

CABINET

28 SEPTEMBER 2010

REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CULTURE AND SPORT

Title: Future Operation of Wood Lane Sports Centre	For Decision
<p>Summary:</p> <p>The Cabinet has previously agreed in principle to the decommissioning and demolition of the Wood Lane Sports Centre when the new Becontree Heath Leisure Centre opens in 2011. However, members deferred a final decision on this matter until alternative options and planning issues had been fully considered.</p> <p>Now that these options and issues have been reviewed it is proposed to dispose of the Wood Lane Sports Centre in line with the Council's disposals procedure.</p> <p>This report also seeks approval for the acquisition and future maintenance of a number of small parcels of land adjacent to the new Becontree Heath Leisure Centre. This is to ensure that the public realm in that area is brought up to a suitable standard in keeping with the building of a flagship leisure facility of regional significance.</p> <p>Wards Affected: Heath</p>	
<p>Recommendation(s)</p> <p>The Cabinet is recommended to agree:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">(i) That the Council has no further use for the Wood Lane Sports Centre site; and(ii) That the building and associated facilities should be sold on the open market in line with the Council's disposals procedure once voluntary organisations have been offered the opportunity to freely acquire surplus equipment.(iii) That the provisional sum identified in the Becontree Heath Leisure Centre capital budget for the demolition of the Wood Lane Sports Centre be instead utilised to protect the building from damage once it has been vacated and prior to its sale.(iv) To the acquisition and future maintenance of two small parcels of land adjacent to the Becontree Heath Leisure Centre in order to improve the public realm to a suitable standard in this area.(v) To the future maintenance of a small parcel of land adjacent to the Becontree Heath Leisure Centre which will remain in private ownership but will be maintained by the Council to improve the public realm around the new leisure centre	
<p>Reason(s)</p> <p>The replacement of the Wood Lane Sports Centre by the new Becontree Heath Leisure Centre will greatly improve the quality, range and accessibility of the sport and fitness</p>	

<p>facilities available to residents. The new facility will make a major contribution to the achievement of the council priority for a healthy borough.</p>		
<p>Comments of the Chief Financial Officer</p> <p>The report has been noted and there are no specific comments.</p>		
<p>Comments of the Legal Partner</p> <p>The recommendation to dispose of the land on the open market accords with the Council's Disposal Policy.</p> <p>It is more attractive for the land to be disposed of with the benefit of the building on it due to the strict restrictions on development on green belt land.</p> <p>All current uses of the Centre whether under licence or lease will need to be extinguished prior to the sale to be able to give the new owners vacant possession.</p> <p>The recommendations in this report include the acquisition and future maintenance of land to improve the public realm around the new Becontree Leisure Centre which is subject to Cabinet prior approval.</p> <p>In paragraph 5.15 of this report it is proposed that the Council maintains a piece of land that will remain in private ownership but with public rights of way. If this land is not going to be adopted as a public highway then the Council should enter into a formal agreement with its private freeholder to grant public rights of way over the land to secure the Council's intentions. That agreement should state whether there will be regular payment for the grant of public rights of way over the land or the Council's undertaking to maintain the land suffices as consideration for the grant of the public rights of way. It should also state the duration of the maintenance arrangement.</p> <p>Generally, because of the importance of these arrangements to the new leisure centre as set out in paragraph 5 of this report, it is recommended that those arrangements be documented formally in agreement(s) with the other parties involved.</p>		
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1. Background

- 1.1 Becontree Heath Leisure Centre will open in 2011. It is intended to replace Dagenham Swimming Pool and Wood Lane Sports Centre, which are out of date, energy inefficient, require significant investment to key plant and equipment and no longer effectively meet the needs of service users.

- 1.2 Members previously agreed (7 May 2008, minute 154 refers) that the Dagenham Swimming Pool and Wood Lane Sports Centre will remain operational until Becontree Heath Leisure Centre opens to the public.
- 1.3 Accordingly, Dagenham Swimming Pool will be decommissioned and demolished after Becontree Heath Leisure Centre opens to the public. The site will be utilised to provide additional car parking capacity for the new leisure centre, which should be available in late 2011.
- 1.4 Regarding the future operation of Wood Lane Sports Centre, the Council Cabinet, at its meeting on 17 November 2009 (minute 94 refers), agreed:

“in principle to the decommissioning and demolition of the Wood Lane Sports Centre but that a final decision on the future of the centre will be the subject of a further report to the Cabinet once the opportunities and risks associated with the potential alternative use options and the planning implications have been fully evaluated. “

Operational issues

- 1.5 The Leisure and Arts division has no further operational use for the Wood Lane Sports Centre once Becontree Heath Leisure Centre opens.
- 1.6 Although it is considered that the new leisure centre provides the best possible facility mix within the space and financial resources available, there are two types of existing provision which will not be replicated at Becontree Heath Leisure Centre: shooting and outdoor artificial turf pitches – both of which are provided at Wood Lane Sports Centre.
- 1.7 There are currently four gun clubs that use the centre and it is considered that it will not be possible to identify suitable alternative accommodation for them. However, the Council's club development officer is currently investigating future potential options.
- 1.8 There is less of a problem for the football teams using the artificial turf pitches. Support is being provided to identify alternative options at facilities across the Borough.
- 1.9 As the facility will become surplus to the requirements of Leisure and Arts, the opportunity for the facility to be re-allocated to another council service was investigated by Property Services during May 2010 as required by the Council's disposal procedure.
- 1.10 All Heads of Service were invited to submit expressions of interest in the site but none were received.

Planning issues

- 1.11 Advice from the Regeneration and Economic Development service is that because the Wood Lane Sports Centre is located on green belt land then this will limit the future development on the site to uses appropriate within the green belt.

- 1.12 The re-use of the existing buildings will not be a problem and it may be the case that a local sporting organisation or religious group may be interested in taking over the operation of the facility. However, if the building is not fit for re-use or can't be made good, it is considered that the demolition of the building, even if a full record was made of the structure, would run the risk of prejudicing any re-development proposals.
- 1.13 If the buildings are demolished then appropriate uses in the green belt is limited to agriculture and forestry and essential facilities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation and other uses of land which preserve the openness of the green belt and which do not conflict with the purposes of including land in it.
- 1.14 Possible examples of such facilities might include the provision of small changing rooms or unobtrusive spectator accommodation for outdoor sport, or small stables for outdoor sport and recreation.
- 1.15 Other uses/development can only be justified if 'very special circumstances' (the legal test) exist. These very special circumstances could be the removal of an existing building and its replacement with a new building which would not be more intrusive or impact greater on the openness of the green belt.
- 1.16 Once the building has been demolished it could be argued that these very special circumstances are lost. In such circumstances, an application may need to be referred to both the GLA and the Secretary of State so the final decision on this matter may not rest with the Council.

2. Proposal

- 2.1 It is proposed that members accept that the Council has no further use of the Wood Lane Sports Centre and that it should be disposed of on the open market in line with the Council's disposals procedure.

3. Financial Issues

- 3.1 It was agreed that an element of the total £23.115 million prudential borrowing cost associated with the construction of the Becontree Heath Leisure Centre will be met from Adult and Community Services budgets amounting to £4.4 million of the borrowing required (equating to circa £350,000 revenue expenditure per annum). This £350,000 per annum requirement will be achieved by reducing overall budgets due to the more effective and efficient operation of the new centre.
- 3.2 The revenue savings which are anticipated from the Becontree Heath Leisure Centre are predicated on the assumption that no further expenditure will be incurred for the operation of the Wood Lane Sports Centre after May 2011.
- 3.3 Becontree Heath Leisure Centre will be funded by the budget for Dagenham Swimming Pool and Wood Lane Sports Centre. As a result it will not be possible to keep both Wood Lane Sports Centre and Becontree Heath Leisure Centre operational at the same time, unless additional budget is made available. The net controllable cost for Wood Lane Sports Centre, excluding support services and capital recharges will be about £110,000 per annum (original net budget for 2010/11 is £107,000). However, it is likely that further additional subsidy will be required as

the continued operation of the Wood Lane Sports Centre would have an adverse impact on income generation at the new leisure centre.

- 3.4 Furthermore it should be noted that a visual condition survey for the centre identifies improvement works required which might cost as much as £250,000 to implement.
- 3.5 All but the most essential of these works have been deferred because it has been assumed for the past two years that the centre will be closed in the short term. If this is not to be the case then it will be necessary to invest in the building to ensure that it remains safe to use and fit for purpose.

4. Legal Issues

- 4.1 The legal issues associated with this report are contained in the comments of the Legal Partner above.

5. Other Implications

Risk Management

- 5.1 It is considered that the key risk associated with this matter relates to the planning restrictions associated with the location of the leisure centre on green belt land. The preferred option to mothball the leisure centre complex of buildings until it can be sold effectively manages this risk.

Customer Impact

- 5.2 It is expected that there will be a marked increase in the number and range of people who will be able to access sport and physical activity programmes at the new centre compared to the current position with Wood Lane Sports Centre. The provision of a modern, fit for purpose facility should also realise improvements in customer satisfaction and positively contribute to the health and wellbeing of residents.
- 5.3 In the design and construction phase for the new leisure centre, the focus has been on ensuring that it is physically accessible to people with disabilities. Consultation with the local disability equality forum and other disability groups has been undertaken to inform the design and layout of the centre.
- 5.4 Following other consultation, steps have also been taken to ensure that the future programme will take into account the needs of faith and minority ethnic groups as well as mothers who may need to breast feed and transgender people. Consultation has also been undertaken with local swimming clubs, employees and local residents, which has informed the facility mix to be provided.
- 5.5 The next stage will be to assess the impact of the proposed activity programme and marketing plan for the centre in terms of race, equality, gender, disability, sexuality, faith, age and community cohesion.

Safeguarding Children

- 5.6 Wood Lane Sports Centre is an old and inefficient building with limited access and inadequate facilities. The new centre will provide a much improved service to children in particular through the health and fitness offer and learn to swim programme. Additionally the changing facilities to be provided will better meet the needs of families.
- 5.7 Current safeguarding standards adopted across the council's leisure centres will be implemented at the new centre.

Health Issues

- 5.8 The replacement of the Wood Lane Sports Centre by the new Becontree Heath Leisure Centre will greatly improve the quality, range and accessibility of the sport and fitness facilities available to residents. It is considered that the provision of the new centre will be a key factor in the plans of the Council and NHS Barking and Dagenham to address the high physical inactivity and obesity levels in the borough.

Crime and Disorder Issues

- 5.9 Appropriate advice has been sought and will be implemented to minimise the likelihood and impact of vandalism, other types of crime and anti social behaviour at the Wood Lane Sports Centre site once it has been vacated and prior to its disposal.

Property / Asset Issues

- 5.10 Wood Lane Sports Centre is no longer fit for purpose as well as being expensive to maintain and operate. If the Council were to continue to operate the leisure centre it is estimated that investment of about £250,000 would be required in the immediate short term to address asset management issues.
- 5.11 The Leisure and Arts division has no plans or budget to operate the centre when Becontree Heath Leisure Centre opens. Similarly there has been no interest expressed from any other council service in the facility.
- 5.12 Accordingly and in line with Council procedures, it is now proposed to dispose of the centre on the open market. Prior to this, in order to support local voluntary sector sporting groups, it is proposed to offer sporting organisations the opportunity to acquire, at no cost, serviceable sports equipment no longer required by the Council.
- 5.13 As part of development proposals for the new Becontree Leisure Centre, the Council has been keen to include the Three Travellers Public House in the wider scheme of improvements to the local area and has held discussions with the public house landlady and Scottish & Newcastle Enterprises, the freehold owners of the site.
- 5.14 The location of the new leisure centre is close to the boundary of the Three Travellers, with the gap between the current site boundary and the leisure centre narrowing down to a width of less than 2 metres. The construction of the new

leisure centre includes public realm works around the new building and Phase 2 car parking, which will be provided to the rear of the site, once the current Dagenham Swimming Pool is demolished.

- 5.15 In order improve the public realm adjacent to the new leisure centre and public access, it will be necessary for the Council to acquire two small parcels of land, shaded red as indicated on the attached drawing in **Appendix A**. These areas have been valued at approximately £2,500 by the council's property services team. This area is to be maintained in future by the Council. In addition to this there is a small area, shaded grey, over which the public will have access but the freehold will remain in the ownership of the Three Travellers Public House. This area is to be maintained in the future by the Council.
- 5.16 The Council will provide a new 2 metre high steel vertical bar fence (indicated by the green and red dotted lines in **Appendix A**) on the boundary of the Three Travellers public house. The ongoing maintenance of this fence will remain with the Three Travellers public house. All the paving and fencing works including removal of the existing fencing, as shown on the plan, will be undertaken by the Council.
- 5.17 In consideration of this land acquisition, rights of access/ passage and associated works, Scottish & Newcastle UK Ltd, who own the Three Travellers public house, have agreed that the Council will refurbish the existing external storage areas, indicated on the south-east boundary on the Three Travellers public house. This work will consist of the external re-cladding of the existing building in timber boarding and the replacement of the existing corrugated roof sheeting. Quotations are currently being obtained, but it is estimated that the cost of these works will be in the region of £10-15,000. Once the external storage areas are refurbished the ongoing maintenance of this facility will remain the responsibility of the Three Travellers public house. These works will also contribute to improving the appearance of the areas immediately surrounding the new leisure centre.

Staffing issues

- 5.18 Due to the long lead in time before Becontree Heath Leisure Centre opens to the public, the implications for existing employees based at the Wood Lane Sports Centre and Dagenham Swimming Pool have yet to be finalised.

6. Options appraisal

- 6.1 The financial business case for the new Becontree Heath Leisure Centre assumes that the Wood Lane Sports Centre closes when the new centre opens. The Leisure and Arts division has no further interest in the facility after that time.
- 6.2 The option of another council service taking over the operation of the facility has been fully investigated. There has been no interest expressed.
- 6.3 The planning issues outlined earlier in this report indicate that it would not be in the best interests of the Council to decommission and demolish the Wood Lane Sports Centre when it falls vacant.

- 6.4 As a result, the preferred option is for members to accept that the Council has no further use for the Wood Lane Sports Centre and that it should be disposed of on the open market.

7. Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report:

Cabinet report 17 November 2009 (minute 94)
Cabinet report 7 May 2008 (minute number 154)
Cabinet report 3 July 2007 (minute number 28)
Regeneration Group report 14 September 2007
Development brief of leisure centre October 2007

8. List of appendices:

Appendix A – Drawing of site