

Response from The Youth Service to the Melish Field Feasibility Study

The new proposal for the Melish Field site is welcomed as the proposal provides for a more generalist young people focused provision that is not just based around sport and fitness. While this is good, laudable and a relevant focus – given concerns around the unhealthy lifestyles of the young - it is recognised that young people are interested in other pursuits than sports. This said, the first floor provision will need to be located within a broader and more sustainable programme of opportunities for young people living in the Rotherhithe area. By itself it will probably not satisfy the major concerns in the area about young people hanging around and the ‘fear’ that this brings that they are up to no good (i.e. anti-social behaviour). It is however a very good start in providing something different in the area.

However:

- Other young people oriented facilities in the locality will need to be considered such as St Paul’s Field – is there likely to be an underuse of this facility due to the ‘newness’ factor of the Melish Field development?
- What about S’wark Park, will this complement what is being proposed at Melish Field?
- The Downtown development, how complementary will this be in providing for young people alongside all the other provisions locally (i.e. Odessa Youth Club, St Pauls, Melish Field etc)?
- The wider community access to the new provision, how will this work? Will there be the need to set up a separate management structure for the use of the first floor provision? If Bacons College is to manage the site, what community access will there be overall to both sports facilities and the opportunities offered on the first floor (see below)?
- To what extent will the new provision address the deep cause for concern in the area with respect to young people hanging around? Will those young people that we see as the ‘problem’ want to use the facility when it becomes available? What will make them want to use it? Would it be structural appropriate for what they want?
- Where will the revenue cost come from to support programme development within this new provision?

While there are many questions yet to be answered, there are nevertheless some very positive aspects to the proposal. The provision lends itself to structured programme development more so than to unstructured and drop-in type provision of the traditional youth club format. However, this in itself is not a reason for rejecting it. It will mean that certain types of programmes are best suited to be delivered than another. Thus:

Possible use of the First Floor Provision

1. Training opportunities – technical and social skills development;
2. Meeting/group rooms – appropriate for seminars, discussions, coaching, teaching and providing for information, advice and guidance sessions in line with the Connexions agenda;
3. Day time provision for young people not attending schools and/or disruptive pupils programme;
4. Evening drop-in sessions with basic ‘youth club activities’ taking place – will be constrained by the final physical structure that emerges and other issues around

- entrance arrangements, other users and the pricing policy of the landlord (i.e. Bacons College).
5. Use by voluntary organisations for one –off or regular meeting place (i.e. Youth Forum etc)

This list is not exhaustive but begins to show what is possible given the shape of the provision.

Budget implications

A realistic appraisal will need to take place as to how this provision would be funded and supported. Points to consider are:

- Bacons College will have to operate this venture so as not to cause budgetary problems for the college;
- Too high a rent will preclude many from accessing it;
- Youth work sessions will need to be secured as additional and growth funding if it is to be part of any local authority maintained Youth Service provision. However, voluntary organisations are best placed to secure external funding to establish such a provision. If this option is to be explored, the Youth Service would be more than happy to support its development. Work would need to begin before the building is built so as to prepare for the 'management' of the provision. A Steering Group would need to be set up as a starting point.

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