

Duffield Rackets and Fitness Redevelopment Consultation – Questions and Answers

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What's in it for me?

You will have a state-of-the-art club house, with an updated and attractive entrance, comfortable changing rooms where you can get ready, supplemented with a sauna. There will be an improved and intuitive layout so guests, visitors and new members can find their way around more easily and won't have to keep going up and downstairs – in fact you won't have to use the stairs at all as there will be a lift.

You will still be able to play squash, tennis or pickle ball AND you will be able to work out in a larger, airier gym with better equipment and access to personal trainers, coaches and therapists. If you want to take a class such as pilates, yoga and other wellness classes, it will be in a separate studio rather than on a squash court. We will also have some lettable spaces for activities to complement rackets and fitness such as physiotherapy and/or a creche.

The bar and lounge will be modern and spacious and will more easily accommodate a range of social events. All in all - you will be proud to be a member and will want to bring your friends and family in too!

Courts

Why not look at the external development first and pursue planning permission for padel courts?

The entire site is currently under review. But the clubhouse forms the critical infrastructure upon which any future external work would depend. At this stage, the extent of potential external works can only be properly tested through a full planning application. Amber Valley Borough Council do not give informal planning advice and we have been told, informally via another supposed credible route, that planning would be unlikely to be granted. Furthermore, we have been told that there are challenges associated with any external development, particularly due to the heightened flood risk. We must also be mindful of the sequencing of works as undertaking any external works ahead of the clubhouse redevelopment might significantly undermine the project's success.

The redevelopment project was originally started in response to the need to renovate the building following the flood damage. In particular, squash players insisted that we upgrade the changing rooms immediately. Subsequent investigations revealed that work on the changing rooms should be carried out as part of the wider building project, otherwise we risked wasting time and money. This is the main reason why the clubhouse is phase 1 of the project. However, upgrading the clubhouse is also seen as a pre-requisite for attracting and retaining new members, whether for padel or other sports.

Following the level of concern at the open sessions regarding padel, the council has now decided to formally apply for permission to answer this question definitively. If planning permission is granted, we will follow this up. We already are aware of funding options, but planning permission is a prerequisite. We hope to apply by the end of January and then it is in the hands of the planning department.

Are you just trying to get rid of squash?

Absolutely not. Squash will continue to be an essential part of our business plan. The chair and members of the council all have a long-standing affinity with squash at the club and want to see it succeed. However, we must recognize that it is not as popular as it was. Squash has declined substantially over the last 25 years from c3.5m players nationally to c450k in 2014, and c250k today. We are short of space at the club and therefore we must repurpose under-utilised areas to develop new business in a growing market to secure the future of the club.

Has the Council really considered the implications of only having three squash courts?

Yes. We realise that there will be some impact on activities. However, data from the last 10 years demonstrates that 3 courts is sufficient for much of the time. There may be some impact, for example, when we hold tournaments or run club nights, but this can be minimised with good planning.

If we have the full option (3 squash courts), will there be any possibility of regrowth for squash (i.e., court capacity)?

It is important to understand that there is substantial capacity outside a narrow time band of squash usage in the week and even more at weekend.

Regarding the ‘traffic light’ table on the open session presentation, when looking at squash, why does the full option show as green (when only have 3 courts) and the partial option show as amber (when have 4 courts)? Surely the partial option should be green, as can have more participation.

The table shows how the redevelopment options match the brief proposed by members and the opportunities we have to widen participation, improve our demographic and enhance the appeal of the club. Given the national picture in the decline of squash (and our falling revenues from squash, as indicated in the last half-yearly figures), there is no indication that retaining four courts will lead to an increase in squash participation.

Why not just close squash court 5 and extend the gym?

Because this gives little extra benefit in terms of usable space and doesn't meet the brief given to the architects. In particular, circulation around the building wouldn't be as good and it wouldn't improve access.

Changing rooms

Why has it taken so long, and why are the changing rooms still not up to scratch?

Because the club has grown through a series of incremental additions over time, any substantial upgrade or redevelopment will inevitably require a broader programme of updates across the clubhouse. Although the original intention was to deliver the changing rooms as a standalone project, this has proven not to be economically viable. If the club had gone ahead in such a manner, once a wider redevelopment strategy had been established, much of the standalone work would have needed to be undone, effectively duplicating cost and effort.

Fitness and gym

The current gym isn't operating anywhere near maximum capacity, so why are we considering substantially enlarging it?

Our current facility was never sized as a performance gym - that concept was not envisaged in the days it was originally designed. Some people will say that they like it, because it feels like their own home gym, and it's fine if there are only one or two people in it. However, its limitations become clear as soon as 4 or more users are in it. Apart from the Spin bikes (2 of), every piece of equipment is unique, so users need to cooperate with each other to use equipment or space.

A properly specified performance gym will be a completely different proposition, providing a substantially greater scope of capability, with multiple pieces of equipment to serve a much broader membership. This capability will not only serve individuals, but also facilitate classes, tuition and circuit sessions.

What makes us believe that there will be sufficient market demand to deliver the growth we are projecting for Fitness?

Eleven million people in the UK hold a gym membership - that is 1 in 6 of the whole population. That number continues to rise year on year, as youngsters make lifestyle choices to be fit, mid-age people focus on staying healthy, and older people want to age well. According to a report from UKActive, published in April this year, the health and fitness market is witnessing major growth against a difficult economic backdrop, with penetration rates hitting 16.9%. Total revenue across the sector rose from £5.2bn in 2023 to £5.7bn in 2024 (8.8% increase). The report demonstrates the continuing demand for health and fitness services, despite challenging economic conditions due to the rising cost of living and increasing operating costs. There is growing engagement across all age groups, but particularly among younger adults. Membership numbers have risen from 9.9 million in 2022, to 11.5 million in 2024 – suggesting that consumers continue to value gym and fitness memberships as a priority for their discretionary spend.

The vast majority of gym members choose to join a club within 2 miles of their home. If we were able to bring high performance gym facilities (including studio for classes, therapeutic services), to the heart of Duffield, we could realistically expect interest from several hundred of our residents.

Do we have people currently ‘knocking on our door’ wanting to use the proposed studio space? Has any research been done to identify potential usage of this space?

Current facilities on the squash courts are sub-optimal, yet our present trainer is still keen to use the club for around half a dozen classes a week. Our new studio space will be designed with fitness classes in mind, and there is no other such facility in Duffield – a village with over 5,000 residents. So, yes, we expect the space to be well used.

Isn't 'fitness' an unsociable activity, in which individuals come to the gym, do their work out and leave again?

That is not the view of our associate PTs, Rich and Jackson, who work at many different gyms throughout Derbyshire. It is also well documented that Gen Z see fitness in a different way to previous generations - they want guidance and classes, and a sense of belonging to a community. It is our belief that if we create an environment that will be attractive for a new generation of membership to stay and socialise (e.g. cafe, juice bar, in a modern setting), then a sense of belonging will be engendered, and they will be motivated to stay longer, spend money etc. The current problem is that, through the eyes of a new member, the existing social area feels outdated and extremely 'tired'.

Who's going to run the new fitness space?

The business case for the gym envisages a club/gym manager. Having a permanent presence in the club would facilitate its running.

Regarding the chart of ‘fitness growth plan’, where does this forecast come from?

This chart is drawn from the fitness and gym business plan and is based on current market research and advice from industry specialists. The plan will be provided to all members for discussion well in advance of any voting decisions that need to be made.

Business and finance

How much will it cost?

The current estimates based on the RIBA stage 2 report, produced by Armsons Barlow and provisionally costed by reputable local contractors, estimate the full works on the club to be around £700k but until more detailed plans are drawn up, we will not have exact figures.

Will members be approached for funding?

Possibly, the club has done this successfully in the past.

Will the membership fees go up?

Yes, as they would if we did nothing, but we will retain the ethos of making sport affordable.

Will subs for squash members reduce if we have the full option (have fewer courts so should have pro-rata reduction)?

What we are doing is right sizing the facilities for the membership numbers, but that is independent of setting appropriate subs. If we applied the logic proposed, subs should rise as membership falls (for a given number of courts), i.e. we should have doubled the subs over the last 10 years, which, of course, did not happen! We expect that both tennis and squash subs will continue on the current trend line, since the utility provided remains the same, but enhanced gym facilities would have higher subs to reflect the additional utility provided.

What are the business assumptions?

We have looked closely at the current and potential future activities at the club. We believe that tennis and squash will have to work hard to maintain the current membership; pickle will continue to grow, but not as rapidly as in the last 2 years. There is enormous potential in the gym and fitness market and to develop the club as a community hub for socialising associated with rackets and fitness.

The club (like many) lacks enough willing and able people to volunteer to do the necessary work. How will the council be able to manage a busier club?

The vision is to create enough margin to employ a manager. The council believes that this will provide the energy and focus to continue to make things happen. It will also open up a wider opportunity and welcoming environment throughout the day. Volunteers will always be needed though, if we are to continue to be a club rather than a business.

How will we accommodate members without a bigger car park?

Firstly, car parking has been an issue at the club for many years. We are land locked and there is no viable, or credible solution to this issue, except moving and that is a highly unlikely option. By way of example, 25 years ago, the club had a much higher number of squash players playing in leagues - over 220, we managed to accommodate them. There are substantially fewer active squash players now.

Moving site has been considered in the past. However, this would likely require substantial funding of c£10m and likely take c5 / 8+ years IF a suitable location could be found and funder to fund it.

In addition, the Fitness business plan, where we expect to grow members, is predicated on research showing that people want to use a fitness facility within two miles of their home. We have a strong potential customer base within Duffield itself, so it is relatively easy for these new customers to use sustainable transport methods such as walking or cycling. We have planned for cycle storage facilities in the current design proposals to encourage such practices.

How will we make money from fitness when we know of some gyms who find it difficult and are not experiencing any growth?

We are aware that there are a lot of fitness facilities around but, currently, none in Duffield. Our business model will be different from commercial gyms: it will position itself as a community-driven, racket-club-based fitness facility, distinct from large commercial gyms and small boutique studios. It will also have specialist offerings such as treatment rooms for physios and other rehab professionals, plus a dedicated studio for Pilates and functional training available - niche services that many box gyms don't prioritise. We envisage targeted programs for older adults, young people, and rehab clients, making the gym accessible to groups often underserved by commercial gyms.

We need to see the business cases for the options before we vote – when are members going to see these? They need to be in simple layman's language please.

The council fully appreciate this. However, it is worth noting that all the plans we have put forward, including our preferred option, do not require the club to add a single new member to the membership numbers as of today. Our financial position and cash generation are very well managed.

However, if we are to make this investment, it needs to add something to the club more than just a nice facility. We want to add new members and fully expect to do so, and we will show how this is expected to be done. It does, however, require the club to change its status to an incorporated club.

Business cases will be provided within the next 6-8 weeks, prior to the EGM to vote on the option.

Why should we spend money when we continue as we are now and spend nothing?

The flood presented us with a unique, once in a generation opportunity to upgrade our facilities, so they continue to attract new and younger members. The current age profile of our membership is skewed towards the older end. If we do nothing to address this issue the club will die a slow death, and there will be nowhere in the village for our children and grandchildren to play racquet sports. Each generation has, in the past, contributed to improving club facilities, whether in terms of extra courts, better playing surfaces, changing facilities or social spaces. It is now our turn to leave a legacy to the next generation. Funding the proposed redevelopment can be met within our current operating surplus, but as said earlier, it does require the club to become incorporated.

Have we looked at what we could do with the funds we have available now, plus the grants we could get (without a loan)?

As agreed at the February EGM, our planning has been based on the proposals members made to improve our facilities post-flood, plus the council's research into the club's future needs. For the changing rooms alone, we would need to spend around £80,000. Until we have plans to show prospective grant-awarding bodies, it is not possible secure commitments for funding.

Can we afford it?

Yes. It is likely that we will need to borrow about £500,000, with repayments a maximum of £50,000 per year, which will be covered by operating profits. Though, we will also explore options for grants and fundraising.

Decision making, timescale and project delivery**When and how will the final decision be made?**

We will hold an EGM early in 2026. All members will be invited to vote.

What happens next?

If members agree to proceed, we will work up the detail of the plans, not least the final lay-out and cost. We will then apply for planning permission, seek funding (grants and loans) and appoint contractors.

Who will be responsible for delivering the project?

Guy Taylor Associates are the architects responsible for planning and managing the design process. They are currently appointed to take the project forward to the stage of obtaining any planning permission needed. A construction package of drawings will then be required and will be subject to tender amongst a shortlist of contractors.

We then hope that there could be various suitably experienced members who could play roles to support delivery of the project saving significant project management costs. At this point in time, the project will be completed under a traditional procurement strategy with a building contract in place.

What is the timescale?

1 to 2 years.

Will there be much disruption?

There will obviously be some disruption, but good planning will keep this to a minimum.

What if I disagree with the proposal?

The role of the council is to make proposals in the best interests of the whole club, and to retain and attract members in line with the purpose of the club. Any change, especially as significant as this, will be met with resistance by some and enthusiasm by others. It will only work with the full support of the majority and then with the future members. In no way does this disrespect those that disagree, but in the end, we all have to make our own choice whether we want to continue to support the club in seeking a more modern future.

Incorporation

What are the advantages and disadvantages of becoming incorporated?

Legal advice is that a club should become incorporated when it grows large, takes on significant financial risks, employs staff, owns property (land/buildings), enters complex contracts, or needs to protect committee members from personal liability, essentially when its operations become too big for a simple unincorporated association and require a separate legal identity for liability protection and formal governance. Sports' governing bodies recommend incorporation for larger clubs.

Key Triggers for Incorporation

- **Personal Liability:** To shield committee members/trustees from personal responsibility for debts, lawsuits, or breaches of duty.
- **Property and Assets:** When the club owns land, buildings, or high-value assets, incorporation provides clearer ownership and simplifies transactions.
- **Employment:** If the club hires paid staff, becoming a separate legal entity protects individuals managing those responsibilities.
- **Contracts and Finance:** For entering legally binding agreements, taking on significant loans, or raising large sums of money.
- **Growth and Professionalism:** When the club becomes large, has many members, or needs to satisfy governing bodies (like Sport England) requiring strong governance structures.

A disadvantage of becoming incorporated would be auditing fees, which for a club of our size are all but negligible.

Why do we need to become incorporated - other clubs have had loans without needing to go incorporated. Is it so the council can make decisions without needing to have a vote?

First of all, if the other clubs are unincorporated, then they could get loans but likely only from private funders that are not regulated by any financial services organisation, as could we, which is an option the council will consider as well. Also, if they are unincorporated, they are not permitted (by law) to take out loans from regulated providers, banks mortgage lenders etc., and no financial institution in the country would be able to lend to them because when they ran their own 'fit and proper' financial checks (KYC – Know Your Customer) checks, they would see we were unincorporated and hence, not lend to us.

What difference will it make being unincorporated or incorporated if we have a loan and cannot pay it back?

If an organisation is unincorporated and does get a loan (from a private investor) and there is a legal repayment plan and it cannot pay this loan back out of club funds, then the legal and financial responsibility to pay back this loan falls on the individual members.

If a business is incorporated, then the “business” now has the loan repayment responsibility not the members as their financial responsibility is limited to £1. However, the club (the business) still has to repay that loan and discussions would then need to be had between the club and the lender as to how this loan would be paid. The issue is where the financial liability rests and how the loan is repaid.

If we become incorporated and borrow a large amount of money, will this put the club at risk?

The risk is no different if we are incorporated or unincorporated, it’s about the process by which the funds are recovered. However, if we are incorporated then a lender will want to specifically know two things: what is our asset back-up (land and buildings) and how much cash do we generate each year to pay any interest and loan capital we borrow against.

Insurance and flooding

Can more be done to mitigate the flooding risk externally? (Not just protecting the building but protecting the outside courts as well).

We have done all we can for the present to protect our facilities, inside and out. Further measures would need the approval of the Environment Agency, and this would be difficult to obtain as it would simply push the flooding problem elsewhere.

Do we have insurance to cover any event that might incur large liabilities? (Whilst we had flood insurance, which we used for flood recovery, do we currently have any insurance to cover other such events for which the members would be liable?).

This is a very technical question because we can try and get insurance to just about cover anything. The insurers need to understand their risk and then set a premium against that risk. Our flood risk insurance is so high that after three years it is not financially viable to have it. We will pay more to the insurer than we would get back if a flood happened again.

What if we flood again?

We have no insurance for flood damage. We have installed flood barriers which will significantly minimise the impact of a future flood. We will always keep about £300,000 as a contingency.