

Thanckes Park Tennis Courts, Torpoint – LTA Operational Proposal

Provided to	Torpoint Town Council
Purpose of brief	To provide an evidenced proposal for the operational model for Thanckes Park Tennis Courts following council investment to improve the court surface and re fence the existing two courts.
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1) Context

Torpoint Town Council have invested funds to improve re fence the two tennis courts in Thanckes Park as part of a wider parks improvement project. These courts are in need of regeneration and this time and investment is very much welcomed and appreciated by us. We work hard to maintain and improve our park courts nationally, making tennis more accessible to local communities to support wider public health agendas.

This project presents an opportunity for Torpoint Town Council to access LTA grant funding (c£6k) to install one SmartAccess gate. The grant funding covers the supply and installation of the gate as well as the software (provided by ClubSpark) to enable online bookings and payments to be taken remotely. It also includes a dedicated website for those courts and the ongoing support of regional LTA colleagues, ensuring the facility becomes a vibrant and sustainable community asset.

SmartAccess Gate Technology represents innovation in the sport of tennis, gives facilities an online presence and creates an easy and simple customer journey to court whilst generating income to ensure the facilities financial sustainability.

2) Insight into Tennis in Parks

The LTA has conducted some wide ranging research to understand how the public feel about tennis and primarily the main barriers to accessing the sport. Some key statistics that inform our work within this area are highlighted below:

- Over 4 million people pick up a racket once a year and play—majority in parks
- A total of 1,744,883 play in parks each year
- 44% of tennis played by those aged 14+ is on park courts (21% in clubs)
- For those *who don't play tennis but would like to*, 83% would go to a park/community court first
- For people who want to play tennis in parks, they are most dissatisfied with state and condition of courts and the ease of the process to book a court to play
- As a result of Covid 19 we have seen a recent escalation in demand for tennis with the highest proportion increase visible within community/park tennis courts
- People are less likely to play tennis if there is no booking procedure in place

This ongoing research serves to provide an overall rationale that community/park tennis facilities are very popular in the UK, with potential for continued growth if courts are maintained to a good standard and are easy to book. Once the planned work is completed and the courts are reopened,

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Thanckes Park tennis courts will be in a slightly better condition but they are in need of resurfacing by a [SAPCA](#) registered company. Once this has taken place it is important that they are maintained to a high standard and the total investment made by the council is protected. This document proposes to focus on using grant funded technology to create a financially sustainable community facility that can be maintained to a high standard, through the implementation of an operational model that combines charged and free access use to create a balanced approach to community tennis in Torpoint.

3) Paid vs Free

Unfortunately we find ourselves in a position where there are a number of park tennis courts across the country in poor condition, unsafe and in some cases derelict. This is a result of park courts historically being free to access, with little in the way of income generated to support ongoing maintenance.

As the National Governing Body for tennis we are working hard preserve our park courts and break this cycle. Longevity needs to be considered from the outset which is why we are investing SmartAccess gate technology into park courts nationally to enable operators to create that much needed financial sustainability.

Insight tells us that free to access courts have lower court utilisation rates than those who offer a booking and payments system. People are less likely to play tennis if there is no guarantee that a court will be available to them. If formally booked and paid for they have the security that a court is allocated and they don't risk 'wasting their time', something that is very important as our lives become busier and busier.

Free to access facilities also have the challenges of keeping young people out of the courts and ensuring that they are only used as intended i.e. not for football or skateboarding for example. This type of behaviour is another barrier to participation where people report feeling intimidated and unwelcome when looking for a court to play tennis with friends or family. It also reduces the life of the court surface.

We advise that £1200 per court (non-floodlit) per year is set aside into a sinking fund to cover ongoing costs, including annual cleaning, repainting, court resurfacing and general repairs. This ensures facilities are maintained to a high standard, thus continuing to encourage usage and increased participation within a valued community asset.

4) Tennis For Free

The LTA work closely with a registered charity called Tennis For Free (TFF). TFF is focused around delivering weekly tennis sessions in public parks to drive new tennis interest into the local community.

Delivery is based on a weekly mass participation session available throughout the year. TFF aims to run mixed ability group games and drills which are managed by fully-qualified, LTA Accredited

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coaches. TFF helps fund costs associated with coaching and equipment to enable sessions to be accessible to the local community.

The format consists of a one hour coach led session followed by a 30min 'Open Play' session. This weekly 1.5hr activity features 3x sub groups (Parent & Child Group, Beginners Group, Improvers+) to allow all members of the public to participate at the same time. It is delivered on either a Saturday or Sunday morning and particularly suited to whole families who want to try tennis in the appropriate sub groups.

TFF provides the perfect operational balance, enabling Local Authorities to provide designated free access to courts whilst generating income to maintain facilities to a high standard to ensure longevity of their community asset.



More information is available on the TFF website [here](#).

5) ClubSpark and SmartAccess Technology (Bookings & Payments)

The use of our ClubSpark online booking platform and SmartAccess Gate Technology has been utilised by local authorities and other operators to solve management challenges, improve the service to the public and create financially sustainable public tennis facilities.

The SmartAccess Gate has a built in key pad which works using a 3G sim card. Each online booking made through the free ClubSpark website or app generates a unique four digit code which is used to open the gate at the required time and activate floodlights (if appropriate). This removes the need for staff to take payment, allows customers to search, book, pay and access courts to suit them, maximising court utilisation and income. It also offers security for the facility with only those who have booked and paid able to unlock the gate and enter the courts.

Key benefits of our technology include:

- Maximises income potential of a given facility to contribute to a sinking fund for future court refurbishments
- Reduces administration time for a court operator due to self-service automated bookings and payments available 24/7
- Increases reporting capacity of tennis participation and court usage to inform future planning
- Improves customer journey in terms of finding, booking, paying and accessing courts
- Low cost membership packages / pay & play / concession pricing are an affordable way for the public to access tennis
- Software settings allow the management of organised groups and casual players
- Free website software for the venue to create a dedicated website
- Increases opportunity for tennis to contribute to local authority public health aims
- Enables the use of coaching for mass introduction to the sport at a local level, including free events

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- The need for councils to find budget for facility maintenance in future years is removed through income generation
- Gates are vandal proof and provide security for the courts
- An example of what a live booking sheet looks like in practice can be found at [Boscawen Park](#), operated by Truro Town Council

The most common model of managing public tennis courts would include:

- Annual Household Membership at £37/year providing annual access for the whole household for 12 months from the date of purchase
- Pay & Play at £6-7/court/hour
- Free weekly sessions funded by the charity, Tennis For Free

This has been adopted by a number of local authorities across the UK as the best balance pricing for affordability and sustainability. Greater detail around financial modelling can be provided as conversations progress and if required.

Some operators in the region have previously opted to offer booking a court on an hourly basis only, due to simplicity to the public and local circumstances (such as a club on the courts already). The specific needs and requirements of Thanckes Park courts can be discussed in greater detail moving forward to accommodate the desired model and pricing structure to suit the local area.

6) Case study – Impact of developing parks on participation in tennis

Boscawen Park in Truro has 8 courts, 2 of which are floodlit. Following a refurbishment in 2018 the Council installed gate access to operate an 'Annual Tennis Pass' (£37 per household) and Pay & Play (£7 per court) model. The coaching team from the local Tennis Club were also contracted to deliver a community coaching programme on the park courts which generates additional income and usage whilst adding to the overall 'offer' of the courts.

The increase in usage and revenue enables the Council to set aside an annual sinking fund of £1,200 per court for on-going maintenance and longer term resurfacing. In June 2020, there were 400 households signed up to the annual membership, which equates to just under 1000 unique people. The Council have seen over 6000 bookings in the last year and on some days in June 2020 the courts were 100% occupied from dawn till dusk. There were over 1200 Pay & Play bookings between June 2019 and June 2020 at £7 per hour per court.

Truro City Council, the LTA & a local coaching provider has successfully worked with Tennis For Free (TFF) to offer the free weekly sessions as previously mentioned. I understand they are in the process of re-establishing this activity following the disruption of Covid and due to relaunch TFF this Summer. The Boscawen Park website can be viewed [here](#).

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Other examples within the region, successfully using a similar model can be found below:

- 2 courts in rural South Devon
<https://clubspark.lta.org.uk/kingsbridgeparkcommunitytennis>
- 4 courts in central Plymouth
<https://clubspark.lta.org.uk/CentralParkTennis>
- 3 courts on the outskirts of Southampton
<https://clubspark.lta.org.uk/WoodhouseLaneRecreationPark>

7) Gate Access Requirements

As part of the criteria for LTA grant funding, all venues will be asked to meet the following requirements:

- Ensure power is bought to the gate point prior to installation
- Become an [LTA Registered Venue](#) once installation is complete
- Join the FREE [LTA Rally](#) Booking Platform to increase online visibility of the courts
- Pay the annual maintenance fee (c.£600) to [CIA Fire & Security](#) who supply and install the gates
- Set aside an [Annual Sinking Fund](#) for court resurfacing and ongoing maintenance

8) Additional LTA Support

The LTA Regional team will provide support throughout to ensure the gates, software and operational model is right for the venue and local area. There are a number of LTA programmes available to operators of community tennis facilities such as [Tennis For Free](#) as previously mentioned, our [Open Court Disability Programme](#) and [Local Tennis Leagues](#) which aim to create an offer to suit a diverse range of users.

9) Summary

The courts in Thanckes Park provide an opportunity to create a facility that is secure, affordable and easy to access with minimal input and admin time required by the Town Council. There is clear supporting evidence from research and live projects that the introduction of SmartAccess Gate Technology helps the 'journey' for someone to play tennis, thus increasing bookings and revenue. The LTA team is prepared to support and financially invest (pending approval) in the introduction of the booking and access technology to improve the management and usage of the tennis courts at Thanckes Park.

10) Next Steps

To be able to move this project forward we would initially need agreement from Torpoint Town Council that they wish to proceed with applying for SmartAccess Gate Technology to support the operation and reopening of the courts in Thanckes Park.

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Following agreement the next steps would be as below:

- LTA to make an internal application to set aside investment into the gate technology
- Ensure power is available at the gate point prior to installation
- LTA to seek a quote from the gate company [\(CIA\)](#) for the supply and installation of the system (c£6k)
- A further discussion between the LTA Regional Team and Torpoint Town Council to confirm the model of operation / pricing and talk in more detail about the system and its features and benefits