

9. QEII CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE – RETIREMENT OF SQUASH FACILITIES

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PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to seek Council approval to retire the remaining four squash courts at QEII Park in order to construct an indoor sports science and training facility; built in partnership with the Academy of Sport South Island; fulfilling the Council's commitment under the 2007 Memorandum of Understanding between the two parties to establish a national centre of sporting excellence.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. In June 2005 the Council unanimously adopted the QEII Concept Plan via a special consultative procedure. The Concept Plan provides a framework for the future development of QEII Park. It recognises the need to maximise the potential of QEII Park for high performance sport balancing this with the needs of other users.
3. In August 2007 the Council entered into a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Academy of Sport South Island (AOS) to establish a national centre of sporting excellence at QEII. In the 2007 Annual Plan the Council resolved to fund the AOS a sum of \$200,000 per annum for five years to deliver on the on this goal. More specifically it was agreed that the parties:

"would work cooperatively towards developing the QEII centre and the city as a training, preparation and performance centre of national and international standing."

4. As a result the AOS, with Council support, mounted a bid with SPARC to establish one of two national centres of sporting excellence. Christchurch was successful along with Auckland. The establishment of the indoor sports science and training facility at QEII is essential to fulfilling the goals of the QEII Concept Plan, the MOU with the AOS and the obligations of being awarded the national centre of sporting excellence. It is also required to optimise Council's \$56 million investment in state of the art recreation and sporting facilities at QEII Park.
5. An indoor sports science and training facility is a specifically designed space where individuals, teams and groups can have access to highly specialised training, coaching, equipment and customised programmes without impacting on the general public's enjoyment of QEII. Its use is not limited to high performance sport. Under the QEII Concept Plan the use will extend to all sections of the community including:
 - Local to international sports teams.
 - Schools.
 - Sports and recreational clubs.
 - Community groups who have special needs.
 - Groups participating in Christchurch events eg Rugby World Cup.
 - Overseas teams and athletes coming to Christchurch in the northern hemisphere winter.
6. The partnership with AOS and high performance sport is financially attractive to the city with numerous direct and indirect benefits:
 - AOS have raised \$350,000 for the fit out of an indoor sports science and training facility and \$650,000 for other office, technical and sports science equipment over 2008 and 2009.
 - AOS will operate the facility at no cost to the Council.
 - Between 2001 and 2007 AOS have invested over \$1 million at QEII.
 - AOS employ staff to the value of \$300,000 annually.
 - Between 2009/2019 AOS anticipate investing \$10 million.
 - AOS are the catalyst that draws 20 (200 staff) sports organisations to locate at QEII.

- The ongoing “cross-pollination” of community recreation and high performance sport required by the Concept Plan and Memorandum of Understanding can only happen through organisations such as AOS, the Council can not assume this function.
 - Christchurch continues to punch above its weight in attracting major sporting events such as the FIFA U17 Women’s World Cup and the IPC World Athletics Championships.
 - Christchurch is producing World Champions at QEII eg Sophie Pascoe.
 - The Council has already made the vast majority of its capital investment in existing facilities, it now needs to work with others to reap the rewards.
7. A number of options were considered for the location of the indoor sports science and training facility namely:
- Building an additional space onto the main body of QEII.
 - Converting part of the existing indoor stadia.
 - Converting an existing building off-site.
 - Converting two of the remaining four squash courts.
 - Converting all four of the remaining squash courts.
 - Not proceeding.
8. The preferred option is the conversion of the remaining four squash courts because:
- It is the best use of a squash facility unused for the majority of time due to the ongoing decline of squash.
 - In 1991 QEII had 41,000 squash admissions forming 6.8 per cent of its total patronage.
 - In 2007/08 QEII had 19,800 squash admissions, 0.9 per cent of its total patronage.
 - Repeated attempts to promote squash have failed to reverse this trend.
 - Each court is used on average seven sessions per day.
 - The area of the squash courts cannot be modified to keep the courts compatible with modern standards.
 - The courts are encapsulated in the superstructure of the building.
 - Glass backs with viewing areas and removable partitions cannot be installed.
 - The Council has worked with Squash Canterbury to provide the best support for squash possible within available resources elsewhere in the city.
 - The Council has established a five court public squash centre at Sockburn.
 - The Council is supporting Squash Canterbury on making casual access to all the city’s clubs a reality through the “opening doors” programme.
 - The Council, by continuing to provide cheap casual squash, is undermining Squash Canterbury who see the future of squash in stronger clubs with junior, schools, competitive, adult and senior programmes.
 - There are a range of squash clubs across the city that can provide workable alternatives to QEII.
 - The nearest clubs include, Christchurch Football Club (Westminster Street), Christchurch Squash Club (Chester Street East), Linwood Squash Club (Linfield), Richmond WMC Squash (London Street) and the YMCA in Hereford Street.
 - A recent survey found that 92 per cent of players came by car, indicating that they are mobile and have transport.
 - The same survey found that 56 per cent of players came from an area with alternative squash provision closer than QEII.
 - There is a possibility that squash facilities that are able to double-up as a multi use recreational space through a partition wall will be incorporated into a proposed sports hub development at Rawhiti.
9. Ongoing feedback from QEII squash customers demonstrates that they enjoy QEII, it is convenient, cheap and does not involve club membership. They do not want squash services retired. Council officers will take all reasonable steps to relocate squash customers and provide a smooth transition. Unfortunately we can not keep everyone happy or offer to provide every sporting and recreational service at QEII.

10. Other options were considered but are not recommended:

- Building an additional space onto the main body of QEII.
 - This is very costly with estimates exceeding \$2 million.
 - There will be significant ongoing operating costs.
 - The squash courts are an existing built asset and not used for the majority of the day.
- Converting part of the existing indoor stadia.
 - The existing indoor stadia is extensively used by a wide range of groups. Removal of floor space will affect far more community users than removal of squash and negate the current advantages of having an indoor three court stadium.
- Converting an existing building off-site.
 - All the other specialist sports and recreational facilities, staff and organisations are based at QEII, going off site is not practical.
 - The Council has made an investment in facilities valued at \$56 million at QEII, it is not practical to take a sports science and training facility off site.
- Converting two of the remaining four squash courts.
 - The floor area of two additional squash courts is not large enough to accommodate a sports science and training facility.
 - It is uneconomic to invest in a specialist floor for such a small area.
 - The AOS would not invest in an area of this size as it would not meet their needs.
- Not proceeding.
 - Not proceeding would jeopardise the QEII Concept Plan, MOU and the Centre of Sporting excellence.
 - Not proceeding would impair the Council's ability to realise the benefits of the relationship with AOS detailed in section 6 of this report.
 - Not proceeding would negatively impact on the Council's reputation.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

11. The Council will spend \$650,000 on building alterations. The fit out and operational costs will be met by the AOS who have raised funding and are ready to proceed.

Do the Recommendations of this Report Align with 2006-16 LTCCP budgets?

12. The Council has \$650,000 in the Recreation and Sports capital works programme allocated to this project.

LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

13. None.

ALIGNMENT WITH LTCCP AND ACTIVITY MANAGEMENT PLANS

14. Yes, the recommendations support the Council's agreed level of service to provide accessible sporting and recreational experiences at all levels. It is consistent with the QEII Concept Plan, the Council's decision in the 2007 Annual Plan to support the AOS and the Council's obligations under the MOU to support a centre of sporting excellence at QEII.

Do the recommendations of this report support a level of service or project in the 2006-16 LTCCP?

15. Yes, the recommendations support the Council's agreed level of service to provide accessible sporting and recreational experiences at all levels on page 132 of the 2006/2016 LTCCP.

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIES

16. Yes, it is consistent with the QEII Concept Plan, the decision in the 2007 Annual Plan to support the AOS and the Council's obligations under the MOU to support a centre of sporting excellence at QEII. It is consistent with the Recreation and Sport Policy 1996 and the Physical Recreation and Sport Strategy 2002.

Do the recommendations align with the Council's strategies?

17. Aligned with the Physical recreation and Sport Strategy goals 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6.

CONSULTATION FULFILMENT

18. The QEII Concept Plan was consulted via a special consultative procedure and a Council working party with actions arising being fed into the 2006/2016 LTCCP process. The Council's support for the AOS was consulted through the 2007 Annual Plan process.
19. QEII management has an ongoing consultative and customer relationship with all of its members and user groups that arises out of best business practice. It is clear that existing squash customers at QEII enjoy QEII, it is convenient, cheap and does not involve club membership. They do not want squash services retired. QEII squash customers were surveyed in July 2008 to fill gaps in our information and satisfy requests for information by the Burwood/Pegasus Community Board. The survey covered the method of transport to QEII and the place customers started their journey in order to play.
20. A seminar was held with the Burwood/Pegasus Community Board on 5 May 2008 where the proposal to retire squash was outlined. The Community Board expressed concerns and asked for further information, this included:
- Concern that the Board had not been involved up to this point and a request to delay the process to allow the Board opportunity to contribute and for officers to consider the proposal in light of Board feedback.
 - That officers look again at the feasibility of converting two courts as opposed to four.
 - That officers look at all alternatives including provision elsewhere.
 - That officers look more closely at customers who played squash including where they came from to play and how they travelled.
 - That a tour of the site be arranged.
21. A tour of the site occurred on 26 May 2008. Officers reported back to the Board at a seminar on 18 August 2008 covering the Board's concerns. The details of the officer response are captured in sections 2 to 10 of this report. The Board issued the following statement:

"It is with reluctance that the Board acknowledges that staff have reassessed and now responded to the Board's concerns and provided a reconfirmed justification around the decision taken to retire squash from QEII Park.

The Board does however reiterate its major reservations about the inability of people on the east side of the city who no longer have access to public squash facilities. The Board therefore gives notice of its expectation that a squash facility for use by the public will be included as part of the sports facilities redevelopment at Rawhiti Domain."

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council:

- (a) Approve the retirement of the remaining four squash courts at QEII Park in order to construct an indoor sports science and training facility in partnership with the Academy of Sport South Island.
- (b) Note that officers will present an update on the proposed Rawhiti sports hub to the Burwood/Pegasus Community Board on 3 November 2008 and that the Council will be updated on the proposal through the Metropolitan Sports Facility Plan process.