

## Agenda Item 4

For decision: Floodlighting the tennis courts at Mary Baily Playing Field

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### Summary

Frome Selwood Tennis Club is looking for the Council to support a project to install floodlights on the three community tennis courts on the Mary Baily playing field at an estimated cost of £60,000 to £70,000.

Since we look after the playing field - in conjunction with Fields in Trust - this would need FTC's formal approval, and with this FTC would become a named partner on all the relevant paperwork, including funding and planning applications.

The project is at an early stage - although the tennis club has already been successful in securing in principle match-funding to cover up to 50% of the project from the Lawn Tennis Association.

The project remains subject to further funding being secured and will require planning permission.

It's also worth noting that ahead of bringing this project to the Council Matters committee for discussion, the tennis club has completed an early public consultation inviting comments and questions from people living in the surrounding area.

At this stage, the tennis club is formally seeking FTC's approval and a commitment of support to progress the project further, including via the planning process.

### Background

This report follows up on the presentation given to Councillors by John Price at the Council meeting on 7 March 2018. Presenting on behalf of the tennis club, John talked to Councillors about various project possibilities for tennis in the town. The outcome of this meeting was that Councillors agreed to "work with the tennis club to bring a project forward," delegating responsibility to staff to do this.

### Tennis in Frome

Although the tennis courts are open to the public throughout the year, there are (naturally) variations in when the courts are booked and used with typical variations by season, time of day and during the school holidays. Not surprisingly, the courts are at their busiest during the better weather and when it's lighter later into the evenings. Weather permitting, floodlights would allow people to use the courts throughout the year.

Time pressures are one of biggest barriers stopping people taking any form of exercise and people who work a “normal working week” between 9am to 5pm on weekdays are often excluded from sport simply because courts and facilities aren’t open at times to suit their commitments.

The Council has committed to supporting the town in looking to provide more opportunities for formal and informal sport in Frome. A perfect example was deciding to work with the tennis club to relocate the courts to Mary Baily.

As such – at least in terms of opportunity and participation - it seems a natural fit to support the tennis club in this project. The prospect of extended hours will also give staff greater flexibility to explore times for free tennis and free coaching in conjunction with the tennis club - building on recent initiatives.

If the project goes ahead, and in line with the current agreements relating to the courts, the tennis club would be fully responsible for the upkeep of the lights and the electricity bills.

However, there are a variety of factors to be considered here:

#### **1. Budgets and grants**

FTC doesn’t have a budget in the current financial year to match-fund this project. Nor is there an allocated or nominal budget in the upcoming financial year (1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020). This is not to say that Cllrs may decide to allocate some of the General Reserve and re-allocate earmarked reserves. In addition to securing an in principle grant from LTA, the club is also exploring Sport England funding.

#### **2. Staff resource**

At this early stage, it’s expected that the club will reflect the costs of all the professional services in their funding bids, including fees for a technical consultant and project management costs.

As such, staff would not be responsible for overseeing the full details of the project, although it is reasonable to assume that staff would provide some time to review a draft planning application. It would be sensible for at least one member of staff to sit on the project team if and as this project progresses.

#### **3. Opportunities**

By virtue of the courts being available for longer, FTC could look to increase the number of hours in a week that the courts can be booked by the public.

#### **4. Design**

It’s likely and expected that a number of details relating to this project will be defined by the planning process. Typically for floodlights, this would include the operation hours (timings); the type of light and bulb; design choices and any other planning conditions.

There may be an opportunity to expand the scope of this project to include a hard-surfaced path that leads directly to the tennis courts, thereby providing better and more inclusive access to the courts.

## 5. Landscape

Lastly, floodlights will have a visual impact in this part of town. While this can be mitigated to an extent by lighting design, opinions about the impact will naturally be subjective. And, depending on Cllrs' view, this will need to be weighed against providing greater opportunities for sport.

### Early consultation

At our request, the tennis club has taken the opportunity to canvass the thoughts and views of the neighbouring area already. They letter dropped the letter to approximately 210 properties (see [Appendix 4.1](#)). These included properties in Park Road, Longleat Court, Slipps Close, Butts Hill and Somerset Road.

As of 1 February, just 13 people had returned their views with over half of these coming from properties in Somerset Road.

Of the 13 replies, 6 people were supportive of the idea, while 5 people had concerns and would likely oppose the project. Concerns highlighted the impact on wildlife, light levels, increased traffic, increased noise, and the potential for problems with parking. There were also 4 comments that the existing courts aren't used enough to merit the project.

It was a significant decision to locate the three new courts on Mary Baily. The decision about whether to support floodlights is equally significant, and perhaps more so, given the impact on the night sky. This impact needs to be compared with the benefits of increasing the facility for healthy sports in the town.

It's unfortunate that the response to the tennis club's letter drop was so poor, and it is suggested (and recommended) that the club tries again to gather the views of local people. In short, additional views from local people will help the Council to make an informed decision about this project.

### Recommendations

In principle, FTC supports floodlighting the tennis courts. But this is subject to the tennis club trying different methods to engage with local people over the proposals; and the outcomes of that engagement.

1. Support the tennis club to further engage with local people.
2. Subject to the response to the engagement exercise, delegate responsibility to the Environment Manager to act as main contact for the tennis club at this stage of the project.