

'Harlow to K2 and Beyond' The Sport and Leisure Legacy Project 2016

The National Lottery Sports Fund

Contributed by David Carpenter, Director, Lottery Sports Fund, 1994 – 2003

Impact, Trends and the Future

My associated article on the National Lottery Sports Fund outlined the factual background to the Fund over the past 21 years. How would I summarise the contribution of the Lottery Sports Fund to sports centre development over 21 years? And what of the future?

First and foremost I think that the Fund has made a positive contribution, a 'step change' in some policy areas, with a very large number of sports centre projects that have had significant impact on local communities, and on individual people locally.

In the early days of the Fund a lot of significant strategic projects were supported in the major cities, and rural market towns.

This then trended into more support for projects on education sites, particularly Specialist Sports Colleges offering curricular, extra-curricular and community use on either a casual or booked basis.

Universally, what was originally often a basic sports hall unit with changing accommodation developed into centres with other, often, extensive 'lifestyle' support facilities, driven partly by demand and partly by the need for financial sustainability.

More latterly provision has been influenced by Sport England's development of the Optimum Sports Hall, the first example being St.Mary's in Hull. Their guidance documentation such as 'Developing the Right Sports Hall. And, on the ground major examples such as Orford Jubilee Park in Warrington, Lancashire.

When the Lottery Fund began almost all of the sports centre projects were being managed by an internal team. Now almost all are with a Leisure Trust or private sector supplier, often on long term contracts that also cover maintenance, renewal and regeneration.

Designs that have reduced 'life cycle' costs, are environmentally more sustainable, use improved building materials and offer more natural light are to the fore.

Future funded schemes are likely to come under intense scrutiny by Sport England, in respect of key criteria for the new Government Sports Strategy; and by Local Government, in terms of making new provision in a policy area that remains discretionary. Health, Wellbeing and Physical Activity agendas will heavily influence future provision.

In summary! The Lottery Fund has had a huge influence over 21 years. But when it comes down to looking at involvement with sports centres perhaps the influence has been less than some other policy areas. True, the Fund has had an involvement with almost 25% of the current stock of Sports Centres. True, that it

has also been involved with many key developments in both cities and rural market towns over 21 years. Investment has resulted in 'lifestyle' experiences and improvements for many local people, of all ages.

But, on a pessimistic level, although the Fund has been and continues to be welcome and significant for sport it has not been able to keep pace with the total sector deficit in terms of replacement and renewal. The simple fact is that many sports centres are either at or reaching the end of their natural life. A figure of £1billion per annum on a rolling basis is probably required to address the issue.

According to Sport England there are still more sports centres being opened than closed at present, that is unlikely to continue in the current public sector environment which is set to get even tougher over the next five years to 2021.

[My thanks to Alison Selfe and Brian Whaley at Sport England for their contributions to my Legacy Project articles on the National Lottery Sports Fund. Their views are not necessarily my own.]