

NORTH SOMERSET COUNCIL DECISION



DECISION OF: COUNCILLOR MIKE SOLOMON. THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR NEIGHBOURHOODS AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

WITH ADVICE FROM: ASSISTANT DIRECTOR NEIGHBOURHOODS AND TRANSPORT

DECISION NO: 22/23 DP 396

SUBJECT: TO AGREE THE PERMANENT WITHDRAWAL OF ALL LEISURE SERVICE FROM CHURCHILL SPORTS CENTRE SITE AND PROCEED WITH INVESTIGATING OPTIONS TO DISPOSE OF THE ASSET.

KEY DECISION: NO

REASON: The value of this decision is less than £500,000 and this decision will not have a significant impact on two or more wards in North Somerset

BACKGROUND:

Churchill Sports Centre was temporarily closed to the public in March 2020 as part of Covid lockdown. At the time the centre was managed by a management contractor GLL. The Council and contractor were not able to open the site between the initial lockdown and the subsequent lockdowns in November 2020 and Jan-Mar 2021 due to the complexity of making the site compliant with Covid guidance and regulations. The contract with GLL was due to expire in March 2021 and was terminated by mutual agreement in November 2020 to reduce ongoing costs for the contractor and council while a long-term solution for the site was investigated.

Following the termination of the contract, partnership work commenced with local ward members and a local working group in order to investigate potential future options for the site. A summary of 7 options was presented to the executive at an informal meeting in March 21. These potential solutions included:

- Trust management (academy led)
- Academy management
- Private leisure management contractor
- Remain closed for 12-24 months
- Sports centre rebuild*
- Private investment*
- Permanent closure

*options included at the request of the working group.

However, none of the outlined solutions were affordable for the council or for the potential future operators where external solutions were proposed for like for like delivery. Due to the significant financial pressures that the council continues to face, funding could not be found to invest in the facility and to subsidise services from the site. The other leisure centres that the council is responsible for are contracted to cover their running costs through income generation and this model would also be required for the Churchill site. None of the options were able to meet this criterion.

As a result of the review, a decision was made to offer the opportunity to the community to explore community led options, with the support of the council to provide information,

coordination and any seed funding required to enable the investigation of the community options and development of a locally led business case to take on the site.

Detailed work took place with the local action group and local ward members throughout 2021 in order to identify a viable community led solution but no solution was identified. It was decided in early 2022 to formally offer the opportunity for a business case to be put forward from any provider to take on the site – with a window of opportunity between March 2022 and July 2022. This window was extended until the end of October 2022 but no proposals were received.

Swim England were also approached for advice and whilst they would prefer no swimming pools to close, they recognised that this particular swimming facility was not viable.

By November 2022 it was clear that there was no affordable and sustainable way to re-open the sports centre. It is therefore recommended that the site is permanently closed and either transferred to a third party for ongoing management or demolished.

DECISION:

To agree the permanent withdrawal of leisure service delivery from Churchill Sports Centre site and to proceed with investigating options to dispose of the asset (subject to a further decision).

REASONS:

See background.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED:

Throughout the process a number of options were considered and worked through as shown below. All require substantial capital investment and a high annual revenue subsidy, which the Council does not have. The costs in the table below were from March 2021 and will have increased substantially for the current time.

Option	Description	Cost	Service Impact
Option 1	Trust Model (Academy led) (Not currently an option)	Capital £535k/£800k Revenue £100-£150k	Facilities available as before
Option 2	Academy Management	Capital - £470k Revenue - None	Limited access for community lettings Loss of swimming pool, fitness gym
Option 3	Private Leisure Contractor	Capital £535k/£800k Revenue £100-£150k	Facilities available as before Professional management
Option 4	Remain closed 12- 24months	Max. Capital £50k Revenue £20k pa	Opportunity for leisure industry to improve Delays capital and revenue costs
Option 5	Permanent Closure	Revenue £300k	Loss of swimming pool, fitness 3G pitch, sports hall, courts for lettings
Option 6*	Sport Centre rebuild	Capital: £15-20m	New facility provided – increased provision Large capital costs
Option 7*	Private Investment	N/A to council	Likely to improve provision Unlikely to be feasible

* Options included at the request of the working group

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

It currently costs £117,000 to keep the site mothballed. The permanent withdrawal from the site will remove £117,000 from the budget and this has been proposed as part of the 2023/24 medium term financial plan.

Once the permanent closure has been authorised by this decision, work will continue to investigate options to permanently divest of the building to ensure the budget saving can be achieved.

The two options being explored are transfer of the asset or demolition, it should be noted that both options will incur one-off costs estimated at approx. £300,000.

There will be a further decision which will authorise the disposal of the asset, this decision will include and authorise any one-off costs required.

LEGAL POWERS AND IMPLICATIONS

This is not a statutory service and legal advice has been taken.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

The closure of the sports centre will reduce the Council's carbon footprint.

CONSULTATION

All the below have been engaged in various stages in this process:

- The Executive
- The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and Community Services
- Informal Place Policy and Scrutiny Panel
- Local ward members
- Local town and parish council
- Churchill Sports Centre Working group
- Churchill Academy

RISK MANAGEMENT

The building cannot be re-opened due to financial reasons; therefore the building must be dealt with by property and procurement colleagues.

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

Have you undertaken an Equality Impact Assessment? Yes

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

The permanent closure of the site has been recognised in the 23/24 MTFP as a necessary element to balance the Councils budget.

Work to permanently divest of the building will require the support of the Property Team.

APPENDICES


N/A

BACKGROUND PAPERS

N/A


SIGNATORIES:

DECISION MAKER(S):

Signed:  Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and
Community Services

Date: 7 February 2023

WITH ADVICE FROM:

Signed:  Assistant Director Neighbourhoods and
Transport

Date: 7 February 2023