



Report to: Cabinet, 21st March 2017

Report of: Councillor Adrian Gregson, Leader of the Council

Subject: PERDISWELL GOLF COURSE

1. Recommendation

- 1.1 That Cabinet endorses the proposals in this report, in particular the maintenance of 'pay and play' provision at Perdiswell; and**
- 1.2 That Cabinet recommends to Council the grant of a long lease to the operator of the Ravenmeadow Golf Centre in respect of part of the golf course at Perdiswell.**

2. Background

- 2.1 At its meeting on 9 February 2016, Cabinet approved the temporary cessation of the Council's golf course provision for a period of 15 – 18 months from 1 April 2016, as a result of the requirement to carry out repairs to the underground culvert that carries the Barbourne Brook through Perdiswell Park. Cabinet also approved the grant of a lease to the operator of Ravenmeadow Golf Centre for the top 10 holes of the Perdiswell Golf Course for the duration of the proposed closure, so that a temporary 18 hole course with 9 Perdiswell holes and 9 Ravenmeadow holes could be established and operated.
- 2.2 As part of the temporary arrangements, the Council was keen to ensure that members of the public who used the Council's golf course did not experience any disruption in their ability to play golf during this period. In particular, it was essential that 'pay & play' provision was maintained. Whilst the Council has not been delivering golf as a service since March 2016, 'pay & play' and Membership golf have been provided by Ravenmeadow for existing Perdiswell Park golf members and casual users, who were displaced by the temporary closure of the council's facility.
- 2.3 The facilities at Ravenmeadow are superior to those on offer at Perdiswell with resident golf professionals, a golfers' club house, café offering hot meals, a large golf shop, a licensed bar, a driving range and a practice pitch and putting areas. The new Perdiswell Leisure Centre does not have these facilities.
- 2.4 The temporary arrangements have proven very popular with golfers, and also local dog walkers and other users of Perdiswell, who have been able to roam at will over the closed portion of the golf course (with the exception of the construction sites).
- 2.5 The repairs to the culvert have now been completed and the Council must now make a decision about the future use of the Council's golf course. This report proposes that the Council ceases to provide golf and enters into a long term lease arrangement with the Ravenmeadow Golf Centre, to include pay and play golf at Perdiswell. This report highlights the public support for this proposal following the public consultation

which has been carried out. It also summarises the Council's legal obligations in terms of the disposal of public open space under a long term lease. Finally, the report provides an overview of the alternative options that have been considered.

3. Public Consultation

- 3.1 Informal feedback of the popularity of the temporary arrangements with Ravenmeadow from both golfers and residents to officers and elected members led to a formal public consultation to accurately measure public opinion. This was carried out through December 2016 and January 2017.
- 3.2 The public consultation asked whether the public were in favour of the temporary arrangements for golf provision continuing on a permanent basis. There were 350 responses to the public consultation, the majority of which were from golfers. However, there were over 130 responses from local residents, dog walkers, runners and nature lovers. 82.5% of all responses were in favour of the current arrangements continuing

4. S.123 Local Government Act 1972

- 4.1 The land at Perdiswell which is the subject of this report is formally held as public open space. Granting a lease of 7 years or greater would qualify as a disposal. Where a Council intends to dispose of land which is held as public open space, it is necessary to publish a notice in a local newspaper in two consecutive weeks of the proposal. The Council published a notice in the Worcester Observer Newspaper on 22 February 2017 and 1 March 2017. It is necessary for the Council to consider any objections to the proposal. At the time of writing, no objections have been received and the current position will be updated at the Cabinet meeting. The consultation closes on 22 March 2017, in advance of the Council meeting on 28 March 2017 where a final decision will be made on the matters covered by this report.
- 4.2 In deciding whether to grant a lease to Ravenmeadow, it is also necessary for the Council to consider the previous use of the land and the proposed use of the land. In practice, the grant of a long lease to Ravenmeadow will not change the current use of the land, i.e. for golf. In addition the grant of a long lease to Ravenmeadow will ensure that public rights of way are maintained and protected in the same way that they have been for many years.

5. Preferred Option

- 5.1 In light of the overwhelming public support for continuing the arrangements with Ravenmeadow, Bilfinger GVA, a firm of Chartered Surveyors, were appointed as external advisers to negotiate a long term lease with Ravenmeadow. The negotiation of a commercial lease relating to golf is a specialised area of work and the Council's external advisers have a wealth of experience in advising local authorities on optimum solutions for golf facilities. The Council's priorities in the negotiation with Ravenmeadow have been to ensure that pay and play golf is provided, that public access is maintained via designated routes and that there is investment in the course and facilities in the early years of the lease.
- 5.2 The area to be leased is the same area of land forming part of the temporary arrangements and is shown edged red on the plan attached at **Appendix 1**. The draft heads of terms are contained at **Appendix 2**.

- 5.3 The consequence of entering into a long term lease with Ravenmeadow is that the Council will no longer be a direct provider of golf. This means that the former 18 hole municipal golf course will be permanently closed.
- 5.4 Proceeding in this way has a number of benefits to the City Council, the golfing community and local residents:
- The City Council will receive a commercial rent under the terms of the lease to Ravenmeadow.
 - The maintenance liability for the golf course will transfer to Ravenmeadow.
 - Significant capital investment will be made by Ravenmeadow in the early years of the lease, which will enhance the golfing offer, ensuring competition standard golfing facilities continue to be an integral part of the Perdiswell site.
 - The golfing community will continue to have the option for pay and play golf at Perdiswell and will benefit from the extensive club facilities on offer.
 - Local residents will continue to have access to public open space at Perdiswell. In practice there will be unfettered public access to the bottom half of the former municipal golf course, as well as continued public access to the remaining golf area of Perdiswell by well-defined areas and paths.

6. Alternative Options Considered

6.1 A number of alternative options have been explored as outlined below.

6.2 Reinstatement of 18 hole golf course and management by the Council

The first alternative option that has been explored is the re-opening of the Council's 18 hole municipal golf course and the management and operation of the golf course by the Council. There are a number of reasons why this option has been discounted:

- The Council would not be able to offer the wider range of facilities that are on offer at Ravenmeadow.
- Returning golf to the lower half of the golf course would result in the golfers and dog walkers sharing the same area again. In the past this has been unsatisfactory with golf presenting a potential danger to dogs and their owners walkers, and dogs disrupting golf.
- Due to adverse ground conditions following the repairs to the culvert there are areas of one fairway that may not be returned to a suitable condition for a considerable period of time, which would therefore require the shortening and redesign of two of the holes including provision of a new tees and greens.
- The cost of reinstatement of this section of the course would be in the region of £30,000.
- Whilst the Council has continued to maintain the area of land leased to Ravenmeadow as part of the temporary arrangements, as well as the temporarily closed area, it is likely to take at least 12 months to complete all reinstatement works and to bring the whole of the golf course back to a playable condition.
- A new golf reception cabin would also need to be provided. The cost of the provision of a golf reception is likely to be upwards of £50,000.

6.3 Enter into a commercial contract for the 18 hole municipal golf course

The second alternative option that has been considered is the reopening of the 18 hole municipal golf course and then the leasing/contracting of the service to a third party operator. This option has been discounted for the following reasons:

- The issue with golf and dog walking sharing the same space would be reintroduced as described above.
- The Council/operator would need to undertake the reinstatement works as outlined in the first alternative option above as well as the provision of a reception facility, both of which would have a significant impact on the financial model for any contract
- The Council's most recent commercial contract with 1Life where golf was included in the management arrangements showed that the annual running costs for the golf course exceeded the income generated by approximately £50,000 per annum.

6.4 Close the 18 hole municipal golf course only

The third option that has been considered is the closure of the 18 hole municipal golf course. The provision of golf is a discretionary service offered by the Council, therefore the Council could decide that it no longer wished to provide these services. This option has been discounted for the following reasons:

- This option would take away the pay and play option for local golfers, something that the Council has been keen to maintain.
- There is overwhelming public support for golf at Perdiswell and for a continuation of the arrangements with Ravenmeadow on a permanent basis. Therefore, it would be unreasonable for the Council to pursue this option.

7. **Implications**

7.1 Financial and Budgetary Implications

The proposal to lease part of the course to Ravenmeadow will provide a fixed income of £16,000 p.a. plus 10% of extra fee income generation, which provides forecast income of £30k in total p.a. The costs of maintaining the golf course will be transferred to Ravenmeadow. The last available operating figures for the municipal golf course date to 2015/16 show that the annual costs of running the golf course exceed the income generated by approximately £50,000 per annum.

The arrangements therefore have a net financial benefit to the Council's finance of £80,000 per year when compared to the last full year's trading accounts of the golf course.

The one-off cost of external advisers Bilfinger GVA is £9,750.

7.2 Legal and Governance Implications

The proposals in this report mean that the Council will no longer be a direct provider of golf as a discretionary service.

The Council has complied with its statutory obligations under s.123 of the Local Government Act 1972 in respect of the grant of a long term lease to Ravenmeadow.

In accordance with the decision of Full Council on 22 November 2016 that any proposal to sell, lease, transfer or otherwise dispose of land at Perdiswell should be determined by Full Council rather than under officer delegation or by Cabinet, this matter will be referred to the next meeting of Full Council.

7.3 Risk Implications

Full diligence with respect to the financial security and viability of Pure Golf Limited (Ravenmeadow Golf Course) will be carried out prior to confirming the lease.

The on-going risk to the public of serious injury or worse by being struck by a golf ball on public open space will be substantially reduced, by removing golf from a large area of public open space and by ensuring public access to the remaining golf area is directed towards well-defined areas and paths.

7.4 Corporate/Policy Implications

Continuing the provision of competition standard golfing facilities at Perdiswell is in accordance with the City Plan ambition Theme 4, a Healthy and Active City.

7.5 Equality Implications

The golf course at Perdiswell provides the public with access to pay and play golf which helps to remove some of the financial and social barriers to participation in the game. It also provides easy access for beginners and those wishing to try the game. The arrangement with Ravenmeadow will protect these benefits.

Discounted golf is available at Ravenmeadow at certain times, meaning those residents with limited financial means can have the opportunity to play golf.

7.6 Human Resources Implications

There are currently four posts associated with golf course maintenance and other duties including football pitches and open space maintenance. Two are being covered by agency staff and will be discontinued. Two other posts are required to cover other activities including football pitches and the remaining open space.

There will therefore be no redundancies resulting from the transfer of the golf course.

7.7 Health and Safety Implications

The safety of walkers and casual visitors to Perdiswell will be improved as they will be able to freely access some of the current golf course, without the risks associated with walking through a golf playing area.

Making Golf easily accessible, without the need to be a member is important for achieving targeted figures for participation in sport and exercise for residents, particularly those aged 50+.

Returning half of the existing golf course to pure open space may encourage more non-golfers and people, who may not necessarily participate in other sporting activities, to walk, or to walk further, across Perdiswell, with corresponding benefits in their health and well-being and this again supports targeted figures for regular participation in exercise.

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Background Papers: none.