

Overview & Scrutiny Task Group Meeting Notes



Review topic	Date of Meeting
New Leisure Centre	3 November 2021

Attendance	Venue
Members: Baker (Chair) Grange Ray Robertson M. Wilcox Apologies Silvester-Hall Eadie (Cabinet Member) Officers: Ben Percival John Smith Sarah Sleigh Christine Lewis Philip Gillingham Witnesses: None	Virtual

Areas Discussed
<p>Declarations of Interests</p> <p>Cllr Grange declared a personal interest as a member of Freedom Leisure and has association with the Friends of Friary Grange.</p> <p>Cllr Ray declared a personal interest as he has association with the Friends of Friary Grange. He also declared that his son is a Tennis coach in Lichfield.</p> <p>Cllr Baker declared a personal interest as her husband uses the facility</p> <p>S122 Consultation</p> <p>The Task Group began the meeting discussing this item and it was noted that there had been 123 responses with 118 logged comments. It was also noted that the majority of detailed comments received did not relate to the loss of open space at Stychbrook Park as required by the S122 Notice. Taking that into account, it was reported that 84 responses were in objection and 17 in support. The Task Group did note that the question posed to residents was specifically requesting</p>

objections to the appropriation of land and it was felt that with this in mind and noting that 19,000 people were contacted via Lichfield e-news and 186 residential properties in close proximity to the park were written to, that this was not a representative return.

Task group were also made aware of the online petition to save Stychbrook Park which at the time of the meeting had 395 signatures.

Members also discussed comments made regarding the location of a new leisure centre suggesting that the BRS site should be considered. They felt that there should be more communications as to why that site is unsuitable and has been discounted to ensure residents had all the information that has been investigated.

It was asked for the full responses to be sent to the task group so that all qualitative information could be considered.

There was the question posed by the Cabinet Member as to whether appropriation should continue as the Levelling Up Fund (LUF) application had not been successful however the task group agreed to that project plan as presented should continue and funding was discussed in more detail later in the meeting.

Further discussion around the Stychbrook Park and site investigations took place and it was noted that extensive de-risking of the site had taken place including ecology assessments where no material concerns had been discovered. It was noted that there would be arboricultural matters to be dealt with at the pre-planning stage but it was noted some hedgerow would be lost for access to the site.

Transport assessments around the site area was discussed by the Task group and it was felt that the current study might not be extensive enough or representative of the true picture. Members felt it needed to take a more holistic approach and consider any impact of access down the whole of Eastern Avenue including tailbacks and problems with coaches trying to turn into the site without signals or similar. It was noted that funding for a new independent study could be requested from SCC Cllr community grants. It was asked if, as a developer, the council would be liable for S106 funding for highway matters and it was reported that it was predicted that major highway improvement works were unlikely to be needed as a result of this development.

Funding

The unsuccessful LUF application was discussed further and it was reported by the Cabinet Member that as a tier 3 authority, it was always unlikely that the council would have been awarded or awarded in future rounds. The Cabinet Member asked the task group for views as to whether to continue with the project as currently planned but wait until funding was secured or build what could be afforded now and try and build other facilities in the future when possible. It was also proposed that this modular approach may not have to be at the same site.

There was much discussion around these options, the task group were in agreement that a modular approach should not be pursued as the evidence and ANOG report showed the need for the agreed facility mix especially in the area approved due to deprivation. The Cabinet Member accepted these views however did not wish to have residents have to wait an indefinite amount of time for facilities whilst trying to get funding. The task group did express that the current plan was in place before there the LUF had been announced and therefore did not feel that a new leisure centre should be hinged on it.

The task group presented a third option of exploring more options for funding. It was felt that there could be other avenues to consider including lobbying MPs and talking to other authorities within the LGA family group to gain their lessons learned when obtaining funding. It was discussed whether development of the BRS site could help fund the leisure centre through capital receipts. It was noted however that, without effective communications, it would be difficult for residents to accept why BRS has been used to fund a facility instead of housing the leisure centre.

It was discussed whether a DBOM type build could be possible but it was noted that there wasn't much appetite for this from the leisure sector market post covid.

Another approach suggested was to investigate actually growing the facility mix and make the centre bigger than currently envisioned to see if that would attract investment.

General Project Update

The need for pitches was discussed and it was noted that other than a pool, this was what was deemed required and although not part of the original study, was part of the playing pitch strategy. It was also discussed whether these could be delivered elsewhere or at a different time however noted that planning in with the centre was the easiest way for mitigating the loss of a pitch at the site and ensuring that Sports England's requirements would be met when submitting a planning application.

It was felt that there needed to be coordination with the Lichfield City Masterplan to ensure there weren't conflicting priorities for the Council.

FGLC was discussed including the user figures however the task group felt it did not give a true picture as did not take into account the need for social distancing, reduced programmes and lack of active marketing. Gym use was considered and although noted that private facilities could provide the service for a lower price, it was only FGLC that provided a fully accessible service eg hand bikes. It was also noted that leisure centres like FGLC were just as much a means of much needed social interaction for some especially older residents than fitness.

It was reported that funding may not be secured without achieving outline planning permission but in contrast it was asked if there was point in proceeding with planning if there was no hope in building what was proposed due to affordability.

Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting would be scheduled in due course but will include input to the pre app and outline planning stages ensuring concerns covered and key consultees/others involved.

Outcomes

That the group be sent all comments received from the S122 consultation and themes of comments made.

That appropriation of the Stychbrook Park site continue as agreed with task group supporting a recommendation to Cabinet for this. That pre-app appropriation be added to the schedule.

That authorities in the LGA family group who have built similar centres be contacted to discuss funding advice.

That extensive research be undertaken regarding funding options.

That there be coordination with the Lichfield City Masterplan to ensure all opportunities and priorities are realised.

The outcomes as shown in the briefing paper are still considered active by the task group but dates may be subject to review.

Further Work Required/Next Steps:

Approval of appropriation of site.

Funding opportunities.

Site visit to another Local Authority built leisure centre