

Report of: **Executive Member for Leisure and Equalities**

Meeting of	Date	Agenda Item	Ward(s)
Executive	11 September 2008	D4	All

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NB - The Appendix has been circulated in hard copy format to Members of the Executive only. It is available on the Council's internet site at www.islington.gov.uk/Democracy or by phoning (020) 7527 3005

Subject: SOBELL LEISURE CENTRE: RESULTS OF CONSULTATION

1. Synopsis

- 1.1 The Council is committed to a complete renewal of the facilities at the Sobell Leisure Centre and its surrounding site and sees this as a key part of its Olympic legacy. Between 30 May and 30 June 2008 the Council conducted a consultation exercise on the leisure and community facilities to be provided on the site, and on broad approaches to determining the site layout including the provision of local housing. The consultation involved a range of innovative approaches to engaging the local community and elicited 1,444 responses; the highest number of returns for any area-based consultation run by the Council. This report summarises the results of the consultation. It also sets out a recommended approach to the improvement of the leisure centre and the surrounding site that will inform the forthcoming procurement process.
- 1.2 The Sobell consultation was one of the most comprehensive surveys carried out by the Council and its results will be used to inform the decision making process on the future development of this site. It therefore clearly represents the Council 'listening to Islington'; whilst the commitment to provide a range of new leisure and community facilities, new housing and a better and larger park, supports the Council's vision of 'One Islington'.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To note the results of the consultation exercise set out in Appendix I to this report.
- 2.2 To approve the approach to the improvement of the Sobell Leisure Centre and its surrounding site, including the provision of a new swimming pool for the area, as set out in Section 3.10 of this report.
- 2.3 To note the Council's commitment to undertake further rounds of consultation as the project progresses
- 2.4 To authorise the Director of Environment and Regeneration in consultation with the Chief Executive to take all steps necessary to procure the redevelopment of the Sobell Leisure Centre, Finsbury Leisure Centre and Ironmonger Row Baths sites, based on the consultation responses and up to the appointment of a developer.

3. Background

- 3.1 The renewal of the leisure facilities at Ironmonger Row Baths, the Finsbury Leisure Centre and the Sobell Centre, and the programme of improvements to external pitches in the Borough, form a central part of the Council's Leisure Estate Review and of its Olympic legacy for Islington. As part of this, the Council has agreed to invest in the redevelopment of the Sobell Centre and in significant improvements to the lay out of its surrounding site. The aims of the Council's Sobell project are:
 - to replace the current ageing facilities with a new type of leisure centre with a stronger community focus, an extended range of activities and a range of complementary community uses, an approach that will also be reflected in future leisure service contracting.
 - to provide an element of mixed housing development, which will provide local homes for local people.
 - to provide a new, extended and safer public park incorporating the current Kinloch Street Park site.
 - to provide a more sustainable and environmentally friendly leisure site.
 - to work with partners to seek improvements to surrounding road lay-outs and traffic flow.
- 3.2 Following completion of both a leisure needs analysis, and initial feasibility work by professional leisure consultants, architects and quantity surveyors, the Council moved to a consultation phase on options for the renewal of the Sobell site. Carried out between 30 May and 30 June 2008, the consultation sought views on local leisure needs, on needs for broader community provision and on four broad approaches to the rebuilding of the leisure centre and its surrounding site, including the provision of new housing and a larger park.
- 3.3 The consultation team developed a broad range of approaches to engage as much as possible of the community, as well as existing and potential Centre users. These included:
 - Distribution of brochures to over 55,000 households across an area comprising all wards in the north and east committee areas, as well as half of Holloway ward.
 - Distribution of brochures to over 3,800 Centre users and user groups.
 - Distribution of brochures to libraries, estates, schools, nurseries, day centres, community centres, doctor's surgeries and a wide range of other public outlets.

- An on-line brochure and questionnaire.
- An offer to local community, residents, youth, sports and voluntary organisations to hold a consultation meeting with their group.
- Promotional banners at a variety of public sites.
- Articles in local papers and in Islington Now.
- A staffed exhibition at the leisure centre.
- 'Behind-the-scenes' guided tours at the Centre.
- Door knocking visits to local estates including both the Harvist and the Andover Estates.
- Distribution of brochures to parents at school gates.
- A stall at the Sport and Cycling Festival at the Emirates stadium on 21 June.
- A stall at the Nags Head shopping centre.
- Leafleting at Grafton School playground Boot Sale.
- A prize draw for completed questionnaires.

Particular efforts were made to involve sections of the community traditionally less well represented in such consultations and to provide translation services for non-English speakers.

3.4 The consultation elicited 1,444 responses; the largest response received to a Council consultation focussed on a local area or facility within the Borough. In addition to this, the Council received a petition signed by 1183 people in favour of the inclusion of an ice rink and a number of letters and e-mails on a variety of topics, which received individual responses. A public meeting, organised by local Ward Councillors, was also held on 16th July.

3.5 Analysis of the consultation responses showed that 49% of respondents lived in the adjacent postcode areas with 24% living elsewhere in Islington and 27% living outside the Borough. 59% of respondents were women and the age profile of the respondents was broadly in line with the adult profile of the Borough, except for an under-representation of young people aged between 16 and 25. A number of special events were run with young people to elicit their views and resulted in 59 responses from under 16s, an unusually high response for a consultation of this kind. The ethnic profile of respondents was also broadly representative of groups in the Borough, except for an under-representation of black respondents. Around one in eleven respondents said they had a disability.

Respondents had a much greater propensity to play sport or take exercise than the Borough average and over a third said they used the Sobell Centre more than once a week. Subsequent rounds of consultation on the Sobell project will specifically include more work with non-users in order to facilitate higher levels of engagement with those sections of the local community currently under-represented in physical activity and leisure centre useage.

3.6 An important part of the consultation was to establish what local people, and Centre users, wanted in terms of both local leisure facilities and wider community provision. In terms of sport and leisure facilities, four stood out as priorities among respondents. These were a gym, a swimming pool, a sports hall and fitness studios (and classes). Each was rated as very or quite important by between 77 and 81% of respondents. Local sports club facilities, squash courts, young people's sports facilities, sauna and spa facilities, an ice rink, football facilities, and a climbing wall were also rated as either very or quite important by more than 50% of respondents.

In terms of other community facilities, youth provision was rated as important by over three

quarters of respondents. A children's soft play area, a café, a police Safer Neighbourhood Team base and crèche/nursery facilities were also rated as very or quite important by more than 50% of respondents.

3.7 The brochure set out four options on the future layout of the site for public comment and is attached as Appendix II for information. In summary the options 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 such as the location, quantity and height of buildings and the provision of greenspace. Consultees were therefore encouraged to express what they liked and disliked about each of the options.

Option 4, with highest levels of residential development and the largest leisure centre, received strongest support with a net support of +7%. Option 1, with least housing and smallest leisure centre was the least popular option with a net support of -42%.

Responses from residents living within a 400 metre radius of the centre (about a five minute walk) were also analysed. These showed a different pattern with Option 2 receiving the highest support (net support +12%).

Approximately three quarters of respondents were resident in Islington. Residents overall favoured higher levels of development than non-residents and also showed stronger support for Options 2 and 3 than non-residents (by margins of 12% and 13% respectively).

Analysis of the points raised for and against each of the options show that where concerns were expressed about housing development, these arose for a number of different reasons. By far the most common reason cited was a desire for increased levels of greenspace, followed by concerns about building heights and concerns about overall quantity of housing.

Fuller details are set out in the attached report. This contains much useful information on specific reasons for supporting or opposing particular options whilst the final open-ended section of the brochure questionnaire has enabled the assemblage of a considerable body of opinion on specific aspects of the proposed leisure centre improvements. Those with more than a hundred individual mentions were;

- Refurbish rather than rebuild (143 mentions)
- Retain the ice rink (114 mentions)
- Provide a swimming pool (112 mentions)
- Expand and improve greenspace (108 mentions)
- No housing (103 mentions)

3.8 In addition to the formal consultation, a petition was presented to full Council on 26 June 2008 by a campaign to 'Save Islington Ice Rink'. This was signed by 1183 people.

3.9 A meeting on the Sobell development organised by Ward Councillors was held at Emmanuel Church on 16th July and attended by about 75 people. Main issues raised at the meeting were:

- Concern that a refurbishment option was not included in the consultation
- Issues concerning Kinloch Street Park and the extended greenspace site, including security issues, lockability of the new site and issues around biodiversity.
- Concerns about what activities might, or might not be available, in the new Centre.
- Support for the inclusion of an ice rink.
- Issues around the detail, design, height and quantum of housing on the site.
- A wish to be kept involved with plans for the site as these develop.

3.10 Next Steps

The results of the consultation, and of other representations received, have guided the Council in determining a way ahead that will best meet the needs of both the community and of current and potential Centre users. Whilst more detailed elements of the design will be determined as the procurement exercise progresses, and will be subject to further rounds of consultation, approval is now recommended for some broad parameters of the redevelopment process that will guide the procurement process. Executive is therefore asked to approve the following principles as forming the basis for the next stage in the Sobell development project:

- **The existing Sobell Leisure Centre will be demolished and replaced with a new facility on a different, better-placed and more efficient footprint.**

The Council recognises the concerns of those who favour a refurbishment of the current building. At the same time it has set itself a number of ambitious aims for this project for the benefit of the people of Islington. In line with the consultation responses, which show clear support for the larger size of leisure centre illustrated in Option Four, the Council is committed to the demolition of the current facility in order to provide a an 'option 4 sized' leisure facility with a new approach to leisure provision. This will include an increased range of activities, as well as complementary community facilities, that will attract a wider range of the community and engage more people in physical activity. It is also committed to increasing the supply of local housing, including social and affordable housing; to increasing and improving the Borough's greenspace and public realm by creating on this site a larger, safer and better designed park space incorporating Kinloch Street Park, and to providing a more sustainable and environmentally friendly Centre. It is clear that these aims are not attainable on the existing Centre footprint or by refurbishing the existing buildings. The professional advice we have received is also clear that to refurbish the current buildings with the inclusion of new activities, including a swimming pool, would cost more than the rebuilding of a new Centre.

- **The Council will seek to minimise disruption of service arising from a replacement of the existing Centre by establishing temporary arrangements during the rebuilding period.**

The Council is keen to respond to community concerns on this issue –particularly those of existing Centre users- and its Leisure Team has already been actively involved in mapping potential locations for displaced activities and in beginning discussions with a number of potential local and Borough-wide providers.

- **The Sobell redevelopment will include the provision of a new swimming pool for the area.**

The consultation response clearly demonstrates the large amount of public support for this new facility that will help meet the growing demand for swimming in the Borough for future generations.

- **Overall leisure facilities to be included in the new Centre will be prioritised to reflect the responses to the consultation.**

The consultation has indicated clear priorities on required leisure facilities and it is proposed that these priorities be adopted as a guiding principle of the detailed design stage. The facilities will include an ice rink as consultation responses and the accompanying petition make it clear that residents wish to retain this as the only such facility in the Borough.

- **Similarly, additional community facilities in the development will be prioritised in line with consultation responses.**

The consultation has also provided a clear indication of the community facilities most required by the local community and it is proposed that the Council work with partners to ensure that as many of these as possible are delivered in the new buildings and that this is reflected in the detailed design.

- **The development will include the provision of housing including at least 50% affordable and social housing to help meet local needs.**

It is clear from the consultation results that a majority of respondents favoured the higher levels of housing development, both in order to meet housing need and to supply additional funding for a larger Leisure Centre, indicated in Option 4 of the consultation. At the same time the consultation also indicated a high level of support for a maximisation of greenspace, and residents living closest to the redevelopment favoured a lower level of development indicated in Option 2 of the consultation. Residents, who formed the largest group of respondents, favoured the higher levels of development but also showed stronger support for Options 2 and 3 than non-residents indicating that residents in particular would like to see a higher level of leisure access with less development and a maximisation of greenspace if possible.

The size of the leisure centre proposed will need a high level of housing in order to be affordable. However, if more money can be raised through grants and S106 contributions or an improvement in the housing market, it is clear that residents would like to see this spent on increasing greenspace. The Council will give further consideration to any potential development of the site adjacent to Hornsey Road. Further consultation on exact details of the housing development will take place at the detailed design stage.

- **The redevelopment will include an increased, safer and better-designed greenspace.**

In line with the consultation responses and the high level of interest in public and greenspace issues, the Council is committed to the provision of a larger and better-designed open space that will also deal with the security issues surrounding the Kinloch Street Park. This will be achieved through more efficient use of space, linkage with the existing Kinloch Street Park and reduction of the current outside car and coach park. The Council recognises the high level of local concern about detailed design and future management and security of the proposed new greenspace site and will fully consult with residents on these issues as the project progresses. It will also seek not just to protect but to enhance the existing biodiversity of the site and will commission ecological surveys by its Nature Conservation Team.

- **The Council will work with partners to improve road layouts and traffic flow in the immediate surrounding area.**

In response to concerns raised by a number of local residents, the Council will be using the opportunity provided by the comprehensive redevelopment of the Sobell site to seek improvements to the surrounding road layout. This will involve the Council's transport planners working with colleagues in Transport for London to deal with such issues as the dangerous exit from Berriman Road onto Isledon Road and the Seven Sisters Road/Isledon Road one-way system that turns a residential section of Islington into a virtual 'traffic island'.

- **The Council will ensure that all elements of site design and construction serve as a model of environmentally sustainable development.**

This will cover the leisure centre, housing and greenspace elements and include the most efficient and up to date approaches to alternative energy generation, energy efficiency, sustainable use of materials, sustainable water useage and promotion of biodiversity.

- **The Council will ensure that residents and Centre users are engaged in the development of this project.**

The Council is committed to 'listening to Islington' and will ensure that residents, Centre users, sports clubs and others, are kept involved with the project as it evolves. It will undertake further consultation as well as establishing mechanisms for ongoing participation.

Put together, these principles will give rise to better leisure and community facilities in better buildings within a better overall environment, and in line with the majority of local and Centre user opinion.

4. Implications

4.1 Financial implications

£12 million of LBI capital funding has been set aside for the Sobell Leisure Centre development project between 2008-9 and 2010-11. Residual value from the proposed enabling housing development will also provide a financial contribution towards the overall project cost. It is impossible to be certain about the amount that this will realise due to the changing economic climate. The Council carried out a financial reappraisal of the overall scheme during the last week of August and will continue to monitor market trends as the project progresses.

In addition to these funds there is already £2.9m of S106 monies secured for the project. The Council will also prioritise future S106 funding from any developments in this vicinity and will be proactively seeking sport and community external funding grants to counter any gaps created by further marketplace changes. If possible this money will also allow for more greenspace to be created.

The proposals in Option 4 of the report have been costed at £30m and this would be covered by the financial arrangements outlined above. Final detailed costs however will be dependant on the detailed design and procurement process and on market trends. This will be kept under regular review and more detailed financial implications included at the next reporting stage.

While the Council will seek to minimise disruption of service arising from a replacement of

the existing Centre by establishing temporary arrangements for as many activities as possible during the rebuilding period, there will be a revenue implication for the Council.

4.2 Legal Implications

- 4.2.1 The Sobell Leisure Centre is currently managed by Aquaterra Leisure on behalf of the council pursuant to the leisure management contract. The contract does not expire until 31 March 2018. However the Council has the right to serve a part termination notice to remove the Sobell Leisure Centre from the contract for the purposes of redevelopment. Aquaterra would be entitled to compensation to meet any unavoidable costs incurred as a result of the centre's removal from the contract so that Aquaterra may continue to operate the remaining leisure establishments on an economically viable basis
- 4.2.2 The freehold of the Sobell Leisure Centre site is owned by the council. The site is subject to a 99 year headlease from the council to Aquaterra which commenced on 1 April 1974, an underlease lease from Aquaterra to the council which expires on 24 March 2073 and a sub underlease from the council to Aquaterra for the duration of the service contract. The sub underlease is co-terminus with the removal of the Sobell Leisure Centre from the contract. There is no break clause in the headlease and therefore the redevelopment of the Sobell site will require the consent of Aquaterra Leisure. There are no restrictions on the title of the site that would inhibit its development.
- 4.2.3 The Executive should have regard to the results of the consultation exercise and the views expressed in this report in reaching its decision on the options for redeveloping the Sobell Leisure Centre site
- 4.2.4 The procurement of the redevelopment of the Sobell Leisure Centre site will need to be undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the Public Contracts Regulations 2006

4.3 Equality Impact Assessment

The consultation campaign was conducted with specific efforts to reach all sections of the community, with particular attention being paid to traditionally under-represented groups. These efforts included door knocking in areas where there was a lower level of response and assistance with form filling on estates, for parents at school gates and in public shopping centres. Facilities for translation were also advertised in a variety of languages. Special efforts were also made to engage young people and these included facilitated work with local young people including a special Centre tour. Organisations representing people with disabilities, ethnic groups, older peoples groups and faith groups were also contacted and sent copies of the consultation. All material produced for the consultation was prepared in line with Council guidelines on appropriate font size for maximum accessibility. Large print versions of the consultation document were also offered to consultees.

Subsequent rounds of consultation on the Sobell project will specifically include more work with non-users in order to facilitate higher levels of engagement with those sections of the local community currently under-represented in physical activity and leisure centre useage, who were under-represented in this consultation.

Whilst this report refers specifically to the consultation process and its results, a full Equality Impact Assessment has been completed for the overall Sobell site project and will be regularly revised and reviewed.

5. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

The Sobell consultation was a comprehensive and innovative exercise that elicited over 1400 responses. It has provided the Council with valuable information on the views of local people, Centre users and potential Centre users, on leisure needs, community needs and potential site options. This information will be used in determining the future approach to the project and to inform the procurement and detailed design stage.

Background papers:

Results of consultation exercise

Final report clearance:

Signed by:

Received by: Executive Member for Leisure and Equalities Date

Head of Democratic Services Date

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