

REPORT TITLE: RIVER PARK LEISURE CENTRE DECOMMISSIONING

24 JUNE 2020

REPORT OF CABINET MEMBER: Councillor Kelsie Learney, Cabinet Member for Housing and Asset Management

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WARD(S): ST BARTHOLOMEW

PURPOSE

River Park Leisure Centre (RPLC) is due to close when the new Winchester Sports and Leisure Park (WS&LP) opens in the early part of 2021.

Cabinet were updated in October 2019 on the complexities and constraints of the site, as well as the results of the North Walls recreation area consultation, and the proposed next steps.

As part of that work this report outlines options for securing and decommissioning the RPLC site and recommends the preferred approach in advance of site redevelopment. There is also a need to safeguard utilities for the bowls clubs, tennis courts, astro turf pitches (ATP) and skate and play parks and an option to provide temporary toilet facilities, and consider use of the current car park.

This report does not cover the future use of the site but includes the proposed approach to develop a programme of work to explore options for the future development of the site.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Cabinet approves:

1. That RPLC ceases to provide sports and leisure facilities and is closed to the public following the opening of the WS&LP at Bar End in the early part of 2021.

2. That RPLC be decommissioned by way of an internal soft strip and part demolition, with the timetable to be linked with the build schedule on the Winchester Sport and Leisure Park.
3. Capital expenditure in 2020/21 of up to £410,000 is approved to:
 - decommission the River Park Leisure Centre building by soft stripping and securing;
 - undertake works to ensure continued utility and services supplies to clubs remaining on site; and
 - provide temporary toilet facilities until a future use for the site is determined or other facilities become available.
4. An annual revenue budget from 2021/22 of £40,000 for CCTV hire and monitoring, building inspections, and cleaning the temporary toilets
5. Delegated authority to the Strategic Director: Place to determine and undertake the procurement process, appoint the relevant contractors to enable the decommissioning of RPLC (including security and continuity of utility services) and the provision of temporary toilets; and to negotiate and agree contractual heads of terms with the appointed contractors.
6. Delegated authority to Service Lead Legal to enter in to contracts to carry out works to enable decommissioning of the RPLC and provision of temporary toilets.
7. That work to determine options for the future use of the site is is delayed until the current budget position relating to the COVID-19 emergency is finalised and the emerging development market is better understood and to bring a report back to cabinet in Q2/Q3 2021.

IMPLICATIONS:

1 COUNCIL PLAN OUTCOME

1.1 Tackling the Climate Emergency and Creating a Greener District

Leisure Centres are a large contributor of carbon emissions and previous reports indicated that the age of RPLC required the council to invest or provide alternative facilities. The new Winchester Sport and Leisure Centre is due to open in the early part of 2021 and is a much more efficient building, albeit significantly larger.

Closing RPLC and decommissioning it, as outlined in this report, would reduce its carbon footprint to near zero. The carbon impact of a future demolition and build would need to be explored, but as outlined in the environmental considerations, the negative carbon impact may be in part offset through large scale recycling.

2 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

2.1 RPLC is an asset owned by the council, built in the 1970's. Significant consideration was given to the future of leisure facilities in the city area and the council determined that a new leisure centre would be built at Bar End. RPLC is an old building at the end of its operational life, and it is intended that it will close on the opening of the new Winchester Sport and Leisure Park (WS&LP). Demand assessments were undertaken as part of the WS&LP proposals and these concluded the RPLC building is surplus to requirements.

2.2 A capital budget of £1.2m, funded by the capital receipts reserve, was approved in the council's Capital Strategy in February 2020 to enable works to decommission RPLC, including demolition if required, and provide temporary toilet facilities until a permanent solution has been agreed by Winchester Town Forum (WTF).

2.3 A financial appraisal and cost estimates table of each of the options is provided at appendix 2.

2.4 The recommended option to decommission, soft strip, and secure RPLC provides the best option financially, as the cumulative cost by the end of year 2 is the lowest. Despite a higher initial capital cost than the option of decommission and secure only, soft stripping should allow the council to have the property removed from the business ratings list, providing an estimated net saving to the council of circa £136,000 per annum. There remains a small risk that the council will be unsuccessful in delisting the building despite soft-stripping, but this is considered unlikely based on the justification set out in the report.

2.5 The total estimated capital cost of the recommended option of decommission, soft strip, and secure is £410,000, with an estimated additional ongoing

revenue cost from 2021/22 of £40,000 per annum for CCTV hire and monitoring, building inspections, and cleaning the temporary toilets.

- 2.6 This option will allow £790,000 of capital receipts funding to be released back to the capital receipts reserve, which can then be used for other capital projects. It should be noted however that given the life of the building and its structure, the risk remains that full demolition may still be required at short notice. To mitigate this risk, the revenue budget requirement above includes an allowance of £10,000 per annum for regular building inspections, which will inform WCC whether the RPLC building has become structurally unsound and requires demolition.
- 2.7 A revenue budget of £150k was approved in 2018/19, Cabinet report CAB3093, to facilitate work to explore options for the RPLC site including its future use. To date, £7,500 has been spent and the remaining budget of £142,500 will be sufficient to proceed through RIBA stage 0 (strategic definition) to identify options to then develop a business case if required.
- 2.8 The challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic will present budgetary pressures for the council. This may make straightforward sale of the RPLC site an attractive option. This would provide a significant capital receipt and limit expenditure of the council directly driving forward a development.

3 LEGAL AND PROCUREMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 It is important to ensure continuous utility and service to premises such as clubs that remain operational after closure and during decommissioning and to agree the approach for the decommissioning of the River Park Sports and Leisure Centre. Consideration of the options has included by officers factors such as Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012, Building act 1984, Town and Country Planning Act 1971 and relevant health and safety regulations.
- 3.2 The award of contracts in order to implement the decommissioning shall be compliant with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015, the Contract Procedure Rules and the Financial Procedure Rules of the WCC constitution, and where relevant in accordance with the terms and conditions of a framework.
- 3.3 Prior to entering into discussions on contractual terms it is advisable to seek advice from the Service Lead Transformation and Procurement and Service Lead Legal.
- 3.4 Future uses on the site are being explored; whilst there are on-site impediments to immediate implementation of particular uses, such as a restricted covenant, the removal of such impediments is subject to a number of factors, including timeframes and budget.

4 WORKFORCE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The project can be delivered from within existing resources, with additional support from external expertise if required.

5 PROPERTY AND ASSET IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 RPLC has reached the end of its economic and useable life. Due to its specialist nature, it is not practicable or cost-effective to repurpose the leisure centre building for another use, such as offices, industrial or retail.
- 5.2 The RPLC site has the potential for a wide range of uses, subject to planning and legal constraints, and there is likely to be considerable interest in the market if it was to be offered at the right time for sale by way of a freehold or long leasehold agreement.
- 5.3 The closure of RPLC in the early part of 2021 will necessitate consideration of re-provision of certain facilities that directly support users of the adjoining open spaces. These include, but are not limited to; toilets, changing facilities and a café. There are also on-going maintenance requirements, site security and issues of structural integrity.

6 CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

- 6.1 An engagement event was held at North Walls recreation ground over the weekend of 22/23 March 2019. This was held to get views on how the recreation area at North Walls could be improved, and to reassure stakeholders and residents that the future of North Walls recreation ground is secure, irrespective of the future use of the RPLC site.
- 6.2 No decisions have been made as to the future use of the site and the recent COVID-19 outbreak sets a different financial climate in the property market. Therefore, the future approach to engagement is yet to be determined.
- 6.3 The Cabinet Member for Housing and Asset Management has been closely involved in the development of the approach to the decommissioning of RPLC and the Winchester Town Forum is leading work on the improvements to North Walls recreation area.

7 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 The carbon impact of RPLC is significant but carbon emissions will largely stop when the facility is closed. The site is within a flood zone, with the River Itchen within close vicinity to the north of the building. In planning terms, the site is currently outside of the settlement boundary, with the South Downs National Park close by, as is a Conservation Area to the east.
- 7.2 Advice has been sought from WCC's Ecologist/Biodiversity team as to the necessary steps to ensure the recommendation to decommission, soft strip and close RPLC is not detrimental to the existing ecology on site.

- 7.3 There is asbestos cladding the building and within it, albeit in a safe state at the moment. As part of the recommendations to decommission the building, a licensed team will remove the asbestos in an isolated environment to prevent materials escaping and contaminating the surrounding environment. The hazardous materials will be securely bagged and disposed of in line with regulations.
- 7.4 A large majority of materials forming waste products from operational construction, such as the action of soft striping, are recyclable at an increased cost. To reduce the waste impact as part of the soft-strip, where possible, this report recommends that the contractors will be required to recycle as many materials as possible, such as timber, steel and glass, and some materials may be re-sold for use in other projects. The additional cost for a high recycling rate for the soft-strip has been included in the financial appraisal.
- 7.5 The high recycling rate for these materials and their re-use in other projects will decrease the amount of 'virgin' materials required for those projects and as a result decrease their carbon footprint. A works impact assessment will be necessary and sufficient measures will be taken to ensure materials, dust and other hazardous items are disposed of properly and do not contaminate the land, affect nearby waterways and wildlife.

8 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSEMENT

- 8.1 Currently the RPLC building provides toilets and changing facilities, this provision will end once RPLC closes. There will be demand for publicly accessible toilets, as North Walls Recreation Ground is host to a popular Park Run, cricket, rugby and football pitches and others who enjoy the recreation ground.
- 8.2 It is recommended that temporary toilets, which are fully accessible, be provided by WCC to address this need. WTF and the Open Spaces and Landscape Team are exploring options, including costs to provide a long-term, permanent solution. WTF are also considering installing water fountains.
- 8.3 An Equality Impact Assessment report will be produced, noting that public access to the RPLC building will be removed when it is closed and decommissioned. It is not proposed that any existing rights of way or access across the site will be affected.

9 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 9.1 None required.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT

Risk	Mitigation	Opportunities
<i>Property Building is not structurally sound and part and/or all</i>	Regular structural assessments and WCC	

<p><i>collapses.</i></p> <p><i>Utility resolution not possible before RPLC permanently closes, due to COVID-19 restrictions and SSE unable to deliver services.</i></p> <p><i>Building is adversely occupied whilst vacant.</i></p>	<p>preparing as much as possible for an emergency demolition.</p> <p>Continuous dialogue with SSE and Southern Water,</p> <p>Security doors installed post closure and CCTV remotely monitored 24/7.</p>	
<p><i>Community Support Active Community Groups, including the Hyde900 may not support proposals.</i></p>	<p>Engagement will be necessary to ensure the public's views are heard and incorporated into plans for the future use of the site.</p>	<p>To inform, engage and seek backing for future proposals</p>
<p><i>Timescales Dependent on Winchester Sport & Leisure Park opening.</i></p> <p><i>COVID-19 puts pressure on utilities resolution.</i></p>	<p>Assess cost impact and report delays to ELB and Cabinet.</p>	
<p><i>Project capacity Insufficient staff resources.</i></p>	<p>WCC has assigned sufficient internal resource to the project. Additional resource from the council's strategic advisors can be called upon if required.</p>	
<p><i>Financial / VfM Business rates are an unplanned Revenue cost that will need to be met if the building cannot be deleted from the Ratings list.</i></p>	<p>Every option will be explored; as outlined in this report, to delete from the Ratings list.</p>	
<p><i>Legal Compliance with any statutory process is required</i></p>	<p>Legal team will work closely with the implementation teams</p>	
<p><i>Innovation</i></p>		
<p><i>Reputation Public reaction to decommissioning RPLC</i></p>	<p>Communications messaging to be clear and released early.</p>	

<i>may be adverse</i>		
<i>Other</i>		

11 SUPPORTING INFORMATION:

Background

- 11.1 RPLC sits adjacent to the North Walls open space and currently provides the local residents and sports communities with leisure services and facilities. The new WS&LP is due to open at Bar End in the early part of 2021 and then the facilities provided within the RPLC building will be surplus to requirement.
- 11.2 The RPLC building is coming to the end of its economic and useable life and needs to be decommissioned, whilst a plan to establish the future use of the site is developed.
- 11.3 Due to COVID-19 restrictions, RPLC is currently closed to the public, but it is anticipated that RPLC will reopen once the situation allows. Therefore for the purpose of this report, work is being carried out to plan for the closure of RPLC in the early part of 2021. A programme has been drafted to establish tasks, potential costs and indicative timescales, but the date is dependent on when WS&LP opens.
- 11.4 Four options for RPLC post WS&LP opening have been considered; in all four options the future use of the site will be explored:
- Option 1: Retain the building and keep open to allow use of facilities, such as toilets and café
- Option 2: Decommission the building, close and secure
- Option 3: Decommission the building, close, soft-strip and secure
- Option 4: Decommission and demolish the building and leave a clear site
- 11.5 Capital cost estimates have been sought and associated revenue costs estimated for all options under consideration. A financial appraisal and cost estimates table for each of the options considered is provided at Appendix 2.
- 11.6 The majority of services and activities will transfer across to the new facility at Bar End, but there are a number of clubs and amenities that will remain and be enhanced by the Winchester Town Forum (WTF) in their current location at North Walls, as WTF oversees management and improvement of the open space.

These include;

- 1) indoor and outdoor bowls club

- 2) Skate park and play park
 - 3) Astro turf pitches (ATP) and tennis courts
 - 4) Ad hoc facilities such as car parking and lighting
- 11.7 The RPLC building also supplies utilities to all of the above and it is recommended in all four of the options presented that the utilities should be separated and their own supplies provided. On-going discussions around the anticipated costs and timings for this are underway, but it is anticipated that the utilities resolution may be delayed due to COVID-19 and pressures being faced by the utilities companies.
- 11.8 It should also be noted that the utilities separation will support the on-going work of the WTF at North Walls Recreation Ground. WTF has commissioned a Park Plan, which will explore options to improve the open space, including permanent toilets, refreshments/café and overall design/use of the space. The park plan will also take in to account the new cricket pavilion which has received funding and approval. It is anticipated that this facility will be completed in 2021.
- 11.9 In line with WCC's Parking and Access Strategy, across all four options there are no proposed changes to the car park on site. It will remain open and in use to provide parking and access for those using the clubs and visiting North Walls.

RPLC – Structural considerations

- 11.10 The current building was constructed in three major phases, and a number of extensions, refurbishments and alterations have been carried out over the years.
- 11.11 The swimming pool, changing facilities and gym were built during the 1970's. This was principally constructed of reinforced concrete to the ground floor, with load bearing masonry and structural steel superstructure. During 1980-81 a sports hall and six squash courts were added using structural steel superstructure and masonry infill panels.
- 11.12 During 1987 there was a significant fire over the Pool Hall, which inflicted considerable damage on this part of the building. The Pool Hall structure was subsequently re-built in structural steel with aluminium glass panelled curtain walling.
- 11.13 The Pool Hall has a built-up metal roof, the Sports Hall roof is part-tiled and the remainder of the building is covered by a combination of asphalt and felt flat roofs coated with liquid applied membrane.
- 11.14 Due to the age of the building a number of building elements have reached the end of their life expectancy. Inspections and surveys have been undertaken and have highlighted the building has reached the end of its

anticipated life. The structural integrity of the building, in particular the pool roof, is of concern and this continues to be monitored regularly by a consulting structural engineer.

Planning considerations

- 11.15 The RPLC site is within 60 metres of the South Downs National Park (SDNP) boundary. The SDNP has an adopted local plan which has relevant policies relating to impacts on views looking into and out of the park and these policies would need to be fully considered and assessed as part of the planning application process. Early engagement with the SDNP would be essential.
- 11.16 RPLC is in a location designated Countryside in the Adopted Winchester District Local Plan and governed by policy MTRA4 and MTRA5. The full excerpt from the Winchester District Local Plan can be seen at Appendix 1.
- 11.17 In summary, planning policy states that consent for new buildings must be in accordance with countryside/agricultural uses. External and internal advice received recommends that retaining the mass of the RPLC building in situ is preferential, as any new planning application could then be considered as redevelopment of an existing building rather than development in the countryside.
- 11.18 If constructing a new building on a clear site, the application will be considered as a new building in the countryside, which would have to comply with policy outlined in Appendix 1 and would therefore be more problematic.
- 11.19 Therefore, if the building were to be demolished ahead of any future plans, steps to mitigate this risk should be taken. These would include a study of traffic movement to and from the site and photographic records of the current building location, massing, views and skylines to document the current use, and support another use replacing the existing one.
- 11.20 The potential to change the settlement boundary as part of the Local Plan review has been explored. Significant justification, including its potential use is needed and here is not yet sufficient information on the future of the site to enable this course of action.
- 11.21 The possibility of including the RPLC site in the Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) has also been explored. However, RPLC sits within flood zones 2 and 3 and therefore cannot be included in the SHELAA.
- 11.22 The options for the future use of the site should be developed with consideration to the Local Plan and the Vision for Winchester.

Recommended approach for decommissioning RPLC

- 11.23 Four options as outlined in 11.4 have been identified and considered with regard to decommissioning the RPLC building. The recommended approach

is Option 3: RPLC is closed, a partial demolition carried out (soft strip) and then the building is secured while the future of the site is determined.

- 11.24 Once the current operator, Places Leisure, has vacated, RPLC would be closed to the public and cease to provide leisure and sports facilities. An internal soft strip and part demolition would be carried out at an estimated cost of £249,000, including preliminaries and contingency.
- 11.25 This work, ahead of full demolition, would include removal of internal services such as kitchens and toilets and structures such as stair cases, and would allow for an application to be made, seeking to have RPLC deleted from the Valuations Office (VO) Ratings List.
- 11.26 If successful, this would remove the business rates liability of circa £170,000 per annum (£136,000 net after allowing for 20% retention by the council). The application to the VO can be made once work starts on site and needs to outline the reasoning behind the application.
- 11.27 The justification for removal from the rating list of RPLC would include:
- 1) The building is redundant because of the new WS&LP and therefore there would be no market for a building of this nature in Winchester.
 - 2) The building is of a specialist nature and repurposing it for other uses such as offices or industrial is not possible.
 - 3) It is uneconomical to keep the building open and in safe repair.
 - 4) Works carried out during soft strip are in preparation for full demolition and include intrusive survey and removal of asbestos, removal of some external parts for the building for safety reasons and the separation of utilities which supply other clubs in the immediate vicinity.
 - 5) A demolition programme has been prepared and can be supplied as the structure, particularly the roof, may deteriorate to a state that demolition is required ahead of future plans for the site being finalised.
 - 6) The future use of the site is not yet determined but there are ongoing discussions.
- 11.28 Any application to the VO can be a lengthy process but, if successful, the decision is applied in retrospect so all rates paid during the process will be refunded.
- 11.29 To facilitate the soft strip, an intrusive asbestos survey needs to be carried out to identify the extent and type of asbestos in the building. Due to the nature of the survey this cannot take place until RPLC is permanently closed.
- 11.30 It is anticipated that some asbestos removal will be necessary to enable the soft strip. The cost of the asbestos survey is up to £5,000, but the actual cost

of removal is unknown at this stage, as this will depend on what asbestos is present and how much needs to be removed to enable the soft strip. It is estimated it could cost up to £20,000 in this option.

- 11.31 Upon completion of the works, the building would be secured and monitored while the future of the site is explored. The anticipated cost to install metal shutters for all access points and installation of CCTV, together with removal of the staircases is estimated to be £52,000, with ongoing hire and monitoring costs for the CCTV of £18,000 per annum.
- 11.32 Attention would have to be paid to parking arrangements and current access routes around the site to ensure access to North Walls recreation ground and remaining clubs is maintained.
- 11.33 Utilities that are currently supplied to clubs on site from RPLC would need to be separated and dedicated supplies arranged. Costs and timings have been sought, but it is not clear what the exact costs are for this until utility companies have quoted for the work. They are currently not taking on new work due to COVID-19 restrictions but it is estimated however that these works would cost up to £75,000 and can be carried out prior to closure.
- 11.34 Temporary toilets would also need to be provided until the permanent solution has been agreed and delivered by the WTF. A quote has been sought to carry out this work. To provide a modular steel cabin would be an estimated one-off cost of £22,500 including installation and an ongoing, estimated cleaning cost of £12,000 per annum.
- 11.35 Planning permission for this option is not required; the closure, soft strip and securing is permitted development. By retaining the building, the previously identified risk of losing the height and massing and then planning precedence is mitigated.
- 11.36 An on-going risk with options 1 - 3 is that the structure of RPLC becomes unsafe. The building requires continued regular inspections. If the structure is deemed unsafe due to the findings during inspection it will be necessary to demolish and clear the site.

Programme to explore future use of the site

- 11.37 The future use of the site has not been considered in this report and the RPLC site is affected by planning and legal restrictions that require careful consideration.
- 11.38 In the current COVID-19 situation, the approach to determining the future of the site may prove challenging due to the intention to hold engagement with residents and stakeholders as to what options can be considered. It is also challenging at the current time to conduct site visits, studies and surveys.
- 11.39 Another consideration is that there are other major projects currently ongoing specifically Central Winchester Regeneration and the opening in the early part

next year of the new Winchester Sport & Leisure Park. Each of these projects will be holding intensive periods of engagement through the remainder of 2020 and early 2021 and it might be prudent to wait until these have been conducted to start work on the future of RPLC.

- 11.40 As the recovery begins after COVID-19, council will be considering priorities and options. There is revenue budget to enable work on the future of the site, but considering the points above this spend could fall back in to financial year 21/22.
- 11.41 Options to consider include a sale of the site and direct development by the council. Both options will prove challenging at this moment due to uncertainty as to what life after COVID-19 looks like. Markets, contractors and consultants are all watching and waiting to see how things develop.
- 11.42 The recommendation is that options are explored once we emerge from the COVID-19 restrictions and a paper brought back to Cabinet in Q2 or Q3 of 2021.

Conclusion

- 11.43 The current situation regarding COVID-19 creates uncertainty around the council's short term financial situation and therefore careful consideration should be given to decisions with financial implications.
- 11.44 Demolition is a costly process, but retaining the building in its current condition could prove costly over the coming months and years. The option to decommission the current site and strip out internally is the most cost effective approach for the current financial year, 2020/2021.
- 11.45 An application to the VO will be made seeking to delete RPLC from the business rate list with a view to mitigating the ongoing liability. Initial indications are that an application would be successful.
- 11.46 The recommended course of action, based on the contents of this report, is that RPLC is closed, an internal soft strip carried out then secured and monitored while the future use of the site is explored.
- 11.47 Timing for this approach is as follows but may change depending on the WS&LP programme;

When:	Event:
24 June 2020	Cabinet decision on approach to RPLC closure
June 2020 onwards	Explore options to retain and develop the site
Tbc – prior to RPLC closure	Utilities resolved
Tbc – prior to RPLC closure	Temporary toilets provided
Early part of 2021	WS&LP opens and RPLC closes to the public
5 month duration post RPLC closure	Places leisure and WCC clear the building Asbestos survey carried out and report produced

	Soft strip carried out Building fully secured and monitoring begins
Q2/Q3 2021	Option paper on future use to Cabinet

12 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

12.1 Option 3: decommission, soft strip and retain is being recommended. Three other options were identified, considered and rejected with regard to decommissioning RPLC and are as follows;

- 1) Retain the building and keep open to allow use of facilities
- 2) Decommission the building but close and secure while the future of the site is determined.
- 4) Demolish the building and leave a clear site once RPLC has closed.

Option 1: Retain and keep open - for facilities such as changing rooms, toilets and café

12.2 The option to keep the RPLC building open once the new WS&LP opens has been considered. This would enable continued use of the changing rooms, toilets and café, while the future of the site is identified and the park plan being undertaken by the WTF is implemented.

12.3 The option of keeping only part of the building open has also been explored, but due to internal layout and access this is not possible.

12.4 A decision would need to be made on the operation of the building and whether it should fall to the council or be contracted out. Retaining and keeping the building open would result in significant ongoing revenue costs to cover services such as cleaning, staffing, supplies and utilities. Insurance costs and considerable business rates would also become payable.

12.5 In addition to these ongoing costs, there will be an ongoing maintenance cost. The RPLC site is coming to the end of its life and the structure of the building currently requires regular inspection and maintenance works. It is estimated maintenance could cost up to £100,000 per annum if the building remains open.

12.6 By retaining the building mass and traffic movement in and out of the site this would minimise the identified planning risk, but this option has been rejected due to the uncertainty around ongoing costs to keep RPLC open and concerns around the structural integrity of the building.

Option 2: Decommission and secure

12.7 Decommissioning, securing and monitoring the RPLC building has been considered. RPLC is currently closed due to COVID-19 but, at present, it is expected that it will re-open when current restrictions are lifted.

- 12.8 Once the current operator, Places Leisure, has vacated the site, the building would be secured and monitored while the future of the site is explored. As with the recommended approach outlined beginning with paragraph 11.23, installation costs of necessary measures highlighted in paragraph 11.31 is estimated to be £52,000 with ongoing hire and monitoring costs for the CCTV of £18,000 per annum.
- 12.9 Utilities will need to be separated for the clubs remaining on site as in the recommended approach, with the same estimated cost of up to £75k.
- 12.10 Temporary toilets would also need to be provided until the permanent solution has been agreed and delivered by the WTF. As in the recommended approach, the estimated cost is £22,500 including installation.
- 12.11 The car park would remain open to service visitors to North Walls recreation ground and remaining clubs. It would be necessary to maintain access, car park maintenance and lighting.
- 12.12 If the building were to remain in place, albeit secured and monitored, business rates will become payable. There is a 3 month exemption period from when the building is vacated before business rates are payable. The council will be responsible for payment once this period has ended. The business rates liability for the year 2020/2021 is £170,000 (£136,000 net after allowing for 20% retention by the council) and will increase annually in line with the business rate multiplier. While the council continues to retain 20% of business rates, the net cost to the council is circa £136,000.
- 12.13 This approach would mitigate the identified planning risk, but factors such as ongoing revenue costs and the condition of the building would remain. The building would require continued regular inspections and if the structure becomes unsafe, it will be necessary to demolish and clear the site.
- 12.14 This option has been rejected due to uncertainty on the future of the site and the cost of ongoing business rates liability while the future plans are determined. The business rate and maintenance liability will fall to the council and it is estimated that the total cumulative cost will exceed the soft-strip option by the end of year 2.

Option 4: Demolish and clear site

- 12.15 The final option available is full demolition of RPLC once closed.
- 12.16 Once Places Leisure vacates the building, an asbestos survey would be carried out. Prior to demolition, all asbestos would need to be safely removed. The survey cannot be carried out while RPLC remains open because of health and safety concerns around the intrusive nature of the work.
- 12.17 Once the extent and type of asbestos is identified, removal would be included in any demolition contract. This would provide certainty with regard to timing

and costs. The contract could be let ahead of the asbestos report, but a large contingency would have to be included to cover removal.

- 12.18 Cost estimates for demolition have been sought to demolish RPLC and leave a clear site, the estimated cost (not including asbestos removal) is just under £1,000,000 including preliminaries and contingency. While the cost of asbestos removal is unknown until the survey is carried out, it is estimated that costs could amount to up to £100,000 in a worst case given the age and nature of the building.
- 12.19 Provision for providing temporary toilets and securing utilities to clubs remaining on site would need to be carried out prior to closure and demolition. A procurement process in line with PRC2015 and the Council's Contract Procedure Rules would be carried out.
- 12.20 If this route was followed and a demolition contractor was not in place before RPLC closes, it is estimated that the procurement process, demolition and site clearance would take at least 12 - 15 months. Time could be reduced if the demolition contractor was procured prior to RPLC closing, but the asbestos would be unknown and the costs associated with its removal would be uncertain.
- 12.21 This option has been rejected due to the uncertainty around the asbestos and costs to safely remove it. It has also been rejected due to the total estimated cost of demolition of just under £1,000,000 and total overall costs estimated at just under £1.2m. The COVID-19 situation has changed the financial position for the council in the short to medium term and this needs to be a key consideration.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:-

Previous Committee Reports:-

WTF283 – MARCH 2020 - Park Plan for North Walls Recreation Ground

WTF287 – MARCH 2020 - Vision for Winchester Update

WTF278 – JANUARY 2020 - North Walls and King George V sports pavilions update report

CAB3190 – OCTOBER 2019 – River Park Leisure Centre – Future use of Site

CAB3082 (LEISURE CENTRE) – FEBRUARY 2019 - Winchester Sport and Leisure centre – full business case

CAB3093 – OCTOBER 2018 - River Park Leisure Centre – Future Use of Site

CAB3031 – JUNE 2018 – Winchester Sport and Leisure Centre – Procurement of a Centre Operator

CAB2914 (CABINET) – MARCH 2017 - RPLC essential repairs

CAB2708 (CABINET) – SEPTEMBER 2015 - Options for River Park Leisure Centre

Other Background Documents:-

APPENDICES:

Appendix 1: Countryside policy excerpt from the Adopted Local Plan 2013.

Appendix 2: Financial appraisal

Appendix 1: Countryside policy excerpt from the Adopted Local Plan 2013.

Planning policy is set out within the Winchester District Local Plan Joint Core Strategy, adopted March 2013. The RPLC site is located within the Countryside.

[Local Plan web link - please see pages 65 - 66](#)

“The Countryside

6.30 Very small communities which are no more than a collection of houses or isolated dwellings are not covered by the above policies and are considered to be within the wider countryside. Development will be limited to that which has an essential need to be located in the countryside. This may include development which is necessary for agricultural, horticultural or forestry purposes, and certain types of open recreational uses which require a countryside location.

6.31 In addition, there are a number of existing buildings within the countryside of the District, some of which are no longer in use and others which are occupied by existing users or businesses which may need to expand. These existing structures are often an accepted part of the landscape and it is considered appropriate to provide for them to be used productively, through re-use, or for them to be redeveloped.

Policy MTRA 4 - Development in the Countryside

In the countryside, defined as land outside the built-up areas of Winchester, Whiteley and Waterlooville and the settlements covered by MTRA 2 and 3 above, the Local Planning Authority will only permit the following types of development:

- development which has an operational need for a countryside location, such as for agriculture, horticulture or forestry; or
- proposals for the reuse of existing rural buildings for employment, tourist accommodation, community use or affordable housing (to meet demonstrable local housing needs). Buildings should be of permanent construction and capable of use without major reconstruction; or
- expansion or redevelopment of existing buildings to facilitate the expansion on-site of established businesses or to meet an operational need, provided development is proportionate to the nature and scale of the site, its setting and countryside location; or
- small scale sites for low key tourist accommodation appropriate to the site, location and the setting.

Development proposed in accordance with this policy should not cause harm to the character and landscape of the area or neighbouring uses, or create inappropriate noise/light and traffic generation.

6.32 Across the District there are a number of large commercial and educational/training establishments set in the wider countryside: IBM (Hursley), Defence establishments (Winchester, Worthy Down and Southwick), Sparsholt College (Sparsholt), Marwell Wildlife (Colden Common), and Arqiva (Crawley). These establishments are primarily involved in business and training activities which support the District's economy and it is important that they can continue to thrive. They also employ large numbers of people with a range of skills that the Council wishes to retain locally.

6.33 Increasingly these organisations are looking to meet modern business needs through adaptation and expansion of their existing buildings. Often these establishments occupy former country estates outside of any defined settlement, where development would normally be constrained. Marwell Wildlife (Colden Common) also lies within the South Downs National Park. However, the City Council and the NPA recognises the value of these organisations and their contribution to the local economy and wish to work with them to plan for their future needs.

Policy MTRA 5 - Major Commercial and Educational Establishments in the Countryside

The Local Planning Authority will support the retention and development of major commercial and educational establishments which occupy rural locations in the District, where this will help them continue to contribute to the District's economic prosperity. Because of their sensitive rural locations, masterplans should be prepared prior to development which identify the site opportunities and constraints, promote sensitive land and building stewardship, promote sustainable development, and maximise sustainable transport opportunities, whilst limiting impacts on the surrounding environment and communities."