

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

9 April 2019

Subject:	Proposals to Depart from the Local Plan at Londonderry Playing Fields, Londonderry Lane, Smethwick
Director:	Amy Harhoff – Director of Regeneration and Growth – Neighbourhoods
Contribution towards Vision 2030:	 
Contact Officer(s):	Carl Mercer – Principal Planner carl_mercer@sandwell.gov.uk

DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That Council:

1. Allow an exception to the Local Plan in respect of planning application DC/19/62642 (Demolition of existing freestanding changing room building and proposed erection of leisure centre (Class D2) including a 10 lane competition 50m swimming pool, competition diving pool, community pool, spectator seating, sports hall(s), fitness suite, studios and other complementary uses, with associated outdoor football pitch and informal play space, parking, utilities and landscaping provisions, together with temporary works to enable the site to first serve as a venue for the Birmingham Commonwealth Games).

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 At the meeting of the Planning Committee held on 13 March 2019, consideration was given to planning application DC/19/62642 which sought approval for a new leisure centre development. The scheme has been submitted by the Council and the site is Council owned.
- 1.2 At the meeting, the Committee approved the planning application with conditions, and subject to the application being referred to Full Council as a departure from the approved Local Plan.

- 1.3 The site is currently allocated as community open space within the Site Allocations and Delivery Development Plan Document. It is necessary for the Council to consider whether or not to grant an exception to its policy to allow the application to proceed.

2 **IMPLICATIONS FOR SANDWELL'S VISION**

- 2.1 Implications contained within this report support Sandwell's Vision 2, in helping residents to live healthy lives and Vision 8 – *'Our distinctive towns and neighbourhoods are successful centres of community life, leisure and entertainment where people increasingly choose to bring up their families'*.

3 **BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS**

- 3.1 The Council proposes to build a leisure centre to include a 10 lane competition 50m swimming pool, competition diving pool, community pool, spectator seating, sports hall(s), fitness suite, studios and other complementary uses, with associated outdoor football pitch and informal play space, together with temporary works to enable the site to first serve as a venue for the Birmingham Commonwealth Games 2022.
- 3.2 Upon reviewing Sandwell's sports and leisure facilities in 2016, the *'Sandwell Sport and Leisure – Built Facilities Strategy'* published in January 2018 noted that the quality of both Langley and Smethwick swimming centres was poor. Additionally, there was an 11% unmet demand in swimming provision in Sandwell, a lack of competition swimming facilities in the West Midlands, and a shortage of large sports halls in Sandwell, with existing provision of varying quality.
- 3.3 Nine alternative sites for the facility were considered by the Council. These sites were discounted on the grounds of being unsuitable in location, as well as having ownership and legal constraints. The application site was chosen as it is of a suitable size, would be capable of accommodating the specification of the development and is readily available to undertake the requisite works within the prescribed timeframe.
- 3.4 The site is allocated in the Local Plan as an area of community open space. However, the improvement of the outdoor pitches and informal open space could outweigh the partial loss of the existing playing fields. Additionally, the site could also become operational without compromise to the vitality or viability of existing centres in the Borough.

4 THE CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 The application has been approved by Planning Committee and awaits the consent of Full Council.

5 CONSULTATION (CUSTOMERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS)

- 5.1 The application has been publicised by neighbour notification letter and by site and press notice, and has received eight individual objections and a 240-signature petition against the proposal. No overall objections were received from statutory consultees which could not be overcome by conditions.

6 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 6.1 Refusal of the application is an option – but sound planning reasons for refusal would have to be put forward.

7 STRATEGIC RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The granting of exceptions to the Council's Site Allocations and Delivery Development Plan Document would not have any implications for the resources of the Council.

8 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 The Planning Committee has delegated powers to determine planning applications within current Council policy. The decision to grant permission for this proposal would be contrary to the Council's Site Allocations and Delivery Development Plan Document. Consequently, the Committee has referred the application to the Council to consider whether or not an exception to the Local Plan should be granted.

9 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 9.1 None relevant.

10 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 10.1 The planning application and accompanying documentation is a public document. Personal details held on file should be redacted before publication or distribution.

11 CRIME AND DISORDER AND RISK ASSESSMENT

11.1 West Midlands Police have raised concerns in respect of the proposal; however, many of these concerns can be alleviated by appropriate conditions (i.e. CCTV and lighting).

12 SUSTAINABILITY OF PROPOSALS

12.1 The proposal is considered to be sustainable within the context of the National Planning Policy Framework.

13 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING SOCIAL VALUE)

13.1 The introduction of new leisure facilities for residents.

14 IMPACT ON ANY COUNCIL MANAGED PROPERTY OR LAND

14.1 The development would regenerate an area of open space for the wider leisure needs of residents and provide a temporary venue for a major sporting event of national significance.

15 CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

16 On balance, taking into account the material factors outlined above, the proposal would provide a venue for a sporting event of national significance, and provide a legacy of a leisure facility for which a local need has been identified.

17 BACKGROUND PAPERS

17.1 Planning application DC/19/62642.