

# Scrutiny committee report



Report of Interim Head of Waste, Leisure and Environmental Health

Author: Ben Border

Telephone: 01235 422203

Textphone users add 18001 before you dial

E-mail: [ben.border@southandvale.gov.uk](mailto:ben.border@southandvale.gov.uk)

Cabinet members responsible: Charlotte Dickson (Leisure)

Tel: 01235 767848

E-mail: [charlotte@leahouse.com](mailto:charlotte@leahouse.com)

To: Scrutiny Committee

DATE: 26 October 2017

## New Leisure Centre for Wantage and Grove area

### Recommendation

The committee is invited to:

- make observations on the public consultation summary report and its findings
- comment upon the proposed facility mix for the new leisure centre for Wantage and Grove area

### Purpose of Report

1. To report to Scrutiny Committee the results of the recent public consultation on proposals for a new leisure centre for the Wantage and Grove area. The draft public consultation summary report is included in this paper as appendix A<sup>1</sup>. The report contains a summary of the online survey results, comments and the feedback received during the consultation with stakeholders including Town and Parishes, Swim England and other National Governing Bodies on the proposals for the new leisure centre.
2. The online survey results will be considered in the next stage of the project (RIBA work stage 3 – detailed design) and it will be determined, if required, whether they

---

<sup>1</sup> The online survey closed at midnight on Wednesday 4 October. The full report is currently being finalised and will follow shortly.

can be incorporated into the design when considering the practical and financial limitations of the overall project.

3. Additionally, the report sets out the proposed facility mix for the new leisure centre to be authorised by the cabinet member with responsibilities for leisure via an Individual Cabinet Member Decision.

## **Strategic Objectives**

4. The delivery of a new leisure centre for the Wantage and Grove area supports the Council's Corporate Plan (2016-2020) of sustainable communities and wellbeing. By building a new leisure centre at Grove we will increase participation in sport and leisure.

## **Background**

5. The draft leisure and sports facility strategy (2012-2029) completed in 2012, identified the future leisure provision in the Wantage and Grove area as its highest priority. This provision took into account the identified strategic housing sites within the locality; Monks Farm, Crab Hill and the former Airfield site, west of Grove.
6. The 2012-2016 corporate plan, 'Vision for the Vale', identified as one of its priorities that officers "review the potential for building a new leisure centre in the Wantage and Grove area as Wantage expands". Therefore, officers appointed leisure consultant, Nortoft, to carry out an initial feasibility study. Nortoft had already produced the draft leisure and sports facility strategy for the Vale of White Horse District Council and was familiar with the issues in the district, and Wantage and Grove in particular. The draft feasibility study concluded that the following four options were available to provide a long-term solution for leisure provision within the area:
  - refurbishment and extension of the existing leisure centre to include a learner pool
  - rebuilding the leisure centre adjacent to the existing location within the King Alfred's Academy site
  - building a new leisure centre within the Grove Airfield development
  - building a new leisure centre on the council-owned site in Mably Way.

## **Preferred option**

7. Preference was expressed by cabinet members for investigating the Mably Way site, although they did not want to dismiss any option at that early stage. Officers considered the risks and issues associated with each of the alternative options proposed and recommended to cabinet members that detailed feasibility work should be carried out on the preferred option of constructing a new leisure centre on the Mably Way site.
  8. To align with the emerging local plan The Vale of White Horse 'Leisure and Sports Facilities Study' was further updated in 2014 up until 2031. This provided further evidence of both the existing and future needs and deficiencies for facilities for the Wantage and Grove area.
-

9. This report reiterated that the existing leisure centre at Portway, Wantage is already operating at full capacity and will be unable to meet any additional demand that new homes in the area will bring. To address the number of homes expected to be built in the area by 2031 the council identified the importance of delivering key infrastructure to meet the growing demand.
10. The study identified core facilities required to satisfy the identified facility needs within a ten mile radius of the Wantage and Grove area, both now and in the future (up to 2031) and to meet the indoor and outdoor (artificial grass pitch) provision.
11. The council commissioned The Sports Consultancy (TSC) in 2015 to complete an options appraisal and business case. TSC tested the impact of the core facility mix identified through the 'Leisure and Sports Facilities Studies' and reviewed this mix by adding and removing facilities. This included as one of the options to retain the existing leisure centre. The report considered capital costs, revenue and affordability implications, as well as non-financial implications (e.g. meeting local need).
12. An overall approved capital growth bid of £18.803million was allocated to support the delivery of the new leisure facility at the Vale-owned Mably Way property in Grove.
13. During the previous two stages of the project the design team (Saunders Boston architects) have consulted with a variety of council internal departments to determine the requirements for the new leisure facility and to start informing the design. These included leisure, planning, sustainability and equalities<sup>2</sup>.
14. Consultation with external organisations such as GLL (existing leisure management operator) and national governing bodies (Sport England, Swim England and Berks & Bucks FA) has also taken place. This has further developed the brief for the proposed facility mix for the leisure centre and the resulting conceptual design, illustrated by site and floor plans that were used during the consultation.

## **Public engagement and consultation**

15. During September and October 2017 there have been two phases of consultation on the proposals for a new leisure centre for the Wantage and Grove area.

### **Phase one – 1-2-1 stakeholder sessions**

16. The council sought the views of key stakeholders with an interest in the existing leisure centre at Portway, Wantage and the proposed new leisure centre at Mably Way, Grove during September and October 2017. This involved 1-2-1 meetings with representatives from various groups that had connections to the project, as well as informal workshops with local community groups to exhibit the proposal and raise awareness of the public online survey. A full list of the invited stakeholders and groups engaged during this process is included as an appendices in the public consultation summary report.
17. Discussions with these stakeholders demonstrated there was an overall enthusiasm for improving the leisure provision in the area. The stakeholders

---

<sup>2</sup> Equalities to consider inclusive design in order to meet the needs of all users

considered that the proposals would enhance the leisure provision in the area and provide a popular attraction for local residents and visitors.

18. Discussion about the size of individual activity areas, layout of the site, floor plans and the access to the Mably Way property created some diverse opinion as to how these should be provided. Feedback will be considered, along with the online survey results, to determine if there need for these to be incorporated into the design when also considering the practical and financial limitations of the overall project.

### **Engagement with Young People**

19. The council's young person's officer along with the leisure team undertook further engagement with young people. Officers consulted with over 100 young people from Sweatbox (youth club), Fitzwaryn School and students from King Alfred's Academy in Wantage. A summary of the findings from these sessions is included as an appendix in the public consultation summary report.

### **Phase Two – Public online survey**

20. A public drop in event took place at Wantage leisure centre (Portway, Wantage) on Thursday 7 September between 08.00 and 20.00 to launch the online survey and to allow the public to meet the design team and council officers to discuss the proposals being put forward. A second event was held on Thursday 21 September between 15.00 and 20.00, at The Old Mill, Grove to provide a further opportunity for the public to see and discuss the plans with the project team.

21. Officers held an open public session on Monday 18 September from 18.30 to 20.30, to coincide with the regular disabled swimmers, to capture feedback on the current facilities and those being proposed at Mably Way.

22. 624 people responded to the online survey which ran from 7 September to 4 October 2017.

### **Communication strategy**

23. The council promoted both the online survey and public drop in events using a wide variety of methods, including:

- public drop in events at Wantage leisure centre and The Old Mill, Grove
- e-shot to all existing GLL members of Wantage Leisure Centre (1,400 members on their database)
- email Invite to Vale Disability Access Group for the Inclusion session and link for online survey
- email online survey link to the Vale's Corporate Consultation mailing list (800 signed up to receive surveys)
- social media

Facebook advertising – public drop in event reached over 5,600 people; drop in session reminder reached 5,200; and consultation open reach 5,500

---

Twitter – 15 tweets before and during the consultation achieving over 23,000 impressions (appeared on people’s time line)

- press releases leading to articles in local media (Herald series newspaper and Oxford mail)
- local radio (Jack FM) announcements
- leaflets and posters delivered for display in key public areas and local businesses in both the town centre and village shops throughout Wantage and Grove
- dedicated webpage for the project
- posted letters to over 200 homes adjacent to Mably Way to inform about the drop in events and online survey.

### Headline summary of online survey results

24. 84 per cent of respondents expressed agreement in principle with the proposal to build a new leisure centre. Only seven per cent disagreed with the development (Figure 1).

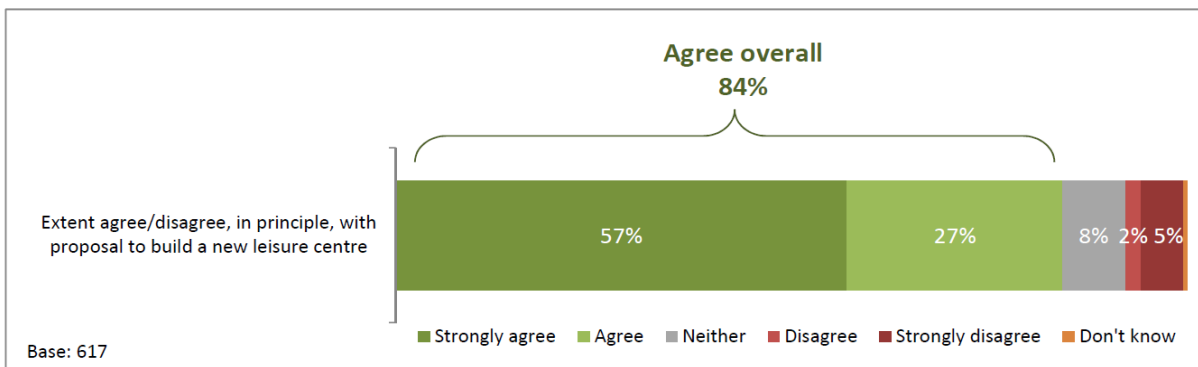


Figure 1

25. 70 per cent of respondents agreed with the location of Mably Way, Grove for the proposed location of the new leisure centre. 17 per cent didn’t have a strong preference and 12 per cent disagreed (figure 2).

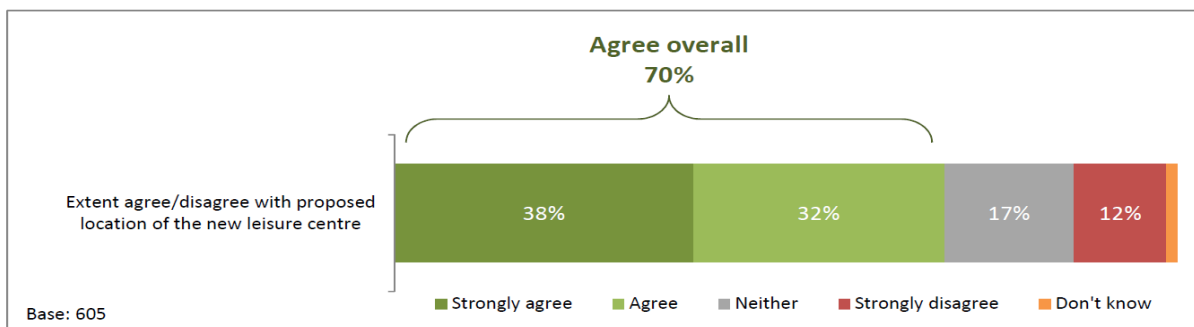


Figure 2

26. The consultation also asked respondents which facilities they would use and which of those facilities would benefit the community most. Figure 3 illustrates the results to this question. Of the people surveyed the main pool was the highest ranked facility at 70 per cent indicating that they would personally use at the new facility. The highest ranked facilities that would benefit the community included the learner pool (76 per cent), artificial grass pitch and sports hall (both 69 per cent).

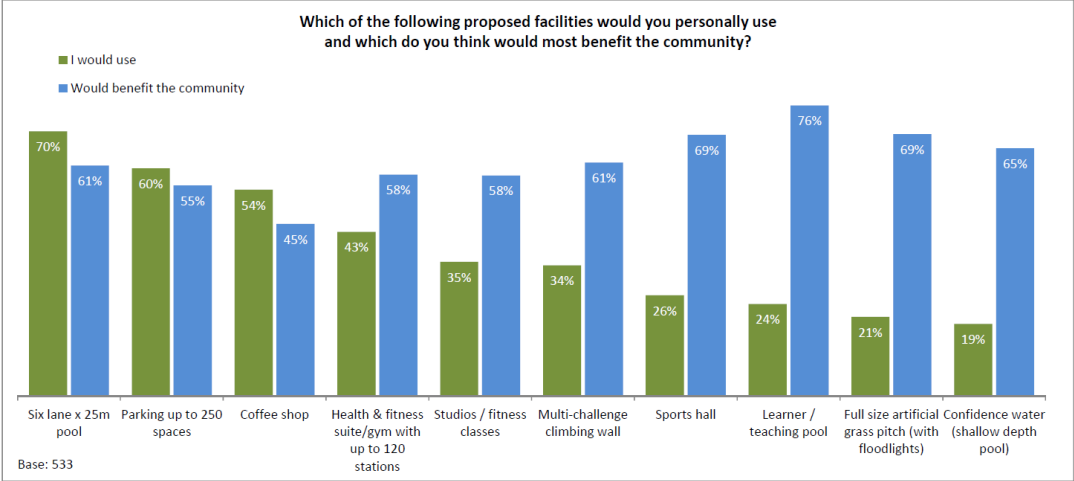


Figure 3

27. 53 per cent of respondents agreed with the concept design of the new leisure centre. 29 per cent didn't show a strong preference and 16 per cent disagreed (figure 4).

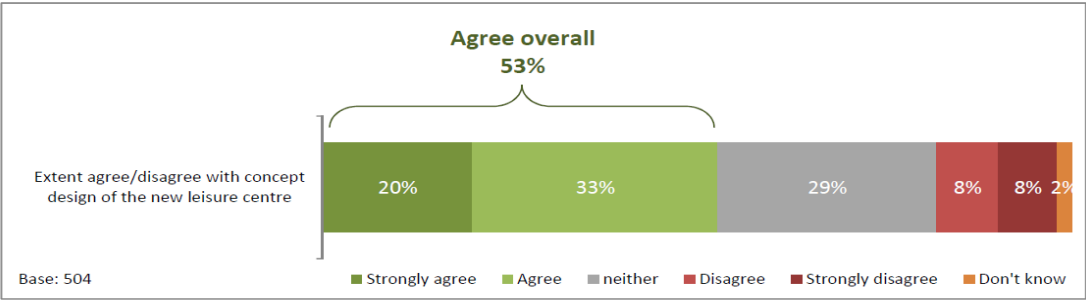


Figure 4

28. 68 per cent of respondents agreed with the proposed funding for the new leisure centre. 19 per cent didn't show a strong preference and 11 per cent disagreed (figure 5).

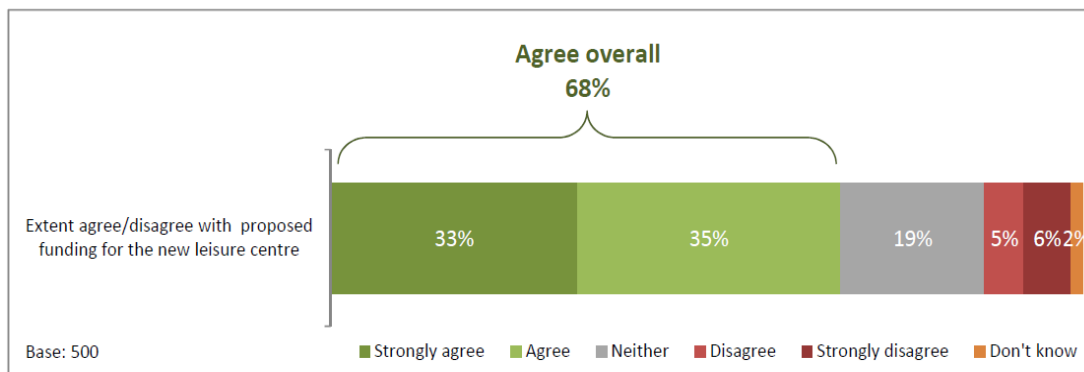


Figure 5

## Key Findings

29. The respondents expressed an array of views in the free comments box provided. These ranged from additional facilities that should be provided to how the monies could be spent on other infrastructure for the area.

### Swimming Pool provision

30. A number of respondents raised their concerns at the proposed main pool being a 25 metre six lane community pool. Respondents would like to see the new facility deliver either a 50 metre pool or a 25 metre eight lane competition pool.

31. Following work on the leisure and sport strategies completed in 2014 officers engaged with Swim England (formally known as the Amateur Swimming Association) to discuss projects in the pipeline and discuss a facility strategy moving forward in both districts.

32. These discussions concluded that the South East Region, in which both authorities are located, the 50 metre pool provision is already established and that the Vale of White Horse falls within the orbit of Wycombe leisure centre.

33. The council already provides a county competition pool at the White Horse Tennis and Leisure Centre with a 25 metre eight lane pool. The council intend to establish this facility as the competition hub for swimming in both districts. Swim England are supportive of this strategy and agree with the new leisure centre at Wantage and Grove being a community pool, which can be used by clubs for training.

34. Swim England would welcome the addition of a moveable floor as this will increase and extend the swimming programme at the new facility and offer a more varied programme for all users. Officers would recommend the movable floor for incorporation into the design when considering the practical and financial limitations of the overall project.

### Mably Way Health Centre

35. 58 separate respondents commented on issues relating to the expansion of the Mably Way health centre and didn't want the new leisure centre stopping the health centre being able to expand in the future to meet the growth in the area.

36. The press reported on Wednesday 6 September that the health centre practices had previously defeated plans to build a care home on part of the site to protect their own expansion. The proposed leisure centre is on Vale-owned land and doesn't encroach on the land earmarked by the health centre for further expansion. An agreed joint statement should be considered with the two practices to this effect.

### **Existing leisure centre destination/usage for community**

37. The future of the existing Wantage leisure centre was raised by a number of consultees and those responding to the online survey. People were keen to understand how it would be managed in the future and if the community could continue to access this facility following the opening of the new leisure centre at Mably Way.

38. The council has over 80 years remaining on the lease of which it is joint tenant with Oxfordshire County Council (OCC). The landlord is the Educational Trust of King Alfred's School, Wantage. There is a Joint User Agreement between the Vale Council, OCC and King Alfred's Academy (part of the Vale Academy Trust).

39. The new leisure centre's core facilities required to satisfy the identified facility needs within the Wantage and Grove area, both now and in the future (up to 2031) are based on retaining continued community use of the existing dry facilities at Portway, Wantage.

40. The Vale of White Horse 'Leisure and Sports Facilities Study' evidences that based on the current proposed housing growth in Vale there is insufficient demand to justify retaining community use of the existing pool.

41. Work is continuing to investigate options for the existing leisure centres future uses and identifying the best value outcome for the council and its partners. In concluding the options, and with Cabinets agreement, it is anticipated that there will be additional cost to Vale Council and will be subject to a separate growth bid.

### **Outside Vale's and project scope**

42. There were a number of concerns raised by respondents that do not fall under the responsibilities for the council. These included the condition of the existing roads and pathway within and around the Wantage and Grove area, loss of bus services to and from the surrounding villages and provision for other infrastructure.

### **Reporting of public consultation findings**

43. The final public consultation summary report will be made available on the webpage for the project. This will provide comments and conclusions following the analysis of the survey. The report will also provide details on the projects next steps and how interested residents can remain updated with the project's development and key milestones.

### **Proposed Final Facility Mix**

44. Officers will recommend that the following core facility mix is taken forward for the detailed design stage of the project and that the design team further consider the additional facilities listed and investigate the enhancements that resulted from the

---



public consultation process and those developed in the early stages of the project, all within the constraints of the existing capital budget allocated for the project.

#### Core offering

Main pool – 25 metre six lane community pool
Learner pool
Sports Hall (equivalent to four badminton courts)
Health and Fitness provision
Studio Spaces (multi use areas)
Artificial Grass Pitch provision

#### Design team to consider further in Stage 3 (Detailed design)

Moveable floor in the learner pool
Multi climbing wall experience
Confidence water
Coffee shop

### **Financial Implications**

45. The Capital budget allocated to the new leisure centre project is £18.803 million. The plans presented during the public consultation are conceptual designs based on the council's requirements to the existing and future leisure needs for the area.
46. Not all the facility enhancements being sought by the respondents are achievable within the existing property location and the budget allocated for the project. As such the design team and officers will carefully consider these during the next design stage for the project.
47. Officers are required to bring the project within the allocated budget. If necessary, if it is agreed that enhancements that were identified outside the original project brief should be included, then officers will bring forward a growth bid to meet additional costs associated with these enhancements and those being considered in the sustainability strategy for the leisure centre on an invest to save basis.
48. Any future costs associated with the existing leisure centre will be subject to a separate growth bid following the work to determine best value for its future uses.

### **Legal Implications**

49. There are no legal implications arising from this report.
-

## **Risk management**

50. It will be important to manage expectations of the residents of Wantage, Grove and the surrounding area. The site and budget constraints will limit the enhancements that have been sought through the public consultation.

## **Project next steps**

51. The project team will be moving to the next RIBA work stage, Detailed Design, which include the outline specifications, structural design, building services systems. Activity for this stage also include applying for planning permission, appointment of the main contractor for the construction and the eventual leisure management operator of the new leisure centre.

## **Conclusion**

52. The public consultation has endorsed the view that the proposed facility mix would be a welcome addition to the leisure provision for the area.

53. Officers would welcome Scrutiny Committees views on the proposed final facility mix to be taken forward to the detailed design stage within the allocated budget and further enhancements identified following the consultation process to be considered by the design team.

## **Background Papers**

- Vale of White Horse Sport and Leisure Facilities Strategy (2014)