

### Reference Matter 16 – 2 MIQ's Policy

Matter 16: Creating a vibrant economy (including site allocations) Issue: Would the strategy and provision for employment development and town, district and local centres be effective and justified and are the individual economic growth policies clear, justified and consistent with national policy, and would they be effective?

#### **Re: Policy W10 Former River Park Leisure Centre site**

*4. Would the site contribute to the open space/recreation space requirements in the District? And if so in what way?*

#### **Statement**

Sport Winchester believe the existing footprint of the former River Park Leisure Centre site should be retained for community sport and recreation purposes.

This site should be considered for registration under the open spaces register, and as such retained for ongoing use under the strategic for central sporting and leisure facility needs, as it would help to address the pre-identified shortfall of sport grounds and facilities within the central Winchester area (as identified within the Open Spaces Assessment of 2022).

This central Winchester city area is perfectly located to continue to provide suitable sporting provision for the population of Winchester. The land area should have been designated and included within the LGS assessment and retained for future use, and to address at least some of the identified open space shortfall in the city area.

The River Park location would be well suited to the building of a replacement sports hall of a size capable of providing internal league competition netball, basketball, and indoor hockey facilities (which the current leisure centre lacks), as well as facilities for dance studios and gymnastics clubs. There is also keen interest in creating an open air Lido at this location. The location for a sport facility would also address the need for access to facilities within a 20 minute radius for a significant proportion of the city population.

Critically, this area also has a sensible car parking allocation that would be required for ongoing use and access for users, and visiting sports teams to both the centre and the surrounding sports fields, and it is essential all of the parking resource is retained for the future.

We note that the 2021 ONS census data for the Winchester district had a population of 127,843. Of this, 5.1% of the population identified as being disabled, and a further 9.8% identified as having a disability that caused some limitation, or minor disability. There is a substantial lack of good easy access to disabled sporting facilities within the city, and the central location of this site, when combined with good flat level access, parking and central to all bus routes, make it an ideal location to provide additional sport facilities suitable for the whole population in an inclusive way.

What is needed is an open public consultation on potential uses and solutions for this site, that would meet the NPFF regulation on retaining sporting facilities resource, and contribute to the recovery of the identified shortfall within the city area.

Sport Winchester have also made recommendations that all identified sports grounds and facilities, that are accessible to the public, should be collated and shown within the WCC central mapping tool to clearly identify and protect these areas.

The proposal to release this site from its sporting use (and the original covenant for the site) for the purpose of business development is also in direct contradiction to policy NE3 item 7.28 which states that all current open spaces and sports facilities should be protected. For the record, the new Winchester Sports Centre at Bar End, (although an excellent facility) was itself actually built on football pitches on the Garrison Ground sports field (reducing the available sports pitch area within the city).