

**REPORT TO:** Executive Board  
**DATE:** 8 April 2010  
**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director, Adults & Community  
**SUBJECT:** Widnes Recreation Club  
**WARD(S)** Borough-wide

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 To determine a way forward for the provision of services at the venue previously known as Widnes Recreation Club.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATION:**

**(1) the Strategic Director of Adults & Community, in conjunction with the portfolio holders for Environment, Leisure and Sport and Corporate Services be authorised to market test for expressions of interest to develop the Widnes Recreation Club site; and**

**(2) following market testing, the Strategic Director and Portfolio holder be authorised to move to letting a lease in line with the approach as itemised in Paragraph 4 below.**

## **3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

3.1 Widnes Recreation Club was originally founded by I.C.I. as a Sports and Social Club for their employees in Widnes. In 1995 with the scaling down of I.C.I.'s employment in the area the club's freehold was passed to Halton Borough Council, and the membership of the club were given a 25 year lease of the premises through a group of Trustees, with a Management Committee responsible for the day to day operations. The Club was a not for profit organisation and re-invested income in the Clubhouse and encouraging sporting and community activity.

3.2 In recent years the Club struggled to survive financially. A combination of lack of income, primarily through the Social Club and the increasing burden of coping with urgent repair and renewed works meant that the members of the Club resolved, on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2009 to cease trading on 31 December 2009. At that point the lease was surrendered back to the Council.

3.3 The Council gave an undertaking to ensure that the operation of the pitches and changing rooms would continue, irrespective of the future of the Club. This commitment has been honoured.

3.4 At the point of closure, there were 7 major sports, 24 sections, 55

teams and over 600 participants using the sporting facilities on a regular basis. There was also a significant community usage of the indoor facilities, ranging from snooker, darts, photography, table tennis, indoor bowling and dance. It is understood that most of the indoor groups have been successful in finding alternative premises.

#### **4.0 THE FUTURE**

4.1 The Council now needs to consider the future of the site.

4.2 Whilst the Club supported the significant sporting activity, it also offered extensive facilities for catering, socialising and licensed premises.

4.3 The proposal now is to seek expressions of interest to undertake the management and development of the site in line with Halton's priorities, but with no additional financial burden to the Council taxpayer. The ownership of the site will remain with the Council.

4.4 As such it is suggested that: -

- a) Expressions of interest should be sought from organisations with the ability to manage the site as a centre of sporting activity, and a centre of sporting excellence, for both outdoor and indoor activity. Organisations should be able to demonstrate proven experience of managing a major sporting venue.
- b) The current level of activity should be maintained, but could grow to encompass different sports and recreational pastimes.
- c) All expressions of interest should set out very clearly how their vision contributed to Halton's strategic priorities, and in particular how their activities tackle the improving health agenda and involve and engage with community activities.
- d) Clear proposals for the management of the site.
- e) Proposals for investment into the site. The current clubhouse is in a state of disrepair. The provision of sports activities has changed since the inception of the site in 1925. Significant investment into the site is required.
- f) Clear, robust and sustainable business plans over the medium term that demonstrate the investment (e above) and revenue planning that ensures the financial viability of the facility. This presumes that management organisations would own the right to revenues generated by the improvement of the site, after entering into satisfactory leasing agreements.
- g) The Strategic Director of Adults & Community, in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder for Environment, Leisure and Sport be authorised to market test for expressions of interest, and to enter

into negotiations with possible partners to achieve the outcomes as itemised in (a-f) above, in line with Council Standing Orders.

- h) A pre-qualification questionnaire will be produced to be used to inform the evaluation criteria to select applicants. The questionnaire will cover the areas of

Technical competence  
Company background/history  
Financial stability  
Equality and Diversity  
Health and Safety  
Environmental Matters  
Quality Management  
Sustainability

## **5.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The current and future development of the site is in line with the Council's Sports Strategy.

## **6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 The basis of proposals would be that there was no extra cost to Halton's Council taxpayers.

## **7.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

### **7.1 Children & Young People in Halton**

The scheme will develop continued participation in physical activity.

### **7.2 Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

Increased participation in line with the Council's Sports Strategy.

### **7.3 A Healthy Halton**

Sport and physical activity is generally acknowledged to improve health and well-being and to contribute to the preventative agenda.

### **7.4 A Safer Halton**

Participation in sport can combat anti-social behaviour.

### **7.5 Halton's Urban Renewal**

The proposal offers the opportunity to re-develop the current site and significantly upgrade facilities.

## **8.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

8.1 A decision has to be taken on the future of the site. Otherwise it will fall into a state of disrepair.

**9.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

9.1 Any expression of interest would have to demonstrate policies and procedures in line with Council and Statutory responsibilities.

**10.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

None under the meaning of the act.