



English Table Tennis Association

## Outdoor table tennis pilot

Six month internal monitoring & evaluation report  
April-September 2010.

(A separate independent monitoring & evaluation report has also been written.)



### What did we do?

ETTA worked in partnership with London borough councils to site 47 permanent outdoor table tennis tables in parks.

### Why parks?

We wanted to provide free ping pong to the general public; parks have good public access. We felt that outdoor table tennis would complement and add value to other park amenities (play areas, cafes, tennis courts, outdoor gyms, etc.) Outdoor table tennis in schools is already a proven success and rapidly growing.

### How was it funded?

The pilot was funded by Sport England whole sport plan capital funding allocated to ETTA. Sport England funding paid for the tables, boroughs paid for the surfaces (to place the tables on) and in some cases bats and balls.



### How much did it cost?

£85,000 - Sport England, Whole Sport Plan capital allocation to ETTA.

Estimated £60,000 of partnership funding based on provision of 20 sites that required a concrete slab surface @ £3,000 each.



### Why did we do it?

To create an informal, social, 'self organised' entry route into the sport, raise awareness of table tennis and to investigate 'what works best', e.g. locations, table types, the weather, durability, aesthetics, etc.



### Did it work?

Yes, we have gathered evidence that outdoor table tennis is viable in England although it is acknowledged that this report covers a six month summer period of good weather and that a novelty value may have a positive effect. Usage figures and anecdotal information proves that the tables have been widely used and are popular with the public.

## Evidence

Outdoor TT London pilot proxy measure of participant 'throughput', new participants and value for money		
	Measure	range (based on estimate at 'quiet' table and 'busy' table)
1	Participant 'throughput' for six months (April-Sept 2010) x 47 tables	30,550 - 315,840
2	Participant 'throughput' estimate for one year (April 2010-March 2011) based on figures in 1 + 5%	32,077 – 331,632
3	Participant 'throughput' estimate for life of equipment (assume five year equipment life span)	160,385 – 1,658,160
4	New participant estimate (calculated as 60% of five year throughput figure) over five years	96,231 – 994,896
5	Value for money (cost per participant)	88p – 0.085p
6	Number of new participants estimated to be playing once a month over five years (assume 1% of total in 4)	962 – 9,949



### Critical success factors

**Location, location, location! (provision of a table, screening from wind, bat/ball access and footfall).** The low cost, low access barrier, compelling nature and high enjoyment value of table tennis attracts all ages, genders and abilities.

### What did we learn?

- A culture of bringing your own equipment quickly develops by regular players, however having access to bats and balls (kiosk, shop, cafe, etc.) helps stimulate activity.
- Social **and** sporting outcomes can be achieved. (Sporting – introducing people to table tennis, getting people active and contributing to healthy lifestyles. Social - engagement between players, breaking down barriers – racial, gangs, family cohesion, social responsibility returning borrowed bats.)
- Borough councils 'loved it' and were very receptive to providing a base (usually in the form of a concrete slab) for the tables to be placed on.
- Borough research and consultation with park user groups frequently identified table tennis as a highly desirable activity to be provided in parks.
- Some equipment needs refining and developing – table durability (broken nets, cracked table surfaces), outdoor bats, outdoor ball.



- Tables are made from a variety of materials including: table tops: concrete, steel, concrete polymer, acrylic resin/silica sand, resin laminate, compreg, fibreglass. Table undercarriage: concrete, steel, fibreglass, polymer concrete.
- Whilst 'playability' on all tables in the pilot varied from 'reasonable' to 'very good', because tables are used for social play, 'durability' is deemed more important for lasting use.
- **ETTA opinion overall is that concrete tables are the best in terms of permanency, vandal and weather resistance. They also have very good playability. However concrete is generally heavier and more expensive than models made of other materials and they require specialist installation.**
- Cost of outdoor table tennis tables for public (not home use) range from £500-£3,500.
- Preferably tables should be sited on a solid, flat surface and not sit on grass, gravel, wood chippings or sand.
- Windy conditions are at best a challenge and at worst a 'spoiler' – sheltered/screened areas are preferable.
- Whilst most sites were free to play on, one site made a nominal charge and a 'pay and play' model may work in certain circumstances e.g. next to a commercial tennis centre.
- Very difficult to access the Royal parks!
- None of the tables conform to ITTF regulations - no net cord, outside limits of the posts are not 15.25cm outside the side line. Some tables have rounded edges for added safety and are therefore not 'rectangular'. Some tables are not uniformly dark coloured and matt.



## What did people say about the outdoor table tennis provision?

*"It's brilliant, as soon as we saw the tables, we went off to buy some cheap bats. We're regular players now"* Father of family of four



*"It's a great idea because everyone can play, but not everyone has a garden or a garage to put up a table"* Man with young daughter

*"We've been down every night since they were installed and sometimes you have to queue to get on. One night it was so busy we didn't even get to play!"* Man with son

*"The outdoor table tennis is fantastic and has exceeded our wildest expectations; it is part of our new offer of park activities contributing to N18 – raising adult participation in sport and active participation".* Paul Highman (Dulwich Area Park Manager)

*"That's cool, people are using the tables, get 'em off the sofas and out playing a sport".* Lorraine Gordon (Freelance journalist, Sporty Londoners)

*"Loaning out the table tennis bats helps to break down barriers between park staff and park users, particularly some of the youth gangs who can be intimidating at*



times. When they come to the park office we get to talk to them and this can help to build respect and reduce conflict” Richard (Park Keeper, Rosemary Gardens, Islington)

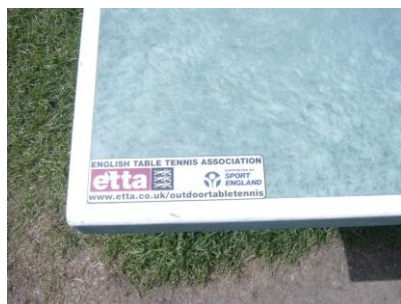
“It’s early days but so far the outdoor table tennis has been a great success. It’s easy to provide and unusually offers an activity for all ages that isn’t normally available – we’re particularly keen to provide activities for older people and this is perfect” Noel Headon (Leisure Manager, London Borough of Islington)

“Free internet access and free breakfasts didn’t work, but free outdoor ping pong gets (hard to reach) youngsters to school. We regularly have 50 kids arrive at 7.30am and have trouble getting them off the tables!” Gary Phillips (Head teacher, Lilian Baylis Technology School)

“I’m writing with regard to the table tennis table at Haggerston Park. I live locally and have recently started playing table tennis regularly with friends. The table is used by a lot of people and is a good place to meet locals. We are three flatmates in our mid to late 20s and often when we go down to play there are other locals playing there. We have made friends with various people this way and have even started a facebook group to encourage people to play and meet other locals”. Yona Lesorgen

### Future plans and thoughts.....

- Develop and publish guidance on all aspects of outdoor table tennis – cost, installation, bat & ball provision, activity ideas, etc.
- Product development – tables (combine picnic bench?), wind shields, and balls.
- Install permanent outdoor tables linked to the Ping! project in Hull and Birmingham.
- Investigate and promote outdoor table tennis in other sites – town centres, motorway services, housing estates, national trust, forestry commission, etc.
- Investigate combining table tennis and cycling with a pilot in Newham.
- Develop club links and ‘play on’ opportunities to each table site?
- Investigate commercial pay & play – sea fronts/amusement arcades/cafes?
- Identify funding to deliver more tables in more locations.
- Develop outdoor competitions (parks, beaches) and liaise with ITTF to investigate the merits of setting a standard for competitive outdoor play.
- Work towards appointing ETTA outdoor table tennis official suppliers or recommended manufacturers with licence/endorsement agreements achieving financial gain for ETTA.
- Consider piloting mobile outdoor table tennis activators around outdoor table sites.



### Case studies

Three case studies are available describing the success of outdoor table tennis in Dulwich Park (Southwark), Eltham Park (Greenwich), and Rosemary Gardens (Islington).

### Summary

**“We are quickly proving that where there are tables, bats and balls, there are no barriers and people play; it’s really as simple as that”!**

Diccon Gray, Facilities & Delivery Manager, English Table Tennis Association

**Dec 2010**