

FoSSC Steering Group: comments to Council on the 2015 draft Sports Centre Improvement Plan

Friends
of
Southampton
Sports
Centre



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Mr Mike Harris, SCC Leisure,

Councillor Satvir Kaur, Cabinet member for Leisure

Councillor Beryl Harris, Bassett Ward.

Dear Mike, Cllr. Kaur, Cllr. Harris,

FoSSC Steering Group response to draft Sports Centre Improvement Plan

The FoSSC steering group welcomes publication of the draft improvement plan and the simultaneous public consultation as a means to identify, determine widespread public support for and prioritise funding bids for the larger scale works necessary to restore the Outdoor Sports Centre to its former iconic status. We further welcome:

- (1) the fact that the draft plan acknowledges and recognises the historical duality of this unique site as a venue for both organised and informal sport and recreation / leisure activity.
- (2) the aspiration to increase both the range and quality of the sporting and recreation offer.

We do not feel it appropriate for us, as a group, to recommend or back one particular plan option over another, but rather to:

- (a) recognise and appreciate the potential for increasing inclusivity, all season use and vital revenue generation that overall concepts, ideas and the larger indoor facilities could bring to the site**

(b) publicise the plan and consultation as widely as possible and facilitate city-wide engagement in the process as much as possible so that as wide a consensus as possible is achieved as a mandate for moving forward

As general comments on the draft plan we wish to make the following observations:

(1) we feel that any and all development and new or replacement features should be designed to be suitable for as flexible and as wide a range of sporting and recreational potential as possible – for example, the proposed cycle track could also be suitable for roller blading and roller speed skating and the relevant UK bodies should be consulted about their needs such that these can be designed in.

(2) Four draft designs have been put forward, but we feel that these should neither be viewed nor offered as mutually-exclusive options, but that the most popular ideas drawn from all 4 should be incorporated into the final plan.

(3) the current draft seems to give very little consideration for the provision of disabled access to sport (formal or informal) and recreation – for example, the proposed 1km and 3km trails should be constructed to be both all-weather and accessible to wheelchairs (and also buggies and prams) with respect to both surface and gradient.

(4) whatever the decided option for the pavilion to replace block 1, we believe that the building should aspire for iconic quality in terms of design, build quality, durability, longevity flexibility and functionality (i.e. court surfaces to be suitable for as wide a range of ball, racquet and wheelchair sports as possible, not simply football and not simply “off the shelf” metal sheds of the cheapest build cost. In particular, we consider that the building height should be restricted to the minimum essential required to fulfil the intended sporting needs in order to minimise both the visual impact and the ongoing heating / maintenance / operational costs. If the building designs could acknowledge the history of the site and reflect the art deco styling of the original period, this should be encouraged.

(5) We acknowledge the need for additional car parking to cope with both existing user numbers and projected expansion of the user base. We note that the bowls clubs would not be adverse to relocation to provide considerable additional car parking at the south of the site, provided that there was suitable access for their elderly members to the new location. In the context however:

(a) we consider suggestions to demolish The View (plan 1) without replacing it with a comparable facility (not present in any of the proposed options) to be massively short sighted. Demolition of the building would create minimal additional car parking space whilst losing a very valuable community space that serves the wider community and local residents as well as centre users

(b) we consider that a large car park, in the middle of the site would be totally inappropriate in terms of visual impact, heavy traffic flow through the site, pedestrian safety and impact on residents of the Battle Roads / Coxford Road area. We urge Council to consider alternatives to this option and would like to suggest that serious consideration be given to the following 2 options, both absent from the plane (i) using part or all of the current depot / nursery sites above the ski slopes as an alternative venue (ii) reconsider options for Jack's Corner – whilst the facilities in the playground are relatively new, many respondents to the original consultation reported that the site was unsuitable as it is out of the way, out of sight line, damp and surrounded by dense trees. As a consequence, they did not like taking their children there and would not consider letting them play there alone. We would like to propose that the equipment be relocated to the area around The View, to encourage safe use and supervision and that this space be used as a combined disabled user, staff, grounds staff and bowls club member car park, accessed from Redhill Close and protected by a controlled barrier. This would achieve multiple goals;

- the problem of Jack's Corner and safety
- flat, access close to the main facilities via level ground and without the need to bring cars in to the site, appropriate for both disabled users and elderly bowls club members using relocated greens
- parking for staff, freeing up spaces in other car parks,
- promotion of facilities allied to The View

(6) We would like to see consideration of the City Golf Course within aspects of the scheme – it was part of the same original vision. For example, complement the 1km and 3km trails with longer trails around the northern perimeter of the golf course by improving the quality of the current narrow, rough and poorly maintained earth paths that run around it.

(7) We would have liked to have seen evidence or at least acknowledgement of mitigation of the possible effects of sports-related development on the overall appearance of the site in order to minimise the visual impact of development and improve the overall appearance of the site to make it an attractive place to visit for any purpose. In particular:

(a) consideration of visual impact reduction by greening– for example, if the proposed cycle track is to be fenced off, the use of planted hedging to mask the wire fences and green the site

(b) maintenance, replacement and enhancement of existing plantings to increase overall site attractiveness

(c) consideration of those aspects of the site that are locally designated as SINCS (sites of importance for nature conservation) and mitigation thereof

(8) Throughout the development history of the site, there has been a strong assumption against allowing developments for exclusive use. We are therefore concerned that if the largest pavilion option is selected, Saints Foundation are seeking permanent, “*exclusive access term time during the day*” to the pavilion (assumed to include both the courts and studios / seminar rooms). We strongly feel that this should not be the default position that Council starts negotiating from in seeking funding support from the Saints Foundation or others but that some more flexible, multi-use and inclusive arrangement should be the default.

(9) The Friends of Southampton Sports Centre reaffirm their commitment to helping to deliver site improvements through both direct, practical activity and through seeking grant funding that Council itself is not eligible to apply for. We are sure that the many organised user groups may also wish to help attract grant funding for the site and urge Council to encourage and support all efforts aimed at delivering the finalised plan.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lynette Hand". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lynette Hand (Chair, FoSSC), on behalf of the FoSSC steering group, December 2015