



To: Fran Connolly, Chief Executive Officer, England Netball
Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester
Cllr Sean Fielding, Leader of Oldham Council
Debbie Abrahams, Member of Parliament for Oldham East and Saddleworth
Jim McMahon, Member of Parliament for Oldham West and Royton
Nigel Huddleston MP, Minister for Sport
Tim Hollingsworth OBE, Chief Executive Officer, Sport England

17 August 2020

Dear all,

Netball Training & Women's Sport in Local Restrictions

Oldham Netball Club were elated to be able to recommence training at the beginning of July, following fully the government and England Netball guidance of being in small groups of six and without sharing a netball or any other equipment.

However, when local restrictions were introduced in Oldham on 27 July, we were told that our resumption of Club training had to stop with just one group of six at a time being able to train and not on multiple courts. This was a huge disappointment, to say the least, to our coaches, players and parents.

We are proud to be an elite performance club, currently the Premier League and junior national champions at both under 14 and 16 level and with around 200 members. At the moment, at a time when we're being encouraged to get fit and active for our physical and mental health, we cannot offer anything to our players and coaches.

To compound our frustration, we have seen many other sports locally – within the same areas of local restriction – move to match play and more intense training.

I know that England Netball have been working to find solutions and way forward, but to our huge frustration it feels like, as a female-only sport, we are forgotten about.

It is simply not fair that our amateur but high-performance athletes have had no training or match play for almost six months – and still have nothing to aim for or look forward to.

On behalf of our Club I would like to request:

1. **That we are given permission to train in groups of six per outdoor netball court.** We hire a venue that has six outdoor courts. If local grassroots football is allowed back to full match play, it seems perverse that we are unable to train in this way.

Oldham Netball Club

Address **19 Quickedge Lane, Grotton Oldham OL4 5RL**

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2. **We are allowed to share a netball within a court 'bubble'.** This change would be accompanied by advice and precautions provided by our club Covid Officer. This would bring our sport more in line with basketball where you can do skills, drills and team-based training, have a maximum of 30 per venue and train indoors or outdoors

We do not believe these are particularly onerous requests, especially at a time when – even in areas of local restrictions like Oldham – people are allowed to gather in pubs, restaurants and shops – indoor spaces where the risk from coronavirus is so much higher than outside.

Our Club has a duty to serve our members and bring back the sport we love in an organised and safe way. We have no doubt we can do that. We just need the opportunity.

You can see the impact on the young girls who are part of our Club in responses to these questions from three members – Alice, 11, Eva, 10, and Isla, 10:

- **When we were in lockdown what did you miss most about netball?**
“Being able to talk to my team & play games”; “Competing”; “I missed being able to see all my friends and playing with them”
- **When you returned to netball in the small group training how did that make you feel?**
“It felt different but loved being there with all my team”; “Great to be back with the team and doing what I love”; “It felt strange but made me feel like everything was slowly getting back to normal.”
- **How did you feel when training was stopped again?**
“Really upset because I loved being with my team again”; “Gutted, love to train and miss everyone”; “It made me feel sad that we can’t see everyone”.

No one can doubt the impact coronavirus has had on us all, but the level of caution at returning to a new normal way of life threatens to have an impact well beyond Covid – on mental and physical health, the effects of which could last a lifetime.

We urge all those in receipt of this letter to address this issue to support the members of Oldham Netball Club to return to training, playing and competing safely as soon as possible.

With best wishes

Pamela Hazelton
Head Coach, Oldham Netball Club

Debbie Hallas
Premier Team Coach, Oldham Netball Club

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