

Gosling Sports Colleagues Concerned with Keeping the Northern Facility Open

**Meeting 4th January 2019
6pm @ Gosling Hall Balcony Area**

Attendees: Dave Bartlett – WHSPAA, WHCBN, HSP, BE; County Cllr Nigel Quinton; Cllr Siobhan Elam – Handside Ward WHBC, Rogar Payne – Spice; Sue Warner – No Strings Badminton & Spice; Robin Kinnear – Member since 1963 and regular user; Kathryn Aresti – Knebworth Badminton Club; Peter Watts – Gosling Squash Support Group; Michelle Brown – Knebworth Badminton Club; Zoltan Tatrai – Knebworth Badminton Club and creator of Charge.org Gosling petition; Kevin Murphy – Knebworth Badminton Club; Stephen Beirne – Gymnastics Coach as Gosling – 28 years; Stephen Willis – Head Coach at TheDKWay Badminton Academy; Noel – Interested Resident; Will Davis – WGC Society; Cllr Malcom Cowan – Pear Tree Ward – WHBC; Melissa Davey – TheDKWay Badminton Academy and creator of Save Gosling Facebook Page; Residents x 4 wishing to remain anonymous.

Apologies: Nick Goode, Goode Academy; Stuart Williams, PE Teacher, Monks Walk School and WH School Games Partnership Lead; Philip Gray, Knebworth Inclusive and Premier Badminton Club

Dave Bartlett opened the meeting and introduced himself and offered for the purposes of this meeting to be Chairman. This was agreed unanimously.

Melissa Davey offered to be secretary. This was agreed unanimously.

Attendees then introduced themselves and what their interest in attending this group was and which club they belonged to.

How many GLL centre members present had been formally notified of the closure of the Sports Hall? None had been informed.

Real reason for closure:

Peter Watts (PW) gave an update on the meeting he had with Craig Woodward (Partnership Manager of Gosling since 2017) and Vishal Karia (General Manager June 2018). As the Squash Support Group rep, he was having regular meetings with CW and VK regarding the state of the squash courts. As recent as September CW & VK had agreed to put costings for renovating 2 squash courts onto their proposed budget for 2019 to GLL's Executives for consideration. In the December meeting on 17th PW was informed that the Building was to be closed.

Craig Woodward confirmed that the anticipated closure of the Sports Hall was NOT down to Health and Safety reasons despite what anyone had heard. The reason for closure was purely that the Hall was unsustainable. Craig Woodward informed PW that the utility bills

¹ It is accepted and a matter of public record that the bank loan interest was unsustainable under Gosling Sports Trust which was the deciding factor in looking for a new company to take over. GLL agreed to clear the bank loans when they took over.

alone for the hall were extremely high. For instance, if you asked all the customers to double their court booking fees in one month it still wouldn't be enough to cover the utility bills (Electric, Water & Gas). PW did ask for figures to prove this claim, but his request has been denied.

PW then gave some thoughts regarding these claims:

- 1 Have the utility bills suddenly increased since GLL took over running of the facility?
- 2 When you look at previous years accounts (Pre GLL) and you remove the bank interest ¹ the park as a whole made a profit, albeit a small one.
- 3 If the experience of many members in that paying for using the facility is being hindered by GLL's money free business practice then can the true income for the building actually be calculated?

When GLL took over they bequeathed £200K to Gosling Sports Trust (GSPT) and agreed to donate up to £25K of any surplus each year. It is understood that no payment had been made to GSPT in the past two years since GLL's takeover of the Park.

Discussion was also had in regard to GSPT and that they are there to represent the members. We need to contact the trustees and ask them to do this.

All clubs have been affected in different ways and those that have been offered alternatives are not at all happy with them.

The squash coach has heard nothing from the centre and he is paid direct by GLL

Chilli Pilates have also been given notice (and the rent the north side of the building and have 80+ staff).

There was a general question and answering session and exchanging of information that then ensued. Mainly questions from the Cllrs to better understand the situation.

It was offered that the Welwyn Borough Council have stated publicly that this closure and running of the park in nothing to do with them. It was felt around the room that GLL are answerable to the council as they accountable to them as their preferred leisure provider. Dave Bartlett said that the Council's Facility Strategy made the requirement for more facilities in the borough now and in the event of more housing being built. It was felt that the council could assert pressure on GLL if they so desired.

From Council statement for Stage 4 examination hearing of WH Local Plan 26/6/18
"The Council has sought to plan positively for the future of Gosling Sports park"

Future action:

- 1 Asking GSP Trustees to approach senior management and ask questions. Action DB
- 2 Meet with Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council Lead councillor on Leisure – Terry Mitchinson. Action DB

- 3 Meet with Tony Kingsbury, Council Lead WHBC. Action DB
- 4 (post meeting) Melissa Davey would do a Freedom of Information application to see the finances.
- 5 Dave Bartlett would contact Grant for a meeting. Action DB
- 6 Nigel and Councillors to do what they can, e.g. to engage more Handside councillors: Action NQ
- 7 Contact as many of the clubs using the facility as we do not have the full and exhaustive list. Action All
- 8 Get as many members and users along to the Meetings with GLL next week (Monday 7th at 6pm, Wednesday 9th at 1pm, Thursday 10th at 11am). Action All
- 9 Get as many people to write to their respective MPs as possible (Template letter attached). Action All
- 10 Brand this Group – “Save Gosling” or “Even Better”: ‘ “Save Gosling” with the strapline “Even Better”.
- 11 Speak to Ros Cramp at Herts Sports Partnership with the educational aspect in mind (and general Herts Sports Partnership concern about any loss of facilities)
- 12 Speak to Jim McManus – Director of Public Health for Hertfordshire. Action DB
- 13 Post information of the WGC news FaceBook page: Action All

A discussion was then had briefly about the general running down of the Sports Hall and how since the publicity on the radio and newspapers, staff has suddenly appeared in the Hall and cleaning had been carried out.

It was then decided that Peter Watts (PW), Dave Bartlett (DB) and Melissa Davey (MD) would seek to carry out the action points above and would be in contact with all interested parties very soon with updates and possible future meetings.

Meeting closed at 7.30pm

Post meeting: Statement of aims of Save Gosling agreed between Peter, Melissa and Dave

Save Gosling Aims

- 1 Because the facility is unique in being the only facility open during the day it should be kept open until similar facilities are available in WGC. The people of WGC and the schools in particular have nowhere else to go in the daytime.
- 2 If GLL are really unable to manage to keep it open long-term then it should be kept open until the end of WGC 2020 Centenary Year and Tokyo Olympics year. This is essential for:
 - I. the schools to complete their planned usage (particularly, see point 2 below) and find alternative arrangements for their large use.
 - II. the clubs to honour their commitment for 2020 celebration events (as agreed with

- a. Craig in July). Many of the clubs have committed to the Sport for All Celebrations
 - b. Committee and found sponsors. For example, Goode Sport have agreed to sponsor junior, adult and inter-league celebratory tournaments in 2020.
- III. Clubs to hold their AGMs this summer to agree alternate facilities for 2021, because:
 - a. there is a serious lack of similar facilities in the borough and clubs will have to assess their future viability (and agree contingency measures with their members);
 - b. most facilities require this time-scale to re-arrange any existing bookings to
 - c. accommodate them. Failure to allow for this will enforce closure on clubs.
- IV. GLL can agree an alternative strategy to comply with their 15-year development plan agreement, started 2009 and 2014 with funding from Sport England and Badminton England

Template letter below:

House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

From:

January 2019

To

Gosling Sports Park North Hall, Stanborough Road, Welwyn Garden City, Herts

I am writing to you as your constituent and asking for your help and assistance in preventing the closure of the Gosling Sports Centre North Hall.

As a user of the facility, Better (who run the facility) informed all users at the close of business for Christmas and then formally announced on the 24th December 2018 that the North Sports Hall will be closing on the 31st March 2019.

This has come as a huge shock to all of us and the timing of the announcement has left us over the Christmas period with no-one to speak to or ask any questions which has caused a great deal of upset and confusion and even anger.

This Sports Hall is home to many clubs at present who will find themselves without a sports facility to re-house them. This will impact hundreds of children and adults of all ages from 0-99 years and beyond. No provision is being offered by the centre for the majority of clubs/groups, and those that have been offered alternatives find that these aren't suitable for their needs whatsoever. This is used by at least 20 primary schools(3-11 years) and 2 secondary schools(11-18 years) during the day as it is essential for curriculum and after school activities.

Hertfordshire has a real need for additional sports facilities in the area and closing a sports hall will have a real impact on this need and will negatively impact many different demographics from children, teens, adults, elderly and disabled users. There are 4 public sports halls in Hatfield but only one in WGC and that is Gosling. It is the only facility that is

open to the public during the day. This Hall is unique and indispensable to WGC and to Hertfordshire.

We have many users that can bring evidence to the fact that Better have been running down this facility for several months:

- 1) No staff on reception to take entrance fees for those attending arranged sports by Better, (No-Strings approx. 30-40 players, squash court bookings)
- 2) Staff that are on reception (on very rare occasions) don't have the log in details for the computer to enable the taking of money (the whole site is a cash free business) or booking of courts.
- 3) No cleaning of toilets on a regular basis or cleaning of the whole facility.
- 4) No maintenance carried out despite repeated requests for the minimum of standards increase (Badminton nets that have huge holes in and no replacements have not been forthcoming despite a minimal charge of £10 per net and multiple requests).

These are just a few of the concerns that users have raised.

There are a number of clubs and schools that regularly use this facility, and some are listed here:

- 1 TheDKWay Badminton Academy – Elite Badminton junior players
- 2 Knebworth Inclusive Badminton Club
- 3 Monday Junior session - for U10s
- 4 No Strings Badminton
- 5 Advanced No Strings Badminton
- 6 21 Primary Schools
- 7 2 Secondary Schools
- 8 Gosling Squash Support Group
- 9 Gymnastics

Plus many other sports and social groups.

Will you please come to our assistance and help us to find a way to keep this facility open and functioning for the 50,000 plus residents of Welwyn Garden City and the wider usage of the residents of Hertfordshire.

Yours sincerely