

West Park, South Shields – Proposed BMX Pump Track – Open Space Assessment

The proposal involves repurposing the existing dilapidated and unused tennis courts within West Park S/S, to a purpose made BMX Pump Track.

Over the past few years, we have seen an increase in demand for biking provision, in particular BMX / mountain biking. This has started to cause issues with anti-social behaviour around the borough where unauthorised and improvised (often dangerous) tracks had been built by youths.

We have engaged with some of the unofficial representatives of these groups, alongside recognised cycle clubs in the area, to discuss what options there were to engage with these young riders and built a purpose-built facility for them in a safe environment. From these discussions, West Park S/S was identified as an appropriate location for the track.

Discussions were held at an early stage with the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) as part of their ongoing involvement in the South Tyneside Playing Pitch Strategy and country wide parks tennis proposals. As there are another 9no tennis courts adjacent to this area, which were in a useable condition, discussions included identifying the required improvements to those 9no courts which would allow the loss of the 4no courts for the BMX Pump Track, without being detrimental to the tennis provision in the park.

The Playing Pitch Strategy supported by the LTA, showed that the expected growth and expected participation number in the West Park catchment area would not be affected by the repurposing of the courts. With this being the case, it was agreed that South Tyneside Council would undertake the following works to the 9no courts before any planning application for the change of use was submitted.

- Resurfacing
- Remarking of courts
- New posts and nets
- New boundary fencing to the courts

The proposal will make use of a site that has had limited use due to its current dilapidated condition and repurpose for a sporting activity that has high demand in the area. The tennis courts have not been in use for several years, with the playing surface deteriorating to an extent that it is not suitable for tennis, resulting in it being used more as an unofficial dog walking area. It diversifies the sporting provisions of the park, allowing it to be used by a wider demographic of users. Current sporting provision within the park includes, outdoor bowls, tennis, outdoor gym and MUGA. Inclusion of a BMX pump track would be a welcome addition aimed at users not covered under the current provisions - the track also incorporates a beginner's area that can be used for toddlers using balance bikes or younger children learning to ride their bikes without stabilisers. The proposal would aid the provision offered by the park, that would include residents of all ages, young or old.

To summarise the above, it is my view, NPPF para.104 c) is satisfied, as the proposal provides an alternative sports and recreational provision, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current (informal) use and the former use as tennis courts.