



**Title of meeting:** Culture, Leisure and Economic Development Decision Meeting

**Date of meeting:** 5 February 2021

**Subject:** Replacement of Eastney Swimming Pool and Wimbledon Park Sports Centre (options appraisal, feasibility and consultation results)

**Report by:** Director of Culture Leisure and Regulatory Services

**Wards affected:** Eastney and Craneswater, St Jude

**Key decision:** No

**Full Council decision:** No

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**1. Purpose of report**

- 1.1. To provide the cabinet member with the results of the sports and leisure consultation that took place in November and December 2020 which shows strong support for a new community leisure centre to combine the existing facilities at Eastney Swimming Pool, and Wimbledon Park Sports Centre.
- 1.2. To provide the cabinet member with a draft options appraisal for the replacement of Eastney Swimming Pool including the development of a new community leisure centre.

**2. Recommendations**

- 2.1. **That officers undertake further focused consultation with facility users and sports clubs to determine the right facility mix for a new community leisure centre at Bransbury Park.**
- 2.2. **That officers continue to work up a full financial appraisal for this project**
- 2.3. **That officers engage with Sport England to prepare a bid to their Strategic Facilities Fund to obtain up to a £2m grant to contribute to a new community leisure centre.**

**3. Background**

- 3.1. On 11 December 2020 officers reported on the structural survey of Eastney Swimming Pool and on the structural assessment of Wimbledon Park Sports Centre. These surveys concluded that both buildings are in poor condition and nearing the end of their serviceable lives.



- 3.2. Eastney Swimming Pool has such extensive defects in the roof structure that engineers advised that there was no viable repair option, and a new roof would be necessary if the facility is to open again. A maintenance plan to address the main issues with the building and maintain it over the next ten years was costed at up to £2.3m with up to £1.3m needed in year one.
- 3.3. Wimbledon Park Sports Centre has serious corrosion to its steel frame and carbonation to the concrete panels. Unless remedial action is taken, the facility will be uninsurable within 2–7 years due to concerns over the structure. A maintenance plan to address the structural issues, upgrade the poor changing rooms, and maintain it over the next eight years was costed at £1.14m, which includes £200k in the first year.
- 3.4. If the £3.45m above was spent, the two facilities would be afforded another ten years of operation, but this investment would make almost no difference to the customer experience, which is generally poor. The limitations which currently prevent the two centres from operating sustainably would remain (no reception, suboptimal location, poor layout, limited facility mix, no catering offer, parking issues, accessibility issues, and disabled access issues).
- 3.5. Officers undertook a top level options appraisal which included:
- Do nothing (capital cost = £0, Eastney Swimming Pool will not re-open, requires ongoing subsidy until Wimbledon Park Sports Centre inevitably closes) - this is not considered as a feasible option.
  - Repair and renovate Eastney Swimming Pool and Wimbledon Park Sports Centre (capital cost = £3.45m, will require ongoing subsidy, limitations (listed in 3.4) not addressed)
  - Re-build Eastney Swimming Pool and Wimbledon Park Sports Centre on their existing sites (capital cost £9.2m, some limitations (listed in 3.4) can be addressed, likely to require ongoing subsidy)
  - Combine the facilities from Eastney Swimming Pool and Wimbledon Park Sports Centre into a new build (net capital cost c £10.4m (assumes Sport England grant of £2m), addresses most limitations, likely to generate an operational surplus)
- 3.6. This top level options appraisal concluded that combining the wet and dry side sport and leisure offers into a new leisure centre is financially the best option, provided the capital was available. The location identified as most likely was Bransbury Park, at the site of the existing Eastney Community Centre, which could be incorporated into the new building. Preliminary work strongly suggests that a new leisure centre could be incorporated in the park on the site of the existing hard courts and that there will be no loss of green space, or any need for relocation of the adjacent model railway.
- 3.7. Officers were consequently instructed to undertake a more detailed options appraisal and feasibility study, and also to consult with Portsmouth residents on sports and leisure facilities in general and specifically on the option of a new community leisure centre. The outputs of this work are summarised below.



- 3.8. As an update to this report, added between the briefing and decision stages, attached as appendix D is a graphic produced by the Association for Public Service Excellence and published by the Local Government Association on 21 January 2021 which emphasises the importance of co-location of wet and dry leisure offers in terms of financial sustainability. Public swimming pools are only sustainable if they are part of a combined offer. Standalone pools appear to be increasingly loss-making.

#### **4. Reasons for recommendations**

##### **4.1. Options appraisal**

- 4.1.1. With a broad brief of investigating a combined community leisure centre which brings together the existing offers at the three facilities in question, officers proceeded with the council's in-house design service to draw up the 'facility mix'. In basic terms this would be a like for like replacement, but a number of improvements were desirable, such as:

- a standard 25m pool rather than the 20m pool at Eastney Swimming Pool
- addition of a learner pool to provide opportunities for levels 1–3 swimming lessons which are not currently viable at Eastney Swimming Pool due to the depth of water there
- a 50-station fitness studio rather than the 19-station one at Wimbledon Park Sports Centre as this is a more sustainable offer and more likely to grow membership
- increased flexibility of community spaces

- 4.1.2. With this high level facility mix, officers approached specialist leisure centre architects GT3 Ltd to prepare a feasibility study for the proposed new community leisure centre. GT3 took the fundamental requirements of a combined centre – 25m swimming pool, learner pool, health and fitness suite, sports hall, café, community spaces, support spaces (eg office, meeting room, stores) – and created a rough layout of the new community leisure centre. This is conceptual only at this stage, and the ultimate layout is likely to be different. This, importantly allows an estimation of the likely capital cost of the proposed community leisure centre (based on standard rates per square metre) of around £12.5m.

- 4.1.3. Having this initial conceptual design layout also allows approximations to be made based on standard models of participation (as well as data from our existing facilities) to enable a revenue model to be built for the proposed new community leisure centre. It was very important that this revenue model should be a realistic reflection of what was likely, and neither too cautious nor over optimistic. For this reason, officers approached specialist leisure consultants Strategic Leisure Ltd to prepare a revenue model. This suggested that the centre would operate in a sustainable way without the need for ongoing subsidy.

Officers have also cross checked this with the actual income and expenditure for the Mounbatten Centre site and made a number of assumptions to calculate the outcome for a similar but smaller centre. Both the internal and external figures



are similar which provides additional confidence however further work is also being undertaken to ensure these figures are as robust as possible.

4.1.4. With a capital estimate and a revenue model, the proposed new community leisure centre can be compared with the other possible options – ie repair and renovate Eastney Swimming Pool and Wimbledon Park Sports Centre, and demolish and rebuild Eastney Swimming Pool and Wimbledon Park Sports Centre on their existing sites.

4.1.5. Officers from the council's financial services have carried out an indicative financial appraisal of the three options based on the following information:

- Pre-Covid19 management accounts from BH Live for Eastney Swimming Pool and Wimbledon Park Sports Centre (2019/20)
- Management accounts from BH Live for Mountbatten Centre used for a comparable although larger centre than the proposal
- Projected revenue model for a combined community leisure centre produced by Strategic Leisure Ltd (2021)
- Capital estimate for a combined community leisure centre from a feasibility study by GT3 Architects Ltd (2020)
- Capital estimates for demolition and rebuilding of Eastney Swimming Pool and Wimbledon Park Sports Centre produced by PCC building design service (2020)
- Land valuation of Eastney Swimming Pool and Wimbledon Park Sports Centre sites produced by PCC property and investment service (2020)

The options appraisal is very much a first draft, and conclusions may conceivably change once a detailed analysis is complete. At this point in time the initial findings have concluded that in terms of a 20-year financial comparison, the most favourable option is to build a new combined community leisure centre.

A high level options appraisal setting this out is included in appendix A.

## 4.2. **Consultation**

4.2.1. A consultation exercise was undertaken to better understand attitudes toward, and usage of, existing sport and leisure facilities in Portsmouth, as well as to gather feedback on plans for the new centre. The aim of the consultation was to help inform the council's decision on how to invest and improve sport and leisure facilities in the city.

4.2.2. The objectives of the consultation were:

1. To measure usage of current sport and leisure facilities in Portsmouth.
2. To understand attitudes toward Eastney Swimming Pool and Wimbledon Park Sports Centre.
3. To measure the extent to which the public support plans for a new sport and leisure facility at Bransbury Park.



4. To understand what aspects of a new sport and leisure facility at Bransbury Park are most important to potential future users.

4.2.3. The consultation was conducted via online survey (although telephone responses were available also). It launched on 11 Nov 2020 and closed on 13 Dec 2020, a little over 4 week later. It was promoted via a leaflet delivered to all residential addresses in Portsmouth; via articles in Flagship and House Talk magazines; via press release; via social media; by email from BH Live to its customers; and on the council's website.

4.2.4. 1800 responses were received (10 via telephone, the rest online). Most were from PO4 (Milton, Eastney, Southsea) or PO5 (Southsea, Somerstown).

Postcode district	Percentage of respondents (%)
PO1	4
PO2	8
PO3	7
PO4	53
PO5	15
PO6	7
External	6

4.2.5. The full consultation report is enclosed as appendix B, and includes some wider insights into sport and leisure in Portsmouth. A top level summary of findings relevant to this report is:

New community leisure centre

- The majority of respondents agree or strongly agree with the proposal to use the money that would maintain Eastney Swimming Pool and Wimbledon Park Sports Centre as they are, on a new facility at Bransbury Park (63%). Just over a fifth of respondents strongly disagree or disagree with the idea (22% net), and 14% are neutral.
- The most common theme that emerged from the open-ended comments explaining why respondents disagree with the proposal was that they would rather the money was spent on upgrading current sport and leisure facilities (33%, 110 respondents)
- Keeping sport and leisure facilities in the current locations of Eastney Swimming Pool and Wimbledon Park Sports Centre was the main suggestion of other locations for a new centre by respondents (30%). Almost as popular was rebuilding on the Pyramids site and locating a new sport and leisure facility there (29%).
- The most important things selected by respondents for a new centre at Bransbury Park to include are good quality changing rooms for the swimming pool (84%) and gym (78%), being able to walk or cycle to the centre (83%), and ease of access for disabled people and people with limited mobility (84%).

Eastney Swimming Pool



- The majority of respondents have never visited Eastney Swimming Pool (56%); 6% visited three or more times a week, 11% visited once or twice a week, 7% visited once or twice a month and 19% visited less than once a month.
- The most common reasons to explain why respondents never visited Eastney Swimming Pool were the condition of the building (36%), the location (34%) and the condition of the changing facilities (28%).
- Lane swimming and recreational swimming were the main reasons why respondents used Eastney Swimming Pool (64% and 43% respectively).
- The most popular theme that emerged from the open-ended comments about Eastney Swimming Pool in general was that it is in a good location which is convenient.

#### Wimbledon Park Sports Centre

- An overwhelming majority of respondents have never visited Wimbledon Park Sports Centre (81%); 7% visited at least once a week, 3% visited at least once a month and 9% visited less than once a month.
- The top three reasons for never visiting Wimbledon Park Sports Centre were that respondents did not know it was there (29%), the location of it (28%), or they do not play sports/ use a gym (26%).
- Of those who had visited Wimbledon Park Sports Centre, just over three quarters used the indoor sports courts to play badminton, basketball and/ or table tennis (76%). A third of respondents also visited the centre to use the gym (33%).
- The main theme that emerged from the thematic analysis of further comments about Wimbledon Park Sports Centre was that it has good facilities for badminton.

4.2.6. The consultation report goes into much more detail, but in summary it indicates that:

- Eastney Swimming Pool and Wimbledon Park Sports Centre share a number of factors that prevent people using them like building condition, changing room condition, or lack of awareness. These issues could be addressed by renovating the buildings and marketing them more.
- However there are several inherent issues that prevent more people using them that would not be addressed by renovation and marketing. These are things like:
  - location
  - limited facility mix (ie "I don't use a gym"/"Do not do the sports offered"/"I don't go swimming")
  - too small gym (ie "limited equipment" at Wimbledon Park Sports Centre)
  - lack of parking and limited transport connections
  - water depth (ie "not suitable for children" at Eastney Swimming Pool)



Only a new community leisure centre would enable the council to address all these issues as well as the ones related to building condition and awareness.

4.3. The consultation concluded by asking whether respondents had any further comments about sport and leisure facilities in Portsmouth. Several themes emerged from the open-ended comments; getting the development at Bransbury Park "right" was popular. Respondents called for a high-quality, modern facility with better management and long-term maintenance. There were also general comments of support for the proposal, with respondents expressing excitement for a new sport and leisure centre in this location, calling it a good idea.

4.4. **Stakeholder engagement**

4.4.1. This report concerns three council owned community facilities:

- Eastney Swimming Pool
- Wimbledon Park Sports Centre
- Eastney Community Association

Naturally there are a great many stakeholders who will be interested in the development of a new community leisure centre to replace them. If the proposed new facility is to succeed, their opinions must be taken into consideration when designing the new building.

4.4.2. Officers have engaged with the council's leisure operators BH Live in preparing this report and have taken advice from them on the development of the facility mix. As the council's leisure facility operators they will ultimately be expected to manage the facility in partnership with the community centre management. BH Live's ongoing involvement with the development of a new centre will be important in getting it right.

4.4.3. Officers have met with trustees of Eastney Area Community Association (EACA) as the management committee of Eastney Community Association. Officers have presented the emerging proposals to a meeting of the board of trustees of EACA in November 2020. Liaison with EACA will be ongoing through the development of the proposals to ensure the association's requirements are met by the building, to ensure that the building retains a community feel and to establish the partnership working arrangements that will be necessary in a shared use facility.

4.4.4. Other key stakeholders have been contacted either by officers, or by the council's consultants Strategic Leisure Ltd: Southsea Badminton Club, Hampshire Badminton, England Badminton, Swim England, Portsmouth Northsea Swimming Club and the University of Portsmouth.

4.4.5. Officers are aware of interest from users of the existing facilities (clubs, schools and individuals). Many have already been contacted and officers will ensure that all have the opportunity to contribute to the discussions to come. Officers will continue to encourage dialogue with the community as plans are developed to ensure that proposals continue to have popular support.

4.4.6. This report focuses on a potential new combined community leisure centre, and does not touch on the future use of the Eastney Swimming Pool and Wimbledon Park Sports Centre sites. In the event that a new centre is confirmed by the



allocation of funding and granting of planning consent, public consultation will take place on the future use of these sites.

**4.5. Sport England**

- 4.5.1. Sport England has supported the council in moving towards a potential bid to their Strategic Facilities Fund by commissioning Strategic Leisure Ltd to prepare a preliminary strategic needs assessment and a Strategic Outcomes Planning Model for the south of the city.
- 4.5.2. Officers have been in dialogue with Sport England about the strategic vision for Portsmouth's sports facilities since the publication of the Sports Facility Strategy in 2017. The approval of this report's recommendations along with the consultation report and the financial options appraisal will be extremely helpful in progressing discussions with Sport England towards a bid. Officers have arranged a meeting with Sport England in the week following this report to CLED committee to accelerate work towards a successful bid.
- 4.5.3. It is important to note that Sport England requires bids to demonstrate an area-wide strategic approach to investment in order to be eligible for funding. The option of a simple like-for-like re-build of Eastney Swimming Pool and Wimbledon Park Sports Centre would be unlikely to be regarded as a strategic solution, and so up to £2m funding may not be available in this circumstance.

**5. Integrated impact assessment**

- 5.1. An integrated impact assessment is enclosed. No impediments have arisen.

**6. Legal implications**

- 6.1. There are no immediate legal implications arising from the recommendations in this report as the proposals will be subject to more detailed financial appraisal and further public consultation, supplementing the consultation already undertaken, in order to inform a substantive recommendation and decision on the way forward.
- 6.2. The Council has the necessary statutory power to provide and operate facilities for sports and recreation.

**7. Director of Finance's comments**

- 7.1. An initial options appraisal has been carried out and a summary of this is attached at appendix A. Whilst work on this is ongoing, the outcome to date is that the provision of a new centre at Bransbury Park is the most financially viable.
- 7.2. Officers are working to complete a full financial appraisal which will include the borrowing requirement for the capital funding still required for the project.



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Signed by:  
**Stephen Baily**  
**Director of Culture, Leisure and Regulatory Services**

**Appendices:**

- Appendix A: Financial options appraisal
- Appendix B: Consultation report
- Appendix C: Integrated Impact Assessment
- Appendix D: Financial sustainability of public leisure facilities by type

**Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972**

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location

The recommendation(s) set out above were approved/ approved as amended/ deferred/ rejected by ..... on .....

.....  
Signed by:  
**Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Economic Development**