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## **FEEDBACK ON ROBERTS LIMBRICK FACILITY DESIGN FOR BAR END**

You asked for feedback on the conceptual floor plans and associated documents prepared by Roberts Limbrick Architects for the WCC “Leisure Centre Project”. These relate to CAB 2798 (meeting date 29<sup>th</sup> March 2016). You also shared the Schedule of Areas for these floor plans, which aids interpretation of the architect’s drawings themselves.

Winchester SALT is excited by the potential offered by the Bar End site. As set out in our November 2014 letter to then WCC Leader Rob Humby (attached for ease of reference), and in our many statements to Cabinet and other WCC committees, Bar End offers an opportunity to develop a sustainable and accessible community hub for sport, leisure, health, well-being and other services, going well beyond the ‘leisure centre’ concept. This potential was something we aimed to showcase in our November 2015 presentation ‘A Better Sporting Future for Winchester’, which can be viewed here: <https://vimeo.com/145861235>

### **Bar End location**

The leisure centre plans developed by Roberts Limbrick Architects use the land proposed for WCC Option 5, namely KGV playing field and Hampshire County Council land (with an access road through the Depot and Stadium). This follows the decision by Cabinet, based on advice in CAB 2708 (September 2015), to pursue this option. This in turn appears to be based on cost data given to and manipulated by RPT Consulting, summarised in their May 2015 report (published February 2016). This suggested that land acquisition and opportunity costs would add £6m in base capital cost to Option 4, which entails constructing the facilities and associated car parking on the Depot and Garrison Ground.

Residents from the local neighbourhood have raised a number of concerns regarding Option 5, which are set out in the recent letter from the Highcliffe Community Forum for Action, St Giles Hill Residents Association, and the Winchester Allotments Society. We share many of these concerns and continue to believe Option 4 offers many advantages over Option 5, not least the opportunity Option 4 offers to protect the Garrison Ground against development for non-sporting uses. As you know, we worked in 2013 with local architects, Studio Four, to develop a wide range of site layout options (some of which are broadly similar to Option 4 or Option 5).

In this feedback, however, we are looking only at the plans developed by Roberts Limbrick Architects using land proposed under WCC Option 5.

### **Local context for sport**

Through the Bar End project, WCC and partners have a unique opportunity to respond to the very high demand for sport and active recreation in the Winchester area. It is important to note that most local participation in sport and active recreation is undertaken outside the existing leisure centre at River Park, and that while Sport England collects some data on adult participation that can be useful in assessing local demand and interests, they collect very little

data on participation by children and teenagers, one of the demographic groups that is expanding most rapidly in the Winchester area. It is no wonder, therefore, that standard assessments of Winchester's facility requirements, based on Sport England data, overlook the needs and interests of children and young people.

Examples of the significant local demand for sport:

- Adult (16+) participation in sport and physical activity in Winchester is very high. Sport England Active People Survey data (from 2012-2015) indicate, for example, that adults in Winchester are more likely to participate in sport at least once a week than the England average (46% vs 36%), to take part in organised sport (41% vs 34%), to be members of a sports club (26.3% vs 21.6%), and to volunteer in the sport sector (23.3% vs 12.4%). Around 20% of adults in Winchester are 'highly active', participating in sport and active recreation 5 or more times a week.
- Around 60% of adults in Winchester say they'd like to do more sport, with swimming and cycling the most popular activities.
- Sports participation amongst children and teenagers (to age 16) has not been measured historically through Sport England surveys. However, data (from 2015-16) from local clubs and swim schools suggest that both actual and latent participation in Winchester are very high. For example:
  - Winchester City Penguins Swimming Club (WCPSC) total membership 1048, of which juniors 847; waiting list of around 150 currently (for both lessons and squads, due to lack of pool space);
  - Eight other swim schools operate in Winchester (not including WCPSC or River Park LC's in-house programme); they have waiting lists for baby/toddler classes of up to 150, and waiting lists for children's lessons of up to 400;
  - Winchester and District Athletics Club (WADAC) total membership 900, of which juniors 475;
  - Winchester Hockey Club total membership 527, of which juniors c.300
  - Winchester Gymnastics Club 200 juniors (waiting list 200+); Treasure Gymnastics 1234 juniors (waiting list 648).

Examples of supply-side constraints within the City of Winchester:

- Swimming pools: River Park LC is the only pool in the District offering 'pay and play' access; in the City, Kings School is available for hire, but is now fully booked; other pools (Army Training Regiment, Winchester College, St Swithun's School) offer very limited club and/or community use. No pool facilities can offer club-level competition.
- Indoor courts: there are no indoor netball or basketball courts in the City of Winchester that meet requirements for safe run-off and/or bench space. Further, at River Park LC, one basketball hoop mechanism is broken and court markings are outdated; Kings School is fully booked; other facilities (e.g. Westgate School, Winchester College, Sparsholt College) can offer only limited access. By way of an example, Winchester Netball Club has to hold its 'home' matches in Southampton, and can only run Back to Netball and junior sessions (Sport England target age range 14-25) on outdoor courts in Winchester in the summer. The Chair of the Club recently wrote to us saying *"I have no end of dedicated coaches and umpires but I am lacking the facilities to provide grass roots opportunity, let alone to be able to support and develop young netballers who have the potential to reach regional and national league level. The number of enquiries that we receive weekly through our website is now around 5-8 and all we can currently do is place people on a waiting list."*
- Gymnastics facilities: the nearest gymnastics facilities to Winchester are in Andover (Salto tumbling facility), Basingstoke (Active Life Centre), and along the south coast.
- There are limited numbers of synthetic turf pitches and tennis courts with community access.

What this means for the Bar End project:

- A new sport and leisure centre at Bar End could correct this supply-demand imbalance, provided the facilities are sufficiently large and flexible, with the correct specification for training and competition across a wide range of sports; facilities designed for sport can always be used for leisure, but the reverse is not the case.
- Clubs, community groups, local enterprises and others that support grass roots participation in sport – by offering teaching, coaching and competitive opportunities – will need to have regular, affordable access to the facilities.

## Facility mix and specification

You specifically asked for Winchester SALT's comments on the facility mix and specification depicted in the leisure centre plans from Roberts Limbrick Architects.

It will be very important to ensure that certain aspects of the facility are correctly configured from the outset, as they will be difficult or even impossible to change later on. These include the energy efficiency of the building fabric, certain types of renewable energy installation, and the size and specification of the pool(s) and the sports hall.

It will clearly be vital to ensure that the new facility delivers for sport, in order to sustain and increase the high levels of sports participation in Winchester noted above, but also to fill strategic gaps in facility provision and complement other facilities within and around Winchester. It should also offer opportunities for play for children, young people and families. It will be important to engage children and young people as participants in the project, as the facility is designed and the Bar End site is enhanced. A mix of indoor and outdoor facilities, offering opportunities for both sport and leisure, is both feasible and desirable at Bar End.

On the facility mix depicted by Roberts Limbrick, we note that:

- The main **aquatic facilities** are not specified. As set out in the community's Winchester Fit for the Future proposals, a 50m community pool (with at least one boom and a movable floor) plus a small warm pool with 'leisure water' would offer the capacity and flexibility required to meet the needs and interests of Winchester residents. (We note that the hydrotherapy facility is very tightly specified in the Roberts Limbrick plans, and is depicted as entirely separate to the other aquatic facilities.) NOTE: we will provide more information on local clubs' potential commitment to hire sections of a 50m community pool, and what this would mean in revenue terms, in due course.
- The number and size of the **fitness suite** and **studios** appear generous.
- Four **squash courts** should be ample. We note that each pair of courts can be opened up into a larger space using moving walls, which will enable the space to be used for some other activities.
- The 'hot desking' **office** appears to accommodate some lockers and/or shelves, allowing it to serve as a shared office space for Winchester sports clubs. A hatch opening on to the corridor would enable this office to serve as an information point as well. If it is also to host staff from the Hampshire Institute of Sport and/or county sports partnership and/or Hampshire branches of sports governing bodies, it will need significant additional desk space.
- There is no indoor **climbing wall** in the Roberts Limbrick plans.
- There is no **gymnastics and trampolining** facility in the Roberts Limbrick plans. Research and dialogue with local gymnastics clubs and with British Gymnastics indicates that a 'rebound facility' would be most appropriate for Winchester, and would complement other elements of a community sports and leisure centre. A 'rebound facility' combines trampolining and tumbling equipment with apparatus suitable for recreational and developmental gymnastics. It can support cross-training for other

sports and accommodate disciplines such as parkour and cheerleading, as well as non-gymnastics activities that use a matted floor (e.g. martial arts, circus arts training), and it can support biomechanical assessment and other sports science activity. As such, the emphasis is on fun, skills acquisition, and low-level competitive development. British Gymnastics estimates such a facility would cost around £1200 per square metre to build. The inclusion of a toddler gym and soft play area within such a facility would support its use as a supervised **crèche**. Thus, it offers far greater flexibility and utility than the **soft play** area shown on the Roberts Limbrick plans. A climbing wall could also be incorporated into this 'rebound facility', rather than standing alone, if that were preferred. NOTE: we will send more information about the case for a rebound facility to be included in the Bar End development in due course.

On the specification depicted by Roberts Limbrick, our initial advice would be as follows:

- The “**12 Court Sports Hall**” as depicted is sub-standard, at 54m by 34.5m. A standard 12-court sports hall measures 60m by 34.5m. This allows 3 netball or basketball courts to be marked up side by side, with the correct amount of run-off and team/official space for netball training at ‘community’ level (and meeting the minimum standard for ‘club’ competition) or basketball training/competition at ‘club’ level (and meeting the minimum standard for ‘premier’ competition). A larger 15-court sports hall (64.5m by 40.6m) is needed to allow for a higher level of competitive netball, or for 3 handball (training) or futsal courts to be offered side by side. The use of Sport England guidance<sup>1</sup> will ensure the correct specification. To separate different activities in the hall, dividing curtains will need to be used. Care will be needed to ensure that the viewing ‘windows’ into the hall from the upper floor corridor don’t coincide with the logical placement of dividing curtains. This issue would be avoided by opening the corridor space out, to form an upper floor viewing gallery.
- It will also be important to ensure that both retractable and portable bleacher **seating** in the sports hall are optimally configured to support spectator events, and are aligned with court markings for the key spectator sports. In the pool hall, we would recommend adding at least a third row of spectator seating, and a dedicated space for spectators in wheelchairs, as well as ledges on all sides of the pool for competition/participant seating. For the sports hall, a row of permanent spectator seating in a gallery above the hall, behind glazed panels (and potentially gates through which access to the retractable bleacher seating can be gained when in use), would enable parents to watch their children without having to sit in the hall itself. It would also encourage casual viewing of activities in the hall, offering inspiration and boosting participation (and revenue) in turn.
- As noted above, the “**pool(s)**” are not specified in the Roberts Limbrick plans. The Schedule of Areas indicates either an 8-lane 50m pool, or an 8-lane 25m pool plus 20m x 10m learner pool. Close attention will be needed to the pool width, and the width and area of the pool surround, as this has implications for maximum bather load and for how the pool may be used. The Health and Safety Executive, British Standards Institution, Amateur Swimming Association and Sport England have all produced relevant guidance and recommendations, which should be followed, and it would be prudent to seek their advice (not least as the key HSE guidance note is currently being updated). The Schedule of Areas notes the dimensions of the pool surround as 4m at the start end and 3m on all other sides, which should be sufficient for most uses. However, it is not clear from the dimensions of the plan whether the pool hall as drawn is wide enough to accommodate an 8-lane pool with this surround. The minimum width of an 8-lane pool should be 17m, and 21m is the optimal width for competitive use.
- The **pool hall** in the Roberts Limbrick plan has long, glazed walls exposed to the East and West. This could give rise to child safeguarding concerns. It would also make the

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<sup>1</sup> Sport England (September 2015) ‘Comparative Sizes of Sports Pitches & Courts (Indoor)’; Sport England (July 2015) ‘Affordable Sports Halls’ and ‘Affordable Sport Halls, Appendix 1: Court Layouts and Sports Equipment’.

pool area susceptible to solar gain and glare from low light, which is hard to control. Rotating the pool hall 90° would help, as this would result in the long glazed wall facing North. (Tree planting could provide a screen between these windows and any properties to the North.) This could also produce a more efficient building layout, as a pool hall (ideally 50m community pool plus toddler/leisure pool) could run parallel to the sports hall and squash courts (total length c.75m, subject to resizing the sports hall).

- The **squash court size** should be increased to match standard dimensions. The width shown at 6.4m is correct, but the length should be increased from the 9.0m shown on the plans to 9.75m. The Schedule of Areas gives the correct length of 9.75m. The plans also appear to show a small number of spectator seats, while the Schedule of Areas says “no double courts or spectating required”.
- The photographs provided alongside the ‘conceptual cutaways’ do not show the specifications depicted in the ‘conceptual floor plans’. Specifically, the pool hall and sports hall in the photographs have greater playing and seating/viewing capacity than those in the floor plans/cutaways.
- The wetside **changing areas** shown appear to offer good capacity and flexibility. They currently connect with the dryside changing areas, which increases the potential for cross-contamination. The dryside changing rooms are modest in size and it is not clear how the toilets are accessed. Dryside group changing rooms should be added, for teams to use during matches (University, school or club) without disturbing other users. There are currently no specific areas for match officials to use for changing, planning, review etc.

We also have some reflections on other aspects of the facility as depicted in the Roberts Limbrick plans:

- **Café:** this seems rather small for the size of the facility (and the anticipated footfall, as indicated by the size of the car park). A larger café, serving a wide range of healthy food and drink options, would better meet the needs of both the general public and more serious athletes. (Many facilities complement this with a ‘sports bar’ area showing televised sport.)
- **Soft play facility:** as noted above, a rebound facility with toddler gym / soft play area would be preferable to the soft play facility depicted by Roberts Limbrick. As it stands, however, the soft play facility on the plans appears rather exposed, and it could become very hot in summer and cold in winter.
- **Circulation space:** this is at the lower end of the normal range for a facility of this type. It could become congested, particularly during busy periods or events; the corridor alongside the squash courts appears to be particularly narrow and dark.
- **Accessibility:** to improve accessibility and ease congestion it would be worth incorporating a second lift, with the positioning of both the facilities and emergency exits in mind. Disability groups, and those supporting the elderly and others with specific access requirements, should be engaged at an early stage in the project.

The **positioning of the new facility** behind the athletics track and to the south of the car park raises significant issues related to access and safety for pedestrians (including those who have travelled by bus via Barfield Close) and cyclists. The Roberts Limbrick plans suggest that pedestrians would have to walk through the Garrison Ground, round the athletics track, and then through the car park to access the building. It is not immediately clear which route cyclists would use. The current positioning of the building also limits **Integration with the athletics track and other outdoor facilities:**

- The building is currently positioned a long way from the track, rather than being integrated with it. Positioning the building closer to the track would encourage visitors to the track to use the café and other facilities. An outdoor seating area between the track and facility would further accentuate this link.

- It would be worthwhile to take this opportunity **enhance the track** itself, particularly by adding some spectator seating. As you know, a strategic gap has been identified in the provision of indoor athletics facilities in the South of England, which could be met at Bar End by including an indoor 60m running strip and jumps/throws areas alongside the existing outdoor track. England Athletics have advised that constructing a simple standalone facility of this type would cost £750,000 upwards.
- The **sequencing of the build** will also be important, in order to minimise disruption to the existing facilities and their users; for example, it would be helpful for a new synthetic turf pitch (STP) to be constructed before the existing one is removed (note that the type of STP will affect whether it can be used for football and/or hockey, or both – a change to a longer pile would represent a net loss for hockey provision in Winchester). Similar sequencing issues would arise in relation to other replacement facilities such as the MUGA, playground, skate park and outdoor changing pavilion.
- **Safety issues:** The location of the playground next to a large and busy car park raises safety concerns. Good fencing and appropriately secure pedestrian gates will be needed to minimise the risk of accidents. It will be vital to ensure good lighting and appropriate use of security cameras (and security guards at night) across the site. The police and other emergency services, and community safety organisations, should be engaged in the development of the Bar End site.

### Construction cost

We are concerned by the inflation of project cost estimates. CAB 2798 suggests that the cost of constructing the modest facilities shown on the plans from Roberts Limbrick Architects, for a 2018 opening, is almost £30m.

We note that the construction cost calculations used by WCC, for Options 4 and 5, were developed by MACE in September 2014. These original calculations were inflated to 2017 by MACE, and have more recently been inflated to 2018 by WCC.

The differences in construction cost between Options 4 and 5, as calculated by MACE, appear to relate to the following:

- The inclusion of a replacement STP in the 'base build project cost' for Option 4, to which 10% fees and 10% contingency are applied; in Option 5, the replacement STP, access road and additional car parking are treated as 'site abnormal costs', with no % uplift for fees or contingency; *NB, in reality, Option 4 would not require the existing STP to be replaced or moved (or disrupted in any way), which removes more than £1m from the cost of this option;*
- The addition of 10 weeks for 'enabling works' (removal of asbestos and other decontamination of the Depot) in Option 4; in Option 5 a period of 10 weeks is added for the construction of the access road through the Depot and Stadium, but nothing is added for Depot decontamination;
- The addition of a further 10 weeks to the base construction period in Option 4, allowing 76 weeks, as opposed to 66 for Option 5 (reasons not specified).
- The consequent inflation of costs over a further 2 months for Option 4.

The outcome of these MACE calculations is a slightly higher cost estimate for Option 4 than that for Option 5 (if the error re the STP is not corrected). Note that both cost estimates include the construction of 6 tennis courts that are not featured in the plans developed by Roberts Limbrick Architects.

The RPT Consulting report (May 2015, published February 2016) includes in Option 4 a £3m opportunity cost of using the Depot, and a £3m cost to purchase the Garrison Ground from Tesco PLC. It is not clear where either figure originates. This adds £6m to the cost of Option 4, which is further inflated by assuming this money will be borrowed over 25 years with interest.

When these cumulative costs are discounted using the 3.5% Treasury Green Book rate to calculate a net present value (NPV) for Options 4 and 5, this accentuates the difference between the two project cost estimates.

At the Stakeholder Roundtable meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2016, two developments were cited, which indicate a need to revisit these project cost estimates. First, the University of Winchester has expressed an interest in purchasing the Depot to develop a new sports science faculty building; it is not clear whether or not this could incorporate some or all of the on-site car parking required for the Bar End sports facilities. Second, Tesco PLC has indicated to WCC (including through a submission for Local Plan Part 2) a desire to see the new sports and leisure facilities developed on the northern part of the Garrison Ground, alongside some housing or other development that brings a commercial return.

There have also been several recent sports and leisure developments across the country that have delivered high quality facilities at affordable prices. Examples include the Wycombe Leisure Centre, which opened in January 2016 at a cost of £25m,<sup>2</sup> and the Leicester Community Sports Arena, which opened in January 2016 at a cost of £4.8m.<sup>3</sup> The former includes a 50m pool, learner pool and splash zone, 12-court sports hall, climbing wall, indoor bowling, fitness suite, studios and squash courts. The latter includes a 12-court sports hall, fitness suite, meeting/teaching rooms and sports bar; 2400 retractable spectator seats were added to the sports hall to enable major events to be held. If Winchester facility design and tender specification were to draw on such examples, using the Sport England Affordable Facilities guidance as a starting point, it should be possible to achieve excellent value for money here too, even with increased emphasis on energy efficiency and the incorporation of passive and/or smart technologies.

In summary, the Roberts Limbrick plans (and accompanying Schedule of Areas) give an indication of how new facilities at Bar End might be developed. In the next iteration of such plans, the following key issues will need to be addressed:

- The location and configuration of the new building and related car parking, so as to maximise access and safety, and to ensure integration with existing facilities at Bar End;
- The configuration and orientation of the components of the new building, so as to ensure an efficient and practical layout, and a comfortable user experience (e.g. the management of natural light and external temperature and their effect on the building).
- The size and specification of core facilities, to ensure they allow for the maximum range of potential users/activities, and to address the key constraints currently faced by Winchester's community sports sector.

We would be very happy to help WCC to address these issues through the Stakeholder Roundtable or other means.

With best regards,  
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Cc:  
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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.willmott-dixon.co.uk/projects/wycombe-sports-centre-high-wycombe>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ballhall.co.uk/case-studies/leicester-riders-arena/>

WCC Councillors  
Stakeholder Roundtable members  
Steve Brine MP  
Key sports sector representatives