

“Come on” all tennis players in Epsom and Ewell

1 July 2026



A borough scheme charging residents to play tennis on council courts has taken in almost double its budgeted income in its second full year, the Environment Committee – Tuesday 30th June – heard, as members confirmed that free morning tennis sessions will return across the borough’s courts this summer.

The Pay-to-Play Tennis Scheme was introduced in 2024 using a grant-funded electronic gate system from the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA), the sport’s national governing body, paired with an online booking platform called Clubspark. Under the scheme, households can buy an annual membership for £40 (£20 for low-income households) covering up to five people for unlimited play, or book a court on an ad-hoc basis for £6 an hour — prices fixed at their original, introductory level through to 2026/27.

The numbers

Interim Assistant Head of Service Samantha Whitehead told the committee the scheme’s growth had exceeded expectations. Household memberships rose from 268 in 2024/25 to 316 in 2025/26, while ad-hoc bookings climbed from 1,404 to 1,868 over the same period. Net income of £31,634.62 comfortably beat a budget of £17,500. “I don’t think any of us at the outset thought it would bring back the returns that it has in a relatively short period,” she said, adding that renovation works funded through the scheme’s income at Court Recreation Ground, Alexandra Park and Auriol Park courts had already paid off: “My team report that since the recent renovations at [Auriol] Park this weekend was the most amount of bookings they’ve ever seen on the courts.”

The scheme was not without unbudgeted costs, however — £21,140.11 was spent on repainting and line-marking at Court Recreation Ground and Alexandra Park, requiring a drawdown of £7,984.46 from the council’s Repairs and Renewals Reserve, which now stands at £8,426.54.

Free summer tennis returns

Free, bookable morning tennis sessions were run for the first time during the 2025 school summer holidays and proved highly popular, generating 566 bookings across the borough’s five sites: 203 at Alexandra Park, 164 at Court Recreation Ground, 88 at Poole Road, 75 at Auriol Park and 36 at Gibraltar Recreation Ground. Officers recommended repeating the offer, running free sessions up to noon each day from 22 July to 31 August 2026.

Before debating the substance of the report, the committee formally amended the recommendation, at Cllr **Liz Frost**’s (RA Woodcote and Langley) proposal, to make clear the free sessions apply to “all EEBC owned and managed” tennis courts in the borough — a clarification agreed with one abstention.

Cllr **Steve McCormick** (Conservative Woodcote and Langley) asked whether residents needed to register with the Clubspark booking system to access the free sessions. Ms Whitehead confirmed they did: “They do have to register with the LTA Clubspark system, which means that they could be exposed to marketing in the future if we chose to do that, but in return they get free use of the tennis courts.” Cllr Frost noted a further benefit of requiring bookings even for free sessions — it stops courts being monopolised by a single group all day, since “now people have the confidence that... they booked play, so they can go and play.”

A push to extend the hours — defeated

Cllr McCormick, noting this would be the borough’s “last summer” before local government reorganisation replaces it with a new unitary authority, argued the free window should be extended well beyond midday. “It’s incredibly popular... why not extend it?” he asked, proposing the sessions run until 2pm instead of noon, covering the same 22 July to 31 August period. “It’s only an extra couple of hours per day across that very short time frame,” he said.

Ms Whitehead’s reservation was that extending free access too far could crowd out members who had already paid for the privilege of unlimited play: “My only reservation would be for those that have paid for a membership, if they couldn’t... get access to the facilities having paid, that would be my only caveat.” Cllr Frost confirmed the committee had considered making sessions free all day the previous year, but had held back for the same reason, adding that the scheme had run smoothly in practice: officers “didn’t receive any complaints from members” unable to book a paid slot, nor “any complaints that people couldn’t play who wanted to play.” Officers were unable to confirm on the night whether last year’s free sessions were regularly fully booked, or how much the current proposal — or Cllr McCormick’s extended version — would actually cost the committee’s budget, saying the figures would need to be worked out and circulated after the meeting.

Cllr McCormick’s amendment to extend the sessions to 2pm was put to a vote and defeated, with three councillors opposed. The committee then voted, unanimously, to note the progress of the Pay to Play Tennis Scheme and to approve free morning tennis sessions on all EEBC-owned and managed courts from 22 July to 31 August 2026, in line with last year’s arrangements.

Also noted: bids for court upgrades

The report also noted that two separate Neighbourhood CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) bids — submitted by Cllrs **Alex Coley** (Independent Ruxley) and **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village) for the regeneration of the tennis and basketball courts at Poole Road and Gibraltar Recreation Grounds — have been approved by the council’s CIL Panel and now go forward to the Strategy and Resources Committee for final sign-off. If successful, both sites would also gain pickleball facilities, a fast-growing paddle sport the report describes as offering “inclusive opportunities for participation across a wide range of ages and abilities.”

Sam Jones - Reporter



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