

Options for the future management of the Old Football Pitches, Hyde Park

Stakeholder and Public Consultation

18th September 2014 – 24th October 2014.

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Chapter I: Introduction

This consultation paper seeks your views on a range of options for the future management of the Old Football Pitches area of Hyde Park, shown in Figure 1 on page 5.

The purpose of this consultation paper is to explain why The Royal Parks considers any change is necessary and to seek opinions from stakeholders and interested parties about the effects of such any change as well as their views on the options outlined here.

For the purposes of this consultation, the following definitions are used:

- I. **Organised sport** – where sport takes place through organised leagues or commercial organisations. Groups often provide equipment and play in identifiable sports kit.
- II. **Formal competitive sport** – competitive games played on regulation sized pitches with full pitchmarking, goals etc. There is no provision for formal competitive sport on the Old Football Pitches.
- III. **Informal sport** – more social and less competitive in nature. Usually no formal goal or pitch markings.

The Old Football Pitches provides facilities for **organised** and **informal** sport only.

Chapter 2: Responding to this Consultation

This is a public consultation. It is open to anyone who wishes to comment or respond and all views expressed will be given full consideration. We welcome all responses.

The consultation can be [completed online](#). Paper copies are available at the Tennis Centre in Hyde Park or can be downloaded and returned to:

Old Football Pitches Consultation
The Old Police House
Hyde Park
London W2 2UH

Alternatively, please write to us at the above address and we will send you a paper copy.

Responses to, and enquiries about, this consultation can also be addressed to:
ofp@royalparks.gsi.gov.uk

The consultation starts on 18th Sept 2014 and will close on 24th October 2014 at 5.00pm.

The Royal Parks will publish a statement outlining intended next steps as soon as possible after the closing date.

This consultation will be carried out in accordance with the published Consultation Principles:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/255180/Consultation-Principles-Oct-2013.pdf

Alongside this consultation, an Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) will be undertaken to establish the potential impact of any future changes on specific sections of the community. The EIA will consist of independent interviews with 20 pre-selected groups, including black and minority ethnic groups, religious/faith groups, groups of people from disadvantaged backgrounds, women's groups, older people's groups, younger people and people with disabilities.

In particular the EIA will target those who are not currently using the site alongside existing user groups. This assessment will look at the booking and charging proposals with the groups and the impact those changes will have on the groups or with individuals themselves.

Chapter 3: Background

The Old Football Pitches is an area of just over 14 acres that runs along the south of Hyde Park, adjacent to South Carriage Drive. The area makes up approximately three per cent of the total area of Hyde Park.

For many years this area has been used for informal sports.

The Royal Parks provides formal competitive sporting facilities at The Hub in Regent's Park, which can be booked for a fee throughout the year.

There are no marked pitches in Hyde Park and the Old Football Pitches area has been used for free on a first come, first served basis for many years. The Old Football Pitches area is currently used for a variety of sports including football, softball, rounders, cricket and ultimate frisbee.

Demand for the area has increased significantly over recent years. In addition to the informal groups who use this area, there has been a growth in organised sports. This includes a number of commercial operators providing coaching services and sporting leagues.

Under The Royal Parks Regulations 1997, it is a legal requirement for anyone operating a business in the parks to have written permission.

Ad hoc licensing of commercial operators using the Old Football Pitches has in the past proved problematic as there was no guarantee that licensed operators could secure a space to play.

In March 2013, The Royal Parks took the decision to introduce a booking and charging system in response to:

- a) requests from some users for a greater degree of certainty about securing space on the site; and
- b) complaints from some users about disagreements that were arising as a result of overcrowding on the site.

In September 2013, this booking and charging system was suspended pending a full public consultation on the future management of the site.

The Royal Parks began a period of consultation in October 2013. This included an online survey, face to face meetings, an open day on site and contact with sports governing bodies. The Royal Parks subsequently commissioned an external supplier to analyse the data from the survey, but the data collected was inconclusive, indicating trends only, and did not give us a full understanding of the range of views held by users of the site on booking and charging and the reasons for those views. The survey did, however, present the following findings:

- 87% of respondents felt charges for the use of the Old Football Pitches were not realistic
- Pitches are used throughout the week with most people spending up to two hours on site

- 60% of users are male, 40% female
- 3% of respondents have a disability
- Wednesday was the most popular day of the week to use the pitches
- Softball and football were the most frequent types of sport played
- The three most frequently used means of transport to the site were by tube, on foot and by bike
- 75% felt the pitches provided good facilities for sport
- 80% of users felt the quality of the pitches over the last three years had remained the same

NB – figures are illustrative and not statistically significant.

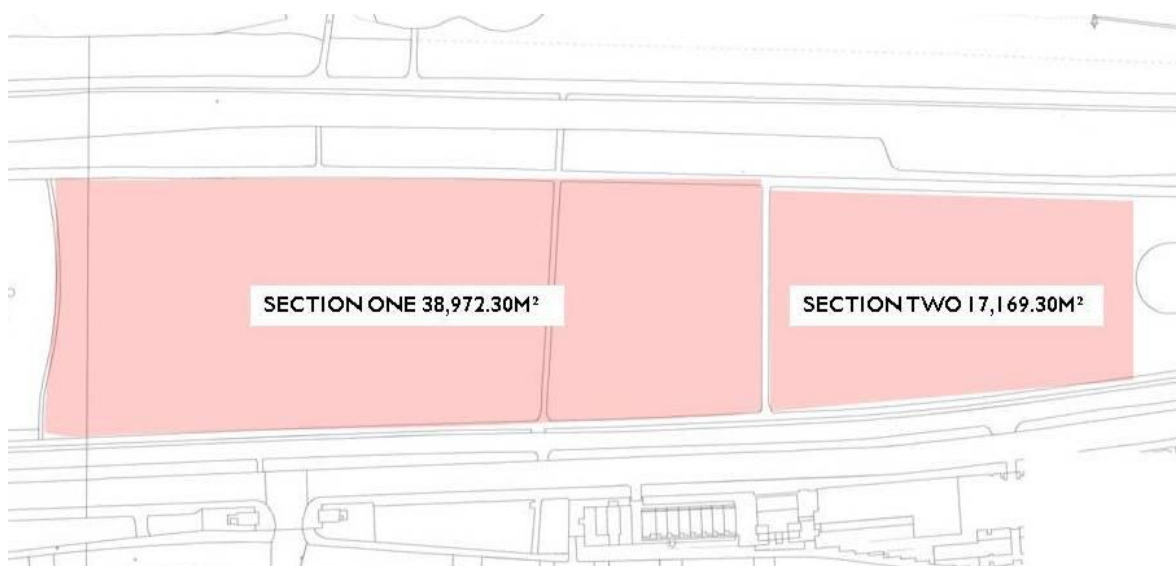
Since charges were suspended in September 2013, a free booking system has operated on the site, managed and subsidised by a booking contractor. As the booking contractor is a commercial operator, this arrangement is not sustainable in the long-term. Because of substantial cuts by central Government to its annual budget, The Royal Parks cannot itself subsidise a free booking system without putting other, vital park services at risk.

The Royal Parks is now seeking views on proposals for the future of sporting activity on the Old Football Pitches area.

The site

The Old Football Pitches covers an area of around 14 acres. This is approximately three per cent of the total areas of Hyde Park. For the purposes of this consultation, the site has been divided into two sections (see fig. 1 below). Section 1 covers about 70 per cent of the site and is closest to the changing rooms and equipment storage space which users can rent.

Fig. 1



It currently costs The Royal Parks in the region of £19,800 a year to maintain this site including, harrowing, grass cutting, litter picking and disposal fees. This represents an additional cost of £6,800 above the basic maintenance cost of an equivalent area of grassland in Hyde Park.

The Royal Parks has no plans to turn this area into the sort of formal sports facilities that can be found at The Hub in Regent's Park. The Royal Parks already provides high quality sports pitches at The Hub and the multifunctional use of the Old Football Pitches area, including army exercises and various events, means that it does not lend itself to being upgraded to that level.

Following the unusually wet winter weather in 2013, the playing surface is in poor condition. The Royal Parks is currently proposing it invests in improvements to this area to bring it up to a basic playable standard i.e. raising maintenance levels above the standard of the general park grassland. Following this investment, regular users of the site should expect to find the site maintained at a similar level to previous years. The level of use is however resulting in a need for more reinstatement work each year. The reinstatement costs are estimated at a minimum of £39,300 per annum although greater reinstatement costs are anticipated in the initial two years to bring the grassland up to a reasonable standard.

Chapter 4: Options

The Royal Parks is now seeking views on a range of options.

It is important to note that at this stage no decisions have been made about the future management of this site.

For the purposes of this consultation, the following definitions are used:

- I. **Organised sport** – where sport takes place through organised leagues or commercial organisations. Groups often provide equipment and play in identifiable sports kit.
- II. **Formal competitive sport** – competitive games played on regulation sized pitches with full pitchmarking, goals etc. There is no provision for formal competitive sport on the Old Football Pitches.
- III. **Informal sport** – more social and less competitive in nature. Usually no formal goal or pitch markings.

A number of the options below include a booking system, administered by a booking contractor.

Space would be bookable either as small pitches (50 x 30 ft); or as medium pitches (60 x 40 ft). Space would be bookable by the hour and informally marked out using cones. Players would be directed to the area they have been allocated by the booking contractor, who would supervise bookings.

Some of the options include a booking and charging system. The booking contractor would administer this. The charges are explained in each option.

NB –

- (1) **The Old Football Pitches is not suitable for formal competitive sport.**
- (2) **The space/pitch sizes are not suitable for adult 11-a-side football, which should be played at The Hub in Regent's Park. They are suitable for smaller-sided or children's sport.**
- (3) **Commercial operators will need to secure an annual licence to operate in the Royal Parks under the 1997 Park Regulations. The annual licence fee would vary between the individual options. If individual pitch booking fees are adopted the annual licence would be a peppercorn. If however, access to the area is free of charge the annual licence fee would be negotiated based on the level of use.**
- (4) **The area is occasionally used for events including the annual Royal Parks Foundation Half Marathon. On such occasions, normal use of the site is temporarily suspended.**

Each option below includes an estimate of the annual costs to The Royal Parks beyond the basic costs of maintaining the Old Football Pitches as open space, without intensive sports use. The reasons for these additional costs are explained in Chapter 3 above. Cost is a factor, but not the only or determining factor, in the decision to be made on the future management of the Old Football Pitches after the consultation. The estimates are provided to assist the public in evaluating the options.

The Royal Parks estimates the minimum annual costs for managing and maintaining the Old Football Pitches as playing fields as follows:

A. Without a booking system	
Annual maintenance (cost to TRP) (Cost over and above standard grass maintenance estimated at £13,000, i.e. additional grass maintenance; harrowing; litter collection; litter disposal).	£6,800
Minimum Reinstatement costs to repair to playing surfaces (works to be undertaken in October each year)	£39,300
Total	£46,100
B. With a booking system	
Annual maintenance and reinstatement costs as above	£46,100
Additional costs of booking and supervision (costs of contractor)	£25,425
Total	£71,525

The estimates set out in the options incorporate an estimated amount of the income to The Royal Parks from licence fees and booking charges, where relevant. In each option, that income is set off against the relevant total figure above.

Option I – no booking and no charging system

The entire site would be available only on a first-come-first-served basis. This option has the advantage of being a popular choice among many of the people who have already made their views clear during the consultation period that began in October 2013.

However, this is not The Royal Parks' preferred option for the following reasons:

- 1) It would reintroduce the problem of licensed commercial operators having no guaranteed access to pitches. This would make it more difficult for these groups, some of which provide sporting opportunities for young people, to operate at The Old Football Pitches. The formal pitches at The Hub are already much in demand and often booked up quickly.
- 2) Based on previous experience, we can anticipate further disagreements arising from overcrowding on the Old Football Pitches site.

Estimated annual cost to TRP	£26,100
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Option 2 – booking but no charging

This arrangement is currently in place at the Old Football Pitches. A booking system is available for the whole site, managed by a booking contractor.

This option has the advantage of accommodating both commercial operators and those who would like to book a pitch for no charge. The booking contractor currently operates this system free of charge as a temporary measure, but there are staffing costs associated with this. As a commercial operator, the booking contractor cannot continue with this arrangement in the long term.

Because of the cuts to its annual operating budget, The Royal Parks cannot pay the booking contractor to run this service without making cuts to other, essential park services. It therefore appears to be the least practical option.

Estimated annual cost to TRP £41,525

Option 3 – Booking and charging for the whole site

This option would cover the entire 14 acre site. A booking system would be put in place with a charge, to allow for space to be bookable either as small pitches (50 x 30 ft); or as medium pitches (60 x 40 ft). They would be bookable by the hour and informally marked out using cones. Players would be directed to the area they have been allocated.

The Royal Parks is proposing a small fee that will make it commercially viable for the booking contractor to run a booking system, and contribute towards The Royal Parks' costs of maintaining this area. The proposed fee structure is:

Small pitch £10 per hr or £30 for a 3 hr period (all costs inc VAT)
Medium pitch £15 per hour or £45 for a 3 hr period (all costs inc VAT)

(Proposed pricing structure was reached after comparison with other sports facilities in central London).

This charging structure would be the same as that set out in option 4, below.

This option would provide certainty for all groups using the site, including commercial operators and less formal groups. While this option would address issues arising from overcrowding, it may not sufficiently take into account the people who are happy using the site free of charge and with no booking system. For this reason, though the option delivers benefits, it is not The Royal Parks' preferred option.

Estimated annual cost to TRP £ 19,525

Option 4 – Booking and charging for a proportion of the site, with the remainder left as 'free-to-play'

This is The Royal Parks' preferred option.

Under this proposal, approximately 70 per cent of the site (section 1) would be bookable and chargeable. The remaining 30 per cent (section 2) would be kept as a 'free-to-play' area, operating on first come, first served basis, with no booking and charging.

Section 1 would be divided into pitches. These would be bookable either as small pitches (50 x 30 ft); or as medium pitches (60 x 40 ft). They would be bookable by the hour and informally marked out using cones. Players would be directed to the area they have been allocated.

The Royal Parks is proposing a small fee that will make it commercially viable for the booking contractor to run a booking system, and contribute towards The Royal Parks' costs of maintaining this area. The proposed fee structure is:

Small pitch £10 per hr or £30 for a 3 hr period (all costs inc VAT)
Medium pitch £15 per hour or £45 for a 3 hr period (all costs inc VAT)

(Proposed pricing structure was reached after comparison with other sports facilities in central London).

This charging structure would be the same as that as that set out in Option 3 above.

The Royal Parks recognises that some groups want to be able to turn up and play for free. Under this proposal, approximately 30 per cent of the site would be reserved as a free-to-play area, with no booking or charging, but would be maintained in the same way as the rest of the site. This would give people the option of paying a modest fee in the knowledge that their booking is secure, or using the space for free on a first come, first served basis. Those who want to play for free most of the time would also be able to pay to secure a space on particular occasions.

In this option as in the other options that include charging, the charge proposed for use of the Old Football Pitches is not designed to generate profits for The Royal Parks. Option 4 is designed to address the increasing popularity of this area and allow people who want to operate a sporting event to do so in an organised way.

The proposed charging system would allow the booking contractor to maintain a booking system but the area would still be subsidised by The Royal Parks, given the additional maintenance and reinstatement work that intensive use of the area requires.

Estimated annual cost to TRP	£	29,925
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Option 5 – Booking for the entire site and charging for only a proportion of the site

Under this option, section 1 would be bookable and chargeable, with section 2 bookable but free to play. The charging structure for section 1 would be the same as set out in option 4.

The Royal Parks foresees problems arising with such an arrangement. It is likely that bookings in the free area would fill up first. The opportunity to turn up and play for free on a first come, first served basis would no longer exist. In addition, there would be an administrative cost associated with maintaining the booking system, meaning that those who pay for a booking would be subsidising those who don't.

Estimated annual cost to TRP	£	35,125
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Option 6 – Charging for the entire site at peak times only.

Under this option the entire site would be available for booking, with charging applied only at peak times. Peak times would be defined as all day at weekends and after 5pm on weekdays and also all day throughout the school summer holidays, from mid July to the end of August. The charging structure during peak times would be the same as set out in option 4.

This option would help address the conflict and difficulties experienced at peak times but would allow for free use at less busy times. However, it may not sufficiently take into account those people who wish to use the site at peak times but whose preference is to use the site free of charge and with no booking system. It would mean that the site would not be supervised at off peak times.

Estimated Net cost to TRP	£	30,325
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(cost of supervision and booking is reduced by £10,000pa as off peak hours would require no staff supervision).