

Rother District Council

Report to: Cabinet

Date: 10 January 2022

Title: Rother Built Leisure Facilities Strategy

Report of: Deborah Kenneally, Head of Neighbourhood Services

Cabinet Member: Councillor Timpe

Ward(s): All

Purpose of Report: To seek approval and funding to procure a Leisure Facility Strategist to provide a Built Leisure Facility Strategy, informed by independent market research.

Decision Type: Key

Officer

Recommendation(s): It be **RESOLVED:** That:

- 1) £50,000 be allocated from £140,000 included in the existing Capital Programme for minor refurbishments at Bexhill Leisure Centre to:
 - I. fund the drafting of a Built Leisure Facility Strategy for Rother District Council; and
 - II. fund market research on residents' use and requirements from built leisure facilities across the district to inform the strategy; and
- 2) delegated authority be granted to the Director – Place and Climate Change to undertake all necessary actions to appoint a Leisure Facilities Strategist and market research company.

Introduction

1. In 2008, Rother District Council (RDC), Hastings Borough Council, East Sussex County Council and Sport England jointly commissioned Capita Symonds to prepare a Leisure Facilities Strategy for Hastings and Rother (2009-2020) (Minute CB09/57 refers) that considered the leisure facility needs for the District. The Strategy made a number of recommendations to improve the offering for local residents and in meeting the deficit in provision.
2. There followed an updated assessment completed by NAA Consultants in August 2015 that did not dramatically alter the original leisure facilities strategy for the District but did include five further recommendations to the Strategy, which focused on the proposal for a new leisure centre in Bexhill.
3. There followed the establishment in the Corporate Plan 2014 of a priority regarding the 'Development of Former Bexhill High School site' as a leisure

destination which consisted of building a new leisure centre including a swimming pool, and residential housing.

4. Following a review by the Project Steering Group in June 2020, Cabinet of 27 July 2020 approved the suspension of the above project given the COVID-19 pandemic, its impact on leisure facilities and uncertainty surrounding Council finances.
5. RDC undertook to review leisure requirements in the longer-term, including the possibility of a new facility in Bexhill, as demand for leisure services and the financial climate became clearer. In the meantime, it was agreed that a new contract to maintain existing leisure services up to 31 March 2024 would be procured.
6. The new leisure management contract for Bexhill Leisure Centre and Bexhill Leisure Pool, operated by Freedom Leisure (FL), commenced on 1 April 2021 and will expire on 31 March 2024. The separate Rye Sports Centre contract, also operated by FL, expires on 31 March 2026.
7. The leisure facilities buildings in Bexhill are coming to the end of their structural 'life' and patch repairs to the current structure are no longer economical or environmentally efficient. The buildings need major refurbishment or replacement and it is therefore important that a strategy is agreed for the provision of appropriate leisure facilities for the future.
8. It is proposed that the Council appoints a strategist through a competitive procurement process to undertake a review of existing built leisure facilities across the District and provide an evidence-based proposal on a strategy that is realistic and achievable, and supports an active and healthy lifestyle across the District.

Strategists Brief

9. As part of the Government's National Leisure Relief Fund, a database called Moving Communities was established by Leisure-Net to capture all relevant data via the leisure facility operators, including levels of use by participants in individual activities across Rother sites as captured by FL, and participation rates across England as a whole. This data, amongst other activities such as stakeholder surveys will be used by the appointed strategist to inform the Strategy.
10. The strategists' brief would include the following:
 - Identify and map current provision of leisure facilities including the type, quality and access for the public. This should build on previous strategy data and use Sport England Methodology and tools to comply with the Sport England Assessing Needs and Opportunities guidance.
 - Undertake a district wide survey with stakeholders, clubs, residents and groups to identify views of current provision and future needs.
 - Consult with agreed stakeholders to identify opportunities and partnerships including the NHS & Public Health, education partners, RDC officers and Members, Active Sussex and the Active Rother Partnership.

- Develop the Strategy to build on and compliment the strengths of the local area including its natural assets, built and other outdoor physical activity opportunities.
- Establish the role of physical activity in contributing to Rother communities' health and wellbeing, Rother's Public Health Strategy, Active Rother Partnership, East Sussex Healthy Weight Plan and RDC's Corporate Plan.
- Review of national and local relevant strategies and policies, including Moving Communities' trends, demographic data specific to Rother, and industry best practise.
- Review of each facility in relation to key strategic factors: meeting local need; community capacity; adjacency to/competition with other provision; financial (cost, investment, income generation); building condition; catchment areas; unmet demand; key users e.g. schools for curriculum delivery.
- Develop a Built Leisure Strategy, informed by independent market research, that includes setting out:
 - Existing provision – facilities and services.
 - Development of national and local strategic context and policy.
 - Assessment of the Rother demographic data.
 - A Needs Analysis for Rother (facilities and services, supply and demand).
 - A new Vision and Strategic Framework for Physical Activity facility provision in Rother – why, what, where, and how this links to and reflects shared priorities for Rother.
 - Delivering the Vision (this will reflect review and assessment of all other aspects of the brief), and what this means in terms of facilities, finance, timescales, resources (Interventions and Commitment).

11. High level indicative timelines in which to complete the Strategy are as follows:

- Report to Cabinet January 2022 for approval to procure leisure strategist and independent market research.
- Appoint independent market research company March 2022
- Appoint strategist March 2022.
- Draft Strategy to Overview and Scrutiny Committee May 2022 that includes findings from market research company.
- Draft Strategy to Cabinet June 2022.
- Public Consultation during July, August 2022 if required
- Analysis of the Consultation Results and Stakeholder Review.
- Report to Cabinet December 2022 for approval of Leisure Strategy proposal.

Market Research brief

12. The market research brief would include the following and the results will be used to inform the strategy:

- Identify and engage with a broad spectrum of people across Rother District that accurately reflects the demographic nature of the district.
- Through using a variety of methods, which may include interviews, focus groups and sample groups, gather specific data on who are current users of leisure facilities and what they use, including Council owned sites; who are not using leisure facilities and why; what facilities current consumers and potential users would wish to have.
- Gather information on the barriers preventing people using facilities and how these may be overcome.

Conclusion

13. The current contract with FL to operate Bexhill leisure facilities ends on 31 March 2024 and the Bexhill buildings need major refurbishment or replacement prior to a new contract. It is important that the Council has a realistic and achievable strategy in place to ensure continuity of provision of leisure facilities that promotes health and well-being and an active lifestyle across Rother District.

Financial Implications

14. It is anticipated that the above strategy and market research work would cost in the region of £50,000 which could be funded from £140,000 included in the existing Capital Programme for minor refurbishments at Bexhill Leisure Centre.
15. On the 27 July 2020, Cabinet agreed to suspend the proposed redevelopment of the Bexhill Leisure Centre (Minute CB20/22 refers). Therefore, any recommendations arising from the strategists' report that require significant investment would be unfunded. Should Members decide to proceed with these recommendations funding would need to be identified before commencement.
16. Failure to have a strategy in place may mean further Council funding will be spent on maintaining old, inefficient buildings that may not meet the needs of residents and could mean sites cannot remain open.

Risk Implications

17. There is a risk that if a Rother Built Leisure Facility Strategy is not agreed and in place there will be a delay to decisions on the future of built leisure facilities in Rother District and how they will be managed and operated in the future, and this may result in loss of service.

Environmental Impact

18. Fully understanding the needs and requirements of residents in the Rother District, and then providing appropriate leisure facilities to meet these needs, is vital to support the community's health and well-being.
19. The existing built facilities are old and beyond their useful structural lifespan and no longer meet the environmental and 'climate change' aspirations of the future.

Legal Implications

20. The Leisure Strategist and market research company will be appointed in accordance with procurement legislation.

Equalities Impact

21. Equalities – a new strategy may improve the offering and inclusiveness of the sites, including making them more welcoming for disabled people.

Other Implications	Applies?	Other Implications	Applies?
Human Rights	No	Equalities and Diversity	Yes
Crime and Disorder	No	Consultation	No
Environmental	Yes	Access to Information	No
Risk Management	Yes	Exempt from publication	No

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Appendices:	None.
Relevant Previous Minutes:	CB09/57, CB20/22
Background Papers:	None.
Reference Documents:	None.