



## Members Meeting - Temporary Padel Installation Q&A

**Date Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> March 2024**

*The meeting commenced at 7:00pm.*

**Chair:** Kate Martin (Hallamshire Board)

**Board Directors present:** Neil Widdowson, Bruce Bentley, Jenny Bentley, Richard Kay, Susi Clarke and Sarah Chatterjee.

Tom Murton (Hallamshire Manager) was also present.

**Notes:** Kathryn Atkin

### **Background and purpose of the meeting:**

All members were invited to the meeting to be advised by the Hallamshire Board of the latest position re: Padel and for members to ask questions/ seek clarifications on the temporary installation of padel facilities at the Club, on outdoor tennis court 2.

The Board agreed on a temporary installation to enable members to test out and determine whether or not to pursue a permanent installation, at a location to be determined.

It was reported that the Board had been considering Padel for approximately two years and that a working group had visited other facilities and met with the LTA and other parties to consider how, if at all to introduce the sport to the Hallamshire.

Having raised the notion of Padel with members at the November 2023 AGM, the Board had continued its explorations and was advised that temporary planning permission would be required from Sheffield City Council for the uncovered padel court. This planning permission was recently approved.

Members have continued to receive updates from the Board by email (25<sup>th</sup> January 2024, 6<sup>th</sup> March 2024).

There is currently no fixed start date for this permission, the working group has considered court utilisation data, to identify which courts are the least used, and when – the least used external tennis court which would be suitable for a temporary Padel installation, is court 2.

The Chair opened up the meeting for Questions.

**Question from a Member:** Has a decision been made about when the trial takes place and can it be after the S&D Finals (after June/July).

**Response from the Board:** No, that will depend on the data – currently, occupancy data indicates that an outdoor tennis court (2) is least used during the period August to January, which would be after the S&D Finals

**Question from a Member:** A question on the practicalities of booking (if an outdoor court is £20 per court). If the weather is unfit, can a refund be issued?

**Response from the Board:** For the duration of the temporary trial, the Hallamshire's current general refund policy will operate (i.e. if a cancellation is made within 24 hours of the booked court time, then no refund is due unless there are extreme weather conditions/ the court is unplayable). This is the same policy applied by, for example, Harrogate. It was confirmed that the Padel court is astroturf.

**Question from a Member:** Has Pickleball been considered as an alternative to Padel?

**Response from the Board:** The Board is also exploring whether or not Pickleball could be introduced at the Hallamshire, mindful of any additional pressure on tennis courts (whilst Pickleball can be played on either tennis or squash courts, the rules for official play do not apply on a squash court).

**Question from a Member:** If the temporary Padel trial goes ahead, when will this be?

**Response from the Board:** As already explained, no decision has yet been made. The Board is considering occupancy data and other factors in order to identify the best time to undertake a 6 month trial. Currently, the data is showing that an outdoor tennis court (court 2) is utilised at its lowest levels between From August /September onwards.

**Question/Response from a Member:** If Court 2 was cleaned and there was dry weather, that court would be used more often/ would be better utilised.

**Response from the Board:** This is a design flaw of acrylic courts – water build up is a safety issue. When the weather permits/ is predicted to be clear, Club maintenance staff do go over the court to ensure that it is clean, clear and safe to use.

**Question from a Member:** When do maintenance staff do this – I/we have never seen them?

**Response from the Board:** Cleaning/ Clearing by maintenance staff takes place early mornings at around 7am, if/when weather is forecast to be good enough for outdoor play to take place on the acrylic courts.

**Question from a Member:** The need for a trial of Padel is redundant, as it is clear that Padel will be popular. Has a detailed feasibility study been carried out to look into the financial viability and logistics of installing padel and if so, what has been done?

**Response from the Board:** The purpose of a temporary installation is to test not only the popularity of the sport but also to determine whether it fits with the Club's ethos, whether it is financially viable and whether it can work alongside tennis. Squash and racketball. Getting to this stage (trailing) is the first challenge in response to members queries and questions at the November AGM. Work on feasibility, costs, locations and other logistics will take place and any decision to take Padel forward beyond a trial will be determined by the members on an evidence-based approach through an AGM or EGM.

**Question from a Member:** Do the members want Padel in the first place?

**Response from the Board:** That is why a temporary trial is taking place – to enable members to try out the sport and see for themselves whether or not they want it to be a permanent sport at the Hallamshire.

**Question from a Member:** What are the options for Padel?

**Response from the Board:** The Board has been looking into whether or not to consider Padel/ install Padel, for many months. Various potential locations and setups have been considered and are still being considered – this will form part of the feasibility study. Options currently include:

- Trialling of a temporary Padel court and it not being a success – no place at the Club. Do not proceed with permanent proposals.
- Trialling of a temporary Padel court and it being a moderate success – look to installing Padel on a permanent basis if feasibility study determines it is viable, fits Club ethos, fundable etc, but location needs to be identified.
- Trialling of a temporary Padel court and it is a success, members like it, potential location identified dependent on fundability: for example, either court 2 and/or court 8?

In addition, consideration also of whether to have covered or uncovered padel would also impact on location and affordability. For the purposes of the trial, the temporary Padel court is uncovered.

**Question from a Member:** Members are advised that the Club needs to get in a good place, so surely the issue is whether we should invest in Padel and if not Padel, then what are the alternatives?

**Response from the Board:** The Board monitors expenditure and is looking at ways to reduce costs not in a penny pinching way but in order to be a sustainable and a good Club on an ongoing basis, that members are proud to be a part of. Whilst the Club has to review pricing to keep up with the cost of living/ inflation and other factors, simply increasing costs for members does not address long term sustainability. Increasing prices this year might temporarily solve an issue but could also lose some members which ultimately hits the bottom line next year and so on.

**Question from a Member:** Discussions seem to be revolving around the Club being in 'financial turmoil' Why, if there is cash in the bank, the Club is making a profit and has one of the wealthiest memberships in the city?

**Response from the Board:** Whilst the Club does hold some reserves, this is a condition of

ongoing loans and also any potential future loans. Also, the Club is still paying back the Covid Bounce Back Loan and capital loan from previous Club investment, it cannot simply dip into savings.

**Question from a Member:** So, Padel is being pushed as a solution to longer term viability?

**Response from the Board:** No, Padel is being proposed as a temporary 6 month trial, explored as an optional additional sport/ offer for the Club. If the membership determines that Padel has a permanent place at the Hallamshire, it will be as a result of a membership vote. For the duration of the trial, the booking fee will generate some income which will be offset somewhat by the cost of temporary court/ installation.

**Question from a Member:** It will be great to have the opportunity to try out Padel, so why not just go ahead and try it?

**Response from the Board:** That is the purpose of the trial period.

**Question from a Member:** But the issue of greatest concern to tennis members is the prospect of losing a tennis court during the trial – and if it is deemed a success, the potential permanent loss of a tennis court? Do we have Padel at the expense of a tennis court?

**Response from the Board:** No decision has been made on anything – including the location - beyond the temporary trial. That will be a members' decision, where one or more evidence based options for a permanent Padel installation would be presented for the membership to consider and any vote in favour would be based on a full membership vote at an AGM or EGM.

**Question from a Member:** What percentage of time are the tennis courts utilised and what is the criteria for introducing Padel?

**Response from the Board:** Criteria will be multifactorial – diversifying sports offer, ongoing viability, sustainability, competition from other clubs also now looking at Padel, so being the first Club in the city would be a big draw for the Hallamshire to retain and recruit members.

**Question from a Member:** Agree with the above but surely, it is just the 'next big thing', and we should focus on tennis and squash?

**Response from the Board:** If we don't address longer term sustainability, we could potentially lose out to the competition.

**Question from a Member:** But we've already overshot the target membership (in the Club's Strategic Plan)?

**Response from the Board:** The Strategic Plan was a point in time, drawn up by a previous Board, things have moved on since then.

**Question from a Member:** Great arguments for the introduction of Padel, I am not against introducing it, but I am against not knowing WHERE it will be located?

**Response from the Board:** The purpose of the trial is to test out and to work on determining where if anywhere a permanent Padel facility could be located. The intent is that a feasibility study will be undertaken by the Board to determine this, in advance of presentation to the membership at an AGM or EGM, where one or more evidence-based proposals can be presented to the membership for consideration.

**Question from a Member:** Having recently attended an LTA online seminar on funding, I am aware that the LTA would not recommend funding for any initiative /project which would result in the loss of a tennis court.

**Response from the Board:** The Board has been in discussions with the LTA regarding Padel. The LTA is keen to promote more interest in Padel as a sport and has indicated that funding would be dependent on individual business cases.

**Question from a Member:** I have met with the LTA representative, Paul Sheard and was advised that a Club would need a 'very good business case' in order to replace a tennis court with a Padel court, is that why you want to run a trial, in order to present a 'very good business case' to the LTA?

**Response from the Board:** The Club has been meeting with the LTA on an ongoing basis and has not been advised that it would or would not get support for funding for Padel. All loans come with caveats/clauses and in the event that the membership was to vote in favour of permanent Padel, other funding opportunities would be pursued, not just LTA.

**Question from a Member:** You've had months to produce data I requested at the AGM (on

membership, utilisation and a membership model) where is that data?

**Response from the Board:** The current systems we have in place do not allow for easy data extraction, nor do we have the flex in staffing to free up staff to undertake this very long manual processing.

The IT system is being reviewed to enable better and more speedy management information/reporting to take place, (which will help to inform any feasibility study for Padel and other projects), but this takes time.

When we are in a position to produce reliable data in an easy format, we will do so for all members, but not on an ad hoc basis for one person, at the expense of the operational running of the Club.

If and at the point at which the Board has a proposal/ proposals to introduce Padel on a permanent basis, all relevant evidence-based reports/data/analysis will be made available to the membership for them to make an informed decision.

**Question from a Member:** The Board has previously stated that it is collating the data to decide whether a trial would be a success or not, but does not specify what 'success' means?

**Response from the Board:** The purpose of the temporary trial is for members to decide and vote in an informed way whether or not they want Padel to be a permanent sport at the Hallamshire.

**Question from a Member:** You say that the Board has 'agonised' for two years over whether or not to go ahead with Padel but how can members decide if we don't know what it is – just go ahead and trial it, Do we (the members) want to test it out, or not?

**Response from members present:** Hear, hear.

**Question from a Member:** You say we've now got the planning permission, so can we agree the start date that won't affect the S&D Summer Tennis? Preference would be for a date after the S&D weeks – e.g. from October. (Another member suggested mid/late September onwards).

**Response from the Board:** The Board notes this.

**Question from a Member:** Can't we just vote on it now?

**Response from the Board:** Not appropriate to vote – this is an information session, not a full membership vote and the purpose of this meeting is to update the members on the temporary Padel proposal and to take note of concerns and questions in advance of finalising the period of the actual trial (planning permission only covered a 6 month window, not the fixed starting date). The Board will take note of suggestions for the start date, mindful of competition/ league end dates.

**Question from a Member:** Why can't you use the all-weather courts for the Padel installation?

**Response from the Board:** The weight of the Padel court would be too much and there would need to be structural work undertaken which is not practical? The temporary court will not damage the acrylic court. Planning permission complies with this.

**Question from a Member:** If a vote takes place to have permanent Padel at the Club and that proposal only affects either a tennis court or a squash court, then will the vote be weighted accordingly as it will only be affecting members of a particular category?

**Response from the Board:** The Articles of Association for the Hallamshire Club determine the voting rules – one vote per member. We cannot change that without changing the Articles of Association?

**Question from a Member:** Why choose court 2, not court 1?

**Response from the Board:** For practical reasons, including safe access to facilities, ensuring that only members and permitted visitors can enter the Club, to monitor utilisation and for fire exit/safety reasons, Court 2 was deemed the best option for the trial?

**Question from a Member:** Why will it be an uncovered Padel court – if the trial is taking place in the winter, surely no one will want to use it?

**Response from the Board:** Having visited the Harrogate facility, it was noted that players preferred the uncovered Padel court over the covered option and that it was well utilised even during the winter months.

For the purposes of the trial and the temporary planning permissions – this could only take place with an uncovered padel installation. The business owner, Chris Mills, is a member of this Club and is available to answer this question. *Chris then explained that he has installed approximately*

*18 courts across the UK, all uncovered and all very popular, even in winter when players continue to use the courts even in drizzly weather. There is a 'massive' difference in cost of installing an uncovered court over a covered court (quoted in the meeting as being around £120k upwards) and the structural requirements and the planning permission would be additional factor.*

**Question from a Member:** So, are you asking members to demonstrate support to lose a tennis court outside for 6 months? Why haven't you asked the membership if they are in support of a decision to change the Club's strategic direction?

**Response from the Board:** This Board has made a decision to trial Padel and to undertake a feasibility study to determine whether or not to progress to a permanent Padel installation if the membership votes in favour of permanence.

**Question from a Member:** When will the Board decide the start date of the trial?

**Response from the Board:** Taking on Board the feedback from this meeting and any further feedback it receives from members, the Board will continue its deliberations at the next Board meeting on Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> April.

**Response from a Member:** Can members please note that the membership elected a Board of Directors to take decisions on the running of the Hallamshire Club on their behalf. These Directors are unpaid volunteers who care about the Club. A trial is logical.

**Response from members:** Hear, hear.

**Question from a Member:** Why did you prepare a Strategic Plan because in the talks about vision, engagement and communication with the membership etc, there is no mention of Padel?

**Response from the Board:** As answered earlier, the Strategic Plan was a point in time and written by an earlier Board. Things move on and with regards to communication, the Board does update members and has continued to do so on Padel. It is not practical to update members on every little detail of a decision, but members are kept updated and there is a forum for feedback or to ask to questions/ seek further clarifications.

The meeting was then brought to a close, with members again being assured that at the end of the 6 month trial period, any proposal to extend or to pursue permanent installation of padel facilities at the Club would go to a full membership vote at an AGM or EGM.

A final decision on whether or not to proceed with Padel on a permanent basis, would be dependent on that membership vote and would be evidence based – a feasibility study and options would be presented to the members as part of that AGM or EGM.

The Chair thanked the member for attending and closed the meeting.

**MEETING CONCLUDED at 8:23pm**