

\$70m sports ground deal for Kowloon

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By DOREEN CHEUNG

THE Royal Hongkong Jockey Club has agreed to build a \$70 million sports ground in Kowloon in return for approval of its \$850 million redevelopment of Hongkong Stadium.

It will also spend \$10 million to improve school sports facilities at Aberdeen.

The compromise was reached yesterday in a meeting between the chairman of the Urban Council, Dr Ronald Leung Ding-bong, the Hongkong Schools Sports Association and the Hongkong Subsidised Schools Council.

The council and schools had been hotly opposed to the Jockey Club's plan to modernise and expand the 40-year-old stadium.

The compromise was suggested by the Government Secretariat - the Chief Secretary Sir David Ford and the Secretary for Recreation and Culture Mr James So Yiu-cho - to satisfy all parties concerned in the six-month row.

The Jockey Club's desire for extra seating at the Hongkong Stadium which would encroach on the existing running field and boost capacity from 28,000 to 40,000 was branded by urban councillors a tactic to bar students from using the new luxurious facility.

The council, as manager of the stadium, and the schools, as users of it, were unhappy that they were kept uninformed about the pro-

posed development of the project.

The Urban Council will meet today to review the compromise.

The Jockey Club's construction management team has almost finished work on the new University of Science and Technology, which has cost the taxpayers \$1.6 billion more than originally estimated.

The general secretary of the Hongkong Schools Sports Association, Mr Silas Chiang Tak-cheung, said the association had found the government-sponsored solution to the stadium row acceptable.

However, the association would have preferred that the new sports ground be built on Hongkong side.

He said the association would no longer press for the retention of the running track in the stadium redevelopment.

"It is almost certain that the Government's decision to redevelop the Hongkong Stadium will not be reversed.

"But the administration now understands our difficult position and our need for an alternative site," he said.

Dr Leung had assured the association that there would be no problem in turning half of the football fields in the Tai Hang Tung ground into an athletics field, Mr Chiang said.

"The Urban Council will provide a standard sports ground with an eight-lane running track in 40 months," he said, adding that it would accommodate 20,000 spectators.

The project would go ahead as soon as possible in parallel with the stadium redevelopment, he said.

In addition to the new sports ground in Tai Hang

Tung, north of Boundary Street, Mongkok, the Jockey Club would upgrade the Aberdeen sports ground.

However, the club's offer would be scaled down from the original \$50 million estimate to a total commitment of \$10 million.

The running track will remain with six lanes, but the number of seats will be increased from 450 to 12,000.

Describing the alternative as "a Hobson's choice", Mr Chiang said he was still worried that schools on Hongkong Island might not like having to travel to Kowloon side for major sports meetings.

Dr Leung had assured him that the site, near Prince Edward MTR station, was served with a good transport network, he said.

The new sports ground could not be built on Hongkong Island because there was not a suitable site, Mr Chiang quoted Dr Leung as saying.

During the construction of the sports ground, the Urban Council promised to make the Wan Chai Sports Ground, open to elite schools only, available for all schools, Mr Chiang said.

The Jockey Club is eager to see the project go ahead as soon as possible to have the newly-developed Hongkong Stadium ready for the 1995 International Rugby Sevens, which has become increasingly popular.

An urban councillor said the Government had promised to let the Urban Council run the Tai Hang Tung playground, managed by the administration.

The councillor, doubtful of the commercial viability of the new Hongkong Stadium, said the council would reserve its management right initially.