

Spelthorne Leisure Centre Public Consultation FAQs

ABOUT THE CONSULTATION

The first stage of the consultation on a potential new Spelthorne Leisure Centre ended on 23 July. We have been very encouraged by the level of response and have received a large volume of questionnaires commenting on all aspects of the proposals, including the mix of facilities and location.

It will now take some time to analyse all the feedback we have received, and due consideration will be given to all responses before deciding on our next steps. There will be further consultation in the autumn.

The following FAQs have been developed to respond to some of the issues raised during the consultation:

Why do we need a new leisure centre?

The leisure requirements of the borough's residents have changed significantly since the current Spelthorne Leisure Centre was built. The current centre cannot cater for those needs and is nearing its 'use-by' date, with condition surveys indicating that a considerable investment would be needed to extend its life much beyond 2021. We are committed to providing leisure facilities to improve the health and wellbeing of our residents. We believe that people should be able to use the facilities they desire, inside their own borough. Therefore, we must take steps to improve the range and quality of facilities provided by our leisure centre to meet current and future requirements.

In undertaking this project, we are seeking to provide a financially viable and future proofed facility mix which will encourage a wide range of people to participate in a number of leisure activities well into the future. Our specialist leisure advisors have identified a core mix of facilities which meet the needs of our community whilst generating sufficient income to help pay for the new centre. We also included a range of possible additional facilities which may be considered depending on the results of the consultation exercise.

Do we actually have a say in this, or has the leisure centre been decided on?

During the consultation period, we wanted to get as much feedback as possible and welcomed comments on every aspect of the proposal, including the location. Now the consultation has ended, all feedback will be fully considered in order to help us decide how to proceed. It is not a 'done deal'. However, we do think it will be an asset that will benefit our community. We are keen to provide the best possible facilities to our residents. No decisions have been made.

Will the questionnaire results be made public?

Yes. The analysis of the questionnaire would form part of the Statement of Community Involvement, which is necessary as part of any planning application. Once anonymised, in adherence with data protection laws, this information would be open to the public. No personal details will be released.

Did I need to send you a letter to comment on your proposals or was an email sufficient?

The first consultation has now closed. Email responses will carry just as much weight as any letters we received. Any comments made in emails will be fully considered when we review the responses to this consultation.

SELECTION OF SITE

What alternatives have you considered?

We looked at a range of other options including refurbishment of the existing centre and building a new centre on the current site.

Refurbishment of the existing centre

An initial evaluation established that refurbishing the current centre was not feasible for a number of reasons:

The age of the structure does not lend itself to refurbishment. The site began as a swimming pool in the 1960s and was extended to form a leisure centre in the 1980s. The existing centre is therefore nearing its 'use-by' date and condition surveys have indicated that a considerable investment would be needed to extend its life much beyond 2021. This would not be prudent use of public funds.

The current centre is of a poor design by today's standards, in terms of layout and flexibility of space, and is not big enough to provide the additional range of facilities now needed to meet current and future customer leisure requirements. A refurbished centre would be proportionately more expensive than a new-build centre, with a more limited lifespan of 15-20 years (around half that of a new build centre) and lower energy efficiency.

Refurbishment would require the centre to be closed for up to 18 months, which would have a significant effect on members and other users of the centre. To put this into context, in 2017 the Spelthorne Leisure Centre had over 579,000 visits. The centre has over 3,100 fitness members; over 1,900+ children are registered on the centre's 'learn to swim' scheme and 10 schools use the centre for swimming lessons. The centre is used for school sports festivals, including indoor athletics, indoor football and swimming galas. The Council also uses the centre for other important functions, such as elections and as a rest centre in emergencies. Although there are other facilities available in and around the borough, it is unlikely that they would be able to cater for all these needs. In particular, there are limited alternative facilities in the borough to cover the demand for swimming.

By closing for such a long period, the centre would likely lose many of its regular customers to rival centres. This could significantly affect the revenue the Council would receive to help cover the costs of a new centre, and the financial viability of the project as a whole.

Rebuilding on the current site

Building a new leisure centre on the existing site would result in similar problems to the refurbishment option. The site is not big enough for the new facilities needed; and rebuilding would have significant effects on members and other users of the existing centre. The centre would have to close for even longer, due to the need to demolish the old facility and clear the site.

It was therefore concluded that the best option would be to identify an alternative site to build a new centre, and to keep the existing centre open until the new one is complete.

Finding a new site

In assessing options for a new site for a leisure centre the Council was looking for a location which met a number of criteria:

- i. **The site must be owned by the Council –**
The costs of building a new leisure centre would be significant. The cost of acquiring land to build such a centre would considerably add to those costs and be likely to make the project unviable. It was therefore essential to focus on land already owned by the Council.
- ii. **The site should not be in the Green Belt –**
Although Spelthorne is currently undertaking a review its Local Plan, the Council has historically been committed to protecting the Green Belt where possible, a goal which is outlined in our current Corporate Plan. Any potential sites for a new leisure centre within the Green Belt were therefore eliminated from any further consideration.
- iii. **The site needs to be large enough to accommodate all the facilities required in the new centre –**
Leisure needs have changed significantly since the existing centre was built. We would therefore be looking to design a facility which meets current and future needs as best we can. This would require a larger footprint than the current site, with sufficient scope to incorporate all the facilities needed.
- iv. **The site must be easily accessible by a large number of the borough's residents –**
Having eliminated any sites which did not meet the above criteria, we then needed to consider how accessible the site would be for people wishing to use the centre, in terms of access on-foot, by car and public transport options.
- v. **The site should be developable within other planning and environmental constraints –**
We also needed to consider whether there were any other planning and environmental constraints which would prevent us from developing the site. This includes considering the possible effects on neighbouring properties.

Which other sites were considered?

A number of Council-owned sites (including some of our other parks) were assessed and ruled out as they did not meet one or more of the above criteria. Many of the other sites owned by the Council were too small for such a development. A site between the Council Offices and the existing Leisure Centre was considered as an alternative for a new centre. Following further analysis it was established that this too was not big enough to incorporate the facilities required. The site currently proposed was identified as the most viable because it meets all of the above criteria and is already used for recreational purposes.

Now that the consultation has closed, the responses will be analysed and a report on the findings will be produced ready for a further consultation in the autumn. No decisions have been taken. Our aim has always been to provide the best possible leisure facilities for the borough's residents.

Couldn't you build a new centre on the Oast House site, in Kingston Road?

The Oast House is a listed building owned by Surrey County Council, not Spelthorne Borough Council. The site is smaller than the current leisure centre site so could not incorporate the range of facilities needed and the cost of acquiring the site would most likely make any new leisure centre development unviable.

You seem to have done a lot of work already. Is this a 'done deal'?

A lot of work has gone into researching options for a new leisure centre including identifying the proposed site as the most suitable location. In order to come to that conclusion, we had to undertake a range of preliminary work to assess the suitability of the site. For example, both ground and tree conditions were investigated. A detailed leisure needs analysis and feasibility study were undertaken to establish which sports facilities are needed in the borough, and to assess the viability of various options for the new centre.

These studies do not mean that our plans are fixed or that we have undertaken any design work on a new centre. The reason we have consulted Spelthorne's residents at this early stage is to ensure that we get their views before we commit to any such work. There is no 'done deal'.

You've shown some design examples – who paid for these and does that mean that you've already developed your plans?

The design examples provided in the consultation exercise are images selected from a wide range of existing leisure centres developed elsewhere. At this stage we have not undertaken any design work. We were merely presenting these images so that people could express opinions about their preferred style which could then be used to guide an architect in the creation of design options.

How much is a new leisure centre going to cost?

The feasibility study included estimated costs for building a new leisure centre. However, as we are still analysing consultation responses about the facilities people would like to see in the new centre, we cannot be certain what the final costs would be at this stage. When we do know, we will be as transparent as we can about this, subject to rules around commercial sensitivity.

If you don't know the cost of the new centre how do you know that it is more cost effective than refurbishing the existing centre?

Evidence from our own studies together with information relating to other leisure centre developments indicates that refurbishing the leisure centre would not be cost effective when you take into account the cost of works and the lifespan of a refurbished centre. The refurbished centre would only have a lifespan of around 15-20 years, whereas a new build centre would last around 40 years. A refurbished facility would also not be able to meet current or future leisure needs in the borough and would not be as energy efficient.

IMPACT ON OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

What consideration has been given to the loss of the park and urban open space?

If our proposals were to go ahead, with the leisure centre located at the northern end of the park, we would intend to retain and enhance a large part of the public open space within the park. Even if the leisure centre and sports pitches are built as outlined in the consultation, there would still be 3.08 hectares of freely accessible green space in Staines Park. To put this into context, the freely accessible green space in Lammas Park is 3.33 hectares.

Staines Park is not designated as green belt in the Spelthorne Local Plan, but it is Protected Urban Open Space (which is a local designation). Policies around Green Belt are far more stringent, and state that development will not be permitted unless it is for one of five appropriate uses, which all look to preserve the openness of the Green Belt. The Local Plan recognises that open space and recreation have an important part to play in the wellbeing and quality of life of people. Policies look to provide, maintain and improve areas of Protected Urban Open Space, and to retain those areas where it's needed for sport or recreation. Policy EN4 does recognise that development on part of a site may be acceptable where the remainder of the site is enhanced in visual and functional terms. Any proposal would need to be assessed by the Local Planning Authority against EN4 and a whole range of other policies in the Local Plan.

Are you aware of the 'Parks Charter' launched on 21 June 2018?

We acknowledge and welcome the Charter for Parks which was recently launched by a coalition lobbying Central Government regarding the nation's green spaces. We invest significant resources to protect and maintain the borough's open spaces and continue to win national awards for some of our parks such as the Green Flag and South East in Bloom. However, we do have to strike a balance by ensuring that there is both green space for the public to enjoy and other amenities for our residents to use, in order to enhance their health and well-being. If our proposals for a leisure centre on the northern end of the site were to go ahead, the new facilities would deliver this with significant open space still available for park users.

What about the seating areas?

We understand that a number of people value the quiet areas at the northern end of the park, used by people for walking and sitting, and would ensure that these are relocated with associated landscaping.

Can the tennis and basketball courts be kept? What about other free facilities?

A large area of the park would still be available as freely accessible green space, where people could play football and other games. Although the tennis and basketball courts would be affected by the current proposals, we would be looking to provide some free sports facilities on the site. We are aware of how popular the basketball facility is and would be looking to replace this facility locally if the proposals go ahead. In terms of tennis, the Leisure Needs Assessment showed that there is adequate provision of tennis courts in the borough to meet current and future demand. At the time of the assessment in 2017 there were 0.39 courts per 1000 population in Spelthorne. This is higher than both the national (0.22 courts per 1000) and the regional (0.35 courts per 1000) averages. The removal of the three courts at Staines Park would still provide 0.36 courts per 1000 population in the borough. There are three free-to-use tennis courts at Lammas Park and other courts at Fordbridge Park.

What will happen to Staines Bowling Club?

The Council is currently in discussion with the Bowling Club regarding possible alternative locations. At this stage the Club have not been given formal notice to vacate the site.

Will Knowle Green day nursery be affected?

No, this is not part of the proposals. We are, however, engaging with the nursery to ensure that they understand our overall plans.

Will the Scout hut be affected?

No, this is not part of the proposals. We are, however, engaging with 6th Staines Scouts to ensure that they understand our overall plans.

Will the adjacent NHS Centre be affected?

The NHS health centre is an important neighbour and stakeholder. Our proposals do not affect these facilities in any way.

Is the model engineers' society affected?

No, it is a significant distance from the proposed location. The Resource Centre, children's play area and allotments are also not affected by our proposals.

What will happen to the footpaths? Will we lose access points to the park?

We know how important the pedestrian routes across the park are for the local community. Much of the park would remain as public, open space with footpaths and pedestrian access retained or enhanced. For example, we would ensure that local schools, routes to the railway station and the town centre can still be freely accessed through the park. As the space would become managed during opening hours, it would benefit from greater security and cleanliness.

How will people be able to get across the park during construction if the proposals go ahead?

Safe routes would be maintained by securely hoarding off the areas under construction. It is our intention to maintain routes across the park that provide access to the school, town centre and train station. The construction works would not affect the operational activities of adjoining properties.

Will users of the centre park in my road?

The current leisure centre has insufficient parking to meet present-day needs. The new centre would have a much larger car park which would enable users to park on-site rather than parking in any neighbouring roads.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

Has an environmental impact assessment been done?

No, it is highly unlikely that one would be required. However, before any design work started we would consult with Planners.

Will a new leisure centre increase noise levels?

We would ensure that the centre is designed to minimise noise pollution and the effects on nearby properties.

Will a new leisure centre cause an increase in traffic?

Enhanced facilities could result in a little more traffic, although because of its central location, close to good public transport links, this should be minimal. We would be working to ensure it does not affect residents in adjacent residential roads and does not impede access by emergency services. The Highways Authority would be consulted as part of any planning application and a traffic assessment would be undertaken. As with the current leisure centre, vehicle access would only be from Knowle Green. We have no intention of creating a through-road to Gresham Road, as some people have suggested.

What proportion of current users travel by public transport?

The existing leisure centre is operated by Everyone Active, not by Spelthorne Borough Council. Therefore, we do not keep such data. The last survey they undertook in 2013 indicated that a high proportion of users travelled by car. Although the majority of current users may still use the car to get to the centre, it is important to ensure that any future centre continues to offer the opportunity of modal shift, enabling people to travel by bus, train, cycling and on-foot should they wish.

Will this project increase levels of air pollution?

The small increase in traffic which could result from a new leisure centre would not have a significant effect on air quality in the area. Whilst refurbishment of the existing leisure centre limits our ability to improve energy efficiency, a new building would allow us to maximise opportunities. A new building can be designed to be thermally efficient, using sustainable materials and technology that enables the building to significantly lower its carbon footprint below that of the existing centre. Vehicle charging points would also be installed to deal with the anticipated increase in electric vehicle usage.

Sweeps Ditch is important for biodiversity. What will happen to Sweeps Ditch?

Ecological surveys would be a part of the application. The intention is to retain and enhance its biodiversity and the habitat's qualities.

Will the new leisure centre pose a flood risk?

Any new buildings constructed on Staines Park would be designed to reduce the risks of flooding. This should result in an improvement for the wider area. A flood risk assessment would be submitted as part of any planning application.

Will trees be cut down?

If our proposals for a leisure centre at the northern end of the site were to go ahead, trees would form an important part of the design and any loss of trees during construction would be limited as much as possible. Replacement planting would ensure no net loss of trees. Our objective would be to retain as many trees as possible, particularly around the perimeter of the site, so that views into the site are filtered and the park setting is respected. This would enhance the proposed development as well as the street scene.

What about the effects on wildlife?

We are undertaking a range of wildlife and ecological surveys which would form a part of any planning application. The intention is to retain and enhance the biodiversity and both the quality and availability of habitats for wildlife across the site as a whole.

MIX OF LEISURE FACILITIES

Does the proposed facilities mix meet future demands? How can you predict what's needed in 40 years?

That is certainly our aspiration. Feedback on the consultation would help ensure this. Although we cannot accurately predict how leisure needs will change over the next 40 years, our aim would be to build flexible spaces that are easily adapted to meet any future leisure trends. These flexible spaces can also be used for a variety of different sports which ensures the community can get optimal usage. The design of the current centre does not offer this flexibility.

Will there be squash facilities, if so will they be an improvement on the existing ones in terms of quality and number of courts?

The mix of facilities is something that is part of the consultation.

What provisions would be made to improve accessibility?

The Council is determined to improve the accessibility of leisure facilities locally and to make any new centre as inclusive as possible. We have already spoken with some local groups and are aware of some of the limitations of the current centre. We would however be very keen to hear from individuals and/or groups including those with disabilities and long-term health conditions about their ideas on how to make the new centre more welcoming, user friendly and accessible for people of all ages.

Why do we need more 3G pitches (all weather) when there are other pitches available in the borough?

The Football Association have a target that 50% of all mini and youth football matches will be played on 3G pitches or high-quality artificial grass pitches by 2020. They also recommend increasing publicly accessible 3G pitches by 50%. This was laid out in their report titled *The FA National Game Strategy for Participation and Development 2015-2019*. Our Playing Pitch Strategy report has identified a shortfall in supply and a strong demand for all weather pitches within our borough. This report can be found in full online (see: www.spelthorne.gov.uk/article/2415/Playing-Pitch-Strategy).

Will the 3G pitches be floodlit? What about noise?

Any pitches installed may be floodlit, so that they can be used in all seasons. We would look to locate the pitches so as to minimise any noise for nearby residents and any lighting would be designed to minimise light pollution and the effects on nearby properties. Limitations would also be placed on operating hours.

WIDER DEVELOPMENT CONCERNS

Will there be high rise buildings built on Staines Park?

No. There will be no high-rise buildings on Staines Park. If we proceed, we have no intention of building anything else on the park other than the proposed leisure centre buildings and associated pitches.

Will the Council be making a profit by selling the current leisure centre site?

This is not 'a money-making plan for the council' and there is no 'other agenda' as some people have suggested. The Council would not make a profit from developing a new leisure centre. Such facilities are expensive to build and whatever facilities mix is chosen, the construction costs for any new centre will be significantly greater than the value of the current leisure centre site. This site is not up for sale and we have no intention of selling it, as some have suggested. If the current leisure centre site is developed in the future, the Council would retain ownership.

At some point will there be new homes built on the existing leisure centre site?

This is a project focussed on developing a new leisure centre, not new housing. The existing site is, however, a brownfield site and the provision of housing is both a central and local government priority. Therefore, it is possible that this may be developed in future years.

Is it true that there are plans to build 800 homes on the site?

Absolutely not. We have no idea where that figure has come from. To put this into context, if 800 homes were to be built on the current leisure centre site it would require a tower block around 70-80 storeys high. We have no plans to build any high-rise buildings on the existing leisure centre site.

What about providing some more infrastructure?

A number of people have expressed the need for more infrastructure (e.g. schools, doctors surgeries etc.) to meet current and future housing needs. This is something which is currently being considered as part of the Council's review of the Local Plan (see <https://www.spelthorne.gov.uk/localplan>). We are beginning work on an Infrastructure Delivery Plan to set out our infrastructure needs to support growth through the Local Plan, and have already been engaging with infrastructure providers on matters such as healthcare, schools and roads. We are also working with our Leisure Team on producing an evidence base on existing playing pitches, recreation land, play space, leisure facilities and open space in the borough and what we will need to support growth in the Local Plan. The development of a new leisure centre would form part of the infrastructure to help support future leisure needs in the borough.

Will the Council building be demolished?

Absolutely not. Our Council Office will remain where it is and will not be sold.

What are the plans for Knowle Green? Will the Council Offices be converted into housing?

Knowle Green is our main Council Office. It is occupied by around 250 staff and will remain so. The Council has no plans to move away from the site. We are however consolidating the space currently occupied by staff with a view to converting part of the building for housing, or offices for occupation by other organisations.

OTHER ISSUES

Why have you removed some posters and banners?

Fly-posting is illegal and our approach to dealing with all posters and banners is outlined on the Council's website, which can be accessed via the following link:
<https://www.spelthorne.gov.uk/article/2234/Fly-posting>

NEXT STEPS

Now the first stage of consultation has ended we will be taking time to analyse all the feedback we have received. Due consideration will be given to all responses before deciding on our next steps in the autumn, when there will be a further consultation.



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