

Consultation on the preferred site for the new leisure centre at Canada Water Questions & Answers Including comments from 30 March public meeting

During February the council ran a number of consultation sessions on the preferred site to build a new leisure centre, which is referred to as plot 6 on the British Land (BL) masterplan that will shape the new town centre at Canada Water.

The masterplan includes the Surrey Quays Shopping Centre, the former printworks site at Harmsworth Quays and the Surrey Quays Leisure Park. The plan at the bottom of this document shows the plots within the emerging town centre that have been considered as sites for the new leisure centre – we have also looked at a number of sites outside of the town centre including the option of refurbishing the existing Seven Islands leisure centre.

The consultation sessions were well attended by local people who asked the council many questions. To help give a better understanding of the proposal some of the most frequently asked questions are answered below.

On 30 March the council held a public meeting on the choice of preferred site and several of those in attendance asked questions. Some of the matters raised were dealt with in the first version of this document, where new points were made they have been added below from Q20 on.

1. Why is the council not delivering a 50m pool on the Decathlon site as shown in the 2005 BLCQ development masterplan?

That was a promise made eleven years ago by a different administration and as such is of limited relevance to current discussions.

In 2005 the council entered into an agreement with a partner (BLCQ) to deliver the regeneration of the town centre. BLCQ created an aspirational masterplan for the land around Canada Basin, including sites not in the ownership of BLCQ or the council. The masterplan included an aquatic centre, with a 50m pool, on part of what is currently the site of the Decathlon store (the owner of the site is now pursuing their own redevelopment plan). The aquatic centre was a facility promised by a previous administration, but that ultimately proved to be undeliverable.

The priority for the council's current administration is to upgrade local leisure facilities in a way that is affordable and that is linked to a robust delivery mechanism.

2. What site option work did the council undertake in 2013?

The council commissioned a firm of leisure specialists to look at three sites that could potentially house a new leisure centre. Ultimately their work was overtaken by events and so was never formally considered or agreed by the council.

It has long been the council's wish to see the comprehensive redevelopment of the town centre delivered in line with a masterplan for the whole area. The council is also sympathetic to the view of many local people that important council services, like the library and a swimming pool, should be in the town centre.

In 2013 the council began working with BL on plans to redevelop the site of the former print works at Harmsworth Quays. BL also own the Shopping Centre, and in 2013 their plan was to extend the Centre into the main car park. BL were not at that time considering the full redevelopment of the Shopping Centre site.

This meant that in 2013 there was no way for the council to deliver a leisure centre as part of a comprehensive plan to create a new town centre. The council was therefore looking at delivering a leisure centre in isolation, for which there appeared to be only three realistic options for a site: build on the existing Seven Island site; include a new leisure centre as part of a redeveloped Harmsworth Quays; or, the overflow car park (the section of car park nearest the tube station) was, in the council's view, an underused resource which might potentially be developed in isolation from the rest of the Shopping Centre. But none of these options would be delivered as part of a comprehensive remodelling of the town centre.

We therefore asked our specialist consultant to consider which of these three sites would be best for a new, stand alone facility.

Over time it became clear another, better approach was becoming possible so that looking at these three sites in isolation no longer made sense. The 2013 site option work was therefore closed down and since then the leisure specialist has been helping the council explore a different approach.

3. Is it true the council changed its mind from 2013 on the preferred location for the new leisure centre?

The council has not changed its mind about the preferred location for the new leisure centre.

The only decision taken by the current administration on an alternative site for a new leisure centre was taken in August 2015. That decision was to confirm plot 6 as the preferred location and that was done so that a properly informed public consultation could be undertaken.

If you would like to see the report it is available on the Southwark consultation Hub website, under related information. Use the link:

<https://consultations.southwark.gov.uk/planning-and-regeneration/new-leisure-centre-site-at-canada-water>

4. What happened after 2013 that the council did not consider the consultant's report?

As they progressed work on their redevelopment plans BL gradually extended their proposals. In 2014 they moved away from the idea of extending the Shopping Centre in favour of a larger scheme that integrated Harmsworth Quays and the Shopping Centre. In the council's view this represented a welcome and significant change of direction by BL. Then in 2015 BL bought the Mast Leisure Park and extended the masterplan again to include all three sites: Harmsworth Quays, the Shopping Centre and Mast Leisure.

This meant the council was no longer limited to considering the future of Seven Islands in isolation from a comprehensive treatment of the town centre and that other potential sites for the new facility would become available. It also meant we had a robust mechanism to deliver the new facility.

This work eventually led to the council choosing plot 6 as the preferred site for the new leisure centre.

5. Why is it the council had to be forced by local people to undertake any consultation?

It is incorrect to suggest the council has been forced into undertaking public consultation. In fact, the proposal to relocate Seven Islands to plot 6 only became public knowledge when the council published a report initiating the current consultation.

The purpose of the report in August 2015 was to set out the preferred location for the new centre, and critically, to authorise council officers to undertake public consultation on the chosen preferred site. It was always the intention the consultation would explain the options the council has looked at and show the preferred site in the context of the BL masterplan. To be able to do that in a transparent and meaningful way it was necessary to confirm the site we are talking about. Hence the August 2015 report made clear our preferred location for the new facility.

When that report was published local people and council members on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee asked for changes to how the consultation should be carried out. The agreed changes have been incorporated into the current consultation.

To view the report click on the link:

<http://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=5460>

6. Is plot 6 a 'nature reserve'?

Plot 6 is not a nature reserve.

There is no doubt that immediate local residents value living next to this green area, and the council acknowledges the valid concerns of residents of these proposals. However, the green area has never been formal designated for ecological protection, on the grounds it does not warrant designation.

As part of site investigations for the BL masterplan plot 6 has been the subject of an ecological report, a copy of which is available at the link below. The report found that plot 6 does not support any designated sites, notable habitats or protected species.

https://consultations.southwark.gov.uk/planning-and-regeneration/new-leisure-centre-site-at-canada-water/supporting_documents/Prince%20of%20Orange%20Walkway%20Trees%20and%20Ecology.pdf

7. What will happen to plot 6 if the leisure centre goes somewhere else?

The site has been identified as a development plot within the emerging masterplan for the town centre. As such, if it is not used for the new leisure centre an alternative use would be proposed as part of the masterplan.

8. Must all of the trees be removed from plot 6?

That depends on the end use for the site.

Given the envisaged size of the new leisure centre it is likely much of plot 6 will have to be cleared to create room for construction activity. But every effort will be made to minimise the number of trees removed and, in line with a landscaping strategy, to replace lost trees.

The planning process requires surveys to be undertaken to evaluate the condition of current trees; their ecological and amenity value, and the extent to which the construction methodology will allow individual trees to be retained. Every effort will be made to minimise disruption and to retain existing trees where this is practical. The design will incorporate landscaping to soften the visual impact of the new building and the council will make every effort to include new trees to replace those removed.

If plot 6 was developed for another use it is possible less of the land would be needed for construction so that more of the existing trees may be able to remain.

9. If the council is serious about its environmental claims surely it would not allow any trees to be cut down?

The council is serious about protecting the environment and regrets the removal of any trees.

As the project moves forward we will continue to make sure environmental impacts are understood. We will only support development where the impacts are balanced and wherever practical that mitigation is put in place. However, it is simply not possible that a project of this scale; with its many benefits in terms of new homes, jobs and community infrastructure, could ever be delivered without the need to remove some trees.

Across the piece, the BL masterplan promises many improvements to the environment and ecology of Canada Water, including an overall increase in public spaces, plants and biodiversity. For example the former Printworks site will, for the first time, be opened up to offer the public use of an extensive new network of access routes and public spaces, including a park, and the landscaping will include many new trees.

That said, the council recognises that looked at plot by plot the effects will be different – and that in relation to plot 6 the neighbours around Hothfield Place, Hithe Grove and China Hall Mews will be disproportionately impacted. That is why we have focused our consultation on

this group and why we will continue to work with residents to minimise the impact of the new leisure centre.

10. How can we be sure you will take on board the views of local people?

The current consultation is asking residents for their views on the choice of preferred location for the new leisure centre, including alternative sites that we should look at. Many people have given us general feedback, with some suggesting other sites they favour, and others raising specific issues about individual sites. In relation to the preferred site some of the issues raised by residents so far are: how close the leisure centre will be to neighbouring houses; concerns about the height and bulk of a new building; servicing arrangements; and, the impact on sunlight and daylight.

Feedback has also been received on the decision to move the leisure centre from its current location, with some residents favouring a rebuild on the existing site.

The consultation runs until the end of April and all comments received by then will be considered before a preferred site is confirmed.

We have already begun to address some of these matters, for example the current design envisages much of the leisure centre built at the same ground level as Hothfield Place so as to reduce its height relative to neighbours. If plot 6 is confirmed we will look to involve local people in design workshops to better understand and address their specific concerns.

11. Is plot 6 a prominent enough position to be used as a leisure centre?

The council thinks that plot 6 provides a good level of visibility and accessibility that is appropriate for this service.

From our experience a successful leisure centre does not need to be located on a highly visible town centre site. Customers of council leisure centres make repeat visits. They know the location of their local gym or pool and plan in advance specific trips to visit them; taking the appropriate clothing and equipment with them.

This is quite different to what happens with shops in a town centre, which get a lot of their business from passing trade. As a result retailers want to be in the most visible and accessible locations; the areas of highest footfall, and will pay a premium for those sites.

From a service perspective a council leisure centre does not need to be on a high footfall site and economically we could not justify the cost of occupying property there.

Looked at in this way, plot 6 offers all of the benefits of town centre transport links, car parking and accessibility but without the cost of being on the main retail pitch. In the new town centre plot 6 will be: on the street next to the main retail parade; a short walk from two tube stations and a bus station and will be served by buses to the front door; and, a short distance from all of the commercial leisure activities planned for around the Canada basin.

12. Is plot 6 even in the town centre – some people say the council’s proposal is just a bolt-on, an after thought to the scheme BL are promoting next door?

Plot 6 is within the town centre as defined in the council's planning policy. It is also part of the land in the shopping centre lease and its future development has been considered as an important element of the BL masterplan.

One of the attractions for the council in working with BL is the opportunity of including the leisure centre in a comprehensive treatment of Canada Water. The council feels that plot 6 is not only a good location for the leisure centre, but that a leisure facility on this site will make a positive contribution to the success of the new town centre.

13. Why has the council rejected the idea of building above the leisure centre?

Experience from other places is that building above a leisure centre is complex and the council is not prepared to accept the risk and additional cost of doing so.

Some of the uses in a leisure centre require large clear spaces with no supporting columns rising through them (you can't have a column in the middle of a competition standard swimming pool). Such long roof spans makes building above a leisure centre a significant and expensive engineering challenge; which would be even more complex if we tried to construct a mixed use building with a leisure centre over the railway tunnel (as would be the case if we put the leisure centre on plots 1 or 2).

Leisure centres also have a different life cycle from other types of uses. For example, a residential block would typically have a design life of over 100 years. In the same period a swimming pool will require several major refurbishments that are likely to include significant structural works.

These, and other factors add to the cost and risk of building and operating mixed use buildings – and the council is simply not prepared to take this on.

14. If the council's consultant previously favoured the overflow car park site how can you now say it would be difficult to build the leisure centre on plots 1 & 2?

The reason for this is the position of the railway tunnel relative to the realigned Deal Porters Way.

The overflow car park is the section of parking nearest Canada Water tube station, bounded on its western side by the former Dock Office and to the east by Deal Porters Way. The railway tunnel runs under one side of the overflow car park, leaving enough space to build the leisure centre without interfering with the tunnel.

The BL masterplan envisages moving Deal Porters Way to run along the western boundary of the car park site, immediately next to the Dock Office – this has been done to create a pedestrianized high street next to the dock. This means the overflow car park considered in the 2013 report and what are now plots 1 & 2 is not the same piece of land.

It also means that the railway tunnel runs under the middle of plots 1 & 2 so that building the leisure centre there would impact the tunnel.

16. But if it is possible to build tall buildings with a mix of uses on plots 1 & 2, as the BL masterplan shows, why would it be so difficult to build the leisure centre there?

Different buildings have different designs and require different foundations.

For example, most of the weight of a tower block is transmitted down through its central core and touches the ground on a relatively small footprint. It is therefore comparatively straightforward to position the building and / or design its foundations to minimise any issue with the tunnel. On the other hand, the nature of a swimming pool means it has a much larger loadbearing footprint so that, should it be located on plots 1 & 2, positioning the building to avoid impacting the tunnel would not be possible. Resolving this would likely require extensive engineering work.

17. The railway tunnel also runs by plot 6, so why do you think you can build a swimming pool there?

Our preliminary design work shows that there is enough space to build the swimming pool on plot 6 without interfering with the railway tunnel.

18. But won't you still need consent from Transport for London (TfL) to build near the tunnel, and who is to say that will be forthcoming?

The council has no reason to believe the proximity of the tunnel will prevent or add significantly to the risk or cost of building the leisure centre on plot 6.

Whether or not you need TfL consent depends on how close to the tunnel you intend to build. Preliminary design work suggests it will be possible to build the leisure centre so that the pool is not close to the tunnel. However, it is possible some limited areas of ancillary space will come sufficiently close to the tunnel to trigger the consent process. There is no reason to believe this will be a significant issue.

The council has experience of the consent process; for example, Canada Water library was built above the tube station and we are currently building the new Albion Primary School over a section of the same tunnel further north of plot 6. Based on our experience of this and other projects we have no reason to believe TfL will object in principle to construction of the leisure centre.

We also know that BL will need TfL consent to develop other plots in the masterplan area. Their preliminary discussions with TfL confirm our understanding that there is no issue of principle about building over the tunnel, subject to TfL agreeing the design of buildings and the working arrangements for the construction.

19. What will happen next?

The consultation will run until the 29th of April and all comments received will feed into a report to the council's cabinet in the summer of 2016. That report will confirm the preferred site for the new leisure centre.

If it is confirmed the preferred site is one of the town centre plots within the BL masterplan we will then progress the design and make a planning application – and this is programmed to happen by the end of 2016.

Subject to receiving planning consent the construction contract will then be let – it is too early in the process to know when this is likely to be.

Further questions asked at the public meeting held on 30 March 2016

20. Will cycle access between Hothfield Place and the Shopping Centre car park be maintained?

British Land is considering how best to provide cycle, disabled and buggy access between Hothfield Place and the Shopping Centre if the leisure centre is built on plot 6. There will be further information on how the existing ramp will be replaced as the scheme is developed.

21. What criteria will the council use in making its choice of site for the new leisure centre?

The selection criteria for the preferred site are as follows:

1. The site must be large enough to accommodate the brief.
2. The site must be an LBS freehold.
3. The leisure centre should be a stand-alone building without other uses above it.
4. It must be possible to deliver the new leisure centre on the site within 5 years.
5. Continuity of service.
6. Planning risk.
7. Serving the catchment area.
8. Accessibility by public transport, walking and cycling.
9. Supports the delivery of the wider regeneration of Canada Water.

22. Is the green area within plot 6 designated as, 'Green Corridor 682'?

No part of plot 6 has an ecological designation.

The council's approach to protecting open space, as well as information on assessing ecological merit and site designations, is contained in our Open Space Strategy. The Strategy can be found by following the link below:

https://www.southwark.gov.uk/downloads/download/2948/open_space_strategy_2012

In preparing the Strategy the council carried out an audit of open spaces in the borough. As part of the audit the green area within plot 6 was included along with further land to the south running along the railway line. This larger site was given the reference number 682 and identified in the audit as a green corridor. The term, 'Green Corridor 682' was a label used in the audit purely to identify the site.

Sites that have nature conservation value have been protected through the Canada Water Area Action Plan (2015) and the council's Core Strategy (2011). However, the green area on plot 6 has not been found to have ecological merit and has no formal protection in planning policies.

23. With the anticipated growth in population in the area why does the council not provide two leisure centres: refurbish the existing Seven Islands and build a new centre located to take advantage of the proposed cycle bridge?

The council simply does not have the funds to consider building and operating two leisure centres in this area of the Borough.

24. Has there, or will there be carried out an environmental impact assessment of the proposal to build on plot 6?

In order to satisfy planning requirements a full environmental impact assessment of the entire masterplan area will have to be carried out. This will form part of the planning application for the masterplan (that will include the proposal for the leisure centre) and will be available for public inspection and comment as part of the planning application submission later in the year.

25. Is there currently public access to the green area within plot 6?

All of plot 6 is owned freehold by the council and let on a long lease to British Land, the owners of the Surrey Quays Shopping Centre. The site is therefore the responsibility of the Shopping Centre. They control access; the green area within plot 6 is currently fenced off or separated by a wall from the walkway and is not intended for public access.

26. Why not use Harmsworth Quays as the site for the new leisure centre?

The council has looked seriously at building the new leisure centre on Harmsworth Quays and the site does have a number of attractions. However, when tested against the selection criteria listed above in Q21, plot 6 better meets the council's requirements.

27. Why not use Roberts Close as the site for the new leisure centre?

As a result of questions from local residents the council commissioned feasibility work to test the suitability of Roberts Close as the site of the new leisure centre. The report of the findings is available at this link:

https://consultations.southwark.gov.uk/planning-and-regeneration/new-leisure-centre-site-at-canada-water/++preview++open/supporting_documents/3393%20Roberts%20Close%20Redevelopment.pdf

The report found that on the whole the site is highly constrained and while theoretically it is possible to provide a building the outcome would not be optimal in terms of day to day management, it would carry a high level of design and cost risk, and achieving planning standards would be a challenge.

28. Will congestion on the transport system prevent development from taking place?

Transport will undoubtedly be an important consideration that will be fully tested during the planning process and the masterplan will be subject to a full transport assessment. The council is seeking to increase transport options and capacity in the area by working with Transport for London to: i. increase the number of tube trains at peak times on the Jubilee line; ii. develop the Rotherhithe bridge to provide a new river crossing to Canary Wharf for pedestrians and cyclists; iii. provide safer and more convenient cycling links; iv. secure additional bus services; and, v. remove the gyratory on Rotherhithe New Road.

If plot 6 is confirmed as the location for the new leisure centre the proposal will be included in the BL masterplan application for the town centre.

29. What will be the specification for the new leisure centre, how was this arrived at and what opportunity will there be to influence the final specification?

The specification the council has set for the new facility is as follows:

- 25m x eight lane pool
- Learner pool (can also be used as a hydrotherapy pool)
- 150 station gym
- Three exercise studios
- Four court sports hall
- A crèche

In terms of pool length the council has followed Sport England advice that pools to be used for competitive swimming should be either 25m or 50m long.

Whilst the basic specification has been set the council will involve sports bodies and user groups in developing the detailed specification and all of this work will be communicated openly with interested parties such as young people and clubs.

30. How long would construction of the leisure centre on plot 6 take?

It is too early in the process to know with certainty how long construction might take, but it is likely to be around 24 to 30 months.

31. Does the fact the council has done so much design work on plot 6 not mean the decision to proceed has already been taken? How can you make a true comparison between sites if the council has not carried out the same level of design work on each site?

The council has developed the design to the degree needed to inform consultation and decision making; but that does not mean a final decision has been taken.

This can be explained by way of two examples. First, a number of people have raised as an issue of concern the proximity of the swimming pool to the railway tunnel. To allow for an informed debate the council has commissioned work to establish how close to the tunnel the new pool might be – and this work required a certain level of design.

On the other hand, some sites suggested for investigation were simply too small to accommodate the council's specification. In these cases clearly there would be no need, or point in carryout any design work beyond establishing the size of the site.

32. What is the area of the current Seven Islands site?

The 7 Islands site is 3,629sq.m.

By comparison the full extent of Plot 6 is 4,400sq.m.

33. Is there any point to the consultation; has the council not already made up its mind? What would it take for the council to change its view on the preferred site?

The final decision on a preferred site has not been taken.

The council will consider the relevant technical information and advice, as well as matters raised during the consultation, before making a final decision in a report to cabinet. If this information makes a compelling case for another site the council will act on that.

34. Do the examples of Lewisham's new Glass Mill leisure centre and Camden's centre at Swiss Cottage not demonstrate you can build a leisure centre as part of a mixed use development?

It is true that both of these municipal facilities were delivered as part of mixed use development schemes. But whilst the schemes were mixed use, the buildings housing the leisure facilities are largely single use.

Lewisham's Glass Mill centre is physically connected to a residential scheme; the key point being the swimming pool is built adjoining a housing block but with nothing built above the pool itself.

The situation at Swiss Cottage is very similar except that in this case as well a block of flats adjoining the centre there are a small number of flats on the roof of the leisure centre.

Neither of these examples supports the argument that it is possible to build a leisure centre as part of mixed use development with significant residential or commercial floor space above the leisure elements.

Plot 6 map

