

REPORT TO CABINET

DATE 11 DECEMBER 2025

**REPORT OF CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET DECISION

Environment, Leisure and Culture - Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Nigel Cooke

Tennis Court Management in Stockton-on-Tees

Summary

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council currently owns and manages 11 public tennis courts, across 3 key locations. In partnership with Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) funding was received to upgrade Littleboy Park and install gate access systems across all sites with the main aim to improve access and long-term sustainability of local tennis facilities. A key funding condition from LTA was a court operator be appointed, We do Tennis (WDT) was appointed in 2023 and a pay-to-play model was piloted at Littleboy Park for a 2-year period. We have also been successful in accessing additional funding from LTA which has allowed the recent re-surfacing and upgrade of Ropner Park tennis courts.

Our current two-year WDT contract was due to expire in April 2025. A six-month extension was agreed to allow exploration of a new, collaborative Tees Valley Model, involving: SBC, Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland BC. This concession contract has now expired, with the option of further extending the original contract for 2 months whilst decisions are considered and approvals are made moving.

We propose extending the partnership with operator, We do Tennis, aligned to a regional Tees Valley model, which includes extending the pay to play model across all 3 sites and 65/35% income split of all court related income.

Reasons for Decision

Partnering with We Do Tennis, as the operator, significantly reduces financial exposure by transferring operational responsibility, including all required maintenance, and supporting the creation of a long-term sinking fund for future refurbishment. Whilst the arrangement does not come without some risk, the partnership ensures high-quality, accessible tennis provision with minimal strain on council resources, and aligns with broader goals to promote health, community sport, and regional collaboration. The ongoing maintenance of these assets has proved to be challenging due to pressures on internal resources, and lack of specialised equipment. This resulted in the temporary closure of Ropner Park tennis courts, prior to the recent resurfacing.

The regeneration and management of our parks tennis courts is highlighted as a key recommendation and action with our current Stockton-on-Tees Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sport Strategy.

Recommendations

1. That Cabinet approve the recommendation to continue an extended partnership with the operator, We Do Tennis, aligned with a Tees Valley regional model
2. That Cabinet approve implementing a pay-to-play model across all 3 Parks Tennis sites to minimise financial risks and enable the longer-term sustainability of assets.

Detail

The Tees Valley Proposal includes amending existing funding agreements to support a joint Tees Valley delivery mode covering a:

- Unified operator agreement across the three councils
- Requirement that all LAs commit to repainting resurfaced courts within 15 years
- All surplus income to be placed in a ring-fenced sinking fund solely for future tennis court refurbishments
- LTA approval required for any future operator arrangements

This includes a **65/35 income split**, with 35% of all court-related income going into Local Authority's sinking fund

In return for their share of income, WDT will:

- Deliver court operations, customer management, coaching, and bookings
- Employ a local Tennis Development Manager (12 hours/week) to lead:
 1. Community outreach and school links
 2. Deliver Free and low-cost tennis initiatives (e.g. Barclays Free Park Tennis, Fred Perry Project)
 3. Growing pay-and-play, passes, and local tennis league participation
- Cover the recommended and required maintenance of courts, across all 3 sites.

Community Impact and Equality and Poverty Impact Assessment

An EPIA has been completed and submitted. The proposal has a neutral impact upon many of the protected characteristics. The courts are level access and with the maintenance included within the proposal, we do tennis will take responsibility for ensuring they are in good working order, thus having a positive impact on disability. The proposal may have a negative impact upon poverty. Mitigations include - charges will be a low level to minimise impact. Concession rates will be available. Free daily sessions will be offered across all sites. Free Parks tennis will take place weekly on a Saturday morning across all sites. Free targeted coaching will be offered.

The proposal will advance equality of opportunity having the tennis courts in good condition / repair, well managed, with a maintenance regime in place and with relatively low cost usage fees could improve accessibility for younger, developing players who would not normally access tennis club type facilities.

The proposal will improve / foster good relations and aim to build community cohesion. community engagement is part of the proposal. The operator will develop and build on links with the local community and local stakeholders. The operator will also deliver a range of LTA supported initiatives including initiatives to encourage engagement and tackle inequalities including via a number of targeted and free initiatives.

It is recognised that indirect barriers may exist for some groups, particularly older adults and disabled residents. There are also potential challenges with digital booking systems and physical outreach. These could be mitigated through community outreach and engagement via the operator and tennis development manager.

A Data protection impact assessment has also been completed.

Corporate Parenting Implications

The report does not contain any direct corporate parenting implications. Concession fees will be available for children in our care wishing to access the courts

Financial Implications

Estimated Annual Income Potential (Based on National Usage Averages)

	Est. Income	35% LA Share	65% WDT Share
Stockton	£25,756	£9,015	£16,741

This proposal will reduce our financial risk moving forwards and increase our opportunities to enable people to be more active in their local communities.

Legal Implications

No implications.

The proposal is to direct award and enter into a new legal concession contract with the operator aligned to the Tees Valley model. The contract will detail the terms and conditions, fees and performance indicators.

Risk Assessment

Risks identified with the recommendation are the Council cedes a portion of control to an external operator, and that the 35% income to the council will not fully cover any sinking fund requirements moving forwards. However, this is mitigated by the operator will cover all management and operations and all maintenance costs and the 35% income to the Council will cover 70/80% of any future sinking fund costs.

Wards Affected and Consultation with Ward/ Councillors (refer to Concordat for Communication and Consultation with Members)

All, borough wide initiative but specifically -

Ropner
Village

Stainsby Hill
Billingham Central
Billingham East
Billingham North
Billingham South
Billingham West and Wolverston

All above ward members briefed prior to the start of the original 2-year pilot contract with We do Tennis.

Background Papers

EPIA (ID 210)
Stockton-on-Tees Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sport Strategy 2022

Name of Contact Officer: Andrea Green

Post Title: Principal Sport and Active Life Officer

Telephone number: 07833233977

Email Address: andrea.green@stockton.gov.uk