



Statement and Questions for the Cabinet from: Ardagh Community Trust

Re: Cabinet meeting June 5th 2018, PART B - Key Decisions 8. Enhancement of Ardagh Tennis Courts

Date: 30/5/2018

We object to the proposal that BCC's Cabinet agrees to spend 200k on improvements to the tennis courts at the Ardagh when this scheme undermines a community-led, fully externally-funded project which will ensure a sustainable future for the Ardagh site at no ongoing cost to Bristol City Council.

If the cabinet agreed to this proposal, it will result in ongoing maintenance and management costs for BCC and will leave this treasured public asset vulnerable to future 'disposal' by BCC when there is an alternative community-led plan in place (with external funding from Power To Change, Enover Community Trust, Architectural Heritage Fund and others) which would ensure its ongoing future for use by the people of Bristol.

ACT's scheme includes improvements to the sports courts to widen their use (from solely tennis to also include other activities requested by local people of all ages) & will enable ACT to manage the whole site sustainably – cross subsidising the cost of maintenance of the public spaces and gardens, for example, with revenue funding from a range of charitable grant funding and earned income.

We believe that the proposal being put forward today misrepresents ACT's views (we have not 'compromised' on our CAT application – we were told by the Deputy Mayor (with whom we were liaising) that she had been told by the Mayor's Office that the decision on this has been taken out of her hands and it was not available for discussion. We are extremely concerned to ensure that a lack of clarity and/or misrepresentation of a number of issues/positions does not mislead to those making a decision in relation to this.

Spending £200,000 BCC funding is unnecessary. There is an alternative plan in place – and fully funded by external organisations – which will pay for capital improvements to the sports courts at the Ardagh – in line with community need and demand. It is difficult to understand why BCC is proposing to spend £200,000 on this unnecessary scheme when it is repeatedly stating that it has no money. It will also result in ongoing costs to BCC for management and maintenance at the Ardagh site which are not needed if BCC supports ACT's CAT application.

This report claims that this decision will result in revenue savings for the Council: because BCC currently pays for repairs/maintenance of tennis courts, across its Parks and is in the process of developing a new parks tennis operating model which is based on a fee paying

model and will include a tennis operator being responsible for the management and operation of the courts.

This is factually incorrect. An alternative viable plan was submitted by ACT to take on management of all of the Ardagh site through a CAT lease. This fully funded alternative has been in development for more than 7 years, has been fully supported by BCC throughout this time & would result in no ongoing cost to BCC and no need for any initial outlay in terms of capital. This spend is entirely unnecessary.

These courts were written out of BCC's sports strategy more than 15 years ago. It is ACT which has sought to bring them back into full use for the benefit of the local and wider Bristol community. Any suggestion that the courts would otherwise be lost is misleading & incorrect. More than 3,000 local residents have participated in the consultations undertaken by ACT (supported by BCC) in relation to our community-led proposals for improvements to the site. These emphatically evidence that local people – specifically local young people – want to see more diverse sports provision at the site.

While inclusion of six tennis courts at the Ardagh may contribute towards a more robust parks tennis citywide operating model, the scheme is currently self-sustaining and viable without these courts being included. **The sole purpose of the inclusion of these courts in the scheme is to provide a 'more attractive' financial proposal for an external (profit-making) operator in the future. Why is BCC allowing a community organization to be undermined in favour of providing opportunities for private profit for external organisations? This does not make sense.**

While this proposal may have been discussed with ward councillors, trustees of the Ardagh Community Trust, Lawn Tennis Association, Sport England, Parks Department and Property, it is misleading to suggest that ACT is supportive of this. ACT has been told that the scheme is going ahead whether we like it or not. This is not consultation.

ACT have an alternative proposal (Tennis+) which would enable the courts to be used by local young people & older people for tennis but also for sports other than tennis – e.g Tai-Chi, Buggyfit etc which is what the community have emphatically stated that they want. Sport England's own guidance states that sports courts in urban areas are much more effective in impacting on public health & wellbeing if they are multisport as they will be used year-round. The LTA scheme predicts under 50% usage of the courts when the scheme is operating at it's peak - we do not agree that this is good value for the council nor a benefit for the city. Horfield residents survey – published in 2018 – emphatically evidenced support from residents in Horfield ward for community-led improvements to the Ardagh site & sports offer which would enable increased numbers of local people to benefit from the facilities. Young people want to play basketball and netball, older people want to participate in Tai-Chi & new mums in Buggyfit. All of these will be excluded from the courts if this scheme goes ahead.

We do not believe that this proposal will make Culture and Sport accessible to all. It is a pseudo-privatisation scheme (no matter how well intended) which will limit access to

facilities located in Bristol's public parks by those least able to afford it. Where there is no alternative (e.g where tennis courts do not have any ancillary facilities or community groups willing and able to take on management of them) this may be desirable. In this case – this decision will undermine a community-led plan for a sustainable future for the whole site which will contribute to BCC's strategic aims while ensuring that the facilities are able to benefit as wide a range of Bristol residents as possible.

ACT notes that the Equality Impact Assessment states that this initiative will have a NEGATIVE impact on people with disabilities and young people in the city since they will no longer get free access.

The report states that this proposal will reduce budget pressures for BCC. This is factually incorrect. If BCC go ahead with this decision, BCC will be committed to continuing to pay for maintenance and management of parts of the Ardagh site ongoing. There is an alternative, fully funded proposal from a Community Anchor Organisation which would enable BCC to divest itself of any ongoing costs for the site. Why is BCC not pursuing this?

Whilst inclusion of six courts at the Ardagh may strengthen the citywide model it undermines a community organisation, will result in ongoing expense for BCC which it does not need to continue to pay for and is not necessary for the citywide scheme to be successful.

The statement that **'Inclusion of six of the Ardagh courts will mean the model is more appealing for operators to bid for as the model will generate more income opportunities.'** is extremely surprising given BCC's policy statements re: the need for community groups in the city to take on community asset transfers if the city is to retain it's public assets, and commitment to working to retain public assets for the benefit of Bristol's residents. This proposal will cherry pick parts of an asset to insert into a commercial scheme to raise revenue for an external (private) operator at the expense of a community anchor organisation and the community in the Horfield Common area. How is BCC able to justify this?

The report states that: The ACT's preference is to retain all 11 courts for inclusion in their community asset transfer, however on the basis the Council wants to retain six for inclusion in the wider parks tennis model the ACT are willing to compromise on their position.

ACT was given no choice by BCC but to compromise if we wished to be able to retain the Ardagh as a public asset as BCC has repeatedly stated that it cannot afford to maintain the site itself. The reason we have objected to inclusion of the courts in the citywide scheme in this form is because:

1. Local people – including local young people – have repeatedly stated that they want to see the courts used for a broader range of sports than only tennis which has a limited interest group and
2. No revenue from the citywide scheme will come back into the Ardagh site to support maintenance and management of the wider site for public benefit so there is no way in which ACT can afford to pay for ongoing maintenance of the wider site (public gardens, paths, fences, walls etc) if there is no way of making any revenue from the courts included in this plan which will be fenced off, locked for use by anyone not able to pay to join the tennis scheme & run as a commercial operation by a profit making company – with no recognition of the need of the wider site for maintenance etc. The scheme is poorly conceived in relation to wider parks maintenance needs and fails to recognise the particular context of these courts in a wider facility which ACT will be maintaining, paying for the provision of public toilets etc in. We think that this proposal is unfair & unethical in relation to BCC's commitment to work to support third sector, voluntary and charitable organisations. We urge the Mayor to rethink this proposal.

The report includes demographic information for the wrong ward. While the Ardagh is in the centre of Horfield Common, it is located in Bishopston and Ashley Down Ward. Horfield Common itself sits across BADW, Henleaze & Westbury on Trym and Horfield wards.

We do not believe that the 467 responses to the citywide tennis consultation meaningfully reflect local views as more than 3000 local residents have participated in ACT's own consultation work in relation to the community asset transfer proposal that we have submitted (and which – until last summer – had been fully supported by BCC).

The report equalities statement states that the courts are currently in poor condition and are likely to become unusable in the future if they are left to deteriorate. This is incorrect as there is an alternative proposal which is fully funded in place to improve the courts and increase participation in sport through their use by making them all multisport & therefore responsive to demand locally and citywide. This would also mean increasing participation in sport at the site amongst people of all ages & interests – not just tennis players. Young people whose parents and families are least able to afford to access the tennis scheme will be excluded from using these facilities which is counter to the aims of BCC more widely and completely counter to ACT's ethos as a community organization and charity.

This proposal is flawed, counterproductive and expensive for BCC. Why is the cabinet considering this application to spend £200,000 that is unnecessary to achieve a pseudo-community sports facility when there is a plan in place which has been fully supported by BCC to date and which is fully funded for ACT to deliver an actual community sports

facility?

We are at our wits' end and cannot understand the rationale of BCC when it is – at the same time – claiming that there is no money available to pay for services needed to support some of the most vulnerable people in the city. We urge the Mayor to reconsider this decision.

Crystal Watters – Vice-Chair, Ardagh Community Trust on behalf of ACT Trustees

ACT's question for the Mayor:

Why is the cabinet considering this application to spend £200,000 that is unnecessary to achieve what will be a semi-privatised community sports facility when there is a plan in place which has been fully supported by BCC to date and which is fully funded for ACT to deliver an actual community sports facility?