



Equality Impact Analysis

Title of policy, function or service	Irish Club review in relation to the Watford Irish Centre
Lead officer	Manny Lewis
Person completing the EIA	Manny Lewis
Type of policy, function or service:	Existing (reviewed) <input type="checkbox"/> New/Proposed <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Background

This analysis considers the potential impacts, both positive and negative, of proposals to enter into negotiations with the Watford and District Irish Association (more commonly known as the Irish Club) on the termination of its lease on the Watford Irish Centre in Oxhey Park on the people in the groups or with the characteristics protected in the Equalities Act 2010. These are:

1. Age
2. Disability
3. Gender Reassignment
4. Pregnancy and maternity
5. Race
6. Religion or belief
7. Sex (gender)
8. Sexual Orientation
9. Marriage and Civil Partnership

The analysis also considers how we can achieve the positive effects and reduce or mitigate the negatives.

The Irish Centre consists of:

- Function hall (available for hire) – capacity is 250
- Bar
- Sports changing rooms

Opening times are:

- Monday-Friday 18.00 - 23.00
- Saturday 12.00 - midnight
- Sunday 12.00 - 22.30

The purpose of the Irish Club Review

There are four main considerations that underpin the council's review of the Irish Club's lease:

1. Financial context (Watford BC):

The council's overall budget position (which requires the council to achieve significant levels of saving by 2014/15). This financial pressure means the council is reviewing all areas of service delivery and looking critically at the needs of the borough in the context of the resources now available. In terms of community facilities and capital this means that council resources are far more limited than they have been in the past. In this environment the council has to be confident that any investment and / or ongoing support for local community facilities and groups can demonstrate good value for money and that resources are contributing to the provision of sustainable facilities / activities that are meeting the needs, and future needs, of the Watford community.

2. Current situation of Irish Club with regard to the Watford Irish Centre

The council has carried out a thorough review of the Irish Club's current situation in terms of the Watford Irish Centre, particularly in relation to its financial commitments and its lease agreement with the council.

This has shown that the current situation is not viable (particularly in financial terms) for the Club and that there needed to be urgent discussions between the council and the Club as to the future of the Irish Centre.

3. Alternative usage for the Irish Centre location

Combined with the financial issues facing the Irish Club, a need has been identified for the land on which the Centre is located that will help bring forward the Watford Health Campus project and associated link road. The Health Campus project is a multi-million pound regeneration/development project that will deliver new hospital facilities, housing, employment space and a new neighbourhood centre in the west of the borough. Vital to the viability and success of the project is improved road and rail links to the site to overcome current access difficulties caused by busy commuter and residential roads.

In addition, there is an urgent need for additional primary school places in the west of Watford (a need that will be added to by the housing that forms part of the Health Campus development proposals) and the Campus site has been earmarked for this within the Core Strategy. This may require land on which the Centre is situated.

4. Strategic context

Although the Irish Club only has a lease for the Irish Centre itself, the Centre does provide changing rooms which provide facilities for those who use the adjoining playing / sports pitches. Without access to such facilities, the groups may no longer find the playing / sports pitches of an acceptable standard.

The council is currently reviewing the strategic framework, which underpins the delivery of local community and sports clubs.

There has been a considerable amount of national research and policy development on the current and future challenges facing community and sports clubs, which has provided valuable context for Watford as it develops its own strategic framework for the borough.

The council has identified two key policy documents that will help guide its decision-making in relation to community sports provision – responding to both the “top down” national policy agenda and the “bottom up” needs of local clubs at a time of sharply declining resources.

▪ Sports Development Framework

Two clear priorities have been identified within the Sports Development Framework (SDF):

Priority 1: Increase community participation in physical activity and sport to contribute towards a healthy town for Watford residents

Priority 2: Develop capacity within the local sporting infrastructure, particularly around clubs, coaches and volunteers, to improve sporting opportunities.

The Sports Development Framework makes clear that ‘The recent local government settlement means that we have big challenges ahead in terms of the resources we have available. This means that we need to be even more focused in our approach to Sports

Development, thereby ensuring that we are using our resources effectively.’

The Watford Sports Development provision has moved away from direct provision to one of enabling and commissioning, with the council focusing on the following:

- Enabling and commissioning partners/organisations and local sports clubs to create sustainable sporting opportunities amongst identified target groups and develop the capacity within the local sporting infrastructure in identified areas;
- Supporting the continuation of a vibrant Community Sports Network – Active Watford and other relevant stakeholders through active networks and forums;
- Help secure external future funding for sports to contribute to outcomes locally. Enable/manage funding to be effectively commissioned through our local sporting infrastructure;’.
- **Sports Facilities Strategy**
This has been commissioned as part of the policy framework for Watford’s Core Strategy but also to steer future investment choices. This Strategy (including recommendations) will be reported to Cabinet in early 2013. Emerging analysis (in the Sports Facilities Study 2011) shows that, given Watford is a geographically small borough, it is possible to have both a relatively small number of separate facilities whilst ensuring high levels of accessibility. Having a small number of high capacity facilities – as the two excellent leisure centres have demonstrated - leads to economies of scale when compared with a larger number of smaller facilities. The borough also faces significant development pressures so has to make the best possible use of its limited land area.

How will the review promote equality

1. **eliminate** discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act
2. **advance** equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it
3. **foster** good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not

The review will consider if the council resources currently afforded to the Irish Club both in terms of ongoing financial support as well as the facilities and land currently occupied can be used more effectively to benefit the Watford community including whether there is scope for them to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations.

Information and evidence

The Watford population

We know from the Census 2001 that:

- 2,304 people in the borough classified themselves as White Irish. This equated to 2.89% of the Watford population
- The experimental ONS data on ethnic population 2009 estimated the White Irish population of Watford as 1,700. This equates to 2.03% of the Watford population.
- If the experimental figures are shown to be accurate in the Census 2011 results (due in summer 2012) then this would indicate a fall in the White Irish population in Watford of around 25% over 10 years.
- A further analysis of the experimental figures shows that the largest percentage of the White Irish population is in the 60 plus age group

Irish Club membership

The Irish Club has informed the council that it has a current membership of around 260. 85% of this membership is Irish (as reported by the Irish Club). There is no additional information as to the make up of this membership in terms of the protected characteristics. Nor is there currently information on the additional users of the Centre and its facilities e.g. hirers of the hall to support this EIA.

Potential users of the Irish Centre changing facilities

In the football season 2010-11, 25 matches were booked at Oxhey Park. There were two adult football teams playing on the pitch last season 2011-12 up to December 2011 – Watford Irish Club and their reserve side. However, one club ceased at Christmas and so from January to mid April there was just one football team using the facilities.

In the hurling season 2010, 13 adult and 10 junior matches were booked at Oxhey Park. In the hurling season 2011, 7 adult matches and 2 junior matches were booked.

All these bookings would have also allowed participants to access the changing facilities at the Irish Centre.

There is no information as to the equality characteristics of the teams using Oxhey Park and possibly the Irish Centre changing rooms, although hurling is a Gaelic sport, popular outside of Ireland with Irish communities.

Uptake of sports activity in Watford

Through the Watford Health Profile 2011, we know that around 10% of age 16+ residents are physically active (Participation in moderate intensity sport and active recreation on 20 or more days in the previous 4 weeks – Active People Survey 2008-2010). This is slightly below the national average of 11.5%).

Further information

Additional information / data will be considered as part of the Sports Facilities Strategy.

Impacts of the review

1. Negative impacts of the review

At this stage of the Irish Club review the potential negative impact identified would be on the White Irish population. As it is not yet absolutely clear which other groups make use of the facility any other impact cannot be identified.

This EIA will be updated in light of any emerging information.

However, any decision on the use of the Watford Irish Centre would not mean that the Irish Club itself cannot continue albeit by using different facilities available within the borough. This would preserve support for the local Irish community. The council would offer advice and assistance to the Club in this regard.

2. Positive impacts of the review

In relation to the playing / sports facilities, a wider review of sports facilities provision within the borough that will report in spring 2013 (the Sports Facilities Strategy). This will focus on consolidating provision within the borough and ensuring it meets the needs of all the community in a way that is resilient and sustainable. At this stage, therefore, it is not possible to identify the full range of positive impacts of the review of the Irish Club and the use of the Irish Centre's changing facilities in terms of the provision of playing / sports pitches as, in isolation from the wider review, these cannot yet be identified. The Sports Facilities Strategy will be supported in its development by an Equality Impact Analysis. It is anticipated this will identify positive impacts for people from a protected characteristics as this will form an integral part of the development of the Strategy. The s.106 agreement for the Campus requires the football and hurling pitches to be relocated.

In relation to the impact the review will have on the delivery of the Watford Health Campus project, this would provide positive outcomes for the community as a whole, including those members of the community with protected characteristics. It will certainly improve access to health facilities within the borough.

Fostering good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not would be advanced through the sharing of community facilities which are open to all groups within the community and encourage groups to share cultural activities etc.

3. Overall conclusion

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Considering the information within this report and both the positive and negative impacts together, this analysis shows that the overall impact on the Watford community is positive. This is because the benefits of releasing the land will impact on all Watford residents (as well as on people from outside the borough whose main access to health facilities is at Watford General Hospital) and there is an opportunity of integrating the cultural activities currently available through the Irish Centre into the wider community.

The table summarises potential negative impacts and ways in which they can be removed or mitigated:

Negative Impact	Protected characteristics	Ways to mitigate the negative impact
Loss of community facilities	Ethnicity White Irish community <i>(no other community groups as yet identified as regular users of the Centre)</i>	Alternative provision is available within the borough – such as halls for hire. The council will work with the Irish Club to identify any affected groups and to work with them to find alternative provision.
Loss of access to changing facilities	Ethnicity White Irish community (known)	Alternative provision will be made within the borough. Wide community use of sports facilities will be considered as part of the Sports Facilities Strategy. The council will work with the Irish Club to identify any affected groups and to work with them to find alternative provision.
Loss of community identity	Ethnicity White Irish community	Although the review might result in the loss of the Watford Irish Centre, the Irish Club and the work it does to support the local Irish community and promote Irish culture could continue without dedicated premises. This would be through the use of alternative facilities / premises that are available within Watford and the surrounding district.

The table summarises potential positive impacts and ways in which they can be removed or mitigated:

Positive Impact	Protected characteristics	Ways to ensure the positive impact
Opportunity to feed into borough wide provision of sports facilities / playing pitches	All	Review to consider equality implications of proposals put forward and to be supported by equality impact analysis.
Contribution made to the delivery of Watford Health Campus project, particularly in terms of improved access	All	The Health Campus has now entered the BAFO stage and the remaining bidders are considering the best way to align the access road to ensure it supports speedier access to the hospital and mitigates any significant amount of additional traffic being experienced on residential roads by providing new access to other elements of the Campus development.
Fostering good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't	All	<p>Through integrating provision of sports facilities/ playing pitches across the borough and communities there should be an opportunity to bring together people across the protected characteristics.</p> <p>This will be considered within the Sports Facilities Strategy .</p>

Monitoring the review

This analysis will be reviewed as part of the development of the Sports Facilities Strategy.

This EIA has been approved by:

Manny Lewis

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