

CABINET REPORT - INVESTMENT OPTIONS FOR LEISURE ASSETS

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The Corporate Governance Manager gave a presentation to the Panel on the renewal plan for the leisure centres. She provided background to the Panel which included residents' activity levels which were low and obesity levels which were high and consequently a healthy life expectancy was low. She brought to the Panel's attention St James and Oasis which were at the end of their economic life, with Lynnsport requiring investment within 5-10 years' time. She advised Downham Market currently operated well with no pressing or significant change needed. She outlined the strategic options for the Council to consider.

The Chair invited questions from the Panel regarding the first part of the Presentation.

Councillor Crofts sought clarification on Oasis facilities and specifically the indoor bowls facilities used. He commented there was a lack of use in other leisure centres such as North Walsham and the Reef leisure centre. He referred to Oasis being on the sea front and added the toilets needed updating and to charge people for the facilities and commented this was a source of income which other Council's use.

The Interim Assistant Director for Leisure, Arts and Entertainment advised the indoor bowls facilities were important particularly for older residents. However, he advised that even during peak months the average utilisation of an indoor bowls hall was only around 20% usage and even at it highest in February there was only 40%. In response to Councillor Crofts, he commented at Lynnsport there was indoor bowls facilities including five rinks which could continue to be provided and was within a reasonable travel distance from Hunstanton.

Councillor Crofts commented that surrounding areas such as Wisbech did not have indoor bowls facilities and they were difficult to maintain as there was not the support for the facilities. He commented further he would support that the facilities at Hunstanton be closed and better facilities at Lynnsport provided to encourage usage.

The Corporate Governance Manager reminded the Panel that no decisions had been made on the future of the facilities and this the beginning of the project with further opportunity for consultation.

Councillor Collingham commented a renewal, and better indoor facilities were needed for tourism and for children to ensure a slump of inactivity did not occur. She added there was an opportunity for indoor racket activities to be provided in the community. She added the new swimming pools should be the same as at the Reef with being able to moderate the depth of the pool.

Councillor Long added the facilities were not appealing and what the council were trying to provide needed to be considered. He added the facilities needed to be

affordable to encourage people to use them and niche facilities did not get the most usage.

The Corporate Governance Manager advised that the experience of other Councils was being considered and new facilities did bring in new customers therefore more usage meant an increase revenue following investment.

The Interim Assistant Director for Leisure, Arts and Entertainment agreed the current facilities were not attractive but that new facilities would be much better used with higher income and therefore this would provide more flexibility for the council on future pricing.

Councillor Ryves sought clarification on an alternative solution such as private investors being considered.

The Corporate Governance Manager referred to the previous report which was brought to the Panel about Alive West Norfolk. She added the facilities were not attractive to private investors in the current state however this was an option to consider in the future. She explained the importance on the Borough Council being the lead with improving the facilities due to the priority being health and wellbeing of residents.

Councillor Ryves commented private enterprise could build new facilities and what was the best value for the Council needed to be considered.

The Interim Assistant Director for Leisure, Arts and Entertainment explained it was unlikely private investment would be forthcoming for public facilities.

The Chief Executive responded to Councillor Ryves and advised Alive West Norfolk was coming back in house from the 1st April 2025 as part of the Borough Council. She added in relation to the Reef, North Norfolk Council had made a capital investment into the new site and used a procurement exercise for the operation of the site. She explained the management of the site was private. She encouraged members to consider neighbouring authorities arrangements regarding their leisure facilities.

Councillor Lintern added that the Council needed to be mindful of the cost involved and offer the best facilities.

Councillor Collingham commented further on the facilities of the Council's leisure centres and that they needed to compete against the private sector health clubs and the facilities they provided. She added the Council needed to be ambitious and not compromise on the facilities.

Councillor Jones commented as the Chair of Alive West Norfolk the current facilities were not dangerous but needed to be renewed and stressed the importance of investing in these facilities.

Councillor Bearshaw explained his views on the opportunity this had given, and the Council needed to invest. He referred to the previous work which had been done surrounding the Oasis site and asked if this was being considered.

The Corporate Governance Manager explained the previous work was the levelling up application for Oasis and added this work would be revisited.

The Interim Assistant Director for Leisure, Arts and Entertainment added, the work which had previously been done on the Oasis site was challenging and lessons had been learnt.

Councillor Dickinson commented it was disappointing the previous work on Oasis did not work out and there was already speculation on the location for the site. She added she felt the Borough Council should own the location and ensure there was adequate parking.

Councillor Ring, Portfolio Holder encouraged the ambition but reminded Members it needed to be within the means of the Borough Council. He commented there was challenges such as site locations and provisions. He added it was important to ensure there was value for the subsidy from the Council and reminded Members not many other Council's provided and delivered leisure facilities.

The Interim Assistant Director for Leisure, Arts and Entertainment gave the remainder of the presentation to the Panel and outlined the four priorities. The first priority was to finalise options for St James Pool alternative sites. The second priority was to replace Oasis in Hunstanton, and the third priority was to review and invest in existing dryside facilities at Lynnsport. He explained, finally the fourth priority was Downham Market. He outlined to the Panel the recommended priorities were priority one and two and explained the capital funding.

The Corporate Governance Manager concluded the presentation with the next steps which included further feasibility and options analysis on St James and the initial call for funding of £450k to progress options analysis and RIBA Stage 2 for St James and Oasis.

The Chair thanked officers for the presentation and invited any further questions and comments from the Panel.

Councillor Kemp referred to the levelling up application previously made for Oasis and commented the site location for the renewal of St James and Oasis needed to be accessible for residents in rural areas.

Councillor Long commented on the importance of providing the correct information when a consultant was used. He commented further, the location should not be fixated on at this stage of the project and questioned the relevance of Oasis remaining on the Seafront. He referred to the Reef swimming pool location and commented the location would not be important if the offer on the facilities was correct. He added free parking would encourage custom and stressed the importance of these facilities for the residents of West Norfolk instead of tourism as there was private facilities such as Searles.

Councillor Kunes sought clarification on the timescales for the renewal of St James and referred to the recent budget report which included funding for lighting to be replaced at St James. He questioned if this was to go ahead even with the renewal in place.

The interim Assistant Director for Leisure, Arts and Entertainment confirmed spending on St James pool was being minimised during the current period whilst replacement facilities were being considered but that the existing facility would remain satisfactory and safe for public use.

Councillor Ryves sought clarification on the breakdown of contribution made by tourism and contributions made by residents of West Norfolk currently and projected.

The Head of Leisure provided an estimate during holidays and explained there was 50% increase on income across secondary spend and usage based on the resident. She confirmed she would provide a further breakdown in response to Councillor Ryves.

Councillor Crofts referred to the Reef swimming pool being privately owned which previously had indoor bowls facilities but closed a couple of years ago due to not being profitable. He commented on the Reef facilities and North Walsham which were privately owned and expressed his concern on continuing with facilities which were not being used and costing money. He commented he did not understand why consultants were being used when Members knew the area better. He added, once the toilet facilities at Hunstanton were renewed, people should be charged to use them and encouraged this idea.

The interim Assistant Director for Leisure, Arts and Entertainment confirmed to the Panel the Reef was owned by North Norfolk Council, but the day-to-day operations were managed privately. He commented further there was advantages to using consultants as this was an external perspective and provide a wide range of data and expertise that wasn't available in the council

Councillor Devulapalli commented she endorsed the facilities to be renewed and added they needed to be accessible by bus early in the morning and late at night.

Councillor Long referred to commercial gyms which operated 24 hours and commented this needed to be considered with the new facilities.

Councillor Rust commented as Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing, she endorsed the positive response and comments from the Panel. She expressed the importance of the facilities being renewed along with the size of the pool and the benefits of the pool having additional lanes. She added with a bigger pool there was more space available to hire and therefore greater income generation.

Councillor Ring reiterated that ambition needed to match financial ability and there had been positive communication with members of the community surrounding the renewal of the leisure facilities. He added there had previously been good consultation regarding the work previously done for Oasis and added it was

important to take this into consideration. He commented better facilities would encourage health experience for residents.

RESOLVED: The Joint Panel support the following recommendations to Cabinet:

1. That Cabinet Resolves to authorise officers to progress Option Three detailed in Section 3.3.3 of the report and the related Options One and Two, detailed in Section 5 of the report, to RIBA Stage Two to enable a full Business Case to be developed for presentation to Cabinet in due course.
2. That Cabinet agree funding of £450k is allocated to the project from the 'Invest to Save' fund to enable work to be progressed to the stage set out in 6.1.1.
3. That Cabinet gives delegated authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Corporate Governance Manager and Monitoring Officer to enter into a Framework Contract to carry out the Project.