



Ms Philippa Dart
Assistant Director, Environmental Services
Arun District Council
Arun Civic Centre
Maltravers Road
Littlehampton

5th October 2012
PH/CP/CMC/

Dear Philippa

DRAFT LEISURE AND CULTURAL STRATEGY – PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Littlehampton Town Council has considered the Colliers International Draft Strategy for Leisure and Cultural Provision in the Arun District at their Council meeting on the 27th September and would like to make the following comments:

General Comments

- There were approximately 50 members of the public in the audience at the Town Council meeting where this matter was considered, all of whom had come specifically for the agenda item covering the Leisure Strategy. They were unanimously against the proposals both for the Swimming Centre and the Windmill.
- Town Council Members expressed concerns that the appointed consultants are primarily developers and as such would not have a completely unbiased view about the potential for housing development
- Whilst strongly opposed to any housing on the Swimming Centre site, it is also of great concern that even if it was redeveloped, there is no guarantee that it would provide family or affordable housing which is what is most needed in the town.
- It is thought that the consultation period has been too short and that the consultation events were not timed to allow many sectors of the community to attend. Notwithstanding this failure, 150-160 members of the public gathered at a community-led public meeting this week, attended by Cllr. Dendle, and unanimously supported the Town Council's stance on this matter.

Swimming Centre

Littlehampton Town Council strongly opposes the move of the Swimming Centre to the Academy site for the following reasons

- Even accounting for any developer contributions, the costs of building a new Centre are likely to be significantly more than that required to refurbish the existing facilities. This is not a good use of public money, however this is generated. The Town Council and the local community (extending beyond the Town itself) clearly wish for investment in the existing site, particularly given its excellent location; fantastic parking and good accessibility from across Eastern Arun. The retention of the site and facilities, and the

consequential costs were not included in the report and therefore funding opportunities were similarly not considered.

- Basing the Swimming Centre at the Academy will result in a huge reduction in public access to a supposed community facility. The parking is limited and however this proposal is couched, it will undoubtedly mean that the school will have almost exclusive use of the facilities for much of the week, as at Arun Leisure Centre and other Dual Use schemes. It is unacceptable for the local tax-payer to be funding a scheme that significantly reduces the service they want and in a location that is not appropriate in many, many ways. It is thought that a swimming facility at the Academy would be useful in addition to existing facilities and that new development might assist in funding this. If this was the case it could supplement the existing facilities and reflect better the "Olympic Legacy", of which we hear so much, but is not apparent in the rationale of this report.
- The report appears to make little reference to the voluntary and community groups that use the Centre and site. Vital local organisations such as the Arun Youth Aqua Centre would lose their base if the Swimming Centre was moved. Impressive local clubs such as the highly successful Littlehampton Swimming Club would be significantly damaged if this facility was to become a shared pool at the Academy. The survival of other community groups that use the pool or Sports Dome would also be threatened. Not enough focus has been given to these groups and their vital role in our community.
- The local community and the Town Council share a common view that this site is wholly inappropriate for housing. This view is even stronger when the possibility of flats is mooted. The Town does not want a seafront devoid of anything other than housing and which would resemble the faceless frontages of Worthing and Bognor Regis. The Mewsbrook Park to Norfolk Gardens vista is part of what makes this town so attractive and should be preserved. This has also been reflected in our consultation for our emerging Neighbourhood Plan. One other comment that has been made is the proximity of this proposed housing to the frequently smelly sewage pumping station!

The Windmill

Littlehampton Town Council accepts the fact that the Windmill is in desperate need of updating and refurbishment and would benefit from air conditioning and the introduction of digital format to make it fit for purpose. Again, undertaking these improvements and seeking funding to do this does not seem to be part of the report, which could lead to the presumption that this is already a fait accompli. However, The Town Council would make the following comments:

- The community benefits far outweigh the price of a refurbishment. The centre is well used and well valued by local amateur groups and individuals. An oft quoted comment is that of Oscar Wilde in that "nowadays people know the price of everything and the value of nothing". This would seem to be the case here. Many of the local groups that use the Windmill have written to you already and we implore you to listen to and act upon their representations.
- The digital equipment required for the cinema facility should be acquired forthwith. The Town must have this resource for people of all ages. Young people particularly crave improved cinema facilities.

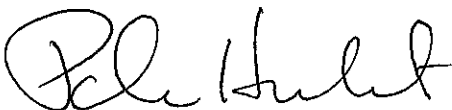
- The theatre is also a resource for all generations and no realistic alternatives have been offered. Whilst this Council would not completely rule out re-location (for example on the St Martin's Car Park site), equivalent and preferably improved facilities must be committed in advance of the current facilities being removed.
- This Council does not feel that the proposed alternatives for the site have been adequately researched. Where is the evidence of demand for a 'small' hotel? History has shown that such a facility has previously been unsuccessful. In addition although a Children's Wet Play area and Skate Bowl are wonderful facilities whether they would benefit the whole of the community is arguable. Furthermore, these will have long term maintenance issues. Local people would much prefer to invest their Council Tax in refurbishing the Windmill complex.

The Town Council is concerned at the inferred criticism of Inspire Leisure, which seems, by implication, to be one of the reasons why these facilities are now in such a poor condition. Frankly, this does not wash. The arrangements were set up and closely monitored by the District Council. It has always been the responsibility of the District Council to maintain these public assets to a high quality. It is not valid to run these down and then claim that it is too expensive to bring them back up to standard.

It is also disappointing that the report has not looked at whether other bodies such as the parish and town councils could have a role to play in the delivery of these vital services. For instance this Council is looking to deliver at least two new community facilities in the next few years. Would it make sense to see if there is any synergy here? We think so, although it would be wrong to expect the taxpayers of Littlehampton to bale-out district-wide services.

In conclusion Littlehampton Town Council does not believe the Draft Strategy fully represents the views and aspirations of the local community or even offers best value, with the emphasis on value. We would urge Arun District Council to re-evaluate the proposals for the Swimming Centre and Windmill sites and very carefully take into account the huge community benefit that both these facilities provide and the incredibly strong local views on this matter.

Yours sincerely



Peter Herbert
Town Clerk