Consultation on future use of old sports centre site

A six-week consultation is being held by Chesterfield Borough Council to get the public’s views on the future use of the old Queen’s Park Sport Centre site.

Councillors recently granted planning permission to demolish the old building, in Boythorpe Road, which closed when the new £11.25 million Queen’s Park Sports Centre opened in January.

A range of different possible future uses for the site have been considered and tested against four criteria. From these, the council’s preferred option is to have 3G all-weather multi-sport pitches on the site with a surface that can be used for football, hockey, rugby and athletics training and recreational use.

Chesterfield Borough Council is asking residents and businesses for their views on the preferred option – but also seeking alternative suggestions that meet the criteria the council is using to decide what the future use of the site should be.

Councillor Amanda Serjeant, cabinet member for town centre and visitor economy, said: “The former sports centre sits next to the grade two star listed Queen’s Park so it is important that what goes there is in keeping with that heritage site and the strict planning rules that come with it.

“In an era of council budget cuts whatever goes on the site also needs to generate an income rather than cost tax payers more money.”

The borough currently has fewer 3G all-weather sports pitches than is recommended for a population of its size and the use would be in keeping with the sport and leisure heritage of the site.

Councillor Serjeant added: “While this is our preferred option at this stage no decisions have been taken. So as well as getting views on that option we also want to hear from anyone who has other great ideas and can show us how they would meet the criteria we are working to.”

The consultation runs from today (Monday 12 September) to Friday 21 October and can be found online, along with further information and a map of the site, at www.chesterfield.gov.uk/gpsecsurvey

Paper copies are also available from the new Queen’s Park Sports Centre in Boythorpe Road; the Healthy Living Centre in Barlow Road, Staveley; and our customer service centre in New Square.

Drop-in consultation sessions will also be held on:

- Monday 26 September in Morrisons, Chatsworth Road from 10am to 7pm
- Thursday 6 October at Chesterfield Market Place from 10am to 3pm

There will also be a session held at Chesterfield College freshers’ fair to get the views of students.

All options have been tested against four principles that the site use should:

- Generate income and not cost council taxpayers any extra money
- Support Council Plan objectives to improve the quality of life for local people, support a thriving borough, and deliver value for money
- Complement Queen’s Park, with its grade two star heritage listing, and other facilities in the town centre and borough
- Be well-used throughout the year and provide added value for the community

The council has considered various options against these criteria and has provisionally ruled them out for the following reasons:

- Indoor leisure provision eg ice rink/roller skating/soft play - operators of these facilities usually want ‘shed’ buildings and they would not be appropriate from a planning perspective. The
council also doesn’t believe these uses would be financially viable without the council subsidising running costs.

- Cultural use eg for exhibitions, artist studios, events - this use could complement the park but usually requires significant subsidies to operate.
- Outdoor leisure provision eg high ropes, climbing, water features - while this type of use would add to the facilities offered at Queen’s Park, it is not felt financially viable without the council subsidising running costs.
- To add an extension to the existing park - this would add to the cost of maintaining and improving the park and put pressure on already tight budgets.
- Shopping – given planning policies this is not felt a suitable location.
- Housing – while there is a need to increase town centre housing the council does not feel this is an appropriate use for the site.
- Car parking – as there are car parks either side of the site, and spare capacity in other car parks, there is not felt to be demand for more in this location.
- Restaurant/pub use – the council does not feel this use would complement the park and there are other locations that would be more appropriate.
- Selling the land – the council would have would have far less control on ensuring the use is appropriate to the park’s heritage setting.

Although these options have been provisional ruled out the council is happy to hear alternative views from individuals, businesses or sports groups who can show how they would be viable.

A decision on a future use is expected to be made by early 2017, once the consultation responses have been analysed and considered.
Have your say – a new use for the site of the old Queen’s Park Sports Centre

As promised, Chesterfield Borough Council is consulting on potential future uses for the site of the old Queen’s Park Sports Centre on Boythorpe Road. The old sports centre has been empty since the new £11.25m centre opened in January and planning permission has now been granted for demolition of the former centre building. Once the site is cleared, the council wants to develop it and this is your chance to have a say as to what you think the future use should be.

Background

The old Queen’s Park Sports Centre was built as a swimming baths in the 1960s and extended into a fuller sports centre in the 1980s. It is sited within the historic Queen’s Park, which is Grade II* listed by English Heritage due to its national significance as a park with a layout and buildings largely unchanged since it was established in the late 1880s. The site is within a wider conservation area, which together with the listed nature of the park means that a number of special planning considerations will apply to any proposals for the future use of the site.

Permission has now been given to demolish the old sports centre as it is no longer viable and for the last few years has been operating beyond its useable lifespan. The council now wishes to develop a future use for the site. Our intention is to work broadly within the current ‘footprint’ of the old sports centre site, keeping in place the majority of the two car parks to the north and south of the site. We have already received advice from Historic England regarding options for the future use and have also taken account of issues such as utilities and flooding risk.

As the council develops these plans, it is important that it does so within the context of the priorities set by the council:

- To make Chesterfield a thriving borough
- To improve the quality of life for local people
- To provide value for money services

Like other councils around the country, the amount of funding received from central government is significantly reducing each year and this places greater pressure on managing our budget. It has therefore been important to consider options for a future use within this context.

What do we want and what has been ruled out?

In thinking about how to use the site, the council has been considering a number of principles:

- Will the future use generate income, so that we can continue to provide and where possible improve council services to our residents during a period of further cuts? A future use that would be a cost to the council would mean making savings elsewhere in our budget.
- Will the future use support the priorities we have set out in our Council Plan? How would the new development improve the quality of life for local people, support a thriving borough and deliver value for money?
- Will the future use ‘fit’ within the wider site, in particular Queen’s Park but also link to our town centre? We have carefully considered local and national planning policies and how new development fits with those.
- Will the site be well used by our communities, businesses and visitors? We do not want to develop a new facility that will end up half empty due to a lack of local demand or that attracts only seasonal use. We also need to consider whether a new use would end up competing with other facilities in the borough or those planned for the future.
As part of this consultation, we are keen to hear your views on whether these are the right principles and whether there are others we should use.

Please use the on-line survey to have your say. You could also attend one of our events or request a paper copy of the survey. The details are at the end of this document.

Having thought about the questions above, we have provisionally ruled out a number of potential future uses in arriving at the preferred option described below. Among the uses that we do not feel appropriate are:

- **Indoor leisure provision** (eg Ice rink, roller skating, soft play) – operators of these facilities typically look for ‘shed’ buildings that would not fit with the requirements of the site in a conversation area. We have also examined evidence of demand and viability for this type of use and do not believe it would be sustainable without becoming a cost to the council.
- **Shopping** – our planning policies encourage retail into the town centre first and given the need to ensure a vibrant town centre, we do not want to establish another retail area that might take people further from there.
- **Housing** – there is a need to increase housing, particularly close to the town centre, but given the nature of the site we do not feel this is an appropriate use.
- **Car parking** – there is an overall surplus of parking across the borough and there are already car parks either side of the site, so we do not feel there is a need for more in this area.
- **Restaurant/pub use** – whilst it might be an attractive location, we do not feel that this use would complement the park and there are other locations, including the town centre, where we feel this sort of development would be better located in line with planning policy.
- **Cultural use** (eg for exhibitions, artist studios, events etc.) – whilst this use could complement the park well, such ventures almost always require significant subsidy. It would also be competing with existing attractions and facilities elsewhere in the town.
- **Outdoor leisure provision** (eg high ropes, climbing, water features) – whilst this type of use would add to the overall offer at Queen’s Park, we do not have confidence that a facility of this type would be financially viable as a year round operation without ongoing subsidy from the council.
- **Park extension** – the site could be used to extend the current park which would potentially enhance its amenity value. However, as noted below, running and maintaining the park is an overall cost to the council and extending the area would add to those costs and put pressure on already tight budgets.
- **Disposal** – we could put the land on the market, but the council would then have far less control on what happens to the site and could lose out on opportunities for future income.

**Future use: preferred option**

Given that a number of possible uses have at this stage provisionally been discounted, the council is proposing for consultation a preferred option of two all-weather third generation (‘3G’) sports pitches on the site, with the potential for a small changing and refreshment pavilion. More details on this option are set out below, but it is important to emphasise that no decision has been made about the use of the new site. That is why we are consulting – to get your views before making a decision. Whilst we are stating a preferred use, this is not ‘set in stone’ and all the views received as part of this consultation will be taken into account before coming to a decision.

Here is what these pitches could look like (images courtesy of Sport England):
Putting all-weather sports pitches on the site will meet all of the principles set out above.

- Having had informal discussions with operators, we are confident that there is a **sustainable income stream** from hiring sports pitches, both to the public for casual use and to sports clubs and organisations for regular training and fixtures. Pitches in other areas have paid back the initial investment in a short space of time and now provide a good return on that investment year on year. Our initial work shows that this would also be the case in Chesterfield, bringing a significant income stream that can then be used to support delivery of council services, including maintaining our parks and open spaces. If this option is chosen, then we will seek to bring in external funding to support the development costs.

- We believe that this use of the site **supports all of the priorities** that the council has set out. In particular, we know that we have a short-fall in this type of sports pitch provision within the area and are not meeting the current need and demand from our residents. We also know that we face significant challenges regarding the health of our communities and increasing opportunities for participation in sport will be help tackle those challenges.

- Providing a sports use on the site will fit well with and complement both the park and the nearby new sports centre. There is already a pitch within the park, very close to the site in question. Initial discussions suggest that the use would be one that will be **acceptable in planning terms** and we will work closely with partners like Historic England to make sure that their views are taken on board with how the site is developed in order to preserve the heritage value of Queen’s Park.

- Finally, there is **interest from potential operators and evidence of demand**, including from clubs active in Chesterfield which are keen to have more all-weather facilities available. We will be looking to work closely with these organisations to maximise the benefit of this proposal and support clubs to increase participation and, in turn, improve the health and well-being of our residents.
An outline of what the site might look like is included below.

This is only illustrative at this stage and further work will need to be done on the detail of how the pitches would fit into the site. The map shows a potential small changing and refreshment pavilion. Again, we are keen to hear views on this, including from potential users. If this is taken forward then it may make sense to use a small amount of current car parking space in order to accommodate it, but there is sufficient parking capacity at the site to do this.

If this option is chosen, more work will also be done with operators of pitches elsewhere to decide on the exact type of surface and layout of the pitches. There would be different options for configuring pitches within the site and we are keen to use the consultation process to explore what will work best. We are keen to have pitches that would offer facilities for a range of different sporting uses. At present, our evidence suggests that the latest technology all-weather pitches can accommodate training and recreational use for football, hockey, rugby, netball and athletics. The current proposals indicate two pitches of different sizes, to maximise the range of uses and give flexibility to clubs and individuals who wish to use them.

In looking at how sports pitches might fit within the footprint of the old sports centre, we will also need to do further work as to how they will fit within the wider park and what might need to be done to mitigate any potential impacts of the development. Queen’s Park is a wonderful asset for our residents and visitors, although it currently costs the council around £260,000 every year to run and maintain it. Developing the site of the old sports centre in a way that provides the council with additional income will give us choices about how to protect and develop Queen’s Park as well as our other parks and open spaces, in spite of the cuts that we are facing.

As part of this consultation, we are keen to hear your views on this preferred option and what suggestions you might have to improve it.

Please use the on-line survey to have your say. You could also attend one of our events or request a paper copy of the survey. The details are at the end of this document.
**Alternative options**

As well as views on the preferred option set out above, the council is keen to consider other options. If you do want to put forward another idea, it will be important to describe how you think it will bring some of the benefits that we have described above as being important to us. How would it bring in income (and avoid becoming a cost); how would it help deliver our priorities; is it likely to fit with our planning policies and those for a park with grade II* heritage listing; is there good evidence of demand for the use in question?

In other words, we want to hear about other uses that you think fit with the principles set out above. This can include some of the potential uses we have provisionally ruled out at this stage if you feel there is evidence we could consider that would show it meets the principles we are working to.

As part of this consultation, we are keen to hear your views on whether there are alternative options for the site and how those fit with the principles we have set out.

Please use the on-line survey to have your say. You could also attend one of our events or request a paper copy of the survey, details are below.

**How to have your say**

An on-line questionnaire is available that will allow you to have your say on all of the points set out above. The closing date for the questionnaire is Friday 21 October 2016. The survey can be found at www.chesterfield.gov.uk/gpsscsurvey

If you do not have on-line access, then you can pick up a paper copy of the questionnaire from reception points at the new Queen’s Park Sports Centre in Boythorpe Road, the Healthy Living Centre in Barlow Road, Staveley, and the Customer Service Centre in New Square.

We will also be hosting drop-in events where you can give your views and talk to officers about the proposals. These are as follows:

- Monday 26 September in Morrisons, Chatsworth Road from 10am to 7pm
- Thursday 6 October at Chesterfield Market Place from 10am to 3pm

There will also be a session held at Chesterfield College freshers’ fair to get the views of students. If groups (e.g. sports clubs) wish to invite officers along to their meetings during this period to talk about the proposals, then we will do what we can to make sure there is someone available. Please email consultation@chesterfield.gov.uk

**What happens next?**

After the consultation ends on Friday 21 October, the council will consider the responses and provide a report on these to its Cabinet, together with a business case for a recommended future use. We are hoping that a decision will be made early in 2017, following which a planning application will be submitted. Depending on the outcome of the planning process and the final option chosen, work on the site could begin in spring or early summer 2017.