

WARWICK DISTRICT COUNCIL

TO: LEISURE COMMITTEE - 21st SEPTEMBER, 1999

SUBJECT: HARBURY LANE - EXPANSION OF PROPOSED SPORTS FACILITIES

FROM: HEAD OF LEISURE AND AMENITIES/HEAD OF PLANNING

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 The report will bring Members attention to the expansion of the proposed sports facilities at Harbury Lane, and following the meetings of the Working Group, decide on the next course of action to take.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Enclosed as Appendix 'A' is a copy of the report that went to the Strategy Committee on 20th April which is included in full in view of the potential major implications for this Committee. Leisure Committee agreed that Group Spokespersons would form the Harbury Lane Working Group, and two meetings have taken place.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

3.1 At the first meeting, a number of issues were considered including if the very strong planning objections could be overcome, and how could it be funded. Some discussion also took place on the feasibility of refurbishing the Edmondscote Track rather than any additional work at Harbury Lane. The initial reactions of the group were that it might make sense to go for immediate outline planning permission, on a twin track approach (with sports hall and pitches and secondly with sport hall pitches, running track and all-weather pitch), to avoid a great deal of officer time being spent on working up the scheme, including trying to find funding, only to find that planning permission was not forthcoming (in view of the Planning Officer's comments to the Strategy Committee.)

3.2 It was originally envisaged this would be the recommendation to this Committee, but after further discussion with other officers, it was felt that this approach is not a feasible one as Harbury Lane is within an area of restraint and therefore exceptional need would need to be demonstrated before planning permission could even be considered. In view of this, the officers feel that if the Committee wish to progress this issue, the original suggestion of asking the English Sports Council (West Midlands Region) to undertake a feasibility study was probably the best option. In this respect, Sandra Roden was invited to a meeting of the Harbury Lane Working Group to outline her views on the facilities planning model process and the likelihood of Lottery Funding being available for this project.

- 3.3 Ms. Roden's views are encapsulated in a letter to the Head of Leisure, dated 19th August, which is enclosed as Appendix 'B'.

The key points are that although the Sports Council support any new sports project, Harbury Lane is unlikely to get lottery funding as the area in general is not one that is perceived to be short of recreation centres or athletic tracks. However, she felt a smaller community based scheme may fare better than the present proposals. Of particular relevance to the Working Group, however, is that Ms. Roden explained that the facilities planning model had experienced some teething difficulties and the officer responsible would not be in a position to process the Harbury Lane application before a minimum of 12 to 18 months.

- 3.4 The Working Group felt this was too long in view of the impending need to do something with the surface of the track at Edmondscote. A suggestion was made that rather than use the facilities planning model, a leisure consultant be used instead and the group agreed that this was the best way forward and if confirmed by the Committee, would be commissioned on the following basis.

"In view of the fact that Harbury Lane is in an area of restraint, this group feels that a case of special need would need to be made before a planning application could be submitted.

We would request that a consultant is employed to endeavour to investigate whether a case can be made for a full blown scheme of athletics track, stadia, sports hall and all weather pitch, or modified alternative, on this site.

In carrying out this survey, the consultant should look at the desirability of this site compared to any others identified in the Leamington/Whitnash area (or district as a whole), the potential for external funding and likely need/demand of the facility."

- 3.5 It was felt that if Michael Carey was available, as he had drawn up the Council's original strategy (which suggested the need for a recreational centre in the south of the district), this would be an appropriate appointment, particularly if the work could be carried out in the next 3 months or so.

- 3.6 In the process of the deliberations over this project, the following additional information has come to light which may have a bearing on the decision that the Committee wish to make. It is highly unlikely that the original proposal to sell off the Edmondscote Track along with the field next to it is feasible in view of opposition from the Environment Agency with regards to the fact that it is in a flood plain. (A report to Resources Committee on this subject will confirm this). However, it may be possible to improve the access into Edmondscote (this is currently being investigated) and the cost of upgrading Edmondscote (report to previous Committee) would need to be compared to the cost of providing athletic facilities at Harbury Lane if no other facilities are to be included there. It is considered that it would also be difficult to justify siting a new sports hall at Edmondscote for similar technical reasons that housing is no longer considered to be suitable. The forthcoming review of the local plan would offer an

opportunity to consider the whole issue of sports hall provision in a wider context, and the most suitable sites, if members wished.

- 3.7 Members may wish to note that as part of the major developments in this area, four football pitches and one cricket pitch plus associated facilities will be available to the District Council at no cost in Harbury Lane, and a community centre, which will incorporate 2 badminton courts, will be constructed in the 'Warwick Gates' part of the development, again without charge to the District Council.

4. COMPOSITION OF THE COMMITTEE

- 4.1 It would be useful to resolve the issue regarding the composition of the Committee. The minute of the Leisure Committee currently states that 'the Harbury Lane Working Group' should comprise of the Leisure Spokespersons, but this precluded the Ward Councillors or other interested parties. Members may prefer to add to Leisure Spokespersons 'or their representative'. As far as voting rights are concerned, assuming this will be necessary, this could be left to the group to decide or prescribed by this Committee.

5. KEY ISSUE STRATEGY

5.1 Report set out relates to Key Issues CO2 (to target resources to communities needs and priorities) and E4 (to encourage the state of the use of countryside to protect areas of restraints, maintaining the gaps between urban areas in accordance with the local plan.)

6. ACTION REQUIRED

6.1 Members are asked, in view of the information contained in this report, whether they:-

- (a) wish to proceed with employing a consultant to look at the issues highlighted in paragraph 3.4 and
- (b) if they wish to amend the current Working Group from "Leisure Spokespersons" to "or their representative" and leave the issue of voting rights to the group or be prescribed by this Committee.

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Background Papers: Nil

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Areas in District Affected: All