

New Leisure Centre Preferred Site

Cabinet Member for Major Projects & Economic Development

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Key Decision? YES

Local Ward Members
All Wards



**Leisure, Parks and
Waste Management
(Overview and
Scrutiny) Committee**

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 A review of suitably sized undeveloped sites in and around Lichfield City identified eight potential sites for the proposed new Lichfield Leisure Centre.
- 1.2 Of the eight sites, Stychbrook Park has been identified as the preferred site for the new leisure centre. Stychbrook Park has several merits as a site for a leisure centre whereas the other seven each present issues that would make the development of a leisure centre problematic.

2. Recommendations

That Committee

- 2.1 Note the contents of the report.
- 2.2 Support the recommendation that Stychbrook Park be identified as the preferred site for the new Lichfield Leisure Centre.
- 2.3 Acknowledge the work of the New Leisure Centre Overview and Scrutiny Task Group in developing the site appraisal and bringing forward the recommended preferred site.

3. Background

Background

- 3.1 Cabinet 7 October 2019 confirmed the Council's aspiration to invest in future leisure provision to address the limited lifespan of Friary Grange Leisure Centre. Feasibility work on a new leisure centre commenced shortly thereafter, assessing strategic and community need to inform the design development of the centre. In tandem with this, work was undertaken to assess potential sites for the new centre.

Potential Sites

- 3.2 The site search focused on Lichfield City for a number of reasons:
 - It is the district's strategic centre
 - Higher population density
 - Need to address the local loss of end-of-life facilities at Friary Grange
 - There is already established leisure centre provision in Burntwood

3.3 A high-level site review – initially looking for undeveloped sites in Council ownership of suitable size – identified eight potential sites:

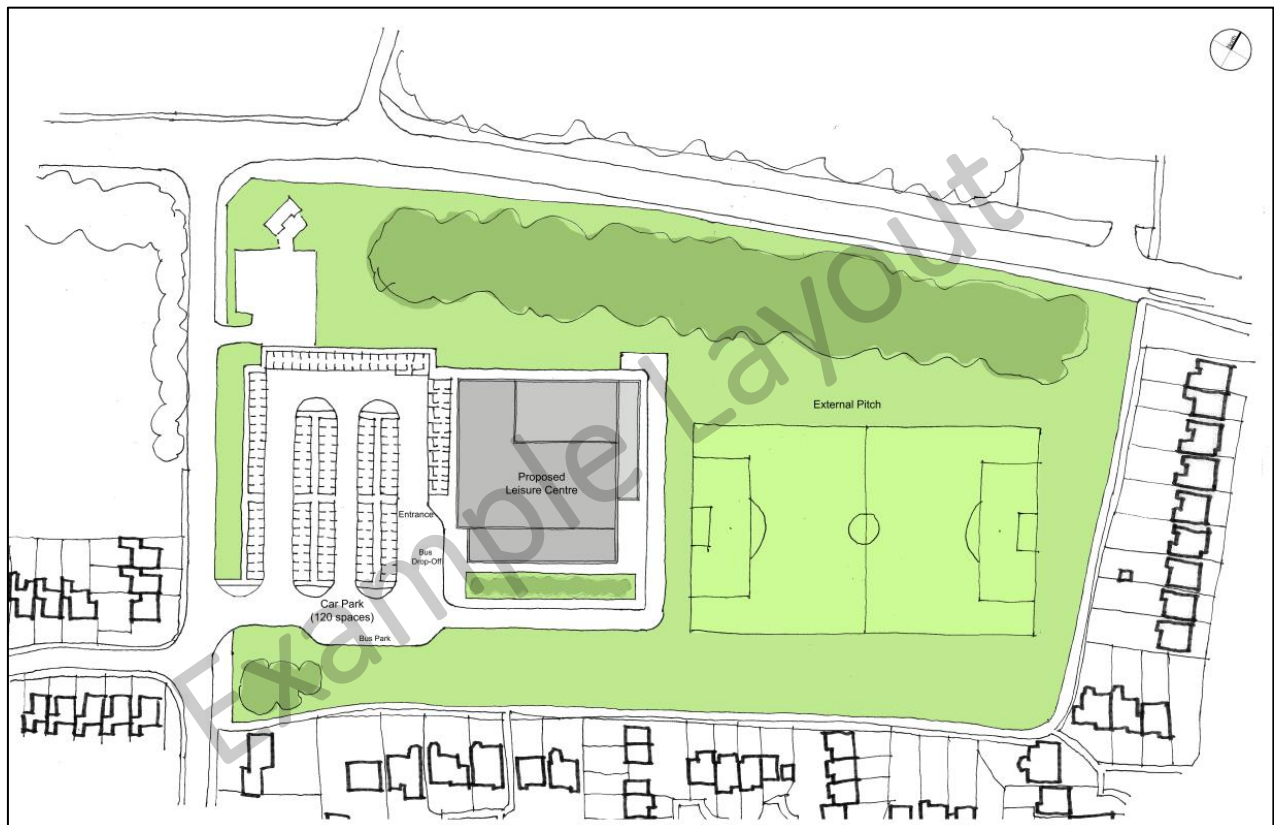
- Stychbrook Park
- Stowe Fields
- Shortbutts Park
- Saddlers Wood
- Leamonsley Park
- Birmingham Road Site
- Darnford Park
- Beacon Park

3.4 A desktop assessment of the sites was conducted, considering planning issues, physical site constraints and analysis of strategic fit. This identified **Stychbrook Park** as the clear preferred site.

Stychbrook Park

3.5 An illustration of an example layout of the new leisure centre on Stychbrook Park is presented as figure 1 below.

Figure 1 – Example Layout – Stychbrook Park



3.6 A number of factors make Stychbrook Park a suitable site for a leisure centre:

- 3.6..1 Close to the current Friary Grange Leisure Centre – will aid the transfer of usage from the old site to new and provide a continuity of provision for local neighbourhoods, some of the more deprived in the district – supporting work to reduce health inequalities.

- 3.6..2 A history of use as a sports / recreational site.
- 3.6..3 At 3.47 Hectares it is a large site – lessening the impact on surrounding housing. As can be seen from the above illustration, the majority of the public open space would remain.
- 3.6..4 The site will likely be able to accommodate whatever scale of facility mix the needs analysis recommends / capital funding can deliver – site shape and size should not be a limiting factor.
- 3.6..5 The new centre would have synergy with existing outdoor pitch provision gives the potential for a “sports campus” style offer.
- 3.6..6 Location adjacent to A5129 aids access.
- 3.6..7 Relatively good public transport links.
- 3.6..8 Ecological impacts assessed as lower than for other open-space options.
- 3.6..9 Public open space impact assessed as lower than for other open-space options.
- 3.6..10 Low risk of current or future opportunity costs – as public open space incorporating playing pitches, planning constraints make it extremely unlikely the site could ever be redeveloped for non-sports / non-recreational purposes.
- 3.6..11 The only site for which the analysis did not identify a significant strategic impediment or planning risk to the development of a leisure centre (please see section below).

3.7 The new leisure centre would take up an area of land currently used as a sports playing pitch, a protected land use. Sport England would be a statutory consultee to any planning application that included the development of a playing pitch and Sport England’s default policy is to oppose such development in all but exceptional circumstances. However the development of a leisure centre should be in accordance with the “net sporting gain” policy exemption (exemption E5). It may also be possible to reconfigure the site to allow the continued provision of the same number of pitches (exemption E4). Sport England have been involved in the development of the proposals to date and work has been undertaken in accordance with their recommended methodology.

Other sites

3.8 The desktop assessment and strategic analysis identified potential development issues for all sites; the issues for all but Stychbrook Park, presented serious impediments to development. The planning assessment of all sites is presented as Appendix 1. The key issues that presented particular planning risks and challenge for the development of a leisure centre are presented in the table below:

Table 1 – Key site issues

Site	Issue / concern
Stowe Fields	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flood risk zone 3 – unlikely to pass sequential flood risk test • Conservation area within the setting of Grade 1 listed building • leisure centre would take up most of open space
Shortbutts Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No vehicle access, • Restricted visibility • Tree loss • Loss of public open space
Saddlers Wood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scale – would lose more than half the non-wooded site • Tree loss • Adjacent woodland would create operational challenges

Leamonsley Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green Belt – not considered “very special circumstance”
Birmingham Road	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of deliverables from City Centre Masterplan – a leisure centre would likely take up the entire site • Conservation area • Adjacent heritage assets present design sensitivity • Constrained site will restrict facility – larger facilities (sports halls, pitches) would not fit • Car parking conflict with City Centre users (car parking is a concern at the current site)
Darnford Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No vehicle access • Significant trees loss, • Site layout (long & narrow) would push leisure centre development close to adjacent to housing.
Beacon Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green Belt – not considered “very special circumstance” • Historic flagship park

3.9 It should be stressed that the above factors do not make the development of a leisure centre impossible in these locations. However they do present significant impediments and would be particularly difficult to justify in planning policy terms while an alternate largely unencumbered site (Stychbrook Park) is available.

3.10 An initial appraisal of the Birmingham Road redevelopment proposals has been commissioned. The draft report presented as Appendix 2 (confidential) indicates that at this stage the majority of developments will not return positive land values. The report considers current land values, reflecting particularly difficult market conditions post-Covid and recommends a further review to assess future demand profile.

Next Steps

3.11 Subject to agreement of Stychbrook Park as the preferred site for development, further site surveys and feasibility will need to be undertaken to confirm suitability. Assuming these surveys do not indicate problems, officers would bring forward an application for outline planning permission, which would test suitability in local, strategic and policy terms and engage with the local community.

Alternative Options	<p>4.1 The other seven sites could be chosen in preference, however all have significant planning policy or feasibility problems.</p> <p>4.2 Further sites away from Lichfield City could be sought. Sites away from the City Centre would have operational disadvantages in terms of accessibility and commercial viability.</p>
Consultation	<p>Sport England, Max Associates, Leisure Centre Task Group agreed the preferred site 14.09.20</p>

Financial Implications	Feasibility and planning costs will be met from the existing capital allocation.
Contribution to the Delivery of the Strategic Plan	Sustainable leisure centre provision in support of active lifestyles contributes to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Enabling people – to live healthy and active lives. b. Developing prosperity – to enhance the district for visitors c. A good council that – is financially sound, transparent and accountable.
Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Implications	There are no equality, diversity and human right implications associated with the proposals.
Crime & Safety Issues	None at this time.
Environmental Impact	The proposed site is currently public open space. The environmental impact of any development will be explored in detail as part of subsequent site investigations and any planning application. Mitigation measures will be identified and agreed as appropriate.
GDPR/Privacy Impact Assessment	Not required.

	Risk Description	How We Manage It	Severity of Risk (RYG)
A	Geotechnical ground conditions make development unsuitable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geotechnical surveys to assess suitability • Mitigation / stabilisation works may be possible 	Likelihood: Yellow Impact: Red Severity of Risk: Red
B	Unable to secure planning consent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with planning officers to develop most acceptable proposals. • Work with Sport England to understand and mitigate impact on playing pitches 	Likelihood: Green Impact: Red Severity of Risk: Yellow

<h3>Background documents</h3> <p>Appendix 1- Planning Report</p> <p>Appendix 2 – BRS Appraisal (CONFIDENTIAL)</p> <p>Appendix 3 – New Leisure Centre Task Group notes</p>

<h3>Relevant web links</h3> <p>None</p>
