

## **Victoria Recreation Ground - Planning Brief Scope**

### **1 Contents**

- 1.1 The purpose of this document is to set out the scope for a detailed planning brief for the potential development of the Danegrove playing field for a replacement Church Farm leisure/sports facility. The report covers the following items:
- Introduction and background
  - Objectives of the development
  - The site
  - Scope of development
  - Spatial strategy
  - Planning context
  - Planning strategy

### **2 Introduction and Background**

- 2.1 The feasibility study into the future of the Council's portfolio of five leisure centres was undertaken in parallel with a broader Sport and Physical Activity Review (SPA), and is underpinned by the Council's need to:
- provide fit for purpose facilities for its residents
  - improve public health outcomes
  - deliver a service that is as close to revenue neutral as possible.
- 2.2 The feasibility study sought ultimately to establish what facilities the Council requires, where they might be located, how much they would cost to build and run (where new developments are required) and how much they would generate in revenue. The existing management contract with Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL) is due to expire in December 2017. This study provides a framework through which a procurement exercise can be undertaken for a new management operator.
- 2.2 In seeking to provide fit for purposes facilities in the future a review of the condition of the existing centres and needs assessment was undertaken which concluded that investment is needed as a priority at two centres including Church Farm. Constructed in 1960 the centre only accommodates a non-standard 19m, 3 lane swimming pool and activity hall. It is dated and generally in a very poor condition with significant and costly defects likely to become more commonplace. Critically it is accepted that the centre is nearing the end of its operational life and does not provide the facilities and services to cater for and support current and future local need.
- 2.3 The site of Church Farm itself is also not ideal as it is significantly constrained and secluded from the main road. It offers no possibility for expansion or major redevelopment and car parking very is limited which limits usage.
- 2.4 In looking at future investment opportunities therefore the feasibility study considered possible alternative sites for a replacement Church Farm facility. A site options appraisal was undertaken to establish appropriate locations based on a series of factors including catchment area, planning context, site availability, nature of location and accessibility.

2.5 The exercise identified 2 preferred locations namely Victoria Recreation Ground and Danegrove Playing Field.

### **3 Objectives of the development**

3.1 One of the Council's key aspirations concerns ensuring its leisure facility stock is fit for purpose, meets customers' expectations and supports the improvement of the health of the borough. However, associated with this, there is an imperative to deliver a service that is as close to neutral revenue cost as possible. The potential relocation of Church Farm offers a significant opportunity for an integrated sports and leisure provision locally and supports the Council's strategic objective of delivering increased participation in sport.

3.2 In proposing a new facility and securing planning permission in a different location it is critical that all relevant requirements, constraints and opportunities are considered carefully and comprehensively. The design of any new facility must cater for need and reflect the corporate objectives in relation to public health outcomes whilst respecting the nature of its location and providing appropriate mitigation as necessary.

3.3 The preparation of a planning brief for the site at Victoria Recreation Ground will provide a framework to guide the design and development of a new leisure and sports facility, ensuring that the character and amenity of the surrounding area is respected and serve as a constructive means of engaging and consulting with the local community in the process.

3.4 It should be noted that the option of Victoria Recreation Ground also requires the appropriation of land for development purposes under Section 123 2A of the Local Government Act 1972 given its status as public open space.

### **4 The Site and surroundings**

4.1 Victoria Recreation Ground is a public park occupying an area of approximately 6.5 hectares on the edge of New Barnet Town Centre, conveniently positioned only a few hundred metre from the 'high street' and station. It is bounded by established residential roads to the north, east and south and a large brownfield development site along its western boundary, formerly gasworks with railway tracks beyond.



*View across park from Victoria Road entrance*

- 4.2 A small cluster of industrial buildings and a redundant gasholder, part of the remaining operational gasworks sit adjacent the north-west corner of the grounds.
- 4.3 The wider area is suburban in nature and accommodates a number schools and community facilities in addition to other significant open spaces including Monken Hadley Common, Trent Park and Oak hill Park close-by.
- 4.5 The recreation ground is mainly grassed and contains a children's playground, football pitches, tennis and basketball courts, a bowling green with an associated pavilion and a small car. Pymmes Brook and Pymmes Brook Trail go through the park which also features matures trees and vegetation including the remains of a formal flower garden.
- 4.6 Adjoining the south western corner of the park is the East Barnet Shooting Club and Nightingdale Day Nursery, both in Council ownership.
- 4.6 Access is gained from Park Road (vehicular), Victoria Road, Lawton Road, and by a footpath and footbridge from Cromer Road.
- 4.7 Church farm leisure centre is sited just a mile and a half away to the south.

## 5 Scope of development

- 5.1 Based on a comprehensive needs assessment, the SPA feasibility study identified a preferred specification and mix of uses for a potential new Church Farm leisure centre.



*View across playground and games area*

- 5.2 Given a clear need for additional swimming and health and fitness provision in this part of the borough (particularly as a consequence of forecasted population growth), it proposes a new wet and dry centre with the following key facility mix:
- 25m, 6 lane pool
  - Learner pool with moveable floor
  - 70-75 station gym
  - 2 dance studios
  - Café.
- 5.3 In addition, given the lack of provision in the area, the study also considers inclusion of a six-court sports hall.

5.4 The planning brief will examine the nature and potential mix of uses in detail having regard to the characteristics of Victoria Recreation Ground.

## 6 Spatial Strategy

6.1 Victoria Recreation Ground presents a number of constraints and opportunities which will influence the siting, quantum, type and mix of uses that may be accommodated.

6.2 The park is in principle of a sufficient size to accommodate the preferred new build specification and offers the advantage of being an existing amenity and destination and locational benefits of being close to a district and other local centres. It is also accessible via good public transport with the potential for links to other facilities locally in terms of usage.

6.3 The park is relatively flat, open and spacious and set away or well screened from existing neighbouring residential property. The current range of facilities is generally located around the edge of the park as are most of the mature trees and natural landscaping.



6.5 In considering how any development might be sited and configured, it is important that the character, function and uses of the park are respected and enhanced, neighbouring residential amenity safeguarded and appropriate provision is made for access and car parking.

6.6 The planning brief will explore a number of development options for the site having regard to the following matters:

- Site topography and conditions
- Natural features including existing trees
- Wildlife habitat and biodiversity
- Neighbouring residential amenity
- Access, highway and parking implications
- Character and form of surrounding area
- User and service requirements
- Planning policy
- Consultation responses
- Mitigation measures



## 7 Planning context

- 7.1 Planning decisions must be made in accordance with the development plan unless there are material considerations which indicate otherwise. The development plan for Barnet is the London Plan and the Barnet Local Plan. Local planning authorities should also take account of national planning policy, which is currently set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
- 7.2 There are a number of key strategic and local planning policies set out in the London Plan and Barnet's Core Strategy and Development Management Development Plan Document (DPD) which are relevant to the potential development of this site. These concern in particular meeting the challenges of an increasing population, public health outcomes and participation in sports and leisure activities, reducing inequality and delivering high quality, sustainable design.
- 7.3 The London Plan emphasises the importance of catering for the needs of a growing population in ways that ensure a sustainable, good and improving quality of life and help tackle issues of deprivation and inequality including inequality in health outcomes.



*View of Pymmes Brook*

- 7.4 In seeking to provide places that promote active and healthier lifestyles, the London Plan supports development proposals that increase or enhance the provision of sports and recreation facilities and emphasises wherever possible, that multi-use public facilities for sport and recreational activity should be encouraged. In addition it states that development should maximize the opportunity for community diversity, inclusion and cohesion; and should contribute to people's sense of place, safety and security and general well-being.
- 7.5 Where sports facility developments are proposed on existing open space, the London Plan advises that they will need to be considered carefully in light of policies on protecting open space as well as the Barnet's own assessment of needs and opportunities for both sports facilities and for green multifunctional open space.
- 7.6 More generally strategic policy stresses that the design of new buildings and the spaces they create should help reinforce or enhance the character, legibility, permeability and accessibility of a neighbourhood and that development should be sustainable and have regard to the form and function of a place and the scale, mass and orientation of its surroundings in addition to biodiversity.

- 7.7 Barnet's Local Plan similarly seeks to promote healthy living and well-being outcomes by addressing the factors underpinning poor health and well-being and educating citizens as to their own responsibilities for health. It specifically encourages the development of new and improved leisure and sports facilities where demand can be demonstrated and which support wider corporate objectives. In ensuring the efficient use of leisure facilities and greater footfall and participation levels local policy also explores options in relation to co-location and usage with other community provision including schools and open spaces.
- 7.8 The Local Plan accepts development on open space in exceptional circumstances where it is a small-scale use ancillary to the use of the space or results in no net loss or a better quality of provision and does not impact on biodiversity.
- 7.9 Given the context of the park and its associated benefits, there is opportunity to provide a well-designed complementary community facility and make a significant step change in the quality and accessibility of sports and leisure provision locally.



*View towards formal gardens*

- 7.10 The planning brief will provide a detailed review of current policy relative to the proposals under consideration and set out the preferred options for delivering a replacement Church Farm facility following a careful assessment of the opportunities and constraints presented by Victoria Recreation Ground and its surroundings.

## **8 Planning strategy**

- 8.1 The planning brief will provide guidance for taking forward the development on part of Victoria Recreation Ground as an alternative location for Church Farm leisure centre in accordance with planning and wider corporate policy objectives and emerging strategies. It will form the basis of a consultation exercise in June as part of the SPA outline business case exploring the future provision of leisure facilities generally and delivery of potential a new centres more specially. Should this particular alternative site be chosen as an option, the brief will assist in the preparation of a detailed planning application in due course.
- 8.2 In preparing the planning brief key stakeholders such as Sport England and local amenity groups and will be engaged, in addition to key service areas including Greenspaces, Leisure and Children's Services and Public Health, to ensure that the most suitable type and form of development and optimal public health outcomes are enabled in line with corporate policy and emerging strategies.

8.3 The brief will set out the process of taking forward any planning application including detailed requirements, risks and timescales.