

**MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC MEETING TO DISCUSS SPORTS PROVISION
IN DOWNTON HELD AT THE TRAFALGAR SCHOOL ON
WEDNESDAY 16TH JANUARY 2008 AT 7 PM**

PRESENT: Paul Leo, Chairman
Jenny Lawrie, Headteacher at The Trafalgar School
Dr Tony Howgrave-Graham, Chairman of BWSCA
Cllr Chris Hall, Chairman, Downton Parish Council
C/Cllr Julian Johnson, Wiltshire County Council
Cllr Ian Tomes, Salisbury District Council

IN ATTENDANCE: Bev Cornish, Clerk to Downton Parish Council

There were 250 members of the public present.

1. **INTRODUCTION:** The Chairman, Paul Leo, welcomed members of the public to the meeting and introduced the panel of speakers. He commented that members of the public should not expect to hear about a developed proposal for a sports centre at the meeting because nothing had yet been agreed and nothing ruled in or out. Tonight's meeting was to seek the views of Downton's resident and users of the existing centre before any ideas were taken further. If the community did not want to pursue the ideas, they would not be pursued.
2. **VIDEO OF SPORTS PROVISION IN DOWNTON:** A video featuring Paul Leo, Tony Howgrave-Graham and Jenny Lawrie giving the background to the idea to relocate the Downton Leisure Centre to the site of the Trafalgar School was shown to the meeting.

Tony Howgrave-Graham explained the poor financial position of the Brian Whitehead Sports Centre reporting that it was only viable for another 18 months. He said it was currently trading at a loss and as a charity was not allowed to continue trading at a loss. He commented further that keeping the status quo at the leisure centre was not an option. It had 18 months left before the funding ran out

Giving some history of the site, Dr Howgrave-Graham said that when it was set up 10 years ago the idea was that the social club would fund the operations at the leisure centre. However, the social club had run up a considerable amount of debt and Salisbury District Council was currently giving BWSCA a grant of £24K a year (£23K of which was paid to Beacon Leisure, the current operators). He said there was also a legacy from Stubby Sherwood and interest of around £4K a year was received from its investment. However, the capital could not be used for the general maintenance of the centre.

He said that he took over the Chairmanship last May and after six weeks of looking at the books and talking to Committee members and

others, he had formed the opinion that the centre was not sustainable. It was around this time that he heard Paul Leo's idea of re-locating it to The Trafalgar School and thought it was an extremely good solution.

Jenny Lawrie explained that the meeting was being held in the school's only indoor PE space for 11-16 year olds and it was a credit to current and past PE teachers that the school had achieved recognition for the quality of its sports provision despite the lack of a sports hall.

She reported that it had been a long-held wish to provide better sports provision at the school and its last Ofsted report had recommended it provide more indoor PE space.

Mrs Lawrie also said that the school was currently looking at how it could do its best for the local community and participate in the extended schools agenda set by the government. It was very keen to provide access to all its facilities for the rest of the community and to provide greatly needed activities for the youth of the area and to help them feel that they were beneficial members of society.

Mrs Lawrie said she was very optimistic about the proposal and that somehow the community would work together to help itself and its children.

3. QUESTIONS RAISED FROM THE FLOOR:

Q. Rob Buckett: Mr Buckett said that he fully supported a community sports centre if there were cast-iron guarantees that it would be open during the day and that any replacement centre would be better than the existing one and he would support a feasibility study along those lines. He said he would also like to say that any comments he had made previously were made before he had received the full facts.

Mr Buckett commented further that given the District Council gave financial backing to the existing centre 10-12 years ago, they had a moral obligation to support the centre until the new facility was built. In his opinion, he said, the District Council officers who agreed to the original funding must have known from the experience of the other sports centres in the district that the cost of running such a centre was not sustainable for a small village like Downton and this he considered to be at best, naïve and at worst, irresponsible.

Despite the lack of funding, Mr Buckett said that he considered that BWSCA had done remarkably well in maintaining the leisure centre as well as paying back half of an £80K loan to the LTA.

A. Jenny Lawrie: Mrs Lawrie said that she didn't think the use of the gym and sports hall would be an issue during the day.

Ian Brown, Head of PE: Mr Brown said that the timetable consisted of both indoor and outdoor PE and it would be a question of looking at the issue in more detail so that arrangements could be made to suit all parties in order not to generate real resentment from outside the school.

Paul Leo: Mr Leo said that he had worked over the last 12 months and over many years previously to get funding for the sports centre. A recent study he chaired into sports centre funding did not conclude that it should give more money to Downton but to look at how to go about closing Tisbury and Durrington - so there really was no chance of any more funding.

Cllr Ian Tomes: Cllr Tomes said that the District Council would be in existence for another 15 months and that it had got to set its budgets very soon. He said the District Council would look favourably on a proposal to relocate the leisure centre to the school and more inclined than in the past to give it some financial support, so it was important not to lose the opportunity.

Q. Kevin Burns: Mr Burns said that the leisure centre must be the most efficient centre in the county at £500 per month and it was appalling that it could not secure more funding. This was something he thought voters could do something about. Why don't years 7,8,9 and 10 use the leisure centre?

A. Jenny Lawrie explained that the leisure centre was too far for the younger children to walk, they would need extra staff to escort them and the timetable was too tight to allow them to spend time getting to and from the leisure centre.

Paul Leo: Mr Leo said that he could not defend the fact that there was no funding but across Wiltshire sports centres were closing not opening.

Julian Johnson: C/Cllr Johnson said that more and more pressure was being put on local government finances such as the NHS and social services and this had meant that discretionary grants had gone by the board. He commented further that there was going to be a new government regime in Wiltshire and he didn't know what grants would be available although Wiltshire County Council had agreed to honour existing grants from Salisbury District Council. He said he didn't have any information on the actual funding available at the current time but was trying to get a sense of the public's view for the proposal at the meeting so that he could, if necessary, make a case for the proposal to present to Council and unitary authority.

Tony Howgrave-Graham: Dr Graham said that an application for a £100K grant had been submitted to Salisbury District Council but he had very little expectation that it would be agreed. If the leisure centre were to remain, he said it would need £50K of funding per year which would need to be increased every year.

Dr Howgrave-Graham commented further that if a leisure centre relied on government funding, it would not be able to get secure year on year funding because regimes change. The added pressure of the Olympics coming up in 2012 meant that all available money was being diverted to the Olympics.

Q. Member of the Public Question: What is the capital cost of building the new centre and what is the revenue funding required to run it? Also, is it true that the developers of the allotment site would like to buy the current leisure centre land to put more houses up?

A. Paul Leo: Mr Leo said that they had not got the figures available because they wanted to see the village's mood on the proposal first. Figures were not know but purely as an illustration if capital costs of redeveloping the land at the existing leisure centre site would generate if say £750K and a similar amount of money came from Wiltshire County Council's education budget for the school site, it would fund the new build. The new centre would also benefit from some of the efficiencies of building a new centre such as cheaper lighting and running costs.

He said he had not heard whether or not the developer of the allotment site wanted to develop the site but if the village agreed with the proposal, it would need to use professional advisers to negotiate on its behalf.

Mr Leo also said that the revenue costs would come from educational funding and there would also be a lower cost base. Funding was more likely to come from the new unitary authority for a shared-use centre because it ticked more boxes required for such funding. If the site also had a youth centre, money would come from the youth service budget too.

Q. Member of the Public Question: Would it be run by a management company if the centre was moved up to the Trafalgar School site?

A. Jenny Lawrie: Mrs Lawrie explained that the school was not qualified to run a leisure centre and a management agreement which worked for both the school and the community would need to be drawn up with whoever was employed to run the centre.

John Foster, School Business Manager: John Foster reported that there were several models of a shared-use site in existence, in particular at Eynsham and Sherborne.

Tony Howgrave-Graham: Tony Howgrave-Graham said that as BWSCA was a charity it could not trade but would like to employ an independent management company to run the new leisure centre.

Chris Hall, Chairman, Downton Parish Council: Chris Hall reported that the leisure centre land was bought from the Longford Estate at an agricultural land price of about £10K. The Parish Council were the freeholders of the land but there was a covenant placed on the land which stated that if it was not used as recreational land, it would revert back to the Longford Estate and could be sold back for the same price.

Cllr Hall said that if BWSCA were to go into liquidation, the Parish Council would become entirely responsible for the site. It could not afford to run the centre without more than doubling the Council Tax for the village which would mean that it would be a very heavy burden on the residents of Downton.

Q. Member of the Public Question: Is it true that the building is to be demolished and re-erected or is there going to be a new building on the site?

A. Paul Leo: Paul Leo said that they had initially thought the current building could be relocated. However, it had been suggested that only the metal frame had any value and it would be more cost-effective to build a new one which could be built to a higher standard.

Q. Member of the Public Question – Louis Rhoades: I am a young person living in Downton and we have nothing to do in the evenings. We need facilities so that we can do things in the evenings so that there is something to stop young people from causing trouble.

A. Paul Leo: Paul Leo said that youth funding was available to put a youth centre on the site.

Youth Worker: The new Youth Worker reported that he had just been appointed to work in Downton and was based at The Trafalgar School. He commented that he had been surprised at his interview to find out that, unlike most other large villages, Downton did not have any youth provision and nowhere for the young people of Downton to go in the evening. From the young people he had spoken to so far, he said that all of them were excited by the prospect of the new centre.

Q. John Benson, Chairman of Downton Tennis Club: Mr Benson gave a brief history of Downton Tennis Club and how it had become an LTA satellite performance club which meant it was in the top 5 percent in the country. He said that it was a thriving, financially viable club and everyone had worked hard to achieve its current status.

He expressed concern that relocating it would mean that it would become part of the school and said that it was important that it remained a tennis club which gave access to the school because to retain its LTA status it was required to meet stringent criteria. He also said that it was important that it was run by someone who knew about tennis and not just a community facility.

A. Paul Leo: Paul Leo explained that the new centre would have to provide like-for-like facilities including floodlights for the tennis club.

Jenny Lawrie: Jenny Lawrie said that the sport of tennis had always been very strong at the school and certainly as long as Ian Brown had been Head of PE, which was 15 years. She said the school would like to continue to work in partnership with the tennis club and the move could be very positive if the new centre was to have like-for-like facilities.

Q. Paul Leo read out a written question from Roger Leicester: At the recent Redlynch parish council meeting it was confirmed that Downton was the most cost effective leisure centre in the Salisbury area. This is due to SDC allocating several years ago a fixed sum of only £21,800 of taxpayers money per year towards running costs. The sum now required is around £45K. It appears to be financial lunacy for us to allow a £1 million fitness asset to close for a lack of a few thousand pounds when the need to use such centres is being stressed. How can our not spending an extra £23K per year possibly be justified? (In the interest of brevity we have restrained ourselves from referring to the £1.5 million tarring up the square and the recent £150K spent at Five Rivers.)

A. Paul Leo: Paul Leo said that he had tried to get funding for the leisure centre over many years.

Q. Member of the Public Question: You have not given us anything concrete to consider.

A. Paul Leo: Paul Leo said he was looking to come back later with a more formal proposal but wanted to understand how the public was feeling about such an idea. He said the proposal had many hurdles to jump and that it could be turned down by Salisbury District Council or the Parish Council. If the community did not want it, it would be stopped.

Q. Hugh Lohan: Hugh Lohan said how nice it was to come to a meeting where the panel had not made a decision. The bottom line, he said, is that in a couple of years there would not be a leisure centre in Downton and the village had an opportunity to have the best ever sports centre in shared-use with the school. The village needed to look strategically and not tactically and consider the financial figures.

A. Paul Leo: Paul Leo said that if the meeting agreed to take the proposal forward the next step would be to conduct a feasibility study. He said Wiltshire County Council officers would be able to advise on how to go about conducting such a study.

Mike Hallam: Cllr Mike Hallam said that it would not be possible to relocate the bowls club to the new site but he issued an invitation to Mrs Lawrie to send some of her students to the bowls club in the summer months so that they could have something to do during their evenings.

Member of the Public Question – Luke Wordly: Luke Wordly thanked the members of the panel for giving their time to put together the proposal. He said it was a huge opportunity for the village and hoped that the community could work together for the benefit of the whole community.

Resolution: Rob Buckett put forward a proposal as follows: “This meeting supports the proposed feasibility study but requests local authority funding until the new centre is built and long term funding for the existing centre if it does not materialise”.

The majority vote was in favour of the proposal with a small number of absentions.

Paul Leo thanked everyone for attending the meeting. He said there would be another meeting as soon as possible. He also said that if anyone had any particular skills, knowledge or experience in putting together such a scheme, he would be grateful for their time and input.

He commented further that if anyone had any further questions or wanted more information, they could contact Bev Cornish, the Parish Clerk.

With no other business, the meeting closed at 9 pm.