

Summary Report for Pre-application Consultation

Background

1. Public consultation has already taken place on the 2016 masterplan for Western Way.
2. To support the final business case for replacement of the leisure centre, a detailed consultation was carried out in Spring/Summer 2019, which received nearly 800 survey responses. This survey focused on what facilities were already in significant use at the existing leisure centre and what the participants would prefer to see in their leisure centre. A detailed summary of this consultation is already provided as Attachment 2 to Appendix 1 (leisure centre business case).
3. A further consultation on the Western Way Development (WWD) was carried out at the request of the Local Planning Authority over summer 2019. The main purpose of this consultation was to provide an informal pre-application consultation for any future planning submission, specifically giving people the chance to influence the design and transportation aspects of the scheme *at the delivery stage of the project*. A further formal public consultation would be carried out for any planning application so this is not the only chance the community will have to comment on the scheme if this business case is approved.
4. This latest consultation also took the opportunity to seek further public views on the broader hub concept and how this may be delivered to its full potential. Therefore the consultation is also relevant to how the WWD project evolves strategically and operationally in the next phase.
5. The consultation started on 24 July and ended on 10 September (7 weeks). This timing reflected the need to consult on the latest designs that have been used in this business case but which were not available until July because they needed to take into account partner requirements and pre-application planning advice.
6. A full report on the consultation, with responses to main points raised, will be published before (or as part of) any planning application submission. In that report, it will be explained how the feedback has been used to inform the final set of designs. However, to assist councillors in considering the business case, a very short and interim summary is provided in this appendix.

Methodology

7. An online response form was created and this was publicised through the media, website, social media, councillors, staff and partner organisations. Letters were also sent to businesses and residents directly neighbouring the main Western Way site itself. Information on the scheme was provided on the Council's website alongside the survey.
8. In addition, a drop-in exhibition was provided between 2pm and 7pm on Friday 6 September in the lobby of the leisure centre. This exhibition was promoted in the aforementioned letters and media releases.
9. At the time the consultation closed, 267 online forms had been completed. In the final report with the planning application, we will also analyse any incomplete forms to see if there is any additional feedback which can be obtained.
10. Added to that, of those who visited specially or stopped to look at the exhibition, 32 completed a very short feedback form on the designs. Some of these respondents may also have completed the main survey as well. However, this only adds to the depth of the information received, reflecting views after having discussed the proposals in more detail.
11. In total, therefore, this report reflects feedback from up to 299 different submissions.

Who provided responses?

12. In terms of those filling in the online surveys, around 65% identified themselves primarily as a local resident and 32% as someone who worked on the Western Way site. The remainder were a mixture of local businesses, partner organisations, elected representatives, students, multiple roles or didn't answer this question.
13. Around two-thirds of online respondents identified themselves as female, and over 90% as not having a disability. Ages of online respondents (where provided) were as follows:

			Response Percent	Response Total
1	0-15		1.59%	4
2	16-24		10.32%	26
3	25-34		15.48%	39
4	35-44		25.79%	65
5	45-54		25.40%	64
6	55-64		13.10%	33
7	65-74		5.95%	15
8	75 or over		2.38%	6
			answered	252

14. Respondents at the exhibition were more evenly balanced by gender and age. However, over 90% again identified themselves as not having a disability.
15. Most respondents also told us the first 5 digits of their postcode, and this data will be analysed anonymously in the full report, particularly to assist with the feedback on travel plans. At a glance, the IP32 and IP33 postcode areas appear to be the most predominant in online and exhibition responses, which will partly reflect the planning requirement to publicise the consultation to properties directly adjoining the site, but also the support of local ward members in promoting participation in the survey. However, the postcode shows there is clearly a wide geographical catchment for the facilities, and the staff working in them.

What did people tell us?

16. The consultation exercise was designed primarily to be qualitative rather than quantitative, and there is a wealth of information provided for the primary purpose of informing a planning application (if this course of action is approved by Council on 19 September). There are, for instance, around 1000 free-text responses to the various questions, which will be read and analysed by the design team. How they have been used to update the draft designs will also be explained in the report provided to the local planning authority, along with the responses themselves. In this way, how the Council uses the consultation will be fully transparent.
17. However, to assist councillors in their consideration of the final business case, the following very brief summary is provided to give a sense of the issues raised.

Testing the Hub Concept

18. The online survey first asked respondents how they currently used services in and around Western Way (as visitors or staff). This data is extremely helpful to the business cases that partner organisations considering a relocation to the WWD will need to make, and will be analysed fully for that purpose. Unsurprisingly, the leisure centre was the most frequently used of the facilities (20% of respondents used the pool at least once a week). However, there were various levels of usage for every single facility among respondents, including all of the services listed at West Suffolk House. A third of respondents used the College, around 15% used the skatepark and just under a quarter used the athletics track, so these views were also well represented.
19. Respondents were then asked which services relevant to the current proposals for the WWD they used elsewhere in West Suffolk. In summary, of those who answered:
 - around 15% used business support at varying intervals between weekly and annually
 - around 25% sought consumer and legal advice
 - around 18% used employment advice and support

- around 73% used NHS primary and community health services
- around 31% sought police advice
- around 32% used voluntary groups and services.

20. These two questions demonstrate the strong potential for co-location of services, particularly between leisure and health. Supporting the strategic case for the WWD, and building on previous experience of hub projects.

21. Online respondents were then asked what other services and facilities they would like to see included in the WWD to link with existing facilities on site. Again, these responses will need more detailed analysis. However, as top-line results, of those who answered, the following proportions of respondents felt it was very or somewhat important to provide:

Business Support	31.7%
Consumer and Legal Advice	49.8%
Employment Advice and Support	57.2%
Improved Skatepark	40.3%
New Employment Spaces (for businesses to relocate to)	52.8%
NHS Primary / Community Health Services	76.6%
Police Advice	61.4%
Shared facilities which would be available for appropriate legal proceedings if needed	44.8%
Vocational Education Opportunities	57.0%
Voluntary Groups and Services	59.8%

Of the nearly 77% who prioritised NHS facilities, 45% felt it was very important.

22. Respondents were also asked if there were any other services they would like to see included. Most respondents did not make any suggestion, but there were a wide range of ideas suggested in the 71 responses to this question. A lot of the responses offered more detail on specific health and leisure elements, and around 20 respondents also used this question to request a footbridge across the A14. Specifically relevant to the WWD business case proposals, a few respondents also mentioned a pre-school and opportunities to provide facilities and activities for children and young people. Again, all of this data will be analysed in the next stage of the project, if the business case is approved.

Design Features of the Hub

23. The online survey then asked how important or unimportant it was that a range of various facilities or features were included in the WWD design. This is helpful to councillors considering the business case because some of the data can be cross-referred to some of the actual proposals e.g. investing

heavily in renewable energy. The rest of the data will be used to refine the range of facilities in the final scheme. For those reasons, it is worth including the full data in this summary report:

How important or unimportant do you think it is that each of the following is included in design of the new Western Way public facilities? NB Any new buildings will be fully compliant with all building regulations covering access for people with disabilities							
	Very important	Somewhat important	Don't mind	Somewhat unimportant	Very unimportant	Don't know	Response Total
Car Parking	75.4% (187)	18.1% (45)	2.8% (7)	1.2% (3)	1.6% (4)	0.8% (2)	248
Accessible Car Parking for People with Disabilities	68.4% (173)	22.1% (56)	5.5% (14)	1.6% (4)	0.8% (2)	1.6% (4)	253
Designated Car Parking for Families with Small Children	43.3% (107)	30.4% (75)	14.6% (36)	5.7% (14)	4.5% (11)	1.6% (4)	247
Secure Cycle parking	58.8% (147)	27.2% (68)	10.8% (27)	0.8% (2)	1.2% (3)	1.2% (3)	250
Public Toilets	66.9% (168)	24.7% (62)	6.4% (16)	0.8% (2)	0.4% (1)	0.8% (2)	251
Accessible Toilets to Changing Places Standard	60.9% (151)	26.2% (65)	8.9% (22)	0.8% (2)	0.4% (1)	2.8% (7)	248
Autism/Dementia Friendly Design	56.7% (140)	23.9% (59)	13.8% (34)	1.2% (3)	1.2% (3)	3.2% (8)	247
Parenting Facilities e.g. breastfeeding room	46.3% (114)	30.9% (76)	15.4% (38)	2.4% (6)	2.0% (5)	2.8% (7)	246
Cash Point	33.5% (84)	31.5% (79)	25.5% (64)	4.8% (12)	3.6% (9)	1.2% (3)	251
Public Wifi	54.4% (136)	26.4% (66)	14.8% (37)	2.0% (5)	1.2% (3)	1.2% (3)	250
Public Café	46.4% (116)	30.8% (77)	14.4% (36)	4.4% (11)	2.4% (6)	1.6% (4)	250
Environmental standards beyond what is required by law	48.2% (119)	27.9% (69)	17.0% (42)	2.4% (6)	1.6% (4)	2.8% (7)	247
Other (please specify below)	29.9% (26)	4.6% (4)	21.8% (19)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	43.7% (38)	87
						answered	258
						skipped	9

24. As can be seen, over 90% of respondents felt it was important (75% very important) to include general car parking in the scheme. However, there was good support for all of the features which are being considered for inclusion.

25. There were 48 comments made for this question, matching the 49 people who felt something else should/might be included. These comments often expanded on the earlier preference e.g. how environmental, parking or disability access standards could be met, or what kind of health or leisure facilities were needed. There were also a few comments on highways, cycling, walking and public transport. However, there were also several suggestions on how any final designs could be adjusted to meet the specific needs of some users, as well as ways to improve external areas e.g. increasing accessibility, providing shade, etc. Mention was also made by some respondents of staff facilities and working environments e.g. providing air conditioning.

Community Use

26. Respondents were then asked about the way in which the community could use the public facilities. Again, this data is helpful to consideration of the business case as it demonstrates how a community hub can work on multiple levels, and why the flexible spaces in the proposed design (such as 'The Street' or meeting/activity rooms) are so important to this.

Thinking about the way in which the community could use the proposed public building at Western Way in the future, how important do you think it is that the following facilities are included in the development?							
	Very important	Somewhat important	Don't mind	Somewhat unimportant	Very unimportant	Don't know	Response Total
Cafe	44.0% (109)	34.3% (85)	12.9% (32)	4.0% (10)	3.2% (8)	1.6% (4)	248
Flexible community space for classes	35.6% (89)	38.0% (95)	18.8% (47)	2.4% (6)	2.0% (5)	3.2% (8)	250
Study space	19.4% (48)	33.9% (84)	32.7% (81)	7.3% (18)	4.0% (10)	2.8% (7)	248
Meeting rooms for community groups	31.7% (79)	42.6% (106)	18.1% (45)	1.6% (4)	2.4% (6)	3.6% (9)	249
Activities for particular groups (e.g. young people). Please give details below in the comments box	31.9% (76)	26.1% (62)	32.4% (77)	0.8% (2)	2.5% (6)	6.3% (15)	238
Internet and computer access	34.1% (85)	37.3% (93)	19.7% (49)	3.2% (8)	4.0% (10)	1.6% (4)	249
Creche and nursery	25.4% (62)	33.6% (82)	29.1% (71)	4.5% (11)	4.5% (11)	2.9% (7)	244
Health and fitness classes	41.4% (103)	34.5% (86)	17.3% (43)	2.0% (5)	2.8% (7)	2.0% (5)	249
Performance / rehearsal space	13.6% (33)	35.1% (85)	34.7% (84)	7.0% (17)	6.2% (15)	3.3% (8)	242
Vocational education opportunities	24.2% (59)	34.4% (84)	29.5% (72)	2.9% (7)	3.7% (9)	5.3% (13)	244
Library access point	24.3% (59)	34.6% (84)	29.2% (71)	5.3% (13)	4.1% (10)	2.5% (6)	243

Thinking about the way in which the community could use the proposed public building at Western Way in the future, how important do you think it is that the following facilities are included in the development?

	Very important	Somewhat important	Don't mind	Somewhat unimportant	Very unimportant	Don't know	Response Total
Winter shelter for homeless people	40.8% (100)	22.9% (56)	22.4% (55)	4.5% (11)	4.5% (11)	4.9% (12)	245
						answered	256
						skipped	11

27. There were also 39 comments made under this question, many expanding on the winter shelter proposal (which was actively supported by nearly two-thirds of respondents). Again, there were also comments on providing youth and other specific community facilities, and some very specific suggestions for activities in the hub. There were also comments about avoiding duplication of existing educational facilities.

28. To build on the previous question, online respondents were then asked if they were aware of any types of local groups who might want to use the facilities, and requested to provide details. There were 19 comments and suggestions, with ideas ranging from pregnancy yoga through to youth clubs and U3A. These will be followed up in the next stage of the project where possible.

Transport and Travel

29. Having established views on the content and concept of any new hub, the online survey then asked respondents about transport and travel.

Thinking about the location of the Western Way Development, how would you typically travel to this site to access its services?

		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Walk	30.00%	78
2	Cycle	4.62%	12
3	Motorcycle	0.00%	0
4	Car share	4.23%	11
5	Drive - park on site	53.46%	139
6	Drive - park on street	0.77%	2
7	Public transport	2.31%	6
8	Taxi	0.00%	0
9	Other (please specify):	4.62%	12
		answered	260
		skipped	7

30. As part of the work to prepare the planning application and any later travel plan, this data will be analysed in more detail, to match post-codes to modes

of transport, and also to distinguish between staff and service users. Obviously, it is not known how representative this data is of all staff and site visitors (as explained above, the consultation was promoted to nearby residents and businesses as part of the pre-application consultation methodology). However, it can be noted that just over half of respondents say they typically drive to the site, highlighting that any later travel plan will need to be targeted at reducing this number.

31. Because it is already recognised that the WWD will need a travel plan to help promote sustainable travel options to and from the site, respondents were then specifically asked which of the following would assist with their journey to the site (or the need to make that journey)? Responses were as follows (backed up with 32 comments):

		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Improved bus links	48.02%	121
2	Improved cycling and walking links	57.94%	146
3	Improved access to train station	29.37%	74
4	Earlier or later operating times for services (i.e. avoiding peak times)	39.68%	100
5	Car sharing	9.92%	25
6	Being able to access some of the services from home using technology	37.70%	95
7	Being able to visit multiple services in one journey	40.08%	101
8	None of the above	5.95%	15
9	Other (please specify):	12.70%	32
		answered	252
		skipped	15

32. This data is very positive in terms of the scope for a successful travel plan, insofar as only 6% of respondents said there was nothing that could be offered to change their current travel practices. Alongside alternative means of transport and access, it is important to note that over a third of respondents felt that they could access services from home using technology (particularly relevant to a staff travel plan). Similarly there was some support for varying operational hours of services, to avoid peak times. These are highlighted as additional areas of focus in the business case.
33. Also, it is worth noting that 40% of respondents highlighted the transport advantage of co-locating services in a hub, namely the ability to replace multiple journeys to dispersed sites by combining the use of various services in one trip.

Views on the Design and Transport Plans

34. Given that the main purpose of the consultation was to inform any planning application, and specifically its design and transport aspects, online respondents and exhibition attendees were all asked what they did and did not like about the draft designs. This was primarily intended to inform the planning application rather than the decision on the business case, and there will therefore be careful analysis of the responses in the coming months. The local planning authority will also want to see the responses in full, and understand how the developer has dealt with them. Nonetheless, it is helpful here to give a flavour of the feedback.
35. Firstly, from a possible 299, it is worth highlighting that:
- there were only just over 160 responses in terms of what people liked (including from 31 of the 32 exhibition respondents);
 - similarly, only just over 130 people (a third of all respondents) provided information on what they did not like (20 of the 32 exhibition respondents).
36. Also, a small number of the comments received in both categories were ambiguous ("too early to say", "not sure", "nothing", etc) or played with the format of the question e.g. having to wait 4 years for the new facilities being something they did not like. Some comments are also questions e.g. how will you regulate the temperature with so much glass, etc?
37. Turning to the comments themselves, there is a huge range of topics and themes, reflecting the large breadth of the project. Some also focus on the content of the scheme, rather than the design per se.
38. Given that views on the functionality and aesthetics of any design are subjective, it is simply noted at this stage that there were a number of both positive and negative comments on the look of the scheme, and its various design features. The design team will need to consider all of these in terms of any final planning submission and, in this regard, the consultation is highly valuable. As evidence of that, changes to the layout of parking and bus drop off areas are already being considered as a result of early feedback during the consultation process.
39. However, in terms of considering the final business case, it is worth noting that, with around 100 mentions each, the two main themes for comments were: highways, transport and parking; and health and leisure. These are summarised in the tables below, with the approximate number of times that a comment has been made shown in brackets. While informative, it should be stressed that, for the following reasons, broad conclusions should be drawn from these frequencies with caution:
- It is generally not best practice to allocate numbers to qualitative data such as this because it is considered too binary when the classification of comments can be subjective; and

- One respondent can cover multiple points of view so the frequency of a particular comment does not show the proportion of respondents who shared this view, but the amount of times it was mentioned by all respondents.

	Positive Comments	Negative Comments
Traffic, Transport and Parking		
Themes (frequency ≥ 10)	Improvements to junctions and traffic flow (10)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traffic modelling and improvements to junctions are not enough to prevent traffic build up (37) • Not enough parking, or information about proposed plans for parking (10)
Other notable points (frequency < 10)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The amount of parking proposed is promising (5) • Multi-storey car park (2) • Newmarket road junction becoming a roundabout (2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Money should be spent on new pedestrian and cycle tracks instead (6) • More greenery needed in car park areas (2) • Specific concerns about the Newmarket road junction (5) • Bury St Edmunds needs a park and ride (2) • Footbridge needed from Howard estate (2)¹ • The current pedestrian crossings aren't enough (3) • Not enough public transport plans (2)
Other thoughts (mentioned only once)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure cycling parking • Clear map and location 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Air quality concerns • The plans need more information about costs, such as new prices for parking etc. • Concerned about multi-storey - location/height • Public service village considered too far out of town • Development is premature to a West Suffolk Local Plan • Coach drop off point concerns

¹ This potentially under-represents this viewpoint as, under other questions, it was raised by 20 or so people (around 7% of all respondents).

The full consultation report will include a comprehensive analysis of these free text responses.

Health and Leisure		
Themes (frequency ≥ 10)	Like plans for the new leisure and pool facilities (20)	None
Other notable points (frequency < 10)	<p>The following changes are welcome:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bigger skate park (6) • Upgrades to the pool (4) • Splash pool/park (3) • Open space/ green place and plants (8) • Improved facilities for children (4) • Bigger gym and additional facilities (6) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bigger gym and additional facilities are needed (e.g. steam room & sauna) (4) • Disabled access concerns (2) • Not clear how designs provide for those with special needs (e.g. autism) – open space can be loud, daunting and distracting (2) • Lack of new features for or around the athletics track (6) • Plans for the pool could be more exciting (7) e.g. flumes and attractions for older children/teenagers (2) • Concerns about temperature regulation given the amount of glass in the design (2) • The pool needs to be Olympic size (5) • Need more open space for officer workers and café users (6) • No all-weather pitches or tennis courts (2) • Not much consideration for environmental sustainability (4) • Concerns about having pools together and children’s play not separated (5) noise etc. • Need more cycling/pedestrian access to promote healthy living (3)
Other thoughts (mentioned only once)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maybe there is only a need for one café? • Need longer café opening hours • Good to have health and leisure facilities all in one place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skate park isn’t big enough • No provision of gender neutral facilities • Needs to incorporate both a doctors and dentist surgery • Seating area needed near the pool • Air pollution concerns – effects on health • Concerns about having all health facilities together • Do we need flexible entertainment/staging facilities? • It is healthier to have both indoor and outdoor swimming facilities

Promoting health activity

40. The online survey also asked a question intended to gather evidence for any later work with Sport England on the scheme. Namely:

To what extent do you agree that the Western Way Development promotes physical activity?			
		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Strongly agree	27.95%	71
2	Agree	42.13%	107
3	Neither agree nor disagree	23.62%	60
4	Disagree (please explain why below)	2.36%	6
5	Strongly disagree (please explain why below)	1.97%	5
6	Don't know	1.97%	5
		answered	254
		skipped	13

41. This data, and the relevant free-text comments provided with it, can also be used to refine the design of the scheme in the next stage and to review the offer of the new leisure centre and hub (e.g. range of classes, opening hours, etc). Some of the supporting comments made are also relevant to any travel plan e.g. helping people to walk or cycle to the site.
42. Online respondents were also asked the open-ended question: *If you were to use the Western Way site in the future, please tell us what kinds of things would encourage you to be more active on site and getting to the site?* There were 148 responses to this question which will be analysed to finalise the content and operation of any approved scheme. Many answers re-emphasise topics in earlier questions (e.g. the nature of leisure and office facilities) but others relate to pricing and opening hours. As with other questions, there is very helpful input on access for people with disabilities, which will need to be taken on board. There is also more mention made of transport matters, including around comments requesting a foot bridge over the A14 from around 20 (7%) respondents.

Other comments

43. Finally, there was a free-text further comments section to conclude the questionnaire, which was used by over 100 respondents.
44. Again, these are a mix of supportive and critical comments, and many repeat or add emphasis to previous responses on scheme content, traffic worries, environmental credentials, pedestrian access, support of the athletics track, etc. These will be fed into the design review, along with the responses to earlier questions.

45. Several respondents also ask questions which it will be possible to answer in the full consultation report when it is submitted as part of any planning application. A small number of comments were of a political nature or about the process being followed to deliver the project.

Conclusion

46. The consultation exercise has been extremely helpful in terms of its main purpose: informing any later planning application if the business case is approved on 19 September. As such, there are not considered to be any issues raised which would prevent consideration of the business case on 19 September. This is because either the topics are already addressed in the business case and/or there is an expectation that the scheme will evolve within budget at the planning stage.

47. Many respondents have expressed support for the ambition and concept of the project, and specific aspects of it. There are also a small number of comments objecting to the principle of the scheme. However, most of the concerns expressed by respondents focus on understandable and legitimate matters of detail such as transport, parking, disabled access, environmental performance, etc. As these are planning considerations, such comments will need to be analysed and then addressed in the final designs and supporting studies for any planning application. They will then, ultimately, be decisions for the local planning and highways authorities.

48. As explained in the main business case, some of the issues raised may also be more relevant to wider reviews of transport provision in the town and, therefore, these will be shared with the highways and planning authorities accordingly.

49. There is also extremely helpful feedback on the content of the scheme itself. If the business case is approved, this can be examined in the next stage of the project to help refine the facilities, within the agreed budget. Service operators will also benefit from observations on operational details.

50. The online survey also provides evidence for the broad hub concept, and of the potential benefits of co-locating services and providing highly flexible and shared community facilities. This is consistent with the Council's existing strategic objectives for the project but, just as importantly, it will assist partners to make their own business cases.

51. A full report on this consultation, allowing people to read the actual comments submitted (anonymised), will be prepared and published to support any planning application if the business case is approved. This report will include responses to the points raised, where needed.