

Parks and Leisure Committee

Monday, 12th November, 2012

SPECIAL MEETING OF PARKS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE

- Members present: Councillor McCabe (Chairman);
Aldermen Humphrey and Rodgers; and
Councillors Haire, Hendron, McNamee,
O' Neill, Spence and Thompson.
- Also attended: Alderman Stoker; and
Councillors M. E. Campbell, Curran, Keenan
and Maskey.
- In attendance: Mr. A. Hassard, Director of Parks and Leisure;
Mr. G. Millar, Director of Property and Projects;
Mr. B. Flynn, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies were reported from Councillors Hargey, Hartley, Mallon, McKee and Mullan.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Proposed Redevelopment of Windsor Park

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 11th October, it had agreed to invite representatives of the Irish Football Association to provide a presentation on its plans for the redevelopment of Windsor Park. It was reported that Mr. J. Shaw, President, Mr. P. Nelson, Chief Executive, Mr. G. Wilson, Head of International Affairs, Mr. G. Patterson, Project Sponsor, representing the Irish Football Association, together with Mr. M. Haslett, Hamilton Architects, were in attendance and they were admitted to the meeting and welcomed by the Chairman.

Mr Haslett provided an overview of the plans to re-develop Windsor Park into an 18,000 capacity National Stadium and drew Members' attention to the following proposals:

- the refurbishment of the North Stand which was parallel with Olympia Drive;
- the demolition of the south and east stands to enable their replacement with a newly-constructed stand;
- the refurbishment of the stand at the former Spion Kop end;
- the replacement of the existing floodlights with lower level lighting;

- the development of ancillary office accommodation to provide a new headquarters for the Irish Football Association; and
- the incorporation of conference and community facilities therein.

He reported that, in order to minimise disruption to local residents during the construction phase of the project, an agreement had been reached with the Council to enable access to the ground via the Council-owned entrance which was adjacent to Olympia Leisure Centre and which ran from Boucher Road to Linfield's training ground viz., Midgley Park, at the former Spion Kop end of the stadium.

Mr. Shaw and Mr. Patterson outlined the twelve-week consultation process which had been undertaken by the Association as part of the planning process. They indicated that a planning application was due to be lodged with the Planning Service in December, 2012 with a view to work commencing in the September, 2013 and the stadium being completed by September, 2014.

Discussion ensued in respect of the feasibility of the existing Council facilities at Olympia Leisure Centre being integrated within the redevelopment of Windsor Park. The point was made that, given the existing adjacent Council-owned facilities, such as the 3G pitch and the leisure centre, a prime opportunity had been presented to the Council and the Irish Football Association to work in partnership to maximise the benefit which the project could bring to the local community, especially within the context of the Investment Programme. The Director of Parks of Leisure emphasised that any redevelopment of Olympia Leisure Centre would be looked at within the context of the Council's strategic review of its leisure services. However, he emphasised the Council's willingness to work with the Association to explore any redevelopment in the vicinity which would be mutually beneficial to both bodies.

In response, Mr. Nelson referred to the plans which existed to provide community and leisure facilities within the renovated stadium. He indicated, given the constraints for the delivery of the project, together with the limited timescale for the accessing of funding from central government, the plans, as presented, would form the basis for the planning application which would be submitted to the Planning Service in December. However, he indicated that this would not preclude the Association from working with the Council to explore future projects in due course.

Further Members emphasised the importance of the Association undertaking meaningful consultation with local community and political representatives at all stages of the delivery of the project. Other Members expressed their support, in principle, for the development and pointed out that the project should be regarded as a prime opportunity for a range of public bodies to work together to maximise the community-based benefits which might be delivered.

In response to further Members' questions, the representatives of the Association clarified the future management arrangements at the stadium; the legal position of Linfield Football Club as tenants thereof; the feasibility of the current floodlighting at the stadium being utilised by the Council at the Danny Blanchflower Stadium and the proposed crowd management arrangements which would be implemented on match days.

The Chairman, on behalf of the Committee, thanked the representatives of the Irish Football Association for attending the meeting.

The Committee noted the information provided.

Chairman