

Report of: Executive Member for Leisure and Equalities

Meeting of:	Date:	Agenda item	Ward(s)
Executive	27 March 2008	E5	All

Exempt:	No
---------	----

**Subject: Ironmonger Row Baths And Finsbury Leisure Centre;
Consultation Results And Next Stages****1. Synopsis**

- 1.1 Between 9 November and 10 December 2007, and in partnership with EC1 New Deal, the Council conducted a consultation on options for the renewal or redevelopment of Ironmonger Row Baths and the Finsbury Leisure Centre. The consultation involved a range of innovative approaches to engaging the local community and elicited 914 responses; the largest number for any such exercise, other than the Council's Borough-wide Budget consultation. This report summarises the results of that consultation. Based on the consultation results, it sets out a recommended approach to the improvement of the leisure centres that will inform the forthcoming procurement process and obtain high quality leisure and community facilities that are in line with the wishes of both local people and Centre users and which will constitute part of the Council's Olympic legacy.
- 1.2 The IRB/FLC consultation was one of the most comprehensive surveys carried out by the Council and its results will be used to inform each stage of the decision making process on the future development of these facilities. It therefore clearly represents the Council 'listening to Islington'; whilst the commitment to provide a new and improved range of both leisure and broader community facilities on these sites, supports the Council's vision of 'One Islington'.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To note the results of the consultation exercise set out in the Appendix to this report.
- 2.2 To approve the approach to the improvement of the two leisure centres as set out in the report.

3. Discussion

- 3.1 As part of its overall Leisure Estate Review, the Council has agreed to invest in the refurbishment of the Ironmonger Row Baths and the refurbishment or redevelopment

of the Finsbury Leisure Centre. This major project, forming part of the Council's local Olympic legacy, will not only lead to the renewal or upgrading of the existing, ageing facilities but will lead to the development of a new style of leisure centre with a stronger community focus and a wide range of complementary useage. This new approach will also be reflected in the Council's future approach to leisure service contracting.

- 3.2 Following completion of a Borough-wide leisure needs analysis and initial feasibility work by Continuum, the Council moved to a consultation phase on options for the renewal of Ironmonger Row Baths and the Finsbury Leisure Centre. Carried out between 9 November and 10 December 2007, the consultation sought views on local leisure needs, on needs for broader community provision and on four broad approaches to the renewal or redevelopment of the leisure centres, including the provision of enabling development.
- 3.3 The consultation team developed a broad range of approaches to engage as many as possible of the local community, as well as existing and potential Centre users. These included:
- Distribution of brochures to 20,000 households across EC1, WC1 and the southern part of N1.
 - Distribution of brochures to over 4,000 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 all local associations to have a presentation and a consultation meeting with their group.
 - Promotional banners at 8 public sites.
 - Advertisements in local papers and the EC1 ND Newsletter.
 - Staffed exhibitions at both of the leisure centres.
 - 'Behind-the-scenes' guided tours at the Centres.
 - Door-knocking visits to local estates
 - Distribution of brochures to parents at school gates.
 - A special swimming gala at Ironmonger Row Baths
 - A stall at Whitecross Street Market.
 - A promotional event on Old Street
 - A prize draw for completed questionnaires.
- 3.4 The result was one of the most comprehensive and innovative consultations carried out by the Council. It elicited 914 responses; the largest response to any exercise of this sort carried out by the Council, with the exception of its borough-wide budget consultation. In addition, a 30-signature petition was received from a group of local residents. The results were inputted and cross tabulated by an independent company. The profile of respondents was broadly representative of the Borough profile, though there was an under-representation of black respondents (although not of other ethnic minorities) and of people in the 16 to 24 age group. 73% of respondents lived in the EC1/WC1/south N1 area, the remaining respondents being largely Centre users or members. Fuller details are contained in section 3.1 of the appendix.
- 3.5 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 Leisure Centre facilities, the swimming pool stood out as the most

important, being rated as either very or quite important by 90% of respondents. A gym, exercise/fitness space, sports hall, football pitches, sauna, Turkish baths, café and squash courts were all rated as either very or quite important by more than 50% of respondents. Opinion was much more evenly divided in response to a question about other community activities or facilities, with a Safer Neighbourhood Police base, youth facilities, sports-related and general healthcare, crèche facilities, advice services, function rooms, internet access, affordable space for community groups and the laundry all rated as either very or quite important by more than 50% of respondents.

3.6 The brochure set out four options for public comment. These were:

Option 1: Repair of existing buildings.

Option 2: Refurbishment of IRB and rebuild of FLC but no housing development.

Option 3: Refurbishment and extension of IRB and rebuild of FLC with housing development on Central Street.

Option 4: Refurbishment and extension of IRB and rebuild of FLC with housing development on Helmet Row and Mitchell Street.

The consultation document made clear that residents were not being asked to vote between the options but could tell us how much they liked or disliked each option and the reasons for this. The comments have allowed us to analyse not just the most popular and unpopular options but also the most popular and unpopular elements within each option. This will enable us to create parameters for development that deal with as many resident aspirations and concerns as possible. The aim was to build the widest possible consensus in the community rather than divide residents between supporters of different options.

All four options received more support than opposition; with the highest 'net support' being received for option 2 (+25%) and the lowest for option 4 (+11%). The cross tabulation of all results also allowed a more detailed analysis of responses and a closer identification of key concerns. This showed, for example, that among residents favouring repairs to existing buildings as an approach, the key concern (cited by 212 respondents) was over loss of service continuity and disruption to facilities during the construction phase. In response to this, therefore, the Council will consider how building works can be phased to minimise or eliminate disruption.

Similarly, the analysis revealed that impacts on trees, on general open space, and on external facilities was a common concern amongst respondents overall, with a total of 253 separate mentions. In response to this, the Council will ensure that the approach adopted leads to an increase in greenspace in a safer and more accessible environment.

As part of the detailed analysis consideration was also given to attitudes to enabling development. By using the cross tabulation to eliminate all double counting this showed that 54% of all respondents expressed support for extensive redevelopment of leisure sites involving some degree of enabling development, whilst 41% opposed this approach. Within the latter group, the most commonly cited concerns were the scale of any enabling development, the location of such development and the level of disruption that it might cause. The recommendations set out in section 3.7 of this report have therefore set out to address these concerns as far as possible.

Fuller details on responses are set out in section 3.3 of the attached report. Together with the open-ended sections of the brochure questionnaire they have enabled the assemblage of a considerable body of opinion on specific aspects of the proposed

leisure centre improvements. These will be used to inform every stage of decision-making around the project and will be particularly useful around the detailed design stage of the project.

3.7 New Leisure Facilities for Finsbury; the Way Ahead

The results of the consultation, combined with the subsequent discussions held at South Area Committee and the EC1 New Deal Board, have guided the Council in determining a way ahead that will best meet the needs of both the local community, and of current and potential Centre users, in the provision of high quality local leisure and community facilities. 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.

- More radical options for the extensive refurbishment of facilities, rather than the repair of existing buildings, have been clearly supported by the consultation process. It is therefore proposed that Executive approve the retention but complete refurbishment of the Ironmonger Row Baths, including the addition of roofline extensions that will maintain the attractiveness of the existing buildings whilst providing additional and improved facilities. The extension of IRB will allow the inclusion of the widest possible range of facilities selected as important by the public.
- On the same basis, it is proposed that Executive approve the complete demolition of the Finsbury Leisure Centre and its replacement with a new, high quality and fit-for-purpose leisure and community centre.
- Executive recognises the concern that was expressed by some respondents, especially those who favoured repairs to existing buildings, over disruption and loss of facility during the reconstruction period. It is therefore proposed that the detailed design and procurement stages include additional consideration of how building works can be phased to minimise or eliminate periods of closure.
- Whilst a majority of consultees favoured the provision of some level of enabling development, especially of social housing provision, concerns were also expressed over its quantity. It is therefore proposed that Council approve the provision of a quantum of housing not exceeding a footprint of 435 square metres. This is significantly lower than both options presented in the consultation and is equivalent in size to the footprint occupied by the current squash courts. This will allow the provision of some social housing which many respondents said was needed while lessening the impact on immediate neighbours.
- Other respondents expressed concern over the exact location of any enabling development. It is therefore proposed that the detailed design stage should include further local consultation on the appropriate siting of such development.
- In line with the above, and with consultation responses, Executive is asked to approve an approach that will include an increase in the provision of both greenspace and general open space, designed in a safer and more accessible manner and with more linkage to other open space in the immediate vicinity.
- 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. This design stage should try to accommodate as many of the facilities highlighted by the public as possible, in the order of priority given by the consultation responses.

- The consultation has also indicated a set of most required local community facilities and it is proposed that the Council work with partners to ensure as many of these as possible are delivered either in the new buildings or in facilities in the immediate vicinity.

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:

This report is seeking in principle approval to proceed with work up to a specification in line with the parameters set out in section 3.7 of the report. Detailed proposals will come back for approval once the specification is fully developed.

The cost of the consultation has been met by existing budgets within the Environment and Regeneration department. As part of the performance and financial planning process £24million of council capital resources has been allocated to the leisure estate review between 2008-2011, £12.35m of which has been allocated to Ironmonger Row Baths and Finsbury Leisure Centre, and EC1 New Deal have earmarked £3.8m towards the cost of the project. Costs of the new specification will be contained within the cost of approved capital funding (including the EC1 New Deal contribution) and any receipts from enabling development.

4.2 Legal Implications:

Ironmonger Row Baths and the Finsbury Leisure Centre are currently managed by Aquaterra Leisure on behalf of the Council pursuant to the leisure management service contract.. The contract expires on 31st March 2018 but it does contain provisions enabling the Council to remove the two leisure establishments 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 establishments' removal from the contract and so that Aquaterra may continue to operate the remaining establishments on an economically viable basis.

The freehold of the two establishments are owned by the Council but are subject to leases to Aquaterra Leisure for the duration of the contract. However both leases are co-terminus with the removal of the establishments from the contract. The Norman Street squash courts are held by the Council on a 99 year lease (term commenced 1 July 1973) from Keniston Second Housing Association Ltd. Any redevelopment of the squash courts would require the consent of Keniston under the lease and may not be feasible without the Council seeking to acquire the freehold.

The Executive should have regard to the results of the consultation exercise and the views expressed in the report in reaching its decision on the options for improving the two leisure establishments

4.3 Equality Impact Assessment:

The Council's consultation campaign included specific efforts to reach all sections of the community, with particular attention being paid to traditionally under-represented groups. These efforts included door knocking and assistance with form filling on estates, and in other areas that EC1ND staff had identified as having had lower

