

Proposed Decision to be made by the Leader on or after 19 July 2021

Title

Portfolio Holder	Leader
Date of decision	Decision Date
	Signed

Decision taken

That the Leader of the Council approves

- the proposal to re-purpose the existing hydrotherapy pool on the RNIB Pears Centre site for use as a sports facility, and delegates to the Strategic Director for Communities the power to enter into or amend any contracts or other documentation necessary to give effect to this decision.
- that the Cabinet decision of January 2021 be implemented as modified to give effect to the change to the project hereby approved.
- the addition of up to one million pounds (£1,000,000) to the project budget and the Capital Programme funded from the CIF.

1. Reasons for decision

- 1.1 In January, as part of a wider capital funding package, Cabinet approved £205k for repair and renewal of the hydrotherapy pool at the former Pears RNIB Centre. The stated intention was to pass the facility to a neighbouring school for use by moving an adjoining fence.
- 1.2 Since the submission of the Capital Funding paper, three factors have led to reconsideration of the business case for this part of the site.
- 1.3 First, the estimated cost for repair and renewal of the facility to ensure its compliance with the necessary regulations has increased from £205k to £300k (excluding professional fees), following further design and feasibility work. The revised quotes include repair works to the facility as well as mechanical and electrical works to ensure the facility is fit for purpose. The quotes are subject to a value engineering exercise, however the full difference between original and current estimates is unlikely to be bridged without significant reduction in scope

- 1.4 Second, the running costs for the facility have now been confirmed at approximately £30k per year. This was not known at the time of purchase and has rendered the original proposal unviable.
- 1.5 Third, the proposed re-location of the fence (which would be required to add the facility to the neighbouring school demise) restricts access to the secondary car park at the top of the site. Consultation with highways and planning has identified a requirement for additional car parking elsewhere on the site with significant financial implications (estimated at £430k) if the plan was implemented.
- 1.6 In terms of alternative uses, although the pool can currently be accessed via three routes, none are considered viable for ongoing use.
- Blackberry Lane access does not meet planning requirements;
 - Warwickshire Academy access would limit access to evenings & weekends;
 - Access via neighbouring school would also limit access to evenings and weekends. It is also inappropriate as it is not on the Academy site
- 1.7 A decision is now required on future use of the hydrotherapy facility as WCC needs to commence works as soon as possible in August to achieve a January opening of the School.

2. Background information

- 2.1 The former RNIB Pears Centre was acquired by the County Council in 2019. The site consists of three main elements:
- The School
 - The Bungalows
 - The Hydrotherapy Pool
- 2.2 Plans for the School are progressing well. A business case is also in development for a multi-disciplinary education, health, and social care service operating from the Bungalows.
- 2.3 Following damage caused in 2020 due to power failures, Cabinet approved £205k capital funding for repair and renewal of the hydrotherapy pool in January 2021. As noted above, the original plan is no longer considered financially viable.
- 2.4 A decision is now required on future use of this facility. WCC needs to commence works as soon as possible in August to achieve a January opening of the School.
- 2.5 Officers identified four options in reconsidering the business case. These are set out in the table below at Appendix 1 and can be summarised as.
- a. Repair the pool, move the fence, and pass the running of the hydrotherapy pool to neighbouring school
 - b. Re-purpose the building as a sports facility and pass the ownership to The Warwickshire Academy (as part of the lease)
 - c. Seek community use of the pool as a WCC asset*
 - d. Demolish the building and extend the green space for the school.

* Use of the pool has been explored with adult social care and health colleagues and is not considered a priority at this time.

- 2.6 It is estimated that 25 children supported by the county nursing teams must have hydrotherapy at any one time. For other children it is desirable but not essential. Where hydrotherapy is used, this would usually be once a week.
- 2.7 Investment in other special schools in the County means that five special schools currently have these facilities and work with the NHS to ensure they are used.

Conclusions

- 2.8 Based on the options appraisal below, option 2 is recommended: ***Re-purpose the building as an addition to the sports facilities and pass the ownership to The Warwickshire Academy (as part of the lease)***. This will contribute to improving the health and wellbeing of the school's learners, make use of the existing changing rooms and showers (which will also free up space in the main building) and is considered the best value for money.
- 2.9 As described above, option 1 (to pass the facility to a neighbouring school) is not considered financially viable due to the impact of the running costs.
- 2.10 Similarly, option 3 (community use) has significant cost implications and would be a complex proposal to fulfil safely and securely. Upgrade works would be required to the pool along with potential capital expenditure to provide access in a safe manner given the facility is housed within school land. The running costs of the facility would also need to be considered. Even if the costs of this option were met, the main barrier remains one of access. As noted above, access to the hydrotherapy pool can be from three directions – none of which are considered viable. Access through The Warwickshire Academy front entrance is not considered appropriate during the school day. Similarly, it would not be appropriate to gain access from the neighbouring school site during the school day. Access outside of the school day would bring additional security considerations and cost. Finally, although access could potentially be made available via Blackberry Lane to the west of the site, this is against planning advice and there are consequently legal impediments to proceeding with this option.
- 2.11 Health and social care colleagues have been informed of the opportunity, but the access issue and the lack of a sustainable financial business case meeting current priorities, mean this option has not been pursued.

Timescales

- 2.12 The Warwickshire Academy is due to open in January 2022. Works to the main building are expected to start in earnest in the next month in order for the school to be able to open on time. The decision as to the hydrotherapy pool has a knock-on effect on the scope of works to the main building, the programme and consequently the date by which the main building can be occupied.

Additional Capital Funding

- 2.13 Following the acquisition of the RNIB Pears Centre site in 2019, further assessment of the accommodation necessary for a SEND School for pupils with social, emotional, and mental health needs highlighted shortfalls against DfE regulations. To meet this shortfall the CIF board approved an additional £3.855 m in February 2021 to ensure that the school site was fully compliant with statutory requirements.

- 2.14 Since then, additional requirements have come to light which are necessary to enable the Warwickshire Academy to deliver a full range of qualifications including subjects that require a suite of specialist teaching rooms such as science, design and technology, art and food technology. Without these facilities Ofsted would not register. This, along with the increased cost of materials and remedial works required to the Teaching block, have increased the overall budget which were unforeseen at the time of the CIF bid in February.
- 2.15 The scope of the project has been costed with a shortfall of no more than £1m. There remain some items that require value engineering (VE) and it is expected that the overall cost will reduce following that VE exercise.
- 2.16 The school is due to open to pupils in January 2022 with all groundworks, fencing, turning circle and parking completed before occupation to satisfy planning regulations, therefore an early decision is sought to the extension of the budget and a decision about the future use of the on-site Hydrotherapy Pool.
- 2.17 A further capital funding bid will be brought forward shortly to cover the proposed multi agency education, health and social care service on the remainder of the Pears site which is still in scoping phase, and not covered by capital monies allocated to date. The purpose of the hub will be to provide a service for children and young people who are experiencing mental health crises, not as an alternative to hospital, but to hopefully prevent young people being admitted and enabling them to stay at home in their local communities with their families.

3. Financial implications

- 3.1 Financial implications are set out in the options appraisal at Appendix 1 and the body of this report above.
- 3.2 Options 2 and 4 are within the capital funding already allocated.
- 3.3 However as noted above, the capital budget for the project will need to be increased by up to £1,000,000. This sum is required to meet the costs of the project. The project team continues to explore opportunities for savings so that as little as possible of the additional funding will be required and any surplus following completion will be returned to the Capital Investment Fund.

4. Environmental implications

- 4.1 Option 2 is considered the most advantageous option from an environmental perspective, as it results in the building being re-purposed to a facility with lower heating costs and no implications for car parking and access.
- 4.2 Options 1 and 3 involve high levels of heating in order for the hydrotherapy pool to be used as intended. Those levels of heating must be maintained, increasing running costs and the carbon footprint of the site. This option would also require the creation of car parking spaces on what is currently green space at the front of the site.
- 4.3 Option 4 involves demolition which, although recycling of aggregates is a possibility will result in greater release of carbon emissions than the other options.

Report Author	Ross Caws
Assistant Director	Ian Budd
Lead Director	Mark Ryder
Portfolio Holder	Jeff Morgan

Urgent matter?	<i>No</i>
Confidential or exempt?	<i>No</i>
Is the decision contrary to the budget and policy framework?	<i>No</i>

List of background papers (If applicable)
Financial implications are set out in the options appraisal above. Options 2 and 4 are within the capital funding already allocated.

Members and officers consulted and informed
Corporate Board – Yes
Legal – Yes
Finance – Yes
Democratic Services – Yes

Appendix 1

Options appraisal summary

Option	Advantages	Disadvantages	Financial implications
1.Repair the pool, move the fence, and pass the running of the hydrotherapy pool to neighbouring school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistent with original business case Makes available hydrotherapy pool facilities to approximately 22 children at neighbouring school and other community groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Running costs financially unsustainable for a school to take on (high heating and maintenance costs) Additional capital funding may be requested High unit cost per head for the additional facility Additional car parking required on site (Note – hydrotherapy needs of children at neighbouring school are currently supported through increased temperature of their existing swimming pool) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> £300k repairs and renewal for compliance + fees £30k per year running costs for the facility Additional car parking required, estimated at a further £430k (Total: c.£730k capital, c.£30k pa revenue)
2.Re-purpose the building as a sports facility and pass the ownership to The Warwickshire Academy (as part of the lease)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Re-purposed as a facility next to the multi-use games area Increased sports opportunities will enhance health and wellbeing of learners The new school do not require a hydrotherapy pool Reduced running costs (less heating) can be met by the school Use of these facilities will result in less capital works in main school building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children from neighbouring school and other community groups unable to access local hydrotherapy pool facilities Increased stakeholder engagement required to explain changing use and removing a community facility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Significantly reduced from pool options due to change in scope (e.g. roof made good, not required for high humidity levels) £25K for infill and screed; up to £180k for repairs and re-purposing including contingency (Total: c.£205k capital)
3.Seek community use of the pool as a WCC asset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Makes available hydrotherapy pool facilities to other stakeholders including community groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Significant unbudgeted running costs for WCC to take on (high heating and maintenance costs) Additional cost and expense required to administer use by other groups If kept within school demise, access to the facility would be 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> £300k repairs and renewal for compliance (Value Engineering to be completed) £30k per year running costs for the facility Further administrative costs would be incurred

		<p>limited to evenings and weekends for safeguarding reasons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access via the neighbouring school site would be similarly restricted. • If moved outside the school demise, additional car parking and a new access road would be required. The latter would add further cost and is unlikely to receive planning consent • Whilst interest from other stakeholders, no firm commitments in place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possible additional costs to develop access (uncosted) and car parking (£430k) • (Total: Minimum £300k capital, c. £30k pa revenue)
4. Demolish the building and extend the green space for the school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land to be part of school playing fields • No continued running costs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change from original business case • Reduction in available facilities to the school and community (and associated reputational risk) • Carbon emissions from demolishing buildings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £65k • (Total: £65k capital)