

Development of an NDP for Balsall Common – observations from BBCSCA

Draft at 31 October 2016 – prepared by Bob Harris

Introduction

The Balsall Common NDP Committee have invited local organisations and residents to provide views as an input to their deliberations, and to help shape their subsequent submissions to Solihull MBC. The Berkswell & Balsall Common Sports & Community Association (BBCSCA) has prepared this note setting out its views on the development of sporting and recreational facilities in Balsall Common.

Role, organisation and activities of BBCSCA

The BBCSCA is a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity whose objects are to promote and facilitate the advancement of amateur sport and recreation in the local area. It currently operates at the Lant Recreation Ground, Meeting House Lane, Balsall Common. This is a three hectare site owned by the Lant Trust over which the BBCSCA has a long-term lease.

In April 2008 the Lant Centre was opened - a new pavilion and community centre - which provides much improved social, community and changing facilities. The capital cost of the building was met entirely from fund-raising by user organisations and long-term funding from the Lant Trust, and ongoing running costs and loan repayments are also met entirely by users.

The principal activities at the Lant Centre and Recreation Ground are:

- A playing and social base for Berkswell Cricket Club, which has five Mens teams, one Womens team and several junior teams
- A playing and social base for Berkswell & Balsall Common Tennis Club which has some 150 senior and 150 junior members
- A training and social base for the Balsall Common Running Club
- A social base for the Balsall Common Hockey Club, which has eight adult and two junior teams but currently plays its home matches outside Balsall Common
- A social, training and administrative base for the Heart of England Offshore Cruising Association
- The base for a wrap-around care service for local primary schoolchildren
- Activities and meetings of a range of other local organisations

The Balsall Hornets Football Club was also based at the Lant Centre until recently, when their new changing facility opened at Lavender Hall Lane. The Lant Recreation Ground has also been the location of the Balsall Common Festival and the Lions Bonfire over the last few years.

The need for increased sporting facilities in Balsall Common

In addition to the facilities provided by BBCSCA, there are also football pitches at several locations in the village and there are other sporting facilities at the Heart of England School and Balsall Common Primary School. However, it is clear that there is already a shortage of certain facilities now, and this will become more acute if some of the higher projections of housing and population growth come to fruition.

The particular needs that we have identified now are:

- A full size, artificial turf hockey pitch, ideally with floodlights to ensure effective usage
- More football pitches, ideally with artificial turf to ensure all-weather capability
- An indoor studio that can be used for a variety of sporting activity including dance, pilates, yoga, keep-fit etc.

Proposed way forward for BBCSCA

The BBCSCA is currently run on a voluntary basis by a Board of Directors drawn from its membership and from the Lant Trust. Our current strategy envisages modest expansion of facilities and activities, but we have to be realistic about how much we can take on. In relation to the development of sporting facilities across the whole of Balsall Common, we therefore propose that our involvement falls into three categories:

1. **Consultation.** We would like to be consulted on the development of sporting facilities across the whole of Balsall Common, including those that may be intended to be developed within existing or new schools and those intended to operate commercially.
2. **Requirements on developers¹.** In the eastern part of Balsall Common – and particularly development site 169-235-30 (Catholic Church field and land behind MHL houses) and development site 33 (Barratts Lane farm), we propose that in granting any planning applications for development of housing, SMBC should require the developers to include additional playing areas (as noted above). The precise detail of these areas and their playing surfaces would be the subject of further discussion. For example, it might be possible to develop a Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) which would be usable by several sports, and which might also attract part-funding from bodies such as Sport England.

We believe that the existing changing facilities at the Lant Centre could be used by users of these new areas. Furthermore, we propose that consideration be given to BBCSCA managing the new playing areas on a long-lease granted by the developer or SMBC.

3. **Community Infrastructure Funding.** If the proposals in (2) above are accepted, then funding for the capital cost of extending the changing facilities at the Lant Centre would be required. In addition, if it were agreed to provide an indoor studio that would also require capital funds, which we propose would be met from the village's share of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). Ongoing running costs would be met by charges to users and other fund-raising activities.

¹ *Note: The provisional plans for sites 169-235-30 and 33 exhibited at St Peter's Church in August both showed areas devoted to playing fields, along with additional changing facilities. Given the proximity of these areas to the Lant Centre, it would prudent to consider whether the use/expansion of existing facilities at the Lant Centre might be a better use of funds.*