

# Rutherglen Lawn Tennis Club Overtoun Covered Courts Club Statement – 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2022

## BACKGROUND

In our statement of the 31<sup>st</sup> March we shared the news from Tennis Scotland (TS), the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) and sportscotland (SS) that our plans to build a new covered tennis facility in Rutherglen as part of a vibrant community hub are not eligible for funding through their Transforming Scottish Indoor Tennis (TSIT) fund and had been rejected.

With this funding stream being fundamental to the success of our vision, this news effectively marks the end of the road for this project.

Since this time, we have been pushing hard for clarity on the rationale for this decision. This is the least all our committed volunteers and supporters deserve given all their hard work, the sacrifices they have made and costs they have incurred in support of our vision.

## MEETING

We met with TS and SS (the LTA did not attend) in Glasgow on Friday 6<sup>th</sup> May where they presented the following rationale:

1. The LTA had revisited their analysis of geographic/demographic needs within Scotland and no longer considered Glasgow a priority area.
2. Despite the fund still sitting at £15m, with rising costs etc. it is now only valued at ~£8m and hence cannot deliver as many projects.
3. There are 6 other projects being actively progressed so the funding is essentially fully allocated.

This meeting was amicable and helpful in that it addressed a number of our concerns and frustrations:

1. There was no mention of the decision being taken based on our proximity to the Gorbals Indoor Tennis Centre (GITC) which had previously been suggested, generating anger amongst our team that we had invested significant amounts of time, energy and personal expense into a project that would appear never to have been eligible for the funding stream that was fundamental to its success. Clearly GITC hasn't moved in the ~5 years we have been progressing our plans for covered courts in Rutherglen with full visibility and open

encouragement and support from TS every step of the way.

2. In our opinion, GITC has underperformed in terms of growing the game of tennis within the local area. Being the nearest tennis club to this facility and being passionate tennis supporters, we have always been disappointed with the lack of impact this facility has made on local and national tennis. It is the complete antithesis of our vision. To be told that we could not progress our plans because of its proximity to this facility would really have stuck in our throats.
3. There was no mention of concerns about the commercial viability of our plans. This had previously been suggested and we separately responded to these directly by addressing the LTAs three key eligibility criteria:
  - *The applicant's ability to match the capital contributions made by the LTA and sportscotland.* We have identified a number of committed and enthusiastic investors keen to put something back into the local community through our plans and vision for a vibrant community hub. They've seen the great work we've done over recent years and want to help us further evolve to do even more for the communities we serve. Through this investment and our own club contribution, we were happy we were well on track to bridge the funding gap beyond TSIT. It would be an obvious and realistic expectation of any private investors willing to support the development of such an innovative tennis facility that the governing body was already fully behind the plans. Securing LTA/TS/SS support was therefore key to our vision and the development of our Business Plan. Any view that LTA/TS/SS should "gap-fund" such a project is, in our minds, misguided.
  - *The applicant's ability to demonstrate a sustainable and viable business plan for the development of covered courts and this being based around a community use model.* With our proven track record of growing the game of tennis in our local community, our proven Community-Club-Performance model, and our wider community hub concept, we believe we could create a thriving facility and

fanatical tennis environment that exceeds the aspirations of TSIT.

- *That the business plan is able to cover the repayments of the loan element of any award.* Talented, capable people giving up their time and seeking no financial reward to run a facility which is open and accessible to the general public and operated on a not-for-profit basis represents an unrivalled economic model when considering value to the local community. By carefully blending commercial enterprise (café, tennis shop, physio etc.) with our voluntary ethos, we were very confident we would be able to robustly demonstrate that we could operate our facility on a fully sustainable basis whilst also meeting loan repayments.

The important point here is that we had not reached the point of submitting a formal TSIT application. We knew we still had lots to do to produce our Business Plan, but we were very confident we could produce a very compelling case by following due process and we were excited for this challenge. It was therefore comforting to hear that our proposal was not being rejected based on a lack of information that would not be expected to be available given the status of the project.

4. We understand the LTAs revised priority assessment was completed only very recently. Whilst we remain very upset that the rules we have been working to seem to have been changed very late in our journey, we were reassured that TS had not willingly encouraged us to invest significant amounts of time, energy and personal expense on progressing a project within a location that would not be eligible for funding.

Related to this, we note that the TSIT guidance clearly identifying Glasgow as a priority area is still published online [here](#). We very much hope that TS/LTS/SS amend or remove this guidance to avoid other organisations, clubs etc. wasting their time progressing plans based on the wrong rules.

We very much welcomed TS/SS agreeing to put this rationale in writing, allowing us to share it directly with all our members, project supporters, stakeholders and wider volunteers. We have worked incredibly hard over the last 10 years to become a highly trusted and respected community organisation

and the damage these events have caused will be hard to recover from. Also, as a not-for-profit community organisation, volunteers are our lifeblood. We never take their efforts for granted nor would we ever ask them to support us in doing anything we didn't think was viable or achievable. A big concern for us is that their trust and respect in us has been eroded by these events. A clear explanation of the rationale for the decision, showing that we did not take advantage of anyone, would go some way towards protecting the relationships we've worked so hard to create and will be key to our ongoing success.

So, whilst we left this meeting extremely disappointed for our own project, we were buoyed by the very positive news for Scottish tennis more generally that the TSIT fund is fully allocated and the indoor facilities we all crave will be delivered soon.

We also appreciated the offer from TS/SS to work with us to progress alternative plans to continue our growth to help meet the huge appetite for tennis within our local community which we have created.

## WRITTEN STATEMENT

We received a joint LTA/TS/SS letter on Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> June and you can view this [here](#).

Rather than providing the clarity we were looking for it has unfortunately caused further confusion and frustration as it does not articulate the points verbally made at the meeting. Instead, it alludes once again to concerns about the financial and operational viability of our proposal. As previously described, we see this as a red herring having not even reached the point of submitting our detailed business plan and so find this point both presumptuous and dismissive.

Clearly the issue around location still stands, but by not documenting the rationale delivered verbally at the meeting, it's not clear whether this relates to Glasgow no longer being a high priority area or is a return to the narrative around proximity to GITC. In either case the ambiguity is unfortunate given our desire to seek an open and honest explanation which all our supporters and stakeholders can digest on their own terms.

## WE'VE TRIED OUR BEST!

We tried our best to deliver a project that we believe would have been transformational for our local community and would have been transformational for the growth of tennis in Scotland by bursting through the preconceived limitations of what a tennis club is supposed to do.

Here's the vision behind TSIT taken from the guidance document;

*"We want to work with organisations that are as committed as we are to developing indoor tennis facilities, and to ensuring that more people have the opportunity to enjoy the sport, all year round – whether they are a social player or a future champion. We want to convert an interest in the game into active participation".*

...is there anyone with a better track record of doing this and who is showing the appetite to put in the hard graft to deliver this vision than us?

We tried our very best to challenge the decision and see if we can work around any of the issues or concerns to make our plans work for everyone.

We tried our very best to get the LTA/TS/SS to publish the rationale for their decision in detail and in an open and honest way. We could then stand shoulder to shoulder with them behind this rationale to protect reputations and relationships.

Whilst clearly we've failed on all three fronts, we know we've approached every aspect of this project with positivity, integrity and a tireless and selfless drive to do something really positive for tennis and our community. For that every single person who has made sacrifices for this project should be incredibly proud of themselves as is the club of them.

## **END OF THE ROAD**

So, it is with great sadness and huge disappointment that we announce that our dream of building some covered tennis courts in Overtoun Park as part of a vibrant community seems well and truly over.

## **WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?**

We're still very sore. Volunteers have provided services and support to help us progress our plans that would easily total over £50k in professional fees if delivered on a commercial basis. Our #PelotonToWimbledon team cycled 724km from Rutherglen to Wimbledon last year to raise funds and awareness for the project and our juniors completed their very own epic cycling challenge. These are just three examples. Our members and volunteers have given tirelessly to raise awareness and funds through a wide range of activities showing total commitment to our cause and through the efforts of this huge group of people we have created huge excitement and positivity for our plans within the local community. This is all now in vain.

We have created a huge buzz for tennis in the local area and with the passion and energy for the project

and our club more generally, we have over-shot capacity across all elements of the club. With the opportunity to develop covered courts no longer available to us, how can we meet demand?

There is the potential to develop a third outdoor venue, with Overtoun Park one of a number of viable local sites. This would help meet the demand for tennis and potentially allow us to cover these courts in a much more modest fashion over time but it won't deliver the vibrant community hub that we saw as the heartbeat of our thriving facility.

Given the feeling of huge deflation within our team of volunteers, unless we can be confident of receiving substantial support and help, it's difficult to see where we're going to find the volunteers to deliver any future projects of this scale. Yes, we received lots of external funding to develop our Burnside facility, our second facility, we delivered this project without any support or assistance. This was a huge challenge which tested our capabilities and resolve to the absolute limit. We're only going to want to go back to square one again and take on such a big challenge if we feel we have a following wind.

After such a huge disappointment, it's time to let the dust settle. Perhaps an attainable goal and the necessary support to allow us to achieve it will emerge from this allowing us to continue to grow the game of tennis in our local community.

Let's see....

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