

Title of meeting:	Culture, Leisure and Economic Development Decision Meeting
Date of meeting:	8 February 2022
Subject:	Parks Fees and Charges
Report by:	Director of Culture, Leisure and Regulatory Services
Wards affected:	All
Key decision	No
Full Council decision:	No

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 To seek approval for annual changes to the fees and charges levied for the use of Parks facilities for the financial year 2022/23.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 **That the fees and charges be approved in accordance with the attached schedules (Appendix A).**

3. Background

- 3.1 In line with Audit Commission recommendations and Financial Rules the fees and charges have been reviewed and market rates applied where appropriate. In the majority of cases a CPI inflation rate of 3.1% as at September 2021 has been applied. Please refer to Appendix A for the proposed list of charges. As in previous years, this report covers several service areas.
- 3.2 It is proposed to increase fees and charges for hire of parks and open spaces by CPI of 3.1% (figures rounded).
- 3.3 The Reviving Victoria Park project was recently awarded a grant by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and work on the delivery phase of the project will commence in 2022 and run for four years. During this time the project will run a large number of events, as well as playing host to other community and commercial events that will be encouraged to use the park as a venue. The project team will seek to develop a guidance document for events considered to be a 'good fit' for the park and an events pack to inform potential organisers of the amenities available, restrictions that will apply and the application process.

- 3.4 It is envisaged that charges will be closely aligned with those already shown on the schedule, but a category for stalls/markets has been added to allow for this to be included in the Victoria Park events documents when produced. Previous fairs in the park have shown it may be difficult to distinguish between community and commercial and this will allow assessment based on number and size of stalls rather than people attending.
- 3.5 In line with the approach adopted for seafront events, in order to be able to use the land at charity rate the event organiser must provide a letter of endorsement from the charity and confirm that all profit, over and above costs, from the event will be given to the charity and proof of such payment provided upon request. Additionally where a commercial company is organising an event to raise money for charity a minimum donation to the charity equivalent to that of the commercial hire rate of the land would be expected.
- 3.6 The city council introduced permits for commercial fitness training activities in 2016. The administration, compliance and enforcement of this permit scheme needs to be reviewed and a separate report will be presented to the Cabinet Member at a future date once sufficient benchmarking and necessary research has been completed. This may include recommendation for amendment to the approved charges.
- 3.7 Prior to this, it is proposed to increase charges for commercial fitness training activities by CPI of 3.1% (figures rounded). It is also proposed to reduce the permit application fee and remove the permit renewal fee as this is considered to be one reason operators are not engaging in the permit scheme. The deposit charge is proposed to be rounded to £300 and consistent with the charge for events.
- 3.8 Football, cricket and rugby pitch hire charges are highly competitive with neighbouring authority charges and the proposal is to increase fees and charges by CPI of 3.1% (figures rounded).
- 3.9 Restrictions applied throughout the Covid-19 pandemic have significantly impacted on full use of some sports facilities and at times, any use at all. The necessary adjustments have been made to pavilions in accordance with Government and national sporting body recommendations so that where bookings and use is permitted, teams are able to use them in conjunction with their own risk assessments and protocols.
- 3.10 Where use of pavilion facilities is not required for a pitch booking, a 40% reduction is applied to the full hire charge. The city council has needed to respond to changing requirements as a consequence of Covid-19 restrictions and where pavilion use may be limited to toilet and welfare facilities only but a sports attendant is still required to attend before and after matches, it is proposed that a 20% reduction is applied to the full hire charge.

- 3.11 It is proposed to bring Drayton Park cricket pitch hire in line with all other venues. The site has historically attracted a higher fee due to the site amenities, but the pavilion is now leased to Fleur de Lys football club with a requirement to facilitate cricket pitch bookings. Reducing pitch hire fees in line with other venues will allow the cricket club allocated to Drayton Park for the season to negotiate any use over and above use of changing facilities with the football club on a seasonal basis.
- 3.12 Great Salterns Golf Course continues to produce a net income for the council. Golfers pay for their round either by purchasing a season ticket, or by purchasing a 'pay-and-play' green fee.
- 3.13 Golf course operations and facilities have been significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. The negative impacts have included periods of course closure and restrictions on the numbers of players allowed per tee-time once permitted to re-open. The positive outcomes have included course availability at times other sports have not been permitted due to the nature of the sport, leading to increased demand on tee-time availability.
- 3.14 In 2020/21, despite the course needing to close for just under 5 months due to Government restrictions, the number of rounds played was only 20% down on the 3-year average and was a clear signal that demand for the sport had resurged as consequence of Covid-19 and the course served as a highly valued recreational facility when Government restrictions allowed. It was apparent that casual player participation, using the course on a 'pay and play' basis, had seen a significant increase with this increasing by approximately 25% on the previous 2 years.
- 3.15 In February 2021, grounds maintenance of the course returned in-house. At the time the course was closed due to Government restrictions and allowed some early enhancement work to be carried out around the course. However, in March, evidence of leatherjackets (larvae of the crane fly) caused extensive damage to a number of the greens and this was exacerbated by crows disturbing the greens to feed on the larvae, as they were undisturbed due to the lack of player presence.
- 3.16 Whilst the impact on the greens was outside the control of the grounds maintenance team, the lifting of restrictions and a return to play coincided with the course in a relatively poor condition to the standard normally offered and to be expected by players. It represented a scenario consistent across many other courses.
- 3.17 The city council responded to the unpredictability of course availability as consequence of Covid-19 and green conditions by retaining 2020/21 season ticket prices for new members, applying reduced charges to existing members, temporarily reducing green fees and adjusting its policy around no refunds, as means to retain player commitment and consequently protect course income towards future maintenance.

- 3.18 This flexible but fair approach appears to have worked successfully with season ticket membership having increased by 20% on last year and the number of rounds played between April to November 2020 already matching the 12 month 3-year average (pre-pandemic) with 4 months of the year remaining. It is predicted by year end, the course will have sustained a 20% increase in rounds played over the 3-year average and continued to outperform the south regional figures.
- 3.19 The course offers extremely good value locally and satisfaction levels are considered to be high. Season ticket holders help support the stability of the course operations and it is in the city council's interest to retain their loyalty and payment commitment. It is proposed that the 2021/22 season ticket prices are retained for 2022/23 as shown in Schedule A. New season ticket applications and renewals will be at the full charge set in 2021/22.
- 3.20 The course operates a 'no refunds' policy on the sale of season tickets. This policy was temporarily revoked when circumstances necessitated but will again be applied to season ticket sales made for 2022/23.
- 3.21 It is proposed that 2021/22 green fees are retained for 2022/23 as shown in Schedule A. It is apparent that temporary reduction to green fees is necessary to maintain customer satisfaction when the course is affected by conditions outside the council's control. Examples are leatherjacket damage across multiple greens, or when deep aeration works are carried out, but that affect the green playability for a short time. When such conditions present, it is proposed that the Parks Manager and Course Professional may be given authority to apply a reasonable temporary reduction to green fees for the duration considered necessary.

4. Reasons for recommendations

- 4.1 Charges have been reviewed and adjusted, where appropriate, to reflect the rates currently being charged in the market, maximising income, but also ensuring value for money and retaining discounted rates where possible to charitable organisations and Leisure card holders.
- 4.2 Site fees have been reviewed to ensure that a commercially appropriate fee for the hire of PCC land is charged.

5. Integrated impact assessment

- 5.1 An Integrated Impact Assessment report is attached.

6. Legal Implications

- 6.1 The setting of fees and charges is governed by the City Council's Financial Rules, Part 7, Rules T1 to T4. Specifically, Financial Rule T2 requires that fees and

charges must be reviewed at least annually and be consistent with Council policies and strategies and in accordance with Cabinet and Council budget decisions and policies as relevant.

7. Director of Finance's comments

- 7.1 The fees and charges have been reviewed taking into account the need to maximise income whilst ensuring that services remain competitive.

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Signed by:
Stephen Baily
Director of Culture, Leisure and Regulatory Services

Appendices:
Appendix A - Parks Fees and Charges
Appendix B - Integrated Impact Assessment

Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location

The recommendation(s) set out above were approved/ approved as amended/ deferred/ rejected by on

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Signed by:
Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Economic Development