

Scrutiny Committee



Report of Head of Community Services

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To: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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Abbey Meadow Progress Review

Purpose of Report

1. To bring to scrutiny committee a review of progress of the Abbey Meadow improvement projects

Background

2. Capital growth bids totalling £570,000 were approved in 2015/16 financial year to support improvements to Abbey Meadow as a strategically important riverside site that, with some investment, could become significantly more attractive and improve Abingdon's offer as a visitor destination.
 3. In 2015, a public consultation process was undertaken with regards to Abbey Meadow and the improvements the public wished to see. There were two phases of the consultation. Phase one was an informal discussion with key stakeholders to generate initial objectives/scenarios for the site that took into consideration practical and financial constraints. Phase two was a district-wide public consultation to identify which of the three scenarios discussed by the stakeholder groups was the most popular.
 4. The three scenarios that were consulted on were:
 - scenario A – a place to swim and play
 - scenario B – a place to relax and unwind
 - scenario C – a flexible outdoor space.
 5. Scrutiny committee were consulted on the proposed consultation and suggested that prior to the consultation on the scenarios the Cabinet Member for leisure gives consideration to:
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1. undertaking a pilot consultation to identify whether the consultation scenarios offered form an acceptable consultation method
 2. using clear wording to describe the consultation options
 3. asking the Scrutiny Committee members to comment on the draft consultation wording
 4. advertising the consultation locally
 5. offering consultees a range of schemes in a matrix system using points or costs for each item
 6. asking Abingdon Town Council to include an article on the project consultation in its next edition of the Town Cryer
 7. using councillors to assist with the public consultation at the community shop
 8. setting up a Facebook page as part of the consultation
 9. consulting the Police, specifically the Police Community Support Officers who patrol the Abbey Meadows
6. Those were the Scrutiny committee recommendations which I understand were implemented. I refer to Appendix A which is a table compiled at the time indicating how officers responded.
 7. An overwhelming 81% of the public who responded to the consultation voted for scenario A 'a place to swim and play'.
 8. The outcome of the public consultation was presented at the cabinet meeting in July 2015. Members supported the top ten highest ranked schemes (attached appendix B). At this meeting it was acknowledged that some of the larger projects would need budget approval and were more likely to be carried out in the post 2016 summer season. Cabinet asked officers to appoint a project consultant (Frankham Consultancy) to assess the viability of the 'swim and play' vision and prepare a project plan by October 2015 setting out timescales and costs of additional facilities and improvements identified in the report.
 9. A project board was set up. This comprised of officers, the cabinet members for both leisure and parks and an Abingdon ward member. A project brief was agreed that outlined the Vale Council's requirements for appointing a project consultant guided by the outcomes of the public consultation (extract from 'Request for Proposal' attached Appendix C). The brief included the Vale Council's desire to extend the seasonal use of Abbey Meadow and asked the consultant to consider different options to achieve this.
 10. Officers and consultants developed a feasibility study and an options appraisal to create a vision for Abbey Meadow based on the consultation results. They presented a number of options for cabinet members to consider.
 11. Following feedback on the proposed options a decision to proceed on a final scheme was taken by the Cabinet Member for Leisure and this was published via an ICMD on 11 April 2016.
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12. The final scheme comprised retaining the existing outdoor pool, including a new public toilet facility and delivering seven of the top ten improvements identified in the consultation:
- a) new picnic tables and seating
 - b) refurbished changing rooms
 - c) adventure play equipment for over 10s
 - d) enhanced splash pad – changing provision
 - e) improvements to under 10s play area
 - f) electrical supply for a mobile ice rink
 - g) multi-use games area

Abbey Meadow Swimming Pool Refurbishment

13. At the time of the consultation a campaign was launched by the Friends of Abbey Meadows Swimming Pool to 'save' the outdoor pool. No decision had been taken at this time, as the matter was still in consultation.
14. At the Council meeting held on 20 May 2015, a petition was presented to save the pool, referring to the pool as a vital outdoor amenity for Abingdon and the surrounding area. The Leader of the council responded that: there was no intention to close the facility; that initial responses to the public consultation on the future of the Abbey Meadow indicated over 80 per cent of respondents were in favour of retaining the outdoor pool; and that £500,000 of funding had been identified to invest in the future of the Abbey Meadow area. Council agreed to refer the petition to Cabinet to consider as part of its deliberation on the future of Abbey Meadow.
15. In Summer of 2016 part of the wall finish to the swimming pool came away and required repair. Whilst the structure of the swimming pool was not compromised it was identified as a risk that due to the age of the facility, maintenance issues would become progressively worse and more frequent, the extent of which was unclear without costly and technical investigation.
16. It was at that stage that Cabinet discussed the refurbishment of the existing swimming pool in addition to the changing rooms. Vincent Stokes were appointed to carry out investigative works and to identify the likely costs of any development works. The results of the investigations led to a proposal for the existing two pools being made in to a single deck level pool with a 'beach area' and to replace all plant and machinery and refurbish the changing accommodation. This would also make the pool safer and more family friendly whilst improving accessibility into the pool and changing rooms. Vincent Stokes and the leisure team estimated the cost of these works at £1.3 million including all project fees.
17. Following on from the investigative works and proposed solution the Cabinet member asked to bring the scheme forward as a growth bid for consideration by Cabinet at its 1 February 2017 committee. At its full council meeting on 16 February 2017 a budget of £1.3 million was approved to deliver the Abbey Meadow Outdoor swimming pool project in its entirety including its plant and changing rooms, building costs and all fees.
18. In March 2017 Martin Arnold Ltd were appointed as project managers for the swimming pool project at a maximum cost of £55,000.
19. During the early design stages Officers consulted representatives of Friends of Abingdon Outdoor Pool on the specification for the new outdoor pool and took into
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consideration specific request for pool depths and lane markings to aid lane swimming. Representatives from the Friends were given opportunities to review the specification for the pool and the changing rooms at Abbey House offices under confidentiality documentation as there were issues around tender timings which had to be taken into consideration.

20. The project was competitively tendered and Vincent Stokes Ltd were awarded the contract to undertake the work at a tender price of £1,167,055 at the August 2017 Cabinet meeting and started on site in September 2017. The works were completed on time and within budget with the new pool opened to the public on 16 June 2018 as planned for the 2018 summer season.
21. The Council and Vincent Stokes are still in contract and are in their final contract period.

Abbey Meadow Toilets

22. The consultation identified as a priority the need to improve the public toilet provision in the park. Frankham Consultants were appointed to design and manage this element of the project and plans were developed for a new build toilet facility to replace the existing toilet block and planning permission secured.
 23. The new build proposals were competitively tendered twice with nil returns on the first tender process. All compliant tenders were considerably over the available budget the second time of asking. The decision was made not to award the contract due to cost constraints and to revisit the scheme to identify whether an alternative solution could be delivered within the available budget. This significantly delayed progress with this element of the scheme.
 24. At its meeting on 11 October 2017 Council received a petition regarding the public toilets at Abbey Meadows, Abingdon. The petition called for “excellent, accessible loos at Abbey Meadows”. The Council considered the petition at its meeting on 13 December 2017 and agreed to refer it to Cabinet for consideration.
 25. In response to the petition and the public participation the Leader of the Council reported that Cabinet had taken on board some of the suggestions raised and had amended the design accordingly. The toilets in Abbey Meadow would be accessible, have wider doors, and provide two accessible cubicles. Officers were asked to share the amended design details with the speakers. However, the provision of a changing places toilet had proved to be beyond the budget available. The council would explore opportunities with other parties for a changing places toilet elsewhere in Abingdon.
 26. Officers met with the speakers to discuss the amended designs. Following these discussions a review by officers and in consultation with the Abbey Meadow Project Board it was decided that a refurbishment option would be feasible and in line with the original brief. It was agreed that Officers should explore the potential to include a Space to Change facility that includes a wheelchair accessible toilet, a height adjustable adult-sized changing bench and hoist. A Space to Change facility includes the same equipment as a Changing Places toilet but is a smaller space. This approach was agreed providing the required designs remained within the footprint of the existing structure and within the available budget.
 27. This option was developed further by Frankham Consultants and officers and the final scheme layout is attached at appendix D. The designs provide a number of
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improvements to the facilities currently provided to the public, including five unisex public toilets, a men's washroom comprising of urinals and an accessible toilet which meets the requirements of a Space to Change facility.

28. The project was competitively tendered and Oxford Direct Services Ltd were awarded the contract in May 2018 to undertake the work at a tender price of £204,904. To minimise disruption, it was agreed that the works should start in late September 2018 to avoid the busy summer months. Temporary toilets will also be installed during the refurbishment period.

Play Area

29. This element of the scheme included improvements and an extension to the existing play area. The suggested improvements to the existing offering at Abbey Meadow from the public consultation included: adventure play equipment for over 10s; improvements to under 10s play area and a multi-use games area and consistent with the final scheme that was agreed.

30. Consistent with the Councils contract procurement rule 72 (e) approval was received from head of service to use the ESPO framework (115) for outdoor playground equipment. This framework has been previously used by our parks team to acquire new play equipment for the improvements at both Wantage and Faringdon play parks.

31. A brief was agreed and included a number of different best practice principles, feedback collated from the consultation process and Play England guidance. The specification was for a design tender and looked for the suppliers to provide a concept plan and costings based on the available budget of £285,000 (including contingency of £10,000). The evaluation criteria were based on the design elements of the tender and not price as approved by the Head of Service under the contract procurement rule 101.

32. During the evaluation three tenders were presented to the public and a number of consultees/stakeholders invited to view the design and speak with officers.

33. Eibe play Ltd were awarded the contract to design, supply, install and project management the expansion of the play equipment and community area in Abbey Meadow a decision taken by an ICMD 16 September 2016.

34. The final contract sum was increased to £322,840 to include more equipment aimed at the over 10 users and to meet costs due to unforeseen ground conditions.

35. The playpark was completed and opened to the public in May 2017. The project delivered other elements of the overall vision with the inclusion of additional picnic benches and increased cycle parking facilities.

36. The Council and Eibe are still in contract and are in the final contract period.

Financial Implications

37. Capital growth bids totalling £570,000 were allocated in the 2015/16 financial year to support the improvement works at Abbey Meadow, including refurbishment of the public toilets. Officers established that further funding was available for the project. This included a section 106 contribution of £45,446 to spend on play, an energy contribution of £13,913 as part of the invest to save initiative and a further virement of £15,000 from

existing budgets. Therefore, the overall budget for this element of the project is £644,359 which includes professional fees, surveys and preliminaries.

38. Costs to date committed under the Abbey Meadow improvement project budget including the play area and toilets together with all professional fees, surveys and preliminaries is £614,744. This will leave £29,615 remaining in the overall budget to deliver the splash pad accessible ramp and fence works.
39. At its full council meeting in February 2017 a budget of £1.3 million was approved to deliver the Abbey Meadow Outdoor swimming pool project in its entirety. This included plant and changing rooms, building costs and all fees.
40. The final costs for the outdoor pool including all professional fees, surveys and preliminaries is within budget at £1,292,983.

Conclusion

41. Positive progress has been made in the past twelve months with the successful refurbishment to the outdoor swimming pool facility completed and opening on time within budget. This follows the installation of the new playpark which was opened in 2017. The play park has not only improved the play provision, but has extended the age group interest and has also greatly improved access for disabled children.
42. With a solution for the improvements to the toilets agreed and planned for later this year, officers are confident that the overall project will achieve the desired outcome of a significantly more attractive park and improve Abingdon's offer as a visitor destination in line with the improvements that had been identified from the consultation.
43. All decisions taken were in accordance with the council constitution. Reflecting on positive learning from the Wessex Leisure Centre project, it is worth noting that if the Abbey Meadow projects were to start today, the project governance could look different. As part of the recent changes to the staff structure a council wide project management framework will be implemented. This is a really positive step and any lessons learned from this project will be used constructively and implemented.
44. The committee is invited to make any recommendations to the cabinet member for community services.

Background Papers

- Abbey Meadow Consultation Summary 2015
 - Abbey Meadows Outdoor Swimming Pool Cabinet Report August 2017
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Appendix A

Actions taken by officers at the time in response to the nine suggested recommendations from Scrutiny committee in 2015.

Resolutions	Actions taken by officers
undertaking a pilot consultation to identify whether the consultation scenarios offered form an acceptable consultation method	The consultation was piloted with twenty members of staff, to test whether it was clear and understood by people who had not been involved in the project to date
using clear wording to describe the consultation options	The consultation was written in such a way to be understood by all members of the community from the very young to the very old
asking the Scrutiny Committee members to comment on the draft consultation wording	Unfortunately there was not sufficient time to get views of Scrutiny Committee prior to the consultation launch deadline
Advertising the consultation locally	<p>3 press releases were issued: at the beginning, middle and near the end of the consultation period, inviting the public to Have their Say on the 3 scenarios.</p> <p>The Leader of the Council was on BBC Radio Oxford and there was widespread media coverage in local newspapers.</p> <p>The project was promoted on the Abingdon blog.</p> <p>All 60+ community groups were emailed at least twice, advising them that the consultation was underway and asking for their participation</p> <p>Abingdon Town Council promoted the consultation on the front page of their web-site</p> <p>VWHDC ran the campaign on the front page of the web-site for several weeks.</p> <p>All parish councils were advised of the consultation and residents invited to have their say.</p> <p>Officers worked in Abingdon community shop on 23 and 24 March to promote the consultation and to take views from the public. Shoppers were also canvassed in the Market Place and in Abbey Meadow on these days</p>

	<p>Hard copies of the brochure were available in the Vale council offices, the Guildhall, the library, AGE UK and in Mostly Books and Added Ingredients on Stert Street</p> <p>Officers presented to students at Larkmead, Fitzharrys and John Mason schools to encourage all students to vote</p> <p>These schools included articles promoting the consultation in Parent Mail which went to around 6,000 parents.</p> <p>The councils equalities officer targeted elderly and disabled people</p> <p>Social media campaigns – officers promoted the consultation via the Southernoxon Facebook page and via Twitter</p> <p>The Council received over 3,200 responses to the consultation</p>
offering consultees a range of schemes in a matrix system using points or costs for each item	<p>consultees were able to choose from one of three possible scenarios for the site. In order to keep the consultation easy to understand, we did not include costs or points. However, respondents were able to prioritise specific improvements for the scenario of their preference, and to provide comments on the consultation. The vast majority of comments were very favourable and people indicated they understood the 3 scenarios.</p>
asking Abingdon Town Council to include an article on the project consultation in its next edition of the Town Cryer	<p>Yes, the town council was asked to include an article in the Town Cryer, but unfortunately the deadline had passed. The Town Council did include the consultation on the front page of the town web-site</p>
using councillors to assist with the public consultation at the community shop	<p>It was felt more appropriate to use officers to staff the consultation at the community shop, however councillors were able to promote the consultation</p>
setting up a Facebook page as part of the consultation	<p>officers promoted the consultation via the Southernoxon Facebook page and via Twitter</p>
consulting the Police, in particular the Police Community Support Officers who patrol the Abbey Meadows	<p>PCSOs will be consulted at the detailed design or delivery phase of the project</p>

Appendix B

The consultation allowed people to rank in order of preference, other facilities or improvements they would like to see delivered as part of their preferred scenario. It is possible to see how these facilities rank across the three scenarios, to also take into account the views of people who expressed a preference for B and C.

	A score	B score	C score	Total	Rank
New picnic tables and seating	12,118	2,043	2,366	16,527	1
Refurbished changing rooms	16,312	0	0	16,312	2
Adventure play equipment for over 10s	9,728	1,450	4,497	15,675	3
Enhanced splash pad	10,126	1,507	2,115	13,748	4
Improved coffee kiosk	13,389	0	0	13,389	5
Improvements to under 10s play area	8,791	1,363	2,068	12,222	6
Outdoor gym equipment	6,142	779	1,312	8,233	7
Refurbished tennis courts	6,217	785	871	7,873	8
Electricity supply for a mobile ice rink	5,218	974	1,263	7,455	9
Multi-use games area	0	1,189	1,894	3,083	10
Pop-up cafe	0	0	2,363	2,363	11
Outdoor performance space	0	0	2,276	2,276	12
Landscaping improvements	0	0	1,894	1,894	13
Circular walking paths	0	0	1,568	1,568	14
Nature areas and information boards	0	0	1,251	1,251	15
Bandstand	0	997	0	997	16
Public art trail	0	0	772	772	17

Appendix C

Extract from 'Request for proposals'

Consultancy support to deliver the 'swim and play' vision for Abbey Meadow, Abingdon-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, OX14 3NR

Aim

This is a high-profile corporate project for the Vale Council. A number of teams across the authority have an interest in Abbey Meadow and will need to be involved in this project as it progresses. These include:

- economic development – responsibility for tourism and visitor destination
- facilities – responsibility for management and operation of public toilets, through its contractor, Healthmatic, and public car parks
- leisure – responsibility for management and operation of outdoor pool, splash pad and kiosk through our leisure contractor, GLL
- parks – responsibility for grounds maintenance and operation of play area, tennis courts, crazy golf and pitch and putt
- participation – seeking to increase participation in sport and physical activity
- strategic property – overall responsibility for corporate properties.

The aim of this piece of work is to develop a proposal for essential repairs and improvements to the outdoor pool and public toilets, as well as to research and cost each of the top ten suggestions listed in the consultation report, in order to bring to life the 'swim and play' vision for Abbey Meadow. The preferred additional facilities / improvements are:

1. new picnic tables and seating
2. refurbished changing facilities
3. adventure play equipment for over 10s
4. enhanced splash pad
5. improved coffee kiosk
6. improvements to under 10s play area
7. outdoor gym equipment
8. refurbished tennis courts
9. electricity supply for mobile ice rink
10. multi-use games area.

The successful consultant will deliver an options appraisal to the Vale Council of what can be delivered within the available improvement budget of £500,000. There is an additional budget of £70,000 available for the refurbishment of the public toilets in the area. There are competing demands for where the money should be spent and the successful consultant is tasked to review these and identify different options for the Vale Council to consider. The consultant will need to take into consideration all feedback from the consultation report, as there may be other useful comments recorded that can add additional value at no or little cost to the project, and to contact key stakeholders. The Vale Council expects to receive imaginative yet realistic options for delivering the 'swim and play' vision for Abbey Meadow. Other funding options also need to be explored with officers, including availability of section 106 money and external funding sources, in addition to the Vale Council considering whether it wishes to provide any additional funding.

The next phase of the project will be to agree a delivery plan and communicate this with the public to demonstrate that the Vale Council has heard the views of those who took the time to respond to our public consultation on the future vision for Abbey Meadow and indicate timescales in which each phase of the project will be delivered. This plan will need to be signed off by the Vale Council's cabinet prior to its publication.

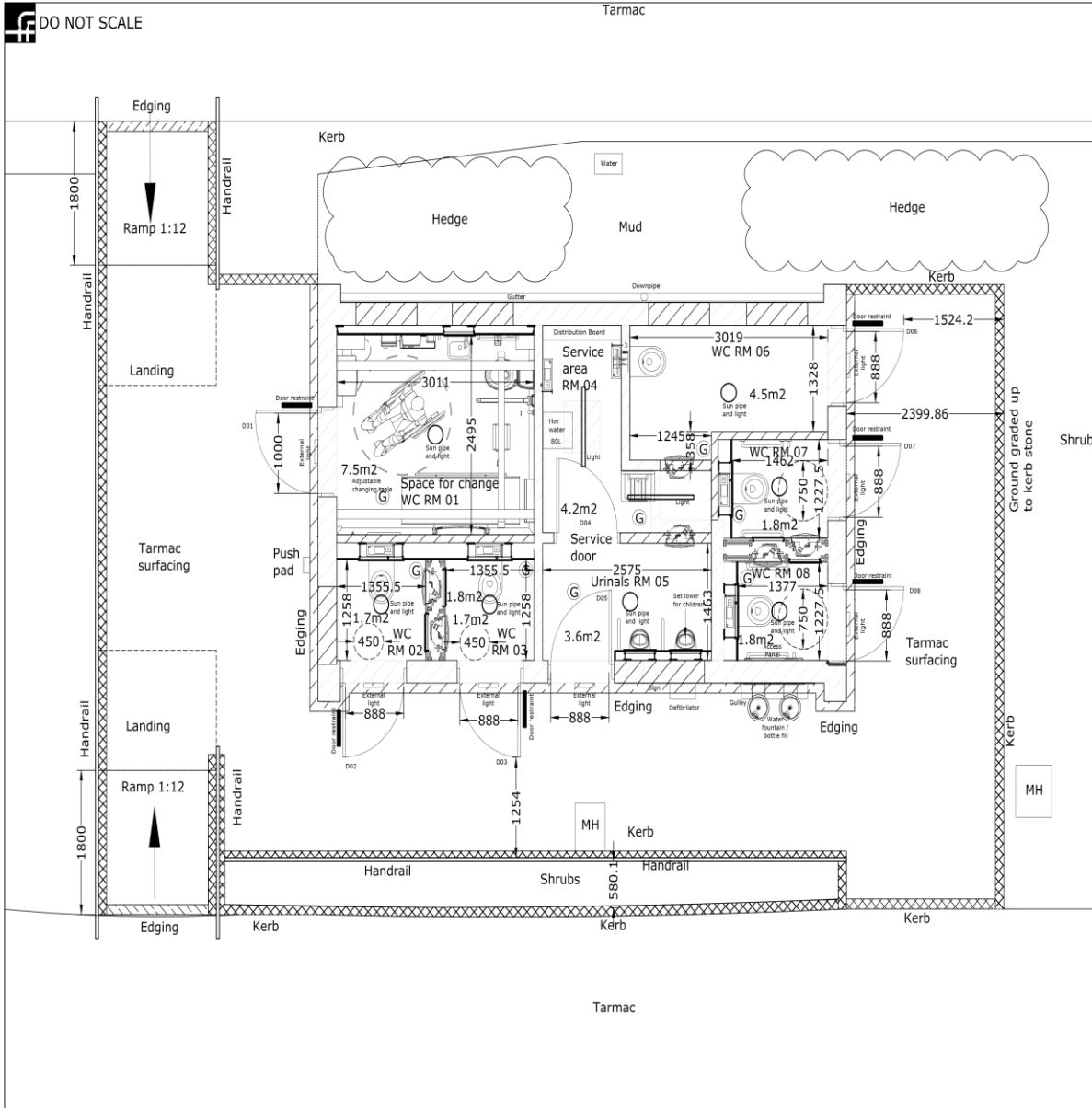
Depending on the outcome of this initial phase of work, additional services may be required to oversee the delivery phase of the projects. An hourly rate for additional works should be provided.

Key outputs

1. a costed options appraisal of the ten most popular enhancement projects and repairs to the outdoor pool. This should include on-going maintenance costs
 2. a minimum of three combinations of options that could be delivered and their associated delivery programme, one of which should include providing a facility that would incorporate a kiosk, public toilets and changing facilities serving the parks and splash pad.
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Appendix D

Tendered Design for the Refurbishment of the toilets at Abbey Meadows



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DR2	28.03.18	ML	MB	DRAFT
DR1	06.03.18	ML	MB	DRAFT
Rev	Date	By	Chk	Comment

SHRUBS

Ground graded up to kerb stone

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Client: Vale of White Horse District Council

Project Title: Abbey Meadows Toilet Block

Drawing Title: Proposed Plan

Status: PRELIMINARY ISSUE

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