EAB Discussion Paper – New sport and entertainment venue

Introduction

The Guildford Spectrum Leisure Complex has been incredibly successful over the 26 years since it was opened in February 1993. Built at a cost of £28 million, the venue was designed with a unique range of facilities. The mix between commercial and community facilities all under one roof remains a unique site in the United Kingdom and makes the venue a regional tourist destination with around 1.7 million visits each year. The current facilities include:-

- An International standard ice rink seating 2000
- 4 swimming pools including a multi flume leisure pool, 25m competition pool, a dive pool with 1m, 3m and 5m boards and a teaching pool
- 32 lane ten pin bowling centre
- 10 badminton court sports hall
- a dedicated group exercise studio
- 72 station fully equipped health and fitness suite
- a 400m athletics stadium with a floodlit football pitch
- a crèche
- a children's soft play facility
- a number of other smaller facilities including a spinning studio, 2 squash courts and dry sport facilities
- a number of catering and sports retail outlets
- a 1000 space car park.

In summary, at the core of the success of this family orientated venue are:-

- a unique mix of facilities & programme all under one roof
- good location with excellent transport links & parking arrangements
- high quality facilities in an attractive parkland setting
- ongoing investment into the site planned from opening
- organisational culture and operation of this award winning venue fulfilling both commercial and community objectives
- excellent partnership arrangements e.g. Guildford Flames.

The last report presented to the Executive Advisory Board in October 2016 outlined a number of different aspects of this complicated project. Councillors will remember that included within this report was a summary of why Spectrum has been so successful, the condition of the venue at that time, potential costs and timescales and the benefits of replacement against refurbishment. This report will provide some updates to various aspects of that report and the project.

The current building

The current building has been the subject of a number of remedial initiatives to try and increase its potential working lifespan so that it can meet community need till a new venue or an alternative solution is open. This programme of work, which was under development at the time of the last report in 2016, is now nearly complete, and comprised of a number of different schemes.

Excluding the adjustments to the management fee for the pool hall closures, these council initiatives will amount to a cost of approximately £3.25m (subject to the procurement of the roof glazing solutions) and are aimed to give the building a further ten years of operation. Works that have been completed so far include:-

- Repair to steel columns in the pools hall
- installation of a new over roof for the pools hall
- liquid plastic coating the remaining roof to significantly reduce water ingress
- some roof glazing replacement
- enhancement of air handling provision in the Leisure and teaching pool area
- internal and external guttering improvements
- repair of smoke vents to reduce water ingress
- renewal/addition of various stainless steel hangers in the pool hall.

These remedial works have made a significant difference to the operation of the venue, particularly in relation to the volume of leaks. Unfortunately, the building will continue to develop new leaks even after the leaking glazing seals are addressed, however the required ongoing maintenance should result in minimal disruption to the customers.

Installation of the Combined Heat and Power (CHP) unit

The new CHP went live in February 2018. This unit generates heat and acts as the primary boiler for the venue, and also produces electricity as a by-product. This unit will of cost just under £600k to install. Over the first eight months of this financial year, the unit has saved £145k by comparison to "imported" utilities. In theory, the unit should generate the most savings in winter and we will continue to monitor the performance of the unit carefully. The savings are currently slightly exceeding the projected annual saving, however the level of savings are directly affected by fluctuations in the prices of gas and electricity.

New build versus refurbishment

With an existing successful facility, there will always be a discussion around whether the existing site could meet the needs of the community through a refurbishment programme. The Spectrum is a complex building that has a significant volume of specialist plant and facilities. As well as a significant plantroom under the main part of the building, it also has numerous plantrooms around the building and in compounds outside. These plant rooms and compounds contain the plant that allows the building to function effectively as a leisure complex, including having different air temperatures around the building, making the pool water safe and clean, ensuring the ice rink is frozen and the building generally being able to be operated safely.

As previously detailed in earlier reports, the existing venue would require a number of significant changes to the physical building (e.g. a new roof) throughout in order to extend its functional life. Any significant refurbishment would also have to include significant pieces of plant and equipment as well as how fundamental things such as water and electricity are distributed around the building (i.e. rewired and re-plumbed). Cosmetic changes such as re-tiling and repainting (including steelwork) throughout would be essential. The building would have to be closed for a significant period of time to refurbish and things like the flumes in the Leisure Pool replaced. With the building closed, there would be an opportunity to address some of the perceived shortfalls in the existing building design e.g. creating a bigger gym and expanding the current soft play facilities, which would be challenging projects in themselves.

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The table below summarises the potential impacts of a new build against a refurbishment.

New build	Refurbishment
Bespoke design building - opportunity for new facilities - designed for maintenance and operation - opportunity for modern technology e.g. utility savings	Refurbished building would be on a very similar basis to the existing footprint and potentially represents the least disruption for the park overall.
Significant cost – funding likely to be challenging	Scalable cost – subject to the life span aspiration of the refurbishment.
Opportunity to address other perceived amenity issues for Stoke Park	Major service disruption - lengthy closure (probably longer than a new build) with no service to the community. Potential loss of key partners and specialist staffing due to closure.
Continuity of service for the community as existing facility can meet need until new venue opens.	Increased risk of overrun due to increased complexity of project e.g. compliance with modern building regulations
Continuity of service for successful major clubs such as Guildford Flames and Guildford City Swimming Club.	Physical restrictions in what you can and cannot do as part of the refurbishment in terms of economic efficiency
Would require the new build to be in a different location to the current footprint and would require alternate access and egress routes	Will still be a building designed for 1990's with inherent age limitation in the design
Would require to comply with land and planning requirements	Will not be able to correct some of the flaws in the original build and design.
	Majority of workforce likely to need to be made redundant for the duration of the refurbishment
	Would have to recover business after closure
	Previous refurbishment work at the site not attractive to the market when tendered
	Any planned maintenance would require to be compliant with Building regulations and any planning requirements

Fundamentally, the core facilities of the existing venue remain popular and continue to attract customers. With the right new build design, it would be possible to significantly enhance the offering to the customer using the lessons learned from both Guildford Spectrum's successes and its flaws. The core provision of pools, ice rink, arena, gym and ten pin bowling have the potential to be modified in different ways to better meet market demand.

All the facilities would benefit from a more comprehensive range of ancillary facilities such as revised changing rooms and toilets. Customers would also welcome a more flexible and diverse catering and retail offer to compliment the facilities.

Other ancillary services such as public transport links and parking would need to be reviewed based on the facilities at the venue and perhaps, depending on the site, in the immediate vicinity.

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Partnerships with third parties may offer the opportunity for a greater range of exciting facilities on site. These opportunities will need to be considered carefully in the context of the overall offer and the impact on the general operation of the site.

Any new build will seek to take advantage of modern technology to reduce the environmental impact the venue. The existing site is the Council's biggest energy consumer and a new build represents an opportunity to take advantage of the technology that has proved challenging to successfully retrofit.

Primarily, a new venue offers the opportunity to review the product mix and take advantage of modern technology. Knowledge of the market place is very important however, consultation and research will also be critical in making the final necessary decisions around facility inclusion in a new offer.

Based on discussion and feedback both from the community and councillors (including the Corporate Plan), during the project we have concentrated on the opportunity for a replacement venue for this ground breaking site but we also recognise the need to assess the case for refurbishment. The primary driver was to build on the success of the existing site considering the exciting opportunities for a new improved venue, enhancing the template of the existing provision and subsequent customer experience.

Production of a draft vision and ongoing consultation

A draft initial vision for a new venue has been developed through research, benchmark visits, reviewing the successes and challenges of the current venue combined with the views, experience and comments of councillors, relevant officers, key staff from the existing operator and Active Surrey (the County Sports Partnership).

This initial vision is an attempt to develop a "look and feel" for the venue without setting out the facility mix, which will be driven by customer demand and community need. The vision has been drafted as a customer journey, which hopefully makes it easier to relate to.

This initial draft vision will continue to be developed and tested against the ongoing research and ongoing wider consultation with customers, local residents, Sport England, National Governing Bodies (NGB's), key partners such as the emergency services, the NHS, and local sports clubs etc.

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Draft vision – A customer journey…

"A pleasure to visit again and again, and a pleasure to operate."

The vision for the new facility must be focussed on making the customer journey and experience an absolute pleasure. It will also reflect that in order to be sustainable, it has to be an absolute joy to operate.

Setting and arrival

The customer visit does not start on entering the door to the venue, the venue is set in Stoke Park and the new facility must compliment this parkland setting. Once the customer has arrived, they can intuitively understand where they need to go for their visit. This may mean crossing the A25 Parkway to visit the main body of Stoke Park for events there. Pedestrian and wheel chair user access to and around the site must be safe and well lit.

Access will be considered carefully, ensuring appropriate access for all the community, deliveries and emergency vehicles have all been an intrinsic part of the planning process. Access and egress to and from Parkway will be planned in such a way to ensure there is no unnecessary delay for the local traffic even during busy periods such as event departure, where a large volume of traffic will leave the venue at the same time.

Emergency vehicles need to have excellent access to the individual facilities, particularly facilities where there is a potential risk of spinal injuries such as an ice rink or diving pool for example.

Delivery access to the venue, and any subsidiary facilities, need to be appropriate for the types of large vehicle expected at the venue (including event trucks and waste collection) and ideally away from general car park access.

Coach and bus arrival, parking and passenger collection will be considered carefully within the design, as will the general drop off and collection points to ensure all the community are appropriately catered for.

Car and other vehicle parking

There will be more than sufficient safe and secure parking convenient for the customer's visit, regardless of whether they are coming to visit the leisure site or a wider Stoke Park event. The number of spaces will reflect the anticipated use of the facilities at very busy times e.g. February half term. Parking is likely to have a free period with a chargeable threshold therefore a charging mechanism needs to be planned into the design. The car parks must be safe, well-lit and planned appropriate to the site. The route to and from the car park to the venue must be accessible for all customers and appropriate for all access and egress points. There must be no undue delay in access or egress; however, the design must discourage anti-social behaviour. Consideration must be giving to recognise changes in modern parking provision and opportunities for secondary services around fuelling and vehicle services. The design of the car park must recognise the need for future maintenance and this must be an intrinsic part of the design so that maintenance and operational requirements are an important factor. The car park must be reflective of its surroundings and be complimentary to the parkland surroundings. Secure and safe parking opportunities must include other vehicles e.g. bicycles and motorcycles. Customers should feel safe and confident to use the parking facilities, this includes the use of video technology.

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Lighting and noise pollution are important factors to be considered in the design, with flexible controls and efficient utility usage.

Satellite facilities

Where facilities are outside the main facility, consideration has been given to the customer's experience when using these facilities i.e. are there appropriate access to secondary spend opportunities, is it easy to retrieve an errant ball, can errant balls be minimised? These exterior facilities need to be safe and secure, especially when they are not manned. They must be complimentary to the environment in which they are set, easy to maintain and operate.

Parkland and pitch maintenance

The look and ease of access and maintenance is at the core of the site design. There must be appropriate, safe access to ensure the parkland and facilities can be maintained appropriately and efficiently using the right plant and equipment. The site is also an access point to ancient woodland and a nature reserve/SNCI.

Design of the main facility

In keeping with the unique selling points of Guildford Spectrum, the main leisure facility must be designed on the basis of "everything under one roof". This is an absolutely intrinsic part of the current venue's success.

The exterior of the main facility must be memorable but recognising that the exterior must be easy to maintain and access. Ideally the exterior will be unique and easily identifiable but without compromising the ease and cost of maintenance.

Customers entering the facility through the main entrance should experience a WOW factor on entry at the interior of the build. The facility will be carefully planned to recognise the customer journey, entry will be into a light and airy, spacious reception area that will have much in common with a large shopping centre. The main point of entry will be a showcase of the key commercial facilities of the venue as well as being a central point for the food and beverage and retail operation. The key commercial facilities must be very visible to create that WOW factor.

Technology must be at the core of the reception service, the customer must be immediately clear on where they need to go for their choice of facility. Ticket purchase and collection facilities should be clear and able to be supported and maintained easily. Routes away from this accessible area should be clear for facilities with appropriately sized lifts and stairs to facilitate the customer journey.

The venue must be designed to be easy to be kept clean and maintained. Fixtures and fittings must be hard wearing and attractive. There must be appropriate toilet facilities for all customers (including a changing places facility on the main entry floor) throughout the venue. Future maintenance requirements will have been considered for every aspect of design both in the customer facing areas and in the plant rooms.

Utility and resource impact

The venue will be designed to be energy efficient, using a range of evidence based technology to make the venue as efficient as possible. The venue will be designed to minimise the environmental impact.

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Facility quality

Each sports facility is designed to meet Sport England standards and is fit for purpose recognising the anticipated large volume of customers. Every facility will be designed with its operation and maintenance in mind. It will be easy to clean and maintain, including planning for roof access and high level cleaning. All facilities will be designed to be as flexible as possible, recognising that areas can be used for a range of activities that may have different requirements in relation to lighting, temperature, power, access to ICT and air handling for example.

Successful catering facilities are key to the long term viability of the venue, they must be flexible in design and operation, be appropriately positioned in relation to the facilities and accessible to all the community. Fundamentally, the product range and experience must meet customer's varied expectations and needs throughout the day.

Technology is at the heart of the flexible operation of the facility, particularly in relation to the plant. The technology must be reliable, easy to use and geared to be being upgraded as circumstances change as the venue ages. One of the most important systems is the Building Management System (BMS) which must be well designed, and geared to flexible operation of the venue.

Plant rooms and storage areas will be secure, easy to navigate and design with future maintenance in mind. Chemical stores will be safe and secure but still easy to access for delivery and maintenance. Plant layout will be designed with future maintenance requirements in mind.

All high level areas will be accessible for safe cleaning and maintenance both internally and externally by design.

Outreach work

The facility will be designed so that appropriate storage can be easily accessed to facilitate the outreach work, which will help to reach the priority groups from a health and wellbeing perspective that might be reluctant to visit a sports and leisure facility.

Next steps

Continue research.

- Produce report for Executive detailing:

    - An assessment of the existing facility and service.
    - demonstration of linkage with council policies e.g. health and well being
    - the options available to the Council e.g. build a new facility, refurbish the existing.
    - the vision and aspirations for the new Spectrum.
    - land and planning matters (limitations and opportunities provided by the site).
    - research into supply and demand/need.
    - estimate of costs and financing options.
    - next steps (preferred approach to develop the project to the next stage).