

Options appraisal of the future management arrangements for Tilgate Park in Crawley

Draft Report

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July 2010



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Tilgate Park, Crawley

1. Background

1.1 The Parks Sector within local government

It is nearly ten years since the first Public Parks Assessment (2001) estimated that £1.3 billion in revenue expenditure has been lost to the nation's parks in the 20 years prior to its report and that around £100 million extra funding was needed in each of the subsequent five years to even begin to turn the situation around. Yet a decade later few, if any, Council's would argue that the lack of funding remains the single reason why parks and green spaces struggle to achieve and maintain high standards. With few exceptions, additional funding is needed for capital investment and renewal, improved maintenance, training and for raising the status of a career in parks and horticulture. Within the sector career prospects are poor and recruitment is a major issue, where low wages and a lack of a recognisable career progression are barriers to the attraction of high calibre staff. In 2003, 68% of parks staff were over 40 years old and 92% were over 30 years old.

Parks and green spaces were not, and are not, a statutory service and therefore slipped down the political agenda, losing out to formal recreation and leisure activities that generated revenue and statutory environmental services such as waste management and planning. Yet by contrast, the aspirations of the visitors to parks continue to rise and visitors no longer tolerate poorly maintained facilities and mediocre service in the way in which they once might have done, which is increasingly reflected in customer satisfaction surveys.

On a brighter note, however, a number of initiatives have been put in place by government to help enhance urban green space and these policies, together with significant investment from the national lottery, and in particular the Heritage Lottery Fund, have helped reverse the fortunes of many of the country's public parks. The number of Green Flag Awards is increasing and the National Audit Office recently noted a doubling of the local authority managers believing their parks and green spaces to be improving. However, local authorities still struggle to find the capital funding for improvements or the revenue funding to ensure that their restored parks are maintained to a good standard and do not decline again.

Like many other local authorities, that are now facing the most serious call for a national reduction in public spending, Crawley Borough Council is simply not going to be able to allocate this additional funding to Tilgate Park and to its other green spaces that is required to tackle this situation and addressing these issues through efficiency measures is therefore even more important than ever.

Since the late 1990's, few local authorities have properly market tested their grounds maintenance costs and service delivery is by and large achieved through either a combined service whereby client and contractor units separated through Compulsory Tendering have been reunited or through external contractors. In an increasing number of cases, however, local authorities are beginning to investigate the possibility of using a non profit distributing organisation (NPDO) or parks or leisure trust and undertaking options appraisals such as this one.

1.2 The current legislative background

In 1988 both grounds maintenance and the management of Sport and Leisure services were identified within the Local Government Act 1988 as prescribed services that must be subjected to Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT). As a consequence many local authorities have now externalised the management of their parks and leisure management functions, either through third party commercial operators or, more so in the case of Sport and Leisure Management, through specially formed leisure trusts.

Those who opted to seek a commercial partner through a tender process did so with pricing models that used either a flat Management Fee model or the more popular Deficit Guarantee linked to a Profit Share system, which encouraged contractors to act in a developmental and ultimately entrepreneurial fashion.

Contractors were required to provide estimates of their gross expenditure and gross income whereby the Council then paid the contractor the difference. The attraction to Local Authorities is that their contractor is liable if the actual deficit is greater than that estimated in their tender. Conversely if the actual deficit is less than estimated, either through reduced expenditure or an increase in income, then this "profit" is shared between the contractor and the Council at an agreed percentage split, normally 50% each.

For many this CCT motivated externalisation brought benefits both in significant cost savings and sometimes in improvements in service quality. In some cases, in-house organisations have been replaced by more efficient private sector suppliers and where contracts were won by DSO/DLOs they inevitably slimmed down, become more cost conscious and responsive, and improved productivity.

A unique benefit to the Parks sector was that the assets it managed were accurately quantified and, although some twenty years has passed since these measurement exercises took place, the data is largely still valid today.

1.3 CABE Space - Paying for Parks

Despite a significant growth in the public's interest in the quality of parks and green spaces, and their realisation of the effect that the lack of investment of the past twenty odd years has had on the nation's parks and green spaces, there remains a desperate shortage of funds within the sector. For this reason alone Local Authorities continue to consider alternative options for the management of their parks facilities, either service or site specific, in an effort to reduce budgets and drive up service standards to meet the public's rising expectations.

While the additional capital investment that has been possible through HLF's Parks for People initiative has helped a renaissance in our parks, CABE Space, the body charged by government to champion public open space, recognised that the challenge local authorities now face is to ensure the long-term security for funding these green spaces. In 2006 it therefore published 'Paying for Parks' which explores eight models for funding urban green space and - while not all the options are immediately transferable to the UK's traditional local authority framework - it does provide a useful reference guide and at least provokes a strategic rethink about how local authorities resource the maintenance of such valuable assets.

Of the eight models, which are summarised below, three are considered worthy of further investigation as possible options for the future management of Tilgate Park and these too are highlighted before critically appraised in full:

1. Traditional local authority funding	In England, parks and green spaces managed by local authorities are usually funded from the general revenue budgets, financed from local taxation and/or government transfers/grant.
2. Multi-agency public sector funding	In England, money is available from a range of government departments and agencies for projects that meet crossover targets, for instance targets for public health, young people, crime or sustainable development. Urban green spaces may receive money in this context.
3. Taxation initiatives	In many countries levies on property, or tax credits, can be ring-fenced to fund the management and provision of urban green space. However, English local authorities have limited freedom to impose additional local taxes.
4. Planning and development opportunities	Planning agreements can ensure funding for the provision and management of urban green space in and around new residential and commercial developments. Such funding can be used only for new development.
5. Bonds and commercial finance	In some countries, local businesses and residents can vote to allow the local authority to receive loan funding from bonds that can be repaid, including interest, over a period of up to 30 years, to fund urban green space. English local authorities are not currently permitted to issue voter-approved bonds.
6. Income-generating opportunities	Opportunities for generating revenue income, such as licensing and franchising, sponsorship, entry fees and fines, are ways in which funding from the private sector and users of urban green space can be sourced.
7. Endowments	Endowments, such as those historically accumulated by the Corporation of London, provide long-term funding for urban green spaces from the interest gained on investments. The Corporation manages around 4,000 hectares of green space in and around London using funding that comes primarily from historical property investments. New endowments will generally be beyond most organisations.
8. Voluntary and community sector involvement	Not-for-profit organisations and voluntary and community groups can contribute time and labour, raise funds and encourage community development and local ownership of urban green space.

2 Crawley's Parks Service

2.1 About Crawley

Crawley is a town and local government district with Borough status in West Sussex, It lies some 25 miles south of London, covers an area of 17sq. miles and had a population of 99,744 at the time of the 2001 Census.

In 1946 the New Towns Act saw Crawley designated as a New Town and a master plan was developed for the establishment of new residential, commercial, industrial and civic areas bringing rapid growth to both the size and population of the town in a few decades.

The town comprises 13 residential neighbourhoods based around the core of the old market town, and separated by main roads and railway lines. Further expansion is planned in the west and northwest of the town, in co-operation with Horsham District Council. Economically, the town has developed into the main centre of industry and employment between London and the south coast of England and its large industrial area supports many industries and services that are directly connected with Gatwick airport.

As a consequence of the Development Corporation's original layout of the New Town, each of Crawley's thirteen neighbourhoods has its own self-contained recreational areas, and there are other larger parks throughout the town, including the Memorial Gardens, on the eastern side of Queen's Square, Goffs Park in Southgate which covers 50 acres and the largest of them all at Tilgate Park.

2.2 Tilgate Park and Nature Centre

Tilgate Park and Nature Centre is a large Country park set between the busy M23 motorway and dense residential open space and adjacent to the Tilgate Forest golf course. Since the 1960s when Crawley Borough Council took on ownership of the park, it has developed into a multi-faceted leisure venue of both local and regional significance. It is by far Crawley's most visited park and one of the most popular in the South East region. As a flagship for the town, it has an estimated visitor throughput of 500,000 per annum; comprising an almost even spread of residents and non-residents of the Borough.

Extending over 80 hectares, the area offers lakes, lawns, ornamental gardens, woods; children's play area; a walled garden (with café); craft units, nature centre with rare and endangered species plus domestic animals and birds; GreenZone and the Discovery Room education centre with lectures on wildlife and conservation. The park has been awarded and retained Green Flag status since 2003.

The park is also home to the Gatwick Greenspace Partnership and seven small business ventures within the craft units. St Catherine's Hospice has a shop adjacent to the walled garden café and to the north west of the park are the Tilgate recreation huts, which are leased to leisure related clubs and societies.

The park is open 7 days a week and offers free admission, with a £3 car parking charge per visit operable in the main car park; although the fisherman's car park is free. The Nature Centre also offers free admission, although it operates a voluntary contribution scheme via donation boxes which generates around £30,000 annually.

2.3 Current Management Arrangements

Crawley Borough Council directly manages all of its Green Spaces and therefore employees a large Parks Service within the Community Services directorate. Appendices 2 and 3 show both the present structure and the managerial arrangements specific to Tilgate Park. This chart has been assembled to show only those members of the service with a significant interest in Tilgate Park and no doubt there are other officers within the overall Parks Service that from time to time have occasional involvement in the Park.

Direct line management of the team comes from the Head of Amenities with the strategic direction for the park coming from the Parks Manager with guidance from the new management plan. It is estimated that around 20% of this officer's time can be apportioned to Tilgate Park.

An Assistant Parks Manager guides the operational and development work while a six person Nature Centre team, managed by a dedicated centre manager, look over all aspects of the centre. This team comprises a livestock manager, an education assistant, a team of 2.5 Full Time Equivalents (F.T.Es.) and a trainee.

The horticultural and arboricultural demands of the park are met by a 3.5 F.T.E dedicated park based operation team, under the control of a grounds maintenance manager.

Comments

- This is obviously an exceptionally complex and well led parks service which in addition to the busy job of simply managing the park seems constantly engaged in countless new initiatives that exceed the remit of most other public open spaces.
- There is an obvious close working relationship between the 'park' team and the nature centre staff and a level of commitment rarely found these days, which is best demonstrated by the fact that certain staff members undertake voluntary unpaid work at critical times of the year.
- All staff seem to be very customer focused as a result of the Council's training programmes.
- Although the size of the overall team has reduced over time there appears to be adequate staffing levels for a park of this size.
- The service maintains Charter Mark (now replaced by Customer Service Excellence).

2.4 Tilgate Park's Budgets

There are three separate cost centres that together provide for the management of the Park and these are:-

B4540 - Tilgate Park

B4541 - Recreational Huts

B4542 - Nature Centre and Walled Garden

Viewed as a combined cost centre the 2009/10 approved gives total expenditure of 891,760, income of 471,160 and net cost of running the park of £420,600.

	B4540	B4541	B4542	OVERALL
Expenditure				
Employees	180,670	0	140,860	321,530
Premises	71,800	32,290	27,050	131,140
Transport	370	0	380	750
Supplies and Services	21,140	1,590	61,710	84,440
Third Party Payments	17,120		4,290	21,410
Support Services	24,370	20,100	21,010	65,480
Internal Recharges	132,610	10,000	100,000	242,610
Capital charges	21,800	0	2,600	24,400
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	469,880	63,980	357,900	891,760
Income				
Costs recovered	1,500	0	0	1,500
Sale of Livestock	0	0	3,550	3,550
Car park charges	137,060	0	0	137,060
Fees	0	0	1,590	1,590
Rents	169,950	74,310	11,030	255,290
Donations	0	0	38,460	38,460
Concessionaire licences	7,160	0	0	7,160
Income internal recharge	0	0	26,550	26,550
TOTAL INCOME	315,670	74,310	81,180	471,160
Net Expenditure	154,210	(10,330)	276,720	420,600

2.5 A review of the Service provided

2.5.1 Observations on the efficiency and quality of the present service

Observations, made after a site visit and an interview with key staff from the Park and through a desk assessment of a suite of documents supplied by the Council (Green Flag assessment reports, the latest management plan and recent customer feedback reports) is that the park is well managed in terms of its on-going horticultural maintenance and that the current and development of a new management plan are ably catering for its future development.

There is clearly terrific dedication to the Park by the key staff members and it is probably fair to say that without this dedication Tilgate Park would not be what it is today.

An initial concern though, is that more could be done to manage the park as a local leisure resource. From a quick analysis of the Council's 'Viewpoint' card feedback scheme there is evidence that, while the park is extremely highly valued among respondents for its accessibility and beauty, there was criticism about the cleanliness of the café, dirty café benches and toilets and some erratic closing times that conflicted with the signage.

This has exposed an issue that now faces the managers of many such facilities across the country in so far as their customer's aspirations as to their expectations and the quality of service they should expect at such facilities are rising as the experiences they enjoy at more commercially minded leisure outlets shape their views of the service levels that should be the norm. In the private sector higher levels of investment are often possible to address these matters but the overlying problem for local authority leisure providers, and particularly Parks departments who have traditionally been the poor relations in terms of investment, is that customers have now set their own benchmark for the quality of service they expect whether they are in the Costa coffee outlet in the High Street or while enjoying a Sunday afternoon with the family in a beautiful country park. Parks are after all "leisure centres without roofs" and must be treated as such in terms of management and commitment to funding and investment.

In summary, although the horticultural matters are obviously well managed and in very good shape - a statement borne out through its status as a Green Flag park and through the comments of the judging panels - an increased focus on the leisure management aspects of the park may bring further improvements and no doubt a reduction of overall cost.

As an example it appears the idea to develop the sand school (pony exercise area) as a crazy golf facility was being driven reactively as the staff described a process whereby they were waiting for a proposal to be submitted by a local entrepreneur that was known to them. A more proactive approach would surely be to develop this through a competitive tendering process among leisure golf providers which would both speed up the delivery of the project and in all likelihood increase the anticipated revenue that will be realised. The same seemed true of the Go Ape proposal to bring a facility to the wooded area immediately to the east of the park. The present closure of the Inn in the Park is also a major problem although it is now understood that an agreement has been reached with Mountain View to take the lease of the Bluebird pub site.

2.5.2 Site Inspections

An inspection of the park in February 2010 has shown that the superb historical landscaping; the tree and shrub collections, the lake and modern additions like the play area and walled garden are all being well maintained by an energetic and committed workforce. Maintenance standards are high and there is clear evidence of the implementation of the management plan throughout all areas of the park. Due to the time of year it was not possible to make any meaningful assessment of the quality of the formal high impact horticultural areas, although there appeared to be preparatory work in progress, particularly in the walled garden area.

While the park was not busy during the visit, there was no evidence of litter, vandalism and there was evidence of on going maintenance activity all around the park.

The Council's overarching Green Spaces Strategy has identified Tilgate Park as being of strategic importance as a regional centre of excellence in delivering nature conservation, access to the countryside and through raising awareness of the importance of the environment.

The key staff members clearly understand this and are very aware of the often conflicting issues of managing a country park where environmental and conservation

issues often come into conflict with the demands of such a high throughput of visitors,

The Park has held a Green Flag award since 2005 and feedback from recent judging events has endorsed these views.

2.5.3 Observations on the Budget

While it is possible to produce cost comparisons across formal parks using data recorded through bench marking studies for items such as sports pitches, flower and shrub beds, fine turf etc., achieving a meaningful assessment of the value of countryside sites is more difficult as expenditure determined largely by labour rates for the region, the number and types of facilities available, the number of visitors, the level of vandalism, the quantity of any formal bedding areas, the volume of fine turf and of many other labour intensive features and factors, all of which can vary wildly from region to region.

So while a calculation of an average expenditure per hectare is not possible, the current budget framework was examined with the view of identifying any potentially anomalous areas or indications of potential efficiency gains:-

Staffing – At 36% of total expenditure this is in line with other services and when viewed in the context of the staffing structure seems wholly appropriate to management of a park of this complexity and size.

Internal recharge - At 27% the ratio between internal recharges and total expenditure seems high.

Supplies and Services – At less than £7,000 for Park materials and provisions and around £2,000 for the Nature Centre, the allocation for parks materials seems very low.

Income: with income from casual parking at £137,000 this would indicate approximately 53,000 vehicles annually use the main car park, with visitor number estimated at 500,000.

Donations at the Nature Centre total £38,500 (2009/10) but with visitors estimated at 300,000 this equates to a donation of 13p per visitor. No doubt introducing an entrance charge has been considered in the past but it is obvious that to do so would significantly reduce the net cost of providing Tilgate Park.

3. Alternative Management Models

Tilgate Park is currently managed using the traditional local authority funding model with directly employed staff spread across three cost centres – the Park, the Nature Centre and café and the letting of a suite of Recreational Huts.

Using the models discussed above the options available can therefore be summarised as:-

- Continue managing the park directly but consider internal restructurings and franchising arrangements
- Introduce management by a private sector contractor sought through a market testing process.
- Transfer the park to an existing trust.
- Establish an entirely new local trust or Parks specific trust.

For similar reasons to those facing Crawley these options are being considered within a growing number of authorities and the driving forces behind this trend may be summarised as follows:-

- **Financial** - the most often cited advantage of externalisation is the relief from National Non Domestic Rates (NNDR) under certain structures, such as a Trust, whether directly operated or via an alternative contractor arrangement. However, other benefits arise from the freedom to raise capital financing outside traditional local government rules and the reduction in overall central support costs, although these will have to be met by the Council elsewhere.
- **Market Forces** – In part due to the work and campaigns of CABI Space, Parks Management is now recognised more clearly as a valuable part on an authority's leisure function that can play its part in contributing to an authority's overall community, health and crime reduction strategies. A typical service will now manage events, outdoor sports, engage in community development work, support 'Friends of' groups, consult the public, deliver marketing and promotion, as well as the routine tasks of within the grounds maintenance operations.
- **Management Capacity** – The realisation that high calibre Parks Managers need far more than a good grounding in amenity horticulture to be successful, often results in a skills shortage within the authority.

3.1 Traditional local authority funding

3.1.1 Direct provision

Like the majority of other Councils Crawley Borough Council manages its parks and urban green spaces from its annual revenue budgets with support for major repairs and improvements through direct capital approvals or Section 106 monies. A weakness of this is that Parks departments must then compete for the retention of annual funding levels alongside other services, from a general revenue budget financed by local taxation and/or central government. The distribution of the budget is therefore decided by politicians elected to the council.

In the context of the increasing financial pressures that most local authorities face, some authorities have introduced management initiatives to ensure greater transparency of green space finance and improve budgetary decision-making. These initiatives include life-cycle costing and internal competition schemes.

3.1.2 Commercial Management Contractors

Through CCT, many authorities transferred the maintenance of their Parks to private sector companies such as Brophy, Glendale, Continental Landscapes and many others. Initially these contracts were entirely maintenance focused and structured to be supervised by an in-house 'client' team within the local authority. The contracted services were limited to the various maintenance operations while the 'client' undertook care of other service aspects such as the events programme, countryside sites, future developments through S106 and user consultations and promotions. The limitations of this approach were quickly identified and led quickly to a number of authorities re-structuring contracts so that all aspects of a parks management function were transferred to their appointed contractor through a shift to 'output' based specifications. The companies operating within this market also recognised

this shift and expectation and adapted to suit. Modern contracts are therefore often bid for in partnership with other firms as services require.

Strengths

- local and national taxation provides a relatively stable source of funding on an annual basis
- strategic thinking can enable pooling of resources between and within local authority departments, neighbouring local authorities and the voluntary and community sectors

Weaknesses

- annual funding arrangements can result in financial uncertainty and an inability to think long term
- ring-fencing funding specifically for urban green space is unusual due to its non-statutory status, and has often been cut when savings have to be made
- commercial contracts may lose the conservation and environmental aspects of country park management while it would be difficult to build a specification covering all aspects of the Nature area, leading to a risk that service levels may reduce

3.2 Third party voluntary and community sector involvement – Leisure Trusts

Within the wider sphere of leisure services many leisure trusts have now been set up that have taken over sports, museums, libraries and other leisure facilities. They are independent of the local council and are run by a board of trustees.

There is currently no legal definition of a Leisure Trust; it is simply an umbrella term, covering various model structures. There are now over 120 leisure trusts and social enterprises operating in the UK, ranging from small trusts representing single leisure centres or parks to larger organisations managing more than 65 sites. Together they have a combined annual turnover in excess of £625 million, have more than 210 million customers each year and employ over 26,000 full time employees. Collectively they operate more than 920 individual locations.

While prevalent in the fields of sports and leisure the incidence of trusts in the Parks Sector is still rare, although a growing number of local authorities are investigating this option while there exist a number of examples where the management of a specific park has transferred to a charitable trust,. Examples of these are included below as they may prove a valuable guide to what is possible in regard to Tilgate Park.

So while still not common across the UK, the not-for-profit sector can be involved in the management role of parks either through joint responsibility with local authorities; or through having sole responsibility.

The following table provides an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of this funding method.

There is the option of the in-house service evolving into a Trust. This is unlikely to be attractive as a standalone option as the risk would need to be underwritten by the Council, unless the Trust could find a partner to provide the financial backing

required. The costs and timescales of establishing an in house Trust are shown in Appendix 4 below.

Strengths

- The not-for-profit organisation can focus on raising additional monies and tap additional sources of income.
- The charitable status of not-for-profit organisations can bring tax-relief benefits and make savings in areas such as business rates and VAT and so is particularly important in this regard
- Voluntary organisations can contribute time and labour.
- Partnerships between local authorities and the community and voluntary sector can access lottery and regeneration funds
- Partnership agreements can ring-fence funding for green spaces and prevent finance from being diverted by the local authority
- The not-for-profit sector organisation has greater flexibility with regard to debt than public organisations, and often has a strong entrepreneurial culture to access funding from a variety of sources such as other business opportunities and commercial finance
- Trusts can encourage all interested residents and stakeholders to become members or trustees
- Trusts can focus on green spaces and so would not face the competitive pressures inherent within local authorities.

Weaknesses

- Fundraising and donor programmes are more suitable for specific capital projects as they can be directly linked to new development initiatives. Funding for green space maintenance may therefore be limited
- The democratic accountabilities of not-for-profit organisations are not always clear
- The level of financial return for gift aid programmes and private sponsorship will be low in areas that are more deprived or where demand is low
- not all private business organisations pursue corporate social responsibility objectives
- Additional funding sourced by a non-profit organisation can lead to pressure on local authority parks teams to cut their green space budgets by an equivalent amount. However, this can work both ways: if additional funding is match-funded by the local authority, this can act as a deterrent to reducing the local authority's budget as the leverage doubles the loss.

A review of existing Trusts that manage Parks is detailed in **Appendix 5** below

4. Evaluation Model – Tilgate Park

4.1 The Appraisal Brief

The brief, established with Crawley Borough Council, required an appraisal of each of the three management options to be undertaken with consideration given to the following:-

- a. Cost of future operation /Investment required (Capital and Revenue)
- b. Current Service levels and quality standards
- c. Staffing
- d. Opportunities and control
- e. Central and Support Services
- f. Legal/Procurement issues
- g. Market testing and benchmarking

The following tables discuss the advantages and disadvantages of three options as follows and ultimately summarises the issues using a quantitative evaluation model, whereby scores ranging from 1 -5 were awarded for each option to the 7 criteria listed above.

4.2 The Future Management Options

1. Continue with an “In House” provision as at present.
2. Undertake a ‘traditional’ market test to source commercial partner producing tender documentation as appropriate.
3. Establish a new Trust / NPDO with or without Charitable Status (with no market test).

4.2.1 The Cost of future operation /Investment required (Revenue and Capital)

Option 1 - In House Option

Advantages

The management team at Tilgate are engaged in other elements of the overall parks service which allows their overheads to be spread more widely under this present arrangement.

Recent capital developments at Tilgate Park have largely come through Section 106 funding and there may be some funding opportunities beyond the current agreed allocations.

There is an economy of scale in the management and operation of green space across the borough.

There are currently high standards of horticulture which would be at risk of decline if the service was contracted out. The recent SIMALTO budget prioritisation survey and residents survey (2009) demonstrate the importance that residents attach to the maintenance and management of green spaces across the borough.

Disadvantages

The management of parks is not a statutory service and often loses out to formal recreation and leisure activities that generate revenue.

There remains a possibility of higher costs through the direct employment of staff under NJC terms and conditions.

Option 2 – Out-Source/Contracting Out

Advantages

It may be easier for an external contractor to make capital investment for any new machinery/technologies required.

In theory, lower overall rates and overall contract costs could be anticipated due to the economies of scale / lower overheads etc. and it may be easier to demonstrate VFM as subject to open competitive tendering process.

Management of a contract will require a fixed budget, so will therefore offer some protection from any drive for efficiency savings within the Council.

Disadvantages

Alternatively, as there is no high cost GM items and this is a service that is not traditionally tendered, costs may come in a long way above the existing budget which would result in these increased costs being unavailable which would drive a reduction in the present maintenance standards.

Option 3 – Establish a Tilgate Park Trust

Advantages

Income would be guaranteed beyond the life of the present section 106 resources, assuming that an appropriate charging scheme is introduced to the park and nature centre as discussed above.

A trust would have the ability to attract additional funding via its charitable status.

It may be possible to redistribute any surplus council funds to elevate standards of the Council's other urban green space areas.

Disadvantages

Trusts can sometimes have difficulty in leveraging external capital, as they do not have substantial assets, although the Council could negotiate capital improvements to the park buildings as part of the service agreement.

While a Trust would have the scope to engage in entrepreneurial activity to boost income, it would always be dependant on the local authority to deliver its 'grant' at previous levels while the Nature Centre remains free and a deficit remains.

We do not anticipate any saving through VAT/tax/NNDR to be significant.

4.2.2 Current Service levels and quality standards

Option 1 - In House Option

For obvious reasons an in-house option ensures greater control, flexibility and responsiveness. It is also more offers greater flexibility to incorporate unforeseen

variations to the service specification which can also help to limit any unanticipated extra costs.

The present arrangement has a long track record of delivering a high quality flagship public leisure service.

Option 2 – Out-Source/Contracting Out

Unless the contract specification was sufficiently tight and monitored there is a risk of service standards slipping. There is little, if any, examples of private sector Grounds maintenance organisations being involved in the management of Country Parks and particularly Nature Centres.

Option 3 – Establish a Tilgate Park Trust

As community engagement is such a strong focus within ‘Vision for Crawley’ a trust could develop into an important community stakeholder, enabling the delivery of best value services focused towards the needs of local people.

A Trust may have the ability to deliver enhanced quality of maintenance of the Park through the freedom it would enjoy over traditional local authority employment terms.

4.2.3 Staffing

Option 1 - In House Option

An in-house service can ensure the availability of staff resources in emergency situations, while the high degree of loyalty among the staff supports the service as they are known to often work additional volunteer hours for the overall benefit of the Park. This is particularly important when dealing with emergency tree work issues.

As stated earlier, the high quality service delivered at Tilgate Park by staff is an integral part of green spaces management across the town. The staff work across the whole service, which could be detrimentally affected if Tilgate was operated in isolation.

Option 2 – Out-Source/Contracting Out

Potentially less well trained, fewer specialists, and less motivated staff might be employed.

Although protected under TUPE transfer, the commitment shown by the present management team may diminish if transferred to a new employer with a different organisational culture.

Option 3 – Establish a Tilgate Park Trust

The skills and capacity of the people running Tilgate Park, both at a management and an operational level, have made a clear impact on the quality and the sustainability of the park and care must be taken to ensure a new organisation is properly resourced in terms of the impact it would have on existing staff resources.

At present there is a high level of integration between staff employed at the Park and those responsible for the service elsewhere, particularly within the senior management structure. A new parks trust would need to retain some of this integration with the provision of the Council’s other urban green space areas.

4.2.4 Opportunities and control

Option 1 - In House Option

A directly provided service by the present team avoids the need for the Council to employ a monitoring resource to ensure quality and performance is at the required level.

Option 2 – Out-Source/Contracting Out

There would be a likelihood of the Council losing control, influence, responsiveness and flexibility compared with the present In-house model.

This risks an adversarial relationship focussed on costs not on quality of service.

An In-house monitoring resource would need to be established to ensure quality and performance is maintained at the required level.

Option 3 – Establish a Tilgate Park Trust

Advantages

As with Option 2 there would similarly be a likelihood of the Council losing some control, influence, responsiveness and flexibility compared with the present In-house provision and monitoring against the adopted management plan would become a prerequisite.

Similarly, the ability of the Council and residents to influence Park priorities may be reduced and standards would need to be monitored and enforced to ensure that Parks Trust delivered the required outcomes.

There exists a perceived current good practice of such 'Public/Private' Sector approaches by Central Government.

Disadvantages

Dual standards of ground care may emerge between the Tilgate Park and other existing sites.

While Tilgate Park may flourish under such an arrangement, other green spaces in the urban neighbourhood that require increased investment and improvement will remain with the Council that will have limited resources to effect any necessary improvements.

4.2.5 Central and support services

Option 1 - In House Option

Costs would remain constant.

Operating an in house service requires the Council to maintain a depot facility. The Tilgate Park depot is used by other elements of the GM service so it would need to retain this, even if Options 2 or 3 were pursued.

Similarly, the Council would continue to bear all the risks re: equipment, staffing inc sickness cover, insurance and health and safety issues / all ownership / leasing of the equipment etc.

Option 2 – Out-Source/Contracting Out

If a transfer of responsibility to a contractor took place there would be a reduction in the requirement of central services which would either result in higher costs for the remaining services or the need to reduce the staffing levels.

Costs or time would accrue to the Council for the running of a tendering process, while a monitoring system, with staffing implications, would need to be established.

Option 3 – Establish a Tilgate Park Trust

No costs or time will accrue to the Council for running a tendering process if management was externalised through the establishment of a trust. However, the costs of setting up a Trust are high and will take up to 18 months to establish. In addition the set up costs may negate any future savings in years 1-4.

4.2.6 Legal / Procurement issues

Option 1 - In House Option

There would be no change to the existing arrangements.

Option 2 – Out-Source/Contracting Out

Staff would preserve their terms and conditions and transfer to a new provider through the present TUPE Regulations

There would be an overall transfer of risk, including public liability, to a successful contractor.

Option 3 – Establish a Tilgate Park Trust

All risks including public liability will transfer to the new Trust.

There would be a need to consider how the Board of Trustees would be accountable to the residents it serves.

4.2.7 Market testing and benchmarking

Option 1 - In House Option

The present arrangements have clearly delivered a first class service for many years. There is scope to increase income through agreements with a range of leisure providers which include the Go-Ape proposals, increased water based activities, a decision to implement a charging scheme to the Nature Centre, the crazy golf ideas and the reopening of the Bluebird P.H.

Option 2 – Out-Source/Contracting Out

Tendering the management of a Country Park is unlikely to result in any significant savings as the work of the Rangers does not include high cost elements of grounds maintenance such as fine turf and other high labour intensive tasks such as bedding and sports, where savings are often made through tendering.

It would be difficult to accurately capture all the elements of managing the Nature Centre within a traditional output based specification.

Option 3 – Establish a Tilgate Park Trust

It is unlikely that the management of Tilgate Park could be transferred to one of the existing leisure trusts as these tend to focus on leisure services and not green spaces. However, a dedicated trust could be established and there are many examples of such earlier in this report.

5. Evaluation Summary and Conclusion

Tilgate Park is clearly a unique facility which provides residents and visitors with an experience that goes way beyond the remit of a traditional local authority managed public open space. The current management team is clearly very customer focused, staffing levels look adequate, yet the net cost of the park demonstrates extremely good value for local tax payers. There is an obvious close link with the Nature centre; the standards of horticulture are high and the recent availability of Section 106 funds has allowed some significant capital improvements to ensure the facilities such as play areas are as up-to-date as possible. The present, and soon to be adopted revised management plan, is comprehensive and well developed and the standard of maintenance and management it has provided has ensured the Park has been maintained to Green Flag standard since 2005.

Management direction is guided by a series of long standing and well development strategic documentation from 'Vision for Crawley', the Council's Green Space Strategy and the Park's management plan and this strategic approach is essential to underpin funding and management structures, whatever the future.

Despite all of this though, it does appear that certain aspects of the management planning are somewhat reactive and this is discussed in more detail in Section 2.5.1. Income from the Nature Centre is considered high (£30,000 p.a. approx) and while this level of voluntary contributions demonstrates high support from visitors, it is a low figure when one considered the number of annual visits.

There is no doubt that non statutory local Authority services will soon be facing some of the fiercest calls for cost reduction in the coming years, and we therefore recommend that the Council reviews its charging policy and introduces some form of admission charge, perhaps through a 'Friends of the Nature Centre' scheme.

Across the country customer's aspirations as to their expectations and the quality of service they should expect places such as Tilgate Park are rising as the experiences they enjoy at more commercially minded leisure outlets shape their views of the service levels that should be the norm. The Council must address the issue of the dissatisfaction that arose through its Viewpoint research with the cleanliness of the café, dirty café benches and toilets and some erratic closing times that conflicted with the signage.

6 Quantitative Evaluation Model

With reference again to the brief, we have employed a quantitative evaluation model whereby each of the seven criteria has been awarded a score ranging from 1-5 across the three future management options.

The results of the exercise and the weighting applied to each criterion are shown in Appendix 1 and show the in-house and the possible establishment of a specific trust achieving similar scores. On balance, the preferred option is to continue to operate

the service in house, however it is also recommended to develop a new commercially focussed management plan for the overall Park.

We do not, therefore, believe it would be appropriate to consider traditional market testing as a future option, mainly due to the fact that we doubt that any significant savings will accrue. We also feel it would be difficult to accurately record in a specification the full range of countryside management and animal husbandry activities in which the two sets of staff engage.

We do, however, believe it may be advantageous to form a Tilgate Park Trust at some time in the future, although we are of the opinion that this should not be considered before the fundamental decisions on the management ethos, which are discussed throughout this report, are resolved.

Set out below are therefore, a series of actions that we recommend are addressed before any move away from the present In-House operation is considered.

7. Recommended actions

Set out below is a summary of the key issues facing Tilgate Park and a series of recommended actions:-

- The strategic direction for the management of the park is strong. Crawley Borough Council has developed a robust Green Space Strategy and will shortly adopt an updated management plan for the Park.
- We believe that a new commercially focussed management plan for the Park should be produced for a 3 year period, with clear financial targets. This should be based upon reducing the current subsidy by £50k each year for the 3 year period. Depending upon the success of this approach, the Council may wish to consider the establishment of a Trust at the end of this period.
- We believe the Council should review its decision not to charge for admission to the Nature Centre and rely only on voluntary contributions. While there is obvious appreciation and support for the Nature Centre from visitors, the level of income these contributions make is small when compared with the high level of visitors.
- We believe significant additional income could be generated from an access scheme that charges a flat charge for casual visitors yet rewards local visitors through an annual membership scheme.

Benefits of annual membership could include:-

- Free entry all year (family members)
- A Discount in the café and shop
- Early notice of the Park's annual events programme
- Invitations to special events in Tilgate park
- Discounts to major events in Tilgate park
- A quarterly monthly mailing of an e-newsletter

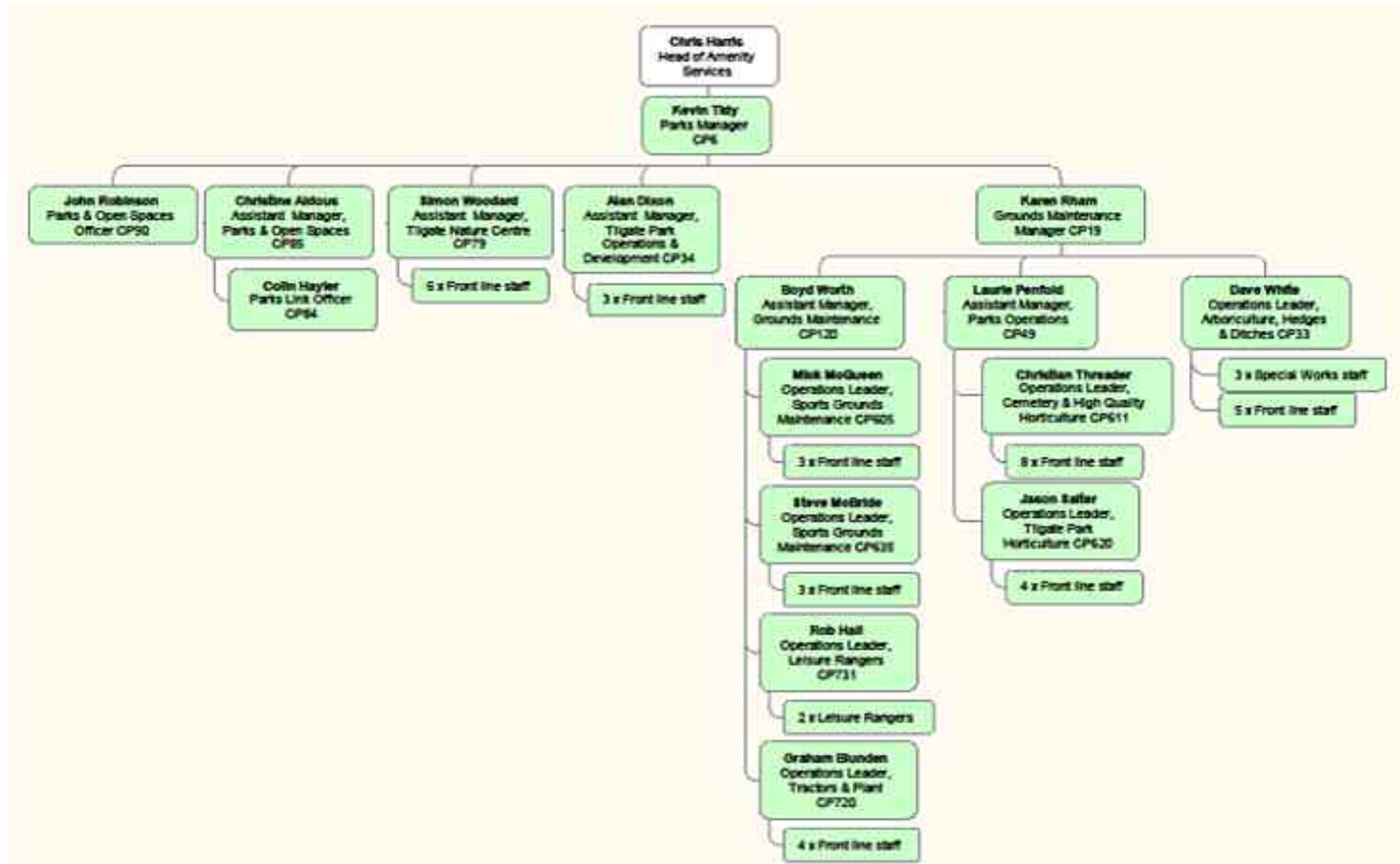
If it is assumed that of the 0.5 million annual park visitors, 0.3m visit the nature centre at least 5 times a year, then such a scheme could generate £300,000 if it achieved a 50% take up at an annual fee of £20 and all being families. With the remaining visitors being casual visitors at a charge of £4/£2 this would bring the operating cost of the park into surplus. Obviously various similar scenarios could be explored to determine a preferred charging policy.

- However, these projections are only indicative at this stage. Related charging needs further investigation. This will need to be addressed in the new 3 year management plan. Although there are clear commercial opportunities, a balance needs to be found between the need to drive down the current subsidy and the current ethos of providing affordable and accessible green spaces to the local community.
- A more proactive approach to future development initiatives should be adopted, as at present it appears new attractions are dealt with in a reactive fashion. We believe the management plan should include these and set achievable timescales for their implementation and likely revenue contribution.
- Tilgate Park is certainly large enough, and possesses enough diversity across the leisure attractions it provides to warrant independent management, with separation from Crawley's other green spaces.
- If not already done so, park management must review the operation of the café to explore the cleanliness issues, the dirty café benches and toilets and the erratic closing times that conflicted with the signage, all of which arose through the Viewpoint research programme.
- Further franchising opportunities should be explored, which include:
 - Establishing a dedicated gift shop
 - Riding lessons in the stables area
 - Adopting a city farm approach and increasing the educational programme
 - Develop an improved and varied catering offer
 - Assessing the opportunities for golf and other outdoor activities i.e. Go Ape
 - Water based activities
 - Other formal and informal indoor and outdoor recreational activities (subject to invitation to tender).

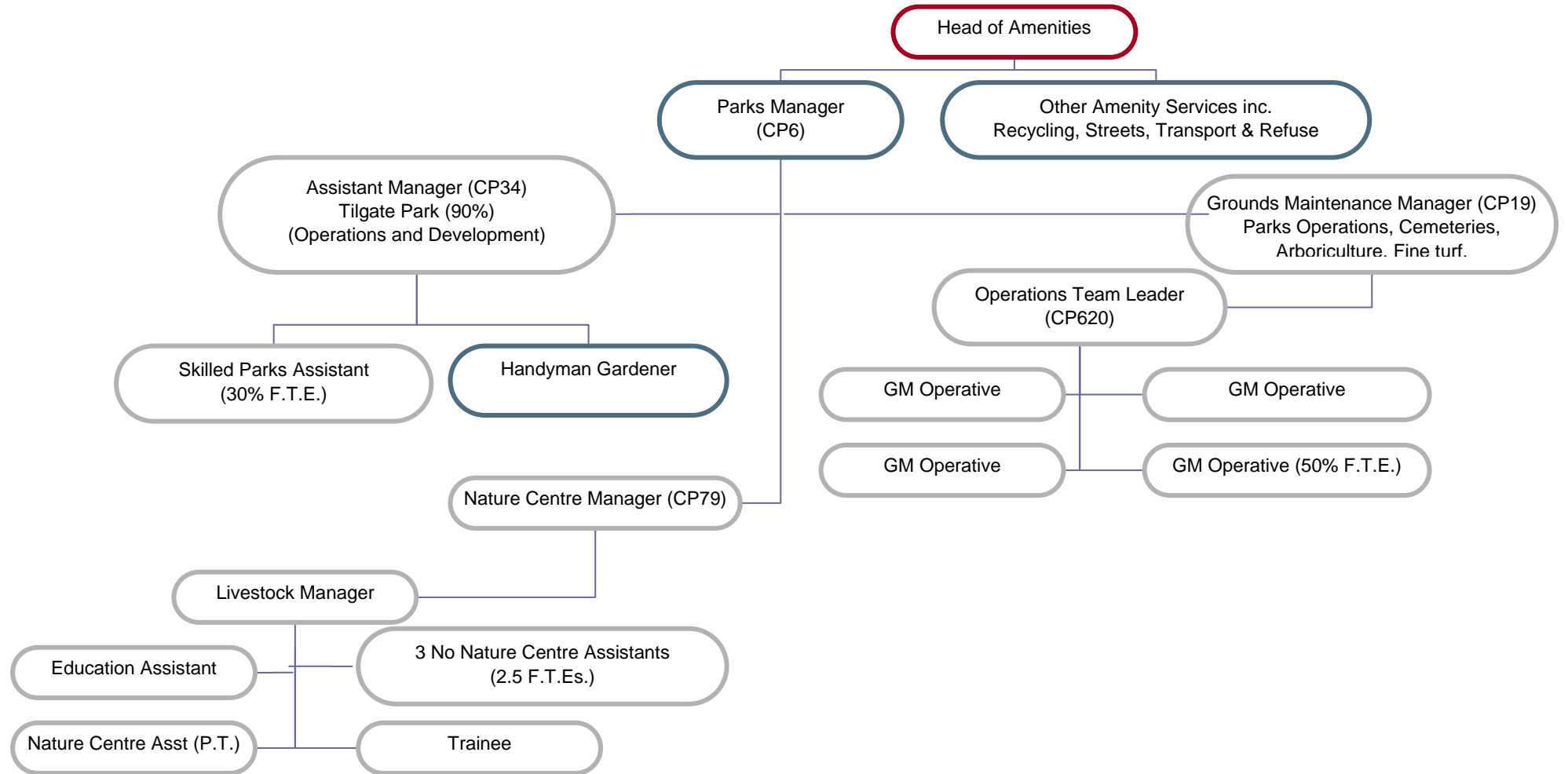
Appendix 1 – Quantitative Evaluation scores

	Criteria	Key Area	Importance to Council / Members	Overall Weighting	Actual Scores out of 5			Weighted Scores		
					In House	Contracting out	Leisure Trust	In House	Contracting out	Leisure Trust
1	Investment Required	Can Capital Investment be delivered into the Services? Condition Survey Maintenance, Building Improvement Investment. Costs of Investment	Medium - It is known that certain facilities will need capital to be spent to ensure they continue to meet customer expectations	15.00%	2	3	3	6.0%	9.0%	9.0%
2	Revenue	Improved Revenue position, Increase in participation and income; NNDR savings, VAT benefits, Is revenue certainty provided for the Council?	High - Council wishes to have affordable and known revenue position	22.50%	4	2	3	18.0%	9.0%	13.5%
3	Current service levels and quality standards	How well will the services be delivered? Able to benchmark? Customer / client feedback, Day to day health and safety and maintenance issues, Marketing / Branding	High - facilities have an excellent reputation within the locality and industry, the Council wishes to maintain this	22.50%	4	3	4	18.0%	13.5%	18.0%
4	Staffing	Are there any Economies of Scale? Staffing terms and conditions protected, Opportunities for staff development?	Medium - Staff benefits and opportunities must also be balanced with a sustainable economic position	15.00%	4	2	3	12.0%	6.0%	9.0%
5	Opportunities and control	How easily will the Council be able to influence the Service Delivery and the budgets of the Services?	Medium - Council wishes to input into the strategic direction and change as per change in policies, however it is not important to be involved in day to day delivery	15.00%	4	2	3	12.0%	6.0%	9.0%
6	Central and support services	Are current client costs reduced? Are there any other potential savings in other areas of Council costs (recharges)?	Low - Council wishes to have affordable and known revenue position	5.00%	2	4	3	2.0%	4.0%	3.0%
7	Legal / Procurement issues	Any particular legal issues with each option? Obliging the Council to spend monies / capital; Governance, Any additional risks?	Low - the Council wishes to minimise further risk	5.00%	4	3	3	4.0%	3.0%	3.0%
8	Market testing and benchmarking	Are there potential partners in the market place for the management options be discussed?	Medium - Council wishes to know that there are suitable partners in the market	15.00%	5	3	4	15.0%	9.0%	12.0%
				100.00%	29	22	26	87%	60%	77%

Appendix 2 – Parks and Countryside Services Interim Structure (April 2010)



Appendix 3 – Tilgate Park – Staffing Structure (April 2010)



Appendix 4 - Establishment of a Tilgate Park Trust

While not an immediate recommendation, if at a future time it is agreed that a Trust might be a suitable future management vehicle, then the following issues will need to be addressed to fully appraise the benefits having particular regard to the impact on customers.

Particular issues to address are as follows:

- a) To determine the most appropriate trust structure for Tilgate Park so as to be consistent with maximising/balancing subsidy reduction, investment potential, good governance practice, ongoing council influence and entrepreneurial freedom and the continued delivery of services that meet Crawley's overarching Green Space Strategy.
- b) To quantify the subsidy reduction that could be achieved through transfer to trust management, through an assessment of income should the changes above be introduced.
- c) To identify the HR issues that would need to be addressed in moving to trust status (with an emphasis on protecting the interests of the existing workforce).
- d) To identify any property issues that would need to be addressed in moving to trust status and the present position regarding the Bluebird P.H.
- e) To identify the potential impact of transfer to trust status on the provision of support services across the Council.
- f) To undertake a detailed assessment of the risks involved in moving to trust management for the council, the service, customers and the community.
- g) To identify and research further examples given of trusts elsewhere.
- h) To produce a draft implementation plan with projected timescales that could be activated if a decision to move to trust status is taken.

Costs would be met either through the generation of funds through the management of assets or through a direct grant from the local authority is below break even.

Key Tasks

Trustee Recruitment

- Advice on NPDO options
- Advice on board composition
- Advice on local authority involvement
- Advice on trustee recruitment campaign
- Drafting advert/trustee recruitment pack
- Involvement in open evening for trustees
- Involvement in short listing of trustees

- Involvement in interviews for trustees
- Briefing for trustees
- Establishment of regular trustee meetings
- Ongoing advice to trustees throughout the process

Establishment of NPDO

- Finalisation of governing documents
- Incorporation of the new NPDO
- Application to the Charity Commission for charity registration (can take up to three months but savings can be achieved in the meantime)

Service Transfer

- Advice on securing VAT/tax/NNDR savings
- Advice on key issues relating to the service transfer
- Advice on assets to be transferred and the terms of such transfer
- Advice on the key legal and practical issues of the asset transfer including advice on staff, equipment, contracts and other aspects
- Specific advice on pension arrangements
- Advice on staff consultation
- Preparation of the suite of project documentation
- Negotiation and finalisation of the suite of project documentation
- Approval by all parties to the project documentation
- Development of the business plan/grant application for the NPDO
- Approval of the business plan/grant application
- Obtaining any third party consents e.g. County Council's consent
- Effecting the service transfer
- Realisation of VAT/tax/NNDR savings

Timeline

Approximately nine to twelve months:

- Up to approximately three months to recruit a shadow board

- Up to approximately three months for shadow board to familiarise itself with the project (concurrent with development of project and documents)
- Between three and six months to negotiate the suite of project documentation and effect the service transfer (concurrent with recruitment/familiarisation process)

Indicative Costs

Costs associated with a project of this nature principally relate to external legal and financial advice.

A summary of these costs is set out below:

- Legal: including trustee recruitment, board induction, establishment of NEWCO and preparation of the full suite of project documents between £70k - £85k (depending on the number of locations and properties involved).
- Financial: including development of business plan and business set up between £60k - £70k

Appendix 5 - A review of existing leisure trusts that manage Parks

For the purposes of this option appraisal, enquiries were made of five leisure trusts identified by (the Sports and Recreation Trust Association) SPORTA as being involved in some aspect of managing parks. These were Mytime Active, Fusion Lifestyle, South Lanarkshire Leisure, Milton Keynes Parks Trust and the Wigan Leisure & Culture Trust. Fusion, Mytime Active and South Lanarkshire Leisure are focused only on indoor leisure provision and only manage parks because of the leisure activities within them, although wider aspects of parks management is something they would like to explore for the future.

The Milton Keynes Parks Trust and the Wigan Leisure & Culture Trust do, however, provide a holistic management service and details of these are given below.

Milton Keynes – The Parks Trust

The Milton Keynes Parks Trust is an independent charity that cares for many of Milton Keynes' parks and green spaces - up to 4,500 acres of river valleys, woodlands, lakesides, parks and landscaped areas alongside the main roads

The Trust was established in 1992 and through a 999 lease manages all the strategic open space in Milton Keynes. At its inception it was endowed with a commercial property portfolio and other assets by the Milton Keynes Development Corporation, that were calculated to be of sufficient value to generate the income required to maintain the open space. As a consequence of this the Trust is not funded through either Council tax or business rates.

The Trust has three different types of land under its control:

- parkland, floodplain, ancient woodland, scheduled monuments
- transport corridors/parkways
- income-earning assets

The Trust is free to trade these assets as it thinks fit, providing of course, it complies with all relevant legislation. Of particular note here is Section 36 of the Charities Act which requires charities to obtain professional (RICS) advice on any property transaction and not to dispose of any property at less than market value.

It is governed by a Board of up to 20 Trustees appointed by relevant organisations, including local parish councils. The Board an executive team which currently numbers 21 full time equivalents, led by a Chief Executive.

The structure of the staff team, which has been deliberately kept small has evolved and now comprises four sections:

Community – liaison with the community, organising events and activities to 'animate' the parks, management of recreation and leisure uses including licences, environmental education and volunteer management.

Operations – the physical management of the green estate; inspections and safety checks of the parks, play areas and equipment and facilities; dealing with adverse possession.

Communications – promoting and positioning the parks and the Trust; dealing with adverse publicity.

Finance and admin – day to day management of finances, administration, preparation of annual accounts and management accounts; liaison with the Trust's commercial property managers.

In addition the Trust employs numerous professional advisors. The commercial property is managed by a firm of chartered surveyors who report directly to the Chief Executive. The Trust does not employ its own direct labour force and uses a range of around 50 independent contractors with contracts usually let for a 3 year period and usually include an option for a further three years.

In 2005 costs of around £3.2m were met by income of £3.3m.

The Wigan Leisure & Culture Trust

The Wigan Leisure & Culture Trust was formed in 2003 as a charitable organisation to work on behalf of Wigan Council to manage and support the Leisure and Cultural facilities, initiatives and events for 300,000 plus residents across the Wigan Borough.

The Trust provides a wide range of recreational, sporting and cultural facilities. It is responsible for 500 hectares of recreational green space (including formal parks, countryside sites and playing fields), two public golf courses, play areas, seven leisure centres (including five pools), sixteen libraries, the Turnpike art gallery, public halls and Wigan's tourist information centre. Additionally, the trust manages a crematorium and nine cemeteries across the borough.

The Trust is sustained by a combination of external funding and income generation, including an annual grant from Wigan Council. The Trust is a registered charity and a social enterprise, which means that any surplus income generated must be invested in improving facilities and services for the people of the Borough.

A trading arm exists for services that are deemed not to be charitable and Grounds Maintenance is included among these which also include the catering services at the Haigh and at the leisure venues. Each of these services comes under the banner of Wigan Leisure & Culture Enterprises.

A Board of Trustees has the legal responsibility for ensuring that the Trust is managed appropriately.

Other management and funding models

The following recreational sites, arranged by organisational type, were also examined in order to establish benchmarks for comparisons with the way Tilgate Park is administered and managed. These are thumbnail sketches of parks with similar characteristics and uses to Tilgate Park.

Local authority models

Mile End Park, London Borough of Tower Hamlets

Mile End Park is administered through the Mile End Park Partnership Board. The Board receives an annual sum from the council equal to what was being spent before the park's development (£250k). The development of the park involved putting a bridge over a main road to link two green spaces, and building shops and restaurants on the street beneath the bridge. These commercial properties were owned by the Park Partnership, as shells with planning permission, and the annual rents (c £300k-£400k) are ring-fenced for running the park. A franchised go-cart track raises another c £50k in rent and profit-share. Negotiations are underway to provide a solar canopy over the track to allow wet weather use and to power the track, further increasing profits. There are also hire charges for an Arts Pavilion and Concert Pavilion which bring in around £15k/year. The annual income for running the park is estimated at around £700k and there are proposals to increase that to a target of £850k.

Lydiard Country Park, Swindon Borough Council

Lydiard Park is a grade II registered historic park containing a grade I listed mansion, housing a museum, a grade I listed church, a conference centre and a selection of garden features including a lake, ornamental dam, ha-ha, walled garden and mature parkland. Designated a country park in the 1970s, Lydiard contains a car-park, visitor centre and café, playground and sports pitches. In common with other public parks, Lydiard Park had experienced severe and increasing decline to its parkland infrastructure.

In order to reverse this trend, the council produced, with consultants, an ambitious restoration plan for the park and has been awarded a grant by HLF of 75% of a £5 million scheme. As part of this process the council has increased its commitment to the park's management and changed its approach. Revenue resources will increase from £100,000 to £350,000 per annum and park maintenance will become mostly in-house, apart from grass-cutting and other routine tasks. The park will retain two full-time rangers but will have, in addition, a property manager for house and park (£35k), admin support (£25k), one head gardener and two under gardeners (£45k) and an education outreach officer (£25k). These will work in a team with the museum staff; curator, front of house staff and an education and marketing officer. The Lydiard Park budget for the whole site will be ring-fenced and the team will be encouraged to raise additional revenue from events and paid facilities.

The thinking behind this approach is to achieve a form of traditional estate management in which staff have clearly defined roles and responsibilities and in which success results in further improvements to the park and to their jobs.

Ashton Court and Blaise Castle Estate, Bristol

These are two extensive public parks which were former country estates, laid out on historic parkland around grand houses. Both sites are on the English Heritage *Register*. After long periods of decline, Bristol City Council started to focus on its historic parks in the 1990s, culminating in successful bids to HLF for major grants for restoration projects. The process of restoring the parks prompted the council to review grounds maintenance regimes, with the result that a different, experimental, approach is being trialled at Ashton Court. Utilising the greater leeway in

procurement allowed by Best Value, the council was persuaded by officers to remove Ashton Court from the service contract process in favour of an in-house team.

The estate now employs a team leader and three gardeners, alongside two rangers, all under the management of the Estate Manager. This move saved £90k/year, which is ring-fenced by a dedicated estate cost-centre for buying equipment. The quality of maintenance is reported as having 'gone right up' as a result of staff engagement with a single site and the use of new equipment. Ashton Court also has a dedicated business unit which increases the annual net budget of £342k to an actual spend of over £400k.

Blaise Castle Estate, on the other hand, continues under a grounds maintenance contract with an annual budget of around £200k, which includes the costs of a new Estate Manager, one dedicated gardener (contractor) and two rangers. The council's park manager is aware that the park is 'not sufficiently resourced' and is being kept under review pending the success of the Ashton Court experiment.

Mount Edgcumbe Country Park, Plymouth

Mt Edgcumbe is a grade 1 registered public park laid out on a formerly private historic estate. The park is underfunded yet takes pride in the park being open for free to all visitors (with the exception of the House for which there is an entry fee). The historic park is managed by amenity gardeners working to council time sheets; it has franchised out the catering and retail for the site and it costs the two councils who own it c £850,000 per annum (2000 figures).

Endowed sites

Cuerden Valley Park Trust

Cuerden Valley Park, between Chorley and Preston, Lancashire, is an extensive public park comprising the former grounds of a mansion, now in the separate ownership of Sue Ryder Homes. The park was removed from the English Heritage *Register* a few years ago because of the intrusion of newly constructed motorways. The park was transferred to Cuerden Valley Park Trust (CVPT) in 1992 by the Commission for New Towns and the Lancashire Wildlife Trust was awarded the contract to manage the park at that time. CVPT was given an endowment of £1 million in 1992, to manage the park in perpetuity for the benefit of local people. The original sum was enhanced by various compensation payments from statutory providers and through investments, and now stands at about £1.6 million.

In recent years the fortunes of CVPT have declined as a result of lower investment returns, changes in VAT and the fall in incomes from agricultural tenancies. As a result of the need to make savings and balance the books, the management agreement with the Wildlife Trust was terminated this year which will mean a much lower level of maintenance in the park.

Stoke Poges Memorial Gardens, South Buckinghamshire

Stoke Poges Memorial Gardens is an extensive public garden featuring a collection of linked and very elaborate formal and informal gardens laid out in the 1920s on former Repton designed parkland of Stoke House. The Gardens were managed by the Mobbs Memorial Trust until they were passed to the ownership and care of South

Bucks District Council, with an endowment to provide maintenance funding. There is also income from the lease and sale of memorial gardens. The gardens have recently been restored in a £1 million project, funded at 50% by HLF. Although detailed figures are not available, the erosion of the investment returns from the endowment caused a gradual reduction in numbers of maintenance staff from eighteen to eighteen to just five. The HLF grant was needed in part to address the backlog of maintenance accumulated over this period, but was also the opportunity to lever the employment of a new Head Gardener by the council.

Park specific Trusts and Charities

Nene Park, Peterborough

Nene Park, near Peterborough has long been recognised as one of the top Country Parks in the UK. The park was conceived as part of the town's 1968 expansion masterplan and in the late 1980's managed switched from the Development Corporation to a newly formed Nene Park Trust. The park combines a balance of commercial attractions and informal and formal recreational pursuits appropriate to the quiet enjoyment of the countryside, in addition to farmed land and nature areas. The main attraction, Ferry Meadows, runs for six miles along the River Nene, and is just over three miles from Peterborough.

Nene Park Trust is a company, limited by guarantee, and a registered charity. It is financially independent, and does not receive funding from local or central government or any other public body. An endowment of properties provides sufficient income to cover running costs, along with that generated by the park's tenancies and operations. Hence it covers running costs and long term maintenance requirements without turning to the local authorities.

Tatton Park, Cheshire

Tatton Park is an extensive historic park similar in character and size to Tilgate Park, on the southern edge of Greater Manchester and serving a predominantly urban population. It is run jointly by Cheshire County Council and the National Trust. The park costs the Trust c £2.5 million a year to run of which Cheshire CC give £480k. The Trust has to raise an annual sum of c £1.8 million via events (including the Flower Show), charging for entry to parts of the site and hosting functions. In addition Cheshire CC administers about £400k directly, which is spent on maintenance in liaison with the Trust. Charges are levied for entry to various high horticulture parts of the garden (including the walled garden, recently restored with a major grant from HLF); the mansion (£3.00); the farm and the Old Hall. There is also a park entry fee for cars of £3.90 with free access for cyclists and pedestrians.

Trebah Garden Trust and Hestercombe Gardens Trust

These two dedicated garden trusts, in Cornwall and Somerset respectively, both run registered gardens as visitor attractions. Both are wholly dependent on visitor entry fees, membership subscriptions and the sale of goods and tickets to events. For both sites the break-even number of paying visitors is around 65,000, including the money visitors spend in the cafés and shops as well as the entry price. Both sites currently

comfortably exceed the break-even figures allowing investment to be made in the gardens and in additional staff, and providing partnership funding to match with HLF grants which both sites have received.

Both trusts are registered charities, administered by voluntary trustees with paid staff and with income generated through parallel, wholly owned, trading companies.

The Lost Gardens of Heligan

This most inspiring and pioneering garden projects started life as a mad and whimsical idea, before taking its place in the imagination of the nation and becoming the most visited garden in Britain. Consequently it had no organisational model in its early years, being developed initially by a band of volunteers. Grant support from the Countryside Commission and the Rural Development Commission helped Heligan become established as a tourist venue, and ultimately as a successful private company, attracting some 350,000 paying visitors a year. As its profile grew, Heligan has set up an educational charity, the vehicle for exploring the traditional management, and good husbandry, of the wider estate. Appropriate organisational mechanisms were put in place as Heligan grew.