

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

8th April 2021

RESPONSE TO REASONS FOR CALL IN

Relating to the Following Decision:

Decision: Whitewebbs Golf Course

Decision Date: 23 March 2021

Decision of: Cllr Caliskan

Key Decision No: KD5177

Reasons for Call In:

- 1) Paragraph 32 says that Enfield Council does not have a legal duty to respond. However, it fails to explain why the decision maker discounted consulting given how many interested parties there are including the Golf Club itself.

Response

Prior to commencing the marketing of Whitewebbs there was full engagement with several interested parties including the Golf Club, other Golf Course users and the Friends of Whitewebbs. There was an understanding of the financial history of the course and the Council's financial position, agreement to the marketing approach and an understanding that this might result in closure of the course.

Since the marketing commenced there has been wider interest in the process and throughout the Council has made the financial position clear. The figures for the 5 years ending in 2019 have been published on the Council's website for some time.

During the pandemic the pressure on the Council's finances has grown significantly. With lockdown restrictions being raised with effect from 29th March there was a need to make a decision prior to then.

- 2) Paragraph 19 includes a table setting out the financials. The £1,157,165 shows the net budget position taking into account expenditure and income from 2014/15 to 2019/20. However, it does not provide any detail about what the net position is after Controllable internal recharges, Capital recharges (Depreciation) and Overheads are excluded from the Council's net budget position. This of course would give Members a greater understanding of the financial implications.

- 4) The report said there was an increase in bookings during the summer; this was considered a temporary situation where existing golfers made up for lost rounds during lockdown. The surge in the summer for golf bookings has just been discounted. However, this sentence does not provide evidence to back up its claim other than financials from before the pandemic. The world has changed since the pandemic and there is new appreciation for outdoor sports and our open spaces.

Response

The course has failed to cover its costs for many years, losses go back before the figures outline above. The number of rounds played has fallen consistently for the last 4 years and this is in line with a fall in rounds played generally.

There was an increase in rounds played immediately following the release of the first lockdown although numbers fell in the following months. These figures are considered exceptional and unlikely to be sustained going forward.

The figures for Whitewebbs were as follows: -

Rounds played

Jun-19	2279	Jun-20	4135
Jul-19	2246	Jul-20	3970
Aug-19	2531	Aug-20	2994
Sep-19	2116	Sep-20	3159

Green Fee Income

	£		
Jun-19	26609.97	Jun-20	54772.01
Jul-19	26609.1	Jul-20	50370.07
Aug-19	26265.93	Aug-20	41513.08
Sep-19	24018.94	Sep-20	40864.96

The number of people playing golf regularly (twice per month or more) in the UK is estimated at around 830,000 or around 1.2% of the population. 84 percent of registered golf players are adult male, 13 percent adult female and 3 percent are registered as juniors.

Out of 6,861 golf courses in Europe in 2017, 1,872 were in England, Germany had the second most with 731.

Participation in other outdoor pursuits has also risen during the pandemic and in both percentage terms and the number of people participating there are many where the growth has been greater and more sustained.

Participation in walking has risen by around 3 times with over 60% of the population walking regularly.

Running, cycling and hiking have also doubled and participation in each is significantly higher than in golf.

Whitewebbs remains open to those pursuing these activities.

- 5) The decision to close the Golf Course indicates a prejudging of the process of receiving bids to run the park and golf course as the report fails to state that the golf course might open under a potential contractor in the future.

Response

No decision has been made regarding the future of the site, but details of the next steps are expected to be announced shortly. The report makes this clear and the decision to close the course does not prejudice the process.

Bidders proposals include a range of activities with some including golf. Those that include golf propose investment in the course prior to reopening so a closure now would not impact significantly on those.