

Weightlifters fear for future of club

Weightlifters in West Lothian fear they may be left homeless for the second time under plans to hand over a community pavilion to a popular local football club.

A community consultation is being run to help decide the future of Meadowpark Pavilion in Bathgate, but the 14 members of a Bathgate weightlifting club fear the door has already closed for them on use of the sports pavilion, where they currently train.

They fear lease of the pavilion to [Bathgate Thistle Community Football Club](#) looks certain, given the number of players is greater than 500 with almost a fifth of them girls and women.

The pavilion sits at the heart of three pitches regularly used by the club.

The weightlifters and the town's Community Centre Management Association, who have asked to be considered as a leaseholder, claimed they have been snubbed by the council in preference to the football club.

The council says the facility, only regularly used by the weightlifting club, is "underused".

A statutory eight-week community consultation over plans to lease the pavilion to Bathgate Thistle Community Football Club (BTCFC) was approved by Council Executive because the Pavilion is considered Common Good property.

But Steven Kenny from Bathgate's Amateur Weightlifting Club (BAWC) and the Community Centre Management Committee returned to the Council Executive to renew their plea for the club to take on the lease. He claims that without it there is nowhere else suitable in the town for the club to train.

The weightlifters have used the pavilion since 2011 and this week pledged that they were willing to share with all community groups in the town .

Meadowpark is recognised by the council as Common Good property and the pavilion was specifically built to complement the adjacent football pitches. It has four team changing rooms and shower facilities, as well as toilets and a referee changing room.

In the past though the weightlifters had exclusive use of the building. BAWC moved to the pavilion in 2011 after their former home at Bathgate Community Centre closed. They currently use two of its four changing rooms as informal exercise space on an ad-hoc basis.

Mr Kenny told the Executive that they had been promised facilities when the new Bathgate Partnership was built. This promise never materialised as there was no space in the new building.

This week Billy Weir, the chair of Bathgate Community Centre Management Association told the Local Democracy Reporting Service: "I would like to make it clear that Bathgate Community Centre has been totally overlooked by Property Services."

Mr Kenny asked the Executive meeting: "Why was the information regarding the free lease withheld from us when a meeting was held with Property Services at Meadowpark in February 2023?"

He added that the weightlifting club and community centre

management team had been excluded from ongoing meetings on the future occupancy of the pavilion. Mr Kenny told the meeting: "Every effort has been made by the management committee and weightlifting group to try to make this work for all parties.

"Nothing is acceptable to Property Services other than awarding an exclusive lease to Bathgate Thistle. The weightlifting group have been sole occupants of two of the four changing rooms for 12 years. Why did Bathgate Thistle not use the pavilion in the last 12 years?."

"We have never felt that we as a club had the security of a home, we'd like to share the space with anyone who would like to share with us."

He said this could be done with a simple booking system.

Mr Kenny said: "We are wanting to share and I'm asking on behalf of Bathgate Community Centre Management committee to stop the lease of Meadowpark pavilion going to one group."

Formed only ten years ago, Bathgate Thistle CFC is now the largest sports club in Bathgate and one of the largest in West Lothian.

They were named as Best Community Football Club 2023 by the Scottish Football Association (SFA) and have over 500 registered players across their 22 boys and girls teams, across various age groups.

The club has seen rapid growth in their membership for girls football in particular and wish to use the pavilion and pitches to meet the increased demand.

If given the five-year Full Repairing and Insuring Community Benefit lease, BTCFC would seek further potential funding to improve facilities at Meadowpark, and have already held initial discussions with the SFA.

Paul Marr, Chairman of BTCFC, told the Executive meeting the

club had initially met with council officials in 2019.

Discussions were put on hold because of Covid until 2023. At the initial meeting – before the council had decided to dispose of its sports pavilions as a budget measure – the club suggested taking on the lease.

In March last year the Community Centre Management committee suggested shared facilities with the club but the football club decided only having access to half of the pavilion would not be viable to the club's needs. Full use of the pavilion would allow the club to further develop and give it a base

Mr Marr told the meeting the football club has had talks with other community groups in the town about shared access.

A West Lothian Council spokesperson said: "The pavilion at Meadowpark is currently significantly underused as an asset for the community.

"The community consultation will ask for local views on the proposal to lease the Meadowpark pavilion to Bathgate Thistle Community Football Club to help them meet growing demand."

The spokesman added: "Discussions between council officers, BTCFC, BCCMA, BAWC and the Friends of Meadow Park group explored a number of different options for sharing the pavilion, but nothing could be agreed that would meet the needs of both clubs."

A number of alternative proposals for BAWC were also put forward, including an alternative site in East Whitburn, none of which were considered suitable by BAWC. Mr Kenny said that the wooden floor of the East Whitburn pavilion could not take the weight of the equipment.

A report to the Executive said: " Officers have also provided BAWC with a list of more than twenty potential venues and third sector organisations in Bathgate that may have been able

to assist or support them in a search for alternative accommodation.

“These were all considered unsuitable by BAWC. BAWC have also been offered free secure storage on-site at Meadowpark or the potential of paid gym memberships by BTCFC, both of which BAWC have deemed to be unacceptable.”

Officers recommended that a further report on the outcome of the proposed community consultation should be brought to the Council Executive on 7 May.

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter



Members of Bathgate weightlifting club, Steven Kenny(centre), Billy Swan, Kieran Smith, Chas Swan and Robert Thomson pictured at the pavilion during their training. Photo: Stuart Vance.