

## **Statement: PS11.08**

**Cabinet – 8 February 2022**

**Re: Agenda item 11 - Leisure Facilities Investment and Procurement**

**Statement submitted by: Nigel Birkett**

Declaration of Interest: I am chairman of Beaufort Badminton Club who have used Kingsdown Sports Centre as it's home for club nights and matches since the Centre opened in April 1975. I have fought to have Kingsdown Sports Centre retained in Bristol City Council's Leisure Investment and Procurement Portfolio going forward since the announcement, out of the blue to us, that it would be excluded from that portfolio, revealed to us in September 2021. We use the badminton courts at Kingsdown every Monday evening throughout the year and most Wednesday and Thursday evenings in the badminton season. I have made submissions to the Mayor and written to him and Guy Fishbourne, the author of the report to Council for this strategy, pleading to have Kingsdown retained in the Council's portfolio and plans. I have enlisted the support of Badminton England, Thangham Debonnaire, Darren Jones and others in the campaign to keep Kingsdown in the procurement portfolio.

History of Kingsdown: Badminton at Kingsdown prior to 1974 took place on boards over the former Kingsdown Swimming Baths. When the old baths were pulled down the then Bristol Baths Committee promised the dispossessed clubs who'd used the baths first refusal when booking for the newly built Kingsdown Sports Centre opened. These clubs were Bristol and District, Beaufort and Parkside. This was agreed with Peter Forward the then manager of Bristol Sports Centres. The clubs were keen to start using the five badminton courts in the new hall as soon as possible as they were and have remained the best facilities for serious badminton play in the Bristol area. Three squash courts were also built and opened, with the five badminton courts in April 1975. The involvement of the then City Engineer's Department part of the then City of Bristol was a testament to discussions between the badminton clubs and the Manager of the Sports Centres (Peter Forward) and the mutual respect and understanding that existed at that time. It is a crying shame that no such respect and understanding has been shown towards badminton and the clubs that use Kingsdown by the current Council officials.

Statistical flaws: The statistics used in relation to counting users of the badminton courts at Kingsdown are seriously flawed. It is my understanding that a booking for one badminton court at the Centre has been logged as one user. If this is true then the count of actual users has been overwhelmingly underestimated. It takes at least two people to play a game of badminton. Most club games are doubles which takes four people. At club nights the model is actually eight or more to each court so it can be seen the one court one user approach has seriously underestimated the actual figures playing badminton.

Current Badminton Clubs at Kingsdown: Beaufort Park Badminton Club plays from 7pm until 10.30pm every Monday evening on 4-5 courts and has over 60 members. During the season we play matches there on Wednesday evenings two courts 7-10.30pm and some Thursday evenings one court 7-10.30pm. Bristol and District

Badminton Club play there every Tuesday evening on 3 courts from 8-10pm and has 30-40 members. Bristol Swifts which is Bristol's first LGBTQ+ badminton club uses courts at Kingsdown on Thursday evenings and Sundays and has approaching 100 members. University students use the courts at Kingsdown extensively on Wednesday afternoons, the traditional university sports session, and over the weekends. There are other group bookings of rehabilitating players from a variety of injuries and procedures. I myself had a hip replacement in April 2018 and attended one such session for several weeks on my road to recovery. There are coaching sessions for school age children and No Strings sessions for players to just turn up to and play.

Kingsdown's Gym: I'm not sure when the gym there was created but it has been a godsend for me to be able to use the gym facilities, especially after my hip replacement operation. One of the then instructors devised a programme of exercises to strengthen the muscles and ligaments around my new hip and this contributed massively to me recovery and ability to play badminton again.

Kingsdown Sports Centre has been like a second home for me since I moved to Bristol in 1983. I have played badminton at clubs there for nearly 40 years now. I have seen a myriad of players, young and old, from many diverse backgrounds, of abilities from club player, team player, county player and national and international player. Given the history I've described it will be a tragedy to lose the relationship that exists between the Bristol City Council and this Centre and the badminton community. It's still the best badminton facility, with it's very recently installed wood sprung flooring. I sincerely hope it remains such a revered badminton facility as well as squash and the gym, most preferably with support in some way from Bristol City Council.