

Report to: Lead Member for Resources & Climate Change

Date of meeting: 28 April 2022

By: Chief Operating Officer

Title: Ringmer Pool, Ringmer

Purpose: To seek approval to commence a formal consultation in relation to the future use of Ringmer Swimming Pool, Ringmer.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Lead Member for Resources and Climate Change is recommended to:

- 1) Approve the proposal to hold a public consultation regarding the future use of Ringmer Swimming Pool, Ringmer.**
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1 Background

- 1.1 Ringmer Swimming Pool (the Pool) is located on the site of King's Academy, Ringmer. East Sussex County Council (ESCC) has freehold ownership of both the pool and the Academy site. In 2011, the school converted to Academy status, but Ringmer Pool was not part of the conversion.
- 1.2 The Pool was constructed in 1981 and has been in operation since that date. Initially under an original Joint Use Agreement between ESCC, Lewes District Council (LDC), Ringmer Community College (RCC) and the Ringmer Community Swimming Centre Association (RCSCA) with the purpose to provide recreational and sports development activities to pupils and the local community. In 2008, a change was implemented which reduced the number of organisations within the Joint Use Agreement. ESCC and the Community College (now King's Academy, Ringmer) currently operate the Joint Use Management Agreement.
- 1.3 The Pool is one of 14 sites subject to a Joint Use Agreement under which ESCC has a property interest in leisure facilities, typically involving school sites.
- 1.4 The Pool was closed Spring 2020 to September 2020 due to national lockdown in response to the Covid pandemic. Although the pool briefly reopened in September 2020, major failure of significant plant and equipment infrastructure at the property shortly after reopening has required the facility to remain closed since that time.
- 1.5 Historically, the Pool was used by King's Academy, Ringmer and other local primary schools during school term time hours and was open for community use outside of term time and school hours.
- 1.6 Since September 2020, local primary schools that used the facility for school curriculum use have found other local swimming pool facilities. King's Academy, Ringmer and community use of the Pool has not occurred since that date.
- 1.7 This joint use asset has previously been managed under a concession contract to Wave Leisure (WL) Trust. There have been several contract extensions over the last five years, primarily due to lack of interest from other leisure concession operators, as there is low income from community use.
- 1.8 Leisure services are the remit of district and borough councils. ESCC's interest in the Joint Use premises is therefore as property owner and not as a direct leisure commissioner or provider.
- 1.9 ESCC commissioned an independent advisor in Spring 2021 to consider options for the future management of the Pool. The consultant recommended that a market assessment was undertaken and Expressions of Interest (EOI) invited from operators/companies able to deliver financially viable and sustainable proposals.

- 1.10 During 2021 the EOI invitation was extended a number of times to maximise the opportunity for parties to respond. ESCC has engaged with local stakeholders, including Ringmer Parish and Lewes District Councils, throughout the process. Stakeholders were aware of the process and deadlines.
- 1.11 The EOI invitation concluded on 5 November 2021. There was a limited response, with only one EOI containing the required detailed information being received before the deadline. ESCC analysed the proposal, submitted by a commercial operator, and additional financial data was requested by ESCC and assessed. The proposal indicated that ESCC would need to commit to substantially increased ongoing financial support, primarily as a result of significant increases in energy costs (for which no budgetary provision currently exists), and undertake significant capital investment in the Pool, as indicated by specialist building surveys. ESCC would also need to accept additional financial risks, if a new provider were to be granted a medium to long-term lease.
- 1.12 ESCC will continue to engage with stakeholders who may still wish to come forward and provide full business details for consideration.
- 1.13 As ESCC is not a leisure commissioner or provider, it needs to seek views on a way forward via public consultation including residents and all stakeholders. ESCC has a duty to consult in respect of any potential changes to the future operation of this pool.

2 Supporting Information

- 2.1 ESCC wish to invite ideas and suggestions for the financially sustainable future management of Ringmer Pool. Use of the swimming pool could change if there is not a financially sustainable model for ongoing use.
- 2.2 The formal consultation process would be conducted by an online survey via the ESCC consultation webpage and hard copies of the survey would be available at County Hall, Lewes and by post, on request.
- 2.3 A proposed timetable based on a minimum 12-week consultation period is as follows:
- 28 April 2022 - Lead Member Resources and Climate Change decision regarding holding a consultation;
 - 5 May 2022 - Consultation start;
 - 4 August 2022 – Consultation end;
 - 5 August – 9 September 2022 - Analysis of consultation results and preparation of Lead Member paper;
 - Mid October 2022 – Lead Member Resources and Climate Change decision as to the future of the facilities.
- 2.4 An Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken and it will be updated using analysis of the results of the public consultation.

3 Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

- 3.1 The Lead Member Resources and Climate Change is recommended to approve a public consultation on future use of Ringmer swimming pool as ESCC needs to seek views on a way forward via public consultation including residents and all stakeholders. ESCC has a duty to consult in respect of any potential changes to the future operation of this pool.

Ros Parker
Chief Operating Officer

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Local Members
Councillor Denis - Ringmer and Lewes Bridge