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12 June 2008

Ruth Hatton
Deputy Committee Clerk
Legislation Office
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay CF99 1NA

Dear Ruth Hatton

Consultation – Proposals for Proposed Playing Fields (Community Involvement in Disposal Decisions) Measure

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the above consultation.

NFWI-Wales welcomes this measure to strengthen the protection of playing fields in order to ensure that local sport and recreational facilities are retained and available for use by members of the public.

Background

The NFWI has a long-standing history of commitment to improving the nation's diet and health. At the 2003 NFWI AGM, members passed a resolution urging HM Government to regulate the promotion to children of foods that contribute to an unhealthy diet and to ensure increased opportunities for exercise and practical food education in schools.

NFWI-Wales is concerned about the dramatic rise in childhood obesity and the decline in time spent by children playing and learning outdoors. In response to our concerns, NFWI-Wales established the *Gardening with Schools* project in 2005 to increase the physical activity levels of primary school children by participating in the creation of vegetable and wildlife areas and general garden maintenance.

In June 2006, members passed a resolution 'sport for a healthy population' urging HM Government to "recognise that participation in sport is an essential factor in the creation of a healthy population; ensure the re-establishment of competitive (mainstream) sport in the curricula of all schools; and take such steps as necessary to reverse the decline in the availability of sporting facilities for all citizens..."

Playing fields have a vital role in contributing towards the health and wellbeing of communities. At a time when there is such an emphasis on the need to encourage children, young people and adults to lead healthy lifestyles and to be physically active, it is essential that any proposals to dispose of playing fields are given proper consideration and that the impacts on the community are assessed.

Playing fields have a role in increasing people's enjoyment, interest and appreciation of their local environment and provide them with access to and enjoyment of green spaces.

More and more community facilities are being eroded. The closure of banks, post offices, schools and hospitals all impact on the vibrancy of a community and the health and well being of its population. As well as the role of playing fields in keeping members of the community active and healthy, they are also a place to socialise. Many schools without their own green spaces and are dependent on community playing fields in order to provide pupils with opportunities to take part in sporting activity.

Response to Consultation Questions

NFWI-Wales agrees with the principle of the Proposed Measure.

There is currently significant emphasis on encouraging people to lead healthy lifestyles and to exercise. For some individuals, playing fields, for either sport and / or recreation, may be the only facilities they use. They provide families, for example, with free access to open spaces and provide children with the opportunity to keep active and to spend time in the fresh air. Removal of such facilities can impact on the health and well being of individuals and could in effect contribute to a reduction in physical activity levels.

With the introduction of the Foundation Phase in September 2008, providing greater emphasis on outdoor learning, the importance of safeguarding playing fields is greater than ever.

NFWI-Wales agrees with the principal definitions used in section 2.

We welcome the impact statements which local authorities would be obliged to provide and agree with the proposed contents. It is vital that any proposals will not have a negative impact on communities and their access to good quality playing fields.

We would suggest that the "deposit period" is extended to not less than 8 weeks and that the "consultation period" ends two weeks thereafter. It should be noted that some community groups meet only on a monthly basis. The suggested extension would give members of the community and community groups adequate time to be consulted and to represent their views.

We welcome the broad range of consultees included in the Schedule. We would suggest that consideration is given to adding school Governing Bodies and Parent-Teacher Associations to the list of consultees as another route to ensuring that parents and the wider public are aware of proposals.

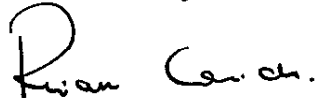
Where the authority has decided to proceed with a disposal of a playing field after a consultation, NFWI-Wales believes that the requirements on a Local Authority are satisfactory.

We welcome the authority of Welsh Ministers to halt the disposal of a playing field in circumstances where it is evident that a local authority has not complied with the requirements of sections 3 to 6 of the Measure.

No financial costs will be incurred by NFWI-Wales as a result of the proposals.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require further information.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rhian Connick". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'R'.

Rhian Connick
Head of NFWI-Wales Office