

Leisure Development Programme – Statement of Community Consultation

Introduction

The Leisure Development Programme will refurbish and extend the Newbold Comyn and St Nicholas Park Leisure Centres in order to prepare the facilities for the next 30 years. A Planning Application will be submitted early in 2016.

As part of the preparation for the submission of this Planning Application, Warwick District Council has undertaken an extensive programme of community consultation. The purpose of this consultation programme was to ask the customers of the centres and the wider public what they thought of the proposed plans. The intention was to seriously consider any proposals made by consultees before finalising the design proposals.

Consultations undertaken

The main part of the consultation exercise took place at Newbold Comyn and St Nicholas Park Leisure Centres. Sessions were run in the main entrance hall of each leisure centre. Officers were on hand to explain the plans and to encourage people to complete feedback forms.

The areas selected for the sessions were accessible to all and the plans were presented in a manner and format that was understandable to all attendees. Although no detailed analysis was undertaken of the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents, officers attending the sessions could detect no positive or negative bias in the representation of any minority group, and it is considered that the percentages of all identifiable groups within the population were broadly representative of the catchment population at large.

The main programme of consultations was launched on Thursday 28th January 2016 at Newbold Comyn Leisure Centre. Invitations were sent to 30 key partners in the area, and the informal session was attended by both invitees and members of the public. Leaflets were distributed to all neighbouring properties in Weston Close to inform them of the sessions at St Nicholas Park Leisure Centre. Neighbouring residents of Newbold Comyn Leisure Centre in Newbold Terrace East were informed of the sessions by word of mouth.

Sessions at Newbold Comyn Leisure Centre took place on 28th, 29th, 30th and 31st January 2016. Total attendances were 708 people who submitted 213 comments forms. Of these, 13 did not support the proposals.

Sessions at St Nicholas Park Leisure Centre took place on 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th February. Total attendances were 546 people who completed 125 comments forms. Of these, 10 did not support the proposals.

The combined totals for these two sessions are therefore 1,254 total attendances with 338 comments forms, of which 23 did not support the proposals. The 23 respondents who did not support the proposals constitute 6.8% of all completed forms, with an implied approval rating of 93.2%.

In addition to these main sessions, Warwick District Council undertook a number of additional sessions with identified groups of people. These sessions are continuing in order to continue to spread the message of the details of the Leisure Development Programme. Sessions conducted to date include –

- Warwick District Council Development Forum on Tuesday 19th January – to present the proposals to County, District and Town Councillors to seek their views, primarily from a design standpoint.
- Schools' Briefing on Tuesday 23rd February – to discuss the implications and advantages for schools that use the two centres for swimming lessons or other activities. This was attended by 11 people representing 10 schools.
- Briefing to the Warwick 50+ Activities Club on Tuesday 23rd February – to explain the developments and to confirm that the Club would not be adversely affected by the plans. This was attended by 36 members of the Activities Club.
- Warwick Town Community Forum on Tuesday 8th March – to present the proposals and to take the views of residents. This was attended by 42 residents and officers, including County, District and Town Councillors.

In addition, 18 comments were received directly by email via the email address set up by the Council to encourage responses. Each of these has received a personal response from officers.

Comments received

An analysis of the Comments Forms received from the public confirms that the large majority of those completing a form are strongly in favour of the proposals. One section of the form invited comments from the public.

Positive comments received regularly included –

- Overall support for this investment in sport and leisure facilities
- Praise for the new changing rooms and their flexibility for many users
- Support for a new sports hall at Newbold Comyn
- Support for investment in new fitness facilities

Negative comments received regularly included –

- By a substantial margin, the greatest number of negative comments received were against the provision of mixed gender changing areas at both centres
- Support of retaining a sauna at St Nicholas Park Leisure Centre

- Support for retaining the splash pool at St Nicholas Park Leisure Centre
- Concerns over parking, particularly (although not exclusively) at St Nicholas Park Leisure Centre

Negative comments which did not relate to the design of the facilities included -

- Comments on the cost of the investment to the Council
- Comments on the management of the facilities

Appendix One to this report lists the comments received from the Development Forum on 19th January, and the responses given by officers.

The comments received at the Schools' Briefing focussed on the timetable for the changes, and the impact that any closures would have on the availability of school swimming. The comments on the design were universally supportive, and the teachers present were very keen to see the provision of dedicated school changing areas at both Centres. There was a query over provision for larger groups, but this was resolved at the meeting as it is a management rather than a design issue.

The comments received at the Warwick 50+ Activities Club were centred on the closure periods and also on the proposal to reduce the size of the meeting room at St Nicholas Park Leisure Centre. Officers confirmed that the representations of the Club had resulted in a change of design, such that the meeting room would now be remaining at its current size. The Club were delighted with this news.

The comments received at the Warwick Town Community Forum were mainly focussed on the loss of the splash pool at St Nicholas Park Leisure Centre. It was pointed out that this facility was not fit for purpose and there was insufficient space to provide an appropriate replacement.

Comments requesting a reply

The over-whelming majority (93%) of people who completed a Comments Form and expressed an opinion supported the proposals overall. Of the 338 people who completed a Comments Form, 66 requested a response from the Council to their comments and provided a contact email or postal address. These have all received an individual response from Officers.

Appendix Two of this report shows the content of the responses with regard to the most comment comments received.

Changes made as a result of the community consultation

The Council entered into the community consultation with a genuine commitment to obtaining the views of customers and the general public with a view to considering making changes to the proposed designs, wherever a consistent message was received from the consultation, and always provided that the requested changes were deliverable and affordable.

As a result of the community consultation, the following changes have been made to the design –

- Officers are working closely with the architects to investigate the possibility of implementing single gender changing facilities to Newbold Comyn Leisure Centre as an option to provide additional or alternative provision to the mixed gender changing areas. It is not possible to do this at St Nicholas Park, due to exigencies of space
- Shoe removal areas will be provided outside both 'wet' changing rooms
- A Members' changing area has been provided in the gym at Newbold Comyn
- The number of private showers and open showers in both 'wet' changing rooms is being increased where possible
- The design of the removable barrier at Newbold Comyn is being re-considered, following representations from swimming clubs
- A toilet is being provided for young children next to the leisure pool at Newbold Comyn
- The staff room at St Nicholas Park is being moved to an alternative location in order to retain the meeting room at its current size

Appendix One – Comments and responses from WDC Development Forum

- Can an alternative location be found for the Community Mosaic currently on the external wall at SNPLC? Yes
- Query regarding the external design of NCLC and whether any consideration has been given to timber cladding to be in keeping with “agricultural setting”. Suggestion that we look at the North Leamington School cladding. *Cladding reviewed but existing proposal retained*
- Consideration should be given to how any incoming operator uses branding on and within the sites. *Agreed – will review at correct time*
- Question whether we had considered including squash courts in the investment plans. *Officers responded explaining that the facilities audit/ Needs and Demands report had not identified a need for additional squash provision in the district*
- Clarification sought regarding the car parking provision at both sites. *Officers explained that based on survey work carried out Autumn 2015, there is sufficient capacity at Newbold Comyn with the work being planned for the “pub/golf” car parks. St Nicholas Park car parking required further consideration and officers are in discussion with colleagues on the options for this site.*
- Would provision be made at the 2 sites to cater for cyclists? Yes.
- Clarification sought on the process that would be followed to appoint a new operator for the centres. *Officers explained the procurement process.*
- Question raised regarding how the new designs had addressed the challenges of reducing energy consumption and whether consideration had been given to alternative energy sources as part of the design. *Officers explained the approach being taken to include sustainable energy solutions and ensure that the design of the new elements of the centres were as environmentally sustainable as possible.*

Appendix Two – Typical responses sent to the more regular public comments

1. Village Changing

We believe that the plan to incorporate village style changing rooms offers the best all round solution for flexibility and space. The changing rooms will offer double and family sized cubicles as well as single gender changing, outside of school usage times. This will support mixed gender families and will provide generally more space for customers than the traditional separate male / female changing arrangements. Finally, higher cleaning standards and supervision can be achieved as staff access is less restrictive than the separate changing room design. Since the consultation we have been working with the design team to consider options for increasing the number of showers in the village changing area.

2. Cost of the investment

The cost of the investment in the buildings is twelve million pounds. We hope to receive around two million pounds from Sport England from their Strategic Investment Fund. A further sum of at least five hundred thousand pounds will be provided from developers of new homes in the district as part of the sum that they are obliged to provide for infrastructure. The remaining amount will be borrowed by the Council. The improvements to Newbold Comyn and St Nicholas Park Leisure Centres will generate additional income which will pay for the cost of borrowing this money and also improve the financial position of the Council. Borrowing this money will not affect the Council's ability to borrow money for other schemes. Finally, it is worth noting that if the investment project was not going ahead the Council would still be required to spend four million pounds on renewing mainly the plant rooms of the two buildings to ensure they were fit for purpose. If this work did not take place the Centre's would have to shut within the next 10 years. This work is contained within the twelve million pounds cost of the programme.

3. Seeking an external management partner

The Council has decided to seek an external management partner to run the Council's four leisure centres and two dual-use leisure centres on our behalf. This is not privatisation, as the four leisure centres will remain as Council buildings and the Council will prepare a Specification that tells the operator how to run the centres on our behalf. The Council will control key prices and other key elements of the provision of the service. The Council will monitor the operator closely, in order to ensure that they continue to operate a service of excellence. After very careful consideration, the Council has decided that using an external management partner gives us the best chance of securing the best possible financial performance from the Centres, which should ensure their future viability at a time when Council budgets are being cut all the time. The Council has also decided that an external management partner will bring increased expertise and innovation to the management of the centres.

4. Shoe Removal

We have designed an area within the changing rooms where customers can comfortably remove their foot wear in order to encourage customers to remove their outdoor foot wear before entering the changing room.

5. Loss of Sauna

We have discussed with our architects the possibility of replacing the sauna at St Nicholas Park Leisure Centre. Unfortunately the only location within the current plans where we could install the sauna would require extensive work to provide adequate

drainage, ventilation and power in that area. We have considered the historical usage data for the last 3 financial years and we cannot make a strong enough business case to warrant the level of investment required to provide a new sauna.

6. Parking at Newbold Comyn Leisure Centre

We are proposing to provide lines for the spaces in the car park opposite Newbold Comyn Leisure Centre. This will give an additional 40 spaces when the development is completed, because people park closer when there are lines. The car park that will be built on currently has 18 spaces, so in total we will provide 22 additional spaces. We have employed traffic consultants to predict the likely demand for parking spaces once the new facilities are open, and we believe that there will be sufficient spaces at Newbold Comyn for the demand created.

7. Environmental sustainability

A sustainability options review was undertaken at the feasibility stage in which various technologies were appraised in terms of suitability for the two leisure centres. A 'fabric first' approach will be taken to the design of the new elements of both centres. The new swimming pool plant to be installed in both buildings will make both pools more energy efficient and thus more environmentally sustainable.

At Newbold Comyn a biomass boiler will be installed to provide the main heat to the building. This will respond to the constant heat load requirements of the building. A gas fired CHP plant was not selected due to existing and ongoing issues with low pressure gas supply on site at the time the feasibility was undertaken. The biomass boiler plant will provide heat to the hot water generation facility. Photovoltaic cells will be placed on the roof to reduce the building's carbon footprint by providing top-up electricity and assisting in Part L compliance.

At St Nicholas Park a Combined Heat and Power boiler will be installed to reduce the carbon footprint of the building. It is not possible to install biomass at St Nicholas Park due to the problems of delivering fuel by lorry.

8. Thanks

Thank you for your positive response to the proposals to improve our local leisure centres. We will continue to progress the project with the intention of delivering these improvements as planned in 2017.

9. Loss of splash pool at St Nicholas Park

The rationale for removal of this small pool is as follows. The current "splash pool" is not, nor has it ever been, designed as a baby pool. It was designed as part of the circulation system for the pool which in the early 1980's was a radical design and untested at that time, but is now considered inappropriate. It is not suitable as a "baby pool". The pool has a large column in the centre which would not meet current H&S design guidelines and the internal steps are a hazard. The water is the poorest quality water in the pool as it is the only outflow from the main pool. It is not large enough to use as a teaching pool, with no space to increase it. The location of the splash pool also prevents movement of lifeguards and swimming teachers around the pool which constrains the use of the pool and is not good design when considering how the main pool operates. Finally, in order to extend the changing rooms, the additional space currently taken by the splash pool is required to meet the space requirements of current design requirements. Taking all these factors into consideration it was agreed that the "splash pool" would not be retained in the new plans. Of the three pool sites that we have in the district, Newbold Comyn is the one with a purpose built "leisure/splash" pool which has warmer water and is more appropriate for introducing very small children to the water.