

## Notes of Member Site Visits to SLL Leisure Facilities

### Visit to Fairlands Lakes Sailing Centre & High Ropes Course Friday 16 August 2019

On Friday 16 August, a small group of Members from the Community Select Committee including Cllrs Sarah Mead (Chair), Stephen Booth, John Mead and Loraine Rossati visited the Fairlands Valley Lakes Sailing Centre, Ropes Course and Cycling Hub. The Scrutiny Officer, Stephen Weaver along with the Culture Wellbeing and Leisure Services Manager, Geoff Caine as well as the SLL Regional Contract Manager, Allan Prescott and SLL Sailing Centre Manager also attended.

The key findings from the site visit were as follows:

- The Sailing Centre offers a wide range of water based activities that are available to the public. A lot of users are via pre-arranged lessons for sailing, windsurfing, and paddle boarding. These sessions are fully booked primarily with schools. There is also pay and play pedalos for hire, which were introduced last year and on sunny days are proving to be popular with local residents.
- Splash Park – This large facility continues to be popular during the summer months with families, which offers a free, fun water activity in a very safe environment. There is a kiosk offering drinks and ice-creams. Parking for this facility can be difficult for families who need to walk a reasonable distance pushing buggies to access the water park. The toilet facilities are very limited and these double up for families as an informal changing facility.
- There are also non-water based activities for hire including grass sledging, sit-in buggies, power kiting and mountain and turf boards. These facilities are popular with Schools, Scout Groups and Children's parties
- Events – SLL organise a number of events throughout the year to attract people to the park, including a Big Fun days out, and fitness testing
- Penguin falls – new feature introduced this year for younger children, which is run by a third party company. This provides inflatable crafts that are used in a small ring comprising 6 inches of water. This is very popular and affordable for families especially in fine weather over the summer.
- Cleaning and litter picking is currently a grey area between SLL and SBC environmental services regarding who should do what and how often at peak times in the summer. The aqua splash park is a priority area to keep clean in the summer
- Ropes Course – The ropes course cost has been made lower since it was opened and a 45 minute use costs £15 for adults and £10 and is now regularly used by casual users as well as being popular larger group bookings/Children's parties etc. The Chair has suggested that a very good addition for the ropes course which could encourage further use for families/teachers and responsible adults would be to provide benches to sit on and a canopy to sit under to observe the young people using the facility.
- Climbing wall - The climbing wall has recently been refurbished and is a popular feature and is regularly hired. The portable climbing wall is used at

events around the town such as Stevenage Day, it is also hired out to other users including other local authorities and is a good income generator for SLL and the Council.

- Disabled access – There are disabled accessible boats for hire which uses a hoist, but there is no roll on roll off disabled access. For the high ropes the user has to be able to be transferred to a light wheelchair to access the ropes course so users who are restricted to heavy motorised wheel chair can't use the high ropes.
- Band stand – There is a need for a cover for the band stand so that it could be used more regularly
- Toilets an issue – there are not enough toilets in the park. There is a reliance on the goodwill of the café for park users to use but at peak times this is not enough.
- Geese poo an issue
- Parking an issue
- Costello Café provides basic food for visitors. They do offer healthier food options but fatty foods seem to currently be the most popular amongst visitors. The Chair stated that she would like to see a more enticing healthy food option as well as provision made in any future contract for environmentally friendly conditions to be included, such as no disposable cups

#### Visit to Stevenage Swimming Centre & Stevenage Arts & Leisure Centre – Friday 30 August 2019

Councillors Sarah Mead and Loraine Rossati attended a site visit with Geoff Caine and Stephen Weaver along with Darren Bickel SLL Swimming Centre Manger and Andrew Gibb, SALC Manager.

The key findings from the site visit were as follows:

- The pool has been reconfigured over the years
- Demand for the baby pool is in high demand with lessons totally booked out and a waiting list for private lessons
- Schools swimming programme is totally full and capacity is informally shared with North Herts District Council. Currently there are 30 – 34 Schools using the pool. Also home schooling groups are very busy outside of the traditional school slots. School hire costs work out at £1.95 per pupil where as its £8 per child for private lessons
- The changing village has been amended and now offers better capacity and flexibility with family changing room cubicles
- The centre is open from 6am to 10pm 7 days a week
- Swimming is offered as a part of NHS GP Patient referrals which work well and combine with the other gym offers such as the Kinesis studio
- There are 230 people as Wellness Spa Members. NHS referrals can use this for £24 a month it is otherwise £34 a month or £45 for a couple
- The booking system does record some demographics information
- Adult lessons are currently at 40 to 50 people
- Casual swimming costs £3 and £5 for junior and adults
- £26 a month for unrestricted times

- There is a teaching room which is used for internal training of first aid. Pool training etc. and also for external sessions
- SLL struggle to now attract swimming pool staff as the availability of 16 year old school leavers has gone due to young people staying in education or training up to 18 years old and at 18 they can earn similar or better in a less demanding role in retail etc.

### Stevenage Arts & Leisure Centre (SALC)

- As well as being used for multiple sports use the main sports hall is hired out for functions, concerts, and Asian Weddings. The site visit saw the main sports hall being set up for an Asian Wedding, which creates income for the centre circa £1000 a day.
- Members also visited the gym fitness centre with the antigravity treadmill and the bowls hall and badminton courts
- Members visited the bistro/art Gallery which is a large area offering a bar area for the show interval
- Members viewed the 750 seater theatre and had a tour of behind the scenes which is a very large and flexible area. However given its seating size the theatre struggles to get larger acts
- The Pantomime continues to be one of the most successful shows with 87% occupancy and awards for the best Panto for the theatre in its category. There is capacity for occasional films such as the upcoming sing-a-long for the Greatest Showman.

### Visit to Steveange Golf & Conference Centre – Monday 2 September 2019

Members had an interesting and enjoyable visit to the Golf & Conference Centre on Monday 2 September. The Members who carried out the visit (Adrian Brown, Margaret Notley, Stephen Booth and Claire Parris) were impressed with the facilities and how things appeared to be arranged organisationally. Members were shown around by Sharon Hannah, Stevenage Golf Centre Manager and Allan Prescott SLL and Geoff Caine. There has been evidence of lots of investment at the centre both on the golfing side and the conference side. Golf - (now circa 350 members and growing – circa £750 a year for 7 day a week annual membership and circa £550 for 5 day a week annual membership – this is a lot cheaper than any comparable private club). £30 for a turn up on the day, pay and play. £30 for a lesson with the resident professional. They also have some society groups (groups who book as a large group and can get access at a different rate). There are issues with people trying to sneak on the course and not pay day fees or be Members (this is difficult to police as there are many entry points on the course, but staff challenge people to produce the score card they are issued with on the day).

The conference centre looks very good, well decorated and maintained, comfortable bar with new tables, chairs and furniture. The conference centre hosts weddings (£4k for 50 seated guests all day all the works plus marriage licence etc. also funeral wakes and parties etc. They provide catering for their own food and the menu looks very good and competitive prices for bar snacks and lunches. They are launching a cream teas service in the autumn. The views from the reception room and bar are excellent.

There are about 20 junior Members (competing with other sports etc. so hard to attract and still expensive for them. Also schools have scheduled golf into the sports curriculum but it's a challenge to get the schools 16-18 to engage). A lot of local football teams and kids parties come along to use the football golf course which is on the 9 hole par 3 course. £6 a head

The women's section is currently small but the women's captain is very keen to expand their numbers and SLL are looking at having a dedicated changing facility for women which would help them promote it. So room for improvement with young and female players participation.

The greens and golf course is managed by a third party specialist company who have run this for 6 years. Over this time the course and greens have really improved, which is resulting in more members joining and positive comments about the course. The driving range has a number of electronic pop-up tees and this is being extended to more of the driving range. There is now a room which is used to film players swing and get tutorials from the professional. There is also clever electronic kit that collects the golf balls from the driving range and also cuts the grass!!

Marketing amongst staff on the intranet would be a good idea as it's a bit of a hidden gem (tricky road if you don't know the road through Aston Village to access the course, especially in the winter).