

Brandon Leisure Centre investment

Report number:	CAB/WS/20/063	
Report to and date:	Cabinet	6 October 2020
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Decisions Plan:

The decision made as a result of this report will usually be published within 48 hours and cannot be actioned until five clear working days of the publication of the decision have elapsed. This item was not included on the Decisions Plan; however, as it constitutes a Key Decision and the matter may in part, be considered in private session, a General Exception Notice was published on 23 September 2020.

Wards impacted:

Predominantly Brandon East, Brandon Central, Brandon West and Lakenheath but also a wider range of wards to the north of West Suffolk.

Recommendations: It is recommended that:

- 1. Capital spending of £1,673,889 from the Leisure Strategic Investment Fund that was agreed in November 2016 (CAB/FH/16/049), be approved to deliver the improvements to Brandon Leisure Centre outlined in Report number: CAB/WS/20/063; and**
- 2. capital spending of £302,111 from the Investment in Growth Fund that was agreed in November 2018 (CAB/SE/17/020), be approved to develop rentable space within Brandon Leisure Centre, as detailed in section 5 of Report number: CAB/WS/20/063.**

1. Context to this report

- 1.1 St Edmundsbury Borough and Forest Heath District full Councils both approved the development of a Leisure Strategic Investment Fund in November 2016 with the aim to provide capital to invest in the Council's leisure facilities to reduce the management fee provided to Abbeycroft Leisure accordingly. Council specifically agreed (CAB/SE/16/055; CAB/FH/16/049):

"the creation of a strategic investment fund of £5m, funded from the strategic priorities and medium term financial strategy reserve, across West Suffolk (£3.5m FHDC and £1.5m SEBC) with delegated authority given to Cabinet (for sums of £500,000 or more), and delegation to the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Culture, in conjunction with a Director and the Head of Resources and Performance (for sums of less than £500,000), to draw down from this fund in accordance with the principles set out in Report No: CAB/SE/16/055 and CAB/FH/16/049"

- 1.2 In April 2017, the Council also agreed to enter into a new partnership with Abbeycroft Leisure with a schedule of management fee reductions, in part based upon an option to improve the offer at Brandon Leisure Centre.

- 1.3 West Suffolk Alliance for health and social care has stated its commitment to the creation of new leisure and health hubs. They have stated:

"We have agreed as an Alliance to move away from working as individual organisations towards being a fully integrated single system and this means having a shared vision and clear local priorities. Working as Alliance partners we have the opportunity to bring services together in a new way that supports our aim to reduce health inequalities recognising that a broad range of factors influence health outcomes. The Alliance has ambitions to strengthen the support for people to stay well and manage their wellbeing and health in their communities by building local integrated working, across all ages and across both physical and mental health. For this to become a reality, we have plans to co-locate health and care teams in wellbeing hubs in Bury St Edmunds and Brandon. These will create a welcoming environment where people can access social, leisure and wellbeing services alongside health and care service, providing a focus on prevention as well as treatment."

This development will take the opportunity to create treatment rooms that can be used by health partners and strengthen the development of this integrated model.

- 1.4 In February 2020, under the delegation mentioned above, it was agreed to invest £99,000 in order to progress the redesign of Brandon Leisure Centre. Alliance Leisure, a leisure facility developer specialising in the provision of local authority, education and leisure trust facilities, were commissioned to prepare plans to a cost certainty phase. (Alliance Leisure designed and delivered the improvements to Haverhill Leisure Centre in 2018 and

Newmarket in 2020). The outcomes of that work form the proposal outlined below. By developing the plans to cost certainty stage we are able to confirm the final cost of the works and also identifying any issues that could impact on the delivery of the project to enable these to be managed appropriately.

2. Proposals within this report

2.1 Surveys and design work have been undertaken to inform a number of improvements to the centre. Whilst the design reflects current trends in the leisure market, the space will be adaptable to enable refits in the future as trends will inevitably change in particular to respond to changes as a result of Covid-19. This scheme proposes the following improvements to Brandon Leisure Centre:

- Improved café and waiting area
- Gym relocation
- Purpose built free weights area
- New Studio
- Treatment rooms (for rental potentially by Community Health)
- Office space (for rental)
- Shapemaster suite
- Improved changing facilities
- Changing places toilet

Ground floor layouts are attached as Appendix A.

2.2 In 2018, West Suffolk officers and Abbeycroft Leisure undertook a consultation to engage with the local community to ensure that the current and future leisure offer would enable all residents to lead healthy and active lives. The survey was designed so the local community could share their thoughts and experiences of Brandon Leisure Centre as well as their usage of the current facilities and what they would like to see in the future.

2.3 The two key areas that were identified as the most important were:
a. enhanced Fitness Suite and Exercise Class provision; and
b. improved café and hospitality area for leisure and social users.

2.4 Users also identified that access to health and support services such as community health groups and physios were also important services moving forward.

2.5 A financial evaluation of the proposed scheme has been conducted and is outlined in exempt Appendix B. The proposal has been examined in the context of the sports and physical activity framework and to identify if the Council should support such a proposal. The proposal sits within the 'Enable' stream of the framework where there is an organisation that provides opportunities for sport and physical activity and looking to expand.

2.6 In addition to this, the proposal also meets the outcomes of the framework as shown in table 1 below. Specific note should be made of the opportunities this creates to deliver integrated health and leisure pathways to meet the specific needs of the community.

Table 1: Promoting Physical Activity Framework

Outcome	Response
<p>Social and community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • create an environment that provides the opportunity for physical activity for all; • encourage personal responsibility for wellbeing through education and the development of life skills and healthy habits; • improve the quality of life and the health and wellbeing of all our communities; • ensure that physical activity is inclusive by understanding and addressing barriers to participation; • maximise use of local assets including sharing assets where appropriate; and • make connections between different communities through shared activities. 	<p>The range of facilities on offer will enable the Council to provide a far greater opportunity for residents to engage in physical activity across a broader age range.</p> <p>The offer has been designed to specifically meet the needs of the Brandon population and build on the success of initiatives like Active Lives.</p> <p>The addition of treatment rooms creates the opportunity to collaborate with health, sharing assets in an effective way. It enables stakeholders and alternative providers to operate within the leisure facilities and refer into a far broader range of activity.</p>
<p>Economic:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure we are financially efficient and responsible in a changing financial environment, in line with the Council’s Medium Term Financial Strategy; • understand how our impact on health and wellbeing will financially benefit the whole public sector; • target our financial support and subsidies to improve outcomes that support our strategic priorities; and • create wider value for money. 	<p>The proposal enables the Council to achieve its vision in terms of the reduction in the management fee paid to Abbeycroft Leisure. The project also has the potential to produce resources that could be targeted at programmes and initiatives that support those who are currently inactive.</p>

Outcome	Response
<p>Personal experience:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide opportunities for physical activity that are accessible, inclusive, welcoming, nurturing and convenient; • acknowledge that there are a range of motivations to participating in physical activity and that some people want to be competitive, whilst others do not; and • support the provision of facilities (including shared facilities) and opportunities in locations that encourage participation and keep active people active. 	<p>The proposal aims to provide real choice to local residents enabling them to engage in a broader range of activity within Brandon and the surrounding area.</p> <p>The range/choice of services and facilities also enable people to initiate and maintain their motivation to stay active for longer, which provides a better chance of success to create behaviour change in the longer term.</p>
<p>Health and wellbeing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promote initiatives that will support the Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Strategy; • focus on activity to address preventable health issues by creating local opportunities that address local health needs, using the health data at Appendix A of the 'West Suffolk: promoting physical activity' framework; • ensure that active people remain active and that more people become active; and • encourage natural exercise as a part of daily lives and acknowledge that this may not include traditional sport. 	<p>The programmes/initiatives operating from the proposed facilities, combined with those in the broader community, create a platform to promote the need to lead a healthier lifestyle and will be tailored to meet the needs of the Brandon community.</p> <p>The addition of treatment rooms/community health space within the leisure centre creates a facility where health agencies can create partnerships with physical activity specialists to further develop programmes, referral routes and opportunities that address the conditions highlighted in the local needs assessment</p>

3. Timescale

3.1 The proposed timeline for the leisure centre improvements is set out below. The changes proposed do require planning permission:

- 44 week build if starting in November 2020 on the works that do not require planning consent.

- Planning consent to be submitted late October 2020; decision expected by week 14 in January 2021.
- Completion September 2021

Phasing to be agreed with Abbeycroft.

4. Cost certainty findings

- 4.1 Alliance Leisure presented their initial findings and proposals in August 2020. The final scheme has a total cost of £1,973,213. However, this is cost certainty, and any overspend on this amount will be Alliance Leisure's liability and not the Council's responsibility.
- 4.2 Note: this cost also includes a contingency cost for Covid-19 in the event of a second wave or local lockdown of £28,479.
- 4.3 There is an additional cost of £23,455 due to the building needing a full rewire; however, this will be met by the existing maintenance budget as this will be required regardless.

5. Financial case

- 5.1 The cost certainty work undertaken by Alliance Leisure determined that the capital cost for the improvements outlined in paragraph 2.1 would be £1.9 million, which can be funded from £1,673,889 of the Leisure Strategic Investment Fund. It is proposed an additional £302,111 be allocated from the Investing in Growth Fund for the rentable space. At year five this delivers a return of 4.34 per cent. A full breakdown is included in exempt Appendix B.
- 5.2 The benefits modelling was conducted prior to Covid-19 and used industry insights and independent experts to design and model the impact of the new facility. Clearly some of those benefits are related to the improvement of traditional leisure facilities. Whilst clearly Abbeycroft's income has been significantly impacted as a result of lockdown and social distancing requirements, there are a number of reports that suggest that the sector will see a strong recovery.
- 5.3 Nationwide surveys have been conducted during lockdown to establish consumer opinion in relation to returning to facility-based activity once the lockdown is over. More than 74,000 responses were received to these surveys as detailed below:

Survey	Number of responses
YOUGOV Survey	866
TA6 Alliance Leisure survey	4,000
Leisure-Net survey	63,000 responses from 43 different operators
Sport England and Savanta Comres Data	319 members and 1,690 non members
Mycustomer lens Survey	4,700

The summary findings of these surveys were:

- 88 per cent of respondents to the largest, Leisure-net survey to gym members, said they would use their facility the same amount, or more than before, once it re-opened
- 27 per cent of non-member respondents to the Sport England and Savanta Comres Data survey indicated that they would be likely to join a gym once gyms and leisure centres re-opened.

Whilst there is clearly some uncertainty as to when these improvements will be realised, they are a strong indication that we should be confident in investing in our leisure facilities. At the same time, the creation of treatment rooms that can be used by health or other private businesses both diversify the offer at the centre reducing the risk of relying purely on membership income.

6. **Alternative options that have been considered**

- 6.1 To not invest in the leisure centre. This would mean an opportunity to reduce the management fee is missed and improvements to health and wellbeing through physical activity are not achieved. If facilities do not remain attractive it could lead to reduced use of the existing facilities.

7. **Consultation and engagement undertaken**

- 7.1 As outlined in paragraph 2.2, West Suffolk and Abbeycroft Leisure undertook a consultation to engage with the local community to ensure that the current and future leisure offer would enable all residents to lead healthy and active lives. Conversations have already taken place with Remembrance Playing Fields who share the site in regard to the leisure centre and car park.

8. Risks associated with the proposals

- 8.1 There are a number of risks and dependencies associated with the project and these are summarised in the table below with mitigation and actions to date.

Risk/Dependency	Mitigation/Action
Phasing of the development in such a way that enables Abbeycroft Leisure to maintain a stable financial platform.	Abbeycroft Leisure are developing a financial plan linked to the phasing of the development that minimises disruption to users and protects key income streams.
Negative feedback from users who are relocated/displaced.	A consultation and communications plan will be developed to address users concerns once the cost certainty phase of work and community use arrangements are complete.
The improvement in leisure income is not realised due to Covid-19 (short term)	Continue to track industry surveys; build local confidence in the centre.
Sport England object to redesign due to loss of court capacity	Review of built facilities strategy to be undertaken in West Suffolk; continued engagement with Sport England on wider benefits of scheme and how it meets their strategic outcomes

9. Appendices referenced in this report

- 9.1 Appendix A: Proposed ground floor layout. Note: the red clouds are revision clouds they pick up the changes between drawing revisions
- 9.2 Exempt Appendix B: Financial summary

10. Background documents associated with this report

- 10.1 [West Suffolk sports facilities assessment](#) carried out by 4Global.
- 10.2 [CAB/SE/16/055 Investing in leisure in west Suffolk](#) Associated Cabinet report