

# Executive Decision Report

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## City Council Golf Courses

Decision to be taken by: City Mayor

Decision to be taken on: 11 December 2014

Lead Director: Liz Blyth

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## Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: New Parks, Western Park, Humberstone and Hamilton
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- Author contact details: 0116 454 3511
- Report version number: Vs. Final

### 1. Purpose and Summary

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to inform the City Mayor and the Executive of the results of the recent consultation on proposals relating to the Council's golf courses. The proposal consulted upon was to maintain and invest in Humberstone Heights Golf Course and to close Western Park Golf Course.
- 1.2. The report sets out the results of the two public consultation exercises and outlines the rationale for the proposal to close Western Park Golf Course.
- 1.3. In addition, this report provides a breakdown of costs, legal implications and equality implications associated with the proposal.
- 1.4. In March 2014 the first public consultation began, asking the public whether they thought Leicester City Council should continue to subsidise the two Council owned golf courses in the City; Humberstone Heights and Western Park. The Council received a total of 2,773 responses. 90% of responses supported the continuation of the subsidy for golf, which in the year 2013/14 cost the Council in excess of £185,000.
- 1.5. The first consultation revealed that there was sizable support for the continuation of Council's golf provision. Thus, a number of possible options were carefully considered – including the closure of one or both municipal golf courses. (The results of the first consultation are attached as Appendix A).
- 1.6. In July 2014 the Council began consulting the public on a proposal to close one golf course (Western Park) and to invest into the other (Humberstone Heights). The proposal would enable the Council to continue providing a municipal golf course of high quality while delivering budget savings (required as part the council's budget strategy). This second consultation closed on 24<sup>th</sup> October 2014.
- 1.7. The Council received a total of 755 consultation responses on this proposal. 38% of consultation participants supported the proposal to close Western Park Golf Course and to invest in Humberstone Heights Golf Course, while 62% did not. 50% of consultation responses were from residents of the city of Leicester. When separated from non-city residents, 48% of city resident responses supported the Council's proposal, while 52% of city resident responses opposed it. (A full analysis of the results is set out in Appendix B).

## **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1. The City Mayor and Executive are asked to consider and assess the results of both consultation exercises and in particular the recent public consultation which proposed to close Western Park Golf Course and to invest in Humberstone Heights Golf Course.
- 2.2. In light of the results of the second consultation as well as the various other supporting and background information provided, the City Mayor and Executive are asked to make a decision on the future of the City Council golf provision. The officer recommendation is to support the proposal to maintain and to invest in the golf course at Humberstone Heights and to close the golf course at Western Park.

## **3. Supporting information including options considered:**

### **3.1. Background**

- 3.1.1 Leicester City Council has had to make substantial budget reductions now and will do in the future owing to very sizeable cuts in government funding.
- 3.1.2 Leicester is not unique in reviewing its golf courses. Other Councils across the country have also reviewed their golf provision in an attempt to focus on core services and make necessary savings. For example, in January 2014 Tamworth Borough Council made the decision to close its only municipal golf course. The golf course closed on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2014. Leeds City Council has also recently been consulting on the closure of two of its municipal golf courses.
- 3.1.3 Golf receives the highest subsidy per visit of all the sports facilities provided by Leicester City Council (subsidy per visit costing approximately twice that of the average subsidy per visit to a sports centre). There are on average 215,000 usages to each of the City Council sports centres per year, while there are on average 28,000 usages of each of the City Council golf courses.
- 3.1.4 In 2013/14 the two courses cost the Council £186,000 (direct costs less income). In May 2014 the golf courses had a joint membership of 560 people – of whom 28 were juniors and 17 were female.
- 3.1.5 There are 32 golf courses in Leicestershire and Rutland, 15 of which are in a 14 mile radius of Western Park Golf Course. These courses offer both annual memberships and a non member 'pay and play' facility.
- 3.1.6 Of the 560 people who are members of the Council golf courses, approximately 63% are residents of the city and 37% are residents of the county.

### **3.2. The First Consultation Process**

- 3.2.1. On 11<sup>th</sup> March 2014, a consultation process began, to gain insight into both the public and users views on whether the Council should continue to subsidise Humberstone Heights and Western Park Golf Courses. The consultation closed on 8<sup>th</sup> April 2014.
- 3.2.2. The public were asked to respond either through the council's consultation hub on the council website or to fill in a short questionnaire, which was available at both golf courses, in all of the Council's leisure centres and at the customer services centre. In total 2,773 responses were received.
- 3.2.3. 90% of consultation responses expressed support for keeping the golf courses open. However, there was a disparity between the responses received at different locations. For example, more than 99% of responses through the golf courses were in favour of the Council continuing the subsidy, compared to 60% of responses through the customer service centre. Moreover, of the total number of consultation participants, 25% were users of Humberstone Heights and 22% were users of Western Park while 37% of respondents were users of both golf courses.

### **3.3. Other forms of Public Engagement (e.g. letters and representations)**

- 3.3.1. Three petitions were received as set out in Appendix A.
- 3.3.2. The Council received 115 letters from members of the public who had concerns and comments about the future of the golf courses and the impact which a decision to close one or both courses would have on their local neighbourhood. The common concerns and comments highlighted in these letters were; loss of green space and the effect this would have on the environment, the cost of playing golf at an alternative club, along with comments highlighting the health benefits which come with playing golf.
- 3.3.3. Teams from both Humberstone Heights Golf Course and Western Park Golf Course were invited to meet with the City Mayor and Assistant Mayor, to discuss the future of the golf clubs. The City Mayor wrote to the clubs following this meeting and requested that they produce a business plan or a vision document defining their ideas for a more sustainable future. While both clubs took the opportunity to present some ideas to improve the financial position of their respective Golf Courses, Humberstone Heights also presented an outline business plan for consideration.

### **3.4. Golf in and around Leicester**

- 3.4.1. There are other golf courses in and around the city which offer a competitively priced non member 'pay and play' and membership facility within a 14 mile radius of Western Park Golf Course. Golf courses such as Beedles Lake, Birstall, Forest Hill, Scraftoft and Whetstone all provide 'pay and play' services at very similar prices to Western Park and Humberstone Heights.
- 3.4.2. All of the golf courses also provide discounted membership prices for juniors and many have weekend clubs for junior players. Nearby Kirby Muxloe Golf

Club offers junior membership at a price of £116 per annum, compared to Western Park's £110. Kirby Muxloe is the closest golf course to Western Park (2.3 miles), it runs a juniors golf club every Sunday and also has around 40 junior members. In comparison, the Council golf courses currently have a total of 28 junior members, of which 25 are members at Humberstone Heights and 3 are members at Western Park. Humberstone Heights also has a juniors' golf club at weekends.

- 3.4.3. The Council golf courses have 245 members/season ticket holders aged 60 and over, including 25 members who are aged 80 and over. These members would be able to find competitively priced alternative golf courses. For example the membership price for people aged 80 and over at Birstall Golf Course is £344.75 – over £100 cheaper than the Council golf course price of £450. In addition, Blaby and Enderby Golf Courses offer annual senior memberships for £280 and £199, while Whetstone Golf Course is priced at £530.
- 3.4.4. There are various 'pay and play' promotions at golf courses around Leicester, such as 2 for 1, discounted prices if you play with a member or if you play at off-peak times. For example, Birstall Golf Course offers a 2 for 1 discount which would bring the cost of a round of golf to £15 per person, cheaper than either of the City Council golf courses. The majority of golf courses in Leicester and Leicestershire offer a 2 for 1 'pay and play' option in some capacity. Furthermore, a 'County Card' for golf offers discounted 'pay and play' prices at a number of golf courses around the county. Most of these golf courses also offer a lower price if booked through 'Tee Time', an online booking system.
- 3.4.5. Some golf courses may need to be booked in advance to guarantee a 'pay and play' time and it may be more difficult to play at peak times. However, Beedles, Enderby and Blaby golf courses use very similar booking systems to the Council golf courses.
- 3.4.6. Golf courses such as Blaby, Enderby, Beedles and Scraptoft also hire out golf clubs for the main course, enabling people to come and play golf without owning their own equipment.
- 3.4.7. People who generally play golf on a main course have either had past golfing experience or have previously undertaken lessons. The Council golf courses would not encourage beginners to play on the main course without any prior experience of playing golf – a policy which is similarly followed at other golf courses. All golf courses welcome beginners and offer lessons or pitch and putt courses, which would allow first time players to gain vital experience to progress in to the sport.
- 3.4.8. As well as the Council golf courses, neither Blaby nor Enderby Golf Courses have a dress code. The dress code at other golf courses may vary, but most courses will accept tailored shorts and polo shirts. Some clothing, such as trainers, are not suitable for golf due to the damage they could do to the course.

### **3.5. The Second Consultation Proposal**

- 3.5.1. The proposal to close one Council golf course is based on the following

rationale:

- 3.5.2 The first consultation revealed that there was sizable support behind the City Council's golf provision. Thus, a number of possible options were carefully considered – including the closure of one or both municipal golf courses. The continuation of a financially viable and effective golf provision was the Council's primary focus.
- 3.5.3 This proposal takes into account the public concerns expressed from the first consultation, about maintaining a competitively priced, good quality municipal golf course, as it proposes continuing and investing into the golf provision at Humberstone Heights.
- 3.5.4 In the past, Councils have provided and subsidised golf provision to enable access to sport and leisure facilities to everyone, by taking away the barrier of cost or status traditionally present in many private clubs. However the changing nature of golf has allowed for greater availability of private courses for all. This has partly been due to a national decline in golf, which has resulted in existing golf clubs being more competitive and less exclusive – with most golf courses now regularly advertising promotional offers as well as welcoming non-members. This has resulted in greater accessibility to many courses around Leicestershire along with lower 'pay and play' and membership prices.
- 3.5.5 In addition the availability of leisure opportunities has increased with access to low cost gyms, sports provision on parks, increased popularity of cycling and walking for pleasure, jogging, and excellent facilities in many schools and colleges.
- 3.5.6 The closure of Western Park Golf Course, if decided, could save the Council in excess of £100,000 a year, making a significant contribution to the Council's revenue savings requirement, as result of national government cuts in public expenditure. This may also release the land for other beneficial purposes.
- 3.5.7 The Council would continue to provide a well-priced, good quality municipal golf course provision in Humberstone Heights Golf Course – with the opportunity to enhance the complex with further investment. This would maintain accessibility to golf for city residents with all the associated health and wellbeing benefits.
- 3.5.8 Following further consultation, if a decision is taken to close Western Park Golf Course, Humberstone Heights Golf Course (6.3 miles away) would expect to see an increase in both membership numbers as well as 'pay and play' users. This is likely to result in a reduced need for Council subsidy.
- 3.5.9 The proposal to close Western Park Golf Course rather than Humberstone Heights is based on the following rationale:
- 3.5.10 Western Park is generally less popular and has fewer members. Below are membership figures for the two Council golf courses:

Western Park

Total Membership: 253

Women: 3

Junior Boys: 3

Humberstone Heights

Total Membership: 307

Women: 14

Juniors: 25

- 3.5.11 Western Park costs more money each year to run. In the year 2013/14, the subsidy for Humberstone Heights was £63,000, whereas the subsidy for Western Park was £123,000. Consequently, closing Western Park Golf Course could save the City Council almost double the amount it would save were it to close Humberstone Heights.
- 3.5.12 Western Park Golf Course also costs the Council more in subsidy per visit. For example, in the year 2013/14 Humberstone Heights Golf Course cost the Council £2.17 per visit, while Western Park Golf Course cost £5.47 per visit.
- 3.5.13 Humberstone Heights Golf Course is a golf complex and generates more income than Western Park Golf Course. In the year 2013/14 Humberstone Heights Golf Course's income was £272,000, compared to Western Park Golf Course's income of £210,000 – a difference of over £60,000.
- 3.5.14 Based on a scenario of 50% of members and 20% of pay and play users switching golf courses, Humberstone Heights would become self-sufficient and would not require the Council subsidy if Western Park Golf Course were to close. Using the same scenario, the closure of Humberstone Heights would not make Western Park self-funding and the golf course would still require a Council subsidy.
- 3.5.15 Humberstone Heights, as a golf complex, has more facilities such as a golf course, driving range, practice area, 9 hole short course for beginners, putting green, pro-shop, function room, bar and catering facility.
- 3.5.16 In contrast, Western Park Golf Course has a golf course, practice area, pro-shop, bar and catering facility.
- 3.5.17 The undercover driving range at Humberstone Heights is a big advantage as it can be used all year round. It is regularly used by local schools.
- 3.5.18 The consultation responses also revealed that Humberstone Heights was slightly more popular than Western Park. 682 responses stated that they exclusively played golf at Humberstone Heights, compared to 601 responses for Western Park.
- 3.5.19 In addition, Humberstone Heights is more popular amongst young people – with 25 junior members, compared to Western Park's 3 junior members. Humberstone Heights also has a Junior Golf Club at weekends which is attended by around 20 young people each week.
- 3.5.20 There is not a leisure centre in the immediate Humberstone and Hamilton area which means that the closure of Humberstone Heights Golf Course could have a greater impact in that locality on reducing public access sport and leisure provision. On the other hand, the Western Park area is near to the Braunstone and New Parks leisure centres.

### **3.6. The Second Consultation Results**

- 3.6.1. The second consultation on the City Council golf courses began on Monday 28<sup>th</sup> July and ended on Friday 24<sup>th</sup> October.
- 3.6.2. The second consultation proposal was to maintain and further invest in the golf course at Humberstone Heights and to close the golf course at Western Park.
- 3.6.3. The consultation also asked questions on gender, disability and ethnicity, allowing the Council to gain further knowledge of the range of people who use the golf courses.
- 3.6.4. Consultation questionnaires could be completed online on the Council's consultation hub as well as the Council's golf courses, leisure centres and customer service centre.
- 3.6.5. A total of 755 responses were received by the Council.
- 3.6.6. 38% of consultation responses supported the Council's proposal, while 62% opposed it.
- 3.6.7. 50% of consultation responses were by residents of the city of Leicester, with 48% being from the county and beyond. 2% of consultation participants did not answer this question.
- 3.6.8. When separated from non-city residents, 48% of city resident responses supported the Council's proposal, while 52% of city resident responses opposed it.
- 3.6.9 Two business proposals were received in relation to the Western Park Golf Course. One was to use part of the site for the development of the emerging sport of FootGolf, which is played with a soccer ball on a shortened golf course and uses 21 inch diameter cups (holes). This is a different proposition to golf and the proposal did not therefore envisage the continuation of golf at Western Park Golf Course. The second was a proposal from a private investor for the development of a 6 hole golf course on a much reduced parcel of land than that which is covered by the current 18 hole course at Western Park.
- 3.6.10 In November we invited both organisations to submit more detail including a business plan and further financial analysis. The responses were variable in the level of detail provided and neither offered comparable provision to the facilities at Western Park Golf Course nor were they sufficiently well advanced to regard as a feasible or a viable alternatives at this stage. Should the decision be made to close Western Park Golf Course other decisions will be required for the future use of the site. It is likely that any future options would be for a mixed use including retaining a large area of green space and therefore both of these proposals could be taken into account at a future stage along with any other interests, including from Glenfield Parish Council as set out below.
- 3.6.11 Glenfield Parish Council has nominated Western Park Golf Club as an Asset of Community Value. The Council have decided to proceed with the nomination.

This means that should the Council decide to sell the asset in the next 5 years then an initial 6 month moratorium period will apply in which community organisations can put bids together. This does not limit the Council's ability to select the most appropriate bidder once the moratorium period has ended. Glenfield Parish Council have also raised concerns on behalf of their residents about the ongoing future of the site, the importance of maintaining green space and wildlife corridor and a separation zone preserving the identities of the different residential communities. The City Mayor met with representatives from the Parish Council in October 2014 to listen to their concerns.

Throughout the consultation process numerous letters, representations and ideas for the future use of Western Park Golf Course have been received and considered accordingly.

3.6.12 A comprehensive analysis of the consultation results is set out in Appendix B.

#### **4. Details of Scrutiny**

A verbal update on the golf consultation was provided at the Culture, Heritage, Leisure and Sport Scrutiny Commission on 10 May 2014.

A visit to the Council Golf Courses at Western Park and Humberstone Heights was carried out by Culture, Heritage, Leisure and Sport Scrutiny Commission members on 2 September 2014.

A report on the golf proposal was considered and debated by the Culture, Heritage, Leisure and Sport Scrutiny Commission at their meeting on 9 October 2014, where representatives from the Clubs from both of the Council golf courses were invited to speak and make the case for their respective golf course.

#### **5. Financial, legal and other implications**

##### 5.1 Financial implications

The proposal to close the Western Park Golf Course could be expected to save circa £100,000 p.a. (on the basis of income and expenditure over the last two financial years) and could release the land for other beneficial uses.

Colin Sharpe, Head of Finance, ext. 37 4081

##### 5.2 Legal implications

Legal advice on consultation prior to decision making has been provided to the Culture and Neighbourhoods Division and the public consultation described has taken place following that advice to provide stakeholders with: sufficient reasons for the Council's

proposal, to allow their informed consideration and response; and a proportionate and realistic timeframe to allow them a sufficient period of time to respond. The product of the consultation should then be conscientiously taken into account before any decision is taken concerning the Recommendations set out in this Report.

Greg Surtees, Legal Services, ext. 37 1421

### 5.3 Climate Change and Carbon Reduction implications

There would be no climate change and carbon reduction implications with a decision to close a golf course.

### 5.4 Equalities Implications

The main equalities issues raised in the second consultation were the positive impacts on health of playing golf, and the potential negative impact of increased cost for use of alternative provision. The previous report to the Executive set out evidence supporting mitigating actions to address these equalities impacts arising: a number of alternative accessible sites available to play golf, and available existing provision at no additional financial cost. The main protected characteristics for those affected by proposals for Western Park Golf Course are gender and age.

Irene Kszyk, Corporate Equalities Lead, ext 374147

### 5.5 Other Implications (You will need to have considered other implications in preparing this report. Please indicate which ones apply?)

Local residents have expressed concerns about what would replace the golf course, were it to be closed. There have been letters received by the Council which oppose the construction of new housing. Both Western Park and Humberstone Heights are regularly used by walkers and joggers, who along with local residents would like the large green space to remain. There are also several animals which inhabit both golf courses, and any future plans would need to take into account their natural habitats and environment.

### **6. Background information and other papers:**

None.

### **8. Is this a private report (If so, please indicated the reasons and state why it is not in the public interest to be dealt with publicly)?**

No.

**9. Is this a “key decision”?**

Yes.

**7. Summary of appendices:**

Appendix A – Golf Courses: First Consultation Results

Appendix B – Public Consultation Golf Proposal Results