

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

EDUCATION COMMITTEE – 29 MAY 2001

NEWMILNS DRY SKI SLOPE

Report by Director of Educational and Social Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to advise the Committee of the outcome of the feasibility study and consultation which has been undertaken with regard to Newmilns Dry Ski slope and to consider the future of the slope.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Newmilns Dry Ski Slope was opened in 1975 and has been in use on a daily basis since that time. In 1995 a survey was carried out on the slope which identified that the whole slope required upgrading, including replacement of the brushes, improvement to the fabric of the centre and the need to upgrade the range of facilities available.
- 2.2 The ski slope requires investment to bring it up to a reasonable quality standard with the proviso that significant investment would be required to bring it to a standard of quality and safety which would be preferred by the Council.
- 2.3 Following a report brought to Committee on 27 April 2000, it was agreed that a feasibility study would be undertaken and reported to Committee. As part of the feasibility study it was agreed that the users of the facility should be consulted about their views on the future of the ski slope in Newmilns.

3. CURRENT ISSUES

3.1 Feasibility Study

The Loudoun Valley Trust commissioned Snowsport Consultancy to examine the future viability of the Ski Slope. Specifically the consultant was remitted to consider:

Demand: current and future market for the slope including competition.

Improvements: to consider requirements to upgrade the facility to meet the market need.

Funding: identify future funding sources.

Management: arrangements regarding future ownership and management of the facility which would maximise funding opportunities.

Marketing: examine marketing and advertising opportunities.

3.2 Consultation

The consultant was advised to consult with a wide range of individuals and groups who had an interest in the slope as well as the community of Newmilns and surrounds.

3.3 The Findings

The Executive Summary and copy of the full Feasibility Report are available in the members lounge.

The feasibility study identifies a significant drop in the users of the facility over recent years and is of the opinion that the ski slope is not marketed or advertised sufficiently. It recommends that the slope should stay within the ownership of the local authority and management for the slope should be delegated to a group of snow sport participants in Ayrshire, brought together as a snowsport club.

3.4 Users Survey

The Director was requested to conduct a survey of users of the ski slope. A total of 210 questionnaires were sent to previous users of the slope and handed out at public sessions during the period June to August 2000. A total of 62 returns were made i.e. 30% response rate. Respondents included parents, group leaders and skiers:

- 48 respondents commented that the charges for the slope were right, with only 2 stating that it is too expensive. The remaining 12 respondents indicated that the charges could be increased.
- 20 individuals highlighted the role that the ski slope played for local young people, believing it to be a valuable local resource.
- All respondents made positive comments regarding the staff, praising the quality of instructors and commending the helpfulness and efficiency of all staff at the slope.
- 53 people identified the need to upgrade the slope, issues regarding the mat and tow were frequent as were suggestions to develop the facilities.
- 43 individuals commented on the need for improved marketing and advertising of the facility.

3.5 Outstanding repair work required to the tow rope was agreed as part of the Capital Programme Report at the Special Education Committee held on 7 March.

4. FUTURE OPTIONS

4.1 Option 1

Status Quo

Continuing to operate the centre as it currently operates, with a part time manager to co-ordinate the service including the need for improved marketing and advertising within the existing budget.

As previously indicated, the ski slope requires investment to bring it up to a reasonable quality standard and significant investment to bring it to a standard of quality and safety which would be preferred by the Council.

4.2 Option 2

Upgrade of Ski facilities

The report identifies that by improving the snowsport available, a wider potential market would become available to Newmilns. This would include snowboarding as well as improving the standard of slope available for skiing.

No costs were available in the feasibility study for this option.

4.3 Option 3

Developing other sports

Future development of the facility could include the development of other sports including snowsports. These opportunities would be complementary to the snowsport facilities and continue the theme of outdoor activity. The feasibility report considers that the potential market is available. Suggested activities could include climbing, abseiling, inline skating, mountain biking and others. The site would allow this kind of extended activity.

No costs were available in the feasibility study for this option.

4.4 Option 4

Transfer facility outwith the Council

Offering the facility for community management with no budget transfer or ongoing financial support. Offering support only to any interested community group to access funding as explored in the feasibility study.

No costs available in the feasibility study for this option.

4.5 Option 5

Retention of ownership by East Ayrshire Council with community management

The Council would retain the ownership of the facility and support the establishment of a management group who would lease the facility in order to access external funding. The Council could phase its financial contribution and commitment over a number of years.

No costs are available in the feasibility study for this option.

5. **Summary Conclusions**

5.1 In January 2001, the Friends of Newmilns Ski Slope was established by local users of the slope and on 31 January 2001 a Steering group was set up with representatives of many local community groups. This steering group is in the active process of producing a business plan which they anticipate will include short, medium and long term plan for the ski slope

5.2 On the basis of the feasibility study, the future viability of the ski slope is likely to be determined by its ability to attract external funding. Community based organisations supported by the Council often have access to a wider range of funding sources. It is therefore proposed that the management of the ski slope is transferred to a community based management committee and funding from the Council phased out over a three year period.

6. **FINANCIAL REPORT**

6.1 The total cost of the ski slope in 2000/01 was £38,111 which includes building, staff, janitorial and utility costs.

6.2 The ski slope generated £6,969 in income in the financial year 2000/01.

7. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

7.1 It is recommended that Members of the Education Committee:

- (i) Approve, in principle, the transfer of the ski-slope to a community based management committee with funding from the Council phased out over a 3 year period;
- (ii) ask the Director of Educational and Social Services to assist the community and other stakeholders in the development of a community based management committee to take forward the management of the ski slope; and
- (iii) otherwise note the contents of this report.

John Mulgrew
Director of Educational and Social Services

AJ/SB
19 March 2001

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

Newmilns Ski Slope Feasibility Study, October 2000
Health and Safety Report

Members wishing further information should contact Kay Gilmour, Head of Community Support, Tel: (01563) 576104, or Anne Jackson, Principal Community Education Officer, Tel: (01563) 576126.

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AGENDA