

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF LEISURE TASK AND FINISH SCRUTINY PANEL
HELD ON TUESDAY, 23 SEPTEMBER 2008
IN WALTHAM ABBEY SPORTS CENTRE, BROOMSTICKHALL ROAD, WALTHAM
ABBAY, EN9 1LF
AT 7.30 - 9.05 PM**

Members Present: Mrs R Gadsby (Chairman), D Wixley (Vice-Chairman), Miss R Cohen, D Dodeja, G Pritchard, H Ulkun and J M Whitehouse

Other members present: Mrs H Harding

Apologies for Absence: S Murray

Officers Present J Gilbert (Director of Environment and Street Scene), A Clear (Performance and Quality Manager), B Ovens (General Manager Waltham Abbey Sports Centre) and A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer)

6. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

Noted that there were no substitute members for this meeting.

7. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Panel noted that there were no declarations of interest made pursuant to the Council's Code of Conduct.

8. TERMS OF REFERENCE / WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel considered its terms of reference.

Councillor Jon Whitehouse asked that the terms of reference be altered to include checking to see if any money was available for investment for the Epping Sports Centre. This would have to be added to the Panel's terms of reference.

The Director of the Environment and Street Scene, John Gilbert reported on the Limes Farm Play and Youth Facilities, that:

- Following comprehensive consultation with local residents and receipt of three tenders for installation of a new Children's playground at Limes Farm, SMP Play Equipment Company was selected to construct the new play facility.
- Construction work was due to commence in mid July with a completion date of 15th August, to enable use of the facility over the summer holiday period, but delays on behalf of SMP resulted in work commencing around 18th August.
- As of today, only very limited progress has been made on the site, with the installation of one piece of equipment and some safety surfacing. Vandalism of the site and construction vehicles had been an issue, with a dumper truck

and tractor being targeted over the last two weeks. Inclement weather has been cited as a cause of the delay. SMP have not confirmed when the installation is due to be completed.

Youth Facilities:

- Consultation with young people on Limes Farm identified a clear desire for a challenging 'Parkour' (free running) facility. A play company was commissioned to produce a bespoke piece of equipment for the site, but following extensive consideration by Officers including Health & Safety & Insurance, a report from the Health & Safety Executive and Legal Advice, a decision was taken not to proceed with the installation of a parkour facility.
- Officers are now re-consulting with young people as to a suitable alternative facility.

The work with Epping Forest College had not taken place as yet.

9. TOUR OF THE CENTRE

The Panel were taken on a tour of the Sports Centre by the Centre's General Manager, Bill Ovens. He offered an insight into the facilities available and answered questions from the members.

The Panel noted that:

- It was a dual use sports centre used in conjunction with King Harold School;
- It was open for public use from 6pm to 11pm weekdays, from 9am to 1pm on Saturdays and from 4pm to 9.30pm on Sundays;
- It was also open on school holidays from 9am to 11pm;
- There were five income generating areas: the bar made about £25k per annum; the main sports hall generated about £43k per annum; the two squash courts about £7k per annum; the dance studio about £9.5k per annum and the gym about £4.5k per annum;
- The centre received about £25k per annum from King Harold School for management, upkeep and maintenance;
- The building is designed to "school standards" and this is not the same as modern public leisure facilities;
- If the Council wanted to update the building facilities it would have to pay for it itself, since there would be no financial support available from the school;
- The standards of the changing rooms were well below what was expected from a public leisure facility.
- The centre generated around £143,000 of income, including the £25,000 from the school. The centre was therefore heavily subsidised, as indeed were all the Council sports centres.

Councillor Ulkun asked what had been done to the centre recently. Mr Ovens said that they had a new sports hall roof installed about three years ago. Unfortunately they still had leaks. The heating system had also failed on about a half dozen occasions. It took time for the school to respond and organise any maintenance work. The School had recently installed a new lighting system in the main hall which cost about £25k. Unfortunately if a light fitting got broken it would cost about a thousand pounds to repair as they had to erect scaffolding to get to the fitting.

Councillor Mrs Gadsby asked if it was built for joint use. Alan Clear, the Performance and Quality Manager said that it was built for joint use but that was thirty years ago. It was built to far lower standards than was acceptable nowadays. One of the main problems was that it had inadequate toilet and changing facilities.

Councillor Miss Cohen asked when the school made decisions such as that about the lighting; did they consult the Centre's management. Mr Ovens said that they did not. They were reliant on the school.

10. TO VIEW THE WALTHAM ABBEY SWIMMING POOL BUILDING

The Panel decided not to visit the Swimming Pool that night.

11. RELOCATION OF SPORTS HALL FACILITIES FROM WALTHAM ABBEY SPORTS CENTRE TO WALTHAM ABBEY SWIMMING POOL

The Panel considered the report on the relocation of the sports hall facilities from the Waltham Abbey Sports Centre to the Waltham Abbey Swimming Pool.

They noted that the current facility was popular with local people and families; the report puts forward ideas for similar use but in a modern setting.

The Waltham Abbey Swimming Pool (WASP) has a 25 metre swimming pool, five lanes wide, with a small teaching pool. There is also a new dance studio and a modern gym / fitness studio and there is a reasonable size car park. The proposed new area will need new changing room facilities so that there will be separate changing facilities for pool users and for the other sports. There were no significant highway problems highlighted, although Essex County Council was still considering this. There would be a small increase in the parking spaces available.

The missing figure under item one in the options part of the report was considered to be about £100,000. This would be for Architect Fees, a Structural Engineer, M&E Services Engineer, a Quantity Engineer, a Project Manager and a CDM Co-ordinator. If the Panel did not decide to go with this option then they would need to decide what would happen to the sports centre post 2010 when the current contract ends.

The new building along with the existing one will have to be brought up to Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) standards. It would need a lift installed and the rest of the building suitably modified.

Councillor Pritchard asked, if the new build went ahead, what would be the loss of facilities to the local area. He was told that there would be the loss of two squash courts, a dance studio which housed martial arts (but this could go into the new sports hall), and maybe the hardcore gym users. There was also the loss of the bar facility. There had been 3 bar functions so far this year and 7 last year. There have also been 5 children's parties this year and 9 last year.

Alan Clear commented that there was no Crèche at the Swimming Pool site and if this was provided then children parties could be held there when needed.

Councillor Pritchard said the general facilities of the area needed to be considered along with what would be lost and what was needed. Councillor Mrs Gadsby said it depended on what we wanted to offer the public; there were also the new Town Mead facilities.

Councillor Whitehouse said that they were there to consider community leisure. Is this being driven by need or finances (savings) or was it just an interesting idea. No doubt it would be offering a better service but would it generate extra income? The pool was important, squash and gym less so. There needed to be more clarity on how the funding was to work and what was SLM's view on this. John Gilbert said that the reason this was being considered was because the dual use agreement with King Harold School would come to an end in March 2010 and there was no guarantee that it would be renewed. If the Council stays here there will still be all the problems seen here tonight to contend with. This centre is not part of the SLM contract and could not be bolted on. A judgement on how to manage and bring this centre up to standards would have to be made if we decided to stay. This would be problematic as the building was not ours.

Councillor Ulkun said that King Harold School would be redeveloping their school, but will it be the school only. Mr Gilbert said it was his understanding that it would not include this building. Councillor Ulkun commented that the school may one day consider that they do not want to continue with the agreement.

Councillor Miss Cohen commented that if the Council moved out, the school may not be able to keep the building going. What will they do? Alan Clear said that they could provide a gym in their school rebuild and extend the school, taking up some of the present car park. Or the Head Teacher may want to demolish the centre and build a new school with a new gym.

Councillor Mrs Harding recommended that the Panel went for a feasibility study, as they needed facts; although £100,000 seemed a lot of money for this. John Gilbert said that this could be looked at again and try to get some reductions in the costs. It was more than just architectural drawings; it was also to see if it was feasible to see if the Council could get permission as WASP was built on green belt land.

Councillor Wixley asked if the new site was big enough and has the school said what it would do. He was told that it was and as said before, the school would develop their school site. Councillor Wixley continued that with the Olympics coming up a sports centre would be a high profile thing. Also the health of the people of Waltham Abbey had to be considered. This was not a particularly attractive part of the Green Belt so should not pose a problem in the development of the swimming pool. The footpath could be redirected. What would happen to the staff here? He was told that the pool would probably only need a couple of extra staff, but that would have to be considered at the appropriate time.

The attitude of SLM was unknown but they would probably be receptive to the new facilities and would be looking to EFDC for the Capital spends.

There was a very tight timeline, especially as the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting had been cancelled.

Councillor Mrs Gadsby said she thought that the sports centre was very old and she was in favour of moving to the new pool site, although £100,000 was a lot. Waltham Abbey needed a good sports facility and pool combined.

Councillor Whitehouse said it was potentially exciting for Waltham Abbey, but the council needed more detailed figures and to begin negotiations with SLM.

Councillor Ulkun asked how many square metres the proposed new hall would be. He was told 594sq.mtrs. He said the estimated price of £2-3million was quite high for

this size of build and could probably be done cheaper. He was told that Sports England quoted about £2.4 million for a sports facility. It was the figure being used at present, but it may change. Also the figure included the changing rooms, increasing the car park and possibly redesigning the reception.

Councillor Mrs Harding wanted to give a vote of thanks to Bill Ovens and the rest of his staff for keeping the Sports Centre going, thinking out of the box and generating so many revenue ideas.

John Gilbert summed up by saying the Panel needed to decide if the facility was needed for Waltham Abbey; was there a need to explore an alternative provision, was there a need for a feasibility study and to explore if there was a cheaper way to carry this out. If agreed a more comprehensive report would go to the next Overview and Scrutiny meeting on 6th November.

RESOLVED:

1. That a lower costing for a feasibility study be sought if possible; and
2. That the Panel recommend to Overview and Scrutiny Committee that the new build is a feasible option and that a funding of £100,000 (or lower if 1 above could be identified in time for the O&S Meeting) of DDF be sought to enable architect's drawings and a costed project to be created and a planning application be submitted.

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

No other business was raised.

13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee Secretary to identify a suitable date towards the end of November for the next meeting of this Panel.