

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

15 January 2019



Title	Leisure Centre Consultation Update		
Purpose of the report	To note		
Report Author	Lee O'Neil, Deputy Chief Executive		
Cabinet Member	Councillor Ian Harvey	Confidential	No
Corporate Priority	Clean and Safe Environment		
Recommendations	Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the outcome of the Council's first phase consultation on its plans for a new Spelthorne Leisure Centre.		
Reason for Recommendation	Not applicable		

1. Key issues

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the progress with the first phase of consultation on the Council's proposals for a new Spelthorne Leisure Centre.
- 1.2 The report outlines the process undertaken, a summary of the results received and some issues to be addressed prior to moving forward with any future phases of consultation on this project.

Background

- 1.3 The Council proposed to build a new leisure centre at the northern end of Staines Park following work to identify a suitable site and facility mix.
- 1.4 As part of this process a detailed feasibility study was undertaken by a specialist leisure consultant, the Sports Consultancy, which identified the optimum facility mix needed to meet community needs and maximise the financial sustainability of any new centre. They also undertook an appraisal of the viability of the two sites which the Council had identified as possible locations for the new centre, i.e.:
 - A. Land at the northern end of Staines Park;
 - B. The green space between the current Spelthorne Leisure Centre and the Knowle Green Council Offices.

The Sports Consultancy concluded that site A was the best site from these two options as site B was too small to incorporate the optimum facility mix they had identified.

- 1.5 Having completed the initial feasibility work, the Council planned to undertake two main stages of consultation on the proposals:
 - a. Phase 1 (planned for June/July 2018) - To seek stakeholders' views on the proposed location and facilities mix for the new centre; and to get some early views on broad design preferences;
 - b. Phase 2 (planned for autumn 2018) - To seek stakeholders' views on a detailed 'worked-up' design having taken into account the views/preferences expressed in Phase 1.
- 1.6 It was also proposed to set up a micro-website to enable people to comment and see how the Council's plans were progressing.
- 1.7 In view of the likely stakeholder interest in such a significant flagship project, it was clear that a robust consultation exercise would have to be undertaken to ensure that a wide range of views were taken into account in deciding on any final scheme. A decision was taken to employ a specialist company to run the consultation as it is an area of expertise that the Council does not have in-house and the communications team would not have the capacity to undertake such a large-scale consultation exercise on top of their existing work.
- 1.8 A procurement exercise was undertaken with the aim of identifying a company that would:
 - a. Have the necessary resources and expertise to organise and manage public consultation events and promote them effectively;
 - b. Prepare robust analysis of any consultation feedback to inform design development and the eventual Statement of Community Involvement; and
 - c. Act as a focal point of contact for the community; engaging on a regular basis with key stakeholders in order to identify advocates and address particular concerns as they emerged.
- 1.9 By employing a company with the above capabilities it was anticipated that the strain on internal staff resources would be less, allowing Council officers to focus their limited resources on other key elements of the project. The project team also believed that using a professional stakeholder relations company would benefit residents with enhanced engagement opportunities, including face to face, to gauge a wide range of views.
- 1.10 Keeble Brown were selected after proposals were received from three companies. Two of these (including Keeble Brown) specialised in undertaking community consultations on behalf of developers and local councils, with both known to the Council's project manager from previous successful work they had undertaken to support similar projects. The third company approached had previously been used by Spelthorne to conduct a residents' survey and had some experience of running specific public consultations on new leisure centres for councils.
- 1.11 Keeble Brown were primarily selected on the basis that they provided the best balance in terms of the support they proposed to provide, the experience of the project lead and cost.

- 1.12 The Leader and Portfolio Holder for Community Wellbeing were kept informed of progress with the feasibility work and Cabinet were provided with a number of updates/presentations.
- 1.13 As the project moved from feasibility to the early design phase, a formal Leisure Centre Development Working Group (LCDWG) was set up comprising of the Leader of the Council (as Portfolio Holder for Strategic Assets), the Portfolio Holder for Community Wellbeing (responsible for leisure) and relevant officers (including the Deputy Chief Executive, Property Development Advisor and the Sport and Facilities Manager). The purpose of this group included:
- a. Providing strategic direction to the project development team on the Council's requirements;
 - b. Approving any documents to be used for the public consultation;
 - c. Considering any consultation responses and how these should inform the design; and
 - d. Monitoring progress with the project, overseeing delivery of any approved design brief and monitoring cost control.
- 1.14 Prior to commencing the consultation exercise a briefing was held for councillors on 9 May 2018 in the Council Chamber to outline the Council's proposals, which received overwhelming support from the 14 councillors who attended.

The Consultation Process

- 1.15 The consultation process ran from 29 June to 23 July 2018 commencing with a two-day drop-in event at the existing Spelthorne Leisure Centre on 29 and 30 June.
- 1.16 The publicity alerting the public, local community groups and other stakeholders to the Council's consultation on its proposals commenced on Friday 23 June 2018. This included:
- a. Publicity for the two-day drop-in event via:
 - i) Adverts in the local press (Surrey Advertiser and Heathrow Villager);
 - ii) Online advertising (supported by social media activity) on the *GetSurrey* media platform and information on the Council's website/Facebook page/Twitter;
 - iii) Flyers and posters distributed to local shops, three local health centres, the Spelthorne Library/Museum, the Knowle Green Council Office Reception, the current Spelthorne Leisure Centre and on the Council's 16 notice boards around the borough;
 - iv) 550 invitation letters delivered to residential properties and businesses in local roads around the proposed site for the new centre;
 - v) Email invitations sent to 49 local sports groups;
 - vi) Email invitations, telephone and face to face canvassing with 12 Community Groups;

- vii) Contacting all councillors and the local MP, Kwasi Kwarteng, to ensure they were aware of the proposals and the launch of the public consultation.
- b. Ongoing publicity for the consultation process via:
 - i) Door-to-door distribution of information to around 1500 homes (including a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document, instructions where to find the questionnaire, information used at the drop-in event, and contact details for Keeble Brown)
 - ii) Information sent to 7 disability/access/mental health groups, 41 PE departments within local schools and colleges, and 20 schools in the local area.
 - iii) Information on the Council's website linking people to the micro-site set-up by Keeble Brown <http://www.spelthorneleisure.info/>
 - iv) Information in the Borough Bulletin;
 - v) A banner advertising the consultation process on the bottom of all emails sent out by the Council.
- 1.17 At the two-day drop-in event at the existing Spelthorne Leisure Centre on 29 and 30 June, Keeble Brown and members of the project team used a range of display boards (shown in **Appendix 1**) to explain the Council's proposals. These outlined:
 - a. The proposed location of the new centre;
 - b. The proposed core facilities mix;
 - c. Options for additional facilities which could potentially be incorporated;
 - d. Pictures of possible designs for the new centre (taken from examples of other leisure centres).
- 1.18 Stakeholders attending the drop-in event and subsequently responding during the consultation period were asked to provide feedback on their views on the proposals via:
 - a. Hardcopy questionnaires (with stamped envelopes) given to those attending the drop-in event. The questionnaire was also promoted as a downloadable document and as an online survey;
 - b. Social media, including a dedicated website and a public Facebook page which reached more than 30,000 Facebook users in the Staines-upon-Thames area;
 - c. Telephone, face-to-face and email canvassing.
- 1.19 Organisations, groups and institutions such as sport clubs, disability charities and organisations (e.g. Age UK) were approached directly and given extended deadlines to ensure they were able to respond.
- 1.20 Public briefings were given in the form of a FAQ document which was distributed locally and online.

Summary of the results

- 1.21 Coverage and responses received:

- a. Leafleting, door-drops, advertising and posters, social media (including Facebook), online advertising and press releases reached more than 48,000 people in the Staines-upon-Thames area;
 - b. A total of 615 residents attended the two-day drop-in event held at Spelthorne Leisure Centre on 29 and 30 June;
 - c. 2,233 responses were reviewed and analysed, comprising of:
 - i) 1,872 questionnaires completed and returned;
 - ii) A further 361 responses received in other formats such as emails and letters (including 117 letters from local schools).
- 1.22 A summary of the results from the consultation exercise is shown in **Appendix 2**, with a more detailed report available at www.spelthorne.gov.uk/LCresults
- 1.23 Some of the key highlights from the results were:
- a. 66% of respondents expressed strong or medium support for a new leisure centre, with support being highest from those who regularly take part in a leisure activity, particularly those using the Council's current facility;
 - b. Strong concern was expressed about the proposed location in Staines Park, with 68% of those not in favour of a new leisure centre mentioning the location as a reason for their objection;
 - c. The greatest number of objections to the proposed site came from residents living closest to Staines Park (within 500m);
 - d. In terms of the facilities residents would most like to see provided, a main swimming pool and parking facilities were cited as priorities, followed by a gym, learner pool and café. The least support was for all-weather pitches. When respondents were asked to rank non-core facilities, there was strong support for squash courts;
 - e. Almost half (44%) of respondents said they would like more facilities to be provided for children.

Moving forward

- 1.24 In view of the strong concern over the use of Staines Park for the new centre the Council made a decision in September 2018 to abandon any plans to use the park and to seek an alternative location for the new leisure centre. The Council is currently in the process of identifying options for a new site for this facility. It is anticipated that the Council will be able to develop the new centre by the end of 2021.
- 1.25 The first phase consultation exercise was designed to ensure that the project team received robust feedback on its developing proposals at an early stage, before any detailed design work was carried out. The consultation process ensured that widespread engagement was undertaken and delivered a very high number of responses from a wide range of stakeholders.
- 1.26 Although the Council did not receive support for the proposed location, the consultation exercise ensured that the Council received a high volume of robust data which can be used to inform the design of the new centre, the mix of facilities and help identify a suitable alternative location for the new facility.

- 1.27 The information gathered from the first phase consultation process will also be used to inform the next phases of consultation.
- 1.28 In taking this forward the Council will need to review the future resourcing of the project. Based on the previous experience of similar projects undertaken by the project team and the consultants, the Council expected a high level of interest in the Council's proposals, but could not have anticipated the unprecedented level of response it would receive from the community. The use of an external consultant to support this process was not as effective as we would have hoped and, as a result, the Council's internal resources allocated to the project became overwhelmed responding to stakeholder communications. It also meant that some of the community lost trust in the aims and objectives of the project, including the Council's motives.
- Careful consideration will need to be given to future resourcing of community engagement for the project prior to further consultation.
- 1.29 The detailed information gathered from the first phase exercise will be used to develop a more extensive range of FAQs which will be made available from the beginning of the next phase of consultation. In developing future FAQs and other communications, the project team will need to anticipate questions and concerns as to how the Council's proposals fit in with its wider plans for the borough, e.g. any plans for developing housing and infrastructure.

2. Financial implications

- 2.1 The final costs of the first phase of consultation on the Council's plans for a new leisure centre is anticipated to be around £18,000, excluding officer time.
- 2.2 The costs of the next phase of consultation will be considered once options for a new site have been considered and the review of future resourcing has been completed.
- 2.3 In addition to the costs of the consultation process, a further £82,052 has been spent on other preliminary work associated with the project. Most of the work undertaken will still be utilised for any alternative site identified for the new leisure centre.
- 2.4 As part of the 2018/19 Capital Programme the Council approved a capital growth bid of £1.8m to cover the initial costs for the leisure centre redevelopment project. This budget will be used to cover the costs of the consultation process and the provision will be carried forward into 2019/20.

3. Other considerations

- 3.1 Keeble Brown received lengthy feedback from Disability Empowerment and Access Groups which indicates that there is a significant need for improved facilities which could address the different needs of the area. In designing any future new leisure centre, the Council will ensure that these needs are taken into consideration where possible including, for example, making the new centre dementia friendly.
- 3.2 The contract for the current operator of the Spelthorne and Sunbury Leisure Centres is due to expire in 2021. The Council has the option to extend this contract for up to five years. A procurement exercise will have to be undertaken in due course to appoint an operator to run the Council's leisure centres, when this contract comes to an end.

3.3 As part of Spelthorne's ongoing discussions with Heathrow Airport Limited (HAL) over the proposed expansion of Heathrow, the Council is exploring options for a new leisure offering in the north of the borough (which HAL have been asked to fund) which would complement the proposals for the new Spelthorne Leisure Centre.

4. Timetable for implementation

4.1 The timetable for the next phase of consultation on the Council's plans for a new Spelthorne Leisure Centre will be decided once the review of alternative locations for the facility have been completed and options identified.

Background papers: There are none

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Display boards used for drop-in event 29 & 30 June

Appendix 2 – Spelthorne Leisure Centre - Abbreviated Analysis of Responses to the Consultation (includes copy of questionnaire)