

SWIMMING PROVISION IN SHREWSBURY - APPRAISAL SITE EVALUATION PROCESS

- 1.1 In 2014 Shropshire Council undertook a comprehensive process to identify potential sites for a new build swimming facility.
- 1.2 An initial trawl of sites potentially suitable for the development of a new swimming and leisure facility within or on the fringe of Shrewsbury (and including the current Quarry Swimming & Fitness Centre site) was undertaken in June 2014 by the Council's Strategic Asset Management Team, and 22 sites were identified for consideration. The listings included land within the Council's ownership and also land owned privately or by other bodies.
- 1.3 The sites were evaluated as a desktop exercise, using specific criteria informed by Sport England and Shropshire Council's vision for the project (acid tests and qualitative tests) to rank different sites, as follows:
 - A. 'Acid Tests' – are there insurmountable obstacles to a given site being used?
 - B. 'Qualitative Tests' – how well will each site be able to meet the vision, and what compromises need to be made because of that choice of site?

A. Acid Tests

A1 Locality of site and ability of users and staff to physically access the site and services (car/public transport/highways/pedestrian/cycle/disabled)

Will the facility be easy to reach physically? Many potential users will be pedestrian and/or public transport users, so proximity to households and good bus routes and cycle routes will be of particular importance. Also assess the condition or suitability of connecting highways. Will the site be easier or harder to reach than existing provision?

A2 Car parking

Given that a significant number of users are likely to want to access the site by car will the site be able to support ample and convenient car parking?

A3 Land ownership, difficulties with acquisition, title issues and timescale

Is the site in the ownership of Shropshire Council, or if not are the owners open to negotiations? Are there insurmountable problems with the acquisition or title of the site? This could include covenants, rights of way, easements and a potential need for compulsory purchase. Is the cost of purchasing the site likely to be a significant restriction to the project going ahead? Which sites can come on line quicker thereby potentially reducing the cost to deliver the scheme?

A4 Ability of site option to deliver the services identified in the vision

Is the site large enough and does it have the potential to accommodate the necessary facilities in a way that does not compromise the objectives of the project?

A5 Site condition, ecological considerations and remediation costs

What are the ground conditions at the site? This could include coal mining works, flood risk, geological surveys, any existing intrusive site surveys and contamination reports. Are there any ecological reports and any protected species such as great crested newts or bats? If there are issues can they be remediated at a sensible cost?

A6 Enhancing the public realm, stimulating economic regeneration, contributing to long-term social and community regeneration

Will the site enhance the physical appearance of the town / neighbourhood, and potentially have positive knock-on effects on the town / neighbourhood's prestige. Will the site contribute to increasing economic activity in the town, for example through generating increased town centre footfall, or fostering linked inward investment? Will the site contribute to improved social, educational and health outcomes in the thematic and geographic areas that most need it?

B. Qualitative Tests

B1 Revenue sustainability of the facility, ability to attract new users, potential to work alongside other leisure, educational, healthcare and community facilities and services in support of increased footfall and usage (co-location), scope for future development

Is the site well placed to support increased usage and the facility's business sustainability? What other complimentary facilities are there on the site? Do these already bring people to the location that the project can benefit from? Does the site, either now or in the future, offer the opportunity to create a more diverse offer which will further increase usage and business sustainability? In this respect consider the potential co-location of the proposed new University of Shrewsbury Student Union with swimming provision on the existing site. Does the site offer the opportunity to realise efficiency savings through co-location of services or sharing of staff, and the potential to attract additional tenants?

B2 Energy sustainability

Will the site and development offer the opportunity to achieve BREEAM Excellent / Outstanding categorisation in the measures that implement to address energy and water use, health and wellbeing, pollution, transport, materials, waste, ecology and management processes. Consider the potential opportunities provided by a site within 1km of the new incinerator and the use of hot water.

B3 Planning issues

What is the chance of obtaining planning consent? Are there any national planning policy issues? Are there any local planning policy issues? Are there any site specific planning issues? Of particular importance in national and local policy is the relative

priority afforded to locating town centre services (including all activities envisaged for the new facility) in town centres.

B4 Housing growth

Do any new sites support areas of future population growth? Possible income e.g. through CIL/Sec 106?

B5 Infrastructure requirements including utilities

What requirements are there in terms of infrastructure to make the site usable? This could include water, electricity, gas, sewage, telecommunications and physical (e.g. road access). Are these requirements achievable at a cost that does not impair the project's ability to achieve its objectives?

B6 Delivery complications and implications (e.g. continuity of service, school access, competing with existing services, impact on budget of site acquisition or access provisions, impact of site on users of existing services)

Although the delivery of the project on a given site may be possible, does that site have sufficient complications to make it impractical to do so?

- 1.4 From this initial exercise, the range of site options were narrowed down against an evaluation matrix, the conclusions of which were presented in a report to the Council's Project Board on 17th July 2014. The original criteria used were revisited and checked to confirm that they still cross referenced with the 'detailed requirements' documents, and then weighted before repeating the evaluation.
- 1.5 Recommendations were presented to the Project Board, proposing a final list of six sites in and around the town; these were then taken forward for further consideration and assessment by the selected Consultant, Strategic Leisure Limited (SLL). One of the options on the final short list of sites was the Quarry.
- 1.6 Strategic Leisure Limited (SLL) independently reviewed the original sites identified, and the shortlisting of these sites, based on a number of scoring criteria. The rationale for the selection of the sites considered in detail for this study is robust and logical, and the Strategic Leisure team confirms agreement with the process undertaken by SC.
- 1.7 The top scoring option was for a new swimming pool to be built at Shrewsbury Sports Village. The option to rebuild on the existing Quarry site scored second highest and was just one point behind, with 287 and 286 points respectively. The option to rebuild on the Quarry site scored highest on the Acid Test, with 210 points against 197.
- 1.8 In July 2014 Cabinet approved the recommendation that a three month public consultation be carried out on the shortlisted options. A four month consultation was launched on 28th May 2015 and subsequently extended to October 2015. This survey indicated a strong desire for the pool to remain in the town centre, with 68.06% of consultees expressing that preference.

- 1.9 A further report to Cabinet was presented in July 2016, with the recommendation that Councillors agree in principle to the new pool being built at Shewsbury Sports Village, but also that third parties should be given twelve months to come up with alternative means of keeping provision at the Quarry site.

- 1.10 At its meeting in July 2017 Cabinet confirmed that a review be carried out of the different location options for swimming provision in Shrewsbury town centre following a change in administration and the public interest shown in the retention of a town centre location.

- 1.11 A further evaluation of potential town centre sites was undertaken using the same criteria for 'Acid Tests' and 'Qualitative Tests' which confirmed that the existing Quarry Swimming & Fitness Centre site remains the most suitable town centre location.