

Sutton Lawn Tennis Club

Tennis Facilities Development 2011 Introduction

In February 2006 the Club members approved a development plan that included the introduction of floodlighting and a three court seasonal Air hall along the southern boundary. After a lengthy process, the planning appeal board (An Bord Pleanála) overturned the decision of Fingal County Council to grant permission, and refused planning permission for our proposal on the grounds of residential disamenity, i.e. light spillage into neighbouring gardens, and overbearing appearance.

The management committee carefully examined the reasons for refusal, and submitted a revised proposal with lighting on only two courts, covered by a seasonal Air hall. This scheme has received planning permission from both Fingal County Council and An Bord Pleanála, and with the members' approval can be implemented immediately.

The following may guide you in any queries you may have. You may, of course, contact any member of the Development Sub Committee with specific questions and in any event a full presentation will be made at the forthcoming EGM on Wednesday 4 May 2011.

FAQ

WHAT IS THE CLUB PROPOSING TO DO?

As part of the ongoing tennis facilities development programme the management committee are proposing to develop courts 10-12 and to replace these three unlit courts with two courts laid out to the current ITF Tennis Court Standard for Club play, light levels of 500 Lux which conform to the current ITF Tennis Court Lighting Standard for Club Play. It is also the intention to provide an indoor Air hall – which will be erected between September and April each year. These courts will be available to all members. Allied to this we are going to create two permanent mini courts for our junior academy members, and to redesign and redevelop the practice wall area by resurfacing the two alleys, renewing the fencing and, covering with netting to prevent stray balls. The courts and Air hall will also be designed to allow disabled access.

WHY IS THE CLUB PROPOSING THIS DEVELOPMENT?

This is the final phase of what is a ten-year plan to upgrade the playing areas of the club, and has been part of the Club's strategic aims for over twenty years. We strongly believe that this will greatly improve the tennis product within the club and will assist us in our drive to:-

- (i) retain existing members;
- (ii) attract new members to the Club,
- (iii) extend the tennis life of our more mature members;
- (iv) Reduce queuing at peak times during winter months
- (v) Provide greater enjoyment to members who might otherwise be playing in cold, wet and windy conditions,
- (vi) Provide an indoor facility that will ensure the minimum disruption and maximum gain by our members from the Club's coaching and tennis development programme.

WHERE IS THE DEVELOPMENT TO TAKE PLACE?

All of the development proposed will take place within the footprint of courts 10 to 12, so minimum disturbance will occur to other parts of the club grounds.

WHEN WILL THE NEW FACILITY BE AVAILABLE TO MEMBERS?

It is proposed that the development will begin no later than July 2011, and be completed by September 2011. This time schedule will allow the club erect the Air hall in September for play during the 2011/2012 autumn to spring seasons.

WHAT SORT OF WORKS ARE PROPOSED?

The project includes the following:-

- (i) New Probounce court carpets surfaces on two new courts,
- (ii) Four 12 metre high poles with floodlights to the side to light the two courts,
- (iii) Two mini courts,
- (iv) A two court Indoor Airhall with fans for seasonal use – which will be anchored to a concrete ring beam,
- (v) A refurbished practice wall area,
- (vi) Disabled access walkway and disabled access to Airhall.
- (vii) A storage shed fencing, pathways, and electrical infrastructure.

HOW MUCH IS IT GOING TO COST?

The project committee have been analysing the budgeted costs for the project, and after careful consideration, and ongoing consultation with the

club's professional quantity surveyor, they are fully confident that all elements in the project can be delivered for a total cost of €239,000.

WHAT IS THE CLUB'S FINANCIAL POSITION AT THE MOMENT?

At present the club has cash balances of €408,000 in the bank which will be partially used to help fund the project. €208,000 of this is the development levy paid in by members for more lit courts and an Airhall for three years since 2006. The club projections for the next few years are to generate cash surpluses to fund ongoing development of other facilities. To achieve this we have taken actions to reduce costs and also to retain and attract members. The advice of our Finance Committee has been to reserve a level of existing cash balances and this we have done. We are very conscious of the current economic situation and continue to budget accordingly.

HOW ARE WE GOING TO PAY FOR IT?

You are probably aware that in 2006, following two EGMs, a ten year levy of €66 for sports members and €33 for junior members was passed and agreed to fund the tennis facilities programme – which was planned in two phases. The levy was collected for three years and a sum of €208,000 was amassed. This money is now available for phase two, and together with the remaining €9,000 lottery funds to be received, we can immediately provide €217,000 for the project. From this it can be seen that there is shortfall of approximately €22,000 to complete the project. While we are confident that the project can be completed for €239,000, it would be prudent to allow some flexibility around the financing of the project, due to the fact that we have not got full tender prices for all elements. For this reason, we will be asking the members at the EGM to allow us borrow up to €40,000, if necessary, to complete the project.

CAN WE BORROW THE MONEY?

We have been issued with two letters from the main Irish banks confirming that they would be willing to lend the club €40,000 to fund the project.

SO HOW MUCH IS IT GOING TO COST MEMBERS.

Any money borrowed will be paid for by an income stream which will be generated by users of the indoor Airhall. It has been conservatively calculated that approximately €6,500 , nett of running costs, can be collected from indoor court usage fees per year and that this will go directly to service any borrowing for the duration of the loan.

ARE MEMBERS BEING ASKED TO PAY ON THE DOUBLE TO PLAY INDOORS?

No. All sports members have contributed to the cost of improving the tennis court facilities in the Club. The user charge for use of the indoor facility will only contribute to the cost of the Airhall, and no charge will be made for use of the new courts when the Air hall is down, or use of the mini courts. As the club is providing nine other courts where no charge will occur, it was felt that the most equitable way of managing the indoor courts was to impose a user fee, given that some members have expressed a desire to play outdoors only.

HOW MUCH ARE WE GOING TO HAVE TO PAY FOR INDOOR COURTS?

We have divided court time into two time periods – peak times, normally evenings, and off peak times, other times – and we would be asking users to pay €2 per court per hour in off peak periods and €4 per hour per court in peak periods. This amounts to 50 cent per person in off peak and €1 per person at peak times for doubles play.

HOW WILL WE GET TO PLAY ON THE INDOOR COURTS?

It is intended using the internet booking system now available for squash players for the indoor tennis courts. Courts will become available eight days in advance and it will literally be first come first served. We are confident that this allied to a court booking policy will maximise usage and provide equal access for all members to the indoor courts. All junior development programmes will take place in off peak periods

WILL PAVILION MEMBERS HAVE TO PAY FOR DEVELOPMENT?

No, the only people who will be paying for use of the courts will be the people who want to play indoors. Pavilion members will not be asked to contribute to the costs of the project.

WILL SQUASH MEMBERS HAVE TO PAY FOR COURTS?

No, the only people who will be paying for use of the courts will be the people who want to play tennis indoors. Squash members will not be asked to contribute to the costs of the project.

WILL ALL SPORTS MEMBERS HAVE TO PAY FOR COURTS?

No, the only sports members who will be paying for the use of the courts will be the sports members who want to play indoors. The fee for the courts will be €2 euro off peak and €4 at peak, i.e. 50 cent and €1 each if doubles play.

In the evening time, between April and September, the courts will be floodlit and normal costs for the floodlights will apply.

WILL JUNIOR MEMBERS HAVE TO PAY FOR COURTS?

No, the only junior members who will be paying for the use of the courts will be the junior members who want to play indoors. The fee for the courts will be €2 euro off peak and €4 at peak, i.e. 50 cent and €1 each if doubles play.

WHY IS THE CLUB GOING TO LOSE ONE COURT?

While the club is going to lose one court, we will be getting in return two floodlit tennis courts, laid out to the current ITF Standard for Club play, and two mini courts. This will increase the number of floodlit courts by 25% from 8 to 10. We cannot light the existing three courts due to their juxtaposition and orientation, nor can we introduce an Air hall on the current court group footprint.

CAN THE CLUB FUNCTION WITH ONLY ELEVEN COURTS?

1. Sports membership has gone from 1560 in 2000 to 981 in 2010 – a 38% drop. The members/court ratio was 130 per court in 2000, and even with eleven courts the ratio will go down to 89 per court, making it easier for members to play tennis.
2. There will be an immediate increase - by 25% - in the number of floodlit courts we will have.
3. Recent changes in the Dublin LTC summer leagues mean that only five courts per event now required – as opposed to six.
4. Winter and Senior leagues require nine courts max, so the indoor Air hall will be available for members during these periods.
5. If membership increases in the future an extra court can be provided between courts 10-12 and 1-4.
6. Other than Sutton LTC, only 4 Tennis Clubs in the Leinster have 11 or more courts

WHAT ARE MINI COURTS?

The club initiated a new category of member over the last two years, i.e. junior academy members. Children over five years of age are encouraged to take up tennis and avail of coaching. They are offered a limited membership at a reduced rate, which allows them to participate in organised coaching and limited play at the weekends. Full-sized tennis courts and standard tennis balls for this age group are not recommended and a smaller court, i.e. a mini court with dimensions of 11 m x 5 m is recommended. Furthermore, there are three categories of tennis ball, which is suitable for this age group as they develop. At present we have to use full-size courts with lowered nets and on special occasions redesign our main courts to provide mini

courts. With the space left over from the proposed development it is the objective of the management committee to provide two permanent mini courts which will be available to this age group. It is also a suitable court for beginners and as such is recommended by the ITF.

WHAT CHANGES WOULD BE MADE TO THE PRACTICE WALL?

While the run-offs to the rear of the existing tennis courts are fully compliant with ITF standards the one metre wide concrete ring beam which will circumvent the new courts requires us to remove part of the existing practice wall to facilitate the expansion. We intend to use this opportunity to renew the practice wall and to cover same with netting to prevent balls straying. It is also hoped to paint the wall with tennis aids, e.g. numbers and shapes, so that it can become an appropriate practice area for tennis players, young and old, who want to groove their strokes. The reduced width of the alleys will not affect the usefulness of the wall for singles practice. It is intended to erect new fencing along the sides and to provide overhead netting to prevent balls travelling outside the practice area. The surface of the practice area will also be renewed with a macadam base.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS TO THE CLUB IN TAKING THIS STEP?

We believe that the risks are minimal given the scale of the club and the low level of borrowing that may be necessary. At annual repayments of approximately €6,500 per annum which is to be funded by court usage charges, the main risk is that usage of the facility is not up to the conservative projections on which we have projected the finances. If the projected income of €6,500 was reduced by say 30% then our only risk is approximately €2,000 per annum which would have to be funded from other income and then only for the duration of the loan. It should also be noted that in the very unlikely event that the Airhall fails to attract adequate numbers of members during the season, then the committee could, and would, look at other ways of maximizing the use of the Air hall to provide the necessary finance to cover the cost of borrowing. The experience of other Clubs in Ireland with similar facilities in Ireland is that usage levels are well over 85% and we do not see any reason why Sutton LTC would be any different. In financial terms this must be regarded as one of the smallest investments the club has made over the last forty years and one which would result in minimum exposure to the banks through borrowings.

WILL WE LOSE CAR PARKING SPACES?

No. Because all of the development is taking place within the footprint of the current courts 10-12, there will be no loss of car parking spaces on the club grounds.

DOES THIS MEAN THE CAR PARK WON'T BE RESURFACED?

Any improvements in the Club are dependent on prudent financing and this committee is determined to provide this going forward. The committee are presently looking at redesigning the present car park in order to make it safer for access and egress and to improve the general environmental quality of the car park area by the increased planting and redesign. The resurfacing and upgrade of the club's car park is high up on our list of priorities for things in need of immediate attention. However, owing to a fall off in membership and an escalation of fixed costs, the monies available to the club for ongoing maintenance have been significantly reduced. That said, the club's finances are robust and over €200,000 will be retained by the club and be available for routine maintenance and ongoing works. The number one priority at the moment is to complete the tennis facilities program and thereby maximise the club's potential to retain its membership and attract new members. The redesign and renewal of the car park will probably take place in the next year - and maybe even sooner if membership holds up.

WOULD WE NOT BE BETTER TO DELAY FOR A COUPLE OF YEARS?

No, the members have reaffirmed management committee recommendations of previous EGMs to provide more, and better, floodlighting on more courts and to provide an indoor facility. The management committee and the membership sub-committee see the investment in these new tennis facilities as being central to our aim to retain as many members as possible and to attract new ones. The club has been continually seeking members over the last fifteen years, and while at the same time many of those that have left the club did so without becoming active members. The extra floodlit courts and indoor facilities will widen the appeal of the club to all types of members and allow more members play more tennis during the hours of darkness. While court usage is low generally when looked at over a fourteen hour period, this usage profile changes dramatically in the evening time with very high court usage between 7pm and 10pm. The club finances are robust, and the €200,000 reserve fund that the club will retain will provide a prudent cushion to get us over the next five years. Completing this development now will re-establish the club as one of the leading tennis clubs in Ireland with the most up to date facilities to nurture and develop tennis, and will enable the Club to focus on the many other pressing developments for the future.

IS THE COVAIR AIR HALL SUITABLE FOR SUTTON'S CLIMATE?

Covair have continually developed their product and have upgraded the Air hall membrane from the original 250 micron material to the new 450 micron material, which has been very successful throughout the UK and North Ireland. They now have over 80 installations – some in very exposed

places like Aberdeen and Swansea – and all of the courts have been performing well. Of course there may be problems in very heavy snow conditions as experienced last winter, and while Tennis Ireland’s Air hall at DCU was deflated after heavy snow, it was let down because it would not be used over Christmas period. Indeed they were able to use space heaters to melt the snow on the roof of the Air hall for a considerable period before that.

WHAT ABOUT SECURITY OF THE AIR HALL?

The Air hall will be surrounded by a 3 metre high fence and will also be monitored 24/7 by the Office and our Security partners (Group 4) via a number of cameras that will be added to our existing security infrastructure.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF THE DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL IS REJECTED?

The Management Committee will take account of the decision and the views expressed at the EGM and will then consider options to progress which will be brought back to the members

Development Sub Committee;
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