

Report of Head of Active Leeds

Report to Director of City Development

Date: 24 November 2020

Subject: Middleton Swimming Pool Deputation

Are specific electoral wards affected? If yes, name(s) of ward(s): Middleton Park	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Has consultation been carried out?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Will the decision be open for call-in?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, access to information procedure rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary

1. Main issues

- A deputation was to be submitted for the 25th March 2020 Full Council meeting. Given the meeting did not proceed as planned due to the exceptional events relating to COVID-19, the Director of City Development is therefore being asked to approve the response to the deputation.
- The deputation (attached at appendix 1) outlines that nearly 2000 people signed a petition for the re-provision of a swimming pool at Middleton Leisure centre. This response outlines the Council's current approvals from Executive Board in relation to its leisure centre stock, namely it's "Vision for Leisure Centres" and goes on to outline that the addition of a new pool at Middleton would not be in keeping with the agreed approach being delivered across the Councils stock of leisure centres.
- The Director of City Development is asked to consider the points made in the deputation as and when any future Vision for Leisure centres is reviewed.

2. Best Council Plan Implications (click [here](#) for the latest version of the Best Council Plan)

- The provision of Leisure centres and swimming pools directly supports a range of Council priorities, especially reducing health inequalities and supporting active lifestyles. The Council must strike a balance between strategic needs across the Leisure centre portfolio, the wider Council buildings stock and the budgets it has at

its disposal. This report sets out to explain the councils approved position on these points.

3. Resource Implications

- There are no resource implications directly arising from this report.

Recommendations

The Director of City Development is recommended to:

- Note and agree the contents of this report.
- Agree this report as the response to the Deputation for a new pool at Middleton Leisure Centre.

1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1 To respond to a deputation for the re-provision of a new swimming pool at the existing Middleton Leisure centre site.

2. Background information

- 2.1 Middleton Leisure centre is a sports complex in the Middleton Park ward that currently provides a sports hall, changing rooms supporting football pitches, an outdoor all weather 3G pitch, and an adult social care facility. A brand new gym is currently being constructed on site to complement the existing on facilities and to support the wellbeing of local residents in particular, where currently 60% of users are local.
- 2.2 During 2008/9 the Council produced “a Vision for Leisure centres” which created a comprehensive forward looking strategy that attempted to address the long term investment needs for the city’s leisure centres. This strategic review included extensive consultation and the use of strategic planning tools with support from Sport England. The vision agreed by Executive Board on September the 2008 was:

“To secure a city-wide network of quality, affordable, accessible and sustainable leisure centres for the benefit of all the people of Leeds.”
- 2.3 Middleton Leisure centre used to provide a swimming pool (originally built in 1973) but this was removed in 2012 (following a period of reduced operating hours) using the 2008/9 vision for leisure centres as the strategic basis and building in the impact of the new aquatics centre at John Charles centre for Sport, which had by then reached operating maturity since opening in 2007. Prior to the pool closing the Middleton Leisure Centre typically operated at an annual deficit of over £150k per annum (mainly as a consequence of the swimming pool running costs, taking in to account staffing costs increases and inflation this would be greater today). The original swimming pool was considerably smaller than other pools in the city being 20mx10m in size and not deemed particularly efficient for the delivery of a typical swimming programme. Local residents are now asking that the Council consider re-providing the swimming pool at Middleton Leisure centre.

3. Main issues

- 3.1 Full council was due to hear a deputation relating to the reinstatement of the swimming pool at Middleton Leisure centre. The deputation received over 1400 on line signatures and 500 on paper. The deputation speech is attached at Appendix 1.
- 3.2 The key arguments presented in the Deputation included that a new swimming pool was needed to;
 - Help support the local area and giving young people something to do
 - Help reduce obesity levels and save the NHS money
 - Reduce waiting list on swimming lessons
 - Make it easier for local people to access a swimming pool. Low car ownership and infrequent buses in the area means getting to other pools is difficult.

- 3.3 The Council undertook a full strategic review of its leisure centre stock in 2008. Furthermore there was considerable pressure from 2008 onwards to drive down costs and increase income in response to pressures on Council budgets. The decision to close Middleton pool followed on from the earlier decision to close South Leeds Sports centre. Both of these difficult decisions to close were taken with consideration to the introduction of the new Aquatics centre at John Charles centre for Sport and the volume of water space that it provided for the south Leeds area.
- 3.4 Sport England’s facility planning model (FPM 2008/9) estimated that with the introduction of the aquatics centre into the south Leeds area it would result in it being over provided with pool water space. In other words the aquatics centre could supply the south Leeds area on its own. In terms of the impact on local people Sport England’s FPM also concluded that the relatively small number of potential users who would no longer be within the 20 minute “walk to “catchment of a pool, has to be balanced against the substantial savings that could result from the closure of two pools.
- 3.5 In practice the Middleton pool continued to open on a reduced hours basis until it was finally removed in 2012 as part of the ongoing strategic review of stock and the increasing pressures on council budgets. To help address some of the obvious negative aspects of withdrawing the pool further investment was made on Middleton site by using section 106 funding and Sport England grant by adding a new all weather 3G pitch and grass pitches as well as new changing rooms. With the pool removed and these new facilities added it has resulted in a more financially viable facility. The addition of adult social care day care provision also cemented the role of the site in the local community.
- 3.6 The 2009 Vision for Leisure Centres was later updated in December 2016 where Executive Board agreed to allow the development of proposals across a range of sites based on the a number of drivers, e.g. the strategic need to replace and upgrade strategically important sites as well as the proposal to drive up income and reduce costs of provision. In terms of Middleton, the following was outlined in that report. The implementation was subject to the gaining the appropriate approvals e.g. capital injections and external funding approvals. The development of the new £1m gym is in keeping with these approvals.

Site	Original Vision	What has been done.	Revised Vision Proposal	Rational
Middleton LC	Close pool and asset transfer dryside.	Pool closed and refurbishment to the remaining building.	Maintain and Install new Gym	Pool already closed, and refurbishment to dryside activities and outdoor facilities completed (£1m investment with support from Sport England). Subsidy level dropped, further development of the gym would decrease subsidy further.

- 3.7 It is clear that swimming pools can provide many benefits associated with being physically active e.g. addressing obesity/mental wellbeing/keeping health costs to the NHS down. Indeed these are the very arguments used to help frame the Vision for Leisure centres city wide. Critically pools also provide an essential life skill in supporting people to be able to swim where 80% of all learn to swim is delivered in

the Council's swimming pools. Officers have explored if the existing site can deliver a new pool from a spatial standpoint, and it can. However, more technical evaluation would be needed in order to provide an assessment as to whether a pool could be delivered on site.

- 3.8 In response to the point made within the deputation about swimming lesson waiting lists the main reason why there are waiting lists is not to do with pool capacity. There are currently challenges being faced in providing the required level and number of swimming teachers and the service is currently addressing this matter.
- 3.9 In reality the Council has to be able to balance the strategic need and demand pressures it has against the costs of building and also operating a new facility and as things stand there is insufficient demand to justify supply. Therefore the basis for the original closure of the pool remains relevant ie. the South Leeds area has enough pool capacity to meet demand.
- 3.10 Notwithstanding the assessment of demand mentioned earlier, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the City Council's finances are very significant and in light of the need to make substantial savings it further weakens the justification for the provision of a new swimming pool at this moment in time.

4. Corporate considerations

4.1 Consultation and engagement

- 4.1.1 Consultation took place with the senior officers of the council, and the portfolio holder for Environment and Active Lifestyles.

4.2 Equality and diversity / cohesion and integration

- 4.2.1 The existing Vision for Leisure Centres (2016) was subject to a detailed equality impact assessment at the time. Clearly building a new swimming pool can improve accessibility but this must be weighed up against the council's ability to fund the development and ongoing running costs.

4.3 Council policies and the Best Council Plan

- 4.3.1 The health and wellbeing of people in Leeds is of primary consideration. The existing Middleton Leisure centre and ongoing investment continues to demonstrate the Council's support of addressing health inequalities and promoting active lifestyles in particular.

Climate Emergency

- 4.3.2 There are no implications directly arising from this report.

4.4 Resources, procurement and value for money

- 4.4.1 The provision of a new swimming pool at this moment in time would be unaffordable both in terms of Capital expenditure and additional revenue costs that would accrue.
- 4.4.2 Therefore there are no resource implications from this report.

4.5 Legal implications, access to information, and call-in

4.5.1 The Director of City Development is being asked to approve this report as the Full Council meeting that was due to hear the deputation did not proceed given the exceptional circumstances created by the COVID-19 outbreak.

4.6 Risk management

4.6.1 There are no particular risks identified.

5 Conclusions

5.1 Executive Board has approved the Vision for Leisure centres in both 2008/9 and 2016. In line with the recommendations the Director of City Development is overseeing the continued development of that Vision. Whilst the points made by the deputation are valid (i.e.the health and community benefits) the Council has to weigh this up against other investment needs across the portfolio of leisure centres and the current and future budget challenges the Council faces. There are therefore no proposals to add a new swimming pool to the existing Middleton site at this stage.

5.2 The Director of City Development is asked to reflect on the comments made in the deputation when the Vision for Leisure Centres is next reviewed.

6 Recommendations

The Director of City Development is recommended to:

- Note and agree the contents of this report.
- Agree this report as the response to the Deputation for a new pool at Middleton Leisure Centre.

7 Background documents¹

7.1 None.

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.