

Snowsport centre gets national backing

✘ [Midlothian Council has been successful in obtaining national backing for Britain's longest dry ski slope.](#)

Two new injections of funding have been secured to help stave off the fears of closure for Hillend, the Midlothian Snowsports Centre.

The centre's future had been in question after the council, one of Scotland's smallest, indicated last year it could no longer afford to indefinitely subsidise the national snowsports facility.

[sportscotland](#), the national agency for sport in scotland, has worked with Midlothian Council to secure the future of the centre, culminating in an offer of funding of £533,000, while the Scottish Government has approved the release of £400,000 revenue funding to support the use of the centre by children in the Edinburgh and Lothians area through the sportscotland Active Schools programme.

Cllr Derek Milligan, leader of Midlothian Council, said: "We are delighted that people have come forward to recognise our case that this is a national facility, a jewel in Scotland's sporting crown, and should not be subsidised wholly by the taxpayers of Midlothian. People have worked hard to cut costs and increase the use of the centre, and we are optimistic that the new developments will make the centre more attractive, and will continue to work in partnership with sportscotland in future. Many people have helped, and I like to thank Stewart Harris from sportscotland in particular for his assistance. But snowsports fans should realise the best way to ensure the centre thrives is to use this brilliant asset for Scotland as much as possible."

A meeting of the full council, held in Dalkeith on Tuesday, 22nd March, formally agreed to accept the funding offers.

The £533,000 funding will be used to cement Hillend's excellent reputation as the breeding ground for tomorrow's champion and recreational skiers and snowboarders. Olympic skiers Finlay Mickel and Alain Baxter have used the slope extensively in the past.

Projects being backed include an extension of nursery slopes, the installation of a "magic carpet", a moving walkway to help beginners, and younger children in particular, learn to ski and snowboard, a new tubing or sledging run and larger areas for intermediate skiers where the slopes are less challenging. The funds will also be used to refurbish the existing visitor centre to enhance the centre's appeal as a family day out destination.

The Council introduced a package of efficiency measures, including increasing ticket prices, last year. The centre lost £433,000 in 2009/10, and the measures were intended to cut losses over a number of years to make the centre profitable.

The measures have been successful in terms of improving the financial position but the centre is still expected to lose £284,000 in 2010/11 en route to breaking even in 2012/13.

The council also heard a planning brief report, which set out the planning and development issues if more extensive development, such as a new hotel or accommodation complex, is considered as part of future plans to secure the centre's longer term future and sustained viability.