

Council Course Closure Shambles

Newsletter May 2021



The Conservative led Derby City Council is disposing of an asset worth millions of pounds without any public scrutiny over the decision to do so.

We have helped them discover a Picasso and without valuing it, Derby City Council have left it out in the rain to die!

This asset is owned by the people of Derby, not the politicians or council officers. We have a right to be involved in decisions affecting its future. The council have taken the decision to close it as a default position resulting from their incompetent process to find a private operator.

All opposition parties have committed to reviewing the decision to close the course should they come to power either directly or through coalition

It is not too late to Save Allestree Golf Course – please use your vote on May 6th

Through our [e-petition](#) we are contacting all 26,400+ respondents via the Change.org platform and supporters through our social media channels/website with an update on the current status of our campaign in advance of the upcoming elections.

There are parties that have made proposals to operate the course fully in line with the requirements of the original process, yet DCC have rejected them.

We know of a fully compliant and capable bidding group ready to take over running of the golf course immediately. The course would be operated as a Community Interest Project, to benefit Derby City residents. We fear the process of placing the golf course out to tender for private operation has been designed to fail, allowing the course closure to be instigated within 6 weeks from the announcement.

We have identified a catalogue of issues, some of which are detailed below for your information. The links are to referenced documentation on our website www.saveallestreegolfcourse.co.uk

Failure to run a fair bidding process. DCC have budgeted £32,000 p.a. ad infinitum to maintain the abandoned course, yet the bidders were expected to bid to run the course at no cost to DCC

Two bidders met all criteria set by Derby City Council but were rejected. A request under the Environmental Information Act ([EIR 15053](#)) has revealed that one bidder did not specify a figure for a subsidy, therefore they should have been awarded the contract. We are also aware the other bidder that met all requirements did not require an ongoing subsidy. They were given no opportunity to discuss their bid with DCC after it was rejected.

Inconsistencies in the 2021/22 Council Tax Budget. Claims of a £69,000 subsidy saving p.a. through closure of the course in the recently set Council Tax budget (which led to a 5% increase across the city) are simply not true due to the £32,000 p.a. required to maintain the abandoned course. Savings of £37,000 could potentially be claimed, however it is difficult to rely on any data provided by Derby City Council. A failure in their computer system to track the number of rounds played means the figures quoted are based on guesses.

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No collective Council Cabinet decision to ratify closure of the course following the Expressions of Interest process. Cabinet delegated authority for the entire process to the Strategic Director of Corporate Resources and the Strategic Director of Communities and Place in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Governance and Licensing and the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Culture & Tourism.

Several inputs in [2019 report to Council Cabinet](#) leading to the decision to close the course are flawed. Assessment of rounds required to make the course profitable was provided by a party with vested commercial interest in closing Allestree golf course. Comparison of local golf course provision is unsound. The [e-petition](#) with 26,400+ signatures was rejected as having insufficient Derby City resident signatures, yet DCC used courses outside of the Derby City catchment area to justify the closure. Only two of the ten 18 hole courses referenced for comparison are in Derby City catchment area and one of those is private. DCC compared Allestree at £15 per round to private courses charging upward of £80 per round. Losses quoted to justify the decision to close were as a direct result of poor management and lack of investment over many years by DCC.

Figures declared in [2019 report to Council Cabinet](#) and the [Expressions of Interest](#) document were estimated. The figures for the number of rounds in 17/18 & 18/19 were estimated (as confirmed by DCC in [FOI 13739](#)) due to lost data through changeover of the green fee management system. These numbers were presented as actuals to bidders on which they made their proposal, thereby compromising the whole process.

The advertising of the Hall sale and operation of the golf course did not focus upon the golfing industry. Neither process referenced to the history of the course, which has considerable commercial value. The golf course operation advertisement was hidden in a little-known leisure opportunities ezine ([see here](#)) requiring active knowledge to access. Only four organisations bid to operate the course, two of which we know to be local individuals with no interest or ability to operate a golf course. The Hall was advertised through a single estate agent with the reference “*Option available to operate adjoining Golf Course*” ([see here](#)).

Once our group highlighted the incompetent marketing of this valuable asset; **TWO** very credible organisations came forward advising they would have been prepared to bid for the Hall and Course combined had they known both were available. These organisations may still be interested, should the Hall & Course package be put back on the market

Flawed DCC golfing pricing structures. In 2018 every leisure activity other than golf at Allestree was subject to a 5% price increase.

[The DCC Leisure & Culture Pricing Schedule Proposals 2018/19](#) states “*Green fees at Allestree Park have been reviewed and revised to reflect the offer and to be in line with other municipal courses in the region*”

This is clearly not true as golf pricing was dropped by half (detailed in the [DCC Leisure Pricing 2018/19](#)) which unsurprisingly led to 2018/19 losses referenced in the [DCC Expression of Interest \(EOI\) document](#).

The pricing documents are not properly linked in the DCC web system and are therefore very difficult for the general public to find. It is not clear if this was a mistake or a deliberate act to obfuscate the information. Openness and Transparency are important in a democratic society.

Failures to obtain best value consideration of a DCC asset that is being destroyed. Statutory duty could have been breached. It has been suggested by DCC that as the course is not being sold, a valuation is not required. Best consideration should have been sought for the Hall sale process, which surely should have included a professional valuation of the Hall with the attached golf course. This has not been undertaken.

The editor of Golf Course Architecture, an architect and renowned historian described Allestree Park Golf Course as “priceless” in terms of its relevance to golfing history. Most courses designed by Harry S Colt that in private hands have been altered through time, the majority of holes at Allestree are as per their original design

We consider that a decision to destroy this golf course is a disposal of an asset and therefore a duty exists to understand the value of the asset. Also, there must be due process to follow to dispose of a sporting facility. This decision has been taken at one Council Cabinet meeting in 2019 without a full review of the implications by Cabinet. For instance, what process would DCC follow to turn the football pitches on The Racecourse over to public parkland?

FOR THE AVOIDANCE OF DOUBT, WE ARE NOT SEEKING TO STOP THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE HALL.

We simply want to secure the golf course for future generations. **Is the deal to sell Allestree Hall still active and when are the funds to complete going to be paid?** We have identified several issues with the planning permission process and submissions that give serious cause for concern as to their validity.

The Hall sale results in destruction of facilities required to operate the golf course. Pro shop, machinery & materials storage and irrigation system are all being sacrificed for the sake of the Hall sale. DCC have made no attempt to support the relocation of these facilities, financially or otherwise through outline planning permissions, placing all responsibility on the bidders. DCC estimated the costs of relocating these facilities at £1m to £1.5m, how can bidders be expected to make this level of capital investment for a 5-Year lease?

The [Equality Impact Assessment](#) is wholly inadequate. The assessment was only published on the DCC website last week and is with issues. It does not consider the impact on protected groups resulting from closure of the course. The mitigations state that these protected groups can move into a different form of exercise, for most of these people golf is their only form of exercise. None of the mitigations have been actioned. Reopening the course would result in significant positive impacts on these groups who have been cast aside by a poorly run council process. As 80% of the assessments identify negative impacts on the relevant protected groups, how can the closure be justified?

The detailed outcome of the Public Consultation has not been made published. DCC have refused to provide the report, despite a specific request from a constituent to do so. We have located a summary of the findings in the [Equality Impact Assessment](#). 805 people responded to the consultation, 75% of which believed that it was important to the local area that Allestree continued to have a golf course. DCC have simply not tried hard enough to ensure the will of the majority of residents has been met.

DCC information being improperly disclosed to outside groups leading to midnight Facebook posts by Friends of Allestree Park that are exact replicas of later DCC press releases placed into the public domain through the DCC media channel.