequence of last year's closure if the one group of users permanently excluded turned out to be regular and occasional golfers - the one group who have contributed most to the upkeep of the site over so many years, by paying to play golf.

It's important that we act very soon. Spring growth is already beginning and another season without dedicated attention to the golf greens will be the death knell for public golf in Bath, meaning the loss of one of the very few affordable, outdoor, family-friendly sports facilities in the city, ironically just as golf experiences a huge increase in popularity.

I believe that our proposal to the Council offers a low-risk, low-cost way to work towards the resumption of golf on the site. Coupled with a new tender process for a café operator, who would take care of the collection of golf fees and hire of golf clubs, the maintenance of the golf course would remain split between the Council and volunteers. We are proposing that the former 12-hole side of the site will be golf-free, with opportunity for increased wilding and biodiversity benefits. Overall, this has good potential to make the Approach Course self-funding once again, to revitalise this lovely green space, bring back all those who used to enjoy it, and attract a good many more people in the years to come.

Thank you.