

Seven Souths bids go to the vote

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A YEAR after their offer to lend South Sydney Leagues

Club \$10.5m to pay off debts and renovate the Redfern premises was rejected, Peter Holmes a Court and Russell Crowe are set to buy it.

Their bid, backed by the South Sydney District Football Club in which they bought a 75 per cent stake earlier this year, is one of seven proposals the leagues club's 5830 voting members will be asked to choose between in a secret ballot held over three days from tomorrow.

If successful, Holmes a Court and Crowe plan to turn the 6000 square metres of floor space - much of it unused - to work with the aim that it will become a major source of funding the Rabbitohs have had to survive without for more than a decade.

The proposal, which they say will leave the leagues club debt-free and with cash reserves of \$4.5m, includes a \$3m renovation of the licensed premises that will be located on the third floor, with outdoor areas overlooking Souths' new \$19m training facility at Redfern Oval.

The Chalmers Street building will also be the headquarters for the football club and house a hall of fame - possibly for the game, and not just the Rabbitohs. A gymnasium and merchandise outlet are also mooted.

The alternative, however, is likely to result in the ties between the oldest surviving premiership club and its licensed arm being severed forever, with the financial administrator, who was appointed on June 30, recommending a proposal to relocate the leagues club to Botany Rd in Alexandria.

Should that happen, the football club may refuse to allow the leagues club, whose board also supports the move away from Redfern, permission to use any of Souths' intellectual property - including the famous Rabbitohs logo - and build their own clubhouse.

The other option detailed at an information meeting for members earlier this week is a proposal from millionaire brewer and plastic surgeon Dr Jerry Schwartz that includes a \$6m micro brewery, a \$2m medical centre and a \$2m outdoor smoking area.

Schwartz also plans to spend \$500,000 each on renovating the leagues club and establishing a gymnasium and spa.

Neither Schwartz nor the South Sydney Revitalisation Project's bid, which has ties to a building company, Baseline Constructions, has made public any provision to house the football club's operations.

The SSRP plan is a building swap, with the leagues club moving to yet-to-be-approved or built premises in Botany Rd partly owned by Baseline Constructions' managing director Nicholas Bettar, but the football club believes there are numerous flaws in the proposal and has called on the administrator, John Lord, of PKF Chartered Accountants, to reverse his support for the bid.

Holmes a Court yesterday described a \$3m correction Lord was forced to make after his report to members undervalued the football club's bid as "a staggering blunder", and raised concerns about the lack of any independent valuation of the Alexandria property in Lord's calculations.

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