

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

POLICY COMMITTEE

19 FEBRUARY 2018

QUESTION NO. 1

Peter Burt to ask the Leader of the Council:

Assessment of bids for Arthur Hill Pool

Will commercial sector and voluntary sector bids to buy the Arthur Hill swimming pool be assessed against the same set of criteria?

REPLY by Councillor Lovelock (Leader of the Council):

The criteria for assessing bids for the site are varied but linked to ensuring that the Council secures 'best value', including taking account of any community benefit as well as the monetary value and factors such as the robustness of proposals and deliverability. Any assessment will also need to be mindful of relevant planning policy, including Policy ERR1h of the emerging draft local plan which supports residential development of the site with the retention of the frontage of the building.

The Third Sector bidding opportunity is advertised on the Reading Voluntary Action website (www.rva.org.uk). Prospective bidders are directed to a Council email address to obtain information covering the Bidding Process, an Application to Bid and Bids Scoring System.

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QUESTION NO. 2

Peter Burt to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport:

Arthur Hill Pool Site - Draft Local Plan

Publicity material for the sale of the Arthur Hill swimming pool site states that the site "benefits from a draft allocation for 6-10 dwellings" in the draft Local Plan, and the planning brief accompanying the sales documents advises potential purchasers on the steps necessary to develop the site for residential purposes.

Has the Council therefore made up its mind on the final content of the Local Plan, regardless of the large number of objections to the change of land use at Arthur Hill and even though the draft Local Plan has yet to be examined in public?

REPLY by Councillor Page (Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport):

I thank Mr Burt for his question.

The Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan, including a draft allocation of the Arthur Hill site for 6-10 dwellings, was approved for consultation at Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee on 22nd November 2017. The Committee further agreed that, subject to minor amendments that do not affect the policy direction as a result of consultation, the Local Plan should then be submitted to the Secretary of State. This is currently planned for March 2018.

In approving the Local Plan in November, Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee were provided with summaries of the responses made to the Draft Local Plan consultation, including those on the Arthur Hill site.

Therefore, the Council has formally agreed the version of the plan it wishes to go forward to Examination, and therefore its intended final version. Any further changes, including as a result of the most recent consultation, will need to be considered through the Examination process, where the Local Plan will be considered by an independent Inspector, who will then provide a report on whether the document is sound and legally compliant.

The Council's consideration after Examination will be limited to deciding whether or not to formally adopt the Local Plan. This follows the procedure set out in the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.

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QUESTION NO. 3

Roger Lightfoot to ask the Lead Councillor for Culture, Sport & Consumer Services:

Swimming Timetables

There is a great deal of dissatisfaction as regards significant reduction in time and lack of access to sessions for general and lane swimmers at both the new Rivermead and South Reading centres particularly in the middle of the day. They are hemmed in by school and Better Swimming sessions. Thus many people are drifting away to alternative facilities, or worse still, stopping swimming with inevitable consequences to health and wellbeing. A minimum of 90 minutes is needed at lunchtime. What tangible action is being taken to make significant improvement for general swimming time?

REPLY by Councillor Hacker (Lead Councillor for Culture, Sport & Consumer Services):

The demountable 25 metre, 5 lane pool was built to provide continuity of swimming in central Reading whilst permanent modern facilities are built.

While the capacity of a single pool is less than a 4 swimming pool complex, much of the activity taking place at Central Pool is being accommodated. For example in 2017 there were over 1000 students attending Council lessons at Central Pool. These have been accommodated in a compressed lesson programme at Rivermead and amalgamated into their "Better" swimming programme. The programme is run between the Lagoon and the new demountable pool. A comprehensive and popular lesson programme augmenting school swimming is one of the best ways to instil the habit of swimming in people.

There are a number of safeguarding considerations that make shared changing accommodation between schools and the general public impossible. Travel times and the short school day introduce further limitations on how swimming pools may be programmed.

As promised we have been reviewing the programme at Rivermead and listening to the feedback from customers. In response to this we have changed 60+ sessions to gentle swimming in the mornings, and extended the lunchtime sessions to 90 minutes from the start of the new school half term.

An extensive and popular school swimming programme is run from South Reading Leisure Centre on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Due to the previously described safeguarding measure, this affects the availability of lunchtime swimming as only one set of changing rooms is available. However the lunchtime swim sessions at both Meadway and South Reading Leisure Centre are well established and over the years have been tailored to meet the local demand.

Across Reading we continue to provide a varied and balanced programme of activity catering for the varying needs of our residents. We offer learn to swim lessons, casual swimming and fitness sessions through to hosting clubs where swimming may be pursued as a competitive sport.

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QUESTION NO. 4

Roger Lightfoot to ask the Lead Councillor for Culture, Sport & Consumer Services:

Funding of new Swimming Pools

The Council has stated that it requires £30 million to build the new pools at Palmer Park and Rivermead; will the sale of Arthur Hill and Central sites deliver these funds, and if not, how does the Council propose to fund the builds of both?

REPLY by Councillor Hacker (Lead Councillor for Culture, Sport & Consumer Services):

Thank you for your question Mr Lightfoot. It was never the intention that the capital receipts from the sale of the Arthur Hill and Central Pool sites would cover the full cost of replacement new pools and investment in the Council's other retained leisure facilities (the very broad estimate of £30m includes all these costs and not just the replacement new pools). Rather the capital receipts from the sale of these sites make a useful contribution that in overall terms bring down the amount of additional capital required. In addition, we will be seeking a capital contribution from Sport England and are in their 'pipeline' of schemes that have been invited to make applications for their strategic capital investment fund.

At this stage, and pending the completion of the competitive procurement process, the disposal of the Arthur Hill and Central sites and the outcome of a bid to Sport England, we cannot be specific about the quantum of additional funding that may be required. However, the Council through its 'prudential borrowing' powers generally has access to much cheaper borrowing than is normally available to leisure operators. This means that in outline, the plan is that the Council will borrow any additional capital needed to fund the investment into leisure and swimming facilities with the full costs of this borrowing being met by payments from the contracted leisure operator over the course of the contract. The detail of this will be worked through as part of the procurement process, particularly the latter stages when there will be greater cost certainty.