

ASHBURTON STADIUM COMPLEX

SOCIAL IMPACT STUDY



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1 INTRODUCTION

The Ashburton District Council has undertaken investigations into the feasibility and desirability of a sports stadium complex for the District. This included significant consultation with potential users and the broader community, as well as research into similar facilities in New Zealand. It was confirmed that the existing facilities for indoor sport/recreation in Ashburton fall well below those that sporting organisations expect and which are becoming increasingly available in other areas of New Zealand. The Ashburton community has expressed significant preliminary support for the proposed complex.

Four variants of a sports complex have been identified for more detailed appraisal. In broad terms these include:

- A three court stadium with a swimming pool and an integrated velodrome
- A three court stadium with a swimming pool but not a velodrome
- A three court stadium with an integrated velodrome but not a swimming pool
- A three court stadium without a velodrome or swimming pool.

1.1 Scope of the report

The Ashburton District Council has asked The Tourism and Leisure Group and Lincoln University to explore the social costs and benefits of the proposed complex and to report on them so as to clearly identify either a net benefit or cost. We will therefore examine the strategic impact of a new sports complex and report whether local businesses see facilities such as those proposed as contributing to their capacity to employ and retain good employees and entrepreneurs. We will also elaborate the suggestion made in the economic impact report prepared by Butcher Partners Ltd that social benefits are likely to depend primarily on the value to the community of having an asset available for their use, rather than from probably minor increase in economic activity associated with it.

2 INDOOR SPORTS FACILITY PROVISION IN ASHBURTON

In the Stage 2 Report to Council on the complex, its authors, The Tourism and Leisure Group and Glasson Potts Fowler, indicated that current indoor sports facilities are not meeting all current needs in the District. The community swimming pool, located in the grounds of Ashburton College, does not meet the requirements of all swimmers and is coming to the end of its useful life. A new 25 metre swimming pool has been mooted. Currently all social men's and women's basketball cannot be accommodated at the existing Basketball Stadium. Women play at the existing Sports Hall and men do not play at all. It is anticipated that men's and women's social basketball will play at the proposed new indoor stadium. Additional use of the facilities by basketball and netball will come through practices and training by Mid-Canterbury representative teams. In addition to the use by the local clubs, a three court hall would enable age grade and regional tournaments to be played in basketball, netball, volleyball and badminton.

While these are open to competition from other districts, Ashburton is particularly well suited to South Island championships because of its central South Island location, but also relative proximity to the largest South Island city. It was further suggested that with a multi purpose focus, there is potential for the stadium to be used for other activities including indoor soccer and cricket, conferences, exhibitions, entertainment etc. In addition, local cyclists are keen to see an indoor velodrome included in any sports complex proposal.

3 THE NEW ZEALAND EXPERIENCE OF LOCAL AUTHORITY SPORTS COMPLEX PROVISION IN SECONDARY URBAN AREAS

New Zealand local authorities, including those which administer secondary urban areas and their surrounding districts, have a long history of providing or supporting facilities that have been built for sport and recreation. In the 1950s this included mainly community halls with a social and recreational focus. The 1960s saw a broadening of the sorts of facilities supported and in the 1970s and 80s sports and physical activity centres were supplemented with multi-purpose convention centres and theatres with economic, arts and entertainment functions. The 1990s saw the emergence of leisure pools with a focus on non-competitive recreation. In the major urban areas events centres also became a prominent addition during the 1990s and over the last five years smaller communities have built such centres, often providing multi purpose indoor wet and dry facilities. As an illustration of facilities and services currently being provided, it is useful to examine briefly a number of case studies of local authority involvement in sports and recreation facilities (and associated programming) in several New Zealand secondary centres. Four of the five centres have populations significantly smaller than Ashburton

Waipukurau

Waipukurau is a small town of 3,900 people in Central Hawkes Bay. It is a prime example of the most recent trend in sport facilities of bringing modern swimming and recreation facilities to smaller populations. In 1997 a 25 metre pool, 12 metre learner's pool and a toddler's pool was completed. In July 2003 a further enhancement to the complex was the completion of a one court hall and fitness gymnasium. The new hall incorporates bleacher seating for 180 and a large viewing mezzanine floor.

The facilities are owned by a trust with the management contracted to a facility management company.

Twizel

Twizel is a very small community in the Mackenzie District with a population of 1,200. In 2003 the Twizel Events centre was completed at a cost of \$2.5 million. This comprises a one court hall, 220 seat theatre, fully equipped fitness gymnasium, 2 squash courts, climbing wall, conference room and kitchen.

Gore

Gore has a population of 9,900 and has over the last few years commenced a programme of recreation facility development that when completed will be the envy of many small communities in New Zealand. Starting with the development of a new swimming pool complex and indoor ice rink, these will be complemented by the construction of a four court hall in the next year. The total cost of the completed complex will be in the region of \$9 million.

Queenstown

Queenstown has a resident population of 8,500 and a two court hall was built in 1997 at a cost of \$7.5million. The indoor main stadium is 1621m² and can be used for general warming up exercises or more traditional sport, such as basketball, netball, soccer, volleyball and badminton.

In addition to the conventional sporting facilities, there is a 12 metre competition climbing wall with a 6 metre overhang capable of holding first class competitions, as well as catering to the needs of the social climber.

The maximum seating capacity in the main auditorium is 2000. This is comprised of two mobile retractable units of 83 seats each and two fixed retractable units totalling 186 seats. The remainder of the seating is laid out theatre style on the flat stadium floor.

Use of the Queenstown Events Centre can be divided into four key categories:

1. Community Participation - for sports and recreation programmes and meetings etc.
2. Community Events - where Queenstown residents can attend, e.g. Netball and Rugby Matches, New Zealand Ballet
3. Special Events - events that reward the Centre and Queenstown through increased tourism, e.g. Winter Festival, Climbing Competitions
4. Corporate Events - Conferences, Trade Shows, Gala Dinners, sports training camps, film shoots

“The Events Centre is therefore not only an important part of our community life, but it also plays an important role in helping attract part of our tourist market. It is envisaged that this role will increase as time goes on. It is important to note that these commercial corporate events are very important to minimizing the costs of the centre to the local community. We always work to reduce the impact of these events on our community activities.” – Manager, Queenstown Events Centre.

Invercargill

In 2003 Stadium Southland and Sport Southland piloted a Skills Based Health and Physical Education Programme with seven Invercargill primary schools. The programme was supported by the Invercargill Licensing Trust. The Trust funded the cost of bus travel to and from Stadium Southland for each of the participating schools, as well as covering half of the Stadium Southland admission fee. The Programme focused on basic fundamental skill development; promoted increased awareness of the benefits of regular physical activity; supported and complemented the health and physical education curriculum by encouraging regular physical activity sessions; promoted greater collaboration between sports codes and facility providers; and offered greater opportunity for children to access Invercargill's premier sporting facility, Stadium Southland. The Programme attempted to meet the needs identified through extensive community consultation, and national trends, which show that our children are becoming less active and struggling to come to grips with basic skills involving "run jump and throw". The sessions were led by sport development personnel from Sport Southland, Stadium Southland and Regional Sports Organisations, supported by teaching staff and parent volunteers who were keen to develop their own sports coaching skills so that they can provide ongoing support within the school setting. The Pilot was developed in consultation with the Southland Primary Schools Principals' Association. Further extension of the programme is being considered.

The specific motives underlying the provision of sports facilities and services of the types illustrated in the examples vary. The efficient management of community resources is clearly important but more obvious has been the perceived social benefits arising from increasing the levels of sport and recreation provision for children and young people. This has often been interpreted as an investment in future generations. More recently, physical activity among all age groups has been encouraged, combined with a focus on individual and community health, and the rise of "green prescriptions". Participation in physical recreation has therefore demanded a progressive improvement in community sport and physical recreation facilities, the pressure for which will undoubtedly strengthen at local authority level as the new provisions of the Local Government Act begin to be felt.

4 RESEARCH METHOD

Our research method has three components. The first is to outline all of the social or non-economic costs and benefits of building a new facility discussed in the research literature. Second, is a brief review of the themes of recent research and professional literature on the social impacts and influences of sports facilities and programming. Here we will refer to social capital and community development. The third and final component is based on a consultation in the Ashburton District with a range of organisations and businesses.

5 SOCIAL IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED SPORTS STADIUM

5.1 Lessons from the literature: recognised social or non-economic costs and benefits of the provision of sports facilities

The international research literature points to a number of social costs and benefits to the provision of new recreation facilities, including sports complexes. In summary they are:

Social Costs: Noise, parking, access issues for local residents; conflict between different community groups over facility use; potential for political conflict; expending of political capital; political opportunity costs; unforeseen negative factors associated with community identity and visibility; and disruption of the development of other community projects.

Social Benefits: Enhanced community identity; enhanced civic pride; enhanced town image; enhanced community visibility; increased awareness of individual sports; opportunity for political capital; stimulus to the development of new community projects; increased participation in activities; facility for non-sporting activities; individual and community health; and capacity building in project planning/management.

These costs and benefits will work themselves out in a variety of ways in different settings. Some may not be experienced at all. Some of the costs in particular result from poor management and planning and are less likely to occur if factored into the development of operational plans and consultation strategies.

A better understanding of the benefits in particular can be gained from recent international research into the relationship between sports facilities and related initiatives and the creation of non-economic benefits to individuals and communities. These do not relate only to facilities such as sports complexes but to participation in recreation and sport more generally, some of which occurs in specially provided facilities.

5.2 Social capital and community development

In general terms it can be said that social benefits are obtained from the provision of sport and recreation facilities and services. Sports activities have a positive role to play as ingredients in wider ranging initiatives to address issues of health promotion, diversion from crime, education, employment, community development and social inclusion. These, however, may be small in scale and not shared by whole populations or indeed all who participate in a particular activity. Changes may be considerable for, and positive to, the individual, even noticeable in small communities, but perhaps only miniscule in the greater scheme of things. There is also plenty of evidence to believe that beyond those immediately involved in community sport/recreation/leisure initiatives there is a ripple effect inducing wider social benefits.

To balance this view, and with particular reference to sports facilities, it must be said that provision of specialist facilities in the hope that they may increase participation is not often warranted. A better approach is to provide facilities that cater for a range of sports that can be managed flexibly to ensure optimum use of resources and cater for established and emerging activities.

Greater insight into the benefits referred to above can be gained with reference to the large amount of research that is being conducted on the development of social capital. It is particularly well summed up in the following paraphrased quotation from DeGraaf and Jordan:

They come from all over your community. Players, coaches, referees, families and friends join together each Saturday for youth basketball games. The parks and recreation department has worked hard to ensure the benefits of participating in this programme, including the new skills gained, the teamwork, the joy of competing with and against others, and the new friends made. Yet the benefits of such a programme move beyond the participants to the families and friends watching these games. The spectators meet and greet one another, talk about the weather, the game and community events. As they connect with one another at many levels, they are in the process of building the social capital needed to increase the quality of life of their community (page 20).

Social capital is therefore the value of all social networks and the tendencies that arise from such networks for people to do things for each other. It is as important as economic capital for successful societies and includes trust, formal and informal connections with others, diverse friendships, political participation, giving and volunteering, faith-based engagement, and quality of civic engagement across the community. In contemporary society people want diverse experiences, low-entry barriers to activities and the ability to be themselves. This type of informal social capital can be generated through community sport and recreation programmes, and may be best suited for knitting a society together and for building broad norms of generalised reciprocity. Sports facilities and associated programmes, such as the one being mooted for Ashburton, can therefore play an important role in promoting a sense of well-being and happiness, as well as promoting close relationships, social support, purpose and hope.

Consequently, the notion of such a facility being administered and managed by a trust, as recommended in the Stage 2 Report has much to commend it in social capital terms. It would allow the District Council to be actively involved in provision of services but in a way that gives maximum possibilities for community involvement in funding and governance.

5.3 Consultation in Ashburton

The results of this section should be read in conjunction with the Stage 2 Report to Council, which indicated that the Ashburton community has expressed significant preliminary support for the proposed complex. In the course of our research for this report it became clear that established residents who are actively involved in sports administration (Sport Mid Canterbury) and education (Ashburton College Physical Education Department) believe that a new facility would have a range of benefits associated with such things as increased school interchanges, greater opportunities for social and recreational sport, opportunities for participation during inclement weather, increased opportunities for introducing new sports and recreational activities (e.g., indoor soccer and cricket), and the provision of physical recreation to a wider range of community groups on a more regular basis (e.g., exercise classes for older residents in comfortable and welcoming surroundings).

5.3.1 Strategic impact

Enterprise Ashburton believes that a stadium complex could be a valuable asset in attempts to attract new businesses and migrants to Ashburton. Variant 2, the indoor stadium and swimming pool, is the preferred option with less value being placed on the velodrome. A central location near the CBD is the preferred location because of the perceived synergies that might be achieved between local, already established businesses, and the sports complex.

In addition to the discussions with Enterprise Ashburton contact was made with employment agencies to determine how Ashburton is promoted to people considering moving to Ashburton. One agency in particular was very involved with assisting English immigrants. Their reasons for moving to New Zealand and Ashburton included lifestyle, clean and green, beautiful scenery, quiet in comparison with their home environment and other larger New Zealand centres. Key requirements for new immigrants were standard of schooling, safe communities, activities available for children in particular. While the excellent outdoor facilities that Ashburton possesses were used to highlight potential activities, little was mentioned regarding the indoor facilities with the exception of the swimming pool. A second agency had very similar views. They considered that a new complex as proposed would make Ashburton more attractive to both existing and new residents. It appears that outdoor recreation activities such as skiing are a major draw card for people moving to the area.

A discussion with a human resources manager of a major company suggested that Ashburton is not seen as an attractive place to live. This image is mainly due to the views of other New Zealanders. Improved community facilities could help to change that image and make Ashburton more attractive to both existing and new residents.

If new facilities are built, the issue arises of how existing facilities will be managed. This will vary according to the actual facilities concerned. The Sports Hall Trust has already

indicated that the facility would be sold and any available monies contributed towards the new facilities. Ashburton College would need to make a decision regarding the continued use of the existing pool. While the availability of the existing pool provides easy access for students (social benefit), there would be an increase in costs (economic cost) and the school would need to determine the net cost or benefit before making the appropriate decision. The Ashburton Basketball Association would need to make a similar decision as to whether there would be a net benefit in retaining the Basketball Hall.

6 CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Existing facilities

The existing indoor recreation facilities (including the Community Pool) are of a very poor standard and are known to limit the number of people wishing to take part in activities. They lack the quality, size and flexibility associated with modern recreation facilities.

The existing facilities are on three separate sites in different areas of the town, negating any potential synergies between the facilities and activities. From a social perspective this provides an additional burden for parents who may have different children involved in different activities at different facilities increasing transport costs and minimising parental involvement in their children's activities.

The existing facilities minimise the potential to promote the growth of particular sports and activities. As an example netball is increasingly becoming an indoor activity, especially for high level competitions. Ashburton will not be able to meet this demand without improved facilities.

An accessible indoor facility also provides alternative venues in the winter for sports and activities which otherwise may have to be cancelled or rescheduled due to bad weather.

6.2 Strategic impact

The economic impact report suggests that the proposed facilities will “create a minor increase in economic activity.” The social impact, however, could be significant but difficult to measure in a quantitative sense. Improved community facilities, while probably not the key reason for people moving to an area, are important once people are established. In the same way that libraries, galleries and museums, as well as facilities for outdoor sports are considered essential facilities for a vibrant community, so too are sports complexes and swimming pools. For families, such community facilities provide a broad range of activities, which are particularly important in social capital terms.

Community facilities help to form peoples' opinions/images of places. There is at least anecdotal evidence that the image of Ashburton as a place to live is not as positive as it might be. The development of community facilities is one way of helping to change the image of a place.

6.3 Trends – International and New Zealand research

Based on facility trends in New Zealand and internationally, identified in this report, a community the size of Ashburton would normally have a range of indoor recreation facilities comparable to other similar and often smaller centres. In essence there is nothing special about providing the proposed facilities (with the exception of the velodrome). They are common elsewhere in New Zealand and will continue to increase in number. Multi-use sports complexes and swimming pools have become an essential part of the community infrastructure for towns and cities in New Zealand. We are aware of new recreation facilities proposed for other smaller centres such as Greymouth and Te Anau in addition to those already discussed.

Unless there are compelling economic reasons for including a velodrome and at this time we do not consider there are, it is more appropriate to concentrate on facilities that provide flexibility in terms of ability to cater for a wide range of activities, as more people will benefit (social) and the risks (capital, operational, market) associated with a potential white elephant are significantly reduced. On this basis a three court hall and swimming pool should be the preferred facilities.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the information obtained for this report and the conclusions developed, our view is that the most appropriate facilities for Ashburton are a 3 court stadium and swimming pool (Variant 2). This does not suggest that other complementary facilities (recreation, leisure, commercial) should be excluded in the future. These will need to be evaluated as to their benefit at the appropriate time.

The rationale for the recommendation from a social impact perspective, is that the facilities will have the greatest potential to meet the existing and future community recreational needs of Ashburton residents, while also offering economic benefits through events for the more popular activities (basketball and netball).

8 REFERENCES

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