

FACILITIES: CRYSTAL PALACE SPORTS PARTNERSHIP FIGHTING TO KEEP HISTORIC SOUTH LONDON TRACK

# Pressure group still hopeful over Palace track

THE chair of a group set up to save athletics at Crystal Palace is hopeful the outdoor track will stay after ongoing meetings with planners who are threatening closure.

The Greater London Authority outlined plans in October which would see the stands taken down, the indoor facility removed and the outdoor track possibly disappear.

A period of public consultation was opened and the Crystal Palace Sports Partnership, chaired by sprint coach John Powell, has been urging planners to slow down the process and reconsider.

A decision is expected over the next couple of months and, if any of the plans get the go-ahead, work would start on a phased basis from 2016.

The 15,000-seater arena was the spiritual home of British athletics for four decades. It followed on from the White City Stadium as host of the AAA Championships from 1971 to 1987 and staged some of the biggest international meetings from the late-1960s onwards.



Ed Warner: not a fan of London Diamond League returning to Crystal Palace



John Powell (second right, front) at the Crystal Palace indoor track

Powell is hoping the historic outdoor track will stay, although he admits the indoor arena, which is in a poor state, and the seating stands will go. He is adamant, however, that a new indoor arena should be built on the site as it is heavily used and no other similar facilities are easily accessible to athletes in the area.

Powell said: "If I had to go down to Ladbrokes with a tenner today I would say that the outdoor track is likely to stay but the stadium surrounding it will almost certainly go." He maintains the plans were arrived at based on inaccurate data regarding the usage of the facilities.

He said: "A couple of Tuesday nights ago I did a survey and we found that 205 people were using the indoor and outdoor athletics facility. More than 100 were indoors ... yet one of the first things that GLA will say is that, based on the information they were given, the facility is not used and is therefore not needed, which of course is complete rubbish. There are probably 15 to 20 different athletics clubs using the track at different times.

"We've been trying to convey the message to the GLA that the data supplied by Greenwich Leisure is totally unreliable. I think

it's been accepted to a degree but whether it's been accepted to the point that they agree there's a need for a facility there is a different issue."

Describing the indoor facility as "filthy dirty" and "cold", he added: "The fact that it gets such use despite being that condition is indicative of the need both locally and regionally for that sort of facility."

CPSP accept the indoor track needs to be demolished but argue that it would be commercially viable to replace it with an arena suitable for several sports, including athletics.

Powell said: "Even from an athletics point of view if you held four or five open meetings indoor and four or five outdoors a year that in itself with training fees would raise £100,000 per year without even blinking."

The outdoor track has been used less in recent years and the Olympic Stadium took over as host of Britain's premier Diamond League meeting in 2012 and 2013. With the Stratford venue undergoing an overhaul at the time of the 2014 meeting, British Athletics chairman Ed Warner described the idea of going back to Crystal Palace for that year as a "backward step".

However, it still hosts the big, annual London Youth Games, the South of England Championships, plus a handful of open meetings throughout the season.

Powell, who is chairman of Belgrave Harriers, said a case had been put forward to retain the Jubilee stand on the back straight, which was opened in 1977.

The plans are part of a wider set of proposals for the National Sports Centre of which the athletics facilities are part.

Another south London athletics track whose future is in doubt is Tooting Bec after Wandsworth Council declared last autumn it would pull the funding. It is thought a private company, sports club or other institution could be invited to take over the running of the venue.

Meanwhile, at the nearby Croydon Arena, hopes of building a new stand, changing rooms, indoor arena and other facilities have been scuppered as a new primary school has instead been given the go-ahead for the site near to the track. Croydon Harriers' Mike Fleet said athletics at the venue would not suffer without the new facilities.

● Read more about CPSP by visiting [cpsp2020.com](http://cpsp2020.com)