



CLUB SUCCESS STORY

‘PILOTING GATE ACCESS TECHNOLOGY: Rejuvenating park courts sustainably to open up tennis in the community’

St Mary’s Park is situated in Prestwich, Bury, bordering the north Manchester area.

It is a flourishing public space with extensive facilities including four tennis courts, two bowling greens and outdoor gym. The park is used by diverse age groups, cultures and abilities and attracts youth and sports teams.

BACKGROUND

St Mary’s Park has retained a Green Flag Award since 2005, which recognises excellence in greenspace management, incorporating sustainability, community involvement and health. Bury Council and the LTA have a long-standing partnership with mutual aims. In 2017 Bury Council and the LTA funded a £40k initiative to drive tennis participation at St Mary’s Park where it was identified that interest was high, but courts were run down.



HOW THE INITIATIVE WORKED

As part of the pilot, the four tennis courts were rejuvenated (including resurfacing, repainting and remarking) and a Gate Access System installed. This facilitated a simple online court booking process which was promoted both in the park and online to the local community. LTA Rally, the LTA’s nationwide online booking tool, was implemented in summer 2019.

- Peak time slots are charged at £3 per hour per court and an annual pass is £20
- Some courts are still free to use, subject to booking and availability
- The park’s tennis offer includes a free weekly coach-led activity run in partnership with Tennis for Free to stimulate local interest in the game
- The income from court bookings is invested back into the tennis facilities and coaching programme.

SUCCESSSES SINCE INSTALLING THE GATE ACCESS SYSTEM

- The number of registered users has grown from around 200 to over 1800
- Bookings at St Mary's Park have clearly accelerated at a much higher rate than for other parks in the local authority (over 4,000 bookings compared to the next highest of 804 in the same period)
- Over £6k income generated
- There have been 602 Tennis for Free users
- The park has seen other improvements as a result of controlled access including courts that are now free of dog fouling, antisocial behaviour and vandalism
- The Gate Access System has helped build a sinking fund for the site to support sustainability of the tennis courts – essential for continued enjoyment

THE FUTURE

Following the project's success at St Mary's Park, Bury Council has developed a long-term strategy (2020-2022) and sustainable model with the LTA. It will protect the planned £500k capital investment into further court refurbishment including long-term forecasting for their 10 sites (24 courts in the borough), making them "good quality operational parks". Furthermore:

- They are adopting a charging model which will bring revenue to cover sinking fund and future refurbishment
- Court revenue projection for 2022 is £15k
- The LTA is providing capital support for the Gate Access Technology
- The council is currently considering a borough-wide operator-led model to drive sustainability and participation opportunities for parks



"St Mary's Park was chosen for the pilot as LTA data showed that these tennis courts were used the most yet were in greatest need of maintenance. As a result of this joint initiative between Bury Council and the LTA, tennis has been opened up for the community through a new secure online booking process, gate technology, low-cost tennis, free coaching and local tennis leagues. We look forward to rolling out St Mary's Park's success to other Bury parks."

Bury Council



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