

**RINGWOOD HEALTH & LEISURE CENTRE - GYM 816****1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Each year as part of the Expenditure Plan process the Health & Leisure Centres review their programmes and facility provision in order to develop any proposals which might meet one or more of the following objectives:
- Increased participation
  - Optimised use of activity space
  - Improved accessibility for all ages and abilities
  - Increased community benefit
  - Maximised Income
  - Meets Council priorities
- 1.2 The Expenditure Plan proposals currently under consideration include a scheme for the construction of an 816 gym at Ringwood Health and Leisure Centre in the space currently occupied by the last remaining squash court. The scheme meets all of the criteria listed above.
- 1.3 The Council is committed to the establishment of 816 gyms at all its Centres. This proposal is part of a programme of developments which aims to address many of the issues around childhood activity and obesity by providing fitness facilities designed for use by younger age groups.
- 1.4 The programme has already started with the establishment of the first 816 gym at Applemore in 2005, with further gyms proposed for Ringwood and Lymington in 2008/09 and Totton in 2009/10. There will be no proposals for New Milton included in the programme until plans for other developments on the school site are clarified.
- 1.5 In addition to the purpose built facilities, the Council has also developed a Club 816 which gives young people who join access to the Health and Leisure Centres' current programmes of activity at reduced prices. The club has proven to be a great success with a current membership of 270.

**2. OTHER ISSUES**

- 2.1 In order to maximise use of the new facilities the range of equipment proposed for the 816 gym can be used by a wide range of customers including older people, mentally and physically disabled people, health referrals and the deconditioned. It would also give opportunities to the school for greater student use.
- 2.2 The use for health referrals is a particular benefit given that health schemes are increasingly limited by the capacity in the gyms and the increasing difficulties in balancing use between those on the health schemes and full members.
- 2.3 When developing the 816 programme, the opportunity is taken where possible to increase income where the potential exists as this will obviously have an effect on the overall pay back. At present all of the schemes in the programme incorporate some level of extension to the existing gym in order to give the opportunity for increased membership. This is seen as an integral part of any proposal.

### 3. EVALUATION OF OPTIONS

- #3.1 Initially only the options for the squash court and main hall conversions were considered but following a meeting held at the Centre a number of further options were included at the request of the squash players. A summary of the options considered is shown in Appendix 1.
- 3.2 As members will see from the summary all but one of the options is feasible in construction terms and all the others have different issues relating to the effect on existing activities and income associated with them, some of which are major, for instance:
- The loss of a court in the Main Hall would seriously disrupt the school PE programme
  - The conversion of the GA Room would mean the loss of a highly popular and successful pre-school gym programme
  - The construction of a new squash court would mean the loss of essential storage space which would be difficult to replace elsewhere in the Centre
- 3.3 The options have been evaluated in terms of which gives the best overall solution in terms of utilisation, programming and finances. The option to convert the squash court gives the best balance.

### 4. ALTERNATIVE PROVISION

- 4.1 Given that the preferred option would mean the loss of the one remaining squash court the availability of alternative squash provision in the area has been investigated and the following locations have been identified:
- Bournemouth Sports Club – Christchurch
  - Ferndown Sports Centre – Ferndown
  - New Milton Health and Leisure Centre – New Milton
  - David Lloyd Centre – Ringwood
  - Two Riversmeet Leisure Centre – Christchurch
  - Littledown Leisure Centre – Bournemouth

All of these are situated within a 5-25 minute drive time from Ringwood Health and Leisure Centre

### 5. SQUASH COURT CONVERSIONS – PERFORMANCE TO DATE

- 5.1 An analysis of the performance of the squash court conversion to the 816 gym facility at Applemore and the squash court conversion to a dance studio at Ringwood has shown them both to be highly successful in terms of participation and income.

Facility	Annual Usage	Annual Net Income
Applemore - Squash court (1)	2016	£ 4400
- 816	10800	£14000
Ringwood - Squash court (2)	3980	£ 7851
- Dance studio	12769	£15307

## **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

#6.1 A summary of the Capital costs and projected payback for each scheme is shown in Appendix 1 and as members will see the most cost effective option is the conversion of the squash court which will generate a net income per annum to the Council of £45,500.

## **7. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 Provision of a purpose built gym for young people may reduce the incidence of crime and disorder in the community.

## **8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 There are none

## **9. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 Provision of a purpose built gym accessible to mentally and physically disabled, people, older people, health referrals and the deconditioned would increase the accessibility of the Centre to a wider number of users hence fulfilling the Council's policies towards equality and diversity.

## **10. CONSULTATION**

10.1 A public meeting has already been held at the Centre to which the Ringwood squash players were invited and their views have been taken into account in evaluating the various options.

#10.2 Mr Martin Bell (representing the Ringwood Squash Players) addressed the Leisure Review Panel meeting on the 15<sup>th</sup> January and a summary of the points he raised are included as Appendix 2. He has also expressed his intention to address the Cabinet at this meeting.

10.3 A further public meeting will be held at the Centre on the 23<sup>rd</sup> January at which the final proposals will be presented to a range of interested parties and prospective users including squash players, gym users, local parents, the school, local GP's and disabled groups.

10.4 The Town Council has expressed their disappointment that they were not one of the initial consultees. They will also be invited to attend the meeting on the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

10.5 The Ringwood School have been fully consulted and are strongly in favour of the proposals giving the advantages to the school curriculum, the strong links with the School's stance on encouraging healthy life styles in young people and school initiatives such as the Sports Leadership scheme.

## **11. REVIEW PANEL COMMENTS**

11.1 The Review Panel considered the report at their meeting of the 15<sup>th</sup> January and endorsed the Officers recommendation.

## **12. PORTFOLIO HOLDER COMMENTS**

12.1 The Leisure Culture and Youth Matters Portfolio Holder comments that, having attended the two public meetings at the Health & Leisure Centre and the Leisure, Culture and Youth Matters Review Panel, he sympathises with the squash players over their loss of facility, however having regard to the greater good that the 816 gym facility would bring to the community of Ringwood he feels he must support the recommendation.

## **13. CONCLUSIONS**

- 13.1 The Council is committed to the development of purpose built fitness facilities for young people in the form of 816 gyms over the next few years.
- 13.2 The principle has been extended to include other target user groups, and where possible to incorporate other elements of provision which will make the proposals more financially viable.
- 13.3 A number of options have been identified for the 816 development at Ringwood Health and Leisure Centre, and these have been evaluated in terms of their feasibility, effect on usage, facility provision, programme and financial return.
- 13.4 Although some of the options have individual strengths the best option overall is seen as the conversion of the remaining squash court. Alternative provision within a reasonable drive time has been identified.

## **14. RECOMENDATION**

- 14.1 It is recommended that Cabinet agree the option to develop the 816 gym and extension in the squash court at Ringwood Health and Leisure Centre.

### **For Further Information Please Contact:**

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### **Background Papers:**

## 816 GYM REPORT – RINGWOOD HEALTH AND LEISURE CENTRE: EVALUATION OF OPTIONS

OPTION	FEASIBLE			COST	PAY-BACK	COMMENTS
	816	Extn.	Studio			
1. Squash court conversion	Yes	Yes	Yes	£223k	4.9 years	Will obviously mean the loss of all squash provision which involves a small user group. However there will be increased opportunity for use by families, young people, older people, disabled, de-conditioned, health referrals and school students. The estimated increase in use would be in excess of 20,000 visits each year
2. Sports Hall conversion	Yes	Yes	Yes	£489k	7.7 years	Would mean the retention of the squash court but loss of a badminton court in the main hall. This would have an effect on the Centre's hall programme and reduce participation opportunities for young people and older people although the hall could still accommodate all of the team sports currently in the programme. The school education programme would also be seriously affected and this option is opposed by the school.
3. G.A. Room conversion	Yes	No	Yes	£100k	N/A	This option, although feasible, would have some major issues in respect of staffing and availability, participation for toddlers, young people and general users, and overall would not generate enough income to pay back the investment. Given that the room is remote from the existing gym the staffing and supervision would have to be strictly programmed thus reducing availability and increasing costs. It would also mean the loss of the popular pre-school gym programme and lucrative spinning classes and the existing income which they generate.
4. New squash court construction	Yes	Yes	Yes	£328k (incl. cost of store)		The construction of a new court in the area occupied by the existing store would be the most achievable and realistic way of re-siting the squash court. However as the court would be remote from reception there would be particular issues over access and the storage area would have to be replaced elsewhere in the Centre.
5. Reconfigure Existing Dance Studio.	Yes	Yes	No	N/A	N/A	The reconstruction of a squash court in the existing studio would not leave enough room for the provision of an 816 gym and a new studio, thus losing a substantial and popular fitness/ aerobics/ dance programme. On that basis the option was not costed.

**Presentation to NFDC Review Panel 15<sup>th</sup> January 2008****Ref: Proposal to close the squash court at Ringwood L.C.****Chair & Members.**

Squash at RLC has already been cut to 1 court 3 years ago and I and two of my fellow players have since then organised squash leagues at the centre in our own time and expense to ensure better utilisation and maximise revenue from the remaining court, as the Management was not prepared to devote resources to promoting/managing this aspect of the centres activity.

Most of the 25 league players who play at these times also play at other times during the week, as do casual bookings.

The RLC already has a considerable Gym facility the extension of which is the subject of the current proposal. This is under used (I supplied a usage survey to the representatives of NFDC at the Public meeting, made during a period of 8 days) and this indicates that there is significant existing capacity to be utilised (without the substantial expenditure which is envisaged in the current proposal) especially at a time when Council Tax payers in the NFDC area are being asked to pay higher than inflation increases in council tax, and economies are needed to even maintain existing services.

The current fitness suite was built some years ago, and additional equipment purchased and existing facilities updated some 2/3 years ago at considerable cost, and yet this 45 station

Gym has at no time during my survey (carried out at different times over several days) had more than 15 people using this. Yet it is proposed to close the squash court (denying existing users the opportunity to play their sport) and spend a further £223,000.00 to enhance the existing facility, and the spare capacity should be better utilised to provide the capacity you claim is needed for the 816 club.

The case for the expenditure on the existing fitness suite has not I believe been cost effectively proven over recent years, and the financial data provided does not give the complete picture of the investment performance/payback as all the costs associated with this facility have not been provided. There is in any case considerable under used capacity within the existing gym.

The options which have been suggested as alternative venues to play squash will either require players to travel in excess of 20 miles (return journey) when we are being asked to reduce Co2 by travelling less, or will cost 3 or 4 times the cost of playing on the existing court at RLC.

I have played squash for well over 30 years, it is one of the best sports for helping to tone the body and ensure physical & mental fitness as it uses many different parts of the body. UK Squash is also one of the few sports which can claim to have players in the top rankings in the world for both Men & Women.

The attendance (approximately 20 people) at the 1<sup>st</sup> public meeting at the Leisure centre was almost entirely made up of squash players. So where are the people creating this overwhelming demand for extending the existing facilities?

Additionally there are other alternatives available which would not require the ending of squash at Ringwood and at lower cost than the proposed scheme, such as:

- 1) Conversion of the equipment store. (equipment could be kept in porta-cabin/container type units)
- 2) Conversion of the Activity room which is not adequately utilised at present. (see my survey)
- 3) Use of the squash court as an activity area at none squash playing periods, with portable equipment or non equipment fitness programs.

In addition to the aspects I have raised earlier, I also would ask what Health & Safety issues have been addressed and risk assessments been made as the target markets detailed in this proposal include 1) "Mentally & Physically Disabled"

- 2) "Older people
- 3) "Children.
- 4) "Blind

What would happen in the event of a fire? This facility is on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor and the lift and stair lift would be unusable (power cut off) there is only 1 staircase at the gym end of the building.

These new facilities for this target group would be better on the ground floor either in the existing activity room or the conversion of the equipment store.

### In Summary

- 1) **There is currently substantial under used capacity in the existing fitness suite.**
- 2) **The financial data requested, substantiating the achievement of the original payback criteria (for the existing fitness suite) has not been fully provided .  
So how can you justify further investment when the existing capacity is not fully utilised?**
- 3) **Now is not the time to spend £223k when the economy and Council funding is under serious strain and is already in difficulty in funding its existing budgets for 2008/9 when council tax charges are already rising by more than inflation and average income increases**
- 4) **Closing the last squash court will deny Ringwoods Squash player the chance to continue with their chosen method of keeping fit, when 3 of the original 4 squash courts have already been taken to expand other activities.**
- 5) **The expansion of the 816 scheme can be effectively done using existing facilities without closing the squash Court or spending £223k, by using the existing facilities more effectively or at lower cost by converting other more suitable areas (for this target group) on the ground floor where there will not be the "high risk" Health & Safety Issues which this proposal poses for the proposed target groups, should there be a need to evacuate these groups due to fire or other emergency within the existing Centre.**

RINGWOOD Leisure Centre -survey of usage. - By M.J.Bell

<u>Date &amp; Time</u>	<u>Activity Room</u>	<u>Sports Hall</u>	<u>Fitness Suite</u>	<u>Dance Studio</u>
4th Dec. 20.00hrs	No use	half in use	12 users	No use
5th Dec. 14.30hrs	No use	part use	11 users	No use
6th Dec. 14.10hrs	No use	quarter use	6 users	No use
8th Dec. 11.40hrs	No use	half use	5 users	No use
9th Dec. 11.00hrs	No use	quarter use	4 users	In use-Martial Arts
10th Dec. 12.05hrs	No use	1 Bdmt court user of 5 laid out.	12 users	?
11th Dec. 12.00	Used as creche	In use	7 users	No use.
11th Dec. 19.00hrs	Table Tennis	In use	12 users	In use
11th Dec. 20.00hrs		In use	9 users	In use
12th Dec. 13.20hrs	No.use	No use	6 users	No use.

Further Visits have been made over the last 7 days with similar results to those above. On no occasion was there ever more than 15 people using the 45 station Fitness suite. On most occasions the Activity Room was not in use.

I am told that the School has significant time allocated to it during the week, if so they do not appear to making full use of this, and this should be reviewed when additional resources are required, for the 816 club, so full use is made of existing facilities.