

Agenda Item 14.

TITLE	St Crispin's Leisure Centre Consultation
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on 29 June 2023
WARD	(All Wards);
LEAD OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure - Ian Shenton

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

Executive approval for a public consultation on the future use of St Crispin's Leisure Centre.

RECOMMENDATION

The recommendation must be clear and specific and state exactly what the decision is and must be directly supported / referable to the Background section. Format of recommendation is as follows.

That the Executive:

1. Approve a public consultation on the future of St Crispin's Leisure Centre, including an option of closing the leisure centre, and considering all potential options for the future use of the site. Note that a report will be brought back to Executive following the consultation recommending the next steps.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Executive approval is required for a public consultation to take place over the future use of St Crispin's Leisure Centre.

The leisure centre has seen a decline in numbers since re-opening post pandemic particularly in our over 60s demographic and the opening of Wokingham Leisure Centre has also had an impact on member use resulting in a request to review the use of the centre for the future including potential alternative uses as detailed below.

As part of the review a full public consultation is required to specifically seek views on the potential closure of the centre and the impact that could have on users and the wider community. It will also consider potential future uses of the site if the decision is made to repurpose the site.

A full and open consultation requires that potential options are considered, and the potential benefits and impacts set out for public consideration.

It is proposed that a consultation will take place from July until the end of August 2023 for a period of 8 weeks, both in person and face to face, through a series of planned dates through various communication channels. This will include engagement with current centre users and members as well as local residents and other stakeholders.

As part of the review, post consultation all considerations will be evaluated and reviewed for potential future proposals.

BACKGROUND

The council established its community vision in 2020 with the ambition for Wokingham Borough to be a great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business. Linked to this overarching vision, physical activity and sports play a fundamental role in supporting the physical and emotional well-being of the Borough's people and communities as is also explicitly recognised in the Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy.

There has been significant investment within indoor and outdoor Leisure provisions across the Borough totally £52.9M supporting residents' health and wellbeing and access to facilities.

Furthermore, the very significant health benefits of physical activity are universal, from the very young to the elderly - helping to raise achievement in schools, enabling self-care for those with long-term conditions and helping to prevent mental and physical illness.

The existing Sports and Leisure service is progressing through a remodelling review and that includes setting out some conditions of how the council will repurpose its service in the future to a more active well-being service – not just a focus on leisure centres but a more active well-being service cited in the community.

This requires a shift into community activity with a clear focus on health intervention and prevention. Resources will be redirected from built facilities into a future model that helps address more health inequalities across the borough.

Following the opening of the new Wokingham Leisure Centre and a review of usage post pandemic, it has been recognised that member numbers are decreasing.

It has been proposed that a full review is undertaken to determine the future of the centre, this will include considering potential alternative uses for the site and land to make the best financial and community use of this town centre asset.

As part of a review a public consultation is proposed to take place, this will specifically seek views on the potential closure of the centre and the impact that could have on users and the wider community with an objective to how to mitigate potential impacts on specific groups and users.

Key stakeholders:

- St Crispin's Leisure Centre members.
- Clubs and other organisations who have regular bookings.
- Astro turf pitch users.
- Squash league / club members.

- St Crispin's School (shared user of site and access)
- Residents and businesses in close proximity to the centre.
- Wescott and Westende schools (after school and breakfast clubs).
- SHINE members using St Crispin's Leisure Centre.
- Wokingham town residents (Norreys, Wescott, Emmbrook and Evendons wards).
- Other stakeholders as identified through the consultation and Equalities Impact Assessment.

Future options for the use of the centre and mitigations will be shared as part of the consultation, informing future proposed decisions.

BUSINESS CASE

A review has taken place looking at usage numbers pre and post pandemic, as shown below there has been a decrease in all areas of use within the centre. It is also recognised that with the opening of Wokingham Leisure Centre we have seen members relocate to the new centre.

Activity	Feb 20	Feb 23
Fitness Members	1,260	967
Exercise Classes	850	785
Junior Exercises	46	43

OPTIONS

Officers have undertaken a high-level options appraisal for the site. A summary of this review is below.

Option	Opportunity	Constraints
Retain site for the use of the Leisure Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Retains leisure facilities for local residents. * WBC manages and maintains external envelope. Currently in good condition and expected to last for next 20yrs. * Would allow use of leisure centre as polling station to continue. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Use of facilities have declined since Covid and the opening of Carnival Leisure Centre. *St Crispin's School has raised safety concerns over the shared vehicle access. *St Crispin's School has raised safeguarding concerns over shared use of public parking and facilities located within the school grounds.
Closure and transfer land to St Crispin's School (The Circle Trust)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Transfer of land would enable the school to increase pupil yearly intake and would support the provision of much needed additional secondary school places in the Borough. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Loss of WBC asset with potential for other use or capital receipt. *Loss of leisure facility for local residents.

	<p>*Provides additional car parking for the school.</p> <p>*Protects the school's green space, including playing fields (as to expand would require development on existing playing fields).</p> <p>*Additional accommodation - particularly changing rooms and smaller activity rooms</p> <p>*Secure environment for students.</p> <p>*New sports hall budget would not be required.</p> <p>*WBC's liability for the building will end when it is transferred to The Circle Trust.</p> <p>*Transfer would support provision of needed additional school places in the borough.</p> <p>* Would allow use of leisure centre as polling station to continue.</p>	<p>*Closure of the Leisure Centre would result in there being no publicly owned squash courts in the Borough.</p> <p>*Planning application required - special justification will need to be demonstrated for the loss of the community facility.</p>
Use for other service	<p>* Potential for use to provide SEND Resource Unit.</p> <p>*Potential to be used as a Community Hub space.</p> <p>*Potential for use by another service not identified.</p> <p>* Would allow use of leisure centre as polling station to continue.</p>	<p>*Site size not appropriate for Care Home.</p> <p>*St Crispin's School has existing right of use of facilities.</p> <p>*Planning application - change of use required.</p> <p>*Existing safety and safeguarding concerns over the shared use of the site and the shared vehicular access would continue.</p>
Disposal of site with or without planning for residential development	<p>* Potential for small development.</p> <p>*Site in good location, close to local amenities, schools and transport links.</p> <p>*Potential for Keyworker Housing.</p>	<p>*Existing safety concerns and safeguarding concerns over the shared use of the site and the shared vehicular access would continue.</p> <p>* Formation of new access from London Road may prove difficult for highway safety reasons and impact on veteran trees.</p>

		<p>*St Crispin's School has existing right of use of facilities for sports and examinations.</p> <p>* Planning application required - special justification will need to be demonstrated for the loss of the community facility.</p> <p>*Site would need to be promoted in LPU.</p> <p>*Capital budget required for planning application.</p> <p>* Current use of leisure centre as polling station would not be able to continue.</p>
Demolish the buildings and mothball site until land values increase and/or a service need identified	*Site retained by WBC for future use or disposal for capital receipt.	<p>*St Crispin's School has existing right of use of facilities for sports and exams.</p> <p>* Initial capital outlay would be required for demolition and long-term security costs while the site is vacant.</p> <p>* Current use of leisure centre as polling station would not be able to continue</p>

Should the centre not be retained as a leisure facility there are alternative provisions for residents within the Borough and neighbouring authorities;

- Wokingham Leisure Centre @Carnival Hub which is in close proximity offering all leisure provisions.
- Wellington Health and Fitness Club – Leisure and squash provisions.
- Berkshire County Sports Club - Offering squash provision.
- Bracknell Leisure Centre – Leisure and squash provisions.
- University of Reading Squash Club - Squash provision.

TIMESCALES

If the recommendation to launch a public consultation is approved, it is proposed to carry out an 8-week consultation to run until August 23.

This would allow the consultation to run partly during the school holiday and partly in term-time, which would be beneficial as leisure centre usage varies between school holiday and non-school holiday periods and so, by covering both, a wider range of users will access the facility during the consultation.

This consultation would be widely publicised and accessible, shared across all social media platforms, promoted in the councils email newsletters and the local media. Drop-in events will be held at the leisure centre to provide opportunities to discuss options with council staff.

Potentially affected groups will be engaged directly during the consultation to ensure specific issues can be raised and fully considered.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	Nil		
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Nil		
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	nil		

Other Financial Information

None at this stage.

Legal Implications arising from the Recommendation(s)

Potential and contractual and change of use implications.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

Full public consultation with all key stakeholders over a 8 week period online/face to face and targeted user group sessions.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Yes

Climate Emergency – This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030

Not applicable at this stage (consultation).

Reasons for considering the report in Closed Session

Not applicable

List of Background Papers

Contact Susan Bentley/Peter Kilkenny

Telephone 07590993510

Service Resource and Assets

Email susan.bentley@wokingham.gov.uk
Peter.kilkenny@wokingham.gov.uk

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