



Chard Leisure Centre Update

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Purpose of the Report

1. The report provides a general progress update on the Chard Regeneration Scheme and wider place-based work, specifically:
 - i) Leisure Centre project
 - ii) Wider regeneration site – Building 11

Recommendations

2. That Members note the contents of the report.

Background

3. Following detailed design, SSSC applied in May 2019 for Planning Consent and Listed Building Consent to build a new Leisure Centre, Library & Community Hub and public realm improvements at the Boden Mill (ACI site) in Chard. The proposal requires the removal of buildings associated with the factory site but the retention of the Mill, Building 11, the listed arch and some adjoining buildings to the south of the arch. The planning application was heard by both SSSC's Area West Committee and then Regulation Committee on 3 September 2019 where it received approval.

PROGRESS REPORT

Leisure Centre

4. The Leisure Centre opened as planned on 8th November 2021. An opening ceremony was attended by key stakeholders followed by a tour of the new facility.

As part of the opening event, local gold medalist swimmer, Matt Clay assisted with the ribbon cutting and then took part in the first swim at the new facility. He was joined by members of the Trident Swimming Club (formerly Chard Swimming Club) and Freedom Leisure Chief Executive, Ivan Horsfall-Turner. (photo below)



Now that the construction work is complete Freedom Leisure have operational responsibility for the centre and the project team will concentrate on monitoring the performance of the building, addressing any defects that may arise during the warranty period.

Customer activity has been strong at the new facility and Freedom Leisure report membership numbers as follows (figures from Nov 15th 2021):

- Aqua and fitness members – 726
- Learn to swim members – 375

These figures are in excess of the expected numbers so soon after the opening of the centre.

Building 11

5. The planning application for the demolition of Building 11 (reference 21/01333/FUL) is still live and has been subject to delays whilst the observations of the statutory consultees have been reviewed.

The fundamental issue with Building 11 is that the cost of renovating the building to a lettable standard is extremely high, whilst the projected rental income is relatively low. This means that the building will not generate a commercial return over the lifespan of any investment. Any investment into Building 11 will also potentially direct funding away from securing the future of other historic buildings on site.



At this stage we anticipate that the application will potentially go to committee in February. If approval for the demolition is granted the works could start in Spring 2022.

Members are advised that although the appearance of the building is detrimental to the local area, the core structure of the building is of historic interest and consequently Historic England are unsupportive of the demolition proposals.

Historic England have been supportive of other local projects such as the HAZ, so it is vital that we take the time to properly review their observations about Building 11 before formulating a response.

Council Plan Implications

6. The Chard Regeneration Scheme is a specific objective of the Council Plan and a priority project for 2020/21.

Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implications

7. None arising from this report

Equality and Diversity Implications

8. None arising from this report. An Equality Impact Audit of the new facility is scheduled to take place in early 2022.

Background papers

None