

Part A

**Report to:** Cabinet

**Date of meeting:** Monday, 11<sup>th</sup> November 2019

**Report author:** Head of Parks, Open Spaces & Projects

**Title:** Woodside Sports Village - Masterplan update

## 1.0 Summary

- 1.1 In 2016, a report was considered by Portfolio Holders with regards to the proposed development at Woodside Playing Fields. The project was originally defined as part of the Sports Facilities Strategy which highlighted the potential to improve this site with a number of enhanced Sports Facilities. A number of initial opportunities were identified for the redevelopment of this area.
- 1.2 A significant amount of work has been completed including the development of a masterplan supported by a detailed budget cost estimate. Following consultation additional options were evaluated and a phased approach agreed. The evaluation of options are being progressed and approval is now required to advance the project and proceed to appointment of the design team for Phase 1.

## 2.0 Risks

- 2.1 A full project risk register has been undertaken and will be developed further as the project moves into implementation.

## 3.0 Recommendations

- 3.1 Cabinet to note the contents of this report and specifically the phased approach to executing the programme
- 3.2 To approve the masterplan
- 3.3 To approve the next stages and moving to the appointment of a design team for Phase 1.

### **Further information:**

Paul Rabbitts X8250

paul.rabbitts@watford.gov.uk

**Report approved by: Alan Gough, Group Head of Service, Environmental & Community Services**

**4.0 Detailed proposal**

4.1 Over the last 2-3 years, work has progressed on the proposals to develop Woodside Playing Fields as part of the adopted Sports Facilities Strategy. The strategy highlighted a number of options and included:-

4.1.1 Community Sports Pavilion – demolition of existing cricket pavilion and new build pavilion with Watford Town Cricket Club as the principal occupier, but shared with others (note the shared option is no longer being pursued), changing facilities for football and other sports, social facilities, meeting space, office accommodation.

4.1.2 Redevelopment of the depot area – which is locally listed with relocation of the parks depot offsite. To incorporate essential improvements to the Watford Boxing Club premises, and accommodation of other potential users in the courtyard to create facilities that are community focussed - including catering facilities

4.1.3 Floodlit 3G football pitch – full size (no longer being pursued as not considered viable)

4.1.4 Options that have been evaluated, and discarded as not being viable have included; provision of a full size - Floodlit 3G football pitch, cycling velodrome, indoor tennis centre and 'youth zones'.

4.1.5 Car parking enhancements

Alternative use for the Indoor Bowls facility has been an ongoing consideration in light of their lease expiration (since extended with a 2 year break clause), rent arrears issues and falling member numbers. A recent study by SLC Consulting indicated that there is sufficient indoor and outdoor Bowls provision within Watford for this aspect of the sport to be a lesser priority when considered against future sports/leisure/physical activity opportunities for all age groups that the site or the building could support.

A number of options have been considered for future use of the indoor bowls including an indoor activity centre as a possible extension to the Woodside Leisure Centre facilities. The indoor bowls club were granted a new tenancy with 15 year term from July 2019 that that the Council can terminate after 2 years under a break for redevelopment purposes. However when exercising this break compensation will be payable to the Club.

In 2018, SLC Consulting with Southern Green Landscape Architects were appointed to develop the Masterplan in greater detail with costings firmed up, develop proposals in greater detail and to undertake consultation with stakeholders on the site.

A RIBA Stage 2 masterplan (appendix A and B) has been drawn up for Woodside Playing Fields to include:

- The development of a new Community Sports Hub to provide modern facilities for cricket, football and boxing and a new multi-purpose community hall;
- Full refurbishment of the existing depot buildings as part of the new Community Sports Hub together with the provision of a new park café, Ranger's office and outdoor courtyard for café seating and events;
- Four separate options for a complementary alternative use of the indoor bowls centre designed to generate much-increased participation in physical activity, particularly by children and young people, based upon a needs analysis and knowledge of the local market;
- Additional outdoor activities including adventure golf, high ropes course and enhanced toddler and junior play areas to help create a destination site and encourage longer visit duration;
- Additional parking based on a Traffic, Parking and Assessment Study allowing for increased throughput to the site as a result of the facility developments; and
- Improved pedestrian access and signposting throughout the site to create a more coherent visitor journey.

The recommendations arising from the masterplan and feasibility study were as follows:

- The Council should adopt the proposed masterplan to include all development proposals including Option 4 repurposing the indoor bowls club building as a multi-use activity centre;
- The Council should use the adopted masterplan as the basis of further consultation on the proposed developments with key identified stakeholders including Watford Town Cricket Club, Watford Boxing Club, regular football users, SLM and Veolia;
- The Council should consult further with SLM to agree the final facility mix and business plan for the multi-use activity centre;
- The Council should develop a funding strategy to explore options for delivery of the proposed masterplan; and
- The Council should consult with selected stakeholders regarding future potential management models including the option of forming a new Community Sports Association.

The Council's Cabinet met in June 2018 to review the draft masterplan and approved the further development of the outline proposals including detailed and wider consultation with stakeholders and the wider public. SLC were subsequently appointed to manage the consultation on behalf of the Council.

In October 2018, SLC completed a consultation exercise (Appendix C) on the draft masterplan which summarised the following:-

- a) The consultation exercise was developed in partnership with the Council and delivered through a combination of face to face meetings, email correspondence and telephone discussions with identified occupiers and stakeholders and through drop-in sessions and an online questionnaire promoted to the wider public through the Council's website and social media channels.
- b) Resident clubs on the site including the cricket, boxing and athletics clubs are supportive of the overarching principle of the masterplan to develop a strategic sports hub. Other key occupiers of the site including the Council's leisure operator, SLM and grounds maintenance contractor, Veolia also welcome the proposals.
- c) The proposals are welcomed by Hertfordshire Football Association and the England and Wales Cricket Board but opposed by the England Indoor Bowls Association due to the proposed removal of the indoor bowls centre.
- d) Sport England supports the principle of developing a strategic sports hub in accordance with the Council's Sports Facilities Strategy but would like evidence to justify the need for the proposed alternative use of the indoor bowls centre and to better understand whether the anticipated benefits of such facilities would outweigh the impact associated with the loss of indoor bowls.
- e) Consultation with local gymnastics and performing arts clubs has revealed strong demand for additional indoor space and a lack of suitable alternative facilities. This feedback supports the proposed alternative use of the indoor bowls centre.
- f) The online questionnaire generated 448 responses, with a high level of engagement from residents within 15 minutes of the site (68% of responses).
- g) The results of the online questionnaire show a positive response from the general public to the draft masterplan proposals with 59% of respondents being either supportive or very supportive compared to 24% being unsupportive.
- h) There is of course opposition to the draft masterplan from members and supporters of Watford Indoor Bowls Club. This was manifested most clearly through feedback provided at the public drop-in session at Woodside Leisure Centre.

4.2 Throughout 2019, further work has been considered and the masterplan continues to evolve following the departure of Owls Bowls Club in March 2019.

A further opportunity was that British Cycling expressed an interest in working with WBC towards the development of a 1km closed road circuit at Woodside, aimed at the competitive and club sector as well for purely recreational use. British Cycling advised that this facility would qualify for their Places to Ride grant programme which can fund up to 50% of the capital investment subject to meeting criteria and specialist design requirement. Development of this proposal was progressed. However it would require a 700m x 6m width closed loop cycle track which would have had significant knock-on implications for other external facilities proposed, such as the adventure golf and high ropes activity requiring careful consideration for the siting of these facilities as well as a major impact on the character of the wider site with what in essence was a 6m wide road around the site. Given the capital cost would be circa £1.8m, with , limited revenue earning potential and environmental and amenity impact, this proposal is not a preferred option.

In February 2019, Council approved a capital budget for the following years:-

2019/20 - £1,000,000

2020/21 - £6,000,000

2021/22 - £2,150,000

To date, £70,000 has been expended on the project, related to fees, survey work and consultation. This forms part of the overall budget above.

## **5.0 Timescales, Phasing and Current Programme**

The 18th July Programme Management Board agreed the following phased approach to the development:

Phase 1 - cricket club + boxing club + changing rooms + community café + parking

Phase 2 – remaining external activities and development of the Indoor and outdoor Bowling Club space + parking

Subject to Cabinet approval, the next stages will involve the appointment of a multi-disciplinary design team to move Phase 1 of the project forward to detailed design and firm costs.

Phase 2 will be subject to further work to select leisure activities that are a good fit for the site, market testing for alternative leisure uses, and agreement on the final outcome of discussions with other potential partners. An updated timetable will be developed once this aspect is more certain.

## 6.0 Implications

### 6.1 Financial

6.1.1 The Shared Director of Finance comments that there is existing capital programme provision for Woodside and any changes to this existing approval will be brought forward through the normal budget monitoring process. Any additional costs will need to be considered as part of the normal budget process.

### 6.2 Legal Issues (Monitoring Officer)

6.2.1 The Group Head of Democracy and Governance comments that any procurement will need to comply with the Council's procurement rules. If this is subject to a cabinet decision it is premature to appoint a design team now.

6.2.2 The Head of Legal Services comments that any Landlord and Tenant issues obligations should be complied with when and if Tenants/Occupiers are asked or vacate the land. In addition any planning controls are complied with if locally listed buildings are impacted.

### 6.3 Equalities, Human Rights and Data Protection

6.3.1 Having had regard to the council's obligations under s149, it is considered that the works will not affect any issues related to equalities or human rights. However, an EIA will be developed as part of the process in appointing the design team and developing the detailed design.

Having had regard to the council's obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018, it is considered that officers are not required to undertake a Data Processing Impact Assessment (DPIA) for this report.

### 6.4 Staffing

6.4.1 Not applicable

### 6.5 Accommodation

6.5.1 The project will impact on a number of properties at Woodside as highlighted in the appended summary from SLC Consulting.

### 6.6 Community Safety/Crime and Disorder

6.6.1 There are no implications.

## **6.7 Sustainability**

6.7.1 The appended report highlights the opportunities for restoring a low grade facility and ensuring long term sustainability of a council facility involving a number of stakeholders. All works to buildings will be carried out using the latest technology and innovation with regards to sustainability.

### **Appendices**

- Appendix A – SLC Masterplan Report
- Appendix B – Southern Green Masterplan
- Appendix C – SLC – Summary of Consultation

### **Background papers**

- See appendices