

INQUIRY REPORT Sporting Clubs Birmingham

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1. Submission from Sporting Clubs Birmingham

Peter Mintoft and Nick Jones, Directors of Sporting Clubs Birmingham, sent the following submission to the APPG Inquiry.

As a member of England Basketball for a period of some 50 years I would like your inquiry to note that although the sport is very, very capable of doing very positive things for people be they from a town, village or inner-city there is one fundamental weakness which inhibits progress at all levels, namely the inaccessible, unaffordable and unsustainable infra-structure. This is particularly so in the inner-city where enthusiastic youngsters all too often do not enjoy enthusiastic parental backing and struggle to avail competitive opportunities whether it be through lack of knowledge, a lack of disposable income or sheer inaccessibility.

The major expenses of a basketball club are court hire and the employment of officials. For most clubs these fees are met from player contributions, but are usually subsidised by some means (e.g. an educational institution which offers a reduced rate). There is a huge inequality in the prices that are charged in this country and those in some of European partners. I could obtain evidence to prove that the prices shown in the table below are accurate:

Table 1

Country	England	Belgium	Sweden
Basketball Court Hire Fee per hour	£40.00	€5.00	€5.00

If a court is needed for two hours to play a regulation game it can be seen that players in this country are being asked to pay significantly more than those in Europe and so where we struggle, our European friends have no problems with their sustainability. The hire costs and officials fees together exceed the participants' ability to pay and so there are precious few opportunities for youngsters to continue their interest.

It can be seen, therefore, that in the traditional form of the game opportunities are scarce. A look at the local club structure in Birmingham also evidences the few opportunities available. In the West Midlands League the table below illustrates the numbers of clubs based in the City and servicing the population of circa 1,000,000. The League is further restricted in that there is no provision solely for Junior (under-19 years) players. Juniors are able to join the senior teams and thereby gain experience of playing with and against adults. Effectively this means that young players need to be of a sufficiently high standard to fit into this scenario. The financial implication for senior clubs is that junior players would expect to pay junior fees and this again puts a strain on club finances.

Table 2

Gender	No of Birmingham-based Basketball Teams	Openly Accessible Teams in Birmingham
Male	13	9
Female	3	2

Junior players are catered for in the City by four National League Clubs who run teams in the various age groups and most junior players are signposted to these clubs. Even so, there is unmet demand from many youngsters. These clubs organise matches using the traditional home and away basis with the traditional form of competition. A more cost-effective approach to the sport has been developed in recent years and is known as a central venue league. This concept works well in certain areas and normally uses a shortened form of the game with the costs shared amongst all playing participants. This makes the game more affordable and sustainable as most families will be able to find the more modest cost per head. There is much more room for the provision of such leagues but sport centres have been slow to adopt this alternative method of provision.

It is this method of provision that Sporting Club Birmingham, a Community-Interest-Company will use if it is successful in its bid to secure the Community Asset Transfer of the Stockland Green Leisure Centre (which is under consideration at this time).

From another aspect British Cycling flourished when they built a dedicated facility in Manchester and secured funding for high quality coaching infrastructure. Badminton have their national centre in Milton Keynes. Is it not possible to build one national facility for Basketball that could ensure minimum investment returns 'medals' and becomes the catalyst for further facility development around the UK? A 4-6 court facility with fitness

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areas could not repay its capital costs but could operate at least at revenue neutral. With a budget similar to that which cycling received a decade ago, basketball would do more to raise the profile of the sport for the next 10 years than any other single initiative. Within 5 years we would see significant increases in national team performance and the sport's profile would be raised with it. Within 10 years, we could win medals at major events and tournaments.