



KING'S LYNN CIVIC SOCIETY

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28/08/25

King's Lynn Area Committee (KLAC)
BCKLWN

Re: Leisure Facilities Renewal

Dear Committee members

We write to Councillors of the King's Lynn Area Committee regarding proposals for the renewal of leisure facilities in King's Lynn – and particularly the delivery of a new swimming pool. We have a variety of concerns about the current proposals and would like these to be fully and transparently reviewed.

We write to KLAC as representatives of the town but recognise that the facilities are for West Norfolk and to some extent the entire sub-region. This should be considered in any decision making.

Consultation / Have your Say

The current round of consultation is variously described as a 'public survey, 'questions and answers' and 'a chance to have your say'. There is a sentence stating that some 'children and adults' were consulted in 2024. We believe this may have included the swimming clubs. As several of us are weekly users of the swimming pool, we can confirm that we know of no general engagement with regular facility users during the 'initial feasibility work'.

We are concerned to read that '*Full Council agreed on 31 July to the further design, survey and financial work needed to produce a business case for a major upgrade of Lynnsport, incorporating a brand new swimming pool to replace St James*'. This sounds very much like Councillors have already made a decision upon redeveloping Lynnsport to include a 25m pool – rendering this 'significant stakeholder and public engagement' a largely cosmetic process? This is disappointing (and not unlike many other BCKLWN 'consultations' of recent years).

This is not how to build inclusivity and trust with residents and, we feel, is very likely to arrive at a sub-optimal outcome that is divisive in the community. We would expect any consultation to include: 'What pool facilities do you think are required in Lynn and West Norfolk?'; 'Where would a pool be most appropriate?'; 'What other leisure facilities are most needed in the area?'. We hope that there is still time for a thorough review.

Feasibility Study

We are not in a position to question the assertion that the St James Swimming Pool and parts of Lynnsport need replacement. We are not able to comment in detail on potential cost benefits and whole-of-life planning. We would urge Councillors to ask detailed questions about these aspects of the feasibility study.

We note that Spalding swimming pool (opened 1974) was declared ‘not fit for purpose’ in 2014 but is only now, 10 years later, about to close for redevelopment. Originally it was stated it was essential to find a new site ‘to avoid disruption’, but we note in the end they have decided to redevelop the same site.

Wisbech pool (opened 1972) was deemed to be coming to the end of its useful life in 2016 but in the end it was refurbished and new amenities were added in 2019.

Current Facilities

What we can say is that St James Pool is still a very good and popular facility and is not showing obvious signs of ageing or disrepair to the main facilities, although the changing areas would benefit from a ‘refresh’. In comparison to other pools in the sub-region, we feel it is a well-proportioned facility – with a logical arrangement of the main pool adjacent to the learner pool; a good-sized ‘viewing area’ (with an outlook to both pools and space for group meetings); two well-used sauna rooms; a functional arrangement of changing rooms that seldom appear to be overcrowded; two gym areas which appear to be used every day; and an ample lobby. The only element of St James that we would regard as underutilised is the grandstand area, which is only accessible via the pool and appears to be used only for club galas.

An attractive aspect of St James is that it has natural light from east, south and west. It may sound obvious to list these amenities / features – but so many swimming pools are poorly designed with vast areas of wasted space, confusing and illogical layouts and / or substandard elements. It seems that architects often try to ‘reinvent the wheel’ with pool design. St James could be used as a model for successful ergonomic pool design.

The pool was partially refurbished following a fire in 2007 and was the subject of investment in 2021 to fit a ground source heat pump (after BCKLWN obtained £4m of ‘decarbonisation’ funding). Therefore, residents were led to believe the facility had been expensively ‘future-proofed’ to reduce heating and running costs. We assume that the plan to vacate the site and build a new pool at Lynnsport would waste this investment?

As regular pool users, the only real wish for enhancement might be expansion to a 50m pool – which would no doubt be a boon to the competitive swimming clubs, would provide a pool that could be easily split into two 25-metre pools to accommodate peak leisure use, and might also accommodate a deep end for diving events. That would make a first-class ‘aquatic centre’ suitable for our growing community and a regionally significant facility.

In our view it would be possible to expand St James to a 50m pool utilising the space between the existing pool and St James Street and making better use of the aforementioned grandstand area (and replacing the unused ‘garden’ outside). A clever designer might accommodate grandstand viewing within that layout. We feel that is an option that should be fully reviewed.

Population / Appropriate Provision

St James Pool was opened in 1975 when the town population was less than 40,000 and the population of West Norfolk was around 130,000. We are now heading towards 55,000 and 160,000 respectively, with a great deal of additional development planned for the next 25 years. We would also argue there is now a much greater realisation of the benefit and need for regular exercise than there was 50 years ago.

We note the statement that there has been ‘advice from Sport England’. Our understanding is that Sport England’s advice for swimming pool provision is presently to offer 12sqm of water space per 1,000 head of population. So for a district with 160,000 residents, we are estimating a

need for over 1,900sqm of pool (or between six and seven 6-lane, 25m pools). Therefore, assuming that Hunstanton and Downham are maintained, and allowing for a few private club pools in the locality, a 50m pool for King's Lynn would still leave West Norfolk technically deficient in swimming pool provision. Moreover, when you consider that Hunstanton is providing for holidaymakers, that we have a nationally recognised swimming club in Lynn and that there is only one indoor 50m pool within 50 miles (UEA), there is a compelling case to create a regionally recognised aquatic centre in Lynn.

Location /Town Planning

We have great concerns about relocating a pool to Lynnsport. We are not clear of all the structural issues at Lynnsport, but if we understand correctly (that the building is not fit for purpose and has to be replaced), then that is a matter that is perhaps not fully reflected in the information we have been provided with.

We can see that putting the majority of the town's leisure facilities in one place and being able to dispose of the St James site might make sense in a simplistic property management mindset. However, we question this approach in terms of accessibility, fair distribution of amenities across the town and West Norfolk and good town planning.

Lynnsport is within 2km of South Wootton, Gaywood and the town centre. It has the benefit of cycle and pedestrian access through national cycle route 1. But for anyone travelling further by car, it is an extremely constrained site. It is especially difficult to access from the south via Loke Road and Columbia Way. Moreover, it is already an extremely busy site. Anyone who uses Lynnsport will know that when the 3G pitches, sports centre and gyms are busy in the evenings, the car park is full. In addition, we have the athletics, hockey, tennis courts, and skate centre on the site. We find it impossible to imagine that relocating the pool to this site would not require expansion of parking – most likely multi-storey parking. That is apparently not factored into the current plan.

Even supposing that a multi-storey car park was affordable within the scheme, it would not negate the impact to local roads. The setting of Lynnsport is essentially residential and there have already been well rehearsed arguments about traffic impact to Beulah Street and Lynnsport Way with other development proposals.

Regarding Town Planning, BCKLWN have had a succession of expensive consultants to consider the town centre, the decline of High Street retail, redevelopment of key sites in the town (including unsightly car parks), the need for repurposing buildings, the need to reduce car congestion and the desire to boost the town centre population. There is, we understood, a widely accepted view that the answer is mixed-use development with new homes close to amenities.

But as far as we have noted, planning decisions in recent years have favoured 'compartmentalisation' of land use – with consent for vast housing estates far from any amenities; intensification of employment estates and expansion of retail areas on the edge of town. Why are BCKLWN now seemingly so bent on providing the majority of the district's main sports facilities on one 18-hectare site in the middle of a residential area? It seems to us to be an unfair distribution of amenities and a plan that will exacerbate local traffic issues. It flies in the face of all the previous advice.

Other sites in Lynn

We would ask Councillors to thoroughly review the statement that there are 'no other sites that are suitable in the town'. We would ask them to consider ease of access for all residents of West Norfolk who do not live within 2km of Lynnsport.

We would regard the current St James site as very well located. It is within 2km of South Lynn, North Lynn, West Lynn and Gaywood. It is adjacent to the railway station, bus station and a multi-storey car park and is much easier to access by car than Lynnsport, especially from the south. It is also on the national route 1 cyclepath.

We find the argument that redevelopment of St James would be ‘disruptive to users’, whilst valid, is somewhat one-sided because the proposed redevelopment of Lynnsport would clearly disrupt the entire sports centre, especially the gyms, lawn bowls, bar and receptions areas. In any scenario there will be disruption, but the end outcome must be the best one for West Norfolk for the next 50 years (or more).

In the event that it did prove to be prohibitively expensive to redevelop the St James site (because we realise that such issues inevitably come down to cost), we think that other town centre sites that might be appropriate for a premier leisure facility might include the Church Street car park and Boal Quay. Both would be regenerating underutilised and unattractive sites within the town and could be integrated with other mixed-use development and enhanced multi-modal transport opportunities.

If the emphasis was on ease of access for residents in the wider district, including the growing communities at South Lynn, Terrington and Clenchwarton, Knights Hill and at West Winch (the largest housing allocation in West Norfolk that could eventually have a community of 10,000 people), a site near the bypass would make sense. There would appear to be sites available at NORA and Morston Point that could be developed along with enhanced cycle connections from the town centre. A landmark aquatic centre at a gateway to the town would perhaps be a bigger statement about the community of King’s Lynn than a downstairs pool in an existing sports centre.

In summary, we would like to ask Councillors to have a forensic review of the current proposals and the assumptions that have apparently been made. We agree that this is a ‘once in a lifetime opportunity’ – so let us get it right. Can you especially consider:

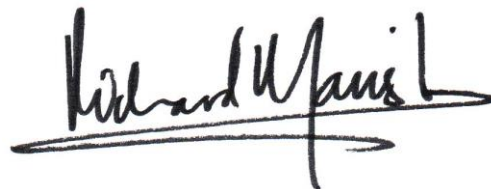
- The attributes of the existing pool facility and site.
- A 50-year perspective on asset provision.
- Opportunities for regeneration and presentation of the town.
- Sustainable town planning.

Lastly, we would add that many pool and leisure centres have traditionally had local benefactors. We don’t think it is impossible that a high-quality project might be partially funded through local donors.

Yours sincerely



Alison Gifford – KLCS Chairman
Rick Morrish – KLCS Vice Chairman



cc: Cllr Alistair Beales
Cllr Simon Ring