

Results of consultation about redevelopment of Sobell Leisure Centre

1.0 Summary

Between 30 May and 30 June 2008 the Council conducted a comprehensive consultation exercise on the proposed redevelopment of Sobell Leisure Centre. The consultation elicited 1,444 responses. This report summarises the results of the consultation and the reasons given for supporting or opposing various approaches. Overall this represents the largest response received in recent years to a consultation focussed on a local area or facility within the borough.

2.0 Methodology

Rather than being a referendum on whether or not to redevelop the site, the consultation was designed to elicit views on a range of issues and options including sports facilities, community facilities and site layout.

Several promotional tools were used to raise awareness of the consultation and encourage participation.

The detail was contained in a 12-page brochure that explained the key objectives and ambitions for the project and possible facilities. It also included four indicative options for the redevelopment of the leisure centre, the surrounding area and the adjacent Kinloch Street Park.

A questionnaire was included in the brochure inviting people to set out their priorities for sport and leisure and community facilities in the area. They were also invited to express an opinion on the different options and explain what they liked and disliked about each.

The brochure was distributed directly to 55,000 Islington households in the northern half of the borough. This included all homes in the N4, N5 and N19 postcodes that are in Islington and most of those in N7. Posters and brochures were also distributed to libraries, estates, schools, nurseries, day centres, doctors' surgeries and a range of other public outlets in the area.

The brochure and questionnaire were also sent to over 3,800 leisure centre members and stakeholder groups that use the centre including schools and sports clubs. The brochure was also sent to TRAs and community groups. An offer was also extended to local organisations for officers to attend a meeting of their group as part of the consultation process. The brochure and questionnaire were available online via the council's web site and a prominent link on the front page of the website was in place throughout the consultation. The Aquaterra website also provided links to the online questionnaire.

Additional promotional tools included two external banners in the immediate area, a feature in council's residents' magazine (IslingtonNow) and an item in the council's residents' e-bulletin and staff e-bulletin. A special tour, briefing and a photo opportunity were organised for the local press, to generate press coverage for the consultation. This included a front-page feature in the Islington Tribune.

An exhibition and copies of the brochures were made available at the Sobell Centre along with a posting box to make it easy to return completed forms. The exhibitions were staffed at advertised times. Special 'behind the scenes' tours were also advertised in the consultation brochure and at the leisure centre to provide further information. An exhibition was also held at the sport and cycling festival in June, and brochures were handed out at the Nag's Head shopping centre and outside local schools.

To encourage participation, especially from local residents, door-knockers visited homes on the local Harvist and Andover estates and other homes in the immediate area to ensure people had received the brochure and to encourage them to complete the questionnaire. A prize draw was also used as an additional incentive.

The consultation period was just over four weeks, running from Friday 30 May until Monday 30 June. In total 1,444 responses were received. Overall this represents the largest response received in recent years to a consultation focussed on a local area or facility within the borough.

The resulting data was received, inputted and cross-tabulated by an independent company, Snap Surveys Ltd.

3.0 Results

All the figures below are based on the percentage of people answering each question or expressing an opinion. In other words, non-responses to questions are not included in the quoted percentages.

3.1 Profile of respondents

Significantly more women (59%) than men (41%) responded. Around one in eleven respondents said they had a disability

The age profile of respondents was broadly in line with the adult population profile of the borough, except for an under-representation of people aged 16 to 25. Fifty-nine responses were received from under 16s, which is unusually high for a generic consultation exercise of this type.

The ethnic profile of respondents was broadly representative of all groups in the borough except for black respondents, who accounted for only 8% of respondents compared to 12% of the borough population. There was an over representation of white respondents.

Respondents had a much greater propensity to play sport or take exercise than the borough average. Over half (51%) of respondents said they take exercise most days or every day (compared to a borough average of 19%). A massive 85% claimed to play sport or take exercise at least once a week compared to about 50% of the borough population who had exercised in the last week (source: LAA survey, 2007). Table 1 summarises these figures.

Table 1: Profile of respondents

	All respondents (no.)	All respondents (%)	LBI Profile (%)
Gender			
Male	556	41%	48%
Female	809	59%	52%
Ethnicity			
White	1073	80%	75%
Black	108	8%	12%
Asian	52	4%	5%
Mixed heritage	68	5%	4%
Chinese and other	45	3%	3%
Disability			
Has a disability	124	9%	18% (LLI)
Does not have a disability	1230	91%	82% (LLI)
Age			
Under 16	59	4%	
16-24	86	6%	16%
25-44	702	50%	50%
45-64	482	34%	22%
65+	74	5%	12%
Takes exercise at least once a week			
Yes	1175	85%	50%
No	214	15%	50%

Note: LBI age profile is based on breakdown of the adult (aged 16+) population

Finally, over a third of respondents (36%) said they used the facilities at Sobell at least once a week with a further 16% using it “most weeks”.

The profile of respondents by postcode shows that half (49%) of respondents lived in the adjacent N4, N5 or N7 postcode areas. A quarter (24%) lived elsewhere in Islington and the remaining quarter (27%) lived outside of Islington.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents by home postcode

Postcode	Number	Percentage of known postcodes
N4	155	11%
N5	149	10%
N7	410	28%
N19	222	15%
Other Islington	121	8%
Non Islington	387	27%
Total	1444	100%

The profile of the 175 respondents who live in the immediate area – within a 400m radius of the centre - is set out in Appendix 1 of this report.

3.2 Importance of services

Tables 3 and 4 below summarise the responses in terms of the importance people gave to having the facilities/activities in the area.

Four facilities stand out as priorities among sports facilities. They are a gym, swimming pool, sports hall and fitness studios (and classes). Each was rated as very or quite important by between 77 and 81% of respondents. Each one was rated as “very important” by at least half of respondents.

The ‘mean score’ is a weighted score taking account of the level of important given to each facility. These four facilities also had the highest mean scores

Table 3: Importance of sports and leisure facilities

	Very important or quite important (%)	Very important (%)	Quite important (%)	Mean score
Gym	81	60	21	2.42
Swimming pool	77	57	20	2.40
Sports hall	80	54	26	2.37
Fitness studios / classes	78	51	25	2.36
Base for local sports clubs	70	40	30	2.13
Gym for young people	64	37	28	2.03
Squash courts	62	36	26	2.00
Sauna and spa facilities	58	28	30	1.88
Ice rink	54	30	24	1.86
Outdoor football pitches	52	28	24	1.79
Sports therapy and treatment rooms	57	23	34	1.78
Football school	54	28	26	1.78
Climbing wall	53	22	31	1.73
Martial arts space	48	18	30	1.61

In terms of other community facilities youth facilities was rated as important by over three quarters of respondents. Most of the other suggestions were rated as important by between 60-70% of respondents. Additional healthcare (such as GP surgery), however, was only rated as important by two fifths of respondents.

Table 4: importance of other community activities/facilities

	Very important or quite important (%)	Very important (%)	Quite important (%)	Mean score
Youth facilities / youth club	76	45	31	2.23
Children’s soft play area	71	39	32	2.11
Café	66	32	34	2.00
Police Safer Neighbourhood Team / base for community policing	64	34	30	1.97
Crèche / nursery	65	32	33	1.96
Additional healthcare (e.g. GP)	39	18	21	1.50

surgery)				
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Respondents were also invited to suggest any other facilities or activities they would like to see as part of any future development. Several of the common suggestions had already been included in the previous question. The most commonly mentioned – with at least 20 mentions were:

- large swimming pool (100 mentions)
- other pool related (e.g. spectator gallery, teaching pool) (36 mentions)
- play facilities for children (30 mentions)
- more green space / landscaped gardens (30 mentions)
- ice rink (27 mentions)
- activities for young people/teenagers (26 mentions)
- tennis courts (23 mentions)
- indoor football facilities (22 mentions)
- dance classes (22 mentions)
- café (20 mentions)

A number of imaginative suggestions were made by smaller numbers of people. For example trampolining, yoga, high diving boards, skateboard park, cycling facilities and an outdoor bowling green were among the sport and fitness ideas that were mentioned.

There were also a number of suggestions for other community facilities such as a leisure complex, gallery space, music studio, underground car parking, secure bike parking and various advice and counselling services.

3.3 Options

Four options were set out in the brochure. In summary they were:

Option 1: Smallest leisure centre, least housing, least additional funding, lower building heights, more greenspace but greater impact on trees.

Option 2: Bigger leisure centre, more new homes and additional funding, higher rise development, more greenspace and less impact on trees.

Option 3: Second largest leisure centre and amount of housing development with higher rise building and housing above the leisure centre, more additional funding, more greenspace than at present but less than options 1 and 2, less impact on trees.

Option 4: Biggest leisure centre and most housing development including higher rise buildings and development on top of leisure centre, maximum additional funding, more greenspace than at present but less than in other options, greater impact on trees.

The consultation was not intended as a 'referendum' on fixed approaches but was designed to establish views on a range of issues and on potential design elements. Consultees were encouraged to express views on the options set out.

Table 5a (overleaf) summarises the data while table 5b (also overleaf) shows the 'net support' for each option. This is calculated by subtracting the percentage opposing the option from the percentage supporting it. The only option with a positive 'net support' was option 4.

Option 4 received the strongest support with a 'net support' rating of +7 percentage points, and option 1 was the least popular with a rating of -42 percentage points.

Of all the respondents to the consultation, four fifths (80%) supported (or strongly supported) at least one of the options and three in five respondents (60%) 'strongly supported' at least one of the four options. Conversely a minority of residents (11%) were opposed to all four options, of whom 120 people (8% of all respondents) were strongly opposed to all four proposed options.

Table 5a: Support and opposition to the options

n=1,444	Strongly support (%)	Support (%)	Oppose (%)	Strongly oppose (%)	No opinion (%)	No reply (%)
Option 1	6	13	25	37	8	12
Option 2	16	21	18	23	9	14
Option 3	14	22	18	23	7	16
Option 4	33	12	14	25	5	12

Table 5b: Net support and opposition to the options

n=1,444	All supporting (%)	All opposing (%)	Net support (% points)
Option 1	19	61	-42
Option 2	37	40	-3
Option 3	36	41	-5
Option 4	45	38	+7

The views of residents living nearby

The responses of residents who lived within a 400m radius of the centre – about a five-minute walk - was also analysed. A total of 175 respondents gave a home postcode that was within this catchment area. The profile of these respondents is set out in Appendix 1. The pattern of support and opposition to the options was significantly different to the overall picture. Tables 5c and 5d set out the figures.

Option 2 attracted the greatest level of support, with 46% of 'neighbouring' residents supporting it (after rounding). This option also drew the lowest level of opposition (35% of 'neighbouring' residents).

All of the other options were opposed by more of these residents than supported them.

Table 5c: Support and opposition to the options from residents living within 400m of Sobell

n=175	Strongly support (%)	Support (%)	Oppose (%)	Strongly oppose (%)	No opinion (%)	No reply (%)
Option 1	14	18	22	28	5	13
Option 2	25	22	11	23	9	10
Option 3	14	14	21	30	5	15
Option 4	19	11	11	38	6	15

Table 5d: Net support and opposition to the options (residents in 400m catchment area)

n=175	All supporting* (%)	All opposing* (%)	Net support (% points)
Option 1	32	50	-18
Option 2	46	35	+11
Option 3	29	51	-22
Option 4	30	49	-19

Note: totals are rounded and therefore may differ slightly from Table 5c.

Of those living within the 400m radius of the site, 77% supported (or strongly supported) at least one of the options and 58% 'strongly supported' at least one of the four options. Conversely a minority of neighbouring residents (10%) were opposed to all four options, of whom 11 people (6% of respondents living within 400m) were strongly opposed to all four proposed options.

Islington and non-Islington residents

Just over a quarter of respondents were not resident in Islington (see Table 2), though the great majority of these were users of the Sobell Centre. An analysis of the views of people who live in an Islington postcode and those who live elsewhere shows differences in the degree of support for the options. For each of the options a greater proportion of Islington residents supported the proposals than non-residents, though for option 4 the extent of support was almost identical. Equally, non-Islington residents were more inclined to oppose each option than those who live in Islington. Option 4 drew the highest level of support among Islington residents and non-residents, while option 1 was opposed by a majority of each group. The data is set out in Table 5e below.

Table 5e: Views of Islington residents and non-residents

	% of respondents who supported each option		% of respondents who opposed each option	
	Islington residents	Non-Islington residents	Islington residents	Non-Islington residents
Option 1	22%	10%	58%	70%
Option 2	41%	28%	37%	50%
Option 3	39%	27%	38%	50%
Option 4	45%	44%	37%	41%

Note: non-replies and don't knows are not shown which is why the totals do not add to 100%.

Reasons for supporting or opposing the options

The following paragraphs (and tables) set out the views on each option and the reasons given in the text responses. Comments have been grouped together and where **at least 25 people** mentioned a particular reason it has been included in the tables below. These views will be important in helping determine the shape of the project and in informing the detailed design.

Individual respondents may have mentioned several reasons for supporting or opposing a particular option and these are all included in the analysis.

3.3.1 Option 1 (Smallest leisure centre, least housing, least additional funding, lower building heights, more greenspace but greater impact on trees.)

This option was strongly supported by under a fifth (19%) of respondents and opposed by nearly two thirds (61%). Young adults, disabled people and Asian respondents were all more inclined to support this option though not more than three in ten of any of these groups supported the option.

People who never use the centre were also more inclined to support this option (28%)

The most common reason given for supporting this option was that it provides more greenspace (mentioned by 294 people) with 39 specifically mentioning more trees. The other three reasons

given by over 25 people were about minimising development, keeping new development lower in height and protecting trees.(see Table 6a).

Table 6a: Most frequently given reasons for supporting option 1

Reason	Number of mentions
More Greenspace	294
Lower height of new buildings	186
Fewer new houses and flats / less housing development	92
More trees	39

The overwhelming main reason for opposing Option 1 was that the proposed leisure centre is too small (477 mentions) with a further 70 people identifying insufficient gain or improvement to the facilities. The number of people who disliked the option because of the new housing development (67 mentions) was balanced a similar number (70) who opposed the option because there was insufficient new housing proposed. Table 6b provides an overview.

Table 6b: Most frequently given reasons for opposing option 1

Reason	Number of mentions
Leisure centre too small	477
Scheme too small / insufficient improvement or gain	70
Insufficient new homes/housing	70
New housing development	67
Loss of trees	58
Not enough Greenspace / park space	48
Housing along Hornsey Road	33
Funding	30

3.3.2 Option 2 (Bigger leisure centre, more new homes and additional funding, higher rise development, more greenspace and less impact on trees.)

This option was strongly supported by a sixth (16%) of respondents and supported by a further 21%. Slightly more people opposed this option. Just over a fifth of respondents did not express a view.

Women were more likely to support this option than men. Younger people were somewhat more inclined to support it than older people. Support for this option was fairly equally split across all other demographic groups.

Non-users of the facilities were more likely to support this option (48% of them) than regular users (of whom only 31% supported it). Islington residents, who are less likely to be centre users, were much more likely to support this option (41%) than non-Islington residents (28%).

Seven different reasons were cited by at least 25 people for supporting this option, but two stand out. The provision of more greenspace was mentioned by 291 people, and the bigger leisure centre was mentioned by 243 people. Nearly a hundred people felt that the housing proposals were attractive and 84 said it was the best idea/option overall.

Table 7a: Most frequently given reasons for supporting option 2

Reason	Number of mentions
More Greenspace	291
Bigger leisure centre	243

Good use of space for housing / more homes	96
Best idea / optimal balance	84
Fewer trees lost	79
More funding for leisure than option 1	28
More facilities	27

The main grounds for opposing Option 2 was the height of the proposed housing development (174 mentions). A significant number of people felt the leisure centre was not big enough (136) with a further 29 referring to a reduction in facilities.

Table 7b: Most frequently given reasons for opposing option 2

Reason	Number of mentions
Housing too high	174
Leisure centre not big enough	136
Housing too dense / too little greenspace	50
General opposition to housing	50
Loss of trees	36
Reduction in leisure facilities	29

3.3.3 Option 3 (Second largest leisure centre and amount of housing development with higher rise building and housing above the leisure centre, more additional funding, more greenspace than at present but less than options 1 and 2, less impact on trees.)

Around one in seven respondents (14%) strongly supported this option and a further fifth (22%) supported it. Nearly a quarter (23%) were strongly opposed and overall more people opposed it than supported it. Nearly a quarter of respondents (23%) did not express an opinion.

Support for this option varied a little across demographic groups without any outstanding differences. Regular users of the facilities were more inclined to oppose this option (47% of them) than occasional users and non-users (35%).

The group most inclined to support this option were residents of the N4 postcode, of whom 50% supported it and only 24% opposed it. Non-Islington residents were much more inclined to oppose this option (50%) than those who live in the borough (38%).

Six different reasons were given by at least 25 people for supporting this option. The most frequently given reason was the size of the proposed leisure centre (295 mentions). The amount of greenspace and the amount of new housing were mentioned by 95 and 87 people respectively.

Table 8a: Most frequently given reasons for supporting option 3

Reason	Number of mentions
Bigger leisure centre / good size centre	295
Keeping greenspace / medium amount of greenspace	95
Amount of new housing	87
Amount of funding for leisure/sport facilities	57
Trees protected	54
Right balance of housing / leisure facilities and greenspace	51

Six factors were mentioned by over 25 people as reasons for opposing this option. Four were mentioned by over 100 people: less greenspace; proposed high-rise buildings; too much development/overcrowded site and housing on top of the leisure centre (see Table 8b).

Table 8b: Most frequently given reasons for opposing option 3

Reason	Number of mentions
Less greenspace	178
Buildings too tall	153
Too much development / too overcrowded	129
Housing on top of the leisure centre	118
Leisure centre too small	54
Loss of trees	31

3.3.4 Option 4 (Biggest leisure centre and most housing development including higher rise buildings and development on top of leisure centre, maximum additional funding, more greenspace than at present but less than in other options, greater impact on trees)

A third of respondents (33%) strongly supported this option with a further 12% supporting it. In total 38% of respondents opposed this option, and a further quarter (27%) did not express a view.

Opinion was fairly consistent across all demographic groups, though support among the 59 under 16-year olds who responded was strong (56% supported this option and 20% opposed)

Opinion also varied very little between non-users, occasional users and regular users of the centre and was broadly consistent by postcode.

Seven different factors were mentioned by at least 25 respondents in support of this option. Of these the standout most frequently mentioned factor was maximum sized leisure centre/bigger centre (462 mentions).

Table 9a: Most frequently given reasons for supporting option 4

Reason	Number of mentions
Maximum sized leisure centre/bigger centre	462
Maximum housing	76
Maximum funding	70
More greenspace	55
Community facilities	44
Best use of space	29
More trees	25

Opposition to this option again focussed on the loss of greenspace (209 mentions) and the nature of the housing development. The high rise buildings was a concern for 168 people, overdevelopment was mentioned by 158 and the housing on top of the leisure centre was disliked by 92 people.

Table 9b: Most frequently given reasons for opposing option 4

Reason	Number of mentions
Less Greenspace	209
High buildings / high rise	168

Too overcrowded / too much development	158
Housing on top of leisure centre	92
More housing (than other options)	83
Loss of trees	72
Parking	31

3.4 Other comments

About 30 issues were raised in the section of the consultation document where respondents were invited to make any other comments. These are set out in full in table 10 (below). However those that were mentioned by at least 50 people and which have not been referred to previously in this report include:

- need to consider refurbishment of current facilities rather than redevelopment
- protect or expand ice rink provision
- make specific provision for young people
- protect or expand squash provision
- importance of Sobell to the local community
- difficulty in responding to the consultation / brochure not clear
- need to improve public transport and cycling facilities
- need to make the area safer

Table 10: Other frequent comments and suggestions

Issue / comment	Number of mentions
Refurbish rather than rebuild	143
Save/keep/expand the ice rink	114
Provide new swimming pool	112
Improve/expand greenspace	108
No housing	103
Maximise leisure provision	87
Provision for young people	82
Save / keep / expand squash facilities	81
Sobell is important to the local community	59
Difficult to express opinions / consultation brochure not clear	52
Improve public transport access / cycling	51
Make the area safer	50
Swimming pool not needed	35
More homes needed in the area	33
Housing proposals take up green space	26
Minimise disruption to users / local residents	25
Keep the number of trees	25

References:

Cross tabulations of consultation data – sn080530combined, Snap Surveys, July 2008.
Census 2001.

Local Area Agreement Survey, ORC International, Oct 2007.

Appendix A: Supplementary table

Table A1: Profile of respondents who live within 400m radius of Sobell Centre

	Local respondents (number)	Local respondents (%)*	All respondents (number)	All respondents (%)*
All	175		1444	
Gender				
Male	70	41%	556	41%
Female	101	59%	809	59%
Not stated	4		79	
Ethnicity				
White	134	81%	1073	80%
Black	11	7%	108	8%
Asian	9	5%	52	4%
Mixed heritage	9	5%	68	5%
Chinese and other	3	2%	45	3%
Not stated	9		98	
Disability				
Has a disability	17	10%	124	9%
Does not have a disability	147	90%	1230	91%
Not stated	11		90	
Age				
Under 16	4	2%	59	4%
16-24	7	4%	86	6%
25-44	102	59%	702	50%
45-64	46	27%	482	34%
65+	13	8%	74	5%
Not stated	3		41	
Takes exercise at least once a week				
Yes	139	82%	1175	85%
No	31	18%	214	15%
Not stated	5		55	

* percentages exclude those not providing an answer to the question.