

LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

EXECUTIVE

DATE: 8TH MARCH 2004

FROM THE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT

FOR ACTION

NAME OF WARD ALL

REPORT TITLE : FUTURE OF NEW BRIDGE PARK COMPLEX

FP REF NO: ES-03/04-189

1.0 SUMMARY

1.1 This report sets out for Members the main findings of a recent independent review of the new Bridge Park Complex and its key recommendations for the future management of the facility.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive:

- 2.1 Notes the findings of the consultants review of the new Bridge Park Complex
- 2.2 Instructs officers to implement the action plan appended to this report.
- 2.3 Agrees to improve staff accommodation and reception arrangements at the New Bridge Park Complex by expanding the area used by the service.
- 2.4 Agrees to use Capital funding as outlined in Appendix 1
- 2.5 Agrees to rename the complex, the 'Bridge Park Community Leisure Centre'.
- 2.6 Instructs Officers to set up the Members Working Party as set out in paragraph 7.9.2.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 The review report recommends the Council undertakes a zero-based budget exercise to ascertain the correct level of subsidy for the facility. The consultants suggest the subsidy level should be as outlined in the table below. The expenditure level is higher than the current level, which they believe is necessary to improve the marketing and to ensure the building is properly maintained. It is also predicted that this additional expenditure will be met by increased levels of income in future years. The projected subsidy figure required for 04/05 can be contained within the existing budget provision. If for any reason the final expenditure is higher it will be contained within the overall Environmental Services budget. Any reduction in subsidy in future years will be used for improving sports services.

Consultants Proposed Expenditure/ Income at Bridge Park for the next 3 years.
(£1000's)

	Budget 03/04	Projected 03/04	04/05	05/06	06/07 (Mature Year)
Total Income	539	497	518	621	701
Total Expenditure	959	795	920	920	920
Subsidy	420	298	402	299	219

3.2 Officers are developing a planned preventative maintenance programme for the Bridge Park Complex. A comprehensive programme of works is needed to ensure the building can deliver the recommendations outlined within this report. Estimates for the required works are listed within Appendix 1 to this report. £176k has been identified for Capital works at Bridge Park (£150k to be approved as part of capital programme to be approved at council tax setting meeting on March 1st, plus £26k carried forward in current programme). The works in Appendix 1 currently total £222k, so will be prioritised with respect to health and safety and implementation of the new policy to ensure maximum use of sports and community facilities, so as to bring the total cost to £176k.

4.0 STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

4.1 A new staffing structure at Bridge Park has been introduced as a result of the structure of the entire Sports Service. The introduction of a reception service will create a new post. Funding for this will be found from within existing budgets.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

6.0 DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The action plan for the centre includes the need to develop a pro-active sports programme for the complex. This will include sessions and activities aimed at identified low-user/target groups as identified in the draft Brent Sports Strategy. This will include young people, black and ethnic minority people, older people, women and girls, and disabled people. Proactive marketing will also be undertaken to encourage use by these targets groups.

6.2 The Bridge Park Complex is accessible to people with mobility difficulties. There is a lift to the first floor and this also 'stops' at the main function hall which is at a slightly lower level. There are disabled toilets on both the ground floor and the first floor. As with most buildings there are limits as to how many people in wheelchairs can be accommodated on the first floor at any one time. Officers are currently developing an evacuation procedure to address this issue.

7.0 DETAILS

7.1 The Council's Community Development Directorate took management control of the complex in 1996, naming it the 'Bridge Park Complex'. After a refurbishment programme in 2001 the Complex was re-opened and re-named the 'New Bridge Park Complex'.

- 7.2 An Audit Commission inspection report of the Sports Service published in June 2002 rated the service as poor. The report specifically highlighted that a considerable focus of the work of the service was on sports facilities rather than on broader sports development work, linked to achieving wider objectives such as improving health and community safety. At this time, the entire Sports Service was based at the Bridge Park Complex. The 'team' was split into three discrete areas of accommodation as follows:
- i) The Sports Development Team – a small office on the ground floor behind the main reception, with a partition wall to unit 33.
 - ii) The 'Sports Team' – an internal area known as the 'Sports Office' on the ground floor. This area is entirely internal within the Complex, having no natural day light, and is generally poor quality accommodation. The area consists of three small rooms, one of which is used as the 'Sports Reception' and one as the safe room which, until recently, contained a safe and was used for counting money. The third room is used as office space and general staff room, and is also used by the public when making sports bookings, taking out gym membership etc.
 - iii) The 'Upstairs' office – consists of three 'Business Units' located on the 1st floor which were used by the staff who administered the non-sports based activities within the Complex.
- 7.3 The structure of the overall Sports Service was such that the day to day operation of the complex relied on staff whose function was not specifically related to the management of the facility. There was a tendency for all staff to become involved in the day to day operation of the Complex to the detriment of achieving wider sports development objectives. In addition, those staff whose main duties were related to the management of the Complex had their responsibilities split between either sports or community functions and there was not a single team working across the whole facility.
- 7.4 In February 2003 Members agreed a 'Sports and Leisure Development Framework for Brent' which included a work programme of priorities for the Sports Service. One of these priorities was to conduct a review of the new Bridge Park Complex to determine its future.
- 7.5 Linked in part to the issues highlighted above, the Sports Service was restructured during the summer of 2003, and in August those staff whose duties did not relate directly to the operation of the Bridge Park Complex were relocated to Brent House. However, it was recognised that by doing this the level of operational support to the Bridge Park Complex would be significantly reduced. Consequently, to ensure the Complex is properly resourced and able to deliver an effective service, a new staffing structure for the 'whole Complex' has been introduced. This new structure consists of a centre manager, 3 duty managers, 4 duty officers and an admin and bookings officer. All staff now work across the whole complex and there is no longer an artificial split between sports and community functions.
- 7.6 Having completed the restructure of the Sports Service, independent leisure management consultants, Ploszajski Lynch Ltd, were appointed in September 2003 to undertake the review of the complex. In order to do this they were asked to consider a number of background documents (management accounts and previous

business plans), and to meet with senior staff, operational staff, ward members and users of the complex. They were also asked to meet with external stakeholders such as Sport England and the Stonebridge HAT and to consider strategic documents such as the 'Sports and Leisure Framework' and the Audit Commissions report of the inspection of the Sports Service.

7.7 Overall, the Review Report concludes that there has been a history of poor management at the complex, resulting from poor business planning, poor management standards and poor financial management. However, the Report also concludes that there is a role for the new Bridge Park Complex in the future, especially in the mid-term as an alternative for the Willesden Sports Centre during its closure period, and as a local sports and community venue in its own right. The Review Report identifies a series of recommendations that need to be undertaken to improve the current operation of the complex. These are grouped under five main headings:

- Set clear objectives and policies
- Establish clear lines of responsibility
- Put sound management systems in place
- Create and implement a promotion and marketing plan
- Set a clear and agreed bottom line.

The recommendations have been collated into a single action plan that is attached as Appendix 2 to this report. The following sections summarise the key issues identified under each of the main headings and the consultant's recommendations. These will be taken into account when implementing the approved Action Plan.

7.8 **Clear Objectives and Policies**

7.8.1 The Report highlights that there has never been an explicit statement of policy as to what the Complex's role in the community should be and how activities should be balanced in relation to programming and financial objectives. There is no statement of when sports facilities (especially the sports hall) will be available for sport and when they will be available for other functions. There is no statement of what activities are acceptable in the non-sporting areas of the complex, and of how the Council will act in regards to sharing risks with event promoters or how the costs of events are re-charged to hirers.

7.8.2 Resulting from not having a clear policy, an 'unwritten objective' of "income above all" has become the complex's priority. As a consequence, there has been considerable conflict of use of the sports hall between sporting and non-sporting uses, with non-sporting uses being given priority as the income for such events is higher. Sports activities and booking in the sport hall are often cancelled to allow non-sporting events that generate a higher income to take place. The result of this approach is that there is no real sports programme for the complex and it is relatively underused with regard to the sports facilities.

7.8.3 The Review Report recommends that an emphasis is placed on sports and physical activity and that the following policies are adopted:

- The sports hall is used exclusively for sport Monday to Friday.
- The sports hall be used exclusively for sport for at least two weekends in four.
- A pro-active sports programme should be developed including a balance of schools, clubs, casual and coaching use, along with a centre-organised programme of exercise classes focusing on 'target groups'.

- An agreed level of charges should be set, including use of the Brent Leisure Card where appropriate.
- The centre should provide community and family oriented events in the non-sporting areas.
- The complex should only hold commercial events if they are financially viable (i.e. are not subsidised by the Council) and are in line with the overall policy.
- The Council should clearly define what activities will no longer take place:
 - No large music events, raves or parties organised on a commercial basis.
 - No 'religious events' for periods of longer than a weekend, except for the Eid and Navarati festivals.

7.9 Clear Lines of Responsibility

7.9.1 At the time that the consultants conducted the review the new staffing structure for the Bridge Park Complex was not completed. The Review Report agrees with the need to have one management team with a responsibility across the whole complex. The report makes the following recommendations:

- The on-site management team should be responsible for sports and community services across the whole complex.
- Full responsibility for the management of the business units should pass to the Council's Property Team under an output based service level agreement.
- Duty managers and duty officers should be given specific areas of responsibility in addition to general supervisory duties.
- Responsibility for financial management and systems should lie with the Complex Manager.
- Set up a Members Working Group to oversee the policy direction of the complex.

7.9.2 It is recommended that the Members Working Group meets on three occasions each year and is attended by the Bridge Park Manager, the Head of Sports and the Sports Service Finance Officer. It is recommended that the Members on the working group are the Lead Member for Environment and Planning and the three local Ward Members.

7.9.3 The report also recommended that the staff accommodation and the provision of a reception service also needs to be considered. This is further discussed in section 7.13.

7.10 Management Systems in Place

7.10.1 The review report highlights how there is no operating manual for the Complex as would be expected at all other Leisure Centres. The report recommends such a manual should be produced following a thorough overhaul of management systems and should then be backed up by training for all staff. The manual should cover standard and emergency operating procedures, financial systems, health and safety systems and customer care policies and procedures.

7.10.2 The report also highlights the need to invest in telecom and IT support, in order to improve booking systems and to improve both management information and service to the customer. Such systems should help contribute to the overall achievement of e-government objectives.

7.11 Promotion and Marketing

7.11.1 The report identified a lack of promotional material and general marketing about the complex. The report states that it's not enough to "sit back and hope people turn up" and makes a number of recommendations as to how promotion and marketing should be improved.

- Produce a marketing plan for the complex, including the production of leaflets and price lists.
- Set up direct mail systems to let previous customers, sports clubs, community groups and schools know what is available.
- Rename the complex so that it is clear what the centre is and what it has to offer. The suggested name is 'Bridge Park Community Leisure Centre'.
- Develop a consistent 'house style' for use in publicity and marketing material and ensure 'Brent Council' is recognised on all marketing.
- Establish a customer consultation group in order to ensure customers are able to influence future developments at the complex.

7.11.2 The review report states that "central to the success of the marketing plan will be a change in the way that customers gain access to the complex". Currently the first people that customers meet when entering the building are security guards rather than receptionists. In addition, telephone bookings for sports facilities or for information about sports activities are limited to times when staff are in the sports office. If they are working around the complex then the phone is not answered. This is clearly not a customer friendly service and results in the loss of potential customers and hence income.

7.12 Set a Clear and Agreed Bottom Line

7.12.1 The report highlights a number of concerns regarding how the budget is set out at Bridge Park and how this skews the real expenditure and income across the different facilities. The report suggests that there should be better apportionment of expenditure and that with the improvement actions highlighted above additional income could be generated. This is discussed in more detail in section 3 of this report.

7.12.2 To ensure the financial position, as discussed in section 3, the Review Report recommends a zero-based budget exercise is undertaken.

7.13 Staff Accommodation and Reception Arrangements

7.13.1 The review undertaken by the external consultants identified a confusion of objectives within the operation of the Complex, poor operational standards and "demoralised and confused staff". It should be noted that the report also states that users were complimentary about the staff and that staff are aware of the shortcomings and are committed to improving the service. However, the staff still talk in terms of 'Sports' and 'Upstairs' staff and do not yet see themselves, and do not operate, as a single team. This leads to poor communication and an inconsistent service to customers. The review report recommends that the on-site team should jointly be responsible for both sports and community functions, which is actually what the new structure was created for.

- 7.13.2 The review report also highlights a number of other issues at the Complex which result in a poor service. These include the issue that visitors are 'greeted' not by a receptionist, as is normal at Leisure Centres, but by security guards. Whilst the security guards are welcoming they do not work for the Council, are not a part of the complex's team and consequently are not able to pass on information to the public about the Complex, (e.g. on prices and the programme). They simply refer customers to a member of staff. As a result of the historical split within duties, they may need to refer to more than one member of staff. Consequently, the system is not user friendly and does not meet customer's expectations of a quality Leisure Centre.
- 7.13.3 In addition, as a result of this split within duties and different areas of responsibilities, phone enquiries and bookings have to be made to separate offices. This again, is not user friendly and results in a poor and confusing service. In some cases, it results in lost bookings and hence lost income or double bookings and unhappy customers.
- 7.13.4 The issues highlighted above confirm the need for a single line of responsibility across the Complex, with a single point of contact for the customers, a single booking system and improved reception arrangements.

7.14 Proposed Future Working Arrangements

- 7.14.1 A single staffing structure across the whole complex has already been introduced in recognition that the split between 'Sports' and 'Upstairs' staff is confusing and results in a poor service to the public. It is expected that a full staff team will be in place by March 2004 and this team will work across the 'whole' complex. However, currently staff still regard themselves as two teams and a considerable amount of work needs to be undertaken to address this, including a considerable amount of work in relation to implementing new operating systems, and in relation to team building sessions and other training.
- 7.14.2 Given the significant issues outlined within this report, it is also considered that a reconfiguration of staff accommodation at Bridge Park would greatly contribute to the development of a single staff team for the Complex. The existing staff accommodation is of a poor standard and is relatively disparate and does not allow for the provision of a single 'block' of staff accommodation. Although the staff should be working as a single team they are based in a number of different offices spread across the building. There is a need therefore to find alternative space, of a suitable size, within the building in which to locate a single staff team with easy access to customers. Such accommodation should provide both office and staff facilities as found in most modern Leisure Centres.
- 7.14.3 In addition to creating a single point of accommodation for staff, there is also need to address the two issues of security in relation to cash collection and improved reception arrangements.
- 7.14.4 Reception arrangements – In line with the recommendations in the recent Review Report there is a need for a single reception area to improve the service to customers. A single reception point will be able to collect 'casual' income, act as an initial contact for bookings across all facilities within the centre, and provide information to the public. However, any such facility (especially where income collection is involved) will need to be both a safe and a secure environment.

7.14.5 Willesden Sports Centre is due to close at the end of April as part of a PFI scheme to provide a new Sports Centre which is due to open in 2005. During the closure period it is expected that a significant number of users (especially gym and fitness class users) will relocate to Bridge Park. It is imperative therefore that any reception improvements are completed as soon as possible to ensure income from this additional usage is maximised and new users are not deterred by a poor initial service.

7.14.6 Improved cash collection – since the ‘theft’ of money from the safe on the ground floor, all income and other money has been kept elsewhere but more permanent arrangements need to be made.

7.15 Conclusion

7.15.1 The Review Report concludes; “We are confident that the majority of problems at Bridge Park can be solved by simple, good management. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with the venue or the range of services offered and there is a market for these services in and around the Stonebridge area”. The Report suggests that if the actions outlined above are implemented, results should be noted within six months and full effects within 18 months. Financial improvements will require a longer lead in but should be achieved after 3 years.

8.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

8.1 Sports and Leisure Framework for Brent Feb. 2003
Ploszajski Lynch Consulting Review Jan. 2004

8.2 Any person wishing to inspect the above papers should contact Sue Harper, Sport and Leisure, Brent House, 349 High Road, Wembley, Middlesex HA9 6BZ,
Telephone: 0208 937 5038

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**CAPITAL REQUIREMENTS FOR BRIDGE PARK
ESTIMATES**

(These are estimates and may change following tendering processes.)

1.	Staff accommodation	£50k
2.	Reception Improvements	£20k
3.	Internal signage, inc H & S signage	£12k
4.	CCTV	£10k
5.	Identified H & S priority works	£52k
6.	External lighting + car park improvements	£9k
7.	Refurbish changing facilities	£11k
8.	Improve toilets, including disabled	£27k
9.	Sports hall lighting	£6k
10.	Reduce glass in dance studio	£3k
11.	H & S issues in function hall	£8k
12.	H & S issues in tropics room	£11k
13.	Redecorate conference and syndicate room	£3k
		£222k

(Budget available £176k, work to be prioritised as set out in paragraph 3.2)

BRIDGE PARK – MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN**APPENDIX 2**

	Recommendation	Action	Lead Officer	Implementation Date
1.	Set Clear Objectives and Policies	<p>1.1 Produce a clear policy statement on booking at the complex, including clarification on the balance of sports and non-sports bookings in the sports hall.</p> <p>1.2 Develop a programme of use of the sports facilities, balancing different ‘types’ of use and target-group sessions.</p> <p>1.3 Develop a new pricing policy for the complex, including use of the Leisure card where appropriate.</p> <p>1.4 Develop a new booking policy ensuring all issues raised in the internal Audit report are addressed.</p>	<p>Centre Manager</p> <p>Centre Manager/ Duty Manager</p> <p>Centre Manager</p> <p>Centre Manager</p>	<p>April '04</p> <p>April '04</p> <p>May '04</p> <p>May '04</p>
2.	Establish clear lines of responsibility	<p>2.1 Clarify staff roles and responsibilities within the centre, clarifying leads on maintenance, marketing and programming, staff development and training.</p> <p>2.2 Transfer full management for the business units to Corporate Property under agreed Service Level Agreement.</p> <p>2.3 Ensure robust financial systems are in place and overall responsibility lies with the Centre Manager.</p> <p>2.4 Set up a Members working party to oversee the operation of the centre.</p>	<p>Centre Manager</p> <p>Head of Sports Service</p> <p>Head of Sports Service</p> <p>Head of Sports Service</p>	<p>April '04</p> <p>May '04</p> <p>April '04</p> <p>May '04</p>

	Recommendation	Action	Lead Officer	Implementation Date
		2.5 Consider options for improving staff accommodation at the complex, with a view to embedding a single management team across the centre.	Centre Manager	March '04
		2.6 Review the current security arrangements, linked to the introduction of a reception service.	Centre Manager	July '04
3.	Put sound management systems in place	3.1 Produce a single operating manual for the complex, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) standard operating procedures ii) Emergency operating procedures iii) Financial Systems iv) Health and Safety systems v) Customer care policies and procedures. 	Centre Manager/ Duty Manager	May '04
		3.2 Upgrade the current 'club runner' system to improve security on income collection and to improve booking service.	Duty Manager	March '04
		3.3 Improve telephone systems at Bridge Park to create more customers friendly booking procedure.	Centre Manager/ Duty Manager	May '04
		3.4 Ensure all recommendations from internal Audit inspection report have been actioned.	Centre Manager	May '04
4.	Create and Implement a promotion and marketing plan.	4.1 Produce an overall marketing plan for the complex, including a design for a consistent house style.	Centre Manager	June '04
		4.2 Rename the complex 'The Bridge Park Community	Centre Manager	April '04

	Recommendation	Action	Lead Officer	Implementation Date
		Leisure Centre' and ensure this is embedded in all marketing and promotional activity.		
		4.3 Develop a leaflet for sports and community facilities to use in the interim period whilst full marketing plan is produced.	Duty Manager	March '04
		4.4 Ensure 'Brent Council' is recognised on all marketing and promotional material and internal/ external signage.	Centre Manager/ Duty Manager	On-going
		4.5 Improve internal and external signage.	Centre Manager/ Duty Manager	May '04
		4.6 Establish a customer consultation forum for the complex.	Centre Manager	June '04
		4.7 Set up a data-base for direct mail of publicity and marketing material.	Duty Manager	June '04
		4.8 Renew the security contract on a reduced day-time level and introduce a reception service.	Centre Manager	August '04
5.	Set a clear and agreed bottom line.	5.1 Determine accurate financial estimates for expenditure and income and set a corresponding budget for the complex.	Head of Sports/ Centre Manager	April '04
		5.2 Ensure all financial systems in place as highlighted in internal Audit report.	Centre Manager	May '04