

**Cabinet
20 September 2016**

**Head of Community and Environmental
Services Report No. COMM1612**

CONNAUGHT LEISURE CENTRE – CHANGES TO WEEKDAY OPENING TIMES

Introduction

- This paper seeks approval to change the weekday opening times at the Connaught Leisure Centre from 8.30am-10pm, to 5pm-10pm with weekends remaining unchanged. During the school day the only facility available to the public is the fitness centre during which time they average 15 users per day. The revised hours will significantly reduce the operating costs enabling the centre to become more financially sustainable and alleviate safeguarding concerns raised by the school around adult customers mixing with school pupils.

Background

- In 1989, the Council along with the County invested in new community buildings at both the Connaught Leisure Centre and the Wavell Cody Community Campus. This Council invested more capital with the County agreeing to cover more of the annual revenue costs. The County provided revenue of £40k pa compared to the Council at £10k pa for each site, with the Council managing the community provision.
- The County also provided a grant of £50k pa to the Oak Farm Community Campus with a grant of £10k pa from the Council.
- In 2011, the responsibility for managing the Wavell/ Cody community campus transferred to the school at the request of the head teacher.
- The following year, due to austerity measures, the County withdrew funding for community schools in Hampshire. This included grants of £50k from the Oak Farm Community Campus, which is now the Samuel Cody Specialist Sports College and £40k from both the Wavell and Connaught campuses.
- The Wavell school had already revised the operation of the Community Campus by providing more support from school staff in order to reduce costs. These reduced costs along with a reasonable development fund ensured that the withdrawal of grants from both the County (£40k) and this Council (10k) did not adversely affect the community programme at the site.

- The situation was different at both the Samuel Cody Specialist Sports College and the Connaught Leisure Centre, with withdrawal of the County grants putting the community programmes in our priority neighbourhoods at risk.
- The additional income derived from the provision of a 3rd Generation (3G) artificial grass surface at the Samuel Cody Specialist Sports College (£300k) and a floodlit 3G artificial grass pitch at the Connaught School (£600k) helped offset the loss of grants. This Council led on these projects, which were funded by grants from Hampshire County Council, Sport England and developer's contributions.
- The additional income generated by the pitch at Samuel Cody has enabled it to continue to provide an extensive community programme and this Council to withdraw its grant of £10k pa. However, having operated the 3G for a year at the Connaught Leisure Centre, due to increased local competition and running costs the site is still operating at a subsidy of around £25k pa. The Council also had a deficit in the development fund of £35k at the end of 2015/16.
- The Connaught Leisure Centre is in the Aldershot Park Ward, which has pockets of relative multiple deprivations in the worst 20%, particularly linked to poor health. It attracts around 70,000 visits a year and includes a thriving community programme of exercise classes, children's parties, sports bookings, Nepali community festivals and large events such as an annual model railway exhibition and the World Powerlifting Championships.

Connaught School

- Even though there have not been any incidents between the public and pupils, the Connaught school has safeguarding concerns linked with adults using the fitness centre entering the site throughout the school day and mixing with the pupils. Based on the low levels of public use, along with the need for this Council to make savings, it is proposed that daytime use should be discontinued with the daytime fitness centre members (around 15 per day) being assisted to use the nearby Aldershot Pools fitness centre.
- In line with the other community schools in the Borough (Wavell, Samuel Cody specialist Sports College and Fernhill), the Connaught school is interested in managing the Leisure Centre to improve joint working with staff. They will revisit this next year but are concerned that the Centre currently operates at a subsidy and would be more comfortable if it was financially sustainable.

Proposal

- To support the ambitions of the school and seek to future proof the service by achieving an operating surplus, it is proposed not to open the Leisure Centre during the school day. This will change the weekday opening times from 8.30am-10pm, to 5pm-10pm, with weekends remains as 9am- 5pm.
- It is felt that the removal of daytime access with its low levels of usage would see attendances, primarily at the fitness centre, reduce by around 5000 visit pa with operating costs by around £35k pa. The staffing will be adjusted to take account of the reduced operating hours. Since the introduction of the new 3G Artificial Grass Pitch, the evenings and weekends are busier and to provide additional cover we will appoint an apprentice to work alongside the duty managers.
- These proposals were discussed at the Leisure and Youth Panel on 6 June 2016 where it was resolved that we should consult with the daytime users and ensure their views are taken into account with any changes.
- We have ensured all members of the fitness centre received letters explaining why the Council was proposing the changes. They are aware that we have secured daytime use for the fitness centre members at the nearby Aldershot Pools, which is available from 7am. To ensure they can still enjoy a daily workout, they will receive a free induction and daytime use of the Aldershot Pools fitness centre, which will be included in their existing Centre membership for up to 1 year. We have also arranged for the casual daytime users to receive a free induction and they would need to pay a daily charge as they currently do at the Connaught Leisure Centre. We have received no adverse views but I will update members at the meeting.

Financial Implications

- In 2015/16 the total income was £192k with expenditure of £217k. The revised operating hours will result in an income of around £187k with expenditure of £177k, providing a surplus of £10k pa. This will include the withdrawal of our grant and use of any surplus to clear the deficit in the development fund.

Recommendation

- Cabinet to approve the Council change the opening times at the Connaught Leisure Centre as shown in this paper

Peter Amies

Head of Community and Environmental Services