

SPORT AND FITNESS FACILITIES

European Parliament Sports Centre in Brussels

Project for the restructuring and improvement of the services provided by this amenity

A - CONTEXT

1 - Exploratory mandate issued by plenary

At the end of 2005, the Committee on Budgets, and then plenary, voted in favour of asking Parliament to assess the operation of the Sports Centre in Brussels, with a view to possible improvements:

Parliament 'points to the importance of daily exercise for the health of Members and staff; asks the Bureau to carry out an evaluation of the functioning of the Sports Centre, notably the services provided and the Centre's price policy, taking into account opening hours'.

European Parliament resolution of 27 October 2005. Report on the draft general budget for 2006 (Sections I, II, IV, V, VI, VII and VIII) (Rapporteur: Valdis DOMBROVSKIS - Committee on Budgets)

At the beginning of 2006, Parliament started a study comparing the European Parliament's Sports Centre with 5 other nearby sports centres :

PASSAGE FITNESS - 47/49 avenue des Arts, 1000 Brussels

ASPRIA - 26/38 rue de l'Industrie, 1040 Brussels

WINNERS - 13 rue Bonneel, 1040 Brussels

WORLD CLASS GYM - Place de Luxembourg, 1040 Brussels

WAOU CLUB MED - 56 Avenue de la Toison, 1060 Brussels

Contacts were also made with various groups with an involvement in Parliament's sports centre (managers, services, users, etc.). It emerged from the analysis and these contacts that the sports centre:

- *was practically the only facility of its kind when opened in the early 1990s, but was now up against a large number of competitive 'rivals';*
- *pursued pricing policy which, when compared with the other centres, was acceptable;*
- *unlike its competitors, was not open at weekends, which made it less attractive;*
- *had a less extensive and poorer quality range of facilities than the other centres.*

Furthermore, the sports centre is one of the few European Parliament facilities not to have adjusted to the major increase in the number of people working at the EP that has occurred over the last 15 years.

In spite of these deficiencies, the demand for sports facilities within Parliament from Members and staff has not slackened, which shows that there is a need for such on-site facilities. The number of people with subscriptions (multi-month or multi-session cards) to the sports centre is on the rise (up by 37% over recent years):

<i>Year</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2001</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>2003</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2005</i>	<i>2006</i>
<i>Subscr. holders</i>	<i>689</i>	<i>783</i>	<i>748</i>	<i>820</i>	<i>843</i>	<i>845</i>	<i>942</i>

In 2007, the number of subscriptions should go above the 1 000 mark. Over the period shown in the above table, the proportion of users from Parliament itself (as against those from other institutions) also increased, from 40% to 60 %.

In February 2006, the European Parliament Sports Centre Management Committee held a meeting chaired by Jim Nicholson (Quaestor with responsibility for the area), in the presence of Astrid Lulling (Quaestor) and Gérard Onesta (Vice-President with responsibility for property policy). The following were also present: the delegates elected by centre users, the management of Blade Runner (firm in charge of running the centre) and the officials with responsibility for the centre.

A clear consensus emerged on the need for improvements to be made at the centre by early 2008, to include:

- extending the opening hours, particularly at weekends;*
- redesigning and improving the existing premises and bringing in new pricing structures;*
- expanding the premises to make room for new facilities of essential importance to the success of any modern sports centre.*

2 - Implementing mandate from plenary

In mid-2006, the Committee on Budgets and subsequently the plenary, following a vote, asked for the facilities at the sports centre to be improved 'in terms of quality and quantity':

'Parliament 'takes the view that, as part of its consistent policy of promoting health through sport, there should be an improvement, in terms of quality and quantity, in what is offered by Parliament's sports centre, which has not evolved since it was designed at the start of the 1990s, although the number of its potential users has doubled since then'.

European Parliament resolution of 1 June 2006. Report on the estimates of revenue and expenditure of the European Parliament for the financial year 2007 (Rapporteur: Louis GRECH - Committee on Budgets)

In accordance with standard procedures, a feasibility study was carried out by the Administration, with advice from architects and engineers. The study (autumn 2006) covers both the redesign of the existing premises and the building of an extension.

B - THE PROJECT

The Administration, in close cooperation with the Vice-President with responsibility for property policy, based the project on an initial analysis of the existing state of affairs. The first finding was that Parliament's sports centre had been set up in premises that were ill-suited to its purpose (spread over three floors in the basement of the ASP Building). The proposed measures thus had to make the centre more dynamic (without moving it elsewhere), rationalise the layout and ensure that a fuller range of facilities was provided. Safety (evacuation, use of equipment in a confined space, etc.) was a constant concern.

The measures to be taken with a view to improving the sports centre can be divided into organisational measures and spatial measures.

As regards organisation, it is essential for the centre's opening hours to be extended to the weekend, and for its pricing policy to be brought into line with the real needs of Parliament's Members and staff. Lastly, and most importantly, it must provide the up-to-date facilities that users have a right to expect from a sports centre in 2006. The new range of facilities must complement the existing facilities and cover, in particular, health, exercise and relaxation needs (not currently being met).

The amount of space available and the way in which it is laid out also need to be reviewed. The current premises are too small and, above all, do not provide the necessary scope for improving the facilities on offer. The existing premises are therefore in need of a functional redesign and, in particular, the overall surface area needs to be increased so as to provide room for the new facilities.

1 - Changing the layout of the existing premises

This would not appear to pose any particular problem. It will consist in simply rearranging the layout of the current facilities by moving partition walls, and should have a limited impact in technical and budgetary terms. It will involve:

- grouping the health and beauty areas (physiotherapist, beautician, osteopath, solarium, etc.) together at the entrance to the centre, to make them more noticeable;
- renovating the men's and women's changing rooms and siting them on the main floor of the sports centre. The changing rooms are currently in a rather dilapidated state and need showers and toilets;
- bringing the facilities into line with standards regarding persons with reduced mobility;
- moving the existing saunas in order to add rest areas, which do not exist at present;
- opening out the large gym hall and adding an all-important 'stretching' area, which is currently lacking;
- widening the staircase leading to the floor on which the two existing squash courts are located.

2 - Extending the premises

This is the largest and most complex part of the project. It is proposed that the sports centre be

extended by taking over a few hundred square metres of space from the adjacent underground car park (level –3 to level –5), which will involve doing away with a few dozen parking spaces. Parliament is anyway obliged to get rid of a large number of spaces in its underground car park in order to comply with Belgian legal requirements (only 1800 of the current 2300 spaces are usable in accordance with environmental rules). Access to the extension will be from the level on which the existing squash courts are located, once the vertical and horizontal access routes have been properly dimensioned. In order to meet the necessary quality standards, avoid technical difficulties and save money by avoiding the need for costly consolidation work, the new architectural elements will need to be installed directly on the main foundations slab, which forms the floor of level – 5), which is amply capable of bearing the weight.

In response to the above needs, Parliament's Administration drew up plans for changing the layout of the existing premises and bringing the total surface area up from 1470 m² to 2150 m² (an increase of approximately 46%). These figures do not include the equipment area (filtration, sterilisation, dehumidification and other systems), because it will be located in a section of the premises where there will be no need for an additional floor slab to be built. This is the project on which the feasibility study was based.

The proposed increase in surface area is perfectly reasonable when viewed in the light of the MAJOR increase in the number of people working at the EP, brought about by the assignment of new duties to Parliament and the successive EU enlargements.

There has been an enormous increase in the number of potential users of the sports centre since it was first designed in the early 1990s.

At the time, Parliament had:

- 518 Members
- 850 officials and other staff based in Brussels
- 750 assistants and trainees based in Brussels

making for a total of 2 100 people (to whom should be added thousands of officials of other institutions who have free access to the sports centre).

By the time the redesigned sports centre is delivered in mid-2008 Parliament will have:

- 785 Members
- 2 600 officials and other staff based in Brussels
- 1 500 assistants and trainees based in Brussels

making for a total of 4 900 people (to whom should be added the thousands of officials of other institutions who have free access to the sports centre, the number of whom has also increased enormously).

The number of potential EP users has therefore increased by 133% (!). This major increase provides the necessary grounds for Parliament's clearly stated political will to at last improve its own facilities. Unless improvements are made, in view of these 'demographic' trends and the constant improvements being made by equivalent centres, Parliament's sports centre would become totally obsolete and would ultimately have to be closed down.

The space per user has shrunk to an alarming extent.

When the sports centre was designed, the space per user stood at around 0.70 m². It currently stands at around 0.30 m², down by 57%. If the extension project is implemented (on the basis of the Administration's initial project), it would rise to 0.44 m² (which would still be down by 37% on the initial figures).

The feasibility study based on the Administration's initial project indicates that the new changing- room area should be further expanded (by approximately 280 m²) in order to cater more effectively for a large number of users. Account also needs to be taken of the equipment area (around 300 m²). However, even this additional area of 580 m² would not bring the space per user back up to its initial level but, instead, to 0.55 m², still down by 21%. 'Demographic' trends within Parliament could therefore, on their own, be seen as sufficient justification for improvements to be made as a matter of urgency.

Following this 'facelift', consisting of the addition of more space and new equipment, Parliament's sports centre will once again be in line with the standards for this kind of facility. It will provide a comprehensive range of facilities which will at last be suited to what has become a much bigger institution, and will thus be in keeping with the 'sports and health' objective set by plenary.

In order to make the premises more attractive and substantially enhance the quality of the facilities available, the architectural design will be more fluid and harmonious than is the case in the current premises. Nevertheless the architectural quality of the premises will be achieved without the use of luxury materials.

The project to extend and renovate the Sports Centre was submitted on 9 November 2006 to the Sports Centre Management Committee (representing users, the Administration, the service provider, etc), which approved it unanimously.

The project was then approved unanimously by the College of Quaestors at its meeting of 28 November 2006, and was then forwarded to the Bureau of Parliament.

The project was finally approved by the Bureau of Parliament at its meeting of 13 December 2006, pointing out 'the need to offer MEPs and staff decent sports facilities, since such since such facilities constitute a service with a social and health dimension'.

The Bureau then forwarded the project for examination by the Committee des Budgets in accordance with Article 179 of the Financial Regulation. It now remains for this committee to ascertain whether funds are available to carry out a project that the committee itself initiated.

C - PERFORMANCE OF THE WORK

The feasibility study on project is now in its final stages.

The firm of architects and engineers commissioned to handle the project has already confirmed that, in technical terms (structures, safety, special equipment and schedule) the project is wholly viable. It has also approved the architectural design, whilst pointing out that the changing rooms in the new part need to be larger. It has also stressed that Parliament's specific constraints (specific safety measures, work carried out in confined spaces, etc.) need to be taken into account in the invitation to tender and during the performance of the work.

The techniques used to build the extension must not only meet long-term maintenance requirements but also comply with all EMAS environmental standards, to which Parliament has now fully committed itself.

Furthermore, all the facilities (both old and new) will be totally accessible to disabled persons.

1 - Budget

The budget - estimated at the feasibility study stage - stands at approximately € 4 million for the new part. To this is added an extra 200 000 euros for contractors' fees, and the Committee on Budgets voted in autumn 2006 in favour of allocating funding of 200 000 euros to pay all the fees for the study phase. The alterations to the existing premises will require a much smaller sum (a few hundred thousand euros), which could be charged directly to the existing budget headings covering the fitting-out and maintenance of Parliament premises.

The 4.2 million euros (work + fees) would be spread, on the basis of a precise schedule for the work, over TWO budgetary years (with or without carry-over of appropriations). The financial statement drawn up by the Administration states that 1.2 million euros could be committed in 2007 and 3 million euros in 2008.

As regards the 4 million for the 'work', the provisional estimate consists of an 'architecture' budget (creation of the floors, walls and passageways and the installation of the various kinds of equipment) and a 'technical' budget (civil engineering work, systems for the circulation/sterilisation of fluids, specific heating and lighting, general safety measures, etc.).

The provisional 'architecture' budget stands at around € 1 400 000.

The calculation is based on the following per-unit amounts for the various areas:

- € 150/m² for equipment areas
- € 300/m² for vertical passageways
- € 700/m² for emergency evacuation routes
- € 1200/m² for standard sports facilities (including changing rooms and horizontal passageways)
- € 1800/m² for specific sports facilities

The provisional 'technical' budget stands at around € 2 600 000.

This figure breaks down as follows:

- € 690 000 for civil engineering work
- € 660 000 for air distribution
- € 570 000 for finalisation of the water supply system
- € 300 000 for electrical equipment

- € 250 000 for specific sports facilities
- € 100 000 for the disabled lift
- € 50 000 for fire-protection systems

The estimates are based on a surface area of 1260 m² for the 'extended' project, following the adjustments made as a result of the feasibility study (680 m² from the initial project + 280 m² for the changing room extension + 300 m² for the equipment area).

As part of the EMAS process, the use of materials and techniques that have less of an impact on the environment and users have been included in the estimate. Consideration has also been given to all possible energy-saving measures, including heat recovery. In budgetary terms, this option requires a larger initial investment but brings substantial savings thereafter.

Finally, when all items are taken into account, the estimate for the work stands at less than € 3 200 per square metre, which is thus extremely competitive for a complex project of this kind.

It is important to bear in mind that use of the sports centre is not free of charge. Users pay a daily or monthly entry fee. There is also a charge for the services provided in the health/beauty section.

As indicated in the financial statement, it would also be desirable - when the next contract for the outside management of the Centre is being negotiated - to include a clause stipulating that all the costs of maintaining the renovated and extended facilities will be borne in their entirety by the service provider. Thus, once the facilities have been created, no further contribution will be required from Parliament's budget.

2 - Schedule

It should take no longer than two months to change the layout of the existing premises. So as not to have too much of an impact on the running of the current centre, the work should be carried out in the summer of 2007.

With regard to the performance of the work on the extension, contacts established during the feasibility study indicate that the work would take approximately ten months.

The extension work will cause little inconvenience because the site can be totally sealed off from the rest of the building. The only potential (but short-lived) inconvenience will be caused by the demolition of existing floors in the current car park. This work should therefore be carried out during a Strasbourg part-session, when most of the building's occupants will be away.

The aim would be to start the extension work in one year's time, at the beginning of the fourth quarter of 2007, with a view to delivery of the new Sports Centre being made just after the summer in 2008.

In order to be able to keep to this schedule, given the time required for completion of the final architectural and engineering studies, administrative formalities vis-à-vis the Belgian authorities and the tendering procedures, it is therefore essential for approval,

if forthcoming, to be given by Parliament's competent authorities in EARLY 2007.

Brussels, 10 January 2006

Gérard ONESTA
Vice-President with responsibility for property policy