

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-002-2018/19

Date of meeting: 14 June 2018



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Leisure and Community Services

Subject: Receipt of Petition - Future of Epping Sports Centre

Responsible Officer: Derek Macnab (01992 564051).

Democratic Services: Gary Woodhall (01992 564470).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (1) That the Petition received in support of keeping a Sports Centre within Epping Town be noted;**
- (2) That the Petitioners be advised:**
 - (a) the Council had yet to take any formal decision on the future of Epping Sports Centre; and**
 - (b) at this point, the Council is exploring options to meet the leisure needs of existing and future residents of the local area; and**
- (3) That the Council's preferred approach would be to ensure that the existing Sports Centre in Epping remained open until any new alternative facilities were provided.**

Executive Summary:

This report seeks consideration by Members of the Cabinet of a petition containing 1790 signatories, seeking the retention of a Sports Centre in Epping, as detailed below:

"We petition the Council to keep a sports centre within Epping Town. Not necessarily in the existing location but within the boundary of Epping Town. The reason is to ensure that people who are unable to drive have access to a sports centre (as is currently the case) and to avoid the additional traffic fumes and congestion in Epping Town that an out of town sports centre would generate."

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

In accordance with the Council's Constitution, any Petition containing at least 1200 signatories requires the relevant Portfolio Holder to submit a report for consideration to the next available Cabinet Committee.

Other Options for Action:

No other options are available for the reporting of Petitions.

Report:

1. Epping Forest District Council has a long established track record of providing a wide range of opportunities for residents to participate in Sports, Leisure and Cultural Activities. It should be recognised that local authorities have no statutory obligation to provide such services, which are wholly discretionary in nature. However, the District Council has recognised the important part participation plays in quality of life and have sought to positively promote active and healthy lifestyles, within the Corporate Plan.

2. The main area of provision that the Council funds (in addition to museum, arts and community development services), is the development and management of the Council's four Sports and Leisure Centres. In order to ensure that the facilities are provided in the most efficient way and that external investment is delivered, the authority has appointed through competitive procurement, a Leisure Management Partner. The new contract with Places for People Leisure, which commenced in January 2017, will result in significant improvements to the Council's Leisure Facilities, at a cost of some £14.5m in total. This includes a new £11m Leisure Centre in Waltham Abbey to replace Waltham Abbey Swimming Pool, a £2m Health and Fitness Suite extension at Loughton Leisure Centre, £0.4m invested in refurbishing Ongar Leisure Centre and £1.1m at Epping Sports Centre. The recently completed improvements to Epping Sports Centre include the conversion of the squash courts to provide a new movement studio, a new Crèche and spin studio, enlargement of the fitness suite and a full refurbishment of the changing rooms. This clearly demonstrates a strong commitment to the future of Leisure Centre provision generally, and refutes any suggestions that the Council is running Epping Sports Centre down.

3. However, by virtue of the age and condition of both Ongar and Epping Sports Centres, the Council, as part of the procurement process for the Leisure Management Contract, asked bidders to develop an indicative cost estimate for the construction and management of a new Leisure Centre, to potentially replace both facilities. It has been made clear that the Council has not taken a formal decision to close and relocate either Centre however, as the contract is for 20 years, it was considered prudent to explore the possibility of providing a new Centre as the existing Centres have already reached their design life. As such, they present increasing risks with respect to the costs of maintenance as well as not fully meeting modern expectations. In addition, Epping Sports Centre, in particular, has poor access for people with disabilities and constrained parking provision.

4. Another significant consideration with respect to the future provision of leisure facilities has been the emerging Local Plan. As a district with 93% green belt, the Council has adopted a general hierarchy which seeks to utilise previously developed sites within settlements in preference to the release of green belt. On this basis, both Epping and Ongar were included in the Regulation 18 Consultation, although Ongar was subsequently removed by the time the Regulation 19 Submission Version was published. Therefore, despite the fact that the future of the Council's older Centres would have needed to be reviewed, irrespective of the requirement to prepare a Local Plan, potential areas for growth will need to be considered and any new provision located to serve the future leisure needs of the maximum number of residents, both existing and future.

5. Currently, and as advised at the last Leisure Management Partnership Board, officers in liaison with Places for People Leisure have started to explore potential alternative sites. It should be noted that within the submission version of the Local Plan, the Masterplan for North Weald Airfield contains a specific reference to the feasibility of incorporating a new Leisure Centre in the Masterplan Area, to meet the potential growth requirements of the community of North Weald, Epping and Ongar. At this point, until the Local Plan has

proceeded through Examination in Public, there is still uncertainty around where growth in the area will finally be agreed. Therefore, a number of options will be developed for consideration by Members towards the end of 2018, once there is more certainty around the final Local Plan.

6. In the meantime, steps are being taken to assure Sports Centre users that the District Council, as evidenced by the approach taken at Waltham Abbey, would not close Epping Sports Centre before any new replacement leisure facilities were available.

Resource Implications:

An indicative business case was submitted by the bidders for the Leisure Management Contract which demonstrated that there would be revenue efficiencies by the provision of one large sub-regional facility to replace the Council's two ageing facilities at Epping and Ongar. A detailed Capital and Revenue projection will be developed for any future preferred option.

Legal and Governance Implications:

The existing Leisure Management Contract has provision contained within the arrangements to either vary the contract with Places for People Leisure, for them to manage any new facility or alternatively, to re-tender the management to an alternative provider.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

Any new facility would be built to high BREEM Standards ensuring emerging efficiency.

Consultation Undertaken:

Places for People Leisure around potential options.

Background Papers:

Petition, Leisure Management Contract. Minutes of Partnership Board.

Risk Management:

The Council after year 5 of the existing contract with Places for People Leisure will carry the risk of major maintenance defects at Ongar and Epping Sports Centres. A new facility would alleviate this risk.