

Agenda Item 3

For decision - Floodlighting the tennis courts on the Mary Baily playing field

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Summary

Frome Selwood Tennis Club is asking the Council to support a project to install floodlights on the three community tennis courts on the Mary Baily playing field. At this juncture, the project has an estimated cost of between £50,000 and £60,000.

Since we look after the playing field - in conjunction with Fields in Trust - this project will 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 remains at a preliminary stage; naturally and necessarily so because we are yet to make a formal decision about whether to support it.

Even so, the tennis club has been successful in securing in principle match-funding for up to 50% of the project from Sport England. The club has also been granted £3,000 by the Somerset Lawn Tennis Association County Committee.

The project remains subject to further funding being secured - potentially from an interest free loan from the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA)

The project will also require planning permission.

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

Background

This report follows up on a presentation from the tennis club at the Council meeting on 7 March 2018; and reports presented to Councillors at the Council Matters meetings on 20 February 2019 and 11 September 2019.

The Council Matters reports discussed in February and September last year both contain much more detail on tennis in Frome; on the findings of the two consultations now completed by the tennis club; and on the overall discussion relevant to this project.

And since the context and the situation remain by and large the same now, this report is somewhat pared back and simply focuses on the main points covered previously:

Tennis in Frome

- The community tennis courts are open to the public throughout the year, but there are natural variations in court bookings and use
- Weather-permitting, floodlights would allow people to use the courts more often and for longer throughout the year

- The prospect of more playable hours would give FTC staff and the tennis club greater flexibility to look at offering more free tennis and more free coaching on the courts; and reduced booking rates out of season
- Discussions around this are happening already - and if the project goes ahead then a new shared usage agreement will be put in place

Budgets and grants

FTC doesn't have a budget or reserve funds identified in the current or upcoming financial year to match-fund this project

Staff resource

- At this stage, it's expected that the tennis club will reflect the costs of all the professional services in their funding bids, including fees for a technical consultant and project management costs
- Staff would necessarily provide some time to review a draft planning application
- It would then also be prudent and expected for at least one member of staff to sit on the project team if and as this project progresses

Design

- It's expected that various details relating to this project will be defined by the planning process, including the hours that the lights can be on and the type of lights
- The planning process could also define other design choices (and could include planning conditions)

Consultations

- As mentioned in the other Council Matters reports, the tennis club canvassed the thoughts and views of the neighbouring area in early 2019 and ahead of the Council Matters meeting last September
- And in brief, the vast majority of the 100+ people who returned responses as part of the second consultation were supportive of the project

Recommendations

1. Confirm FTC's support for the project; thereby enabling the tennis club to finalise the planning applications for the floodlights and the pavilion
2. Delegate responsibility to the Environment Manager to carry on discussions with the tennis club exploring the opportunities for free tennis and reduced booking fees out of season
3. Delegate responsibility to the Environment Manager to report back to the appropriate Council Matters or Council meeting at the next key stage in the project