

Minute of a Meeting at Sobell Centre 7 July at 12.30

Present:

LB Islington Culture and Leisure Department:
Bob Gilbert – Assistant Director Environmental Sustainability
Mark Christodoulou – Head of Leisure
Dave Walton
Aquaterra Management (Centre Operator) Adrian Tribble
England Squash: Gordon Kerr
Local Campaign against Demolition: Barry Hill, Jeremy Corbyn MP

LBI Strategy re Sobell Centre

BG led by saying that he had replied to JCMP's letter (attached). The plans were a major piece of work. Various initiatives and reviews had taken place of LBI's options to deliver its ProActive Strategy and Action Plan and the thinking set out in the Sobell Leisure Consultation Brochure was the result. In short the indoor facilities were tired, the outdoor layout provided options to improve the facilities offered and accommodate housing. The community's leisure needs had been analysed by consultants (GK requested sight of the briefing and report) and a redesign along the lines of the advertised plans had resulted from this review.

JCMP commented on the lack of numbers and detail in the consultation exercise, GK queried the validity of a consultation exercise without a refurbishment option. MC/DW explained that the consultation had been widespread, 55,000 leaflets, plenty of local advertising and that 1 month to June 30th was adequate for the purpose. The results were being analysed by an outside consultant and would be available in due course. GK suggested that the consultation exercise was heavily skewed away from refurbishment, which he believed was the preferred route of the vast majority of users; MC maintained that if that was so then the survey results would show it. 1400 responses received.

BG referred to a similar exercise at Finsbury Leisure Centre (FLC) where the existing 4 squash courts will become housing. Decision not yet taken as to specific sports facilities there. LBI's budget is £24mm across the two sites. Refurb at Sobell had been ruled out as too costly - £48mm for the option costed (GK has requested details of the spec and costings).

BG further laid out the thinking behind the plans – LBI wished to attract users who would not visit a traditional leisure centre, he referred to "complementary leisure facilities" a definition which embraces doctors surgeries and a police facility which would feature in the rebuilt centre. He referred to the Phoenix centre at Sutton as an example of this new model.

GK stated ES policy to ask LBI to reconsider a proper refurb option and reconsult with this included as an option. ES have experience in situations like this and would like to see condition surveys, layout plans, design briefs and an indication of desired facilities in order to present an alternative refurb option to the local community as part of the follow up consultation exercise.

BH presented a note of the concerns emanating from the 650+ Sobell users with whom he had made contact. Concerns included:

- a) Implied link with 2012 Olympics
- b) Selective consultation with local residents

- c) Kinloch Park security
- d) Overwhelming support for refurbishment – why not an option?
- e) Concerns for Aquaterra staff security

BG addressed this list of his concerns, including the concern that Aquaterra staff would be displaced – they would be compensated for the 2 year rebuild period.

JCMP wanted to record his support for refurb to be investigated further and his opposition to the use of the Arsenal £1.8 mm s106 (Emirates Stadium) funds to be employed in this Sobell scheme.

GK expressed ES' concerns:

a) The admission by staff that ruling LibDem LBI councillors have already dismissed the option of refurbing, and undertaken a consultation exercise considering only demolition and rebuild (each option playing a varying amount of sports and leisure facilities off against varying quantities of housing, only to cite the absence of pro-refurb responses as justification for the view that the community wants demolition of the sports centre and housing;

b) The incorporation of "complementary leisure facilities" (as above, medical facilities and a police counter) within a sports and leisure centre. Those wishing sports to be played now have to compete for space in the sports/ leisure centre not only with gyms, but also police and doctors.

GK returned to refurb as surely the preferred route. BG had described the grass bank between the staff car park and the road as "inappropriate green space" and GK commented that he would indeed prefer his own house to be 6 feet further back from the road, but would never suggest that it would be economically viable to demolish and rebuild it for such a reason. Surely the same applied to Sobell Centre? BG disagreed and maintained that such a demolition/ rebuild made economic sense to LBI.

The timeline laid out culminated with a decision by LBI Councillors on Sept 11th. GK stated that that gave ES, hopefully with LBI's help, enough time to organise a balanced consultation exercise that he would draft within 2 weeks of receipt of the requested documents to give him time to prepare the refurb alternative. MC objected to reference to the completed consultation exercise as "a consultation" – it was "the" consultation". GK preferred to refer to it by the indefinite article and for so doing earned a rebuke from BG for "mudslinging."

The meeting ended.