

REPORT TITLE: FUTURE OF FORMER LEISURE CENTRE SITE

28 MAY 2026

REPORT OF CABINET MEMBER: Councillor Kathleen Becker - Cabinet Member for Healthy Communities

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WARD(S): ST BARTHOLOMEW

PURPOSE

In July 2025 Cabinet (CAB3466) approved the marketing of the former River Park Leisure Centre (RPLC) site.

This report sets out the progress undertaken to date including the completion of the following stages of the process: expressions of interest, public engagement and inviting and initial evaluation of formal bids.

To enable the council to take a decision on the future of the site prior to the constraints of Local Government Reorganisation, this report seeks Cabinet approval to publish notice in order to comply with section 123 (2A) of the Local Government Act 1972 which requires giving of notice of any intention to dispose of land consisting or forming part of open space land and advertising the notice in a local newspaper for two consecutive weeks. All bids received were recreational in nature and therefore the notice will advertise the council's intention to dispose of the site for a recreational use. The advertisement period and time to submit objections will take place whilst the viability assessments and due diligence (assessing and verifying information provided) is undertaken on the bids that have been received for the former leisure centre site.

An evaluation of all representations received in response to the notice will be undertaken and considered by Cabinet. Cabinet will also decide the preferred bidder following the due diligence in August 2026.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That Cabinet approves the publication of the required notice under Section 123 (2A) of the Local Government Act 1972.
2. That Cabinet delegates authority to the Strategic Director, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Healthy Communities, to finalise and publish the statutory notice.
3. That Cabinet agrees that a further report will be brought back following the expiry of the notice period to consider any representations received and to consider the disposal of the site to the preferred bidder.

IMPLICATIONS:

1 COUNCIL PLAN OUTCOME

1.1 Greener Faster

Our Carbon Neutrality Action Plan ensures all council activity is undertaken with a view to supporting our commitment to achieving net zero carbon. We are actively working with partners to ensure that development in the district is undertaken sustainably. The re-use of this previously developed site which provides economic, social and community benefit would align and support this aim.

1.2 Thriving Places

The council's Green Economic Development Strategy sets out the opportunity to build a cluster of national significance in creativity, design and related heritage and nature/land based professional services along with the opportunity to deepen a creative network of scale. The redevelopment of this site would therefore support the economic development of the city in line with the council's already stated ambitions. Once the development is defined, it would bring construction and jobs to the area. The value of these jobs would be quantified once the proposals are determined.

1.3 Healthy Communities

There will be no impact on the surrounding green space, whether skate park or playing area or tennis courts this is wholly out of scope. Likewise, the indoor bowling green will be maintained

1.4 Good Homes for All

Due to planning policy and restrictions in the title deeds to the site, there are no plans for residential development on the site.

1.5 Efficient and Effective

The project will be managed in line with the council's project management framework. This includes reviewing and updating the project risk register and ensuring that mitigation measures are implemented. The project will be managed via the Project Board and quarterly highlight reports will be submitted to PAC Board for review and published as part of the quarterly Finance and Performance Cabinet report.

1.6 Listening and Learning

The former leisure centre site is located in River Park and future use of the site is of considerable interest to local residents. There has been engagement and consultation regarding the site as part of the adopted local plan process, this involved two rounds of public consultation on the allocation of this site

under Policy W10 as part of the local plan and the future of the site was also discussed at the Local Plan examination (hearing session 3 June 2025). Public views have been sought through this phase and subsequently as the council seeks a new partner who can invest in the site of the former leisure centre. A public engagement session took place on 26 June 2025 which consisted of display boards at the Guildhall, feedback forms and council officers on hand to answer questions. Information was provided online and online responses was also encouraged. Another engagement event took place on 27 January 2026 to provide an update on the number and type of expressions of interest received this information was also available online. Following the publication of the disposal notice the public have the opportunity to have their views heard. A further drop-in information session will also be held, prior to the council taking a decision regarding its preferred bidder.

2 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 2.1 Marketing and evaluation activity to date has been funded from the £130,000 budget previously approved by Cabinet in CAB3466.
- 2.2 The preferred bidder will need to represent best consideration, consistent with the Council's obligation under Section 123(2) of the Local Government Act 1972.
- 2.3 The council is forecasting a significant budget deficit, and as part of the Transformational Challenge 2025 (TC25) 'Asset Challenge' workstream, it is critical that all redevelopment opportunities are considered within this context and only those that are affordable and financially sustainable are approved.
- 2.4 Previous reports have identified that the site might generate a capital receipt and the council can use capital receipts to fund new capital expenditure either for future projects or to reduce the borrowing requirement for previous unfinanced capital expenditure which reduces the annual cost of servicing the debt via reduced MRP (principal repayment) and interest costs.
- 2.5 A final report will confirm any capital receipt and the estimated financial implications of the disposal to the preferred bidder.
- 2.6 Furthermore, the decommissioned leisure centre currently has ongoing costs associated with it. Although it has been successfully deregistered for business rates, the ongoing maintenance and security costs are the council's responsibility and are currently budgeted at £55k per annum. This will no longer be required should the council dispose of the site.

3 LEGAL AND PROCUREMENT IMPLICATION

- 3.1 Under Section 123 (2A) of the Local Government Act 1972, notice is required to be advertised prior to disposal of land consisting or forming part of open space land.

- 3.2 Following publication of the notice, for two consecutive weeks and expiry of the representation period, any objections must be considered before a final decision on disposal is made.
- 3.3 The proposed transaction is a land disposal by way of long lease and is not considered a procurement covered by the Procurement Act 2023 (PA23). Only if a purchaser is under an obligation to carry out specified works (conferring a pecuniary benefit for the council) will that obligation arise and, therefore, is not applicable in the circumstances recommended within this report.
- 3.4 All procurement required for delivery of the project was conducted in accordance with the Procurement Act 2023, the council's Contract Procedure Rules (CPRs) and adhere to the council's Procurement and Contract Management Strategy (2020-2025) in consultation with the Procurement and Legal Teams.
- 3.5 The general power of disposal of land is contained at section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 which gives a local authority the power to dispose of land held by it in any manner it wishes provided that the local authority achieves the best consideration that can reasonably be obtained (except where the disposal is for a short tenancy of no more than 7 years) or the local authority has the consent of the Secretary of State).
- 3.6 The Secretary of State has issued a general consent for disposals of land under section 123 for less than best consideration. This allows a local authority to dispose of land for less than best consideration if it considers that the disposal will contribute to the promotion or improvement of the economic, social or environmental well-being of its area and the extent of the undervalue is no more than £2m.

Disposal of Open Space land

- 3.7 The council has the power to dispose of land and buildings under sections 111 and 123 of the Local Government Act 1972.
- 3.8 Under section 123(2A) of the 1972 Act a council may not dispose of any land consisting or forming part of open space unless before doing so they cause notice to be published of the intention to do so, specifying the land in question, and advertised for two consecutive weeks in a local newspaper. The council must then consider any objections to the proposed disposal.
- 3.9 Section 123(2A) defines open space by reference to the definition given in S336(1), Town and Country Planning Act 1990, as follows: "any land laid out as a public garden, or used for the purposes of public recreation, or land which is a disused burial ground".
- 3.10 Careful consideration has been given to the areas of the Site meeting the definition of open space for the purposes of S123(2A) Local Government Act 1972 having regard to case law including *Whitstable Society v Canterbury*

City Council [2017] EWHC 254 (Admin). Officers, having taken KC advice, are satisfied that the proposed disposal site, which consists of the closed leisure centre building and part of the leisure centre car park, does not itself meet the definition of open space set out in the 1972 Act.

- 3.11 However, the requirement in section 123(2A) of the 1972 Act is to advertise intention to dispose of any land “consisting or forming part of an open space”. As the wider site is considered to be open space land, officers consider that notice should be advertised because the site forms part of an area of open space land.

Best consideration reasonably obtainable

- 3.12 When disposing of land, the council has an obligation to obtain the ‘best consideration reasonably obtainable’ (section 123(2) Local Government Act 1972). The best consideration reasonably obtainable can be established by way of a competitive process or by a valuation exercise (or both).
- 3.13 The appropriate level at which to agree the sale price (capital receipt) will be assessed by an independent valuer in accordance with S123 ‘Best Consideration’ principles.

Best value obligations

- 3.14 Under section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999, a best value authority must make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. For the purposes of deciding how to fulfil this duty, an authority must consult specified representatives. Case law establishes that the duty to consult is triggered by decisions about high-level issues concerning the approach to the performance of an authority’s functions, and it is about those and not about particular implementation that consultation is required. It is not considered that the proposed decision falls into the category requiring such consultation. At this stage, the council is simply progressing the agreed disposal process by publishing the required statutory notice, which is an implementation step rather than a change in strategic approach.

Statutory Trust

- 3.15 The Site forms part of the council’s freehold title no. HP3062 which also includes River Park and the site of the Ancient Gateway of Hyde Abbey. This freehold title was acquired under an Indenture dated 3 July 1902 made between William Barrow Simonds and the Urban District Council of the City of Winchester, being the Winchester City Council’s statutory predecessor. The conveyance was made “for the purpose of a Public Park and Recreation Ground”. In consequence, a statutory trust arose under section 164 of the Public Health Act 1875, which required the land, including the proposed disposal site to be used as “public walks or pleasure grounds”. The statutory trust would potentially bind a purchaser of the Site. Provided the process in

section 123 (2A) of the Local Government Act 1972 is correctly followed (advertisement and consideration of objections) the land is freed from any trust arising under section 164. It should however be emphasised that not only would the skate park and indoor bowls club uses continue but that continued public access to and recreational use of areas outside the Site, including Hyde Abbey Gardens, River Park and the tennis courts, would be unaffected by any new scheme. Further, there are footways around all four sides of the Site which allow public access to Hyde Abbey Gardens, River Park and the tennis courts from Gordon Road and Park Avenue.

3.16 *Existing leisure facility operator at Winchester Sport & Leisure Park (WSLP)*

The Council has an existing long-term leisure management contract in place at WSLP, which was procured based on certain assumptions regarding the council's leisure provision within the district. Whilst competition in itself is not prohibited, there is a risk that the disposal of the former RPLC site in a way that involves subsidy or disposal at less than best consideration could be perceived as council-sponsored competition.

In such circumstances, there is potential for legal challenge or financial exposure under the existing contract, together with wider financial implications arising from any material impact on the performance of the operated facility. Accordingly, careful consideration is required of the council's statutory duty to secure best consideration, the application of the General Disposal Consent, and the extent to which any proposed disposal could give rise to contractual or financial risk. Independent advice is being commissioned to further assess these potential implications and will inform future Cabinet decision-making.

4 WORKFORCE IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The following external resources have been engaged to dispose of the site:

- Marketing agents
- Technical consultants to undertake surveys

These were procured, as set out in paragraphs 3.4 above.

4.2 The project continues to require support from teams across the council including Finance, Procurement, Planning, Estates, Legal and Communications. Ongoing staffing for all services is included in annual budgets or individual business cases.

5 PROPERTY AND ASSET IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The former Leisure Centre building and the land immediately surrounding it remain part of the council's freehold estate and are currently held as a surplus asset following decommissioning. The marketing process approved by Cabinet in CAB3466 has now been completed, Expressions of Interest were received, formal bids were invited, and bids are now being evaluated. At this

stage, the recommended next step is to proceed with publication of notice under s123(2A) prior to Cabinet's future consideration of final disposal.

- 5.2 The former Leisure Centre site is an important part of the city and public access will be retained to River Park. Pedestrian access is maintained along the side of the car park and along Gordon Road. Any future development will be controlled through the lease terms and planning processes to ensure that public access and neighbouring recreational uses remain protected.
- 5.3 Disposal of the site by way of a long lease will transfer future investment, maintenance responsibilities and asset risk to the lessee, subject to the final structure of the transaction. The council will retain appropriate landlord controls to safeguard adjoining land, ensure compliance with planning and environmental obligations, and secure community benefits aligned with the Council Plan.

6 CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

- 6.1 Local residents have been consulted on the proposed allocation prior to the adoption of the Local Plan 2020 – 2040. Proposals for the former RPLC site were included in Reg 18 LP public consultation that took place between 2 November 2022 – 14 December 2022. The proposals for the former RPLC (Policy W10) were also reconsulted on in the Reg 19 LP public consultation that took place between 29 August 2024 – 13 October 2024.

Previous engagement and consultations relating to the site for are set out in CAB3342.

- 6.2 An engagement event took place in the Guildhall on 26 June 2025 at which over 100 people attended to let the council know their views on what they would like to see at this site. In addition to the event there was an on-line survey for those who could not attend in person. Altogether 993 feedback form responses were received. The data revealed an overwhelming support to the commitments made by the Leader of the Council to preserve green space, the skate park and the indoor bowling green. Respondents provided a wide range of suggestions for the future use of the site. The common themes include a lido, community hubs, cultural venue and family-friendly leisure spaces.
- 6.3 Over 250 people attended an engagement event on 27 January 2026. A total of 757 feedback responses about the different expressions of interest that had been received were received on the day and subsequently online. This feedback was summarised and provided to potential bidders via the marketing agent. The following word cloud visually represents the most frequently mentioned terms:



- 6.4 A further public engagement event is to be scheduled prior to Cabinet’s final decision on disposal of the site. The council is committed to ensuring that the public are involved in discussions concerning the future of the site and will continue to talk with the public throughout the process.

7 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 All potential options to redevelop the site will have to contribute towards the council’s policy commitment to be carbon neutral and deliver an exemplar sustainable development that delivers environmental and well as social and economic benefits. All proposed development will be required to achieve Biodiversity Net Gain in accordance with the national legislation and planning policy.
- 7.2 Any investor partner will have to review whether or not they can re-use the existing building for their proposals as set out in the council’s Local Plan reflecting the embodied carbon in the existing structure. Any proposals to demolish the building will have to be justified.
- 7.3 The site is located within flood zone category 3 which is an important consideration for redevelopment of the site.

8 PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY

- 8.1 Under s149 (1) of the Equality Act 2010 the council (and its decision making bodies) must have due regard, in the exercise of its functions, to the need to:
- a. Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisations and any other conduct prohibited by the Act.
 - b. Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share relevant protected characteristics and persons who do not share them.

- c. Foster good relations between persons who share relevant protected characteristics and persons who do not share them.

8.2 An Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken prior to Cabinet making the final decision to dispose of the site. However, equality matters have been considered throughout the process.

9 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

9.1 Having had regard to the council's obligations under the data protection legislation, it is considered that a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) is not required.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT

Risk	Mitigation	Opportunities
Financial Exposure – risk that disposal is delayed or does not proceed resulting in continued or increasing costs and reduced / delayed capital receipt	Progress the statutory notice and disposal process promptly; maintain a clear audit trail and legal compliance to minimise the risk of challenge; ensure contingency planning in the event the preferred bidder withdraws.	Disposal removes ongoing costs and liabilities and secures a capital receipt that supports the Council's financial strategy
Legal Challenge – risk of challenge to disposal if correct process not followed	Work with Legal, Estates, Planning, Procurement to ensure compliance with statutory requirements and maintain audit trail	Transparent and robust process reduce risk of later disputes
Statutory Notice Challenge – risk that representations received delay the disposal	Ensure process under s123 (2A) is correctly followed and that objections are duly considered.	Demonstrate public concerns are considered
Best Consideration Risk – challenge over best consideration	Independent valuation and a clear well-documented evaluation process	Provides assurance that the council's approach is transparent, lawful, and delivers the most advantageous outcome – not only financially, but also in terms of deliverability
Reputation – risk of damage by perceived lack of consultation	Continued engagement and clear communication around statutory notice process which provides formal representation opportunity	Opportunity for collaborative, supported outcome with broad community support

Achievement of outcome – risk that intended benefits not achieved	Qualified consultant supported marketing; strong governance	Partner-led scheme delivering community regeneration benefit
Property – empty building risk	Building is secured and monitored in the interim period	Disposal returns to operational use and increasing natural surveillance will reduce antisocial behaviour (ASB)
Community Support – risk of losing support	Statutory notice and clear communications/updates	Exciting scheme with long-term community benefits
Timescales – risk of project delay	Project plan monitored	Maintain delivery momentum
Capacity – risk Council lacks resource capacity	External technical / legal expertise / support used	Knowledge transfer into organisation
Dependencies – risk from related projects	Coordinated through Property Board and PAC	Resource sharing opportunities
Local Government Reorganisation – risk decisions slip to new shadow authority	Timescales currently aligned to enable Winchester City Council Cabinet decision/s	Certainty and continuity for local community
Contractual and Legal Exposure – risk that selection of proposal which does not represent highest financial consideration may expose the Council to challenge or financial liability arising from existing contractual arrangements associated with the Council's leisure provision.	The Council's evaluation process considers best consideration in the round applying consistent criteria taking account of deliverability, not solely price. Legal advice and professional advice is being sought.	Ensures that any disposal decision is legally robust and does not place the Council at undue financial or contractual risk.

11 SUPPORTING INFORMATION:

11.1 In July 2025 Cabinet (CAB3466) agreed the marketing of the former River Park Leisure Centre site for disposal by way of a long lease.

11.2 Site

The site is circa 0.7 hectare (1.75 acres) within the Winchester City Centre boundary. The site borders the River Park to the North and the residential area of Hyde to the West, the Winnall Moors Nature Reserve to the East and

the University of Southampton campus to the South. The extent of the site area for the disposal will be the former RPLC building and associated carparking spaces. Map attached in Appendix A.

11.3 Site Constraints

There are a number of known constraints on site that will impact and/or discount future uses of the site. including:

Planning use

The existing use is a leisure centre building including swimming pool, skate park and indoor bowling facility. Policy W10 in the now adopted Local Plan allocates the site for Learning and non-residential institutions (Use Class F.1 and E (d)).

Class F1 allows for any use not including residential use:

- For the provision of education
- For the display of artwork (not for sale or hire)
- As a museum
- As a public library or public reading room
- As a public hall or exhibition hall
- For, or in connection with, public worship or religious instruction
- As a law court

Class E (d) allows for indoor sport and recreation (not swimming pools, ice rinks or motorised vehicles or firearms).

Policy W10 states that planning permission will be granted for development of F.1 and E (d) use classes provided that detailed proposals accord with the Development Plan.

A detailed assessment of all material planning considerations including conformity to the recently adopted local plan will be undertaken when the preferred bidder brings forward a developed scheme. The preferred bidder should engage with the Local Planning Authority at the pre-application stage. Policy W10 (i) requires

“Any application for development is preceded by, and is consistent with, a site wide masterplan for the whole site which has involved and engaged with stakeholders and interested parties before it is agreed by the council”.

Flood risk

As part of the work for the Local Plan, a [Stage 2 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment](#) was undertaken by the council working in collaboration with the Environment Agency. The assessment shows that due to the proximity of the site to the River Itchen, it is located within a flood risk area (Flood zone category 3) and the groundwater levels are less than a metre below the

surface which are important considerations that would need to be taken into account when considering redevelopment including:

- A specific site Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) will be required
- Sequential approach to site layout
- No development in Flood Zone 3b
- 8m buffer strip
- Requirement for EA or LLFA consent
- Flood compensation measures
- Finished floor levels
- Safe access/egress considerations
- SuDS, green-roofing, permeable surfacing
- Groundwater and hydrogeological considerations
- Reservoir breach modelling

These requirements have been made clear to bidders during the marketing process, and detailed compliance will be assessed at planning stage once a scheme is developed.

Views

The site is adjacent to the South Downs National Park (SDNP). There are views into, and out of the site, to the park and views of Winchester Cathedral which will be key matters to consider when bringing forward any plans for the redevelopment of the site. A 3D scan has been completed which shows the former leisure centre in the context of the wider environment. In addition, a Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment has been undertaken which can inform development of the site. These heritage and townscape considerations remain applicable to any redevelopment brought forward by the preferred bidder.

1902 Indenture Deed

The freehold site was acquired by WCC's predecessor in title by an Indenture in 1902 for 'the purpose of a Public Park and Recreation Ground'. In consequence, it is likely that a statutory trust arose under section 164 of the Public Health Act 1875, which has the effect of dedicating the land for public recreation. The statutory trust would potentially bind a purchaser of the Site. However, the Purchaser was given rights that include the right to erect 'any other building or galleries for recreation, scientific or other similar purposes and the necessary lodges for keepers and caretakers or any other buildings that may be required for the benefit of the City except Industrial Dwellings'.

It would be consistent with the statutory purpose for which the site is currently held to add ancillary facilities and buildings such as changing facilities, a café and community spaces for the promotion of arts and culture.

To release the site for use for another, unrelated purpose, it may be necessary for the council to follow the process of appropriation to that

purpose, if known, or for planning purposes following the procedure in section 122 of the LGA 1972. This would not require ministerial consent.

The sole restrictive covenant to which the site is subject is not to erect “Industrial Dwellings” so precluding the development of residential accommodation on the site.

Scheduled monuments

Hyde Abbey Gardens which include the remains of Hyde Abbey, a Benedictine monastery, extends into the car park and grounds of the adjacent former Leisure centre complex. Hyde Abbey Gateway, which is located opposite St Bartholomew’s Church in King Alfred’s Place, and the Bridge is a Scheduled Monument, and a Grade I Listed Building. The Bridge is also a Listed Building and a Scheduled Monument. St Bartholomew’s Church is a Grade II Listed Building and, as the church for Hyde Abbey, it is the only remaining building still in use. These are the only substantial above ground / upstanding remains that exist. As the western boundary of the site is also located adjacent to the Winchester Conservation Area boundary, any development will need to take this into consideration – as well as the Abbey remains above and below ground, both scheduled and unscheduled but potentially of national importance, and impacts on their significance – as part of the design process. These heritage constraints will be considered as part of any future design process led by the preferred bidder and will be a material planning consideration as part of a future planning application.

Access

Vehicular access is solely off Gordon Road, off Hyde Abbey Road, both residential streets, in turn taking access off North Walls, part of the one-way system. There are many walking and cycling routes through the space connecting with the surrounding residential areas and these will be maintained and ideally enhanced. This is a highly sustainable accessible location and these access constraints will inform future design proposals.

Adjacent uses

The site is next to the outdoor skate park and the indoor bowling facility which are intended to remain and which any redevelopment will need to take into consideration.

11.4 Surveys

A number of surveys were commissioned in order to market the site including:

- Phase 1 Environmental
- Geotechnical
- Flood Risk Assessment
- Highways and Access

- Asbestos update
- Planning Statement
- Title Report

These surveys have now been completed and were made available to interested parties during the marketing process. No further survey work is required at this stage. Any additional technical work will be undertaken by the preferred bidder as part of their planning and design development.

11.5 Offering the site to market

Following a competitive procurement process, commercial agents were appointed to undertake the marketing of the site for disposal at best consideration on behalf of the council.

The appointed agent set up a data room for holding the marketing materials including the surveys outlined above.

The opportunity was marketed from September 2025 and interested parties were invited to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) form by 19 December 2025.

12 EOIs were submitted by the deadline for the following uses:

- Care home
- Padel/racquets - with coffee shop, soft-play and public exhibition space
- Music/performance space, with sports offer
- Church with multi-function community space
- Fitness facility with restaurant and outdoor lido
- Padel/pickleball
- Community Sports Hub
- Education facility (primary years)
- Indoor football and padel
- Health Club – racquets/gym/leisure
- Padel/Pickleball centre – with potential lido and indoor football
- Health and Wellness Club – gym

All organisations that submitted an EOI were invited to submit a formal bid by the deadline of noon on 2 April 2026.

11.6 Formal Bids

Following the deadline for Formal Bids, bids have been received and will be evaluated in accordance with the key evaluation criteria approved by Cabinet in CAB3466 criteria:

1. Covenant Strength and Funding
2. Deliverability
3. Experience and Track Record
4. User Mix and Local Compatibility
5. Planning Policy Compliance
6. Highways Compliance
7. Price

11.7 Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation approach must reflect the council's statutory obligation to secure the best consideration reasonably obtainable, recognising that best consideration is determined not solely by price but by the overall strength, deliverability and certainty of the proposals. The criteria set out in paragraph 11.6 above has been developed into the following evaluation methodology which was shared with bidders.

Pass/Fail Gateway:

Pass / Fail	
Requirement	Evidence Required
<i>Legal capacity to contract & purchase</i>	<i>Corporate docs; authority to sign; consortium agreements, approval to proceed</i>
<i>Covenant Strength and Funding available & verified</i>	<i>Financial Standing test e.g. D & B; Bank letter / proof of funds; lender heads of terms</i>
<i>No disqualifying conduct</i>	<i>Self-declarations; past performance checks</i>
<i>Conflict of interest declarations</i>	<i>Bidder & evaluator forms</i>

If pass above then:

Criteria	
Deliverability:	<i>Deliverability and programme: Methodology; completion timetable; readiness (legal, governance, due diligence) risk management</i>
	<i>Experience and track record: Relevant track record; technical capability and team/resourcing</i>
	<i>Economic, social and environmental benefits</i>

	<i>Planning policy compliance: Understanding of planning context; route to consent; engagement plan; impact upon transport network (highways compliance)</i>
Price:	

Bids will be assessed to ensure compliance with the council's obligation to ensure best consideration and general consent for undervalue if applicable.

Each bid will be assessed independently by a multi-disciplinary officer panel, supported by external professional advice where appropriate.

In undertaking the qualitative assessment, the evaluation will take account of feedback received during the engagement process. Social value, local compatibility and community benefit were included as part of this qualitative assessment. In this way, the evaluation will ensure that local views are considered alongside financial considerations when assessing the overall strength of each proposal.

Qualitative elements will be assessed using a consistent scoring scale (0 to 5) to reflect how well each bid met or exceeded the Council's requirements, ranging from unacceptable responses (0) through to excellent (5).

11.8 Publish Notice

All bids received proposed an end use which is recreational in nature so the council may proceed by way of a disposal under Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972, which enables the land to be disposed of free of the statutory trust, subject to publication of the required notice and consideration of any objections received. Appropriation under s122 of the LGA 1972 is not considered necessary as the use of the site is proposed to remain as recreational.

11.9 Resource requirements

A budget of £130,000 was approved in CAB3466 to support marketing, technical surveys, valuation advice, legal support and communications.

This budget has supported completion of the marketing, survey, and evaluation processes. No additional budget is requested as part of this report. Any resource implications associated with the final disposal decision will be set out in the subsequent Cabinet report following the statutory notice period.

11.10 Anticipated Timescales

Activity	Revised date
Bid deadline	2 April 2026
Evaluation of Bids	April to July 2026

Cabinet	28 May 2026
Publish Notice	June 2026
Review Representations	July 2026
Resident and stakeholder engagement event	July 2026
Final Evaluation	July 2026
Heads of Terms agreed pending approval by Cabinet	August 2026
Cabinet consideration	25 August 2026

12 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

12.1 Council redevelop site

Redevelopment of the site by the council would require funding as well as risk to the council. This option is not recommended.

12.2 Demolish and leave

A budget has been included in the Capital Investment Strategy for demolition funded by existing capital receipts. In addition, further funding would be required to 'make good' the site following demolition.

Although this is not the best use of the site should the council decide that none of the bids received are viable it may choose to reconsider this option. This option would not prevent a future Unitary council taking another view on use of the site.

12.3 Demolish and enable temporary / meanwhile use

As an alternative to long-term disposal, the council could proceed with demolition of the former RPLC site and bring forward a temporary or meanwhile use, such as carparking, on the cleared site pending a future permanent solution.

A budget provision for demolition of the building has already been included in the council's Capital Investment Strategy. This approach would remove the risks and costs associated with retaining a vacant structure and could provide

short-term solution. As set out in para 12.3 this option would not prevent a future Unitary council taking another view on use of the site.

However, whilst demolition and meanwhile use may offer an interim solution, this option would not deliver the long-term regeneration, community benefit or capital receipt sought through the current disposal process. Accordingly, and considering the positive response to the marketing exercise, this option is not recommended at this stage but remains available to Cabinet should it decide not to proceed with any bid.

12.4 Do nothing

The site is currently redundant but requires ongoing maintenance, security and management. This option is not a good use of council assets and is not recommended.

Proceeding with the statutory notice and disposal process will allow the site to be brought back into active and beneficial use.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:-

Previous Committee Reports:-

CAB3093: River Park Leisure Centre – Future Use of Site, 31 October 2018

CAB3190: River Park Leisure Centre – Future Use of Site, 31 October 2019

CAB3242: River Park Leisure Centre – Decommissioning Report June 2020

CAB3342: A land transaction in respect of the River Park Leisure Centre Site and associated parking area, bowls club and skate park, 9 March 2022.

CAB3466: Future of former leisure centre site – restart redevelopment after UoS withdrawal; market site; £130k budget – 15 July 2025.

Other Background Documents:-

[Adopted Local Plan 2020 - 2040 - Winchester District Local Plan](#)

APPENDICES:

Appendix A – Plan of Site