

**To:** City Executive Board  
**Date:** 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2011  
**Report of:** Head of Leisure and Parks  
**Title of Report:** Keep Publicly Funded Leisure in Oxford – Petition

## Summary and Recommendations

**Purpose of report:** To report to the Board upon two petitions received by the Council concerning publicly funded leisure facilities in Oxford; to advise the Board on Council's consideration of them; to set out the sequence of events concerning the provision of a new swimming pool in Oxford; to provide information on publicly funded or facilitated leisure provision in the City; and to make recommendations.

**Report Approved by:** Councillor Van Coulter and the Corporate Management Team.

**Finance:** Jackie Yates  
**Legal:** Jeremy Thomas

**Policy Framework:** N/A

**Recommendation(s):** The Board is recommended to note the contents of the report, the views expressed by the campaign group in the petition, the public consultation and engagement exercises carried out by the Council and the substantial body of evidence established and in the light of this to confirm the previous policy to build a new high quality swimming pool facility adjoined to Blackbird Leys Leisure Centre and once completed to close both Temple Cowley Pools and Blackbird Leys Pool.

## Appendices

- Appendix One - Consultation on Leisure Facilities and the Proposed Competition Standard Pool at Blackbird Leys Leisure Centre
- Appendix Two - Summary of publicly funded or facilitated public access leisure facilities in Oxford and associated information.

## **Petition to Council**

1. A petition entitled "Keep Publicly Funded Leisure in Oxford" was handed in at the full Council meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> February 2011. The petition reads as follows:-

"We the undersigned petition the Council to keep publicly funded leisure facilities inside the ring road in East Oxford by carrying out the minimum maintenance required to keep Temple Cowley Pools and Fitness Centre operational, instruct the operators Fusion Lifestyle to put on more classes, events and features to increase attendances, and to use income from the gym to fund the improvements identified as necessary by the 2008 condition survey and the Save Temple Cowley Pools Action Group".

2. Council adopted a Petitions Scheme (as required by the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009) in July 2010. The scheme requires petitions containing over 1,500 signatures will be debated by full Council. The 2009 Act says that in order for signatures on a petition to count against this total they must provide the signatory's name and address and that people signing must live, work or study in the local authority's area. A sufficient number of signatures to achieve the 1,500 mark have accompanying names and addresses. It is not possible to check whether any signatories from outside Oxford work or study in the City.
3. In accordance with the Petitions Scheme the petition was debated by full Council on 18<sup>th</sup> April 2011. Where the subject of the petition is one on which the City Executive Board is responsible for reaching the final decision, the Council debate serves to provide the Board with its recommendations on the response that should be made to the content of the petition.

## **Council Decision**

4. Council on 18<sup>th</sup> April 2011 resolved to note the petition; to record that publicly funded leisure was remaining in Oxford; and that a report would be submitted in due course to the Board.

## **Matters for the Board to Consider – Sequence of Events**

5. In considering the petition, the Board should take account of the previous decisions that have a bearing on the provision of swimming facilities in the southern part of the city:-
  - (a) The Council's Capital Programme (agreed by Council on 21<sup>st</sup> February 2011) contains a budget line relating to a new build competition pool (Z3018 under City Leisure). That budget line does not of itself constitute commitment or authority to spend.

- (b) The City Executive Board on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2011 granted delegated authority to officers to select an appropriate lead contractor to obtain detailed tender pricing for the construction of a competition standard pool.
- (c) The sequence of decisions thus far on the matter of swimming provision is this:-
- City Executive Board – 1<sup>st</sup> July 2009 – (upon consideration of the report on the Leisure Facilities review) resolved that “project approval be given to commence the development of a new pool at Blackbird Leys Leisure Centre which, upon completion, would enable the closure of Temple Cowley Pool and Blackbird Leys Pool .....
  - City Executive Board – 13<sup>th</sup> January 2010 – resolved “to approve the outline business case (for a new pool at Blackbird Leys) and that further development of the business case and financial approval in line with different design options for the new competition pool be undertaken”.
  - City Executive Board – 1<sup>st</sup> September 2010 – (upon a report on feasibility and consultation outcome) resolved –
    - “(i) Reflecting the leisure facilities strategy which seeks to retain swimming provision in the south of the city, the City Executive Board confirms that the preferred option to achieve this is to develop a new pool which meets the needs of the city for a competition standard pool and has wider appeal for casual swimming and play adjoining the Blackbird Leys Leisure Centre as shown in option 3 (c) of the feasibility study;
    - (ii) the City Executive Board approves the seeking of tenders for the works on the basis of (i) above with a report back to the Board once tenders have been received and the availability of funding in the medium term financial strategy is clearer following the comprehensive spending review and formula grant settlement;
    - (iii) That work is continued to ensure Temple Cowley residents retain good access to leisure facilities”.
  - City Executive Board – 9<sup>th</sup> March 2011 – (upon a report on lead contractor arrangements) resolved to –
    - “(i) Grant delegated authority to the Executive Director, City Services to select an appropriate lead contractor from the Improvement and Efficiency for the South East

Framework to obtain detailed tender pricing for the construction of the competition standard pool; and

- (ii) Approve expenditure of up to £15,000 for pre-contract work with the selected contractor to support the value engineering stage of the pool design and obtain final pricing for each element of the pool construction prior to the final report to the City Executive Board advising of the full construction costs".
  - Strategic Development Control Committee – 28<sup>th</sup> April 2011 – approved a planning application to provide a 25 metre swimming pool at the Blackbird Leys Leisure Centre. That decision was called in and the application went to the Planning Review Committee on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2011. The Committee approved the planning application.
- (d) A report is programmed in the Forward Plan to go to the City Executive Board in July 2011 with a final tender price, to request award for the construction contract and for works to commence on the new competition standard pool at Blackbird Leys.
- (e) A 10,000 signature petition opposing the closure of Temple Cowley Pools was considered by full Council on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2010. The petition said "We, the undersigned, want to save Temple Cowley Pool and Gym facility from destruction, we do not want this valuable commodity removed (without replacement in the immediate vicinity), or substantially altered ie village changing rooms. Temple Cowley Pools is at the heart of our community and we want to keep it that way. Please repair and maintain Temple Cowley Pool and DON'T CLOSE OUR POOLS!" Council noted the contents of the petition.
- (f) A great deal of public consultation has taken place in relation to the proposals for the competition standard pool. This consultation has been carried out in line with Oxford City Council's consultation strategy and the following four primary methods have been used:
  - A city wide survey;
  - Public open sessions;
  - Focus groups; and
  - Design boards and comment cards.

An overview of the consultation to date is shown in Appendix One.

### **Publicly Funded Leisure in Oxford**

6. Council has noted that publicly funded leisure remains extensive within the city. As far as the Temple Cowley Pools complex is concerned, Fusion Lifestyle has made some improvements in usage through

improved programming and making the complex more appealing through modest improvements. The Council and Fusion Lifestyle have however not been able to identify a cost effective and sustainable means of significantly increasing income at the site, due to the layout, the condition of the facility , the mix of the facilities available and restrictions on car parking.

7. Attached as Appendix Two to this report is a summary of the publicly funded or facilitated public access leisure facilities in Oxford together with a comparison with key benchmark authority areas. This relates to the city of Oxford rather than to “inside the ring road” which is an entirely artificial construct in terms of leisure provision for which accessibility is judged by travel times, relative to whether the facility’s primary role is community, district wide, sub regional, regional or national.
8. The elements of the Council’s adopted Leisure Facilities Strategy which have been delivered so far have proved a success and have more than delivered the usage figure set out in the business cases. This combined with the proactive management and development of our leisure facilities through our partnership with Fusion Lifestyle has led to a 11% overall increase in usage of leisure facilities to just under one million visits a year and a 6% increase in memberships for those on low incomes through our concessionary entry scheme. We have also exceeded our targets in terms of target groups who were previously under represented in the users of the service particularly the disabled and people from black and ethnic minority communities.

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**Background papers: None**

**Version number:**

## **APPENDIX One - Consultation on Leisure Facilities and the Proposed Competition Standard Pool at Blackbird Leys Leisure Centre**

### **1. Introduction**

A great deal of public consultation has taken place in relation to the proposals for the competition pool. This consultation has been carried out in line with Oxford City Councils' consultation strategy and four primary methods have been used, these being:

- A city wide survey;
- Public open sessions;
- Focus groups; and
- Design boards and comment cards.

The consultation was promoted through the following methods:

- Several press releases;
- Coverage in the Oxford Mail;
- Coverage on radio and television;
- Posters to community centres, surgeries, libraries and sport centres;
- Front page web coverage on Council's website for the duration of consultation periods;
- Direct e-mails; and
- Through key groups such as the Community Sports Network.

As would be expected a mixture of view points have been expressed by those who contributed to the consultation process, especially at the open sessions where there was committed local support to keep Temple Cowley Pools open. However, throughout the process the majority of consultees have indicated that 'doing nothing' is not an acceptable way forward and that the proposed solution demonstrates value for money.

### **2. Consultation with Key Stakeholders**

A great deal of consultation has been undertaken since 2009 with various key stakeholders and statutory consultees, regarding the Leisure Facilities Review 2009 and also the proposed Competition Standard Pool. The consultation has included liaising with the following bodies:

- the Amateur Swimming Association (ASA);
- the City of Oxford Swimming Club;
- Sport England (utilising the Sport England's Facilities Improvement Service);
- the Oxfordshire Sports Partnership;
- Fusion Lifestyle and other leisure operators;
- the Community Sports Network (includes a representation for the voluntary sector, and the Youth Sport Trust);
- the County Council (social care, education - including Peers Academy, and Oxford Community School);

- the Library Service;
- the Primary Care Trust; and

## 2.1 Sport England

In particular, Sport England have been a key consultee from the Leisure Facilities Review (May 2009) up to the current consultation on the outline designs for the new pool. Oxford City Council has worked closely with Sport England on the Facility Improvement Service when looking at the Blackbird Leys option.

Oxford City Council has also corresponded with Sport England in regards to comments on the outline designs. Sport England are supportive of the project.

## 2.2 Amateur Swimming Association

Oxford City Council's Leisure Team has also been working closely with the Amateur Swimming Association (A.S.A). In particular the Leisure Team have worked with the ASA's Regional Officer. The Regional Officer took part in the pool focus consultation group that met in June 2010 and also attended the outline design consultation on the 26 November 2010. The Council also met with the A.S.A's Regional Director in July 2010 and a representative from the A.S.A's Facilities Team in November 2010. The A.S.A are supportive of the project.

## 2.3 Oxford based Swimming Clubs

The City of Oxford Swimming Club and the Oxford Swans (a club aimed at disabled people) have been fully involved within the consultation process and have contributed to ensuring that there have been improvements to the new facilities changing facilities, private shower areas, spectator seating and disabled access. Both clubs are supportive of the proposed new facility.

## **3. Focus Group Sessions**

Two focus group sessions took place between June and August 2010. The focus group was made up of the following key users and stakeholders:

- Temple Cowley Pools User (Swimming);
- Temple Cowley Pools User (Swim, Gym and Classes);
- Blackbird Leys Pool Users;
- City of Oxford Swimming Club;
- Oxford Swans Disability Swimming Club;
- Thame and Oxford School Sports Partnership;
- Fusion Lifestyle;
- Old Temple Cowley Residents association; and
- Oxfordshire Sports Partnership.

The focus group was instrumental in the design and approval of the web and paper based survey. A summary of the key points that were raised by the focus group sessions are shown below:

- Temple Cowley Pool is currently poor quality, except for the gym which is of good quality;
- Any option that is approved must provide value for money, be affordable and sustainable;
- The disabled provision at Temple Cowley Pools is of a poor standard;
- Doing nothing is not a good enough option for the Council; and
- A new competition standard pool at Blackbird Leys was the most sensible way forward and first choice of those present at the latter meeting.

There were an additional two Focus Group drop in sessions on the 24<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> of November 2010 where members could view the outline designs for the proposed new pool. Comments from the individuals from the groups were fed into section six below.

Focus group sessions have been held on the 4<sup>th</sup> February, 8<sup>th</sup> March, 7<sup>th</sup> April and 4<sup>th</sup> May 2011 with the key comments shown below:

- Is it possible to have some wheelchair refuges alongside the benches on poolside?
- Is there enough competitor seating?
- Can some of the lockers be added to the group changing room?
- Is there enough storage on poolside? (The feeling at the time was that there is currently adequate).
- Lane rope storage.
- Moveable floor (longitudinal) was highlighted as a good feature.
- Number and placement of hoist sockets around both the main pool and learner pool.
- Underfloor heating. It was generally thought that this was expensive and could be problematic and costly if there was an issue.
- There is a proposal for a biomass boiler. The potential of solar panels was also discussed although the cost / benefit would seem to rule these out.
- A discussion was had regarding potentially having blinds to help ensure privacy. Although the group could see that it was important for privacy for some groups, it was felt that this shouldn't compromise the building / glazing. Possibilities such as landscaping, film on windows and screens could have potential.
- Can traffic signs be looked at further down the line?
- The group felt that it would be good to have pictures or freezes on the outside of the buildings.
- Could we adapt two of the group change so that there were hoists and plinths for increased accessibility?
- Ensuring that pool surrounds were non-slip.
- Placement of timing clocks.



Further focus group meetings will also be planned during the construction period on a quarterly basis.

#### **4. Open Sessions**

There have been three open sessions that have been conducted with two being held in June and one in August 2011.

Within these sessions it was clear that the majority of individuals that attended the sessions have a preference to refurbish Temple Cowley Pools. The group does not want to lose a facility in the local community. A number of questions were asked at these sessions and these have been answered on the council's website under the question and answers section.

#### **5. City Wide Survey**

A survey was produced at a city wide level, which was agreed by the focus of group of key users and stakeholders and included a TalkBack panel which is a representative cross section of the City's population.

The survey took place from 26 May to 23 June 2010. There were a total of 641 responses, which gave Oxford City Council a confidence interval of plus or minus 3.9%.

Within the results of the on-line and paper survey, as well as the TalkBack survey there is an indication that satisfaction is lower at Temple Cowley Pools than Ferry Sports Centre. Users of existing Sports Centres were least satisfied with:

- The availability of spectator facilities;
- The quality of catering/vending facilities; and
- How well the facility caters for clubs.

In light of this feedback the proposed new pool facility at Blackbird Leys will have much improved spectator seating meeting Sport England and the Amateur Swimming Association guidance. The Café is also proposed to have an improved seating area.

Underperforming areas for Temple Cowley Pools (low satisfaction and high importance) were identified as;

- The quality of the changing facilities;
- How well the centre caters for people with a disability; and
- The continuity of service

The designs for the proposed new facility will look to implement an improved flexible changing space that meets Sport England requirements. It will also look to ensure that the new facility meets the Equalities Act legislation and modern day standards; meeting all relevant guidance to ensure the continuity of service.

Respondents strongly indicated how important it was that sports/leisure facilities provide value for money. The new proposed facility at Blackbird Leys will look to achieve this by ensuring a high quality leisure experience planned, with forecasted lower costs and projected higher usage in comparison to Temple Cowley Pools and Blackbird Leys Pool.

## **6. Outline Design Consultation 22<sup>nd</sup> Nov – 17 Dec 2010.**

Consultation was undertaken in regard to the outline designs of the new proposed facility at Blackbird Leys. The public were asked about their thoughts on the outline designs. Most of those who took part in this were very positive about the outline designs.

Four sessions were undertaken the week of the 22-26 November including both lunchtime and evening sessions. Facilitating these events were City Councillors, Parish Councillors, key users and stakeholders. The following groups were invited and their comments fed into the overall process:

- Temple Cowley Pools User (Swimming);
- Temple Cowley Pools User (Swim, Gym and Classes);
- Blackbird Leys Pool Users;
- City of Oxford Swimming Club;
- Oxford Swans Disability Swimming Club;
- Thame and Oxford School Sports Partnership;
- Fusion Lifestyle;
- Oxfordshire Sports Partnership;
- Local schools (including TCP users);
- Oxford Blackbirds Football Club;
- All residents on Pegasus road that are opposite the existing and new proposed facility;
- Greater Leys football Club; and
- The Leys Children's Centre

Designs were also made available for the public to view and comment on between Monday 29 November and Friday 17 December 2010 on the Council's website and at the following facilities:

- Barton Leisure Centre;
- Blackbird Leys Centre;
- Blackbird Leys Pool;
- Ferry Leisure Centre;
- Temple Cowley Pools; and
- The Ice Rink.

In total there were 168 comments made on comments cards. The most common areas of response can be summarised as follows:

- More spectator seating needed;
- Need to maintain the current community hall;
- Need to add in a sauna;
- Not enough space on the pool surrounds;
- More car parking; and

- Single sex changing preferred.

In respect of these comments the following design amendments are being investigated:

- Additional spectator seating has been incorporated to proposals to meet A.S.A guidelines;
- The current community hall is proposed to be re-provided at the first floor level;
- A sauna facility has been incorporated onto the poolside in the proposals;
- The pool surrounds exceed Sport England guidance and are now wider than found at Aylesbury's, Aqua Vale;
- An overflow car is now being considered as part of the proposals;
- The group change areas have been modified so that single sex use can be achieved in them;
- Inclusion of additional private showers.

#### **7. Door to door canvassing by local councillors**

This has been undertaken and general feedback has been positive to the proposed new competition standard pool at Blackbird Leys.

## **APPENDIX Two - PUBLICLY FUNDED LEISURE FACILITIES IN OXFORD**

- 87 Play Areas
- 62 Tennis Courts
- 23 Adult Football Pitches
- 20 Mini Football Pitches
- 14 Sports Pavilions
- 12 Multi-Use Games Areas
- 7 Leisure Centres (proposed to be 5)
- 6 Junior Football Pitches
- 5 Outdoor Table Tennis Tables
- 3 Bowls Greens
- 3 Cricket Pitches
- 3 Artificial Grass Pitches (soon to be 4)
- Rugby Pitch
- Baseball Pitch
- Gaelic Football Pitch
- Horspath Athletics Track
- Cricket Nets

### **Benchmarking**

#### **Indoor Swimming Pools**

<b>District</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Number of sites</b>	<b>Number of Pools</b>	<b>Provision</b>
<b>Oxford</b>	149,300	4	7	1 site per 37,325 residents
<b>Cambridge</b>	118,700	3	6	1 site per 39,567 residents
<b>Southampton</b>	234,100	3	6	1 site per 78,033 residents
<b>Wycombe</b>	163,600	3	5	1 site per 54,533 residents
<b>Exeter</b>	118,800	3	5	1 site per 39,600

## Outdoor Sports Pitches

### Total number of pitches and number of residents per pitch

District	No. Football	No. Cricket	No. Tennis	No. Pavilions	No. Bowls	No. Play areas	No. AGP
<b>Oxford</b>	49	3	62	14	3	87	3
<b>Oxford – No. residents per site</b>	3,047	49,767	2,408	10,664	49,767	1,716	49,767
<b>Cambridge</b>	25	2	10	-	3	39	-
<b>Cambridge – No. residents per site</b>	4,748	59,350	11,870	-	39,567	3,044	-
<b>Southampton</b>	34	11	4	11	1	-	2
<b>Southampton – No. residents per site</b>	6,885	21,282	58,525	21,282	234,100	-	117,050
<b>Wycombe</b>	30	6	6	7	-	86	-
<b>Wycombe – No. residents per site</b>	5,453	27,267	27,267	23,371	-	1,9023	-
<b>Exeter</b>	49	1	13	9	2	50	1
<b>Exeter – No. residents per site</b>	2,424	118,800	9,138	13,200	59,400	2,376	118,800
<b>Bristol</b>	57	3	38	-	17	-	4
<b>Bristol – No. residents per site</b>	7,475	142,033	11,213	-	25,065	-	106,525

### **Other Leisure facilities that have community use (not funded directly by Oxford City Council)**

In addition to those listed the Council has worked with educational establishments including schools and universities to open up community use on their facilities.

#### Oxford University

At Oxford University there are community access agreements in place, which facilitate general access to its sports facilities for the public. This includes,

An agreed community membership package, which on payment of the relevant fee, allows free access to the facilities at all program times.

<http://www.sport.ox.ac.uk/oxford-university-sports-facilities/sports-facilities/memberships/community-membership>

In addition there are prescribed priority use times for schools / clubs;

All Weather Pitch: Term time, community sports clubs or individuals have priority use week days from 8-10pm. Priority use for schools 9am -12pm. Outside of term time the community has access (except for eight hours).

Swimming Pool: Term time, free use for local schools 9am-12pm and six hours paid hire for clubs (time at discretion of university).

The Council also works closely with the Thame and Oxford School Sports Partnership and Oxford University to facilitate some free or reduced rate access to its facilities for major events such as the Oxfordshire Youth games etc.

Community groups also make use of the various colleges' cricket facilities during the cricket season.

### Brookes University

The community has full access during operational hours to the sports facilities at the Centre for Sport (Headington Campus) and Westminster Sport Centre (Harcourt Hill). The community membership package is very competitive at a price no greater than that charged at the City Council owned relevant sport centres.

<http://www.brookes.ac.uk/sport/docs/community>

The Council has secured a community access agreement that safeguards the above and also a level of community coaching / coach development time aimed at schools / clubs.

### Other Educational Sites (schools)

A key part of the city's leisure strategy is to better coordinated provision across all sectors. Schools have a key role to play and the council's sports development team continue to encourage schools to offer their facilities to the wider community. The Head of Leisure & Parks has written to every secondary school in the city that has sports provision and met with several schools to further encourage community use.

### Free Activities (Sports Development and Go Active)

The Council also facilitates a number of sport / physical activities that are free of charge. These include activities such as StreetSports (11-18yrs), Badminton sessions, Basketball sessions, Free Swimming sessions (under 17's) and Health Walks. More information is available on the website.

<http://www.oxford.gov.uk/PageRender/decLP/LeisureandParks.htm>