

22 January 2014

William Powell AM
AM for Mid & West Wales
Chair Petitions Committee
Ty HYwel
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff CF99 1NA

Dear William,

Closing of the Wales National Tennis Centre

On the back of Andy Murray's historic Wimbledon victory, which has caused a huge surge in tennis interest and participation across Wales and Great Britain, you are aware that Wales is now in serious danger of permanently losing its National Tennis Centre in Cardiff, the only public access indoor tennis facility in the Capital of Wales. The National Tennis Centre has now been closed as of August 23rd, temporarily at this stage. However I believe that rather than being a negative situation, there is an extremely positive opportunity here for Welsh tennis and for the Cardiff Council if the right parties approach this situation in the right way.

Tennis Wales and the entire Welsh tennis community are obviously extremely concerned about this situation, and we want to work positively and proactively with the Cardiff City Council and Welsh Government to do everything possible to ensure that this centre can re-open at some point under a very different business model. Under a more ideal business model we strongly believe that the centre can be used in the way that it was originally intended and built for, which is a community access tennis centre for mass community participation, as well as a 'National Centre of Excellence' for Welsh tennis. Under the previous business operations at the centre, and with the centre being operated as a 'Commercial Centre', it was not at all possible for this to occur. Under the previous commercial operators, despite several of them being very large companies, there was next to no chance of the centre being successful.

We very much believe that if given the right opportunity with the right business model and the right operators, the tennis centre can really flourish as a successful and financially sustainable community sports facility, and Tennis Wales, Sport Wales, and the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) are very eager to support the Cardiff City Council to help make that happen. We have a tremendous case study example of exactly this situation in Swansea. In 2011 the Swansea City Council closed the Swansea Indoor Tennis Centre for similar reasons to the situation in Cardiff, with a lack of tennis users. However, Tennis Wales and the LTA worked with a committed group of volunteers to organise a Trust Group called Tennis Swansea 365, and the Swansea Council re-opened the tennis centre under the management of TS365. By taking a very different approach to running and promoting the tennis centre, TS365, Tennis Wales, and the LTA have transformed the Swansea Tennis Centre and it is now at bursting point with tennis

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players from all sectors of the community, including people from very deprived areas and people with disabilities.

The 'Commercial' business model at the Cardiff Centre was based around expensive annual membership fees for the whole centre of between £500-600 per year. Alternatively, the public was able to have some limited opportunities to hire a tennis court, but at very high cost of up to £25 per hour. Consequently, the centre had a low membership of just 1,800 people (gym, swimming pool, and tennis) and the tennis courts stood empty for much of the time. Contrast this with the business model that we have helped to implement at the Swansea Tennis Centre. They now base their business model on mass community participation at very affordable rates and with a range of flexible options for how the public can access and pay for using the centre. As a result, two years later the centre is now absolutely booming and is at capacity. There are over 600 people formally signed up to regular tennis programmes (previously only 100 at the time it was closed down) and 11,000 tennis players on their database. The centre has moved from making a substantial financial loss when it was closed down, to now making a significant annual surplus which is able to be re-invested back into the centre and re-invested back into the tennis programmes for the community. The Swansea Tennis Centre is now a shining beacon of success for the Swansea City Council and Welsh tennis, and has been presented by the LTA across Britain as a model of best practice for other Community Indoor Tennis Centres.

We would now very much like to work with the Cardiff City Council to help create a similar situation with the Cardiff Tennis Centre. Expressions of interest from 12 different potential partners have been put forwards to Cardiff City Council to potentially take over as operators of the centre. We are aware of many of these and there are at least several of these options who we strongly believe would be able to operate the centre in a similar way to what I have described with the Swansea Centre, including the group who are currently operating the Swansea Centre. Obviously a very robust and sustainable business plan would have to be presented for this, but Tennis Wales and the LTA are confident that there is great potential here, and both Tennis Wales and the LTA would provide substantial support to a potential new operator to make the centre successful, including significant financial support.

In partnership with Sport Wales and the LTA, Tennis Wales has set a very ambitious 8 year plan to double community tennis participation in Wales. Cardiff has been the initial priority area for Tennis Wales to launch these community tennis plans, and over the period preceding and during Wimbledon 2013, Tennis Wales launched the 'Tennis with A DIFF' campaign across Cardiff with over 2,400 members of the public having a go at tennis during the various promotional events. The LTA's recent YouGov research in Cardiff shows that more than 40,000 people in Cardiff are interested in playing tennis if the right opportunities were there. Tennis participation rates for juniors in Wales have doubled in the last three years, and on the back of Andy Murray's amazing win at Wimbledon, these levels of interest will have gone much higher now. Enclosed are the results of the 2013 Sport Wales School Sport Survey which clearly shows that the interest in tennis by school children is absolutely exploding over the last several years. Tennis is now the third most popular sport that school children in Wales would like to participate in, behind Football and Swimming. However, with the closure of the Cardiff Tennis Centre, there is now no public access indoor tennis centre in the capital of Wales with which to take advantage of this booming interest in tennis, as has been done in Swansea.

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The Cardiff Tennis Centre, if re-opened as a truly community focussed and accessible tennis centre, can play a major role in helping Tennis Wales, Sport Cardiff, Sport Wales, and the LTA to allow this huge desire in the community to play tennis to be more fully taken advantage of, as the Swansea model has demonstrated. Cardiff City Council is currently assessing their options as to the best use of the land and the facility where the National Tennis Centre is located. Surely if there are viable options available to have the centre operating in the manner that I have outlined here then this must be a priority. Wales and Cardiff are quite rightly very proud sporting communities, and as part of this proud sporting culture, Cardiff has some truly outstanding sporting facilities for a city of its size. In 2014, Cardiff becomes the European Capital City of Sport, further testament to this proud sporting culture. If the National Tennis Centre in Cardiff closes down permanently, and is instead used for some other purpose, Cardiff will be one of the very few major cities in Britain without a public access indoor tennis centre, just at a time when tennis in Wales has a really fantastic opportunity to surge forwards as a fun, accessible, family, community sport.

Without the National Tennis Centre in Cardiff, the plans of Tennis Wales, Sport Wales, and the LTA to double community tennis participation in Wales will be severely impacted, and the proud sporting city of Cardiff, the 2014 European Capital City of Sport, will have lost a very vital national sports facility when there are extremely good options on the table to potentially allow for a very different outcome and a very positive outcome for Welsh sport.

We would very much welcome any support from you with this issue, and we look forward to supporting this process in any way possible.

Yours sincerely

Peter Drew
Chief Executive Officer
Tennis Wales Ltd

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