

Inspired Facilities



Fenland Equestrian Centre

CASE STUDY THEMES

- Equestrian
- Expansion of existing facility
- Education and training
- Surfaces and lighting

PROJECT SUMMARY

Summary

Expansion and development of an existing equestrian facility.

Facility name	Fenland Equestrian Centre
Lead organisation	Cambridgeshire County Council
Organisation type	Local authority
Location	Redmoor Bank, Cambridgeshire
Sport	Equestrian
Total project cost	£220,000
Inspired Facilities funding	£110,000 (50% of total)
Other funding sources	Cambridgeshire County Council
Tender process	Local authority framework
Contract type	tbc
Start and end date	November 2012 – March 2013
Duration of capital works	tbc

Achieved outcomes

- Increased opportunity for training, competitions and other activities all year round
- Improved facilities for students



Introduction

Fenland Equestrian Centre is located in the village of Redmoor Bank, in rural Cambridgeshire. The centre has existed for the past few years, operating out of a converted cattle shed, and in 2011 became an outreach base for the College of West Anglia to deliver equestrian-based education for 16-19 year olds. There was space available to undertake training on horses; however, this was poorly lit and the surface was not ideal for riding. In addition, the standard of local horse riding provision was generally poor, with few centres that met a high standard, not least in horse care. The main driver for the funding application was to develop and expand a community facility to enable it to deliver training, competitions and activities all year round at an affordable price.

The Project

The project aimed to build an equestrian facility that was fit for purpose and could meet local needs. The centre required two arenas, one which was large enough to be used for competitions and a smaller arena for practice and warm up, both needed appropriate surfaces for horse riding and adequate lighting. There was also a need for the centre to have stables, a grooming and inspection area as well as a classroom to allow students to effectively train on all aspects of equestrian care. The project also funded construction of a shop in order to help with the on-going sustainability of the facility.

Just under half of the project funding came from Inspired Facilities, the rest was provided by Cambridgeshire County Council. Cambridgeshire County Council owns the site and charges the centre an annual rent of £10,500. The framework for contractors was not used as Cambridgeshire County Council had their own tendering process which had to be followed. Without the support of Sport England, the centre manager feels that they would have tried to build a single arena, but that it would taken at least five years to complete.

Outcomes

The Facility

The project has resulted in a far better facility than that which existed previously. It is now able to host competitions due to the appropriately sized arena and surfaces. In addition, the centre can be used all year round and for longer hours due to the improved lighting. Users were impressed with the facilities and some highlighted how the new surface made them feel safer, and so had helped them develop their confidence in riding. The facilities had enabled users to properly undertake studies in equestrian care particularly those modules on animal grooming. Previously the only available course of this type was over two hours drive away so was not a realistic option for many of the students.

“I used to train when it got dark, but the light was really poor and I couldn’t really see what I was doing. Now the lights are fantastic so I can train much later than I ever have done.” (User)

“I feel much safer out there [in the arena]...I know that if I fall off it’s not going to hurt” (User)



Without the support of Sport England, it was felt that the centre would not look as good as it does now.

“It looks fabulous now...It has a ‘wow’ factor, which means people expect a high standard delivered locally. [Without funding] it would look far worse, and anything I could do would have to cut corners... It wouldn’t get used as much if it looks ramshackle. “(Project Manager)

Sports Participation

In terms of throughput, the baseline was 1,865 visits per year and the project's aim was to increase this substantially over five years to 43,000. Initial results have been promising as there has been an increase in the number of users. It is thought that competitions have generated interest in the centre and lead to an increase in participation; furthermore the improved facilities have meant existing users are able to use the centre all year round.

The main benefit of having better facilities, so far, is that it has helped them to slowly build up the demand for different equestrian activities at the centre. The improved look of the facility is far more attractive to prospective users. Most of the users spoken to as part of the case study felt that their participation had increased due to the improved facilities and that the quality of the surface was better for the horses. A number were also convinced that their performance in competitions had been enhanced as a result.

THROUGHPUT	Baseline	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Target	n/a	14,400	21,600	28,800	37,600	43,200
Actual	1,825	-	-	-	-	-

Lead Organisation and Partners

The application process represented a huge learning curve for the organisation. There were relatively few funding streams available, and, where these opportunities existed, the requirements or criteria were too onerous, for example Fen Adventurers, a European-funded rural development programme, required projects to attract tourism to the area. Sport England funding was more sports-orientated and so it was easier for them to meet the criteria.

The application process itself was fairly straightforward, though the timeframes were very tight, especially as it took time to receive the required letters of support.

The project experienced a number of setbacks throughout the process. Initially the plan was to start the development in January 2012 and finish in March 2012. However, the work was held up by building regulations which resulted in the planning application being rejected. The aim had been to locate a classroom within the stable area; however this required more wall space, use of fire retardant materials and concreting of the stable area. These proposed changes would have increased costs significantly. However, a revised plan was approved and the development was finally set in motion in November 2012 and completed in March 2013. This was followed by further issues as a safety light in the arena exploded shortly after opening. This delayed the start by at least six weeks in order to both replace the lighting and also replace a section of the arena surface to ensure no glass remained. This delay meant that they lost opportunities to recruit in favourable spring conditions, and also meant that they missed the 'Olympic bubble' which had boosted demand in equestrianism elsewhere.

The project would not have been viable without the partnership with Cambridge County Council. They had a vested interest in ensuring the project was successfully completed, and importantly had the knowledge, expertise and money to see the project through all the set backs.

“I couldn’t have done it without Cambridge County Council; I’d have been bankrupt before I’d got it off the ground.” (Project Manager)

Local Community

The project was the vision of the proprietor, though she did undertake consultations with students and other users prior to commencing the project, collecting their ideas about the prospective facility, where the deficiencies were in the existing centre, the activities to run, and the health and safety requirements.

Key Findings

The biggest lesson learnt was around financial planning, and the importance of overvaluing the request at the outset to provide the contingency needed to be able to overcome any setbacks. The delays to the project getting started had an impact on costs as original quotes had become outdated in the intervening time, for example haulage costs had increased, which impacted on the overall project cost. It was found that rewiring and electrical lighting was required for the stable area that had not been factored into the original budget. Thankfully the council were able to cover some of this shortfall, though in order to help achieve the budget they had to revise the lighting plan, removing those in the small arena and scaling back the lighting in the larger arena. In addition, they had to privately fund the classroom and were subsequently unable to fit out or equip the shop.

Due to the size of the contract companies were required to tender for the whole project and then subcontract elements out if required. The contract was awarded to the only organisation that had similar experience of developing an equestrian arena, as this was judged to be the most important aspect to get right. This company then subcontracted the other aspects of the work. This method was seen as the least risky approach because the responsibility for delivery of the project would lie with just one company. However, this company was declared bankrupt prior to the finish of the project with a number of elements still outstanding.

Good practice for future projects would be based on preparation, particularly relating to the smaller aspects. In this case, the project manager feels that they got the arenas largely right, as a result of proper research on the types of surface and size required. However, they neglected to fully research the smaller jobs in other areas, such as the full costs for fitting electrics and plastering.

“You can get the overall building costs, you can’t [envisage] companies going bust or doing a bad job.” (Project Manager)