

(PROPOSED) LONDON MIND SPORTS CENTRE

The British Go Association (BGA) have received a legacy of about £300,000. The person who left this sum to the BGA (T Mark Hall) requested that it be used to set up a place in London where Go can be played on a daily basis. (Apparently such a place did exist in Hampstead some years ago.)

It is the idea of Toby Manning of the BGA that the money be used to set up a (more general) mind sports centre (including chess) as such a centre would be more viable. I know Toby via the Sports and Recreation Alliance and I put him in touch with Amanda Ross who runs “Casual Chess”. Casual Chess is essentially a daily evening chess club run in the foyer of the British Film Institute with no membership fee.

The BGA commissioned Amanda to produce a feasibility study. The first stage looked at different possibilities for a centre and came up with the following options:

1. Renting a cafe premises.
2. Taking over part of an unused building (rating advantages for existing owner).
3. Buying premises (clearly requires funds in excess of £300,000).
4. Sub-letting where space is currently unused.

Following discussions it was concluded that option 3 is best because it could provide a centre in the long term. A major obstacle in achieving option 3 is the estimated cost (between £2 million and £4 million). Achieving this option will require a major fund raising activity seeking contributions from grant giving bodies and other benefactors. Although a detailed study still needs to be done it is believed that (once established) such a centre could be self-supporting by sub-letting part of the premises and charging a daily (or longer period) membership fee and charging for refreshments etc.

Even if such a centre did not prove to financially viable (i.e. self-supporting) the premises could be sold and any contribution made by bodies such as the ECF would be recovered – indeed the scheme could be regarded as an alternative investment to stocks and shares for some of our PIF monies.

The ECF board feels unable to support this scheme without a clear indication from Council that it favours the idea of the centre. Therefore the purpose of this agenda item is to test the water and see (perhaps by means of a straw vote) whether the scheme should be supported in principle.

Mike Gunn (12th April 2016).