

Winchester Fit for the Future

Let's build Winchester's Olympic legacy!



Councillor Rob Humby, Leader
Councillor Jan Warwick, Portfolio Holder
Winchester City Council

27th November 2014

Dear Councillors

WINCHESTER CITY COUNCIL 'LEISURE CENTRE PROJECT': DOCUMENTS AND PRESS RELEASE NOVEMBER 2014

I welcome Winchester City Council's recent publication of some of the studies commissioned to inform its 'leisure centre project'.

The Council's press release (dated 30th October 2014) and the recent Cabinet paper (for the meeting on 3rd December) indicate a desire to focus on three potential options for new 'leisure' facilities: a new build at Bar End; a phased new build on the site of the existing 'leisure centre' at North Walls; refurbishment of the existing 'leisure centre' (River Park LC).

It is clear from the commissioned studies that Bar End is a uniquely attractive and viable site for the development of new community sport and recreational facilities. It is a less constrained site than North Walls in many ways, and far less flood prone, making investment less risky. The studies indicate a new facility at Bar End would open a year earlier and at a lower cost than a phased build at North Walls, and with far less disruption to users of River Park LC or to other facilities such as Riverside Bowling Club and the new skate park.

Most importantly, at Bar End, we can build a comprehensive suite of facilities to meet the sport and recreational needs and aspirations of the City and District, fill key strategic gaps in Hampshire's sporting infrastructure, and provide a vibrant community hub.

It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity we cannot afford to miss.

I am writing to ask directly to work in partnership with you – Winchester City Council – and with local sports clubs, Hampshire County Council, the University of Winchester, Tesco PLC (the owner of the freehold to the Garrison Ground at Bar End) and others, to fully explore this option.

An Olympic legacy partnership, engaging local people

Winchester Fit for the Future is a voluntary community project to improve sports provision in the Winchester area. We aim to build a true Olympic legacy for Winchester. Better community sports facilities are essential to this. For more than three years, we have engaged in detailed and diligent research and analysis, examining local need and potential as well as national and international best practice. This research and analysis is reflected in our outline proposals from 2012 and in all our follow-up work.

From the outset, we have stressed the need for a partnership approach, to deliver the best possible outcome for local people.

We have much to bring to partnership, including:

- A clear technical specification for core sports facilities based on the requirements of local clubs, associations and leagues
- Case studies from facilities we have visited or studied across the UK
- Site layout options and building design concepts developed (for free) by a local architect
- Detailed programmes, based on current need (and some future potential), for a 50m community pool and a gymnastics and trampolining facility
- Business case development work (ongoing)
- Research into energy efficiency and environmental technologies, with input from MITIE
- A transport and access plan for Bar End facilities (in development currently)
- Public support and engagement, including a petition signed by almost 3500 people
- Community fundraising that is ongoing for new sports facilities, with the specific target of a new community sports hub at Bar End
- And, of course, the energy and commitment of local volunteers!

The community sports clubs and local providers we are working with through Winchester Fit for the Future also have much to bring, including:

- A strong and growing membership / customer base
- An excellent understanding of opportunities and constraints in the local 'market' for sport and recreation
- A base for talent development, coach development, volunteer engagement, and increasing participation in sport and parasport at all levels – from beginner to international competitor
- Good links to their National Governing Bodies who can offer technical (and in some cases financial) support
- Club fundraising – several local clubs have set up 'facilities funds'
- The capability to programme and operate parts of a new facility, if necessary (as seen elsewhere in the UK, e.g. Hawth Gymnastics at K2 Crawley, Guildford City Swimming Club at Surrey Sports Park).

I have been told many times that the extent of voluntary work undertaken to secure new community sports facilities in Winchester is unusual, if not unique. Certainly, our local community continues to demonstrate a passion for sport and to engage energetically in the quest for new facilities. Those involved in sport currently have valuable knowledge, skills and experience. They will be regular

users of any new facility and will draw others to it, so engaging them now will help ensure strong local ownership and footfall from the outset.

By bringing these actors together with major local institutions – principally Winchester City Council, Hampshire County Council and the University of Winchester – a partnership approach would facilitate:

- Access to sport for schools and colleges, particularly for schools with limited or no sports facilities of their own
- Links to the Hampshire Talented Athlete Scheme and other talent development pathways
- Links to the University of Winchester's sports-related teaching and research, and to the proposed Hampshire Institute of Sport
- The provision of sports science, health and well-being services at the facility
- Links to public health and NHS services, adult social care and children's services
- Opportunities to develop apprenticeship schemes for sports coaching, facility management, customer service etc, as well as offering the Advanced Level Apprenticeship in Sporting Excellence (AASE) in collaboration with local schools and colleges
- Links to, and opportunities for, other community services and groups in and around the City of Winchester
- Use of the facility for major events and conferences, both sport and non-sport.

In short, **there is the potential to go beyond the 'leisure centre' concept, to develop a hub for sport, health and well-being**, generating a high social *and* economic return on investment.

A unique opportunity

To repeat my comments from last November, when the Council published its initial proposals, we now have an opportunity to develop sports and recreational facilities that can serve our City and broader District for many decades to come.

This opportunity may be unique, given the coincidence of factors that make strategic investment possible, namely:

- Winchester City Council is considering the replacement of the City's only public leisure facility (and the District's only public swimming pool), at River Park LC;
- The University of Winchester wishes to expand its own sports and recreational facilities, in order to enhance provision for its students and to support its sports faculty;
- Our community sports clubs continue to experience strong demand for their provision, but many face facilities constraints and hold long waiting lists;
- Construction and borrowing costs are relatively low, and local authorities have access to infrastructure funding through the New Homes Bonus and Community Infrastructure Levy;
- Post-Olympic/Paralympic grants are still available, and interest in sport following London 2012 remains high, reinforced by the success of Glasgow 2014;

- Hampshire County Council remains keen to see a strong legacy from London 2012 for Hampshire, and Winchester – as the county town – should have a central role in this.

There is a strong incentive for local institutions to pool resources, therefore. The recent Cabinet paper highlights the financial constraints faced by Winchester City Council, meaning it would struggle to fund a new sports and recreational facility – but it doesn't have to do this alone, or even find the lion's share. **A balanced and holistic partnership approach could bring both capital and revenue to a new development, underpinning its long-term sustainability.**

Getting the facilities right

Winchester's existing community sports facilities do not meet the area's needs. Our own research and other studies, such as those commissioned by Winchester City Council and the University of Winchester, highlight several key deficits. Current demand outstrips the supply of aquatic and indoor court facilities, in particular. Several local sports facilities have little or no access for the community. Several types of facility – most obviously those for gymnastics – are missing altogether from the Winchester area.

In order to accommodate, facilitate and enhance local sports provision – and therefore participation across all age groups – now and over the longer-term, our research indicates a new centre would need to include:

- a recognised flexible pool format, i.e. a 50m community pool;
- a large and flexible sportshall, ideally a '15 court' hall with retractable bleacher seating;
- a gymnastics and trampolining facility;
- spectator seating and indoor training facilities for athletics, alongside the existing outdoor track.

Facilities such as a climbing wall and leisure water (slides etc) ought to be considered as well, to bring some options for 'family fun' and recreation to Winchester.

The facilities outlined in the reports from Roberts Limbrick and MACE do not address these deficits. They focus, instead, on increased fitness provision. Compared to the existing River Park LC (which dates from 1974) they provide: an additional four 25m lanes in the swimming pool; an additional 60 stations in the fitness suite; some additional exercise studio space. (A hydrotherapy suite has been incorporated into the design, in response to an offer of external financing.)

River Park Leisure Centre (1974-present)	Proposed new leisure centre (2017-2057+)
25m pool (6 lane)	25m pool (10 lanes)
Learner pool	Learner/studio pool
Flume and splash pool (now defunct)	
	Hydrotherapy suite (funded separately)
8 court hall	8 court hall
4 squash courts	4 squash courts
2 studios	2 large studios (divisible into 4)

Soft play area	Soft play area
Café	Café
Treatment room (injury/physio)	Treatment rooms (unspecified)
Crèche (now beauty parlour)	
Function room	Multi-purpose rooms
Fitness suite (120 stations)	Fitness suite (180 stations)
	Shared club office

Since the 1971 Census, the population of both City and District has grown significantly. 4000 new homes are due to be built in the City of Winchester alone over the coming years. **New facilities must take account of past and future population growth, as well as a local interest and participation in sport that is well above the national average (and has potential to grow further).**

The incorporation of a shared club office is welcome, as is the proposed synthetic turf pitch at Bar End. However, the proposed indoor facilities would struggle to accommodate recreational sport or club training and competition. The sports hall, specifically, offers no more capacity than the existing sports hall at River Park LC, which Winchester’s community clubs and groups struggle to access at all.

We must take this opportunity to secure the kinds of facilities that can meet existing need and demand AND inspire and extend participation in sport and active recreation. We are building now for the future.

We can do this without breaking the bank. The recent Cabinet paper warns against “optimism bias” in costing a new build. It is yet more important to guard against the inflationary pressures inherent in the market for ‘leisure centre design and build’, which is oligopolistic in nature. It would be prudent to **refer closely to the Sport England Affordable Facilities guidance and to seek NGB advice, to develop a clear specification for an open competitive tender for design and construction.** Through a robust tender process, costs can fall even further, as recent examples demonstrate.

By way of illustration, the Sport England Affordable Facilities guidance indicates a base construction cost of £12.6m¹ for a sports centre with a 50m pool and small teaching pool (less for a 50m pool with boom and movable floor but no teaching pool), 150 station fitness suite, 3 studios, and a 5 court sports hall (that can be extended at a cost of £1017 per m² as per the guidance).² I have been advised by a contributor to the sports hall guidance that a gymnastics facility can be costed at the same price per m², plus equipment, for estimation purposes.

The Sport England specifications are designed to be efficient and affordable to operate, too. However, even based on running cost and programming data from River Park LC (which hosts a small proportion of Winchester’s sport and recreational activity), Continuum’s recent study indicates a 50m pool with one boom and a movable floor would generate an operating surplus in Winchester.

¹ <https://www.sportengland.org/media/382423/affordable-sports-centre-with-50m-pool-main-document.pdf>

² <https://www.sportengland.org/media/31442/Affordable-Sports-Halls-2012.pdf>

Thinking strategically

The decisions that Winchester City Council and other local institutions are poised to take on this issue are vitally important to the future of Winchester. They will have far-reaching implications for the future of sport locally, of course, as well as for public health and well-being – but they will also affect the local economy and the environment, Winchester's social capital, community resilience, and its sense of place.

As I set out one year ago, some key questions are:

- Will local institutions work in partnership to develop the kinds of sports and leisure facilities that can serve the city and surrounding area over the long-term, and how should we do this?
- How will Winchester City Council seek to protect and enhance open space and sports pitches at both Bar End and North Walls?
- Will Winchester City Council ensure that Bar End is enhanced as a vibrant, well-designed and attractive gateway to the city that has strong amenity value, not as another housing estate?
- Will Winchester City Council and others explore opportunities to develop the existing River Park LC site in the longer-term, in a way that is appropriate and sympathetic to the area's heritage and character?

Such strategic considerations can be addressed through dialogue and collaboration, and with a desire and commitment to do the very best for Winchester.

I and my colleagues remain keen to partner with the City Council and others to this end, and I look forward to discussing the opportunities soon.

Yours faithfully

Emma Back

for the Winchester Fit for the Future project
The Winchester Sport Art and Leisure Trust (Winchester SALT)
www.fit4thefuture.org
www.winchestersalt.org

CC. contacts at:

- Winchester City Council
- Hampshire County Council
- Sport Hampshire and IOW
- Tesco PLC
- The University of Winchester
- Local Members of Parliament
- Local sports clubs and groups
- Local schools and colleges
- National Governing Bodies for sport
- Sport England
- Hampshire Chronicle