

Bell's Sports Centre

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 In May 2024 Council instructed officers to bring forward further proposals for Bell's Sports Centre later in 2024, including plans for community engagement on these further proposals (Report 24/151 refers). This report proposes a number of options to support recommendations 6a and 6b in the covering report.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Following a decision of the Live Active Leisure (LAL) Board to relocate health and fitness activities from Bell's Sports Centre to Dewars Centre, Council approved a formal request from LAL to withdraw delivery of all service from Bell's from 31 August 2024.

- 2.2 Since then officers have been investigating a number of options for Bell's with the following initial assumptions:

- 1 Perth and Kinross Council or no single other organisation would want to take over all current accommodation and provide sports services from the accommodation without significant capital investment or annual support to running costs from the public sector;
- 2 The building is well regarded in Perth and residents would like to see it continue to support activities on the North Inch;
- 3 The building has recently received B listed status and the Council as its owner is obligated to maintain. In such a prominent location leaving the building unoccupied would form a blight on the locality;
- 4 Flood risk will be minimised by the decisions of Scottish Water to invest in flood/drainage improvements;
- 5 As a result of the January 2024 Council decision to consolidate Perth leisure facilities into one location, Bell's for site size, traffic management and other reasons was not considered a suitable location for that purpose;
- 6 Proposals should aim to address:
 - i. Public facilities
 - ii. Changing places facilities
 - iii. Low annual revenue cost
 - iv. Public/ North Inch amenity ambitions
 - v. Gannochy Pavilion lease arrangements to current tenant Perthshire Rugby Football Club

Historic Environment Scotland Listing

- 2.3 On 12 April 2024 Historic Environment Scotland (HES), after public consultation, listed large parts of Bell's Sports Centre with a "B" designation. This has subsequently been discussed with HES who have clarified that in any redevelopment the original dome is the key material architectural feature

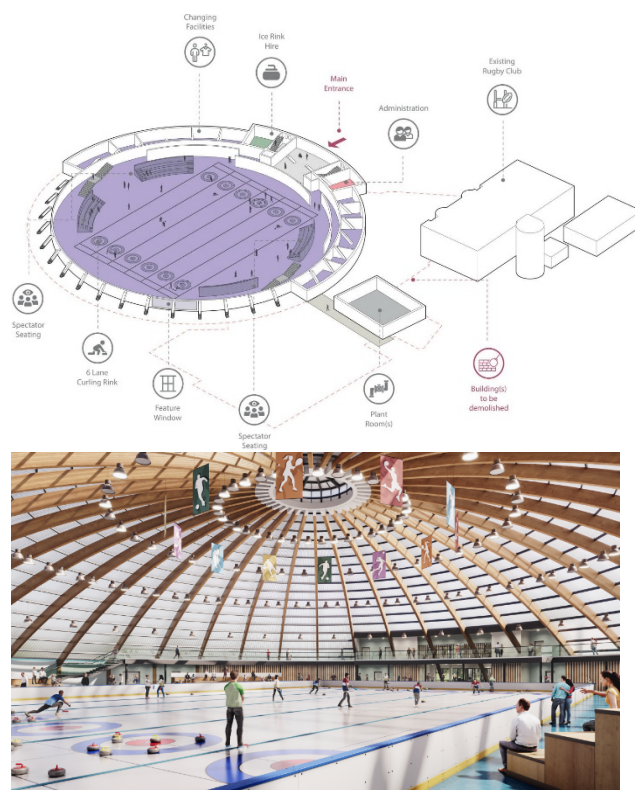
that is of significant importance. No further discussion/agreement has taken place with HES about the options for future use considered here, as this is subject to the community engagement process agreed with Council.

3. OPTIONS

3.1 Initial options for Bell's have focused on two concepts:

Curling/ Ice Arena

3.2 Concept: Demolition of “skirt buildings” with retained dome structure converted into 6 lane ice facility, separate from the Perthshire Rugby Football Club use of the Gannochy Pavilion.



3.3 As indicated in Appendix E participation in ice activities is profiled as 600-700 curling members who account for 80-90% of the 11,112 curling visits to the current facilities at Dewars per year. Plus the approximate 5,288 non-member visits who attend events a year.

3.4 Estimated costs:

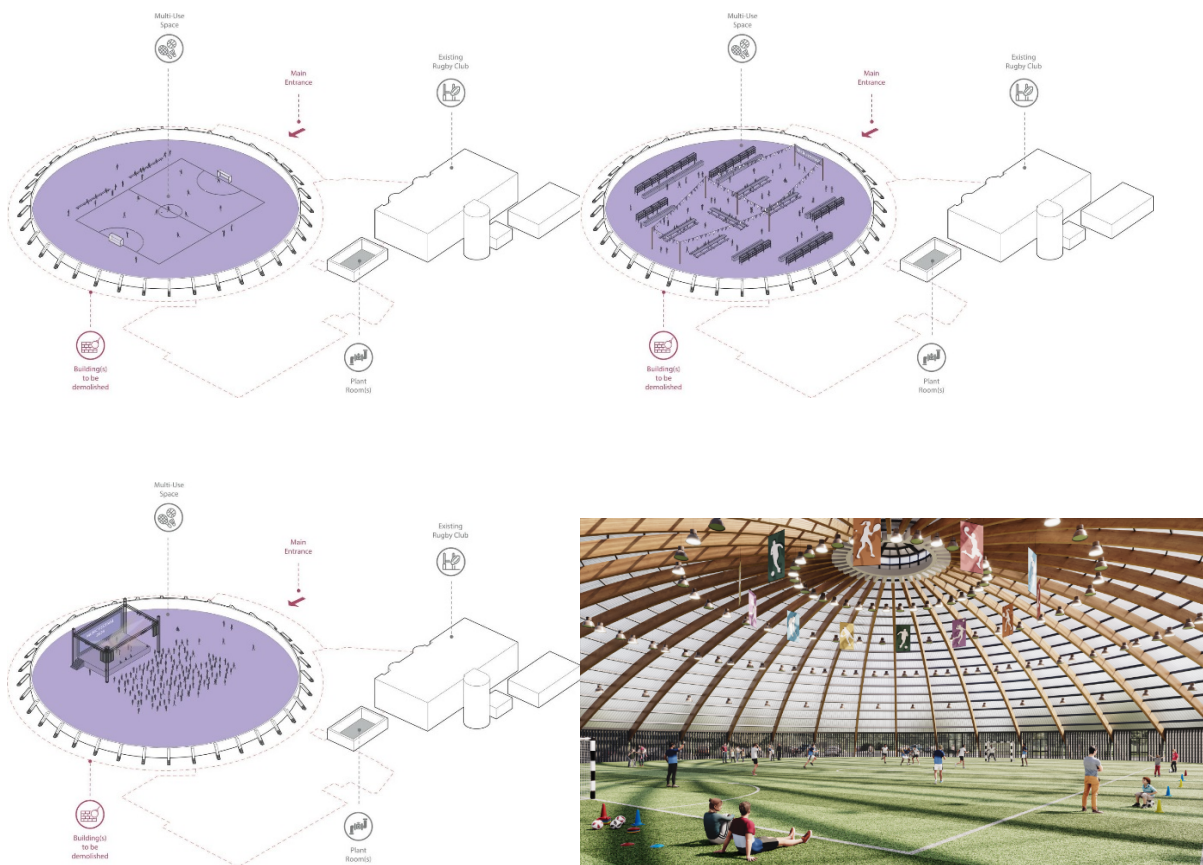
- Capital costs: demolition of peripheral buildings excluding Gannochy Pavilion = £15M
- Revenue costs: annual running costs, excluding potential business rates liability = £400,000

Unheated Event Space/ Indoor Sports Pitches

- 3.5 Demand for synthetic pitches in Perth city, particularly over the winter months is significant. We currently have two Council-operated 3G synthetic pitches, one at the North Inch Community Campus and one at Bertha Park High School. There is a third at Perth High School which is unavailable due to the construction of the new school, this pitch is due to re-open in the summer of 2026. There are two further synthetic pitches operating in Perth city, one at Letham and one at St Johnstone football club, both are privately operated and managed. The Council also has a sand dressed pitch at Perth Academy (which is used but is not an ideal surface for football training).
- 3.6 Usage of the 3G pitches at Bertha Park and North Inch Community Campus is currently close to 100% on Monday to Thursday evenings and between 50-70% at other times. Demand significantly outstrips pitch availability especially for smaller youth clubs. Most clubs are volunteer led and in the case of youth teams tend to want to train on similar nights and within a similar window typically between 6pm and 8.30pm, increasing pressure on the two facilities during these times.
- 3.7 The Council and LAL work collaboratively to ensure that bookings for the two available 3G pitches are distributed fairly and reasonably, and as such we have to prioritise bookings in line with the Perth and Kinross Council Sport and Active Recreation Guidance. As part of this exercise, we also have to allocate space on the sand dressed pitch at Perth Academy although many clubs choose not to use this facility.
- 3.8 Demand for pitches is highest during October to April and as such we operate a block booking window covering those months. Demand drops significantly between April and September as clubs take advantage of lighter evenings and the (sometimes) better weather to train on free to use grass pitches. Therefore during these months we have more flexibility in the allocation of pitch spaces, however demand is still high.
- 3.9 PACES (Perth and Kinross Accredited Club Excellence Scheme) registered clubs are given priority and wherever possible we try to give historical existing users the opportunity to book the same facility again (not anything extra) before bookings are opened to other clubs. This can be a complex process with several competing demands on the limited space available, and several factors that need to be taken into consideration. Whilst all clubs receive an allocation of the existing facilities, we cannot accommodate the demand from every team within a club and many teams are therefore unable to access a Council-operated synthetic pitch.
- 3.10 Currently 8 Clubs, each with multiple teams and community focused groups receive an allocation of the available pitch space these are:
- Jeanfield Swifts
 - Fair City

- Scone Thistle
- Luncarty
- Bridge of Earn
- Pitfour
- Stanley
- St Johnstone

3.11 Concept for Bell's: Demolition of “skirt buildings” with retained dome structure converted into unheated multi-use sports space such as a 3 court 7-a-side pitch facility, or events space, separate from the Perthshire Rugby Football Club use of the Gannochy Pavilion.



3.12 It is suggested this is a 7 day a week facility accessible by all. Indicative participation is conservatively estimated at 20,000 visits per annum.

3.13 Estimated costs:

- Capital costs: demolition of peripheral buildings excluding Gannochy Pavilion to create a naturally ventilated, non-heated space = £5M-£6M
- Revenue costs: operating costs for delivering, for example facilities 3 court 7-a-side offer, are almost break even given the demand for this type of amenity across Perth and Kinross (excluding any business rates liability). There are examples of this type of facility being run on a commercial basis in Dundee in existing buildings.

4. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

- 4.1 While ice has been considered, given the costs involved in developing this at Bell's and the wider officer recommendation that there is no commercial case for the Council to continue to operate an ice facility this option is not being pursued.
- 4.2 There is a potential sustainable use case in the concept of an event space/ unheated multi-use sports pitches, and it is considered that this option should be included in community engagement on the future use of Bell's.
- 4.3 The original design of Bell's Sports Centre dome was intended to create an training and indoor games hall. The concept of an event space /unheated multi-use sports pitches offers a cost-efficient, sustainable future for the site while preserving the listed dome roof. It is therefore recommended that community engagement is undertaken on the basis of uses for an unheated space.
- 4.4 To support continued access to public/change places toilet facilities Gannochy Pavilion could be redeveloped to provide in conjunction with the long-term leaseholder.
- 4.5 Council approved in May 2024 that the future use of Bell's should be the subject of community engagement. This paper gives options to inform this discussion but is not exhaustive and it is recommended that the community engagement process includes the opportunity for members of the public to suggest other unheated use options for the site.

5. CONCLUSION

It is recommended that community engagement is undertaken on the future of Bell's through a survey and supporting communication campaign to encourage participation. Survey options to include:

- Do nothing beyond essential maintenance requirements which are the responsibility of the owner of a Category B listed structure
- Convert the dome to an unheated event space/ multi-use sports pitch venue
- Invite community suggestions for other unheated use