

Promoting Sporting Participation

Duration of the review July 2011 – May 2012

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Chair's Foreword



**Councillor Luke
Stephens**

In the year the Olympics come to Britain and with sporting fever set to grip the nation, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee believed it would be an appropriate time to launch a review into promoting sporting participation in the town. While at the start of the review we hoped to use the Olympics as a spring board, due to time constraints we have instead focused on the areas that we believe will leave a lasting legacy and ensure that Redditch has a positive sporting culture moving forward.

Time and time again throughout the review, the lack of promotion and knowledge of the facilities that Redditch should be proud to have was apparent and it is in this area that makes up the main crux of the report. It should be noted that the Leisure and Culture department has recently gone through major changes and have been running new initiatives running alongside this report. I look forward to seeing the success that they bring.

On behalf of the group I would like to thank all of the Officers who have helped us along the way, including John Godwin and Laura Kerrigan for their advice and support. Special thanks go to Michael Craggs who has been there to help and advise throughout.

Thank you to my fellow Councillors Mark Shurmer, Simon Chalk, David Bush, Adam Griffin and the late Robin King. It has been a pleasure working with you all and I am proud of the passion that the group has shared.

I hope that my fellow councillors will see the merits in the recommendations included and they can be a first step to creating a healthier and happier future for all Redditch residents.

Cllr Luke Stephens
Chair, Promoting Sporting Participation Review Group

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Introduction

This report presents the findings and recommendations of the Promoting Sporting Participation Review Group which was commissioned by the parent Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 201 to investigate how sporting provision in the town could be promoted and publicised more effectively to help arrest a recent decline in adult participation rates for sport in Redditch during recent years.

There were a number of original aims and objectives of the scrutiny exercise. These included:

- To review what arrangements are currently being made locally and nationally to use the 2012 Olympics to promote sport and raise participation levels and to discuss the possibility of staging local Olympic themed events.
- To consider what can be done to ensure that the 2012 Olympics boosts sports participation levels in Redditch in the long term. This could include consulting with participants at any local Olympic themed event that may be staged on what further provision for sporting participation the Council might provide.
- To review existing provision for sport in Redditch and to identify any existing barriers to participation.
- To consider how the link between increased sporting participation and improved health and wellbeing can be further strengthened and promoted in Redditch

During the course of the review, however, the Group felt that their efforts would be most effective in terms of helping to increase the overall level of sporting participation in the town by narrowing the scope of the review to place a clearer focus on their principal objective of improving the promotion of both the existing provision for sport in Redditch and also any upcoming sporting events and activities that will take place in future.

Recommendations

The Group RECOMMEND that:

1. **A new independent website be created to promote sport and leisure in Redditch, be maintained and updated on a constant basis, and possess its own domain name to give it its own distinct identity.**
2. **That Officers undertake a review into the possibility of creating new branding for Redditch Sports and Leisure to help compliment the new independent website.**
3. **That the Council look to maximise the benefits of parks and green spaces in Redditch by introducing more informal games areas to help increase sporting participation and physical activity in the local area.**
4. **That the Council give its full support to the introduction of new events to promote sport and physical recreation, individual sports clubs, and increased sporting participation in Redditch.**
5. **That the Council work closely with NEW College to enable its students the opportunity to support these new sporting events on a voluntary basis.**

Background

The Promoting Sporting Participation Review was launched in an attempt to draw upon the expected increased interest in sport that London's hosting of the 2012 Olympics promises to generate by making more residents aware of what opportunities are available for them to play sport locally. For many people, the staging of a Olympic Games in the UK is likely to be a once in a lifetime event. It was consequently agreed that this would be a very timely opportunity to undertake a review of how to best promote the considerable benefits that can be accrued through playing sport when public interest is likely to be at its very peak.

The recent decline in adult participation rates for sport in town added a greater local significance to using the Olympics as a springboard to improve the public's awareness of sporting provision in the Borough. Immediately prior to the review, Redditch possessed the second lowest rate for sporting participation in Worcestershire, with fewer than 21% of adults participating in sport and active recreation, at moderate intensity, for at least 30 minutes on 3 or more days a week. Indeed, figures suggested that there had been an especially sharp decline in sporting participation levels in Redditch for people between the ages of 16 and 54. Adult sporting participation in Redditch had declined year on year since 2005 according to NI 8 figures which measures adult participation in sport and active recreation. By October 2011, after the start of the review, this figure had declined still further, with less than 1 in 5 adults now playing sport in Redditch on a regular basis.

During the very early stages of the review, the Borough Council's Leisure and Cultural Services Department underwent restructuring due to the advent of shared services with Bromsgrove District Council. Under the new arrangements, the Council's Sports Centres and Sports Development Team were to be placed within a central Sports Development Unit to serve both councils. It was expected that this would lead to improved coordination of the local provision for sport. These significant changes have been taken into account by the Group during its investigations.

Evidence Gathering

During the course of the review, the Group met with Officers from the Council's newly established Sports Development Unit on a number of occasions to gain a much clearer understanding of what actions were being taken to increase the overall number of people playing sport, or at least being more physically active, in Redditch on a regular basis. The Group has been informed of what is being done to improve the quality of sporting provision for many areas of the local population, including young people, adults, and disabled residents.

Members also met with relevant Officers from the Communications and Information Technology Departments to establish how sporting provision in Redditch was being publicised and communicated via the Council's own website, and to determine how the Council could make it easier for local residents to find out about what opportunities there were for them to play sport in Redditch.

A key aspect of the review has been an investigation into how opportunities to play sport are being communicated in other areas, in particular via online media, and whether some of these practices could be replicated locally. As part of this, local authorities that had created their own standalone websites to promote and publicise sporting activities in their area were contacted to help Members develop an understanding of how these websites were resourced and whether the level of information on the Borough Council's own website about sport could be improved.

The Group produced two questionnaires to give sporting providers and participants in Redditch the opportunity to feedback their suggestions on how information about sport in the town could be made more easily accessible and whether there was anything specific that the Council could do to improve either the level of available information or access to this information. Over thirty local sports clubs received both versions of the questionnaires to give the club itself and also its members the opportunity provide feedback. The questionnaire aimed at anyone who played sport in Redditch was also widely distributed to sports centres across the Borough and was posted on the front page of the Council's website throughout the consultation period. Unfortunately, however, the Group received a very limited number of responses to either questionnaire.

Current Activities

Members were informed during their investigations that there is already a considerable number of opportunities for people of all ages in Redditch to play sport. They were especially pleased that the Sports Development Unit has already been effective in facilitating a number of these opportunities, a few of which are outlined below:

Abbey Stadium Sports Event (27th May 2012) – A free event which will provide residents of all ages in Redditch the opportunity to meet nearly fifty local sports clubs and to take part in free taster sessions. Local clubs will therefore be able to showcase what they do to help generate increased interest.

Bromsgrove and Redditch School Games (September 2012) – A highly successful annual event which usually takes place during the Lloyds TSB National School Sport Week. This helps to raise the profile of sport among young people and provides opportunities for them to try out new sports. It can also help the schools to develop stronger links with local clubs, other schools, and the wider community.

BRAVO (Bromsgrove and Redditch Active Volunteering Opportunities) (expected to launch September 2012) – a programme to be run with a variety of local partners which will provide many volunteering opportunities for local people.

Sport Makers - National 2012 Olympic Volunteering programme. All new students or members of BRAVO to complete as part of their induction.

Join in – Local Sport (August 2012) – A national campaign that is looking to capitalise on the Olympic-effect and hopefully get thousands of people trying new sports and activities immediately after the Olympic Games. This will invite sports clubs and facilities across the country to open their doors and offer activities during this weekend.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

The Group RECOMMEND that:

A new independent website be created to promote sport and leisure in Redditch, be maintained and updated on a constant basis, and possess its own domain name to give it its own distinct identity.

The Group feels that the creation of a new independent website to help communicate information about sport in Redditch is essential if sporting participation rates in the town are to be increased. From the outset of the review, the Group was of the opinion that Redditch residents needed a central online resource where they could easily find out about all of the sporting activities that were taking place in the town irrespective of the provider.

Having researched the arrangements for promoting sport at other local authorities, it became increasingly evident to the Group that it is easier for residents in many other locations to access information about how, where, and when they could play sport due to the operation of a dedicated website to provide information about playing sport in that given area. The Group is aware that these websites are updated on a regular basis to ensure that the information about sporting activities remains up to date and credible for the user. In a number of cases, independent sports clubs in a particular location are given the opportunity to register their details and activities with a website controlled by a local authority, significantly increasing the information about sport that appears on the website and is available for users to access.

The Group feels that the creation of a similar online database facility in Redditch, giving the many sports clubs in the town the option to register their events and activities, can make it far easier for its residents to obtain information about playing sport in the Borough. Furthermore, the Group believes that this facility can be easily maintained by Council Officers if they can be simply required to check the information submitted by the club and approve this where appropriate.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1 The Group strongly suggests that a new independent website to promote sport in Redditch should possess its own distinct image and identity if it is to operate successfully and believe that a clear emphasis must be placed on promoting sport in Redditch regardless of the provider. Members therefore feel that this prospective new website and be given the freedom to operate independently from the Council's corporate format.

The Group is aware that bespoke websites have already been created by the Council to promote specific venues in the town, including both the Forge Mill Needle Museum and the Palace Theatre. These operate as subsidiary websites to the Council's own website with each possessing its own distinct appearance from the Council's corporate image, despite being hosted by the Council. Referring to these examples, the Group believes that a similar subsidiary website should be created to focus specifically on promoting sport and leisure in Redditch. This could be simple to develop and require relatively little cost to maintain. Members have been informed that it would cost the Council very little to purchase a new domain.

Members of the Group feel that it would be more likely that the prospective website would be accessed by local residents through internet searches if it is given relatively simple domain name, for example Redditch Sports and Leisure. They suggest that not only would this would help explain the main purpose of the website in acting as a central point of information for sport and leisure activities in the town, but that it would also increase the possibility of closely matching internet search engine entries. Members are also aware that relevant Officers are increasingly able to manipulate search engines to prioritise Council information towards the very top of search results. The Group therefore believe that the website can quickly become a prominent online resource for obtaining information about how, where and when people can play sport in Redditch.

Recommendations

Recommendation 2

The Group RECOMMEND that:

That Officers undertake a review into the possibility of creating new branding for Redditch Sports and Leisure to help compliment the new independent website.

Closely aligned to the previous recommendation, the Group feels that Officers should undertake a review into the possibility of introducing new branding to help promote sport in Redditch. Members believe that the creation of a independent website to focus on sport, together with an expected boom of public interest in playing sport due to the upcoming Olympics, represents an ideal opportunity to create fresh branding to help produce a distinct and positive sporting image for the town.

The Group is aware that the new Sports Development Unit (SDU) in Redditch is already helping to enhance the overall quality of sporting provision in the town, not least by enabling many sports clubs in the Borough to develop and to improve the standard of their operations. Members feel that the creation of a local sporting brand can help to capture a new positive image for sport in the town built upon these improvements that the SDU is making to sporting provision in Redditch.

The Group suggests that the prospective new branding should feature prominently on the new website to promote sport as opposed to the standard Council logo. Members feel that users visiting this section website would be principally interested in finding out about how, where, and when they could play sport in the Borough, regardless of whether this was Council operated or not. In this sense, prominently displaying Council branding and imagery on the new website would not necessarily add any value to it in terms of communicating information about all sport in the Borough. The Group therefore believes that the development of new branding for sport in Redditch would be important in complimenting the bespoke new website independent from Council imagery.

Recommendations

Recommendation 3

The Group RECOMMEND that:

That the Council look to maximise the benefits of parks and green spaces in Redditch by introducing more informal games areas to help increase sporting participation and physical activity in the local area.

The Group believes that more can be done to maximise the benefits of Redditch's many parks and green spaces by increasing the number of opportunities for local residents to play sport, or at least become more physically active, in the Borough.

In particular, Members feel that more young people should be given the opportunity to play sport without supervision and at little or no cost. The Group therefore suggests that the creation of more informal games areas, for example the introduction of rounders / softball diamonds, volleyball / badminton courts, and table tennis tables in suitable park facilities, can provide these young people with more opportunities to play sport for fun without the initial need to sign up to a sports club. It is hoped that this will encourage more young people to play sport on a more regular basis by giving them a taste of the many benefits that are associated with being physically active in a social setting. Indeed, the Group believes that the increased provision of informal sport within the town can help encourage many of these young people to eventually play organised sport as part of a club in the longer term.

The Group was informed during its investigations that many young people find it difficult to use sports facilities in Redditch, for example, Astro turf pitches, due to strong local demand. The Group therefore suggests that it is imperative that new infrastructure is created to help utilise the parks and green spaces in the town more widely to give these residents more opportunities to play sport. Furthermore, it is more likely that young people will play sport, or at least be more physically active, if their parents are also involved. The Group therefore suggests that the Council should facilitate more family fun days that would enable sporting activities to take place in a fun and safe

Recommendations

Recommendation 3

environment. Members feel that should more families be given the chance to play games in the park then it is more likely than young people will continue to pursue this opportunity separately.

The Group is also aware that the recent installation of an outside gym situated at Arrow Valley Lake has also been successful in enabling more residents to become more physically active at minimal cost. Members feel that the potential installation of similar facilities in other suitable areas within the town should therefore be explored.

The Group understands that the Sports Development Unit is already introducing more opportunities for sport in these locations. One such example includes the installation of outdoor table tennis tables in Morton Stanley Park. Members feel any replication of the success of Ping!, which witnessed over 100,000 people across the country playing table tennis in a variety of city centre locations in 2011, including Birmingham, can only be good for the town. The Group feels that more opportunities should also be facilitated for other sports by creating more sporting infrastructure, for example dual use volleyball / badminton courts, to help increase wider participation in sport.

There are financial implications for this recommendation. Estimated costs are described below:

Installation of table tennis tables: A circular shaped table suitable for numerous players with a fixed net providing for separate or games in the round would cost £3799.00 with installation into a block paved hard standing costing £490. Total cost around £4289.

Installation of badminton / volleyball courts: The cost of marking the court would be minimal, net posts approximately £735.45 with installation around 145, a suitable net would retail at £139.16. Total cost would therefore be £1019.61. Officers suggest the installation of a semi fixed provision assembling the net posts within the summer months and providing the net on a request basis and/or with informal sport/fun sessions would be most appropriate.

Recommendations

Recommendation 3

Installation of softball / rounders diamonds: It is possible to combine both softball and rounders as the court dimensions and requirements are similar, as with badminton/volleyball the cost of marking the court is minimal, there would be a requirement for hard landscaping providing for a pitching diamond and to ensure a level playing surface. This would cost approximately £1750. Three permanent fixed bases would cost approximately £480 with installation at around £150. Total cost is therefore estimated at £2380.

Recommendations

The Group RECOMMEND that:

Recommendation 4

That the Council give its full support to the introduction of new events to promote sport and physical recreation, individual sports clubs, and increased sporting participation in Redditch

One of the main motivating factors behind the review was to build upon the expected increased interest in sport during the Olympics by introducing new sporting events in the town. Redditch already possesses excellent sport facilities relative to the size of the town. Since the review started, these facilities have been further improved by the opening of the re-vamped Abbey Stadium. The Group is therefore very encouraged to learn that relevant Officers have already put plans together to stage local events to use the Olympics as a springboard to help increase sporting participation in Redditch, not least by arranging an event at the Abbey Stadium to coincide with the opening of the Paralympics. It is understood that many local sports will be providing free taster sessions to give those attending a brief opportunity to play a variety of different sports. Members feel that providing local residents with as many of these opportunities to play sport as possible is essential to not only help boost local interest in the town's sports clubs, but to increase overall sporting participation in the Borough as a whole.

Members are also aware that sports students at North East Worcestershire (NEW) College have been running their own events across the town in recent months to help more residents become physically active, including taster sessions to help reintroduce more young people back into sport. The Group was very encouraged by this and felt that the Council must ensure that it promotes all opportunities to play sport in the town irrespective of the provider. The Group subsequently feels that the Council should provide these students with the necessary support to help publicise these activities more widely.

The Group therefore recommends that the Council gives it full support to promoting and publicising these upcoming events to ensure that the potential benefit of the London Olympics for sport in Redditch is maximised.

Recommendations

Recommendation 5

The Group RECOMMEND that:

That the Council work closely with NEW College to enable its students the opportunity to support these new sporting events on a voluntary basis.

Increasing the number of volunteering opportunities in sport was another important objective of the review. Having spoken to relevant Officers, the Group was once again very encouraged to learn that since the inception of the new Sports Development Unit in August 2011 more volunteering opportunities have been created to support local sport in Redditch, building upon Redditch's strong tradition for volunteering.

A key aspect of this is the imminent introduction of BRAVO (Bromsgrove and Redditch Active Volunteering Opportunities), a programme to be run with a variety of local partners which will provide many volunteering opportunities for local people. This is expected to launch in September 2012.

The Group has also been made aware that the Sports Development Unit has forged close links with NEW College in recent months to provide its students with more volunteering opportunities to support Council run sporting events and activities.

The Group therefore recommends that the Council continues to work closely with NEW College to enable its students to support the new events that are being arranged by the Sports Development Unit to promote increased sporting participation. The Group feels that this can be mutually beneficial to both organisations by helping the Council to run these events more cost-effectively while providing more opportunities for local students to obtain crucial experience.

Conclusion

While there may have been many contributing factors behind the decline of adult participation rates in sport and physical recreation in Redditch during recent years, the Group contends that ineffective communication to explain how, where, and when across the town local residents could play sport is very likely to have been a dominant factor. Although the Group was extremely encouraged to learn that clearly there are already many opportunities for people to play sport in Redditch, due in part to the excellent work of the Sports Development Unit over recent months in acting as enabler of local sport, the Group became increasingly of the opinion that changes need to be made to improve both the level and access to information for people wanting to find out about playing sport in the Borough. Furthermore, the Group feels that an expected increase of public interest in sport before, during, and immediately after the upcoming Olympics, is ideal timing for such changes to be made.

The Group has therefore proposed a number of recommendations which it believes will help to reverse the decline of sporting participation in the town, particularly through improving communication about what opportunities already exist, once implemented. The Group therefore urges the Council's Executive Committee to approve these recommendations.

Background Papers

Websites:

- www.wmfor2012.com – West Midlands for 2012
- www.morethansport.com – Sports Partnership Herefordshire & Worcestershire
- www.solihullactive.co.uk – Solihull Active
- www.slt-leisure.co.uk – Sandwell Leisure Trust
- www.nblesiuretrust.org.uk – Nuneaton and Bedworth Leisure Trust
- www.mkweb.co.uk/sport - MK Web
- www.northamptonshiresport.org – Northamptonshire Sport
- www.coventrysports.co.uk – Coventry Sports Trust
- www.derbyshiresport.co.uk – Derbyshire Sport

Other scrutiny reviews consulted:

- Increasing Participation in Sport through Sports Clubs Task Group – Brent Council, 2008
- Young People's Participation in Sports leading up to the Olympics – Tower Hamlets Council, 2008

Acknowledgements

The Group would like to thank the following individuals who have provided Members with information, advice, and their time during the course of our review:

- Barry Smith, Further Education Sports Co-ordinator, North East Worcestershire (NEW) College
- Steve Brewster, Sports Partnership Herefordshire and Worcestershire
- John Godwin, RBC Head of Leisure and Cultural Services
- Laura Kerrigan, RBC Sport and Physical Activity Development Manager
- Dave Wheeler, RBC Sports Services Manager
- Matt Hartles, RBC Sports Development Officer for Children and Young People
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