

CULTURE, TOURISM & ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Agenda Item 23

Brighton & Hove City Council

Subject:	Withdean Sports Complex Masterplan		
Date of Meeting:	29 th September 2011		
Report of:	Strategic Director, Communities		
Contact Officer:	Name: Toby Kingsbury	Tel: 29-2701	
	E-mail: toby.kingsbury@brighton-hove.gov.uk		
Wards Affected:	Withdean		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 This report informs Members of changes to the sports provision at Withdean Sports Complex following Brighton & Hove Albion Football Club moving to the American Express Community Stadium in June 2011. In addition, there is now an opportunity to review options for how the site can further meet the sporting needs of the city. This report provides the opportunity for Members to be consulted on the scope of the review.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That Members note the current facilities at Withdean Sports Complex (WSC) following the departure of Brighton & Hove Albion Football Club (BHAFC).
- 2.2 That Members views are sought on the review to be undertaken by officers in determining the future sports provision at Withdean.

3. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 Work has begun on a Sports Facilities Plan for the city to review the current level of provision and identify priorities. The plan will be used to inform future sports facility developments in the city, the results of which will form the subject of a report to Cabinet in spring 2012.

- 3.2 The plan will review the previous Open Space, Sport and Recreation Study undertaken by consultants PMP in 2008 and the Sports Facilities Audit of the same year. Consultation will be undertaken with facility managers and clubs to gain a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in provision and to prioritise needs accordingly. Benchmarking of other similar sized authorities will also be undertaken to provide a comparison.
- 3.3 The options for WSC need to be considered within the overall context of sports facilities across the city. The site is large and could be considered as a potential site for future developments, depending on what conclusions are reached in the Sports Facilities Plan.
- 3.4 A site plan and overhead photograph is attached as Appendix 1 which shows the large scale of the site.

Facilities at Withdean Sports Complex

- 3.5 WSC is listed in the Core Strategy as one of the city's major sporting venues and is one of six sports facilities operated under contract by Freedom Leisure on behalf of the council. It is set on a site of approximately 5.8 hectares and consists of the following facilities;
 - 3-court indoor tennis centre with a fitness suite, exercise studio, sauna/steam/spa and associated changing facilities
 - 8-court squash centre with bar and changing facilities, home to Brighton Squash Club
 - Floodlit stadium with running track, spectator seating, football pitch and changing facilities
 - 3 outdoor tennis courts
 - 1 outdoor multi-use area
 - Minor Clubhouse providing meeting/activity space
 - Car parks (including park and ride area)

The Sportsman public house is located in the centre of the site with its own designated parking area and is on a long-term lease.
- 3.6 BHAFC used the stadium at WSC for home matches between 1999 and 2011. During this time they added facilities to the stadium including;
 - An additional car-park in the north-west corner of the site
 - A permanent roof to the north stand
 - New upgraded floodlights

- Spectator stands to the south, west and east of the stadium
- A semi-permanent changing room block and players lounge
- A semi-permanent two-storey hospitality suite
- Semi-permanent toilets for spectators
- Turnstiles to west, north-east and east of stadium
- Additional storage containers for grounds maintenance equipment

3.7 BHAFC's planning consent for some of these facilities was temporary. However, following discussions with the athletics clubs, BHAFC and the sports facilities management contractor, the council were granted planning consent in July 2011 to retain the following facilities;

- Permanent retention of the north-west car park. Visits to WSC have increased by approximately 60% since 2004 and this car-park is heavily used. Losing it would have resulted in increased parking on surrounding streets.
- Permanent retention of the west stand. This provides useful additional spectator viewing, particularly for the athletics field events.
- Permanent retention of the turnstiles to the west and north-east of the stadium. These help to provide a secure perimeter to the stadium and will enable control of access for future users.
- Temporary (3 years) retention of the changing room block and players lounge. The building is in good condition and provides high quality changing facilities for stadium users and the players lounge can be used as a meeting/training venue. The temporary nature of this building meant that permanent retention was not possible.

BHAFC agreed that all of the facilities above could be left in situ at no cost to the council. The only cost incurred will be for some landscaping works to the north-west car park which is a condition of the planning consent.

However it should be noted that there has been an initial challenge to the grant of the July planning permission relating to the screening opinion relating to the proposed development and this is being dealt with by the Council's legal team. See section 5 of this report for further information.

3.8 The council did not apply to retain the two-storey Hospitality Suite. This was due to the high cost of either renting or purchasing the unit outright. Also, the pre-application advice from planners was that it was unlikely to receive any further temporary consent.

3.9 There was some concern about the loss of the Hospitality Suite which had been used by a small number of community groups. However, the

minor clubhouse which had been used as the BHAFC Project Office is now available for use by these groups. The clubhouse provides an ideal environment for meetings and other activities with self-contained toilets and catering facilities.

- 3.10 The other temporary facilities installed by BHAFC have been removed from the east end of the stadium, leaving a large hard-surface area which was previously the designated park and ride car park. This area is currently being used as an overflow car park but could be utilised in other ways.
- 3.11 The north-east car park has been used as the park and ride since 1999. Use of this car park is shared with customers of WSC and is on a first come first served basis. There are no dedicated spaces for either park and ride or WSC customers.
- 3.12 An area of the north-east car park has been leased to the owners of The Sportsman public house for the sole benefit of their customers. The area has perimeter barriers and an entrance barrier.

Users of Withdean Sports Complex

- 3.13 WSC plays host to three athletics clubs and a squash club. It has a strong health and fitness membership which is currently at capacity – approximately 1900. This is high compared to other facilities such as Prince Regent Swimming Complex (approximately 1000 members) or Moulsecoomb Leisure Centre (approximately 400 members).
- 3.14 At the Cabinet Member Meeting on 7th December 2010, Whitehawk Football Club was granted permission to use the stadium for a period of two seasons to allow the club to undertake improvements to their own ground in East Brighton Park. However, the club were unwilling to meet the Ryman League's conditions regarding the temporary use of the stadium and will therefore not be using it for the 2011/12 season. They have indicated that they would like to use it for next season (2012/13).
- 3.15 The football pitch may be used for the 2011/12 season by BHAFC reserves, women's and youth teams. However, it will be difficult to accommodate all these teams and Whitehawk FC the following season without it impacting negatively upon the condition of the pitch and upon the use by the athletics clubs. Therefore, a choice between BHAFC and Whitehawk FC is likely to be required if they both wish to use the stadium.
- 3.16 WSC is a multi-sports venue and the athletics clubs have shared use of the stadium with BHAFC. With careful scheduling of fixtures, the future

impact upon these clubs can be minimised and the two sports can work together well.

Future Plans

- 3.17 The athletics track will require replacement over the next few years at a cost of approximately £500,000. This is to be funded from the savings made on the recent re-tender of the Sports Facilities Management Contract as agreed by Cabinet on 10th December 2010. The replacement works are likely to take approximately twelve weeks and will need to be undertaken outside of the athletics season. This investment will secure the stadium's future as a regional standard athletics venue.
- 3.18 The changing room block is a semi-permanent building, has been in situ for six years and has a lifespan of approximately 15 years. The council therefore need to develop a long-term permanent solution for this building. One option would be to construct a permanent pavilion for users of the stadium.
- 3.19 Officers are currently assessing the feasibility of a capital investment proposal to increase the health and fitness provision at WSC which will form the subject of a report going to Cabinet in October 2011. WSC is currently at capacity for gym and exercise classes and it is estimated that the development proposal would increase membership by 66% with a further 1194 members as well as increasing the much-needed capacity for 'pay and play' users. The proposal involves the construction of a two storey extension to the front of the existing Indoor Tennis Centre including:
- A new entrance and reception space including café/bar facility and associated seating;
 - A new, larger fitness suite with space for 125 equipment stations (approximately 2 ½ times the size of the existing fitness suite).
 - A new link between the tennis centre and squash centre to provide a more coherent customer journey and to improve security and control of access;
 - Increased studio space for exercise and dance classes;
 - Extended and completely refurbished male and female changing facilities and toilets;

- 3.20 At the Culture, Recreation and Tourism Cabinet Member Meeting on 22nd March 2011, a deputation from Mr Robert Nemeth was considered concerning the provision of a skate park at Withdean Sports Complex. The Cabinet Member responded by advising that the proposal would be considered as part of a masterplan for the site. It was proposed that this could be situated in the area formerly occupied by the Hospitality Suite.
- 3.21 The Indoor Tennis Centre was part-funded by a grant from the Lawn Tennis Association as part of the Indoor Tennis Initiative. A condition of this grant funding was that the tennis hall had to be used exclusively for tennis for the duration of the agreement which expires in November 2012. After this date other uses of the hall may be considered. Whilst the Indoor Tennis Centre remains a popular and important facility, there are times (particularly during the summer months) when there is less usage. It would therefore be worthwhile considering whether the hall could be used in a more flexible way to better meet the wider sporting needs of the city. Any such consideration will be done in consultation with existing users.

Next Steps

- 3.22 Work will continue on the citywide Sports Facilities Plan to help identify priorities and inform potential options for WSC.
- 3.23 In addition to this review, consideration needs to be given to a range of questions to identify the role of WSC as part of the citywide Sports Facilities Plan:

Is WSC considered to be a favourable site for further sports facility developments?

Should WSC be considered for a potential enabling development to help fund facility provision at WSC or elsewhere in the city such as the King Alfred Leisure Centre?

What are the aspirations for WSC as an athletics venue?

What are the aspirations for WSC as a football venue?

What are the aspirations for WSC as a racket sports venue (tennis and squash)?

What role should WSC play as a non-sport community facility?

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 Consultation was undertaken with Sport England and the council's planning department regarding the proposed methodology for the Sports Facilities Plan.
- 4.2 Officers have also consulted with the athletics clubs, BHAFC and Freedom Leisure regarding the retention of facilities at WSC following BHAFC's departure in June 2011.

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

5.1 Financial Implications:

- 5.1.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report. Any future developments would need to be fully evaluated and the funding identified as appropriate.

Finance Officer consulted: Michelle Herrington Date: 16/9/11

5.2 Legal Implications:

- 5.2.1 A letter has been received by the council as local planning authority from a nearby resident claiming non compliance with certain procedures relating to the grant of the planning permission at the stadium. Initial Counsel's advice has been received and it remains to be seen as to what the planning outcome will be. An oral update may be available at the time of the meeting, depending on the status of potential proceedings at that time.

Lawyer consulted: Bob Bruce Date: 19/9/11

5.3 Equalities Implications:

- 5.3.1 The operation of sports facilities that are accessible to all sections of the community are important to increase participation and subsequently improve health and wellbeing. The diverse sporting needs of the city will be taken into account as part of the review of facilities.

5.4 Sustainability Implications:

- 5.4.1 Sustainability implications arising from any potential development proposals will be assessed as part of any required planning consents.

5.5 Crime & Disorder Implications:

5.5.1 Increasing participation in sport and physical activity is recognised as having a positive effect on reducing crime and anti-social behaviour.

5.6 Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

5.6.1 Officers would identify the most appropriate arrangements to achieve best value for money for the council.

5.7 Corporate / Citywide Implications:

5.7.1 Additional or better quality facilities that help increase participation in sport and physical activity and widen access will help to meet the outcomes of the council's Sports and Physical Activity Strategy.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Withdean Sports Complex site plan and overhead photograph (photograph to be distributed at meeting).

Documents in Members' Rooms:

1. None

Background Documents:

1.