

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the background to this proposal and how does it relate to the Bristol Playing Pitch Strategy and Bristol Sport and Active Recreation Facility Strategy?

In May 2018, following full public consultation, the Council adopted a proposal to operate “chargeable sports facilities and other facilities in public parks only when they generate no cost to the Council”. This was part of the need to make savings to parks budgets and generate income to support parks budgets.

In July 2018 the Council adopted the Bristol Sport and Active Recreation Facility Strategy (SaARFS). This strategy covers all sports facilities except the major grass pitch sports. The strategy states that there is a need to review all council funded outdoor bowling provision to assess the longer term sustainability of clubs in light of local authority budget pressures. Also in the summer of 2018 the council held informal consultations with several of the bowls clubs that are potentially affected. These conversations highlighted a desire from the bowls clubs to remain open and operational. There were also frank conversations about whether the clubs could survive without council subsidy. Some felt they could, others were less optimistic due to low membership numbers and deteriorating facilities.

In December 2017, the Council adopted the Bristol Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) and an aspiration from partners to improve grass pitches and ancillary facilities. However the PPS also identified that the Council was providing its facilities at a significant loss and that alternative methods of provision had to be considered to reduce this deficit. Five options were put forward for future consideration:

1. A reduction in the level of service provided by the BCC Parks team (i.e. clubs doing more of the required work on match days)
2. Fees & charges review: an increase in cost to the user for facility / pitch hire
3. Efficiency of use: consider the efficiency of maintaining single pitch sites
4. Community asset transfer: consider which sites are suitable for potential transfer
5. Rationalisation: consider which sites can realistically attract future funding and which sites should be considered for closure (i.e. no longer providing facilities for formal sport participation)

The Council have experimented with point 1. The trial has been a reasonable success in operational terms but there remains significant cost to the Council.

Reducing overheads wherever possible, the cost of providing a pitch and changing facility is estimated at £208 per pitch/per game for football facilities. Costs to the user (in 2017) were averaged at £54.81 per match, which is roughly £2 per person. This means the council providing a circa 75% subsidy for each football match played.

Further investigation of “single pitch sites” identified that the main cause of inefficiencies is not the number of football pitches on the site but the number of changing rooms and how much the changing rooms are actually used. Managing and maintaining a changing room for only two adult football teams to use in a weekend is the least cost effective model. These sites are not sustainable and alternative usage patterns need to be instigated.

2. What is the cost of hire at other facilities in Bristol and the rest of the country?

Area	Site	Hire costs (examples taken from current websites)	Link
Bristol	Council facilities city wide	Adult football with changing rooms, provision of nets and goal posts, for 12 games = £697.06 to £767.57 (depending on site)	https://www.bristol.gov.uk/documents/20182/2721903/Parks+football+terms+and+conditions+2018-19/737a24a8-5c07-d5b9-3a53-f764a0989a65
Bristol	Council facilities: 2 sites	Cricket pitch booking costs for a season are: adult pitch £644	https://www.bristol.gov.uk/museums-parks-sports-culture/cricket
Bristol	Council facilities: 5 sites	Outdoor bowls: green booking costs for a season are £5,418	https://www.bristol.gov.uk/museums-parks-sports-culture/bowls
Bristol	South Bristol Sports Centre	Grass Pitches – £95 per hour and a half for one off hire	https://www.southbristolsportscentre.co.uk/facilities/pitches/
Bristol	Coombe Dingle (UoB)	Grass Pitches - £77 per match	http://www.bris.ac.uk/media-library/sites/sport/documents/Facilities%20price%20list.pdf
London	Regents Park	Adult football pitch = £80 2 changing rooms = £54 Goal nets and corner flags = £15 Total = £149 per match	https://www.royalparks.org.uk/parks/the-regents-park/things-to-see-and-do/the-hub-sports-facility/sports-pitches/winter-sports-pitch-booking-form
Bath	Odd Down	Full Pitch- Rugby or Football - 2hr - Standard Hire £84 Cricket: Grass Square Hire £80	https://www.better.org.uk/leisure-centre/banes/odd-down-sports-ground/prices
Wakefield	Various	Adult football pitch (casual use) = £62	http://www.wakefield.gov.uk/Documents/sports-leisure/sports-pitch-prices.pdf
Chelmsford		Adult football pitch including changing rooms, showers and nets = £74.47 Bowls and cricket also on the document	file:///C:/Users/brlscjh/Downloads/SportsPitchPrices_201819.pdf
Basingstoke		Includes info on football, cricket and bowls hire	https://www.basingstoke.gov.uk/sports-pitch-prices

3. Why are hire charges at different sites so variable?

There are numerous potential reasons for the variability in hire costs around the local area and beyond.

- Some facilities are owned by charitable or large commercial organisations that wish to offer their facilities at lower costs in order to facilitate their use by the local population.
- Private facilities may choose to offer their pitches/greens for hire at a loss in order to attract more users to their site. Often these private facilities can generate income from these users from other facilities on their site such as practice facilities, cafes, bars, parking and function room hire.
- The costs of maintaining grass pitches/greens will depend on numerous issues. Private contractors may be able to offer the necessary service at a lower cost than councils can due to economies of scale, different human resource costs and their focus on providing a specific service.
- Some councils continue to choose to subsidise the cost of sports pitch hire at various levels of subsidy.
- Some councils have chosen to raise their hire charges and fees to reduce the level of subsidy they are providing.

4. Are there any examples of this issue happening elsewhere?

Yes. The issue has arisen all over the UK. Please see the following links for some examples of related stories and consultations:

<https://consultations.southglos.gov.uk/consult.ti/CSPPitchreview15/consultationHome>

<https://www.gateshead.gov.uk/article/10112/No-longer-providing-maintenance-for-bowling-greens-and-football-pitches>

<https://www.bridgend.gov.uk/news/current-high-subsidies-for-sports-pitches-and-pavilions-aren-t-sustainable/>

https://secure.manchester.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/24446/7_review_of_public_bowling_green_s

<https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/manchester-council-plans-close-one-14103649>

<https://www.bournemouthecho.co.uk/news/15343724.bowling-club-may-be-forced-to-close-after-80-years-and-keeping-toilets-open-for-public-hasnt-helped/>

5. Does the city council currently lease out any sport facilities in parks?

Yes. There are several examples across the city including rugby, cricket, tennis, bowls and football facilities.

6. Is there likely to be external funding available to help improve these facilities in Bristol?

The Bristol Playing Pitch Strategy and the recently published Football Association's Football Facility Plan for Bristol give a strong indication as to which sites are realistically likely to attract funding from the Football Foundation. Whilst there are clear criteria to suggest which sites are likely to attract funding, there is also an appreciation from The Football Association that some sites have significant potential and may attract new proposals and/or alternative uses should the sites be made available for asset transfer.

Funding sources are available for other sports via the respective national governing bodies and Sport England. However the sums available for these sports are not at the same level as that for football.

7. Clarification of terms used in consultation

Term used	Further explanation
“chargeable sports facilities and other facilities in public parks only when they generate no cost to the Council”	This means that when all costs and income associated with the provision of the service are taken in to account, the Council is not spending any money and the service is being delivered ‘cost-free’.
expressions of interest	Depending on the consultation responses, there could be an “expression of interest” process where the council wants to hear from interested parties who might want to operate a sports facility, and asks them to return information on their proposal for the site(s).
third parties	An organisation, club, group, charity, company etc. who, in this context, might operate a sports facility in a park.
full repairing lease arrangements on buildings	A lease provides exclusive occupation rights to the lessee (tenant). This is appropriate for buildings or land where the tenant will have control of its use and maintenance responsibilities during the term of the lease.
full maintenance licence arrangements on pitches	A licence grants rights, but these are not exclusive. This is appropriate for the land where rights can be granted to allow organised sports use (including training etc. associated with the sports use), but the land remains open for public recreational purposes at all other times.
capital funds	One-off sums of money that are used to improve a facility or build a new one. This is opposed to money that is used to maintain or repair a facility.
external grant funds	Grants from organisations other than Bristol City Council.
operated sustainably	Able to generate enough income to cover both annual expenses and long term maintenance and repair costs.
all relevant maintenance and repair costs	Includes every aspect of maintaining and repairing a facility in the long term, including where necessary, replacement of components of the facility.
match funding	A sum of money that is then used to help secure funding from other funding sources. Some grant funding providers ask that match funding is available.
“operated until it is no longer safe to do”	Facilities need to meet Health & Safety standards. Typically this includes meeting electrical safety and water hygiene issues with sports facilities but may also include more structural issues such as roofing.
formal, organised sport	Sport that is played to a defined set of rules, with a specific playing area and normally affiliated to a national governing body and league.
sports facilities in parks for informal use	Informal sporting use is also described as casual or recreational use.