



CHESTERFIELD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

*Enterprise and Wellbeing Scrutiny
Committee*

Scrutiny Project Group

report on

*Future Use of Former Queen's Park
Sports Centre Site*

Project Group Members:

Councillors:

Lead	Gordon Simmons
Group Members	Peter Barr Kate Caulfield Keith Miles
Project Group officer support was provided by Brian Offiler, Democratic and Scrutiny Officer	

1.0 Introduction and Review Aims

- 1.1 Following the public consultation exercise in late 2016 on the potential uses of the former Queen's Park Sports Centre site and the petition in support of the development of an ice rink presented to Council on 23 February, 2017, Cabinet had approved the development of a full business case for the preferred option of artificial sports pitches on the site on 7 March, 2017.
- 1.2 The setting up of the Scrutiny Project Group arose from the annual scrutiny work programming process for 2017/18 and was approved by the Overview and Performance Scrutiny Forum on 9 May, 2017, in order to contribute to the development of the full business case, providing a wider Member and community perspective.
- 1.3 The project supported the Council Plan priorities 'to improve the quality of life for local people' and 'to provide value for money services'.
- 1.4 Within these priorities, the project focused on the objectives 'to improve the health and wellbeing of people', 'to reduce inequality and support the more vulnerable members of our communities' and 'to become financially self-sufficient by 2020'.
- 1.5 The aims of the Project Group were established as:
 - To contribute to the development of the full business case for the preferred option of artificial sports pitches;

- To seek further information on the practical implications of operating an ice rink from operators of similar facilities, in the event of the Council being approached by an ice rink operator;
 - To contribute further, acting as a 'sounding board' and monitoring progress during the design and building stage of the chosen use once this has been decided by Cabinet.
- 1.6 The Group's Project Start Report, including these aims, was approved by the Enterprise and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee on 25 July, 2017.

2.0 Review Approach

- 2.1 The Project Group was assisted throughout the review by Michael Rich, Executive Director, and Councillor John Dickinson, Assistant Cabinet Member.
- 2.2 The following Cabinet Members were consulted at the key stages of developing the Project Start Report and formulating the comments for inclusion in the report to Cabinet scheduled for 5 December, 2017:
- Councillor Chris Ludlow, Health & Wellbeing
 - Councillor Steve Brunt, Town Centres & Visitor Economy
 - Councillor Amanda Serjeant, Deputy Leader
 - Councillor Terry Gilby, Economic Growth.
- 2.3 The Project Group reviewed the Cabinet report of 7 March, 2017, from which it was noted that the public consultation undertaken in late 2016 showed significant support for the preferred option of artificial sports pitches (69% of respondents), that the Council's Sports Facilities Strategy showed a shortfall in provision of artificial pitches, taking account of current demand and potential future demand, and that the outline business case for this preferred option indicated the potential for a net income to the Council.
- 2.4 The Project Group considered the petition presented to Council on 23 February, 2017 requesting that the Council build an ice rink on the site of the old Queen's Park Sports Centre, noting the Council's decision, if approached by an ice rink operator, to assist with the identification of suitable sites and provide advice on planning and funding opportunities, including the development of external funding

bids, in order to enhance the Borough's sport and leisure offer. The review also considered an initial assessment of the feasibility of operating an ice rink on this site, from which it was noted that this was unlikely to be fully self-financing, particularly given the proximity of other existing ice rink facilities in Mansfield, Sheffield and Nottingham.

- 2.5 The Project Group Lead Member met with the consultant from FMG Consulting Ltd appointed by the Council to develop the full business case for the preferred option of artificial sports pitches.
- 2.6 The Project Group considered the draft report prepared by the consultant following further consultation with sports clubs to assess demand and with the Council's Planning Officers and Historic England, taking account of the grade 2* listed heritage status of the park. The draft report set out a number of options seeking to achieve a balance between restoring the park landscape and enhancing the site to meet current and future leisure needs in a financially sustainable way, and it included estimated capital costs and revenue income for each option.
- 2.7 The Project Group discussed the aspects of the planning process with the Development Management & Conservation Manager, taking account of the Council's planning policies in respect of designated heritage assets and historic parks and gardens and of the existing Queen's Park Conservation Area Appraisal from 2009. It noted that Historic England would be a statutory consultee during the development of any planning application for the site and that the Council's Planning Officers had experience of having worked closely with Historic England previously.

3.0 Review Findings and Conclusions

- 3.1 Following the appointment of the consultant to develop the full business case in September, 2017, the Project Group recognised the importance of the proposals for the reuse of this site being progressed with the minimum of delay. In order to assist this, it has therefore prepared this report to summarise its conclusions and submit comments for consideration along with the Cabinet Member report being submitted to Cabinet on 5 December, 2017.

- 3.2 The Project Group noted that the Council had not been approached by an operator of an ice rink with proposals to establish such a facility in the town, and it accepted the evidence from the initial assessment that an ice rink was unlikely to be financially sustainable. In considering the need to take account of the impact of any development on the heritage aspects of the park, it concluded that the site would not be physically large enough to accommodate an ice rink and that if an approach was received from an operator in the future, an alternative site would need to be identified in any case.
- 3.3 The Project Group supports the preferred option emerging from the development of the full business case for the future use of the former Queen's Park Sports Centre site of restoring the area to parkland to include one 7x7 sports pitch.
- 3.4 This conclusion is based on the following considerations:
- The importance of providing suitable sports facilities to support increased participation in physical activity as part of meeting the Council's objective to improve the health and wellbeing of residents, in order to meet evidence-based demand and which can be delivered and operated in a financially sustainable way;
 - The importance of meeting public expectations arising from the consultation exercises in late 2016 and more recently;
 - The importance of considering the heritage value of the wider park and of the close working with Historic England through this process in order to develop realistic proposals which protect this;
 - The importance of achieving a balance between these three considerations, without any one having a significant adverse impact on the others or causing unnecessary delay.
- 3.5 In pursuing this preferred option, the Project Group recognises that the Council will need to ensure that it has explored options for sports pitches on other sites, such as behind the new sports centre, through option appraisals and costings to determine whether any other sites could provide realistic options or to demonstrate why not.
- 3.6 The Project Group is of the view that the detailed design of the preferred option would need to give careful consideration to:

- The extent to which the heritage value of the park could be protected and enhanced without merely returning to a previous design prior to the construction of the original sports centre;
- The relationship between the sports pitch and the park, including encouraging access between the two (to enable wider participation and enjoyment of both facilities), fencing of the pitch which is not obtrusive, landscaping and planting to mitigate any adverse visual impacts;
- Physical security of both the park and the sports pitch, especially at times when the park may be closed but the sports pitch is being used;
- The park boundary along Boythorpe Road, including possible reintegration of the original park gates;
- Provision of some pitch-side shelter for spectators;
- Detailed examination of the costings for work to be undertaken, especially in respect of park landscaping and planting, and consideration of scope for this to be done in-house, utilising the experience gained from the restoration of Eastwood Park, and exploration of any available funding options;
- Operational arrangements for the sports pitch and the relationship to arrangements for the existing MUGA pitch within the park.

3.7 The Project Group would encourage the progression of the further work required in order to successfully enable this site to be used and enjoyed by the public with the minimum of delay. It welcomes the opportunity to continue to act as a 'sounding board' and to monitor progress during the design and building stage of the chosen use, as set out in the Group's original aims.

Contacts:

Project Group Lead – Councillor Gordon Simmons

Democratic and Scrutiny Officer – Brian Offiler

