

Classification: Public

Key Decision: No

Gravesham Borough Council

Report to: Community & Leisure Cabinet Report

Date: 31 January 2023

Reporting officer: Adrian Hickmott

Subject: Consultation Process for New Leisure Centre – Information Report

Purpose and summary of report:

To provide members of the Community & Leisure Cabinet Committee with an overview of the involvement of various stakeholders with regards to the new leisure centre development as well as the recent public consultation process.

Recommendations:

1. That Members note the recent public consultation process that was undertaken across October and November 2022 to support the recent planning application submission, as well as outlining other associated consultation processes that were put in place during the design and development phases of the scheme over several years.

Key Implications:	
Item	Implications
Legal	The approval and commissioning of building of a new leisure centre is an executive function for which the Cabinet have responsibility once the budget has been approved by the Council.
Finance and Value for Money	The financial considerations for the council are set out within the 31 January 2022 Cabinet Report.
Corporate Plan	Our ambition is to deliver this new state-of-the-art building in line with the project vision and sustainability objectives and the Corporate Plan commitments - #2 Place.
Climate Change	A decision to undertake this project will have a direct impact on the delivery of the council's Climate Change Strategy. This will contribute to Priority 1: GBC – the organisation and, specifically, the progression of plans to replace the largest energy-using operational assets of the council. In 2020-21 the council produced carbon emissions totalling 1,760.3 tCO ₂ e. Of this, 255.4 tCO ₂ e (15%) could be attributed to Cascades Leisure Centre.

1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 A commitment to replace Cascades Leisure Centre and improve the Borough's leisure offer derives from the 2019-2023 Corporate Plan. Development of proposals for a new centre has been further influenced by a range of stakeholder

and community engagement processes, including consultation on the council's Sport, Leisure and Active Recreation Strategy, additional studies and strategies.

- 1.2 As part of this work and taking on board the information from the original Indoor Facilities Strategy and the updated feasibility work, a new design option at Cascades Leisure Centre was developed which offered an attractive, cohesive facility mix giving prominence to the core family focussed activities, competition usage capability and dedicated space for potential community health referral and consultation.
- 1.3 This report gives an outline of the process so far with regards to engagement with stakeholders through the various stages. For information the planning submission includes a more detailed specified report on the recent formal consultation process that supports the recent application report, that covers in more detail the analytics of the survey as well as a summary of additional qualitative data and comments received. A hyperlink to this report can be found under section 5 below.

2. Strategy Development and Engagement

- 2.1 In 2015/16, the council embarked on the development of an Open Space, Sport and Recreation Strategy in partnership with Knight, Kavanagh & Page (KKP) as part of its Local Plan evidence base. The three components to this study included an Indoor Sports Facilities Strategy, Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy and an Open Space Strategy.
- 2.2 The Indoor Sports Facilities Strategy is the first key document which highlighted the need to undertake a specific further piece of work looking into the future of Cascades and Cygnet leisure centres. This Strategy was supported by a range of stakeholder engagement meetings with organisations such as; local authority partners (e.g. GCLL) and key officers, national governing bodies of sport, local sports clubs in sports such as swimming, basketball, gymnastics, badminton, etc. as well as engagement with local secondary schools, health partners and key community groups.
- 2.3 The level of engagement in developing the Indoor Sports Facilities Strategy was in line with other Local Plan evidence bases that we have delivered and was key in delivering a clear action plan for the Council.
- 2.4 Following the original Strategy recommendations and Corporate Plan commitments, the Council engaged further with KKP in November 2020 to undertake a Feasibility Study on the potential of a new single leisure centre to replace Cascades Leisure Centre. Again, KKP engaged with a wide range of consultees with regards to this further study.
- 2.5 The results of the Feasibility Study have ultimately led to the Council deciding to progress with the design development of a replacement facility and set a target of submitting a planning application by the end of November 2022. This approach was supported by consultation on the council's Sport, Leisure and Active Recreation Strategy earlier in 2022.

3. Development of the Proposal and Facility Options

- 3.1 The Council's ambition to deliver a new state-of-the-art building, is in line with the project vision and sustainability objectives and Corporate Plan commitments.
- 3.2 Key Corporate Plan commitments (adopted October 2019) include:

- Design a quality and affordable leisure offer –improved facilities and creative sports programmes to tackle local health inequalities
 - Improve resident wellbeing – provide and preserve a suite of high-quality play areas and promote opportunities for active lives
 - Carbon neutral borough
 - Positively promote sustainable development
- 3.3 Once the design team for developing the scheme was fully in place, several design meetings and workshops were organised in order to review the original Feasibility Study outline and consider the mix of facilities the new centre should provide. At this initial stage the core facility requirements as highlighted within the Study were identified as follows:
- an eight-lane 25m swimming pool capable of hosting competitive swimming
 - a teaching pool and splash pad area to promote and support water confidence and learning to swim
 - a large sports hall able to support sports development activity
 - fitness suite and provision for studio space for class activity
 - community space
 - squash court provision
 - an active reception and café/Seating Area with soft play and clip and climb facilities
 - an outdoor active environment
- 3.4 Proposals were then further developed to consider where facilities could be expanded or enhanced further (taking on board the capital and revenue implications for these options) including; the provision of a Health Suite facility on a separate floor, enhanced water space areas, such as a larger leisure pool area (incorporating the original splash pad space), plus enhanced permanent seating adjacent to the 25m pool and seating within the sports hall area to support competitive events. Other options that were looked at were, additional squash courts which could be opened up into one large leisure space, as well as a climbing wall within the reception area and a larger soft play area and community room space.
- 3.5 These proposals were also supplemented with updated financial operational information from the proposed new facility mix options from an affordability and ongoing revenue perspective, as well as ‘live intel’ from the existing leisure centres (particularly relevant following Covid-19 and the changes in usage and behaviours) and some further early feedback from the public on the proposals within the January 2022 Cabinet Report and facility make-up that was publicised at the time.
- 3.6 For example, the original design did not include the fun elements such as water flumes and was based mainly on the desire for the leisure centre to be a regional competitive sports and leisure centre. The very clear public response was this was an unpopular decision and people wished to see the fun element included. As a direct result of that feedback, flumes and a larger children’s splash area now form part of the design, along with other more family orientated facilities that it became clear were desirable, alongside the ability to host regional competitive events.
- 3.7 The proposed preferred scheme, with major amendments in bold, now includes;
- A café/hub/reception zone
 - Soft play, clip and climb facilities, with additional café seating and associated party room area
 - **Enhanced leisure water area with splash pad and associated internal flumes**

- **25m - 8 lane swimming pool capable of hosting regional competitive swimming events, including timing room on poolside**
- **17m x 7m adjacent learner/teaching pool, poolside steam and sauna rooms**
- **100 permanent spectator seating/viewing area for the main pool**
- **6 court sports hall for sports development and competitions with bleacher type seating**
- Large fitness suite, with 100+ stations
- 1 Spin studio, 2 fitness studios for class activity
- Community space/rooms
- **2 Squash courts with removable middle wall for multi-functional activity area**
- An outdoor active environment with enhancements to existing surrounding open space.

3.8 These amendments show that the views received through public and stakeholder engagement are being listened to and, whilst the focus is currently on replacement of the indoor leisure provision, views on the outdoor leisure provision are being collated to inform that future phase.

4. Consultation

4.1 From the moment the Council declared its intention to replace Cascades within the budget announcement in February 2020, we have engaged with the local community several times, have been speaking to existing leisure centre users, groups representing a variety of sports and local clubs, and governing bodies such as Sport England to ensure our starting point for the new centre was based on a sound understanding of what current and potential users would want to see included and how this could be future proofed.

4.2 The formal public consultation last year was widely publicised and attracted almost 700 responses, which compared to numbers responding to previous council consultations is a good response. This is in addition to the many social media comments received across a range of platforms and feedback via our media releases on the topic as it has progressed through each of its stages.

4.3 The consultation exercise commenced on Monday 24 October 2022 and closed at midnight on Sunday 20 November 2022. This included a drop-in session for residents wishing to speak to someone from the design team on 8th November. An additional extension was put in place until midnight on Wednesday 23rd November to allow extra time for current Active Leisure members to respond to the survey.

4.4 The Council launched the formal consultation process via a range of media outlets on and created a bespoke web page to promote the development. The Council's Communications Manager also assisted with regular social media activity to maintain the knowledge and interest in the consultation process with local residents. Added to this, there was direct communication and sharing of consultation links with established groups and clubs in Gravesham, as well as a final 'push' in the last week of the consultation period.

4.5 As mentioned earlier in the report, the full consultation report provided can be found as part of the publicly accessible planning submission pack for the development (link to report under section 5 below), but some general points to outline include the following;

- In general, there is agreement about the mix of facilities and activity areas proposed for the site.

- There were no statistically significant responses for facilities that were identified as missing from the facility mix.
 - It is clear from the responses that open space around the centre is high value.
 - The Council has a clear public mandate to provide a modern replacement leisure facility in Gravesend.
 - There is public consensus that this proposal is worthy of investing public funds to deliver.
- 4.6 From the qualitative statements provided, analysis by the consultants identified that there were clusters of responses for facilities such as 50m pool, health suite, climbing wall, wave machine, slides, outdoor pool and petanque. However, there was no stand-out activity area or facility that was identified from the responses to the consultation survey that they believe give cause to the Council and its design team to reconsider the facility mix for the proposed new centre.
- 4.7 There were a range of comments made within the survey (e.g. disabled access, leisure water, slides, fun activities for children, opportunity for something different, wheelchair access, netball provision, football facilities, dance floor, etc) which are already included in the facility site area and potentially need to be reinforced.
- 4.8 This is especially true with regards to improvements around accessibility. For example, the building will be fully accessible (as required by DDA regulations) on both floors and the main pool will have steps, a submersible lift access and both pools will have powered self-controlled / powered pool pods to ensure dignified access for all. A changing village for the wet side area will have individual changing cubicles, as well as a specified 'Changing Place' facility/room for disabled people. There will also be two larger separated changing room areas within the changing village that can be utilised for specific requirements and sessions, bearing in mind that some user groups will not feel comfortable changing within a village environment.
- 4.9 Respondents feel very positive about the proposal and the investment in facilities, but it will be important to ensure continuity for residents during the development period. This presents a key opportunity for the Council to develop an ongoing communication and public engagement strategy for the development of the new centre as it progresses to ensure that residents and perspective user groups are continually updated and informed about the development.

5. Background Documents

- 5.1 The publicly accessible Planning Application can be found [here](#) or via www.gravesham.gov.uk/planning/view-comment-planning-application - planning application reference 20221293.
- 5.2 The Cascades Leisure Community Consultation report can be found [here](#) or within the list of supporting documents to the planning application above

Lead Officer: Jamie Izzard/Adrian Hickmott

Email: Adrian.hickmott@gravesham.gov.uk

Secondary Implications	
Risk Assessment	Replacement of a leisure centre is a large project for a district council, so it is important that the necessary resources are dedicated to this project to ensure that all risks are covered. The council does not have the necessary capacity or professional expertise in some of the areas required to deliver this complex and large-scale project.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	<i>A data protection impact assessment (DPIA) should be carried out at the start of any major project involving the use of personal data or if you are making a significant change to an existing process.</i>
	a. Does the project/change being recommended through this paper involve the processing of personal data or special category data or criminal offence data ? A definition of each type of data can be found on the Information Commissioner's Office website via the above links. No
	b. If yes to question a, have you completed and attached a DPIA including Data Protection Officer advice? Not applicable
	c. If no to question b, please seek advice from your nominated DPIA assessor or the Information Governance Team at gdpr@medway.gov.uk . As above.
Equality Impact Assessment	a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community? If yes, please explain answer. No
	b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality? If yes, please explain answer.
	<i>In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above</i>
Crime and Disorder	A new leisure centre will enable the principles of Designing Out Crime to be implemented.
Digital and website implications	Steps will be taken to promote progress with the scheme via the council's website.
Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults	Elements of the design for the new leisure centre will take account of safeguarding issues.