

APPENDIX 7

NOTE OF EVIDENCE GATHERING INTERVIEW HELD 5 DECEMBER 2002

Councillor Martin Repton, Council Cabinet Member for Leisure and Cultural Services introduced background information that had been submitted to the Commission on golf courses. He explained that the Council owned two courses, Sinfin and Allestree and considered that they provided excellent golf facilities and outdoor recreation for a wide range of people across the City. The facility was of great benefit to those who could not afford private fees, 60,000 rounds had been played on average in recent years.

Councillor Repton explained that if the golf courses were reverted to open space the income from the courses would be lost and there would be an increase in costs to the Council. If the land was converted to parkland, with bins, seats and paths to maintain there would be even greater costs to the authority. It was therefore noted that it was more expensive to remove the golf courses than it was to retain them.

Councillor R Skelton asked about the option to have a 25 year lease as a means to encourage additional investment into the courses. Geoff Hall, Assistant Director, Works and Engineering, explained that longer leases had been considered when the current contract was renewed in 2000. However, at that time it was decided to go for a five year contract rather than a ten year one as this would allow the Council to consider the option for longer leases when the contract came up for renewal.

In response to a question from Councillor Ahern, Geoff Hall explained that under the current contract, Commercial Services were responsible for the maintenance of courses. Cannons, the contractor, managed the courses and were responsible for taking fees and marketing etc. The courses were maintained according to a tight specification. A dedicated green keeper had been employed and a number of Commercial Services staff were permanently located at the golf courses. High levels of satisfaction had been recorded from players at both courses.

Councillor Brown considered that the Council could not compete with the best private courses. However, he was aware of many golfers who considered the courses to be as good as many private courses.

Councillor Ahern raised concerns about how the courses coped in wet conditions. Geoff Hall explained that a lot of money had been spent on drainage in the past two years and Councillor Brown said that it was possible to continue playing at Allestree and Sinfin when many private courses were closed because the ground was too wet.

The Commission was advised that whilst the Council could decide to invest more money in the facilities at the golf courses there were many other priorities in the parks service and the Council generally. Councillor Brown agreed that the facilities should not be upgraded if this would lead to increased fees.

Councillor Jackman asked if the Council sought external funding for the courses. She was advised that the Parks Department was about to appoint an external funding officer but it was not expected that any money would be sourced specifically for golf courses as it was considered that they were already provided to a high standard.

Marketing was the responsibility of the contractor Cannons. Councillor R Skelton asked if their marketing was adequate. Geoff Hall explained that it was in Cannons' interests to have an effective marketing plan and that they were required to submit an annual marketing plan to the Council. The Parks Department's Marketing Officer worked in partnership with Cannons to review the plan.

Councillor Brown said that he was keen to see an increase in schools and young people using the courses. Councillor Repton was also keen to engage young people in the sport. Geoff Hall explained that the Professional at Sinfin was giving courses to young people in the immediate local community.

At the suggestion of Councillor Brown, it was agreed by Councillor Repton, that when officers had their regular management meetings with Cannons, he should be invited.

The Commission considered five hypothetical options:

- Option 1 – retain the golf courses with incremental improvements
- Option 2 – retain the golf courses with major investment
- Option 3 – sell as going concerns
- Option 4 – close and convert to public open space
- Option 5 – close and sell.

When asked, Councillor Repton said that he would prefer the status quo, option one, but with extended community use and constant reviews to ensure that the courses provided value for money. Geoff Hall's opinion was also that option one was the preferred route as it would provide an opportunity to consider private investment when contracts came up for renewal.

Councillor Jackman advised the Commission that Sinfin Golf Course was 80 next year and suggested that this anniversary could be used to raise awareness of the course and its facilities. Councillor Repton agreed that this was a good idea.

The Commission thanked Councillor Repton and Geoff Hall for agreeing to answer questions as part of the scrutiny process.