



**LUTON AQUATIC CENTRE**  
**Scrutiny Task and Finish Group Review**

**Final Report**

**May 2010**

# **LUTON AQUATIC CENTRE – SCRUTINY TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

## **Executive Summary**

Luton Borough Council will build an Aquatic Centre at Stopsley to improve the provision of sports and leisure facilities in the town, by May 2012. This is to help increase participation in physical activities by all ages, to improve their health and fitness. Funding for the project will be through borrowing and income from London Luton Airport.

A review of the implications of building the Centre was set up by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Board, which considered a wide range of evidence. It concluded that, although some facilities will be reduced or lost, the Aquatic Centre would provide a substantial improvement to facilities, particularly relating to swimming and diving. New road layout at the site will improve access and road safety, but there are concerns about potential increase in traffic congestion, particularly in Stockingstone Road.

There are also some concerns about the way the Centre will be paid for and about measures taken to keep within the fixed budget. There are uncertainties too about how to measure the Aquatic Centre's contribution to the achievement of local priorities, particularly relating health. There are potential economic benefits, which need to be fully assessed.

From its conclusions, which are shown in details in Chapter 7, a number of recommendations are made as follows:

1. To make up for some of the reduction in facilities, that school sports facilities provided by the Building Schools for the Future programme are made available for wider community use out of school hours, during school holidays and at other times when schools are not actually using them.
2. That the multi-function room at the new Centre is provided with full bar facilities.
3. That appropriate action is taken by the Council to address congestion on Stockingstone Road, ahead of the opening of the Aquatic Centre, which is likely to exacerbate the situation, given that the town-wide survey indicates that 81% of those who expect to make use of the Centre, would travel by car.
4. That the Leisure Trust develop and adopt a comprehensive Event Management Strategy for the Aquatic Centre, to ensure large special events at the Centre are planned and managed robustly to avoid clashes with other special events at the Vale Cemetery and Crematorium, and minimise any adverse impact on local residents by inconsiderate parking.
5. That the measures to cut costs to keep the Aquatic Centre project within budget, are reviewed by Executive and the Overview and Scrutiny Finance Review Group on a regular basis through the course of the project, in terms of the impact on the facilities, accessibility and revenue costs of the Centre.
6. That the Leisure Trust implement robust actions to stop and reverse the drop out rate of people using current facilities, to keep user numbers up now, who would then be likely to transfer to the Aquatic Centre.
7. That an Economic Impact Assessment is carried out relating to the potential economic benefits for Luton, of planned major regional events at the Aquatic Centre.

8. That the Aquatic Centre project team ensure the running costs of the new facility will not exceed the combined running costs of the Wardown pool, Regional Sports Centre and Putteridge pool.
9. That plans and objectives include clear and transparent measures of success by which the performance of the Aquatic Centre could be judged, preferably by means of a formal post-project evaluation carried out by or on behalf of the Overview and Scrutiny Board.
- (10) That promotion of the new Aquatic Centre is as high profiled as possible so as to raise Luton people's satisfaction with sports and leisure facilities in Luton and increase usage levels.
11. That a survey, similar to the Sport England Active People survey is carried out in due course following the opening of the Aquatic Centre, to determine what effect the new facility is having on participation and satisfaction levels.
12. That the final business case for the Aquatic Centre address the issue of sustainability – in particular, whether the project fully meets the Council's commitment to the Nottingham Declaration on climate change.
13. That a full Equalities Impact Assessment is produced as part of the final business case, with confirmation that the Council's duties across all strands of equality are being met.
14. That the Overview and Scrutiny Board ensure it is equipped to carry out effective performance measurement relating to the success or otherwise of the Aquatic Centre, in contributing to the achievement of relevant Luton's priorities and objectives.
15. That the relationship between the Council and NHS Luton is exploited fully to ensure that the appropriate incentives are provided to encourage much greater participation, by adults and the young, both through schools and with their families.

## **The Report**

The report is set up in chapters, as follows:

- Chapter 1 is a short introduction, providing background and context;
- Chapter 2 looks at what facilities are current provided compared with what will be available when the project is completed;
- Chapter 3 deals with the issue of access and travel;
- Chapter 4 is on finance;
- Chapter 5 examines the impact of the project on local priorities;
- Chapter 6 looks at consultation issues;
- Chapters 7 sets out the review's conclusions; and
- Chapters 8 are the review's recommendations.

# **Chapter 1 - Introduction**

## **1.1. Background**

Luton Borough Council has made a commitment to build an Aquatic Centre at Stopsley, for completion in May 2012. The Centre will provide swimming, as well as other sports and leisure facilities.

The project is designed to replace some old facilities and improve the provision of sports and leisure facilities in Luton. It is intended to help increase participation in physical exercise, sports and active recreation by young people and adults. This is a priority, as the Sport England Active People survey 2008/09 shows that participation in physical activities by adults in Luton at 15.1% is poor, compared with the Eastern Region average of 20.5%. Luton people's health is also generally much poorer than the regional average, e.g. life expectancy in Luton for males is 76.8 yrs and 80.5 yrs for females, compared with the regional averages of 79 yrs and 82.7 yrs respectively. Some of the causes of health inequalities are linked to lifestyles and lack of exercise. A local target has also been set to reduce childhood obesity, which is a cause for concern in the town.

The Council will borrow money to pay for building the Centre. It will then use income from London Luton Airport to help run it and to repay the debt.

## **1.2 Purpose of Review**

This review by Scrutiny Councillors was set up to examine the proposals for building the Centre, with the purposes of:

- Ensuring the project meets its objectives, in line with local priorities;
- Examining its implications for the people of Luton;
- Reviewing the financial implications and risks, given the current economic climate and uncertainties with public sector funding;
- Advising and making recommendations for consideration by the Executive, to assist decision-making and management of the project.

The proposed location of the Centre in Stopsley was not within the scope of this review.

## **1.3 Method Used**

A review group of five Councillors was set up by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Board, supported by a number of Officers. The group held meetings between early March and late May 2010. Evidence was taken from members of the public, representatives of sports and swimming groups, relevant professional witnesses, senior Council Officers, and the Leader of the Council. All group Members also visited the facilities at Corby International Swimming Pool and took evidence from a project Member and two Officers.

The public were invited to give their views, in press releases, a radio interview and on the Council website. A demographically balanced telephone survey of 500 residents from across Luton was carried out to supplement previous consultations. There were ten responses to press releases. Eight residents attended review group meetings.

Numerous documents were reviewed, including feasibility studies, traffic and transport assessment, statement of public engagement, business and cost plans.

## Chapter 2 - What facilities are being provided?

### 2.1 What do we have now, compared with proposed facilities?

Evidence for this chapter was mainly obtained from professional witnesses involved with the Aquatic Centre, particularly the project manager and the Chief Executive of the Leisure Trust, and from documents reviewed.

#### 2.1.1 Luton Regional Sports Centre (to be demolished)

Current facilities, compared with proposed facilities at the Aquatic Centre:

Activities	Current Facilities	Proposed Facilities
Badminton	3 Sports halls, approx 640m <sup>2</sup> each - 15 badminton courts	Sports Hall - 1221m <sup>2</sup> - 8 badminton courts. Additional new sports hall capacity (26 courts) is intended to be provided through the Building Schools for the Future programme by 2014
Dance	Sports hall	Dance studio/Multi-purpose studio
5-a-side football	Sports hall	Sports hall+ additional capacity through Building Schools for the Future programme
Korfball	Sports hall	Sports Hall
Martial Arts	Martial Arts Room, 177m <sup>2</sup>	Multi-purpose studio, 207m <sup>2</sup> , meeting National Governing Body requirements for Judo and Karate.
Netball	Sports hall + outdoor facilities	Sports Hall + outdoor facilities
Running	Changing/ social	Changing, Multi-purpose studio
Squash	Squash courts	None
Table Tennis	Table Tennis Room, approx 21 x13m (267m <sup>2</sup> )	Multi-purpose studio, 14 x 14m (207m <sup>2</sup> ), accommodating 3 tables
Pétanque	Pétanque terrain	Pétanque terrain
Tennis	Outdoor facilities	Outdoor facilities
Gymnasium	70 stations	100 stations
Football/ cricket	Outdoor facilities	Outdoor facilities
Fitness	Fitness classes; Trampoline; Climbing wall	Sports Hall
Other	Social areas x 2; Physio; Crèche	Multi-purpose activity room for flexible use (licensed); (licensed) café; Crèche

Table 1 (Source: Project Manager & The Leisure Trust)

### 2.1.2 Wardown Swimming Pool (to be demolished)

Current facilities, compared with proposed facilities at the Aquatic Centre:

Activities	Current Facilities	Proposed Facilities
Swimming	- 25m main swimming pool - Learner pool	- A national competition standard 50m eight lane pool with integrated diving area and spectator seating for 400 - A 20m x 10m community pool
Diving	5m diving facilities	International diving facilities, including boards up to 3m and platforms up to 10m
Training	Training in function room	A dry training centre for swimmers and divers
Sauna/ steam room	Sauna and steam room	Not provided
Other	Function room/ Hall / Social area for dance and fitness classes and training room	- Aerobics/ dance studios for flexible use; - Multi-purpose activity room for flexible use (licensed)

Table 2 (Source: Project Manager & The Leisure Trust)

### 2.1.3 Putteridge Recreation Centre

Currently, Putteridge has a 25m swimming pool and public recreation centre facilities, including 4 court sports hall, squash courts, climbing wall and synthetic football pitch for school and adult learning use during the day and public use after 4.00 p.m.

After closure, these facilities will be provided at the Aquatic Centre (See Tables 1 and 2).

## 2.2 What will we have when the project is complete?

### 2.2.1 Aquatic Centre – Summary of Proposed Provisions:

- A national competition standard 50m eight lane pool with integrated diving area and spectator seating for 400;
- International diving facilities, including boards up to 3m and platforms up to 10m;
- A dry training centre for swimmers and divers;
- A 20m x 10m community pool;
- An 8 court sports hall that can be used for a range of sports, including football, badminton, basketball;
- A 100 station fitness gym;
- Aerobics/dance studios for flexible use;
- Multi-purpose activity room for flexible use (licensed);
- A (licensed) café;
- Crèche.

## 2.3 What do we gain?

Main gains:

- 50m, 8 lane pool and spectator seating, which will allow major gala events to be held up to national level;
- International standard diving facilities;
- A dry training centre;
- An increase from 70 station to 100 station fitness gym;
- Single larger sports hall better suited to 'show court' sporting events;
- Two aerobics/dance studios for flexible use.

Other facilities are as follows:

- Community Pool (20m by 10m pool varying between 0.9m and 1.5m deep)
- Sports Hall - large adaptable sports hall that can be used for:
  - 8 Badminton courts
  - 2 x 5-aside football pitches or
  - 2 x basketball courts or
  - Indoor cricket and other sports
  - Regional 'show court' matches with up to 500 spectators
- Modern, accessible, family friendly changing facilities;
- Crèche
- Café (licensed)
- Reception staff offices
- Multi Function Room (licensed)
- External Facilities (400 parking spaces and six for coaches, dedicated drop off, disabled and family parking)

It is proposed that additional new sports hall capacity will be provided through the Building Schools for the Future programme as follows:

School	Provisions	Availability
Challney Girls School	4 court hall	Jan 2011
Barnfield West Academy	4 court hall	March 2011
Barnfield South Academy	4 court hall	March 2011
Cardinal Newman Catholic School	4 court hall	April 2011(provisional date)*
Stopsley High School	4 court hall	June 2011(provisional date)*
Icknield High School	6 court hall	February 2015 (provisional date)*

Table 3: Source: Project Manager (\*Notes: Assuming no change in funding)

## **2.4 What do we lose?**

As a result of building the Aquatic Centre, the following facilities will be lost:

- Luton Regional Sports Centre, variations/ losses, include:
  - Squash (Possible provisions at Lewsey Squash Centre, subject to funding)
  - Bar (Function Room and Café at the new Centre will be licensed)
  - 8 badminton courts (26 additional courts will provided through the Building Schools for the Future programme by 2014)
  - Outdoor changing
- Wardown Swimming Pool:
  - Sauna and steam room (Total loss)
- Putteridge swimming pool:
  - Public recreation centre facilities after 4.00 p.m (dry side facilities are expected to be made available to the public under a Community Use Agreement, from the Building Schools for the Future redevelopment of Putteridge High School)
  - Climbing wall

All three old facilities are to be kept operational during the transition period.



## **Chapter 3 – What will be the impact on access and travel to the Centre?**

### **3.1 How will users get there?**

Given the Centre's location at Stopsley on the north eastern edge of the town, it is evident that most people would need transport to get there. A question on the main means of transport to the Centre was, therefore included in a telephone survey of 500 Luton people (see Chapter 6). Overwhelmingly, respondents who indicated that they would or maybe would use the Centre (81%) said they would travel to it by car, followed by walking (18%), bus (10%) and cycle (3%).

### **3.2 How will access affect local residents?**

Evidence of the traffic impact of the new Centre was taken from the public, representatives of Peter Brett Associates, the Council Highway Development Manager, the Superintendent/ Registrar, the Vale Cemetery and Crematorium, the Arriva Buses Depot Manager, and Transport Assessment reports.

#### **3.2.1 Junction, Hitchin Road/ Butterfield Green Road/ Cannon Lane**

The assessment carried out by the traffic and transport consultants covers the junction at Hitchin Road/ Butterfield Green Road/ Cannon Lane. It is planned that a new junction would be provided, controlled by automatic traffic lights. This junction will be enlarged to accommodate traffic to the Centre, as well as ensure no adverse impact on traffic to The Vale Cemetery and Crematorium.

In his opinion, the Superintendent/ Registrar of The Vale believes that the proposed new junction layout would greatly improve the situation for vehicles to The Vale and would remove a hazard posed by the current junction. He was also content that the close proximity of the Aquatic Centre to The Vale should not cause any interference with mourners.

It is intended that a pedestrian-controlled crossing will be provided over Hitchin Road, which is a fast dual carriageway. Given the hazards this road presents to pedestrians, such a crossing has been needed for many years and is most welcomed.

#### **3.2.2 Wider traffic issues**

There is a strong perception amongst a number of local residents, responding to requests for views on this project that the Centre would add to the already congested local traffic.

The access roads leading to Stopsley are Stockingstone Road and Hitchin Road. Stockingstone Road is invariably congested at peak times, due to heavy and very slow moving traffic from Round Green to New Bedford Road. An automatic survey of traffic flows in Stockingstone Road during weekday peak hours was undertaken by the transport consultants. This found that it is operating at 74% of its ideal capacity, when compared with Department of Transport road capacity standards.

The assessment suggests that any congestion on Stockingstone Road is likely to be caused by the number of junctions along its entire length, parked vehicles and domestic driveways off it. The assessment also shows that the increase in traffic in Stockingstone

Road as a result of the new Centre is unlikely to be more than about 3%, keeping it well within the ideal capacity of the road. To reduce congestion, the transport assessment assumes users could be encouraged to access the Centre by means other than cars. This is believed to be optimistic, as the town-wide survey indicates that 81% of those who expect to make use of the pool, would attend by car.

In the same survey, only 10% of those who said they would use the centre would travel by bus. The Arriva Buses Depot Manager advised that buses from the Town Centre to Stopsley run at 20 minute intervals during operating hours, with the last bus at 7.30 p.m. He intimated that increasing the frequency would be expensive and that there was no justification at present for a larger investment, as there was enough spare capacity to provide a 20% increase in services. An alternative could be to re-route a school bus service to Stopsley to help with transport to the new Centre, if necessary. He said that extending services into the evening is unlikely to be commercially viable, and will not be considered unless the Council agree to fund it.

### **3.2.3 Parking**

Evidence from the Transport consultant and the Highways Development Manager suggest that the amount of parking provided at the Centre is likely to be adequate for normal day-to-day use, based on evidence from other similar facilities. However, large special events at the Centre could be a problem if these clashed with other special events/ ceremonies taking place at the Vale. Evidence suggests such large events at the Vale often lead to overflow car parking into adjoining areas, causing inconvenience to residents.

## **Chapter 4 – How much will it cost?**

Evidence on finance was taken from the Project Manager, Commissioning Manager, the Chief Executive of the Leisure Trust, the Head of Capital and Asset Management, the Head of Corporate Finance, the Leader of the Council, and from relevant documents. Evidence was also obtained from a visit to the new Council-run International Swimming Pool in Corby.

### **4.1 Context**

The Aquatic Centre project is being managed by the Local Education Partnership, which is a not-for-profit organisation comprising Luton Borough Council and Wates Construction. It is part of the Building Schools for the Future Programme.

### **4.2 How much will it cost to build?**

The current estimated cost of the Centre is £26 million, based upon the current cost plan and the anticipated completion date of May 2012. According to the Options Appraisal report, the proposed cost of building the Aquatic Centre is mid range, compared with the benchmark for similar projects.

In order to stay within the approved budget of £26 million, a number of savings had to be made. The impact cost of these cost savings varies considerably, although most were unlikely to directly affect the facilities to be provided or on users' access to them. The biggest savings came from market testing, although a number of these were 'commercial judgements' that had yet to be realised. A few of the other items were comparatively high value (£100k – £300k range) and will impact on the flexibility of some of the facilities or have a revenue impact.

All the proposed savings, apart from the market testing, would be made in the next stage of the design. The Aquatic Centre project team accept that there was a risk that some of these savings might not be achieved or achieved in full. There was a higher risk that some might not be achieved, as they relied on transferring costs to other bodies or making savings in services to be provided. A risk management process is in place across the project and evidence was provided that these risks were being managed.

It is noted that the contract with the Local Education Partnership will be based upon a guaranteed lump sum, which means that there will be no additional costs to the Council after it is signed, unless the Council makes changes to its requirements.

### **4.3 Where will the money come from?**

The money to build the Aquatic Centre would come from borrowing by Luton Borough Council. The loan (capital and interest) would then be repaid from income received from London Luton Airport.

According to the evidence obtained from the Head of Corporate Finance, a significant drop in this income, which is dependent on passenger throughput, together with major increases in interest rates could have financial implications for the Council. Although not anticipated, in the event of this happening, he believes this should not affect the Aquatic Centre project in the short term. One of the reasons is that the Centre will have first call on all airport income. This evidence was confirmed by the Executive Leader of the

Council. There could, however, be serious implications for other projects and grants which are funded with income from the Airport.

#### **4.4 How much will it cost to run it?**

The operational cost of running the Aquatic Centre will, in the main, be the responsibility of The Leisure Trust. Facilities management will become the responsibility of a separate Facilities Management company, yet to be appointed by the Local Education Partnership.

Evidence from the Commissioning Manager (Housing & Community Living), the Project Manager and The Leisure Trust business plan, indicates that the running costs for the Centre should be similar to the costs of the current facilities, although no figures have been provided to substantiate this.

Evidence from the Leisure Trust also suggests that the centre would take over two years to generate a surplus, and this does not take account of the effect on income due to essential maintenance, which could be every 2 years for about 1 month.

The Leisure Trust assumptions, which were reviewed, are more than 6 months old and no up-to-date business plan was available. In particular, concern is expressed about the drop out rate of people using current facilities. This was last indicated by the Leisure Trust to be 7-8%, which was being managed through increases in sale promotions.

#### **4.5 What are the current running costs?**

No information on the running costs of current facilities at the Luton Regional Sport Centre, Wardown and Putteridge has been provided.

#### **4.6 What saving will be made by disposing of the three existing facilities?**

No saving is expected from the Wardown site, as it is listed as a potential location for primary school expansion and will not be disposed of.

No saving is expected from the Luton Regional Sport Centre site, as it is expected to be returned to common land, to partly offset the use of green belt land to build the Aquatic Centre.

Whether there will be any savings from Putteridge is unclear, as it is part of the Building Schools for the Future Phase III programme, which is now at risk due to cuts in public sector funding.

#### **4.7 Financial Risks**

Evidence on financial risks to the projects were mainly provided by the Head of Corporate Finance as follows:

- Luton London Airport Income

A significant reduction in passenger throughput could cut the income from the Airport.

- Interest Rates

Major increases in interest rates could have financial implications for the Council, as the capital cost of building the Centre is being financed through borrowing.

- The Leisure Trust Business Case

There could be a risk to revenue generation at the Centre, if The Leisure Trust assumptions on drop out rate is inaccurate, and/ or it continues to increase, causing user numbers to drop.

- Facilities Management

Although it is intimated that Facilities Management is likely to be cost neutral, in the absence of any clear idea of costs, this could be a risk if the costs are higher than anticipated.

#### **4.8 Opportunities for the local economy**

Evidence from Team Luton (Swimming) suggests that the Aquatic Centre has the potential to be of major economic benefit to Luton, particularly when hosting major swimming competitions. This is based on experience elsewhere, with local hotels, restaurants, etc... increasing business.

To what extent Luton would realise similar economic benefits from the Aquatic Centre is unclear, as an economic impact assessment has not been carried.

## Chapter 5 – Will the project help meet local priorities?

Evidence for this chapter was taken from representatives of Team Luton (swimming), the Disability Policy and Access Officer, professional witnesses from the project team, the Director of Public Health, the Executive Leader of the Council, and drawn from relevant documents, such as the feasibility study, the outline business case, the options appraisal, and various strategic plans/ reports.

### 5.1 Will it achieve its aims?

A feasibility study report produced in November 2008 by the Luton Borough Council's Building School for the Future project team addressed the project's strategic context as follows:

- The need to address Luton's health and obesity problems, especially in the young, and to improve life expectancy;
- The need to provide better quality facilities to improve participation in sports and active recreation;
- The need to deliver a sustainable building that will meet the Council's commitments on climate change.

These strategic drivers were expanded in the outline business case produced by the project team in April 2009. It recognised that the project was born out of twin requirements, that is, the need to replace Luton's existing main pool at Wardown, and the need to address the worsening health issues in Luton caused by low levels of activity and increasing levels of obesity. The business case also recognised the need to tackle the town's health inequalities in order to make improvements in life expectancy and the quality of life of residents, particularly in their later years; and identified the opportunity for the project to re-energise the town by providing new infrastructure.

An Options Appraisal produced in 2009 by the project team confirmed that the original Council strategic review had identified the need to deliver *"a community sports centre with international swimming and diving facilities that is economically and environmentally sustainable in the long term....(which).... needs to be accessible to all the communities of Luton and provide a landmark building for the town"*.

Planning application submitted to the Council's Development Control Committee in 31 March 2010, stated that the 50m main pool will meet competition standards laid down by the international governing body and the Amateur Swimming Association. However, the Group heard evidence from Team Luton (swimming), that, because the new facility will not have a 10-lane pool, it would not be able to mount international competitions; but that it would be able to provide a focus for county and regional events.

The Group has identified those of Luton's corporate plans and objectives to which the Aquatic Centre would be expected to contribute in terms of improving performance as follows:

- The Sustainable Community Strategy;
- The Council's Corporate Plan;
- The Local Area Agreement;
- Luton's Children and Young People's Plan;

- The Council/ NHS Annual Public Health Report;
- The NHS Strategic Plan; and
- The Council's Single Equalities Scheme.

One of the aims of the NHS Partnership Strategy to Reduce Health Inequalities, 2010-2026, which has been endorsed by the Council's Executive, is to *"narrow the gap in life expectancy between areas in Luton with the worst health outcomes and areas with the best health outcomes in the context of increasing the overall life expectancy of the local population"*.

The outline business case, to add weight to the argument for the new Aquatic Centre, highlighted the Sport England's Active People Survey, last carried between October 2007 and October 2008, to identify how participation in sport and active recreation varies between places and between different groups in the population. The survey results show that the very low levels of participation in sport in Luton (the worst in the Eastern region) are a major cause for concern as they are likely to lead to significant levels of long-term health problems and obesity.

In the context of seeking to reduce health inequalities and improve life expectancy rates, neither a health impact assessment nor a health equality audit had yet been carried out by the NHS or the Council to show the current baselines against which the establishment of the Aquatic Centre could be measured. The joint NHS/ Council Director of Public Health advised that although there was certainly the potential for the Centre to improve performance against the Local Area Agreement targets, this depended on a number of issues, including the range of activities offered by the facility, the Council's success in encouraging more people to participate in those activities (including those hard-to-reach groups in the community), and on how accessible the Centre would be for those perceived as having the most need to take up sporting activities and thereby improve their health.

## **5.2 A sustainable facility?**

Luton's Sustainable Community Strategy has confirmed that the Council and its partners will *"ensure best practice sustainable design and construction is undertaken to reduce consumption and protect resources for current and future residents"*. The Council's Corporate Plan has identified, as one of its five priorities, environment and economic development, with a specific focus on *"successfully adapting and mitigating for climate change; protecting and enhancing the natural and built environment...; and reducing the consumption of water, energy, materials and minimising waste, including support for renewable energy generation"*.

The Aquatic Centre Project Team stated in the 2009 outline business case, that the Local Education Partnership would be expected to meet the Council's requirements for sustainability set out in its *"Statement of principles for embracing the Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change"*. The outline business case also confirmed that the Council would be seeking a minimum 'Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method' rating of 'Very Good' for the new facility.

S & P, the architects for the facility, advised that they proposed to use their own rating to ensure a robust technical standard was met, and that best environmental practice was incorporated into the design for the Aquatic Centre.

### **5.3 Equalities issues met?**

Luton Council has committed itself to a Single Equality Scheme, which replaces separate race, disability and gender schemes, and which covers Luton's public sector duties under existing and anticipated legislation – covering all strands of equality.

During evidence, the Council's Disability Policy and Access Officer reminded the Group of the need to ensure that the design of the Aquatic Centre complies with the requirements of the equalities legislation, and also that appropriate consultation was carried out with those in the community most affected. He confirmed that he would be willing to discuss issues relating to disability and access with the design team. Evidence from the project manager suggests that the Architect has taken account of disability and access, in line with the Sport England Design Guidance Note.



## **Chapter 6 – Who have we asked about it?**

Evidence for this section was taken from members of the public, representatives of sports/ swimming clubs, the project manager, the Consultation and Engagement Manager, drawn from a town-wide survey and from relevant documents, e.g. the statement of community engagement.

### **6.1 Who have we asked previously?**

There have been substantial public consultations about the provision of a new swimming and sports facility in Luton going back to 2000.

In February 2009 there was a survey of local residents on the general issues about using Stopsley as a venue. In December 2009 public exhibitions were held across the borough and 84 questionnaires returned. Meetings were also held with key stakeholders including sports groups. This feedback is summarised in the Statement of Community Involvement.

It should be noted that the choice of location at Stopsley compared with other locations within the borough has not been consulted upon and is outside the scope of this Task and Finish Group.

### **6.2 Who have we asked now?**

The Task and Finish Group considered that extensive consultation had taken place with local residents in Stopsley and also with sports and interest groups.

However the Group considered there was a still a need to do more to hear the views of residents living across the borough and people who did not belong to a sports club. The Group felt that most people who use swimming pools are “casual users”.

A press release led to a radio broadcast and a radio interview with the Chair of the Task and Finish Group. There were also two articles in local newspapers and responses from 10 people.

An opportunity also arose to include questions about the aquatic centre as part of a random telephone survey of 500 residents across the borough. This survey was the economic development strategy and joining up in this way provided a cost-effective consultation mechanism.

### **6.3 What views were received?**

The main findings of the survey relating to the aquatic centre are:

- Awareness of proposals

48% of residents were aware of the proposals for the new centre, 52% were not.

- Participation in sport and exercise

A question was asked about participation in sport and exercise – 30 minutes or more at a moderate intensity. This was broader than the question asked in the Sports England Active People survey.

18% of those interviewed swam at least once a week (10% once a week, 3% twice a week and 5% three or more times a week).

- Reasons for non participation in sport or exercise

The respondents who stated they never participated in any sport or exercise were asked why. The main reasons given for non-participation were time (33%), health reasons (31%) and no interest in doing so (21%).

- Existing swimming pools

Respondents who participate in swimming were asked which swimming pool they currently use. The most popular were Wardown (21%), Putteridge (15%), Lewsey (11%). 53% of people mentioned they used other pools – these could be pools within private gyms or swimming facilities outside of Luton.

- Use of the new aquatic centre

In total 59% of respondents said they would use or maybe use the new centre (39% yes and 20% maybe). 38% said no.

- How often would people use the new centre amenities

Respondents who stated they would or maybe would use the aquatic centre were then asked how often they would use the various facilities the centre will provide. The most popular facilities were swimming (53% saying they would use at least once a week), the café (46%) and the fitness centre (34%).

- How people will travel to the centre

A question on main means of transport to the centre was also asked of respondents who stated they would or maybe would use the centre.

Overwhelmingly respondents would travel to the centre by car (81%), followed by walking (18%), bus (10%) and cycle (3%).

- The importance of facilities such as the new centre

Respondents were asked how important access to high quality recreation facilities such as the aquatic centre were to them. 83% of people felt it was important to their sense of wellbeing, and to keeping active; 72% to their health.

## **Chapter 7 – Conclusions**

### **7.1 What facilities are being provided?**

It is clear that the Luton Aquatic Centre, providing a national competition standard 50 metre swimming pool, with integrated International diving facilities and a dry training centre for swimmers and divers, represent a substantial and much needed improvement to the facilities available in Luton. Its sports halls, fitness centre and other indoor and outdoor provisions represent an updating of current facilities.

There will, however, also be some reduction and loss of facilities currently available. In particular, Squash will be lost, with provision expected to be provided at Lewsey Squash Centre. The number of badminton courts will be reduced from 15 to 8, with provisions expected to be supplemented by 26 courts in six school sports halls, as part of the Building Schools for the Future programme. It is essential that these school sports facilities are made available for wider community use out of school hours, during school holidays and at other times when schools are not actually using them.

The Chair of Luton Sports Network told the review of their enthusiasm for the proposed swimming and diving facilities and their concerns at the loss of sports halls. Representatives from Team Luton swimming clubs also informed the review of their support and high expectations of the new swimming facilities. From their experience of organising competitions elsewhere, they were very positive about the benefits to the local economy of having a competition standard pool in Luton.

The consultations have identified that the café provision is an important social facility. However, the loss of the bar at Luton Regional Sports Centre is a cause for dissatisfaction to those who use it regularly. The café will be licensed, as will be the multi-function room, which will have a full bar, although this will not always be available.

Overall the review group is satisfied that the Aquatic Centre has great potential to help increase participation in physical exercise, sports and active recreation and consequently in Luton people's fitness.

### **7.2 What will be the impact on access and travel to the Centre?**

The new traffic lights controlled junction layout at Hitchin Road/ Butterfield Green Road/ Cannon Lane and pedestrian-controlled crossing over Hitchin Road are much-welcomed improvements, essential to ease congestion at the site, minimise any impact on mourners attending The Vale and improve road safety.

The assessment of traffic flows on Stockingstone Road at peak times, shows that it is operating at 74% of its ideal capacity. It also shows that any increase in traffic resulting from the Aquatic centre is unlikely to be significant, at no more than about 3%. The town-wide survey indicates that 81% of those who expect to make use of the Centre, would attend by car. The assessment does not reflect reality, and is contrary to local people's views and some of their own personal experiences of regularly using that road.

Arriva Buses believe they have enough spare capacity to cope within current service level. This is supported by the town-wide survey, which indicates only 10% of those who said they would use the centre would travel by bus. They also state that any extension beyond current operating hours would not be commercially viable, but would be provided if funded by the Council.

Parking facilities at the Aquatic Centre are likely to be adequate for their normal day-to-day use, but could be a problem if large special events clashed with other special events/ceremonies at the Vale. Evidence from The Vale Superintendent suggests that large events at the cemetery often lead to overflow car parking into adjoining areas, causing inconvenience to residents. It is evident that large special events at the Centre should be planned and managed robustly as part of an Event Management Strategy, to avoid clashes with other special events at The Vale and to minimise any adverse impact on local residents by inconsiderate parking.

### **7.3 How much will it cost?**

At a fixed £26 millions cost, the Luton Aquatic Centre appears to be good value for money at mid range, compared with the benchmark for similar projects.

The estimated cost of the Centre has increased since the feasibility study, but additional facilities are being provided (function room and larger sports hall). The Local Education Partnership's cost plan indicates that it can be built within budget, but assumes that a significant amount of savings will be achieved through the next stage of design. No single item is large enough to have a serious impact on the viability of the project but if a number of the larger savings are not realised, the impact could be significant. This risk has been recognised and is being managed by the project team. A few of the savings will impact on the flexibility of some of the facilities and the extent of this impact is not clear at the moment.

Reliance on income from London Luton Airport to fund the project carries some risks, which are linked to a large reduction in this income, as well as increases in interest rates. However, it considers these risks to be acceptable, as the evidence from the Head of Corporate Finance, backed by the Executive Leader of the Council, confirmed that the Centre will have first call on all airport income, so that if the worse happens, the impact on the Aquatic Centre project should be minimal, particularly in the short term.

In terms of revenue generation by The Leisure Trust, stopping and reversing the 7-8% drop out rate of people using current facilities is crucial to keep user numbers up now and in the new Centre.

Anecdotal evidence given by Team Luton (swimming), that the Aquatic Centre has the potential to generate economic benefits for Luton, particularly through planned major regional events. However, an Economic Impact Assessment is required to establish the exact situation.

The Executive Leader of the Council advised that the decision of the Labour administration to make the provision of this facility its priority capital project, with first call on all airport income, was based upon the need to provide credibility after too many false starts by previous administrations.

As airport income to the Council is dependent upon passenger numbers and can, therefore, fluctuate, neither the Executive Leader of the Council nor the Head of Capital and Asset Management were able to say what the consequence would be for the many other projects which are funded through the income from the Airport. It is clear that should airport income fall, or the capital cost of this project rise, there will be serious consequences for other projects and for grants, which are provided through the airport.

The Head of Corporate Finance confirmed that a Council decision to change the rules for raising finance had been an essential prerequisite to obtaining the necessary finance.

With regards to continuing revenue funding, it is proposed that the running costs of the new facility will not exceed the combined running costs of the Wardown pool, Regional Sports Centre and Putteridge pool. We have received no evidence to support this aspiration.

The substantial backlog maintenance costs associated with the existing facilities will all disappear when the new facility is operating.

#### **7.4 Will the project help meet local priorities?**

It remains to be seen to what extent the creation of the new Aquatic Centre at Stopsley will aid the achievement of targets in the various plans and objectives to which the Council and its partners are signed up. Those plans and objectives have to include clear and transparent measures of success by which the performance of the centre could be judged, preferably by means of a formal post-project evaluation carried out by or on behalf of the Overview and Scrutiny Board.

As part of this evaluation, two significant areas will need to be examined. First, is the Sport England's Active People Survey results which show that the very low levels of participation in sport in Luton, the worst in the Eastern region, are likely to lead to significant levels of long-term health problems and obesity. The second area for future examination is the Council's Place Survey, used to measure progress against several Local Area Agreement targets. The most recent (2008) survey shows a very low level of satisfaction with sports and leisure facilities in Luton, and suggests that this is driving low levels of usage.

As the outline business case in 2009 recognised, the low level of satisfaction with sports provision and facilities in Luton is, at least in part, the cause of worsening levels of participation – and this in turn is likely to lead to continuing health problems, obesity and poor life expectancy rates for Luton's residents. There will need to be a careful analysis of future surveys, similar to those conducted in 2007/8, once the Aquatic Centre is up and running to determine what effect the new facility is having on participation and satisfaction levels.

The final business case must address the issue of Aquatic Centre sustainability – in particular, whether the project fully meets the Council's commitment to the Nottingham Declaration; and a full Equalities Impact Assessment must be produced as part of the final business case, with confirmation that the Council's duties across all strands of equality are being met.

Before the creation and operation of the Aquatic Centre can be judged a success, the performance indicators in the various corporate plans and objectives to which the Council and its partners are committed will need to show positive improvements. The Overview and Scrutiny Board will therefore need to ensure that it is equipped to carry out effective performance measurement: the success or otherwise of the Aquatic Centre in contributing to the achievement of Luton's corporate objectives cannot be claimed unless and until improved performance against the various targets is both visible and measurable.

## **7.5 Who have we asked about it?**

The demographically balanced telephone survey of 500 Luton residents revealed that almost half of them did not know about the proposed Centre and 40% would not visit it when it opened. Much more work will have to be undertaken to promote the Centre and to encourage Luton residents to support it. The health and fitness objectives of the town will not be achieved if only the users of existing facilities transfer to the new Centre.

The relationship between the Council and the Primary Care trust must be exploited fully to ensure that the appropriate incentives are provided to encourage much greater participation. In particular, the young must have the opportunity to participate, both through schools and with their families.

There must be a strong emphasis for the operators of the Centre to raise the profile of sport and swimming, and with it, the expectations for Luton residents.

It is disappointing that the Council's Disability and Access Officer has not been consulted at all prior to this Overview and Scrutiny review. However, it is noted from the evidence from the Project Manager that the design complies with Sport England, Design Guidance Note.

## Chapter 8 – Recommendations

The recommendations of the Aquatic Centre Scrutiny Task & Finish Group to the Executive and the Overview and Scrutiny Board are as follows:

1. To make up for some of the reduction in facilities, that school sports facilities provided by the Building Schools for the Future programme are made available for wider community use out of school hours, during school holidays and at other times when schools are not actually using them.
2. That the multi-function room at the new Centre is provided with full bar facilities.
3. That appropriate action is taken by the Council to address congestion on Stockingstone Road, ahead of the opening of the Aquatic Centre, which is likely to exacerbate the situation, given that the town-wide survey indicates that 81% of those who expect to make use of the Centre, would travel by car.
4. That the Leisure Trust develop and adopt a comprehensive Event Management Strategy for the Aquatic Centre, to ensure large special events at the Centre are planned and managed robustly to avoid clashes with other special events at the Vale Cemetery and Crematorium, and minimise any adverse impact on local residents by inconsiderate parking.
5. That the measures to cut costs to keep the Aquatic Centre project within budget, are reviewed by Executive and the Overview and Scrutiny Finance Review Group on a regular basis through the course of the project, in terms of the impact on the facilities, accessibility and revenue costs of the Centre.
6. That the Leisure Trust implement robust actions to stop and reverse the drop out rate of people using current facilities, to keep user numbers up now, who would then be likely to transfer to the Aquatic Centre.
7. That an Economic Impact Assessment is carried out relating to the potential economic benefits for Luton, of planned major regional events at the Aquatic Centre.
8. That the Aquatic Centre project team ensure the running costs of the new facility will not exceed the combined running costs of the Wardown pool, Regional Sports Centre and Putteridge pool.
9. That plans and objectives include clear and transparent measures of success by which the performance of the Aquatic Centre could be judged, preferably by means of a formal post-project evaluation carried out by or on behalf of the Overview and Scrutiny Board.
- (10) That promotion of the new Aquatic Centre is as high profiled as possible so as to raise Luton people's satisfaction with sports and leisure facilities in Luton and increase usage levels.
11. That a survey, similar to the Sport England Active People survey is carried out in due course following the opening of the Aquatic Centre, to determine what effect the new facility is having on participation and satisfaction levels.
12. That the final business case for the Aquatic Centre address the issue of sustainability – in particular, whether the project fully meets the Council's commitment to the Nottingham Declaration on climate change.

13. That a full Equalities Impact Assessment is produced as part of the final business case, with confirmation that the Council's duties across all strands of equality are being met.

14. That the Overview and Scrutiny Board ensure it is equipped to carry out effective performance measurement relating to the success or otherwise of the Aquatic Centre, in contributing to the achievement of relevant Luton's priorities and objectives.

15. That the relationship between the Council and NHS Luton is exploited fully to ensure that the appropriate incentives are provided to encourage much greater participation, by adults and the young, both through schools and with their families.

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### **Membership of the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group**

- Councillor Jacqueline Burnett
- Councillor Jenny Davies
- Councillor Khtija Malik
- Councillor Barry Neale
- Councillor Sid Rutstein (Chair)

### **Acknowledgements**

The Chair and Members of the Aquatic Centre Scrutiny Task and Finish Group would like to thank members of the public and all witnesses and officers, who have made an invaluable contribution to the success of this review. They also thank Corby Borough Council, who hosted their visit to the Corby International Swimming Pool.

### **References**

The Scrutiny Task and Finish Group made reference to numerous relevant project documents and reports mentioned throughout the text of this report. Those documents, except for cost plans considered in private, are available for viewing through the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Team – Telephone number: 01582 546781 or e-mail: [bert.siong@luton.gov.uk](mailto:bert.siong@luton.gov.uk).