

Appendix 1 – Statement of need provided by Community Services

Oxford Ice Rink future parking provision and access needs analysis (user and operational) 09 June 2022

INTRODUCTION

The Oxpens car park adjacent to the Oxford Ice Rink (OIR) is currently used by visitors to the OIR. The de-construction of the decked car park is currently underway, closing the whole Oxpens car park until August 2022. In addition there are proposals to redevelop the surface car park as part of the OxWED scheme which is currently at pre-application stage with a planning application due for submission this year.

The council has a working vision for the leisure offer: -

“A service which puts the needs of communities at its heart, providing a range of accessible and inclusive activities, plays an important role in tackling the climate emergency, reducing health inequalities and creating more active communities.”

OIR is the only permanent ice activity offer in Oxfordshire, the facility is sub-regional and one of ten ice activity facilities in the south east. It is a unique city centre located community asset that whilst focuses on the needs of Oxford’s residents, the offer goes beyond the city’s boundary.

OIR has operated on a sustainable footing and historically has in part subsidised the wider leisure offer in the city; including free swimming sessions for those 16 years and under living in the city.

The unique ice offer provides a good local, social, sporting and cultural amenity. It is not only enjoyable in its own right, but supports community cohesion – cutting across social divides and improving physical and mental health.

It provides a safe, entertaining, and recreational activity for people of all ages and abilities and there is a strong, passionate volunteer base across all skating profiles and development programmes.

Through the years, a number of those participating from a very young age on the Learn-To-Skate programmes have represented OIR and Oxford at national and international skating events. At the December 2021 British Figure Skating Championship two Oxford

skaters were crowned the British Champions; there were 19 qualification places taken by Oxford skaters at the same event, with Oxford skaters achieving 5 medals in total. Many of these skaters are trained by coaches who themselves came through the Learn-To-Skate programmes and have participated nationally and internationally.

There are at least 14 ice activity profile clubs using OIR, with a combined membership base of more than 400.

The Oxford Junior Ice Hockey (circa 150 members) is a development club with age groups from under 9 to under 20. This development club feeds in to the senior Oxford City Stars Ice Hockey Club.

Oxford City Stars Ice Hockey Club were established in Oxford in 1984 and play at a high level in the National Ice Hockey League Division 1. The Club have regular attendances of 300+ watching matches, relying on revenue from gate attendances to survive as a Club. It also has a strong relationship with the local media including The Oxford Mail and BBC Radio Oxford.

All Ice Hockey clubs need parking provision as it is virtually impossible to carry on a bus, or a bike due to the significant equipment that is carried.

Additionally, although an Ice Hockey team has 6 players on the Ice for matches, it requires between 17 – 22 players in attendance, as well as at least three match officials.

The ice rink is a well-used¹ used by circa 180,000 people a year. The activity offer is inclusive, provides a safe, entertaining, and recreational activity for people of all ages and abilities and helps tackling health inequalities, social isolation and bringing communities together.

The main OIR indicator strengths² from the National Benchmark for Sports and Leisure Service include:

- Casual use
- Market penetration
- Cost recovery
- Total income per visit
- Direct income per visit
- Secondary income per visit
- Maintenance and repair.

¹ Pre-Covid data

² Pre-Covid 2018

The same report shows: -

- Visits by 14-25 year olds, disabled access <65years, first time visits, percentage of casual visits and weekly number of people visiting visits in the top quartile of the leisure sector (+75%).
- Overall satisfaction score of 4.23 out of 5

Background

It is in the interests for both the operation and financial sustainability of OIR for some on-site parking to be provided for service continuity and inclusive access and participation. Alongside, accommodation of inclusive participation for key stakeholders using unique and essential activity equipment that cannot easily be transported. The impact of which could mean that the Junior and Adult Ice Hockey Clubs and Figure and Dance skating clubs fold.

The council's developing Thriving Communities Strategy outlines the approach to how services will be coordinated with a focus on *People and Place* - how we ensure our services are sustainable, tackle inequalities and help make Oxford a great place to live and work; including working with and not to our communities and stakeholders.

Need for Car parking

We are not aware of any Ice Rinks across the country that do not have access to any parking.

Depending on the live activity programme the current public hours are: -

- weekdays generally 06:15 to 00:30/01:30
- Saturday 06:45 to 00:00
- Sunday 06:45 to 22:30
- Bank Holidays 06:15 to 00:30

Staff rotas are generally at least 30 minutes prior to and following programme start/finish times. This allows completion of statutory health and safety inspections, the ice pad to be safely prepared for the next activity and the customer facing areas to be cleaned and maintained for quality provision.

The provision of operational parking for staff and people with accessibility issues (i.e. those less mobile, wheelchair users, with particular special/ educational need, etc.), people with heavy equipment and the ability to drop-off is a high priority for users of OIR. Additionally, it is essential to provide some parking to ensure the long term viability of key clubs and stakeholders (many of whom are led by volunteers).

The Council has retained the option of 50 car parking spaces on the OxWED site but this would come as a cost to the Council. Continued engagement with our leisure provider Fusion Lifestyle, identified that at an absolute minimum of 25 parking bays would help reduce some business disruption – but would not by any means remove disruption. Feedback from OIR users and key stakeholders also shows need for some parking and drop off provision, See User & Stakeholder feedback below.

Customers are telling us that public bus operators are unable to accept large ice activity equipment that can weigh more than 40kg.

The Park and Ride offer does not operate out of normal hours and does not meet the needs of those who train and use OIR overnight or early morning.

Those travelling by train are experiencing increased costs, as well as still having to try and carry heavy and bulky equipment if you are a member of one of the ice hockey clubs.

Essential Needs

- OIR needs to be inclusive, supporting the needs of those with a wide range of ice activity profiles including Ice Hockey and Figure Skating and needs that support residents, respond to local needs, help reduce inequalities and build strong, reliant communities.
- Disabled parking provision for inclusive participation
- To ensure the building can be serviced by emergency vehicles in compliance with building standards and there is appropriate emergency vehicular access.

Key risks

- Financial sustainability and future viability of a community asset
- Potential for our leisure provider to claim for loss of income; this becomes the Councils direct problem when the contract expires in March 2024
- Sports Development – including high achieving local skaters competing nationally & internationally, the Junior Ice Hockey Development Club, etc.
- Council Reputation
- The Oxford City Stars Ice hockey club either move to another City, or they fold.

Summary of essential requirements to meet needs

It is accepted that it is unlikely all desires for convenient parking to replace the existing provision will be met when the Oxpens car park is removed but some provision is essential.

- At very least a minimum of 25 essential parking bays for inclusive participation, early morning and overnight operations and activities; including accessible parking provision (a minimum of 3 disabled parking bays)
- Suitable vehicle drop off provision to help support
 - maximum public occupation needs of 728

- Safeguarding duty of care (i.e. early, late and overnight sessions and operations)
- Suitable coach drop off provision (minimum of 1 coach/ mini-bus drop off option)

User and stakeholder feedback

Feedback from some of customers in recent months includes: -

“The ice rink serves the region - with skaters travelling up to 30 miles to access the facilities. Some do use the trains but sadly the reliability of the services in the early hours of the mornings is extremely poor.”

“The council has suggested that people use alternative parking such as park and ride or cycle. However this is not practical for most of the individuals that train on a daily basis and travel from all over the county to develop and succeed in their sport, in particular several children who are released for short periods from their schooling.”

“Many parents who bring children to skate often need to drop off / pick up early in the morning or later at night and may have other children in the car. Others may have children or others with special physical needs who need to be dropped off as near as possible to the ice rink.”

“Currently there is no “drop off“ zone and this can make it difficult, especially if I’m running late due to traffic.”

“Since many of the higher level skater’s need, for safety sake to be driven to the rink, there needs to at least be a safe drop off zone with short-term parking next to the ice rink.”

“There are a lot of competitive skaters in Oxford, mostly young women, teenagers and girls but also young men and boys who train mornings and evenings at the rink, arriving often before 6am, several times a week. This includes our 14-year-old daughter. Many come quite a distance (for us, Kidlington). This part of Oxford centre is an unsafe area for these young skaters to walk around alone or with their parent (usually the mother) even in the light. It will be more dangerous in the dark.”

“We are also concerned about the impact on other young skaters with lessons on Saturday and Sunday mornings and the Ice Hockey players - the queues into Westgate, the walk for the less able, the equipment that has to be carried.”

“The option of park and ride/bus/train is very restricted at the very early point of the day when a lot of us are arriving at the rink! From a safety point of view having to walk further from a carpark to the rink or the train station in the cold and dark of the winter is a worry especially for females on their own.”

“It is not possible, due to timings, to use the Park and Ride, either before or after training sessions. The park and ride from Seacourt only opens at 6am and buses are only every 30 mins. After training session, most kids have to rush off to get to school on time on the weekdays (using taxi of mum or dad). We do use the Park and Ride at every other opportunity and drive an electric car.”

“The parking is particularly important in the morning when we arrive at 5:30am for a pre-ice warm up and time to put skates on before a 6am start, my daughter has lessons at 6.15am.”

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