

COUNCIL MEETING - 25 FEBRUARY 2020

AGENDA ITEM 4

PETITIONS

1. Lead Petitioner: Carol Goddard
Rivermead Bowling Club

It is with great regret that I understand you are not replacing the Bowls Hall when the new Leisure Centre is to be built.

I am currently a bowler at Rivermead Bowling Club and would like the facility to either be provided at the new Leisure Centre or at a new building close to the current one.

I will be unable to play at Whiteknights and I do not want to drive to a Club up to 30 minutes drive away from my home.

Please reconsider your current plans and provide a new facility for Rivermead Bowling Club.

RESPONSE by Councillor Hoskin (Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport):

Thank you very much for taking the time to bring your petition to the council tonight.

We do understand your disappointment that a dedicated bowls hall could not, in the end, be provided within the final plans for the new leisure centre at Rivermead. Whilst we would love to have been able to provide a new bowls hall the process to select a partner was driven by a need to secure affordability for the council tax payer. These budget constraints meant we were unable to include these facilities in the specification for the leisure contract as a minimum requirement.

As part of the process to develop the specification, the council used Sport England modelling to review the demand and supply for indoor sports facilities, including bowls. Particular attention was paid to likely future demand including changes in population and changing trends in participation in physical activity.

This was used to produce the minimum requirements for facilities and services. The modelling indicated greater capacity than demand for indoor bowls, reflecting the membership numbers observed.

Reading is unusually fortunate to be served by two indoor bowls halls, three miles apart. Whiteknights bowls club with seven rinks has 850 to 900 members, and Rivermead with 250 to 300 members, uses the six rinks provided.

Whilst the consideration of what facilities exist within Greater Reading was part of the considerations in terms of prioritisation, the club's aspirations and business plan was provided to the bidders to help them draw up their proposals.

Whilst the new facility at Rivermead will not include an indoor bowls centre, the aim is to create an inclusive swimming and fitness environment, including a 25m 8-lane competition pool and a 6-court sports hall.

In addition, the GLL have been tasked with increasing the number of people from priority groups participating in physical exercise. To achieve this GLL have opted to make significant

improvement to facilities and provide a number of targeted activities within their programme.

For older people, this includes expanding the 60+ clubs across all leisure centres in Reading, providing more walking sports, and developing new activities with Age UK and the University of the 3rd Age.

There are plans to link to health programmes such as social prescribing, exercise referral, falls prevention, cardiac and cancer rehabilitation activities. There will also be community outreach programmes targeting priority groups delivering monthly sessions in community settings such as parks and community centres.

That said, I understand that your specific concern, and passion, is about indoor bowls. I have committed myself to working closely with Rivermead Bowls Club to explore fully all options and proposals to support both it and members over the next couple of years. A senior council officer and I have already enjoyed a productive meeting with the club and the next is in the diary. Furthermore, we will increasingly include GLL in these discussions. It is also important to remember that the present bowls hall, along with the rest of Rivermead, will remain open until, at least, late summer 2022, and therefore provide a home for the winter 20/21 and 21/22 seasons.