

FOBRA RESPONSE TO THE REC TRUST CONSULTATION ON LAND USE AT THE REC, 6 JUNE 2011

1. *The Trustees believe that the benefits secured by the Trust’s proposed land use are greater than any additional detriments (negative elements) arising from them. Do you:*
Strongly disagree/Disagree/Neither agree nor disagree/Agree/Strongly agree
**Please tick one box which represents your opinion*

FoBRA response:
 Neither agree nor disagree

2. *If you disagree, could you explain why you believe there are more detriments (negative elements).*

FoBRA response:

The FoBRA committee feels strongly that there is not enough information provided to agree or disagree on the balance between benefits and detriments.

We don’t think a meaningful judgement can be made in the absence of a detailed proposal for any new development. This would need to include details of facilities, including non-sporting facilities such as shops, bars and restaurants; capacity, height and design, parking and transport, and financing.

In any case it is not clear that the proposed land use plan is definitive, since the owner of Bath Rugby has stated in recent press interviews (Times, 18 April and Bath Chronicle, 28 April 2011) that he wants the club to have a bigger stadium than the proposal provides. Further changes could alter the balance of benefits and detriments.

The proposal pays no regard to the legal safeguards provided by the 1922 covenant (protection of adjoining premises) and the 1956 covenants (not using the land otherwise than as open space, and not showing undue preference between sports).

The proposal would permanently alienate more open land in the most sensitive part of the Rec, right opposite the Abbey. We do not accept that this can be simply offset by a land swap with Lambridge, even of a larger area, because the sites are in no sense equivalent:

- Lambridge is much less convenient to access than the Rec for most people in the Bath area, and we doubt whether many people will want to use it
- The amenity value of open land in the heart of the city, especially in this particular location, is much greater than that in any other location.

The consultation appears intended to close off other locations for a new stadium and Leisure Centre, such as the present Homebase site or other locations on Bath Western Riverside.

The current proposal misses the opportunity to modernise the Leisure Centre, which is coming towards the end of its useful life. Regularising its continued presence on the Rec is only a first step. The Council recently set aside £10m towards its re-provision, and it is believed that Bath Rugby was also prepared to make a significant contribution. It will be much more difficult to assemble the funds for a new Leisure Centre if this is handled later as a stand-alone project.

The current proposal also misses the opportunity to redevelop the current facilities on a less sensitive area of the Rec. The current stadium is in a very prominent position, right opposite the Abbey, and expanded facilities on this site are bound to be visually intrusive. It is not enough to say that any issues will be dealt with through the planning process, when it is clear that a better solution in land use terms would be to move the stadium downriver towards North Parade Bridge, and to incorporate the present Leisure Centre and Pavilion buildings. That would facilitate a more efficient use of land, remove several unattractive structures, and minimise visual detriment.

Development at the Rec or at Lambridge (if a land swap goes ahead) could exacerbate traffic problems in Bath, notably congestion in the city centre, and the NO₂ level at Lambridge which is twice the legal limit. It needs to be made a precondition of any development at either site that there be a sustainable travel plan based on alternatives to the private car.

FoBRA is concerned about the legitimacy of this consultation, since there is no way of distinguishing local respondents from those at a distance. As the Rec was originally conveyed to the Mayor, Aldermen and Citizens of the City of Bath, we believe the consultation should be targeted at local people. Despite this, we note that Bath Rugby says *'we need as many supporters and followers of the Club as possible to take part'* and that the Real Friends of the Rec are asking members to *'support our '10x Initiative'....as well as responding to the consultation yourself, get 10 of your family, friends, neighbours, work colleagues etc. to respond to the consultation, and in turn ask them to get 10 more people to respond'*. These efforts seem designed to get people to respond whether or not they are local to Bath. We have no objection to a wide range of respondents, but we believe that the responses of locals should be separately identifiable, so that their concerns can be distinguished and addressed.

3. *Are there any benefits to the proposals that you believe we have overlooked?*

FoBRA response:

The consultation document should have outlined the financial position of the Rec Trust, its dependence on Bath Rugby as its principal source of income, and the costs it incurs in maintaining the area as a whole including some of the other clubs and activities which take place there.

Against this background, the document should have explained the additional income it expects to receive from Bath Rugby and from the Leisure Centre if the proposal goes through, and how this would be used to improve other facilities at the Rec and at Lambridge (if a land swap goes ahead).

The document should also have clarified the benefits which accrue to the city from the rugby, and the potential costs to local businesses and to the management of the Rec as a whole if the premiership game were to leave the Rec.

4. *What additional clubs, societies, and/or activities would like to see available at The Rec, Leisure Centre or Lambridge?*

FoBRA response:

We believe that the citizens of Bath should be encouraged to make use of the Rec for informal public recreation whenever organised events are not taking place. The present regime, where they are admitted grudgingly and on sufferance, should be discontinued.

The Rec should be available for sports other than rugby, particularly cricket, hockey and lacrosse, for music concerts, and for open-air activities for schools and clubs.

The Leisure Centre should benefit from a new building with a long-term life and sustainable, adaptable facilities. This must at least include a gym and swimming pool.

If a land swap goes ahead, Lambridge should be available for sports other than rugby, and for open-air activities by schools & clubs.