

#### 4. REPORT OF THE QEII ATHLETICS TRACK SUBCOMMITTEE

<b>Responsibility</b> QEII Athletics Track Subcommittee	<b>Author</b> Alan Direen, Julie Sadler
Corporate Plan Output: QEII Park	

The purpose of this report is to submit the outcome of the investigations of the QEII Athletics Track Subcommittee into the replacement of the QEII Park athletics track.

##### **BACKGROUND**

The Leisure Manager reported to the April meeting of the Committee on the condition of the QEII athletics track. The present track was installed in 1991. It had a seven year guarantee and a 14 year life expectancy. Based on the projected life expectancy, funding of \$1.55M was provided in 2003/04 for the replacement of the track. Unfortunately, the track has deteriorated more rapidly than originally envisaged and will not achieve its projected life expectancy.

An evaluation of the track was undertaken in December 1999 by Mr Robert Jones, Australia's foremost sports surface consultant. In his report on the condition of the track, Mr Jones concluded:

“The existing synthetic surface has deteriorated, since the last inspection in 1997, at a faster rate than was projected at that time, which now leads to concern over several areas.

The high jump fan is in a poor condition and needs urgent replacement.

The areas of bubbling and delamination, particularly on lane one of the track, will increase as the average daily air temperature increases over the next few months.

Because of the track's condition in some areas, doubt must be raised as to whether it would still meet all nine clauses of the IAAF's Performance Specification for Synthetic Surfaces Athletic Tracks (Outdoor) January 1990. In particular clauses 1.1 Imperfections, 1.2 Surface Flatness, and 1.9 Drainage. It is a requirement of the IAAF, if international athletics is to take place on a facility with comfort and safety for the athletes, that the synthetic surface meet the performance specification requirements at all times throughout its total life span.”

On the issue of replacement surfaces Mr Jones recommended as follows:

“Given the delamination and bubbling problems which can be experienced with sandwich systems, which is the synthetic surface currently installed on the new Queen Elizabeth II Stadium track, we would recommend that consideration be given to the new surface being a solid system. Either precast such as Mondo, or cast-in-situ such as Recortan.”

The report, in addition to signalling the need for the early replacement of the athletics track, also sought direction from the Committee on whether the track should be located to another area at QEII Park.

The Committee appointed a subcommittee comprising the Chairman, Councillors Baker, Corbett and Sheriff to investigate the issues raised in the staff report and to report back to the Committee on the best option for the replacement and relocation of the new track.

#### **RELOCATION ISSUE**

At its first meeting on 14 April 2000 the Subcommittee addressed the track relocation issue and requested staff to report back on a range of matters, including:

- current usage of the main stadium
- consequences of not having a major stadium for athletics
- usage levels of other similar outdoor sports facilities
- current and future requirements of sports codes which are likely to use the main stadium
- the cost of relocating the athletics track

The Leisure Manager reported back to the Subcommittee, at its second meeting on 5 September 2000, as follows:

“A decision on the siting of the athletics track is required due to its failing condition and the need to replace and upgrade the surface as it nears the end of its life as an international and national life track. Funding provision of \$1,550,000 has been made for its replacement in the 2003/04 financial year of the Council’s 5 year Capital Programme.

The main options that are available for the QEII Athletics track are:

- Not providing a major international athletic venue in the city.
- Retaining the athletics track in the QEII main stadium
- Relocating the athletics track to another area at QEII
- Relocating the athletics track to another location in the city.

#### **CURRENT USAGE OF QEII MAIN STADIUM**

The stadium hosts approximately 60 athletics meetings per season. The Marley Games, part of an international series, attracted the largest crowd last season (1,200 spectators).

This winter, one Bartercard Cup rugby league match and four national league soccer matches were held at the stadium, each of which attracted fewer than 1,000 spectators.

QEII was one of the four New Zealand venues for the recent FIFA Under 17 World Soccer Cup with attendances of up to 9,000 spectators per day.

As a multi-purpose venue the QEII Stadium also hosted the World Wheelchair Games and is a major venue for the Supergames (March 2001) and the Children’s Millennium Games.

Previously outdoor concerts attracted the largest crowds. However, promoters now prefer to use the WestpacTrust Centre for these events. There is no guarantee of any future outdoor concerts at QEII. However, the capacity of the ground is 20,000 – a figure that should not change.

#### **THE CONSEQUENCES OF NOT HAVING A MAJOR STADIUM FOR ATHLETICS**

The existing main stadium at QEII Park is a major athletics stadium on a world scale with a spectator capacity of 20,000. The number of athletics events held at QEII since the 1974 Commonwealth Games that require this seating capacity has been limited. QEII remains the largest athletics stadium in New Zealand.

An athletics track that meets today's international standards would still be required in the city for our local athletes, for training and for hosting national events for competitors of all ages.

Removing the athletics track at QEII and re-establishing athletics to a purpose-build venue of 3,000 spectator capacity would retain the status of an athletics venue on a New Zealand scale. Such a venue would be comparable to other main athletics venues in New Zealand e.g. Auckland, New Plymouth, Wanganui and Dunedin, but would only have limited capacity.

#### **USAGE LEVELS OF OTHER COMPARATIVE FACILITIES IN CHRISTCHURCH**

##### **Jade Stadium**

Jade is the home venue for Canterbury Rugby NPC and Super 12 which involves 8-12 games per year. The New Zealand Rugby Football Union allocates one major and one minor rugby test to Christchurch each year.

Canterbury Cricket plays important one-day matches at Jade and New Zealand Cricket attempts to allocate one test match to Christchurch each season.

Stadium management looks to host a variety of other events but in reality their priority is to keep the turf in pristine condition which means that multi-purpose usage does pose some difficulties.

In all, Jade Stadium hosts approximately 20-24 events most years.

##### **Denton Park**

Primarily an outdoors concrete velodrome, which also hosts some Ellesmere club rugby. However, the ground is poorly drained and undersized.

##### **Rugby League Park**

Home of Canterbury rugby league. Club league and National Bartercard Cup matches are played at the venue. Bartercard Cup matches regularly draw crowds of approximately 700 spectators.

## **English Park**

Home of Canterbury soccer. Currently being redeveloped. National league matches, which have been played at Garrick Park and QEII main stadium this season, attracted approximately 300 spectators.

With the upgrading of English Park proceeding in the next few months, the demand on QEII for larger soccer matches should reduce to only major international games. Rugby League Park can cater for crowds up to 10,000. However, the need for a facility for rugby league of this capacity is in question and the cost of maintaining and upgrading their facilities is causing financial difficulties for rugby league. At some point in the future the velodrome and stadium at Denton Park will need to be addressed in relation to the needs of cycling. With the Council having a major financial interest in Jade Stadium it is important that we do not create facilities or environments to compete with this facility. The future of the QEII Stadium and seating capacity needs to keep this factor in mind.

### **THE CURRENT AND FUTURE REQUIREMENTS OF SPORTS WHO USE, OR ARE LIKELY TO USE, THE MAIN STADIUM AS A VENUE**

Rugby, rugby league, soccer, Australian rules football, cricket and athletics were canvassed, at a provincial level, for their opinions as to how useful QEII Park's main stadium might be to their respective sports in the event of the athletics track being relocated to another location within QEII.

#### **(a) Rugby**

The Canterbury Rugby Football Union sees rugby having a continued use for the stadium as a match venue. That is likely to be concentrated on club games but may also involve representative fixtures below NPC level. The Union will be looking for an affordable alternative to Rugby Park, which has been designated as a training facility.

Moving the rugby ground closer to the main grandstand at QEII would be an attractive improvement but the track relocation is only a secondary issue for rugby.

#### **(b) Rugby League**

It is likely that the Canterbury Bulls and the Canterbury Rugby Football League will become separate entities. The CRFL is unlikely to require QEII Park but the Bulls would be keen to play several games at QEII next season. They are also impressed with QEII as a training venue. The issue of the track is not one that concerns the Bulls greatly but it would be better to have the field closer to the main stand.

Their response was based on the premise that Rugby League Park would remain as home to rugby league. If that were to change their view would alter significantly.

(c) **Soccer**

A revamped English Park should provide a suitable venue for crowds up to 3,000. There has been no difficulty with soccer using QEII in the past and it would be envisaged a similar use of No. 1 and No. 2 grounds in the future.

(d) **Australian Rules Football**

The New Zealand Australian Football League Incorporated has inspected QEII Park and envisages the main stadium as a major Australian Rules venue in New Zealand. Such usage would be contingent upon the relocation of the athletics track. They believe that if suitable financial and promotional arrangements could be made, it may be possible to interest the Australian Football League in holding a major pre-season or Premiership AFL match at QEII Park each year, attracting over 15,000 spectators.

They suggest that relocating the running track and making the main arena all grass would maximise the use of QEII Stadium. Removing the running track and using the stadium for a variety of sports is completely consistent with stadium management in Australasia. All Commonwealth or Olympic Games stadia in Australasia (with the exception of our own stadium) will, or will have, the running track removed and the stadium used for a variety of events, e.g. Melbourne Cricket Ground, QEII Park Brisbane, Mt Smart Stadium and Homebush Stadium.

The NZAFL would have additional domestic use for QEII main stadium. The game is growing in New Zealand. Jade Stadium is too small for Australian Rules Football. However, despite the optimism of NZAFL it will be a number of years before the game becomes (if at all) a major sport in New Zealand.

(e) **Cricket**

It has been well publicised that Canterbury Cricket has experienced difficulty gaining satisfactory access to Jade Stadium at Lancaster Park. In conjunction with the Christchurch City Council they are establishing a second-tier venue at QEII Park's Village Green, suitable for matches up to Shell Trophy level.

Canterbury Cricket acknowledges a stadium venue such as QEII Park's main stadium may well be of use to cricket at some future time should the athletics track be relocated. However, they have no plans to use the main stadium for cricket at this time. Jade Stadium remains their focus for major internationals.

(f) **Athletics**

Athletics Canterbury's principal concern is that a relocation of the athletics track is unlikely to provide an adequate wind sheltered facility and would carry the serious risk of adding to New Zealand's already long list of poorly located track and field venues. In all major respects, the QEII track meets the needs of Athletics Canterbury. Competition criteria, the size of the main stand as a wind-break, tradition, the value of voluntary endeavour and expertise that has gone into existing athletic facilities at QEII and the new scoreboard are all important considerations for retaining the current location.

Athletics Canterbury acknowledge drawbacks of size and scale for local competitions and that a facility catering for 3,000 spectators would meet requirements for competitions such as Marley Games, National and South Island Championships.

Athletics Canterbury also make the point that they have invariably co-operated with QEII Park management in accommodating other users of the stadium and, as long as requests were reasonable, would continue to co-operate in this way.

Main stadium downsizing could be considered, allowing for a more aesthetic facility and pool entrance area, lower running costs and an opportunity to provide a higher quality, smaller venue.

**OPTION 1 - NOT PROVIDING A MAJOR INTERNATIONAL ATHLETIC VENUE IN THE CITY**

The complete removal of the all-weather athletic surface would be a very unpopular move for the city athletes and would reduce the city's opportunities for hosting events such as Masters Games, World Wheelchair games in the future. It would be detrimental to the economy of the city in not being able to attract and host these types of events. It would also impact on the performance of the city's athletes.

**OPTION 2 - REPLACING THE EXISTING TRACK IN THE MAIN STADIUM**

**Advantages**

- There are no additional capital costs associated with the replacement other than for the track.
- Cost of providing spectator, changing and event administration facilities at a relocated track would be avoided.
- Athletics would retain the ability to host events attracting up to 20,000 spectators.
- The Council still has the option of downsizing the spectator capacity of the main stadium, thereby reducing operating and asset maintenance costs.
- Would please a large proportion of athletes, coaches and supporters of the sport in Christchurch.
- The shelter provided by the fencing and stadium seating provides for better racing conditions than an exposed field.
- Traditional home of Canterbury Athletics.
- No additional scoreboard would be required as the new scoreboard would still be used for athletics.

## **Disadvantages**

- The cost of hosting minor athletics meetings/training in the stadium is more expensive.
- While athletics use the track approx 60 times per year, it restricts the availability of the stadium at peak times of the year for other sports events.
- The continued siting of the athletic track in the main stadium reduces the attractiveness of the venue for other sports. This relates to the distance of the pitch from the spectator facilities.
- The financial return from athletics is minimal.
- Atmosphere is difficult to attain in a large concrete stadium.

## **OPTION 3 - RELOCATING THE ATHLETICS TRACK TO ANOTHER SITE AT QEII**

There are two areas at QEII Park which could be redeveloped to resite a new athletics track and limited spectator facilities. These are the No 2 ground or the Ascot Field or Fun Park area.

## **Advantages**

- Relocating the track to another site at QEII provides the continued benefit of sports cross-training and multi-sports events being able to be held at the one venue e.g. World Wheelchair Games.
- Relocation of the track would retain the unique ability of QEII Park to host athletics and aquatics events at the one venue, an ability that has gained QEII Park an international reputation for cross-training.
- The removal of the athletics track from the main stadium would enable the venue to be more flexible than is the case at present. The stadium could then be used as a true multi-purpose venue, specialising in one-off events and as a support venue to the more highly developed Jade Stadium.
- The main stadium at QEII Park would be able to host rugby, rugby league, soccer, Australian rules and cricket on the main stadium ground with the benefit of the pitch being aligned closer to the main stand, enhancing spectator appeal.
- Specialised events such as international equestrian and motocross could also be staged in the main stadium (although that can currently not happen).
- Athletics would take place in a more size-friendly, cost effective location.
- The new track would be less likely to suffer from multi-use syndrome than would be the case in the main stadium.
- The provision of a second-tier sporting field within the track would provide Christchurch with an additional medium-sized venue for other sports.
- In the event of Christchurch successfully bidding for an event such as the Commonwealth Games, the relocated track could be used as the warm-up facility and new track laid in the main stadium for the duration of the games only.
- Retaining the track at QEII enables the utilisation of the QEII infrastructure and experience in hosting major athletic events.

## **Disadvantages**

- There are considerable additional costs associated with this proposal. These include forming a new base for the track, and providing spectator facilities, changing areas and toilets and possibly shelter for the track. Scoreboard facilities may also be required for major events as the mobile scoreboard may be only suitable for local events.

## **OPTION 4 - RELOCATING THE ATHLETICS TRACK TO ANOTHER VENUE IN THE CITY**

Consideration also needs to be given on whether QEII Park remains as the ideal venue for an international athletics track in the city. There may be other locations and facilities that may be more suitable and may benefit from the track being sited elsewhere in the city.

## **Advantages**

- There are no specific advantages of providing the athletics track at an alternative venue in the city, above those of relocating the track to another site at QEII.

## **Disadvantages**

- There would be considerable additional costs associated with this option. Land may also need to be provided if suitable Council land were not available.
- The infrastructure to maintain a new facility would be required.
- This would more than likely place increase demands on athletics organisations.
- QEII staff are experienced in hosting major events.
- A temporary track may be required in a major stadium (QEII or Jade) for a major event.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

### **The costs of replacing and/or relocating the track to another location at QEII or elsewhere in the city.**

The cost of replacing the track in its current location.

This information has been reported elsewhere but in summary, Australia's foremost sports surfaces consultants report that replacement of the existing surface with a solid polyurethane synthetic surface will cost in the vicinity of \$750,000. This allows for the replacement of the main track, including the water jump extensions, plus the high jump, the two javelin runways and the pole vault runway. It does not include the triple/long jump runway, which has just been rebuilt.



The cost of a new track and field facility with a solid polyurethane synthetic surface would be in the vicinity of \$1.02m. Grandstand facilities would be additional to that figure. The athletics facility at Logan Park, Dunedin included an 1,100-seat grandstand and extensive car parking (including a small vehicle access bridge) and was recently completed for approximately \$2.6m.

\$1.55m for track replacement at QEII Park has been budgeted for the year 2003-04. As previously stated the issue of replacement is more urgent than is currently reflected in the budget.

### **Additional revenue that could be generated by a modified stadium**

#### *Athletics*

It is reasonable to assume that a relocated athletics venue would return approximately the same level of revenue as is currently generated by athletics in the main stadium. Currently, the Council receives approximately \$15,000 per annum from athletics.

#### *Sports Training*

Stadium related sports training at QEII Park currently generates about four times the amount generated by athletics.

#### *Small Events*

There is little opportunity to return significant venue hire from these events (fewer than 1,000 spectators). The average return is approximately \$500 per hire.

#### *Medium Events*

It is possible to generate revenue in the vicinity of \$5,000 for events attracting between 3,000-10,000 spectators.

#### *Larger Events*

Significant income can be generated where events are able to attract 10,000–30,000. However for QEII these are generally one off type events.

Clearly, for QEII Park's main stadium to become an economically viable venue, a tenant capable of attracting large crowds on a regular basis would be necessary. If that is not possible, the stadium will remain an important support venue for a range of sports and events but it will continue to be subsidised.

### **OTHER ISSUES**

Opportunity exists to downsize the stadium thereby reducing the ongoing maintenance costs. This, however, is not desirable due to the stadium's position as an alternative major city venue.

Consideration also needs to be given on whether the wooden seating on the western side of the ground is retained as it is currently in poor condition and will need to be replaced or removed in the near future. Provision should be made in the capital budget to replace this seating in a more permanent form.

Some events will have a significant economic impact for the city in terms of the number of participants involved but it is only spectator sports that will have a significant effect on the financial performance of QEII Park itself. While this is relevant QEII still remains a significant city venue for a range of sports from children's to (possibly) Super 12 rugby. It is a city asset and should be recognised as important to city facility infrastructure."

After considering the above report, the Subcommittee unanimously concluded that the athletics track should remain in the main stadium.

In addressing the track replacement issue, the Subcommittee noted staff advice that, while the existing surface had deteriorated and was not in good condition, it could be used for another season. It would, however, not last until 2003-04.

The Subcommittee is therefore recommending that the funding provided in 2003-04 for the replacement of the track be brought forward to the 2001-02 financial year. It is recognised that it is unusual for such decisions to be made in advance of the financial plan process. However, if the track is to be completed in time for the 2001/02 season, preliminary work will need to commence early in 2001. Certainty about the funding of the project is therefore essential.

The Subcommittee's recommendation has been discussed with the Director of Finance who comments as follows:

"The Financial Plan has made provision in 2003/04 for this project of \$1.55 million. The request to bring this project forward to 2001/02 is principally one of timing rather than financial provision. It will have an impact of increasing budgeted debt servicing costs for 2001/02 by approximately \$34,000 and in 2002/03 of \$68,000 but after this the costs impact will be the same as has been provided in the long term forecasts (assuming the remainder of the funding is retained for other refurbishment at QEII costs). The impact on the operating costs of the Council is relatively small in relation to fluctuations which would normally occur in putting the budget together. In view of the urgency of this work and the lead time needed to do the planning work I am comfortable with supporting this requested change in timing."

**Subcommittee's**

**Recommendation:**

1. That the athletics track remain in the QEII Stadium.
2. That sufficient funding to cover the cost of the track replacement be brought forward to the 2001/02 financial year.
3. That the balance remain in the 2003/04 capital works budget for the replacement of the wooden embankment seating.