



## **Planning Appeal: Lamb's Club, 1 Lamb's Passage**

**APP/V5570/E/06/1199436 and APP/V5570/A/05/1195728**

**Closing Submission by Peter Durrans  
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### **1. Proposed loss of Major Sports Facility**

Where proposals would lead to the creation or the loss of major sports facilities, the government advises local planning authorities to consult Sport England, to enable our views to be taken into account in determining such applications. This advice is contained in Annex B of DoE Circular 9/95, General Development Order Consolidation (as amended). The London Borough of Islington has continued to consult Sport England on the applications affecting the Lamb's Club on this basis.

Sport England has no doubt that the Lamb's Club should be regarded as a major sports facility as its nine squash courts (including three show courts) and ancillary facilities, together with its quality, make it a squash facility of major significance in London, with a considerable future potential role for the sport.

We also consider that decisions on proposals affecting such a major sports facility should take careful note of the expert views of the relevant National Governing Body, English Squash. The Chief Executive of English Squash has pointed out in his four letters on the application: (1) That Sport England selected squash as one of our ten priority sports because of its capacity to make a real and lasting contribution to lifelong participation in sport; (2) That squash is a mass participation sport – the DCMS Taking Part survey found that nearly 500,000 people participate regularly (at least once every four weeks); (3) England Squash has highly successful programmes for introducing, retaining and developing newcomers, particularly young people to the sport through its national coaching scheme; (4) Squash is one of our few sports in which England is genuinely world class. Our men recently regained the World Team Championships, we have four of the top ten in men's and women's rankings and hold almost all the European titles in senior and junior age groups.

England Squash therefore regards the threatened loss of the Lamb's Club squash facility as a further blow to the sport. The issue of significant overprovision of courts is an historical one. In the past, the governing body had few resources or opportunity to address ~~the need~~ the issues of increasing participation and clubs operating below full capacity. The past three years have brought significant investment and activity in club development and

support and the 10,000 and more new squash players will need clubs where they can play.

England Squash is also very critical of the narrow definition of “surplus to requirements” adopted in Pan Leisure’s assessment. By focusing solely on existing members of Lamb’s it ignores any assessment of the potential future value and needs of the sport and the community, which could be considerable. A facility of this size has a very real potential for the future, including benefiting from a £250,000 investment as part of England Squash/Sport England Community Club Development Programme to develop and sustain links between schools and squash clubs. LAT has already identified interest from local schools to use Lamb’s if the opportunity was available. The possibilities for the club, as part of the community sports infrastructure in Islington are significant, if it can be retained.

## **2. Precedent nature of this case**

Sport England considers it to represent such a serious conflict with our objectives and to be in clear breach of PPG17 and other policies that we consider it necessary to make representations to this enquiry and to the Planning Sub-Committee. The implications for other private sports facilities from the outcome of this appeal, and the interpretation of PPG17, could be wide-ranging. We therefore request that particular care is given to the interpretation of PPG17 because of its possible implications for applications affecting other sports facilities in the future. In particular, the loss of a major sports facility without any meaningful replacement provision is damaging to sport and contrary to government policy objectives for improving public health through promoting increased participation in sport and physical activity.

## **3. Peak Period Demand and Supply – essential in ‘surplus to requirements’ test**

Sport England’s Facilities Planning Model is a well-researched and widely used computer model to assist in planning the provision of new sports facilities (see attached extract). It forms an integral part of our advisory service on the planning and development of sports facilities. I referred to it in my evidence last week in relation to the importance of peak period demand.

The model has three key components:

(a) *Demand* is the estimated number of visits from people who may want to use a particular type of facility in the normal peak periods per week. Peak periods are defined as the times when most people want to participate and therefore when the facilities are under greatest pressure, for example evenings on weekdays and at weekends. The peak period will depend on the type of sport and the needs of participants.

(b) *Supply* is the aggregate capacity of the facilities available in the area during the normal peak periods per week to accommodate the estimated demand.

(c) *The catchment* areas of different facility types.

From this it is clear that information on peak period demand and supply is essential for assessing the adequacy of provision of sports facilities. If the level and type of facilities cannot meet demand in the peak period, then they are insufficient and should be increased. The model is used to provide such assessments and to estimate the shortfall or excess in supply and to indicate where new provision can be most effectively located.

It follows that if you wish to assess objectively whether alternative facilities can accommodate displaced demand from a facility that may close, it is the peak period demand and supply that should be examined.

In the light of this, Sport England supports the methodology adopted by the Lamb's Action Team in assessing booking availability for squash courts at peak period demand in alternative venues. We consider that this provides far more reliable assessment of demand and supply than Pan Leisure's use of available club memberships. There is no obvious correlation between membership numbers and actual court bookings – a member may play once a month, once a week or five times a week. This provides no reliable substitute for properly assessing court bookings during peak period demand.

The studies for the appellant have not demonstrated that there is available peak period capacity in squash courts at the other venues (10 courts) sufficient to absorb the displaced demand that would be likely to result from the loss of Lamb's nine courts. It therefore follows that there is no a sound basis for regarding the squash courts at Lamb's Club as surplus to requirements. Indeed the information provided by LAT on peak period demand and supply indicates the contrary.

#### **4. The England Squash Whole Sport Plan**

This provides evidence that the game has growth potential with the necessary funding and strategy to grow participation in the sport. England Squash reiterates its support for retaining important squash clubs like Lambs because of the need to halt further decline in the number of courts and to provide the facilities needed for the future development of the game.

Last week Mr Warren stressed that Lambs is not mentioned in the National Facilities Strategy. I spoke to the Chief Executive of England Squash yesterday (Nick Rider) who confirmed that the National Facilities Strategy is out of date. Very few clubs were referred to in the document anyway, so the absence of Lambs is not particularly significant. The strategy was predicated on the national centre in Manchester with two regional performance facilities in Birmingham and Nottingham.

Participation rate information is out of date in the National Facilities Strategy. England Squash considers that the decline in squash participation has stopped and has stabilised. However, with increasing investment and the strategy set out in the Whole Sport Plan, the national governing body is confident that evidence of stability and upturn in participation will come through. He recognises the need to address the stock of courts available for

playing squash in England. The apparent decline in participation from 3m peak may also have been exaggerated as the peak figure was probably an over-estimate. However, England Squash considers there are potentially 1m players of squash in England.

The Whole Sport Plan for England Squash was published in 2005 and is a public document available on their website. A Whole Sport Plan is a plan for the whole of a sport from grass roots through to elite level and identifies how it will achieve its vision and contribute to Sport England's objectives of start, stay and succeed. They enable Sport England to direct funding and resources to the National Governing Bodies. The plans identify the help and resources needed to implement the strategy e.g. county sports partnerships, and programmes such as PE, School and Sport Clubs Links and the Community Club Development Partnership.

However, neither the Pan Leisure Report nor Ms. Hinson in her evidence made any reference to this document, which is more recent than the National Facilities Strategy which is now out of date. The Whole Sport Plan underpins the claims made in the letters from Nick Rider, the Chief Executive of England Squash, that the portrayal of squash as a game in continuing decline is inaccurate. As I previously mentioned, squash was selected by Sport England as one of the ten priority sports because of its potential for growing increased participation and because of the excellence of England players at the international level. Indeed, squash is now the number one squash nation in the world.

In the context of the WSP, England Squash sees a big future potential for clubs such as Lambs as part of the Community sporting infrastructure of Islington. Squash has a particular need now to retain courts in order to provide the facilities for new participants in the sport. Ms. Hinson expressed the view that if you were building a squash centre today, you would not build a nine-court facility. This is clearly an acceptance that if this major sports facility is lost, it is unlikely to be replaced and it would therefore represent a significant loss to facilities available in London.

It is important to note that you cannot create an environment to play the game as easily as, for example, a badminton court – many of which are easily accommodated in most sports halls, or table tennis. England Squash has found it difficult to counter the loss of courts for other purposes, but the national coaching scheme, school sports partnerships and the development of mini-squash provides increasing demand to use existing facilities properly. The danger is that if existing facilities are lost, they will not be easily re-provided. Over the last 18 months, mini-squash programmes have been incorporated into one-third of the school sports partnerships (150 across England). This represents 13,000 children starting in mini-squash and sustaining their activity. The crucial need is that they will have clubs where they can play in the future if their involvement in the game is to develop.

England Squash has fulfilled its key performance indicators for the PE and School Sport Club Links Programme and secured funding for next year. This

means that they will be gradually converting children from playing mini-squash to squash itself. Clearly squash courts are needed to sustain this growing participation in the future. England Squash considers that this demonstrates that they are laying down the foundations for the future growth of the sport.

#### **5. Status of the Lamb's Club**

Last week Ms. Hinson suggested that the Club's website had not been updated since the 1990s. However, the club has confirmed to me, in a telephone enquiry, that their website is kept up to date. I note that it has been updated, for example, by adding the names of new personal trainers since March 2006. You will doubtless arrive at your own opinion from your site visit regarding the club's description of itself on its website. I attach a copy of the latest version printed out last week.

#### **6. Predicted closure of the facility/loss of the building**

Mr. Simmonds, of DP9, expressed the opinion that in the event of the Clan proposals not receiving planning permission, there would be nothing to stop the owners demolishing internal walls etc. to get rid of the squash courts, or to demolish the whole building. However, Sport England questions whether this is, in fact, the case in view of the expected introduction in 2007 of the requirement for planning permission to carry out demolition works (amending the General Permitted Development Order, GPDO 1995)

In the light of these new requirements, which Sport England greatly welcomes in the interests of good planning, the prospect of being able to safeguard important sports facilities, such as the Lamb's Club, will be significantly increased, unless planning permission is granted for a redevelopment scheme. It is worth noting that the previous consultations in July 2000 on such changes attracted 77% in favour of the proposal. The Government clearly considers that it is in the public interest to prevent the unnecessary loss of sports facilities.

#### **7. Conclusions**

The numerous objections from its members represent the views of an important part of the sporting community of London. The objections from England Squash are strongly made and support the case for retaining the stock of squash courts for the future growth in participation in the sport. We note significantly that the appellant has failed to demonstrate that the facility is surplus to requirements and has chosen deliberately not to consult the community on their proposals. We do not consider these failures to be mere technical breaches of PPG17 but to be clearly contrary to the government's national policy guidance on safeguarding sports facilities. In our view, the need for the proposed office and residential development has not been demonstrated. Conflicts also with UDP policies and with the Mayor's London Plan provide further planning reasons for dismissing this appeal.

We consider that it remains in the public interest that the Lamb's Club, a major sports facility in Central London, should not be lost to the proposed redevelopment. We therefore consider that on the basis of the evidence presented to this enquiry, there are clear grounds for dismissing the appeal.