

Halton Leisure Centre Project, Moor Lane, Widnes Frequently Asked Questions



How long will construction take/when are you planning to start?

Construction scheduled to take 108 weeks from start on site. The start on site date is 9th January 2023 with completion 5th February 2025.

When will the existing Leisure Centre close?

It is our intention to ensure the current Leisure Centre remains operational until the new one opens.

Why is the council not refurbishing the existing Leisure Centre?

Parts of the existing Leisure Centre built in the 1970s, it was later extended in the late 1980s. It is now nearing the end of its useful life. Condition surveys have indicated that a considerable amount of investment (£15million +) would be needed to extend its life much beyond 2025, which is just not cost effective and would cause major disruption to current users.

A refurbished centre would have a more limited lifespan (approx. 15-20 years), be less energy efficient and not offer the same range of facilities as a purpose built new-build centre, which can deliver the required facilities mix. We therefore need to progress plans to build a new future proofed flexible facility that is fit for purpose and meets user expectations for the next 30-40 years. In order to meet modern day standards in terms of energy efficiency and minimising the site's carbon footprint, it is

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necessary to have a good building's fabric. This helps in improving the thermal efficiency (air tightness, heat loss and cooling) of the building and reduces the need for higher levels of energy consumption. This could not be achieved through refurbishing the existing premises. In fact it is both time consuming and often more expensive to adapt existing buildings particularly when significant mechanical, electrical and technological changes need to be made. The pool replacement is a major example. Also, if the existing centre were to be refurbished, it would need to be closed down for at least 18 months and this would lead to a major loss of amenity to Halton residents; there are over 250,000 visits to the centre each year. Ultimately, we want to build a facility that minimises energy consumption, provides flexible facilities, which can be expanded to meet the needs of today's and future generations.

How much is the new Leisure Centre going to cost?

The appointed contractor Wates Construction Limited has conducted a full competitive tender process. The total build cost including fit out, circa £29 million. That being said, it is our intention to ensure value for money is obtained.

Where are construction workers going to park during construction and how will the construction affect access to existing businesses?

Workers will park within the construction site or at off site car parks, such as, the one extended on Caldwell Road. Work phased to ensure that some public car parking, surrounding the site compound retained. However, some of the current car parking affected, during construction of the new centre. Therefore, there is a possibility of some disruption and a reduction in capacity for a few months. Any development will be subject to a construction and environmental management plan (CEMP) which will set out good construction practice which the development will need to be carried out under.

How will the construction affect the area?

There will be increased traffic movements with workers and deliveries during the construction process. However, deliveries in particular will be coordinated through a construction management plan to minimise impacts at peak times. The busiest periods for users of adjacent businesses are typically outside normal working hours so the prospects of clashes with construction traffic will be minimised.

Will a new Leisure Centre cause an increase in traffic?

The facilities offered may generate more visits and result in a little more traffic. However, because of its central location it is close to good public transport links, so the impact should be minimal. The Green Travel Plan will include details on reducing the carbon footprint of visitors by encouraging more sustainable forms of transport, plus walking and cycling and ensuring that there is adequate and safe cycle storage. It can also include encouraging car sharing by visitors. The Highways Authority consulted as part of the planning application and a traffic assessment undertaken. A Transport Statement provided as part of the planning application.

Are there enough car parking spaces?

The current centre car park struggled to meet demand, used regularly by visitors to surrounding buildings, such as, college. Expected that use by those not visiting the centre will be minimal. The number of car park space at the Caldwell Road car park increased and the flexible working arrangements, in response to the pandemic, has seen a drop in parking around the area. Coach and cycle spaces to accommodate users.

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Will the Council be making a profit by selling the current Leisure Centre site?

No. The construction costs for the proposed new Leisure Centre are significantly greater than the value of the current Leisure Centre site. No planned use for the existing site. Work will commence on the future use of this land, once construction of the new build starts. This will link to Town Centre Regeneration work/studies.

Will there be new homes built on the existing Leisure Centre site?

Work has not commenced on determining the future use of the existing site.

How is the Council going to pay for the new Leisure Centre?

The Council borrowing will fund the cost of the Leisure Centre. Whilst a modern Leisure Centre with a wide range of facilities will generate more income per annum than the current Leisure Centre, the additional income will not be sufficient to fully cover the annual financing costs of the loan. There will therefore be a net pressure on the Council's Revenue Budget because of the new Leisure Centre. The Council will look to offset any deficit by seeking to generate additional income streams from elsewhere in the Borough.

Will the nearby NHS Centre be affected?

The NHS health centre is an important stakeholder. Our proposals do not affect these facilities in any way.

Do we actually have a say in this or has the Leisure Centre been decided on?

Consultation has taken place. Independent review of facilities commissioned during 2017/2018, this involved public consultation. The Council adopted Indoor and Built Sports Facility Strategy, including an action plan in 2019. Replace Kingsway Leisure Centre identified as the key priority. Building plans prepared and public consultation took place in January 2020 and again during the planning application process in May 2020. Planning approval granted in November 2020. The project has been through the Councils decision-making process. Amendments made to the energy source, removing gas supplies, approval to proceed granted in October 2022. The building design is now fixed.

It was necessary to identify a location:

- already owned by the Council
- large enough to accommodate all the facilities required in the new centre
- not within the Green Belt
- centrally located, easily accessible by many of the borough's residents (on foot, by public transport and by car)

It was also necessary to consider a number of other factors, which could affect the location of the site, including:

- other planning issues and environmental site constraints
- any potential need to relocate existing site uses/occupiers
- visibility of the site, synergies with surrounding land uses and Council regeneration plans
- the sensitivity of the site to any proposed development

Will the new studios be soundproofed and have air-conditioning?

Yes, all the new studios will have this.

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How will the proposed design and facilities meet the need for disabled residents in the Borough?

The centre will be fully accessible and dementia friendly. It has a Changing Place facility accessible to support residents and visitors get active and enjoy day-to-day activities. In addition, it is planning policy that the centre is DDA (Disability Discrimination Act) compliant.

Will the new Leisure Centre pose a flood risk?

The site is situated in a location with risks of flooding; the building base has been raised. It is not uncommon to develop in such areas. Any new buildings constructed are designed to fully mitigate any additional risks of flooding. A Flood Risk Assessment was submitted as part of any planning application and this would demonstrate how the building would mitigate any impacts it may create.

Who will be the operator for the new Leisure Centre? Will my membership costs go up?

The Council's in house team will operate the Centre. In terms of membership, it is our intention to offer competitive prices to ensure the Leisure Centre remains accessible to as many people as possible within the Borough.

Why do the new plans not include, like for like facilities or additional facilities like climbing wall?

The current facilities require more capital and revenue. The Council needed to reduce the expenditure on areas that had low daytime occupancy and increase the commercial offer to provide a balanced flexible facility mix.

