

20 May 2021

Please find response below

Orkney Amateur Weight Lifting Club would like to thank the Island Games Committee for raising their concern and, appreciates that there will be some impact on the sport of Squash in the 2025 Island Games if the asset transfer request is successful. After careful consideration and deliberation we believe that the potential positive impacts of this project are far greater than the negatives:

Upon examination of the FOI request for usage statistics for The Stromness Squash Court building between April 2016-March 2020, OAWLC the lack of usage is very apparent. For a facility that is open circa 36 hours a week, the number of uses from members of the public is low and usage from any Squash clubs, have been non-existent, which doesn't look set to change as Stromness Squash Club is defunct and Kirkwall Squash Club train at the Pickaquooy Centre:

April 2016-March 2017- 96 people used the facility

April 2017-March 2018- 316 people used the facility. We understand that during this year OIC ran a racquetball qualification which would account for the increase in usage.

April 2018-March 2019 171 people used the facility.

April 2019-March 2020- 81 people used the facility.

Please note that we chose to ask for usage statistics from April to March, so that 2019-2020's figures were not biased due to the impacts of Covid-19.

When we compare this to OAWLC's usage, we see an upward trend (excluding statistics for the current year, which are slightly due to issues around Covid-19):

July 2018-June 2019: 352 Class attendances

July 2019-March 2020: 936 Class attendances (we did not count the whole year due to Covid closure in March)

September 2020-18th May 2021: 593 Attendances to OAWLC classes (monitoring dates have changed, as the club re-opened in September and have a new system of booking)

If we go on the reasonable assumption that 2 people using the facility, as a squash court, equals one game of squash it would appear that at best there were 158 games of squash in one year (~13 in a month), at worst 40.5 games of squash in a year (~3 in a month). In several month-long periods there has only been one game of squash played. The usage statistics indicate that this facility is currently not engaging the community in sport and physical activity as it should. Given the current crisis facing the country surrounding inactivity, obesity and related co-morbidities OAWLC view this as a wasted chance to help improve the overall health of our community. OAWLC also noted that all uses of the facility from 2016-2019 have been from members of the public, there has been no hire of the facility from any squash clubs, or any other sports club leading us to believe that this community asset transfer will not impact Kirkwall Squash Club as they do not use the facility.

When compared to OAWLC's usage, which is based on around 4 hours of class time, we can see that even in the year 2020-2021 we have already nearly doubled the usage of the Squash courts' best year. We expect that, if we are successful in this application, OAWLC will see much more usage than the club ever has before (and the squash court too), as members will have much greater flexibility in session times and we will be able to expand our offering to young people of a wider age range. This will allow us to engage with more people, more often, in a sport that involves muscle and whole body strengthening activities, which fits perfectly with the

UK Chief Medical Officers' 2019 Physical Activity Guidelines that states that more people need to engage in resistance training as, many are fulfilling the guidelines on moderate to vigorous cardiovascular activity but, few are meeting resistance training guidelines.

Other than the period in the run up to, and during, Island Games 2025 there is no indication to believe that the facility will see any increase in usage through the general public, from Kirkwall Squash Club, or any other Squash club (as there is no active Squash club in Stromness). Once Island Games is finished it is likely that the facility will return to its current state of usage. The club would also like to point out that Weightlifting and Para-Powerlifting are both sports in the Olympic/Paralympic and Commonwealth program. This means that both sports could feature in the Island Games. We know that this is not possible for the Orkney 2025 program, but we have reached out to clubs in the Isle of Man, and Anglesey with the hopes to include Weightlifting in future Island Games, of which Orkney Weightlifters could very well be a part of.

Orkney Amateur Weight Lifting Club also present an option for the facility to become integral in the preparation of athletes for Island Games, with a willingness to offer and facilitate athletes from other sports a space in which to engage with affordable Strength & Conditioning training, which will undoubtedly benefit the results of our athletes, something which we believe has already benefited athletes in Football and Athletics who have attended, or are attending, sessions with us.

OAWLC have a clear and demonstrated commitment to introducing the sport of Para-Powerlifting to Orkney, something which is currently impossible to take part in on the Islands. We believe that this will allow disabled members of the community to engage in recreational physical activity, or competitive sport, in an inclusive environment. In a community such as Orkney, where the chances of forming full Para squads or teams are low, this will allow disabled people to take part in sport alongside able bodied people giving them access to a sporting community. We believe, through our current work alongside a young member who suffers from physical disability, access to disabled sport is sorely lacking in the community. The clubs work to engage with disabled members of the community will ultimately allow a demographic (who already face higher risks of social isolation, inactivity related illness and of not being offered the opportunity to excel in sports) to engage in sport and the life long, physical and mental, benefits that come with doing so.

OAWLC has athletes who are competing in international competitions for team Scotland; one who is demonstrably on the pathway to commonwealth games (according to criteria published by Weightlifting Scotland); athletes competing at senior British level (shoulder to shoulder with Olympians and Commonwealth Games athletes); and our coach is currently appointed as one of the Team Scotland coaching personnel. We believe that the success of these members of OAWLC is leaving, and will continue to leave, a legacy for future generations in Orkney to aspire to. This legacy will ultimately increase the number of people who engage with our sport, and will further increase the usage of the facility more so than if it remains a Squash Court. These promising Orcadian athletes currently have no dedicated training facility with appropriate equipment, where they can receive the coaching support they need to develop, and are at risk of having nowhere to train at all. This would be a devastating blow to their development (especially our athletes who are under 16 and must train under fully supervised conditions). We believe that not having the capacity to offer coaching sessions (which is a realistic possibility) could spell the end of OAWLC and the sport of Weightlifting and Para-Powerlifting on Orkney. However, the change of use of Stromness Squash Courts to a Weightlifting/Para-Powerlifting clubhouse will have a relatively small effect on the sport of Squash, and the Island Games in 2025; as there is a state-of-the-art Squash facility, nearby, in Kirkwall at the Pickaquoy Centre which is well used by the local

Squash Club.

The future of OAWLC depends on the club being able to find a premise to call its own, and if we do not then our club, and the future of our sport in Orkney, is at serious risk. Whilst squash currently has a state of the art 3 court facility at the Pickaquoy Centre which affords the sport a very secure future. We hope that Island Games Committee understand OAWLC's tenuous position and will consider withdrawing their representation of complaint against the community asset transfer request to take over the Stromness Squash Court.

Kindest regards on behalf of the Orkney Amateur Weight Lifting Club committee.