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## Athletics track could bring hope for the future



Athletics in the county could be set for a major boost if a new state-of-the-art track and field facility gets the go-ahead.

The athletics track would be built in Maidstone and would be the first of its kind in the area. If plans are given the nod by planners at Maidstone Borough Council it is hoped the venue will be used as a training facility for international athletes competing in the 2012 Olympic Games.

The town has never had a permanent athletics facility, which means athletes from the area have to travel to the Julie Rose Stadium in Ashford or the Deangate track at Hoo to train and compete.

Members of Medway & Maidstone Athletics Club have been striving for the past 20 years to get a facility in the area. A partnership with Sutton Valence School has brought them a step closer to the construction of a state-of-the-art track and plans have been drawn up for it to be built within the school grounds.

A floodlit 400 metre all-weather track is part of the plans along with facilities for all field events including long jump, javelin, hammer and high jump.

Club secretary Lyn Neeves told KoS: "I would be delighted to get this track. The town really needs a facility of this nature. This is a really huge opportunity for us. We have never had the facility for our athletes to train and there is such a lot of untapped talent in the area and it is a chance for more children to get involved. We hope to get more coaches on board to start taking young groups for training sessions."

The development will be used by pupils from the school, athletics club and it is hoped training schemes will encourage newcomers to the sport.

As the new facility has been earmarked as a pre-training camp for the 2012 London Olympics, the aim is to attract more young athletes from the county that could compete in the games.

Ken Burkett, of the Kent Schools Athletics Association, said: "The construction of the athletics track at Sutton Valence can only be a good thing for Kent athletics.

"We only have a few really good venues like the Julie Rose Stadium and the track in Tonbridge in the county. It should attract more children into the sport and with 2012 on the way it could be key for their development as athletes.

"The people at Medway and Maidstone Athletics Club have been planning this for a while and it will be properly used and managed so it should be a success.

"A lot of athletes are lost to sports like football and in the Maidstone area they have nowhere to train, so football is often an easier option.

"Hopefully with the brand new facility this may change in the future and Kent will produce a 2012 Olympic champion."

A decision on the plans is expected in January.

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## Athletic track plans halted



Athletes will have to wait until March before finding out if plans to construct Maidstone's first athletics track are given the go-ahead.

A state-of-the-art athletics facility had been proposed by Sutton Valence School and Medway & Maidstone Athletics Club to be built on grounds belonging to Sutton Valence School.

The track hopes to attract more people to get involved in athletics and be a training venue for the 2012 Olympics.

The partners were awaiting planning permission originally scheduled to be declared in January before construction could begin. However, residents have forced the partnership to change their plans for the track.

Two residents have complained about the glare of the proposed floodlights so the plan has been changed by moving the track slightly.

Medway & Maidstone AC member, Paul Alcock said: "This change to the plan has cost us six weeks which is annoying.

"Despite this we are still going ahead with our plans and will be appointing a project manager very soon."

Planning permission for the facility will be decided by March 9.