

APPENDIX 5

Leisure Feasibility Study, Temple Cowley Pools Public Consultation Meeting Tuesday 17th August at 7pm

Consultants present: Richard Smith (Project Manager, Mace),
Mike Hall (Partner, Faulkner Brown Architects);
Amanda de Lussey (Project Director, Faulkner Brown Architects);
Richard Monksmith (Executive Engineer, Hoare Lee Mechanical and Electrical Engineers);
Jon Moister (Associate – Team Leader, Curtins Structural Civil Consultants);
Matt Darby (Senior Cost Consultant, Sense Ltd Cost Consultants).

Oxford City Council Tim Sadler (Director, City Services);
Ian Brooke (Head of City Leisure);
Hagan Lewisman (Development Manager, City Leisure);
John Bellenger (Building Design and Facilities Manager);
Courtney Warden (Development Officer, City Leisure);
Lois Stock (Democratic Services Officer)

Chair of Meeting Councillor John Tanner (City Executive Board)

Approximately 85 members of the public were present.

Introduction

Councillor John Tanner welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained the process to be followed. There would be a short introduction from the consultants, after which the meeting would be opened for questions from members of the public.

Richard Smith and Mike Hall, on behalf of the consultants, explained the background to the issue, and the options and costs that had been identified in the feasibility study. They identified the current problems with Temple Cowley Pools (TCP) then ran through the key options available and explained them. The recommendation made in the feasibility study was the demolition of Temple Cowley Pools, and the building of a new competition pool at Blackbird Leys Leisure Centre (BBL) which was intended to serve the whole of the City.

Questions from the public with answers provided.

- (1) Jackie Collier (Florence Park resident) – are there any plans to replace the fitness suite currently at TCP, if this site is sold?

Answer: There is an allowance made for a fitness area in Options 1 & 2, however if TCP should close there would not be a fitness area there.

- (2) Ellen Baxter – The development at BBL relies on TCP being closed and the site sold – if this was not to happen, where would funding for this scheme be found?

Answer: Capital receipts from the sale of the land are part of the business case.

- (3) (Member of the public) – What is the definition of inaccessibility? Some people found TCP accessible and BBL not accessible. Has consideration been given to closing BBL to fund the refurbishment of TCP?

Answer: Many options were explored, including the above, but the recommendation arising from the report was to retain BBL and build a new pool there. This would need capital receipts from the sale of the land at TCP. The City Council does not own the land at BBL, so would not receive money from its sale. This land is owned by the County Council. Work on assessing accessibility had been carried out and it was found that a greater number of people could walk to BBL than to TCP. There are also good bus routes. Accessibility for the whole of the City has to be taken into account.

- (4) Peter Wilkinson (Rose Hill Tenants and Residents Association) - Feels that Rose Hill and some other parts of the City had been ignored by this exercise. Any swimming pool should be accessible for the whole of Oxford and the best location for this would be near the Cowley Centre and not at BBL. When the Peers Pool was closed, it was said that TCP could be used instead, but now this too may be closed. The extra mile travel required from Cowley to BBL is a mile too far.

Answer: It was acknowledged that Templars Square (Cowley Centre) was at the heart of East Oxford, but there were good bus routes to BBL. It had to be realised that the only option was to take the cash from the sale of TCP to incorporate it in the business case.

- (5) Stuart Jenkins (works at Oxford Business Park, Cowley) - had people who worked at the Business Park and used TCP for a lunchtime swim been counted as part of the catchment area?

Answer: Ian Brooke would take this away and check.

- (6) Joe Richards (local resident) – How do you define a competition pool? A new pool at BBL would take up part of the sports field. If there are problems with existing pools, why has this situation been allowed to develop? Why was maintenance work not carried out in the past? It would be better to bring existing pools up to standard.

Answer: Most of the options outlined in the report would provide an 8 lane, 25m competition pool, with spectator seating that was suitable for galas. Investment in pools would be £millions. For that level of investment you would be looking at vibrant, modern, state of the art facilities that were sustainable and would last for the next 25 years. They would also be more accessible, beyond the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA).

- (7) Cynthia Brown (TCP user) - the Save TCP Group had an option for the refurbishment of TCP that cost £3million. Had this ever been considered?

Answer: Tim Sadler had regular correspondence with the Save TCP group and asked for information about this £3million refurbishment. The consultants have been asked to look at a lot of the ideas presented by the Save TCP group.

- (8) Caroline Williams (TCP user) – questioned the suitability of the current consultants. Surely they should have more experience in refurbishment rather than in the provision of new facilities? How many children can afford to go the BBL pool for competitions and the swimming club?

Answer: Mace has carried out extensive refurbishment work, including a £23million refurbishment scheme in Watford in 2007. The team, including the architects and the engineers has long experience of refurbishment and remodelling as well as new build. There are recognised guidelines that identify when a facility is good value for money. There are times when parts of a facility can be refurbished and reused, but there comes a point when financial considerations mean that such a step does not make economic sense. Each case has to be looked at on its merits.

- (9) Ian Smith (Chair of the City of Oxford Swimming Club) - the Swimming Club has 250 members who swim regularly. Most people who learn to swim do so via the swimming club. If the club ceased to exist, what would this mean for the City? Mr Smith saw the pool at BBL as the main swimming facility for the whole of Oxford. It isn't just an issue for Temple Cowley and Blackbird Leys. An 8 lane, 25m pool was required for galas and competitions.

Answer: Efforts have been made to promote the BBL pool as a facility for the whole of the City. The Swimming Club was an important partner. The Council wanted to provide a home for the Swimming Club and a facility for the whole community.

- (10) Jane Alexander (Save TCP Group) made the following points:-

- 10,000 people want to keep TCP and the gym;
- 50% of people completing the Save TCP survey want to keep a diving pool;
- More people can reach TCP than BBL;
- 60% of people who completed the Save TCP survey said they could not/would not travel to BBL pool;
- Many people walk or cycle to TCP, but would not/could not do so to BBL;
- BBL is not as accessible for lunchtime swimmers;
- The Save TCP group could not find details of the business case in the feasibility study;
- The Save TCP group would like to see the gym at TCP moved downstairs – this would cost £550,000 and make the gym far more accessible;

- The sauna and steam room at TCP could also be moved to make them more accessible;
- The showers in the changing rooms at TCP were not adequate at present but moving round facilities would address this;
- BBL pool could be refurbished for £1million, to include a learner pool and an extension to the entrance hall;
- £3million would give TCP all the facilities the people wanted;
- Why were costs quoted to the City council so high? She had found pool covers for a cost of £16,000, but it seemed the City Council had allowed double this – why?
- It was noted that the feasibility study had cost £70,000, but the Save TCP group's study had only cost Jane Alexander's time and effort with a few ancillary costs for paper and photocopying;
- If maintenance of TCP has not been done, to the tune of £2million over the years, then where has that money gone? This should be put towards the refurbishment of TCP;
- While the Swimming Club was important, it still only catered for a small number of people, whereas 10,000 people had signed the Save TCP petition;
- It had been suggested that the University Pool at Iffley Road could be used, in line with conditions attached to the planning consent; but at present there was limited public access and no seating for spectators. This pool could house 450 spectator seats for use at a swimming gala. This should be enforced;
- The structure of the TCP building was said to be in poor condition, but there was only 1 pillar that was in a poor state. This could easily be repaired, but nothing had been done yet;
- She urged the £3million refurbishment option proposed by the Save TCP group, and added that TCP must be kept in its current location.

Answer: A review of leisure facilities was begun 3 years ago. It was discovered then that there was a backlog of £6million worth of repairs across all the leisure functions. Members of the Council in the past (over 2 decades) had had to make choices about funding and had chosen not to prioritise the maintenance and repair of buildings. However, most of the backlog had been dealt with in the contract with Fusion.

The planning consent for Iffley pool allowed general access by local communities.

The business case had not been included in the feasibility study because it included confidential and commercially sensitive information related to the contract with Fusion, and to Fusion's business as a whole. Were that to be released into the public domain it could give an advantage to their competitors. However, a summary had been requested from Fusion. The report which would be going to the City Executive Board (CEB) on 1st September would cover the financial aspects.

The problems with TCP that had been outlined by Jane Alexander were noted. It had to be agreed that there were structural and other problems with TCP. There was a danger with "cherry picking" costs (such as pool covers) because

items did not always stand alone, there might be other costs associated with them which were not immediately obvious. Costs had to include an element of future proofing so that things were sustainable both now and into the future. Matt Darby indicated that he was willing to look at the Save TCP groups costs and go through them, but the City Council would not be delaying its process until this exercise had been carried out.

- (11) David Cook (long term TCP user) – thanked the team for the organisation of this meeting and for the information that had now been provided. He asked what would happen to the site were TCP to be demolished. Also asked why there was a £4million difference in costs between refurbishing TCP (£12million) and rebuilding at BBL (£8million).

Answer: Tim Sadler confirmed that the TCP site was not being marketed at present and that no decision had yet been taken about its future use. Possible uses that had been considered included housing, but there were still many factors to be taken into consideration. Whatever happened here, it must be in keeping with the surrounding area.

The BBL option was cheaper because it was more efficient and cost effective to blend together the “dry” and “wet” sides of a leisure facility under the same roof. Also, were TCP to be refurbished or rebuilt, it would require additional administration and ancillary facilities at extra cost that BBL would not need because they were already in existence at BBL. An attempt had been made to keep the water area the same for each option.

- (12) Councillor Nuala Young (City Council) - questioned the feasibility study figures for people within walking distance of each pool. She also pointed out that people at TCP did not necessarily want a “state of the art” pool. They wanted a place that they could reach by bicycle or on foot, with single sex changing areas and not just the “village” arrangements for changing. TCP should be refurbished decently and kept.

Answer: The idea of village style changing facilities has not been cast in stone. There would be a consultation on the preferred configuration.

- (13) Anne Cresswell (Oxford Swans Swimming Club) – How will you deal with access for people with disabilities? This includes car parking, which is a problem at TCP.

Answer: It is agreed that site access for the disabled at TCP is very constrained. As a new development at TCP would require planning consent (which it may or may not obtain), access for disabled people would be a big issue. It is hard to incorporate new facilities in existing buildings and there are a lot of detailed issues around the specifications that need to be explored. There would be discussions with access groups about requirements.

- (14) Councillor Tony Brett (Oxford City Council) – asked if it was a good idea to be selling land during a recession – was this really the right time to do so? He also had concerns about the number of people stated to be in the catchment area for each facility. Oxford East was very densely populated. Consideration

should be given to the amount of water for swimming per head of population rather than looking at it by area.

Answer: Ian Brook would come back on the numbers of people per catchment area.

- (15) Caroline Morrell (local resident TCP area) - expressed concern that this was not a real consultation exercise and that the decision had already been taken.

Answer: John Tanner explained that a report would be presented at CEB on 1st September. This would recommend the option of closing TCP and building a new competition standard pool at BBL. He personally had an open mind on the issue. Nothing yet was cut and dried, and further clarification of the funding issues was needed. Even if the option outlined above was chosen, TCP should remain open for a further 2 years. He reminded all present that CEB on 1st September would be open to the public.

Tim Sadler added that the public had asked for more examination of the possibility of refurbishing TCP. This had been done and a report produced. Tonight's event gave the public the chance to question the consultant group on this report. The recommendation, though, was the adoption of Option 3C in the feasibility study. This is affordable, and if this step is not taken, there is a risk that there will not be a pool in south Oxford.

- (16) Viv ? (member of the public) – disagreed that this meeting was a public consultation. She asked who, in the City, was requesting a new pool? The pool at Temple Cowley was at the heart of a useful little local area that included a library and a church. The people who signed the petition have said that they want the facility at TCP and this should be the main consideration.

Answer: This whole process began when the Council asked how it could make TCP a safe swimming pool. From then consideration moved to refurbishment, then rebuilding, and finally to the conclusion that it would be better to build a fresh pool somewhere else. If work began on the refurbishment of TCP, it could be that more faults and problems were uncovered; in which case, if the problems were serious enough, the pool would have to close anyway.

It was acknowledged that this was a well-loved facility, but swimming pools are costly items. The feasibility report shows the costs involved with each of the possible scenarios. It would be more efficient and cost effective to move to the BBL site. Finances had to be a major consideration.

- (17) Vim Rodrigo (resident, Rose Hill) – if TCP has structural problems, why not take this up with the original engineers? Running costs are high because of the diving pool. Poor maintenance over the years has caused most of the current problems. If a new pool is needed, why not build one at TCP? The schools around TCP use the pool – the BBL one will be out of the way.

Answer: The concrete around the pillar that is currently propped up in TCP has decayed and there is corrosion of the steel structure within. This compromises the stability of this column. If structural defects are becoming apparent then it threatens the future of the pool. Some defects and failings in TCP have been

observed. The column in question could be repaired, but the decay of the concrete and steel will continue because of the environment in which it stands. All buildings have a shelf life, and TCP is reaching the end of the road.

- (18) Councillor Abbasi (Oxford City Council) felt that the meeting should be asked which option it preferred.

Answer: To be done at the end of the meeting.

- (19) Councillor Malik (Oxford City Council) – a meeting to discuss the feasibility study had been promised, and this was the meeting. It is extra to the normal consultation process. It is important to listen to all sides.

Answer: Noted.

- (20) Nigel Gibson (Save TCP group) – was speaking on behalf of the 10,000 people who had signed the petition to save TCP. He had asked local Councillors to come out with the campaign group to meet the public. Most people do not want TCP to be shut. He has asked Fusion where the additional projected users of TCP will come from but has not had a reply yet because such information is deemed commercially sensitive. The Council should reveal details of the Fusion contract. Fusion states that more people will use the new pool, but if the pool at BBL did not succeed, surely this would be a huge waste of money for the Council?

The consultants have used a conditions survey that is 2 years old, and have dismissed the refurbishment or rebuilding of TCP as unviable. People are constantly told that TCP is falling down and that there is £2.6million worth of repair work needed. Yet the cost of fixing the propped up pillar is only £30,000, so why hasn't the Council done it? This whole thing is being rushed through. There is no need for the issue to go the CEB on 1st September. There should be more and wider consultation before any decision was made.

Answer: The Council has spoken to lots and lots of people, both individually and in groups. It's clearly understood that TCP is a well loved facility and this will be made clear to CEB.

It is difficult to predict user numbers at any new facility, but experience has shown that they normally increase, often substantially.

- (21) Councillor Dick Wolff (Oxford City Council) pointed out that the scrutiny panel had to look at this issue to examine value for money, in order to help CEB take its decision. But he would have difficulty doing this as he has been unable to see the business case and does not know what information may be being kept from him. This project commits a huge amount of Council funding and he did not personally feel that he was currently equipped to scrutinise the value for money aspect of the proposed scheme. Since the feasibility study was commissioned, a decision had been taken to release some land including at the Cowley Marsh site. The study did not look at this, and it should be considered.

Answer: The draft CEB report is expected to be given to members of the Scrutiny panel (due to look at this issue on 19th August (tomorrow)). Fusion has carried out extensive market research on this issue, and this is commercially confidential for reasons that have already been explained. Council Officers are negotiating with Fusion about the level of confidentiality and what details might be released. Fusion has indicated that it would co-operate as much as possible, but it should be recognised that some matters of business are confidential

Councillor John Tanner then asked for a show of hands in favour or against the recommendation to close TCP and build a new pool at BBL. 4 people were in favour, with everyone else against.

Councillor Tanner reminded everyone that CEB would be considering this report and the recommendation at its meeting on 1st September, and would subsequently be making a recommendation to Council. Whilst all views would be considered, it was important that the Council acted in the best interests of the City and did what was best for Oxford as a whole.

He thanked everyone for their attendance and useful contributions.

The meeting closed at 9.30pm