

South Lakeland District Council

Ulverston Leisure Site Masterplan - Ulverston Tennis Centre

This is the written response to the representations made to South Lakeland District Council on the 10th October 2018 by users of the Ulverston Tennis Centre. It sets out the Council's current position and future course of action. It is presented as an open response, so that its content may be shared with all interested parties.

Representors presented their concerns over the future of indoor tennis provision in Ulverston. This followed the Cabinet's decision in September 2018 to take forward a further stage of project development work.

The Council still has to decide whether it will proceed with a new leisure facility in Ulverston. This next stage of work will furnish the Council with the necessary information to take that decision.

Representors presented their views on the importance of promoting active lifestyles, the importance of the indoor tennis facility to users and the locality, how provision had been reduced over recent years and, whilst recognising the importance of developing modern facilities, an interest of one sport should not be overlooked by the provision of facilities for other sports. They felt that the recent Cabinet report provided an incorrect starting point for the next phase of work, they sought assurances that tennis users would be engaged in the future work and that previous studies be made available.

Background

Since 2015, SLDC has been exploring the opportunity to develop a new leisure facility, to replace its existing ageing facilities in Ulverston. New facilities would be modern, fit for purpose, designed in response to user need and demand assessments and have the prospects to be financially sustainable on a revenue basis and be affordable on a capital basis. The work has explored the opportunity of working with GSK to create a new facility to supersede both the existing Council and GSK leisure facilities at a time when the existing site of the GSK leisure facilities was considered necessary to provide land for the then proposed Biopharm facility.

In July 2016, the Cabinet received a report on the outcome of the first stage of work which had focussed on whether in principle, a combined facility could be accommodated on the Priory Road site. At the same meeting the Cabinet also received and approved the South Lakeland Indoor Leisure Facilities Strategy and its supporting Needs Assessment. Links to these reports are provided at the end of this response.

Both these reports made reference to the indoor tennis facility, remarking on the structural issues the facility faces (Issues of condensation and durability of the existing roof structure), the absence of changing and WC facilities and the financial under performance when benchmarked against comparative centres, using the benchmarking data of the Lawn Tennis Association(LTA).

Consultation with the LTA at this first stage, together with the options work, concluded that an acceptable option moving forward would be the new provision of two indoor courts, together with the existing outdoor courts. (4 courts in total).

This first stage of work also considered and concluded that the most favourable option for the location of the new facility would be on the site of the existing tennis centre. This would place the new facility at the heart of the site, with good accessibility, parking provision, and enable its facilities to service the whole site and be most efficient in operation.

This position was considered in the July 2016 Cabinet report and was carried forward into the second stage of feasibility work. This stage undertook wider public and user engagement and undertook further work on the facilities mix and justification in respect of user demand. Consultees included the Lawn Tennis Association, Ulverston Victoria High School other National Governing Bodies and local clubs and users. The Cabinet report to the September 2018 meeting includes reference to the outcomes of the consultation, particularly in appendix 1 to that report.

In the development of leisure facilities projects, it is necessary to keep testing the mix of facilities and design with the likely demand and the operational business plan so as to develop a viable project proposition. This is an iterative process and will continue throughout the feasibility and design stages of the project.

In July 2017, GSK announced their strategic review of their Ulverston business, including the cancellation of the Biopharm project. Through continued discussion, GSK confirmed the scale of financial support they would provide to the project. This, together with the design process and business planning, necessitated the project to further consider its scope, including how the capital cost of a new facility could be reduced whilst still being capable of delivering a valuable range of facilities for Ulverston.

As part of this process, we looked at how the build costs could be reduced. An option is to consider a single storey facility rather than a two storey facility as envisaged by the first phase study. This would reduce the internal floor area, requiring amendment to the facilities' mix. An option is to reduce the provision of indoor tennis to the option of one court which could be provided in the sports hall plus the provision of an air dome over the existing outdoor courts.

Air domes are a current feature of the LTA's strategy for indoor facilities provision. A further option could be to consider a new two court area with air dome linked to the new build and the retention of the existing outdoor courts. It is acknowledged that such options and their alternatives have not been subject to further consultation at this stage.

The next stage of work

The September 2018 Cabinet report makes specific references that the next stage of design work will need to address the facilities mix and in particular the tennis provision. The following sentences are included in the report:

“The revised facilities mix will require further consultation and design with users and sport governing bodies so that needs can best be accommodated.”

“There are particular issues which will need further address in the next stage, most notably how tennis provision will be made.”

The next stage of work will take place over the next 9-12 months. As the design work progresses, it has always been the intention that the facilities mix will have to be refined and agreed. Situations change, including the funding environment and how facilities are designed. It falls squarely in the scope of work that we examine the options for tennis provision and how the original intention of 2 indoor and 2 outdoor courts could be achieved. We will work with the LTA and local users to do so.

A meeting between SLDC, LTA and the Council’s leisure partner, GLL has been scheduled in early November. Further meetings will take place with local users.

We will make available the studies to date, subject to the necessary redaction of commercially sensitive information.

David Sykes

Director People and Places

South Lakeland District Council

19th October 2018

Links to Previous reports

Cabinet July 2016

<http://democracy.southlakeland.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=121&MId=3767&Ver=4>

2 items –

Indoor Leisure Facilities Needs Assessment and Strategy

Ulverston Leisure Facilities Study

Cabinet September 2018

<http://democracy.southlakeland.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=121&MId=4462&Ver=4>

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