

Academy would be based on clubs such as Ajax

EXCLUSIVE

A SPORTS academy based on Dutch clubs such as Ajax and backed by one of the greatest ever Scottish football managers could make life much healthier in Inverkeithing.

Sir Alex Ferguson, who manages Manchester United and also starred for Dunfermline as a player, has agreed to be the patron for a proposed £5 million-plus facility at Spencerfield.

It would cater not only for football but also rugby, cricket, golf, tennis, fencing, aerobics and martial arts, among others, and boast a cafe, offices, shop and viewing area.

The idea is that it would complement existing facilities at neighbouring Inverkeithing High School, provide educational programmes and community facilities as well as an area for rehabilitation and treatment of sports injuries.

That's the goal of the Norrie McCathie Sports Facility Trust but it also relies on Fife Council re-zoning the Spencerfield site for housing.

And while their aim of increased participation in sport is healthy for the body and mind, the idea is that it will also lift youngsters off the streets and out of trouble.

Chairman of the trust, John Wilson, said, "If we can get one knife off the streets of

Inverkeithing we've won a cookie.

"At Spartans over in Edinburgh, the police over there say the crime rate dropped by 36 per cent since they opened their academy.

"If we got anything like those figures what a benefit it would be – and for the whole community too."

And he added, "Henry McLeish's report into Scottish football says we need more fa-

cilities and this would be the third in Scotland after Torryglen in Glasgow and Aberdeen.

"Look at the World Cup just now, teams like Holland and Denmark are always there and we're never there.

"We need better sporting facilities in this country and I'm determined to try and make that happen here.

"It has to be complementary though, if we do something that's not there at the moment, every-

one will use it."

Visits were made to academies at Ajax and Nijmegen in Holland, as well as Manchester United and Ross County, to draw on ideas for their plans and any profit made from the academy would be ploughed back into the community.

Mr Wilson, who is also the chairman of charity Furniture Plus and was heavily involved

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the Abbeyview indoor bowling centre project, said, "The Scottish Government said they would endorse it but we have to gather all the stakeholders and get them on board first.

"That's what we're trying to do now and I hope we can take Inverkeithing High, councillors and the public with us.

"From the moment we get the zone change, I suspect it will take 18 months for all the funding to be raised.

"Having Sir Alex Ferguson as a patron is huge for us and I'm sure that will help open doors too."

The trust initially wanted to team up with various partners, including Fife Council, the Dunfermline Carnegie Trust and Dunfermline Athletic, for a £4million-plus SFA football academy at Pitreavie.

They have now distanced themselves from that plan and hope their dreams can be realised at Inverkeithing.

Trustee and former Fife councillor, Alan Kenney, said, "The advantage it has over Pitreavie is its proximity to Inverkeithing High School.

"A sports academy works not just as an indoor sports hall but it can help improve qualifications and education within sport.

"We would also hope to get a further partnership with Carnegie College to help people progress a career in sport."

He added, "It won't be in competition with the community use or the sports pitches at Dalgety Bay, this would be complementary.

"Fife Council has no money for this type of facility but we'll certainly look to them to be partners."

Fife Council insisted their aspirations for Pitreavie have not changed.

Grant Ward, the head of leisure and cultural services, said they were working towards the long term aim of a £4 million soccer academy but also exploring the possibility of a more ambitious multi-sports academy at Pitreavie.

The bulk of the money was never going to come from the council although there is £350,000 in the capital plan earmarked for the Dunfermline site and it is still in the running to be a site for a Judy Murray Tennis Centre in Scotland.

He added, "We would be interested to hear more about their plans for the sports academy and what we as a council can do to support that initiative."