



DERBY CITY COUNCIL

COUNCIL CABINET
1 AUGUST 2006

ITEM 11

Report of Cabinet Member responsible for
Leisure and Direct Services

LANCASTER SPORTS CENTRE

SUMMARY

- 1.1 In June 2005 the Cabinet endorsed the Sports Facilities Strategy and commissioned a specialist company to carry out a detailed condition survey. There was also a Fire Risk Assessment undertaken in consultation with the Fire Officer at Lancaster Sports Centre. These pieces of work identified works that needed to be undertaken so that the Lancaster Sports Centre could remain open and be safely evacuated.
- 1.2 Paragraphs 1.4 and 1.5 of the supporting report show that expenditure of £42,000 is needed in the next 6 months in order to keep the centre open. The report further identifies a sum estimated at £750,000 is needed to be spent over the next 5 years on the basic refurbishment of the building, plant and equipment.
- 1.3 The Council has yet to determine how it will fund the basic refurbishment works for all its sports centres, identified as £6.9 million in the next 5 years and almost £38 million in the next 25 years. In those circumstances, I felt that it would be irresponsible to spend £42,000 without considering if the centre had a viable future. You will see that the background information led to the conclusion that the centre did not have a viable future. As the safety issues were being addressed by short term and expensive arrangements, it was considered necessary to start a consultation process with existing users to explore possible relocation options and that was started in June.
- 1.4 To date we have made alternative arrangements for at least 75% of the users and I fully expect to meet the needs of the users shortly. I set out those arrangements in my response to a question at Council on Wednesday 19 July. That response is produced at appendix 2. It is unfortunate that Council debated the issue without the information contained in this report and clearly I have thought carefully about Council's request to defer a decision on closure until there has been a period of 12 weeks consultation on the closure. I believe that consultation started in June and extending beyond October would not add anything to what we have learned since we started consulting with users. I add that I met with a group of supporters of the Lancaster Sports Centre in the Council Chamber on Friday 21 July and have taken into account the views expressed to me at that meeting.

- 1.5 Whilst I take no pleasure in stating this, I remain convinced that we must close the Lancaster Sports Centre in October as we cannot continue to operate without addressing the issues set out in the report, which effectively requires us to spend £42,000. The longer term future must also be in doubt as I believe that we can cope with the removal of this facility with the current and planned facilities provided by the public and private sector in the city. I am also convinced that if we had £750,000 to invest in sports centres that it would be better spent elsewhere.
- 1.6 However, it is clear that this centre is well liked and Council has asked that Cabinet consider seeking expressions of interest from the private sector to manage it. I think that this is an avenue that we should explore. I have therefore included that the following recommendations.

RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 To note the progress that has been made in relocating users of the Lancaster Sports Centre by the end of October 2006.
- 2.2 To maintain the Lancaster Sports Centre pricing policy for user groups relocated to other City Council Leisure Facilities for a 12- month period until October 2007.
- 2.3 To instruct officers to seek expressions of interest from parties willing and able to operate the Lancaster Sports Centre.
- 2.4 To close the Lancaster Sports Centre by the end of October 2006 and secure it whilst expressions of interest are sought from parties willing and able to operate the Lancaster Sports Centre

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

3. The expenditure required to keep Lancaster Sports Centre open cannot be justified when considered against other pressures.

For more information contact:
Background papers:

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Report of the Corporate Director of Environmental Services



DERBY CITY COUNCIL

COUNCIL CABINET 1 AUGUST 2006

Report of the Corporate Director of
Environmental Services

LANCASTER SPORTS CENTRE

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 1.1 On 20 February 2006, a report was considered at Culture and Scrutiny Commission outlining a range of options that needed to be explored to finance the modernisation and improvement of the Council's sports centres.
- 1.2 Officers had received a report on the outcome of the Fire Risk Assessment at Lancaster Sports Centre and the measures that had to be immediately taken following consultation with the Fire Officer, so that the facility could remain open and be safely evacuated.
- 1.3 Lancaster Sports Centre was built in 1973 and transferred from Derbyshire County Council, to the City Council in 1997. It is a popular, well-used facility that attracts a cross section of people and groups, including schools (8), clubs (30), and casual users. The centre plays a key role in the social inclusion agenda by providing opportunities for women, the youth service and for children from Ivy House, St Clare's and St Andrews Special Schools. Facilities are also used to deliver a comprehensive range of activities for young people during school holiday periods.

Last year, 93,700 attendances were recorded, £138,832 income was taken and the net cost of provision was £66,996, excluding support service charges of £35,336. At present staff, trade unions and customers have been informed that the Council are considering the potential closure of the facility following consultation.

In view of the potential closure Leisure Officers, working in conjunction with the user groups (excluding 5 a side) have been able to accommodate 75% of the existing user groups. Officers are to work with the remaining 25% over the coming weeks. Further information is outlined in 1.6.

- 1.4 To keep Lancaster Sports Centre open over the past six months, it has been necessary to:
 - staff reception during all opening hours to provide supervision of a fire risk area and assist with any emergency evacuation of the centre. This is costing £1,200 a month for which there is no budget provision
 - install battery operated smoke alarms and improved signage around the centre
 - introduce metal cabinets for the storage of cleaning products

- install a new metal fire exit door for the sports hall
- relocate two vending machines away from the entrance area to improve egress in the event of an emergency evacuation. This is already reducing the amount of income taken and will have a negative impact on the budget
- fit low level Perspex guards below window frames, to prevent children climbing on ledges, accessing and falling through windows
- fit smoke guards to the fire doors in the car park stairways and introduce a system of regular inspection
- reduce the maximum occupancy of the centre by 33%, from 150 to 100. This could well reduce the income taken the centre during peak periods and may have a negative impact on the budget
- carry out a risk assessment before allowing organised club/group bookings and activities that include Disabled People. We have been advised by the Fire Officer that individual wheelchair users will not be able to access the facility because of the uncertainty of providing a safe means of escape in the event of an emergency evacuation

1.5 In order to keep the centre open in the long term, in addition to the above measures, it would be necessary to:

- in the next month, invest £5,000 to coat the windows with an anti-shatter film
- in the next two months, invest £27,000 to install a fire alarm and emergency lighting
- in the next six months invest £10,000 in ICT to meet the ODPM requirement for on-line booking at sports facilities.
- over the next five years, based on a condition survey by external consultants, it would be necessary to invest £750,000 in the basic refurbishment of the building, plant and equipment
- over the following 20 years, based on a condition survey by external consultants, it would be necessary to invest a further £534,140 to keep the building operational

1.6 Given the scale of investment referred to above, in particular at paragraph 1.5, there are a number of other factors that need to be taken into account when considering the level of investment required at Lancaster Sports Centre. These are:

- Location of the centre -- the centre's location on the top of Chapel Street multi-storey car park, is far from ideal. The lift is small and unwelcoming, as is the entrance through the car park and the ten flights of stairs to access the centre.

There are also concerns about the activities that occur in the access route, usually associated with homeless or intoxicated people that congregate in and use this area as a public toilet. This is an intimidating and unpleasant environment and potentially has implications for the safety and well being of customers and employees. It also limits the scope to develop the service.

Evacuating people from the centre is also problematic, particularly when programmed activities are being delivered for Disabled People.

- the changing infrastructure in sport in the city -- in 2005 as part of the Best Value Review of the Council's Sport and Leisure service, an external consultant analysed the supply and demand for sports halls in Derby. They concluded that by 2011 there would be a demand for 13.5 four court sports halls and that this could be met from the supply, estimated at 23.5 four court sports halls. In the past two years there has been considerable investment in sports facilities on school sites and from September 2006, an additional 3 four courts sports halls will be available.

As you would expect a number of user groups are reluctant to work with Leisure Officers on alternative accommodation until a decision has been made, however at present Sport and Leisure are able to accommodate the following;

- 17 of the 18 hours coaching courses
- 2 of the 3 special schools
- All 4 of the Sports Clubs based at the Centre.
- 2 out of 5 martial arts clubs
- The 2 leagues based at the Centre
- Ladies Only Gym (feasibility of re establishing the old gym at Queens Leisure Centre.
- Free Weights – can be accommodated at Champions Gym.

Officers will meet with the remaining schools in September alongwith Youth Services and the Pupil Referral Unit who use Lancaster Sport Centre. The Centre has 19 club/ block bookings for 5 a side that can be accommodated if the users would be prepared to play at an outdoor venue.

- Budget pressures across the Council -- the demand and competing priorities for capital is significant and the existing backlog for investment in buildings is estimated at approximately £100 million.

The minimum investment needed for the basic refurbishment and to maintain the Council's sports centres over a 25-year period has been costed by external consultants at £18,671,670. This comprises of £6,932,004 for a basic refurbishment of facilities, £10,739,666 to cover building life cycle costs and £1,000,000 for the replacement of major sports equipment.

The dilemma the service faces is that the basic refurbishment investment of £6.9 million needed over the next five years is insufficient to make the changes that are necessary to provide modern, attractive and accessible facilities. Research in Derby over the past three years of sports centre users and non-users has consistently identified that improving and modernising local facilities

must be given high priority if we are to increase usage and participation. In effect we need to provide facilities that are of comparable quality to those offered by the private sector.

It is not acceptable for people who cannot afford to use private facilities to be offered anything less than similar good quality public sector facilities and this can only be achieved by investing capital to adapt and remodel facilities or by the rebuilding option. Because of the above, investing in the basic refurbishment of sports centres is not considered a long-term cost effective solution.

The investment needed to modernise, improve and maintain all of the Council's sports centres over a 25-year period, has been costed at £37,774,525. This includes £20,916,000 for modernisation, £15,858,525 for building life cycle costs and £1,000,000 for the replacement of major sports equipment. Options to modernise and finance improvements at Moorways, Queens Leisure Centre, Shaftesbury and Springwood Leisure Centre are currently being explored in conjunction with Estates, Planning, Derby University, Derby College and the Primary Care Trust.

1.7 There are several outstanding tasks to be undertaken if a decision is taken to close Lancaster Sports Centre and these include:

- staffing -- identify potential redeployment opportunities for staff at the centre, initially within Sport and Leisure and if necessary, in other Departments of the Council
- transferring demand -- 1.6 highlights the work that has been undertaken with the existing user groups to try and find suitable alternative accommodation elsewhere in the city. Inevitably, there will be user groups that we cannot or who are unwilling to be accommodated. It is important therefore that we continually work with the remaining 25% and the 5 a side user groups during the summer period.
- vacant/surplus properties procedure -- work closely with Estates and Property Services to implement the guidelines in the procedure and meet the Council's insurers requirements for unoccupied properties. The cost to secure the centre (boarding windows), monitor the condition and keeping the building closed in 2006/7 is estimated at £38,000. This will fall to around £10,000 a year from 1 April 2007.
- Asset Management Group will need to consider the long term future of this property and explore alternative uses by other departments or a letting to release Sport and Leisure from this ongoing liability.

- 1.8 In the last month, consultation has been undertaken with users to identify alternative venues for their activities. This is an on-going process but an assessment of the current situation is in Appendix 2. Where it is necessary to direct customers to alternate use provided by the private sector, we will consider transitional financial support.

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Background papers:	Report of Cabinet Member responsible for Leisure and Direct Services - CC Lancaster Sports Centre CM

IMPLICATIONS

Financial

1. The closure of Lancaster Sports Centre will save £65,000 per year. However, there may be redundancy costs in 2006/07.

Legal

2. None.

Personnel

3. Staff employed at Lancaster Sports Centre will be at risk. Consultation will be taking place with the staff and trade unions.

Equalities

4. An equalities impact assessment has been undertaken around the potential closure of Lancaster Sports Centre.