

Promoting Sporting Participation Task Group – Relevant Extracts from the Group’s Final Report

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.

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 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.

RECOMMENDATION 3: The Group RECOMMEND that: the Council look to maximise the benefits of parks and green spaces in Redditch by introducing more informal games areas and additional equipment 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 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.

In addition, it is suggested that the Council investigate the possibility of installing giant chess/draughts boards and pieces in appropriate locations to give residents the chance to play chess or draughts outside in a safe and sociable environment. It is thought that should a permanent board be installed, the chess / draughts pieces could be held by the particular venue and be made available for short-term hire.

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 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.

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.

Installation of giant chess / draughts boards: There are a couple of possible options. The first involves installing a portable roll out mat with large plastic pieces. This would cost approximately £300. The second option is to install a permanent board into the ground suitably edged and finished. It is estimated that this would cost around £650. The indicative total cost to include the chess / draughts pieces is approximately £1000.