

Subject:	Climbing Wall development – Withdean Sports Complex		
Date of Meeting:	19th September 2013		
Report of:	Assistant Chief Executive & Executive Director Finance & Resources		
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Ward(s) affected:	Withdean		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE**1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:**

- 1.1 This report sets out a proposal to install a new climbing wall in the indoor tennis centre at Withdean Sports Complex. The proposed climbing wall would occupy the space of one of the three indoor tennis courts. The remaining two courts would still be available for use.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That Economic Development & Culture Committee;

(i) Approve the installation of a new climbing wall at Withdean Sports Complex to be operated by High Sports Ltd;

(ii) Note that, to implement recommendation (i) if agreed, the council will grant a lease direct to High Sports Ltd under powers delegated to the Head of Property and Design; and consequential amendments to the Sports Facilities Contract with Freedom Leisure will be managed and implemented under powers delegated to the Assistant Chief Executive.

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

- 3.1 The construction of the indoor tennis centre in 1991 at Withdean Sports Complex was part-funded by the Lawn Tennis Association. A condition of this funding was that the centre had to be used exclusively for tennis for a period of 21 years. This period of exclusivity ended in November 2012 and so the council is now able to look at alternative uses of this space.

- 3.2 Consultation undertaken to inform the council's Indoor Sports Facilities Plan 2012-22 showed that there is strong demand for a climbing facility within the city and this reflects the national trend of increased demand for non-traditional sports.
- 3.3 Withdean Sports Complex is operated by Freedom Leisure as part of the citywide Sports Facilities Contract which started in April 2011 and runs for a period of 10 years. The complex is currently undergoing major capital improvement schemes to extend the health and fitness, changing and reception facilities and to replace the athletics track.

Proposal

- 3.4 The proposal is to replace one tennis court located at the far end of the indoor tennis centre with a state of the art, regional standard indoor climbing facility. The facility is proposed to be operated by High Sports Ltd who were established in 1994 and operate 20 climbing walls across the UK including the wall at K2 Leisure Centre in Crawley. The operation of climbing walls is recognised as being a very specialised due to the strict health and safety requirements.
- 3.5 The current usage of tennis court 3 is approximately 7200 visits per year (based on 1/3 usage of all 3 courts in 2012). Current users are a mix of adult and junior 'pay and play' hire and adult and junior coaching courses. These users will be accommodated on the two remaining courts, accepting that some courses will be merged or condensed to allow for the loss of one court.
- 3.6 Projected attendances for the new climbing facility are anticipated to be in the region of 50,000 in year 1 which is estimated to grow in subsequent years. This figure is based upon estimates by High Sports Ltd and will be made up of many different activities and user groups which include adults at beginner and elite levels, juniors from 4 years including school groups and disabled users of all ages. A full breakdown of the proposed activities and users groups can be seen in Appendix 1.
- 3.7 High Sports would assume full responsibility for the operation and management of the Withdean Sports Complex climbing wall. This would include:
- Staff recruitment, management and training.
 - Provision of an Operational Plan containing a health and safety statement, full risk assessment, emergency action plan along with specific guidelines for the safe and effective running of the facility.
 - Appropriate public liability and employers insurances.
 - Easily accessed customer booking system and a dedicated climbing wall reception able to provide point of sale and payment handling services.
 - Regular management reporting and review meetings.
 - Climbing instruction, including the recruitment and training of suitably qualified personnel.
 - Provision of a wide range of climbing activities, courses, clubs and special events.
 - A robust registration and membership system ensuring that all visits are recorded and that access to the climbing wall is only granted to appropriately skilled persons unless under the supervision of an instructor.

- Membership to the Association of British Climbing Walls, including adherence to their best practice guidelines.
 - Climbing wall maintenance including a maintenance schedule, safety checks and an equipment register stating 'in service' and 'retirement' dates for all equipment.
 - Replacement of all consumable wall items such as ropes, holds, karabiners and anchors.
 - Frequent high quality graded route setting.
 - Retail and equipment hire services.
- 3.8 It is proposed that High Sports would provide capital funding of approximately £250,000 to build the new facility. In return High Sports would require a lease arrangement of 15 years in order to recover this investment. This lease arrangement is proposed to be between High Sports as operator of the climbing wall and the council. The negotiated Heads of Terms would be approved by council officers prior to Legal Services granting a lease. In order to retain control and ensure that High Sports Ltd do not acquire security of tenure at the end of their 15 years, the lease will be contracted out of the provisions of the Landlord & Tenant Act 1954. The rent to be paid under the lease will be passed on to Freedom Leisure as compensation for the calculated loss of income on the one tennis court. The Council will not be retaining any of the rent but will have the benefit of an investment of £250,000 at no cost. The transaction is dependant on Freedom Leisure surrendering the one tennis court out of their existing lease and contract which they are willing to do.
- 3.9 The climbing wall charges will include discounts for schools and Leisure Concessionary Card holders. There will also be discretionary discounted use for key partners including the council's Sports Development Unit for specific initiatives designed to increase participation by key target groups.
- 3.10 The charges will be subject to an inflationary annual uplift and will not form part of the core charges of the wider Sports Facilities Contract. However, any proposal to increase the charges above the inflationary uplift will be subject to approval from council officers and Freedom Leisure.

Timescale

- 3.11 Subject to approval, installation of the climbing wall could begin in late November 2013 and be open for use by late January 2014.

4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION

- 4.1 Consultation has been undertaken with key stakeholders including customers of Withdean Sports Complex, customers of other sports facilities and the Lawn Tennis Association. In addition, local ward councillors were also consulted and were very supportive.
- 4.2 The response from customers has been positive. Out of a total of 795 responses, 536 were in favour (67%).

- 4.3 Consultation undertaken to inform the council's Indoor Sports Facilities Plan 2012-22 showed that there is strong demand for a climbing facility within the city.
- 4.4 Further consultation on the final design of the climbing wall will take place with the local climbing community including clubs and the universities.

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 5.1 The capital cost of installing the climbing wall will be met in full by High Sports Ltd. All ongoing costs in connection with the wall will also be their responsibility, so there are no costs for the Council.

Finance Officer Consulted: Michelle Herrington Date: 19/08/13

Legal Implications:

- 5.2 Freedom Leisure have a lease of the Withdean Sports Complex which is contracted out of the Landlord & Tenant Act, so that whenever the services contract expires the lease also terminates. It is proposed that the Head of Property & Design and the Assistant Chief Executive use their delegated powers to enter into appropriate arrangements with Freedom Leisure and High Sports Limited as referred to above.

Lawyer Consulted: Bob Bruce Date: 19/08/13

Equalities Implications:

- 5.3 The provision of sports facilities that are accessible to all sections of the community are important to increase participation and subsequently improve health and well-being. Climbing is a sport that can be enjoyed by people of all ages from 4 years upwards, from complete beginners to elite climbers. The proposed climbing wall activity programme consists of sessions for children, schools, youth groups, families, disabled groups, older people and students.

Sustainability Implications:

- 5.4 The proposal will intensify the use of an existing area of the indoor tennis centre which is already being heated and lit. It will therefore be making more efficient use of the area.
- 5.5 The proposal will create jobs locally and will allow the climbing community to visit a facility within the city rather than having to travel further afield.
- 5.6 The operation of sports facilities that minimise energy consumption are important to help reduce the carbon footprint of the facilities and reduce costs. The contract specification requires the operator, Freedom Leisure, to establish best practice in environmental management through the development of an annually updated Environmental Management Plan which is approved and monitored by council officers.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 5.5 Increasing participation in sport and physical activity is recognised as having a positive effect on reducing crime and anti-social behaviour.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 5.6 High Sports Ltd are a leading operator of climbing wall facilities and have considerable experience and expertise in this specialist field. Freedom Leisure currently work with them at K2 Leisure Centre in Crawley.

The proposal provides an opportunity to help meet the demand that exists in the city for a large climbing facility.

Public Health Implications:

- 5.7 Increasing participation in sport and physical activity is key to improving the health and well-being of the city's residents and reducing the cost of obesity-related health care

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 5.8 The proposal would provide the city with a dynamic and exciting new sports facility that is in high demand amongst residents.

6. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):

- 6.1 There are no suitable alternative council sports facilities which have the available space to install a major climbing facility. There have been a number of previous attempts by climbing groups to establish such a facility in the city but without success. This has been due primarily to the lack of facilities within which to build a suitably sized climbing wall.

7. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 The proposals outlined above provide an opportunity to improve the quality of the sports facilities at Withdean Sports Complex and increase participation and healthy living amongst residents of Brighton and Hove.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Appendix 1 – Climbing Wall activity programme and user groups
2. Appendix 2 – Proposed climbing wall design

Documents in Members' Rooms

None

Background Documents

1. Indoor Sports Facilities Plan 2012-22