

**Notes of meeting to discuss proposal related  
to squash courts at Larkfield Leisure Centre.**

**19 March 2012 – 7pm**

		Action
1.	<p><b>Introductions</b></p> <p>Martin Guyton (MG), Leisure Contracts Manager, introduced himself and briefly described his role. He also introduced Kirstin Brimsted (KB), General Manager at Larkfield Leisure Centre (LLC).</p> <p>It was noted that 12 customers attended the meeting. MG advised that he had received a further 7 e-mails from customers who were unable to attend but had expressed an interest in receiving notes of the meeting.</p>	MG
2.	<p><b>Outline Proposal</b></p> <p>MG advised the meeting that the Council (TMBC) had approved funding of a capital scheme to convert the existing squash courts at LLC to a fitness studio.</p> <p>MG referred to the history of this proposal which included earlier consideration of new build provision of a studio at the rear of the Centre.</p> <p>The current proposal was based upon a number of factors summarised below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A year on year decline in squash usage – 15% in real terms since 2009/10. Only two competitive leagues.</li> <li>• Under utilisation of the squash courts with around 65% occupancy at peak times and 15% at off peak times</li> <li>• Increased expressed demand for group exercise classes</li> <li>• Poor exercise class space per member ratio at LLC</li> <li>• Reduced capital spend compared to new build alternative (approx 35%)</li> <li>• Lifestyles exit surveys that demonstrate attrition as a consequence of customers being unable to book classes</li> <li>• Attractive payback period on capital investment (max. 3 years)</li> <li>• Proposal would release peak time Sports Hall space currently utilised for exercise classes</li> </ul> <p>MG was keen to stress that the proposal, whilst considered an 'Invest to Save' capital project was driven primarily on the basis of meeting changing demand. He noted nonetheless that squash represented income of around £24,000 per annum and was falling. Health and fitness income continued to rise and amounted to in excess of £600,000 per annum.</p>	

	<p>MG stated that he was obliged to present a detailed design report to the Council's Leisure &amp; Arts Advisory Board (L&amp;AAB) on 14 May 2012 in which he would incorporate the outcome of the process of customer consultation. He stressed that any final decision to progress the proposal would be made at that meeting by Members of Council.</p>	<p>MG</p>
<p>3.</p>	<p><b>Questions From Customers</b></p> <p>A range of questions were asked by customers, summarised below;</p> <p><b>What was the Council's strategy in terms of leisure provision?</b>  MG confirmed that it was the overarching objective of the Council to provide high quality, value for money facilities and activities in response to expressed customer demand.</p> <p><b>Why not use a badminton court for additional classes?</b>  MG replied that the environment was not conducive to the demand of group exercise classes and customers. The conflict with other sports hall activities, lack of mirrors and air conditioning did not render this suitable.</p> <p><b>Why not convert a part of the Sports Hall into a self contained studio?</b>  MG admitted this idea had been considered briefly but not developed. MG was asked if he would consider further investigation into this idea and agreed to undertake some preliminary consideration with the consultant architect. MG was concerned that the proposal may have increased capital costs and result in less capacity than the squash court proposal. MG would also undertake a cost benefit analysis and consider any impact on Sports Hall access/usage.</p> <p><b>Why not convert the bar area?</b>  MG did not feel this was viable based upon the daytime usage as spectator/catering area for Larkabout and the overall operational compromise required.</p> <p><b>Why is squash not promoted more?</b>  MG stated that squash was advertised on the website and in LLC brochures. He admitted that it was not advertised as aggressively as other activities but that this was due to the potential market. MG noted that squash continued to decline nationally and reversal of this trend was difficult. The recent introduction of junior squash had met with limited take up.</p> <p><b>What timescale was likely if the proposal progressed?</b>  MG suggested that, should the proposal be approved at L&amp;AAB in May he would be advertising the work for tender thereafter. He expected the planning and procurement process to take 6 to 8 weeks and did not believe that a contractor would be on site any earlier than the end of July. In this regard MG confirmed that the junior squash course in the summer term would run.</p>	<p>MG</p> <p>MG</p> <p>MG</p> <p>KB</p>

	<p>A wide ranging discussion ensued regarding alternative development opportunities and polarised around possible conversion of a part of the Sports Hall. Issues related to the Disability Discrimination Act, secondary income from squash from membership fees and the advance notice given to customers of the meeting. In respect of the last point MG pledged that the consultation process would remain open until the report to L&amp;AAB in May.</p>	MG
<b>4.</b>	<p><b>Alternative Playing Proposals</b></p> <p>MG advised that he had been in consultation with Cobdown Sports &amp; Social Club regarding the possible transfer of members to their facilities.</p> <p>MG advised that CSSC had two squash courts that were in good condition and a membership base of less than 60 players. The annual cost (£76.50) whilst higher than LLC membership was offset by court charges that are considerably lower than LLC.</p> <p>MG stated that discussions with CSSC had been positive and opportunities including some capital investment by the Council in the courts, discounted membership for the first year and a membership contribution from LLC were all possibilities.</p> <p>MG believed that CSSC could comfortably accommodate increased membership from LLC and that, in fact, from the perspective of overall provision in the locality the advent of one thriving squash club was more positive than two failing facilities.</p> <p>The general view of customers present was that whilst opposed to the conversion of the courts at LLC they were keen for MG to formalise an offer from CSSC for individual consideration. MG confirmed that any transfer arrangements would be designed to coincide with the closure of the courts.</p> <p>MG also made reference to the Council's squash facilities at Poult Wood Golf Centre near Tonbridge. Whilst the location of these (4) courts may not be convenient for some members they were only 20 minutes from LLC. Again current costs are lower than LLC and MG pledged to explore transfer arrangements for interested parties.</p>	MG
<b>5.</b>	<p><b>Ongoing Consultation</b></p> <p>MG pledged to undertake the actions above and report back to the customer group in due course.</p> <p>MG thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.</p>	MG