



## **GRAVESHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **CASCADES LEISURE CENTRE COMMUNITY CONSULTATION REPORT**

#### **DRAFT REPORT v2**

**NOVEMBER 2022**

QUALITY, INTEGRITY, PROFESSIONALISM

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Gravesham Borough Council

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**CASCADES LC COMMUNITY CONSULTATION REPORT**

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the draft consultation report by KKP following a public consultation exercise on the proposals to replace Cascades Leisure Centre with a new state of the art facility.

This report provides an overview of the results and provides some options on the way forward for the Council.

### Key findings

- ◀ There was a good level of response (695) to the consultation exercise given the localised nature of the development and the general profile of respondents reflects the general profile of Gravesham. However, more females than males responded to the survey - 60:40 female:male split and there was clear underrepresentation among under 16s and 16 to 24 years, although it is assumed that many parents completed the survey on behalf of their family.
- ◀ The Council has a clear public mandate to provide a modern replacement leisure facility in Gravesend.
- ◀ There is public consensus that this proposal is worthy of investing public funds to deliver.
- ◀ Respondents feel very positive about the proposal and the investment in facilities, but it will be important to ensure continuity for residents during the development period.
- ◀ In general there is agreement about the mix of facilities and activity areas proposed for the site.
- ◀ There were no statistically significant responses for facilities that were identified as missing from the facility mix.
- ◀ It is clear from the responses that open space around the centre is high value. The priority areas for investment to improve the area include:
  - ◀ Improved children's play facilities
  - ◀ Walking routes and connections to existing rights of way
  - ◀ Improved landscaping
  - ◀ Sensory garden (quiet activity space)
  - ◀ Cycling skills area
- ◀ There are a number of qualitative responses and additional comments provided within survey responses that are worthy of note; however, none had statistically significant levels of response which requires alteration to the direction of travel for the facility mix and wider development.
  - ◀ The provision of a 50m pool for Kent
  - ◀ The potential for an outdoor pool
  - ◀ The provision of outdoor petanque facilities
  - ◀ The need for facilities to be fully wheelchair user accessible.
  - ◀ The provision of a health suite
  - ◀ Concerns about the potential closure of Cygnet LC
  - ◀ The retention of leisure water within the facility mix.
  - ◀ The need to accommodate youths and young people at the new facility.
  - ◀ The range of sports that can be accommodated at the new centre.
  - ◀ The retention of the site's heritage

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The above is not an exhaustive list of comments raised but reflects the opportunity for the Council to enter into ongoing dialogue and consultation with residents as the facility design develops.

This public consultation exercise reflects the first real open dialogue with residents on the new leisure centre. It reinforces the need for further dialogue to allay any fears about closures and to reassure residents that all users, especially those with disabilities, will be accommodated within the design of the new facility. This may also present an opportunity for the Council to establish a working group of residents who can feed in any concerns on the development and who can represent the needs of specific groups.

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### INTRODUCTION

#### Strategy development and engagement

The Council's journey to making a decision to replace Cascades LC has been developed over a 7-year period and has included a range of stakeholder and community engagement processes in its development.

In July 2015, Gravesham Council embarked on its Open Space, Sport and Recreation Strategy as part of its Local Plan evidence base. The three components to this study included:

- ◀ Indoor Sports Facilities Strategy
- ◀ Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy
- ◀ Open Space Strategy

The Indoor Sports Facilities Strategy is the key document which highlighted the need to undertake a feasibility study into the future of Cascades and Cygnet leisure centres. This study was supported by a range of stakeholder engagement meetings with organisations such as:

- ◀ Local authority partners and key officers (Leisure, Planning, Assets, Public Health, Clinical Commissioning Group, Libraries, etc..)
- ◀ National governing bodies of sport (e.g. Swim England, Badminton England, Basketball England, England and Wales Cricket Board, English Gymnastics, etc..)
- ◀ Local sports clubs in sports such as swimming, basketball, gymnastics, badminton, etc..
- ◀ Stakeholders including Gravesham Community Leisure Limited, all local High Schools, health partners and key community groups.

The level of engagement in developing the Indoor Sports Facilities Strategy is in line with other Local Plan evidence bases that we have delivered and was key in delivering a clear action plan for the Council.

In line with the Strategy recommendations, the Council engaged KKP in November 2020 to undertake a feasibility study on the potential of a new single leisure centre to replace Cascades and Cygnet leisure centres. Again, KKP engaged with a wide range of consultees with regards to this study including:

- ◀ Local authority key officers (Leisure, Planning, Assets, etc..)
- ◀ County Council and Health partners (Public Health, Clinical Commissioning Group, Libraries, etc..)
- ◀ Lower Thames Crossing – project officers
- ◀ National governing bodies of sport (e.g. Swim England, Badminton England, etc..)
- ◀ Key stakeholders such as Gravesham Community Leisure Limited.
- ◀ Neighbouring authorities and the Ebbsfleet Garden City development

The key result of this study was that the development of a replacement for Cascades needs to be considered within the same location (as there are no other available plots of land closer to Gravesend) and that the development of a new leisure facility at the Ebbsfleet Garden City development needs to influence the Council's thinking with regards the future of Cygnet.

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The results of the feasibility study have led to the Council deciding to progress with the design development of a replacement for Cascades LC. The design stage of the project is at RIBA Stage 2 and follows on from an options appraisal on initial design concepts and construction techniques.

The Council has made the decision to progress with the design development and set a target of submitting a planning application by the end of November 2022. Given the necessity to move at pace and to ensure there was sufficient public consultation to support the stakeholder engagement undertaken over recent years it was decided to progress with a full public consultation process to support the planning submission.

### Public consultation

The consultation exercise commenced on Monday 24<sup>th</sup> October 2022 and closed at midnight on Sunday 20 November 2022. However, additional responses were received through until midnight on Wednesday 23 November to allow for current members to respond to the survey.

The Council launched the consultation process via a range of media outlets on 24<sup>th</sup> October and created a bespoke web page to promote the development. The Council's Communications Manager also assisted with regular social media activity to maintain the knowledge and interest in the consultation process with local residents. Added to this, there was direct communication and sharing of consultation links with established groups and clubs in Gravesham, as well as a final 'push' in the last week of the consultation period.

The online survey generated 695 responses which is a good response for a localised consultation process for a local development and given the four-week period for the consultation. This level of response provides confidence level of 95% with a margin of error of +/- 3.69%. Consequently, while the data is indicative of public opinion and behaviour it is recommended that individual results are not used in isolation but are used as part of a wider suite of opinion on the development.

The survey was divided into six broad sections as briefly outlined below:

1. *Personal characteristics*  
... gender, age, ethnicity, disability – this enables variations to be determined by age, gender etc.
2. *General overview*  
... whether respondents are users of the current facilities (e.g. pool, sports hall, fitness, group exercise studios, health suite).
3. *Views on the leisure centre development*  
... the degree to which residents feel there is a need to provide modern replacements for the range of facilities on the site.
4. *Facility mix*  
... the degree to which residents agree or disagree with the proposed facility mix and if anything is missing from this.
5. *Open space around the site*  
... the importance of open space and outdoor facilities and the potential improvements that should be delivered on the site.



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#### 6. *Other comments*

... respondents were invited to provide any other comments they felt were relevant to the proposed development.

#### ***Drop in session***

In support of the online consultation survey, KKP and S&P undertook a drop-in session at Cascades LC on Tuesday 8th November 2022, from 12 noon to 7pm.

The drop-in session provided residents with an opportunity to view the proposals for the replacement leisure centre and to ask any specific questions in relation to the development. In total there were circa 50 users of the facility who engaged with the drop-in session. The majority of these were interested in the mix of activity areas within the new centre and the location of the centre on the site. Key areas of interest included:

- ✦ Continuity of provision - the current centre would only close when the new centre opens.
- ✦ Swimming provision – the retention of leisure features, but the ability to swim lengths and host competitions was seen as a positive.
- ✦ Learn to swim – a good quality pool to accommodate learn to swim sessions was welcomed.
- ✦ Adventure play – the provision of play facilities was seen as a positive.
- ✦ Outdoor play – improvements to the outdoor play area were viewed as really important for parents engaged in the consultation event.
- ✦ Health suite – there was some challenge about the provision of a health suite within the new facility.



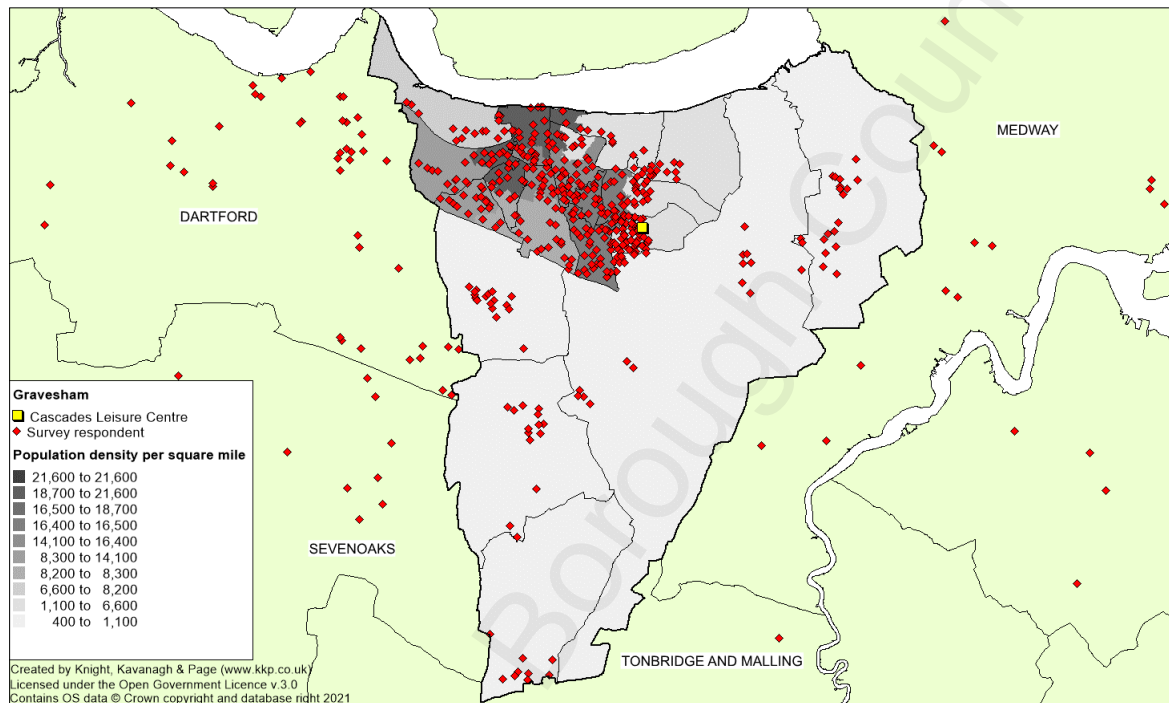
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### Overview of respondents

87% of respondents are from Gravesham with 13% from outside of the Borough, primarily Dartford, Sevenoaks and Medway.

*Figure 1: Respondents post code analysis*





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### PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

The headline analysis based on personal characteristics of respondents is detailed below.

Respondents by gender		
Male	250	36.0%
Female	432	62.2%
Prefer not to say	9	1.3%
Other	3	0.4%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>694</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Respondents by age band		
Under 16	6	0.9%
16 to 24	34	4.9%
25 to 34	124	17.9%
35 to 44	194	28.0%
45 to 54	124	17.9%
55 to 64	116	16.7%
65+	95	13.7%
<b>Base</b>	<b>693</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

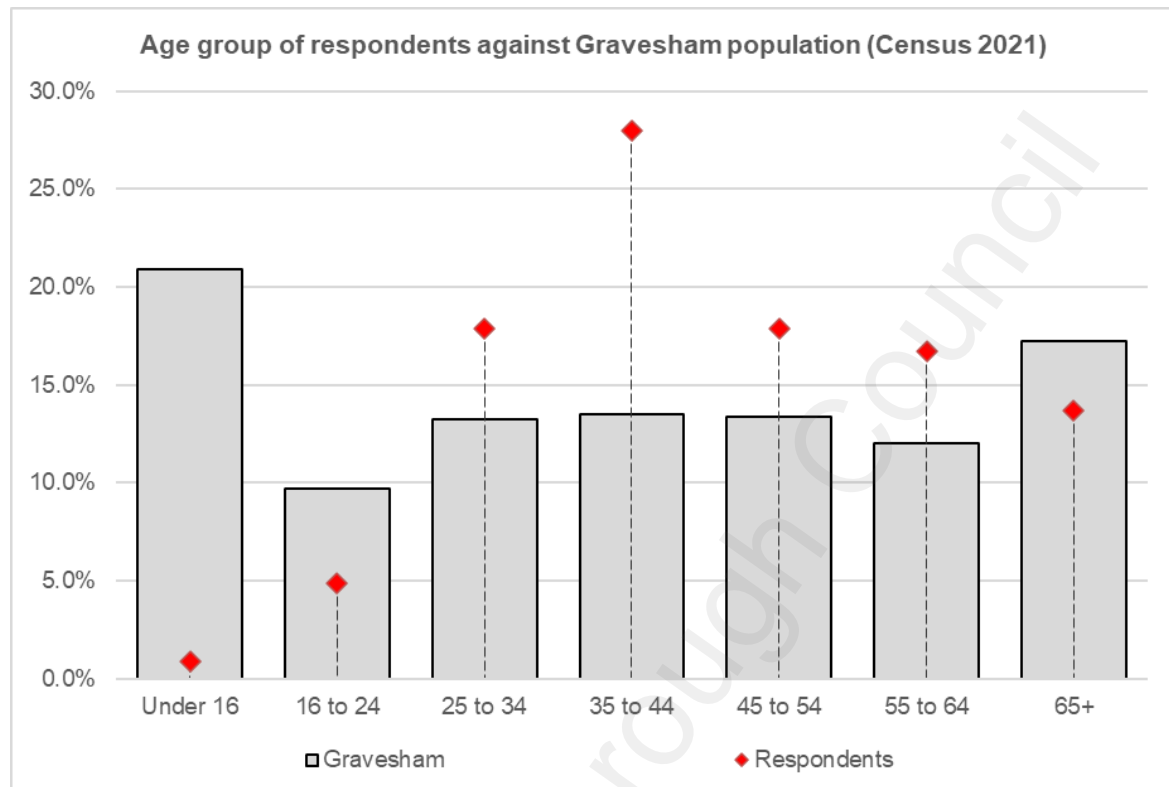
It is clear from the above that the highest proportion of respondents (28%) are from the 35 to 44 year age band. This, coupled with the 25 to 34 year and 45 to 54 year age bands are the key age groups for parents of young children and teenagers in the local area, and in many circumstances these responses will be on behalf of the family. Apart from the 35 to 44 age band, all the age bands between 25 to 64 years have a similar level of response to the survey.

If we compare the age profile of respondents against that of Gravesham residents, under 16s are the most underrepresented age group, although many parents will complete the survey on behalf of their children and family. The 16 to 24 age group is also underrepresented, but again, a proportion of these may be considered within a wider family response.

The 35 to 44 age group has almost double the response rate compared to its population profile. This reflects that it is the age group with the greatest interest in the provision of community facilities which will serve the needs of their children in future years.

The over 65's have slightly less representation than their profile, but this is insufficient to raise any concerns from the response profile.

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The following analysis sets out the level of response by ethnicity, disability and area of residence:

Respondents by ethnic group		
White (British/Irish/other White)	603	86.8%
Black (Black Caribbean/Black African/Black British/other Black)	20	2.9%
Asian (Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi/Chinese/other Asian)	34	4.9%
Mixed (White and Black/White and Asian/Other mixed)	13	1.9%
Prefer not to say	25	3.6%
<b>Base</b>	<b>695</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Do you have a long term illness or disability which limits your daily activities?		
Yes	92	13.3%
No	581	83.7%
Prefer not to say	21	3.0%
<b>Base</b>	<b>694</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Are you a resident of Gravesham Borough Council?		
Yes	601	87.0%
No	90	13.0%
<b>Base</b>	<b>691</b>	<b>100.0%</b>



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### GENERAL OVERVIEW

A key baseline assessment within the survey is to understand the current use of Cascades. The question asked was:

*Do you (or your household) currently visit/use any of the facilities on the current Cascades Leisure Centre site?*

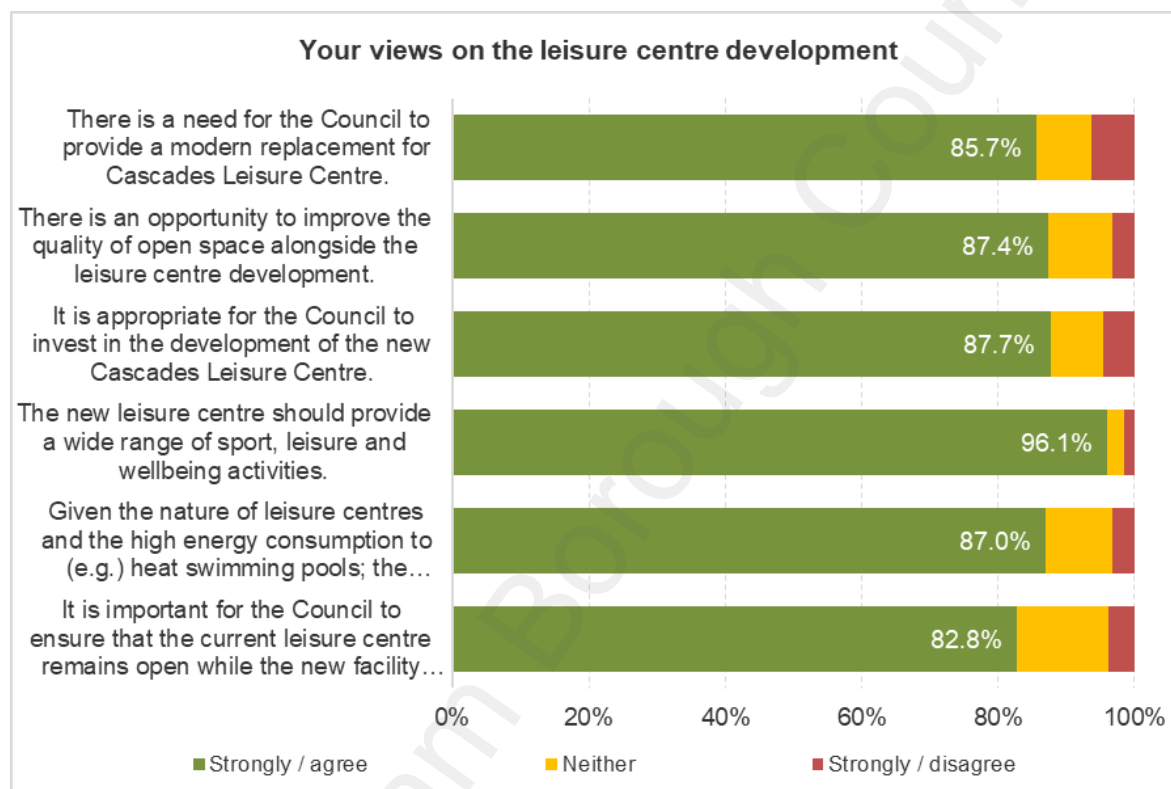
Facilities/activity areas	All		Male		Female		Other		Prefer not to say
Leisure centre	<b>510</b>	73.8%	183	73.8%	319	73.8%	1	33.3%	6
Swimming pool	<b>463</b>	67.0%	158	63.7%	297	68.8%	0	0.0%	7
Sports hall	<b>150</b>	21.7%	76	30.6%	72	16.7%	1	33.3%	1
Fitness suite	<b>226</b>	32.7%	102	41.1%	120	27.8%	1	33.3%	3
Group exercise studios	<b>156</b>	22.6%	43	17.3%	112	25.9%	0	0.0%	1
Health suite	<b>165</b>	23.9%	68	27.4%	94	21.8%	0	0.0%	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>691</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>248</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>432</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>8</b>

It is clear from the above that 510 of the 695 respondents (74%) are users of Cascades Leisure Centre and the majority of these (91%) are pool users. This reflects the level of interest at the drop-in session regarding the type of pool provision being planned within the new centre.

Other activity areas within the facility are also identified as being used by respondents, but these are 44% or less than the level of pool users within the survey.

### VIEWS ON THE LEISURE CENTRE DEVELOPMENT

The survey asked a series of questions to elicit residents' views on the proposed leisure centre development. Six questions were asked in this section which focused on the need to replace the existing centre; the opportunity to improve open space; the appropriateness for the Council to invest in facilities; the range of activities and the need for the facility to contribute to carbon neutral commitments.



The above results clearly identify that there is extensive public support to replace Cascades LC and that this community project is something that is worthy of Council investment.

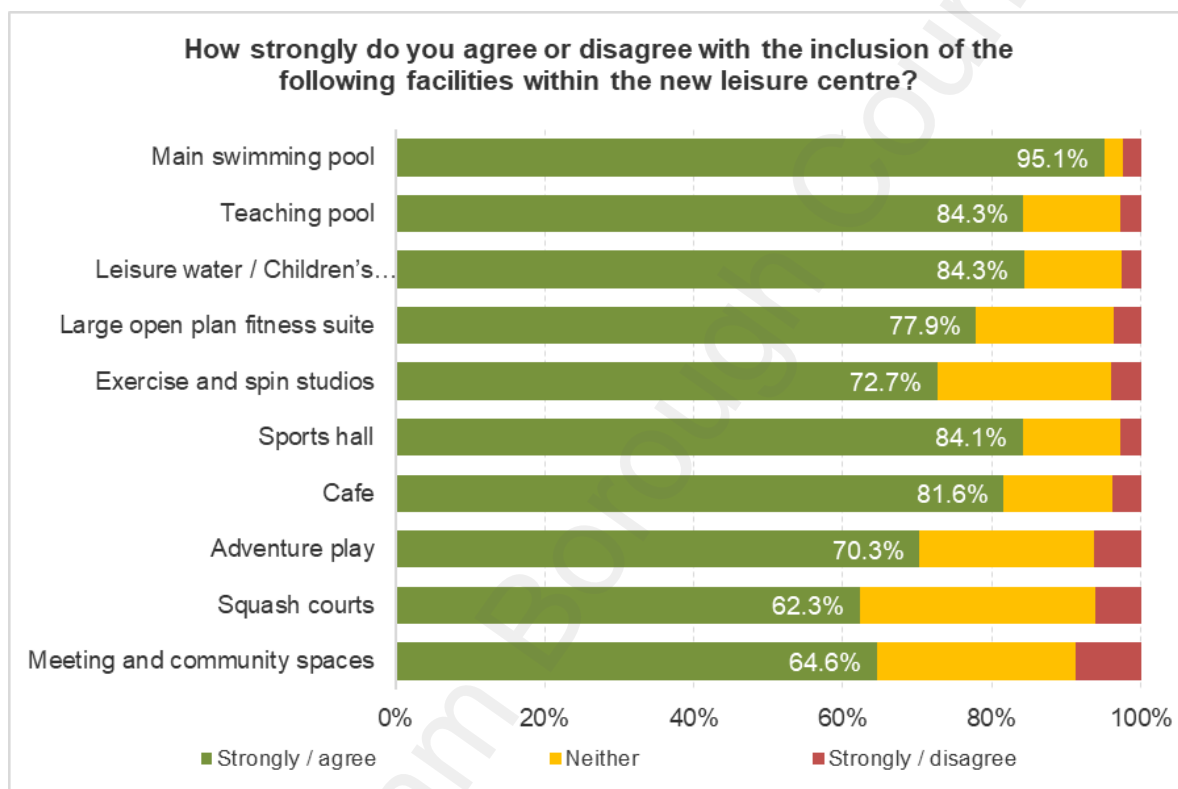
There is also strong support that the facility should accommodate as wide a range of activities as possible, and that the opportunity should also be taken to improve the quality of open space around the centre.

There is slightly less strength of feeling about the continuity of provision and the need to address the carbon emissions from the new centre; however, these responses are still in the region of 83% to 87% of all respondents.

In summary, there is very positive public support (i.e. between 83% and 96% agree or strongly agree) to replace the centre, improve the open space, provide a wide range of activities, have a facility with low carbon emissions, for there to be no break in provision and that this is what the Council should be spending council tax payers money on.

### FACILITY MIX

Residents were asked their views on the proposed facility mix for the new development. In general, there is positive support for all aspects of the proposed facility although meeting spaces and squash courts have a slightly less positive response. However, less than 10% of respondents stated that they disagreed/strongly disagreed that these activity areas should be included within the facility mix.



Respondents were given the opportunity to identify other activity areas which should be included within the facility mix. 306 respondents provided a qualitative comment within their survey response, with almost 389 respondents seemingly satisfied with the proposed mix.

Analysis of the 306 responses identifies that there were clusters of responses for facilities such as 50m pool, health suite, climbing wall, wave machine, slides, outdoor pool and petanque. However, there was no stand out activity area or facility that was identified from the responses to the consultation survey that give cause to the Council and its design team to reconsider the facility mix for the proposed new centre.

However, there are a range of comments made within the survey (e.g. disabled access, leisure water, slides, fun activities for children, opportunity for something different, wheelchair access, netball provision, football facilities, dance floor, etc) which are already included in the facility and potentially need to be reinforced. This presents a key opportunity for the Council to develop a communication and public engagement strategy for the development of the new centre to ensure that residents are continually updated and informed about the development.



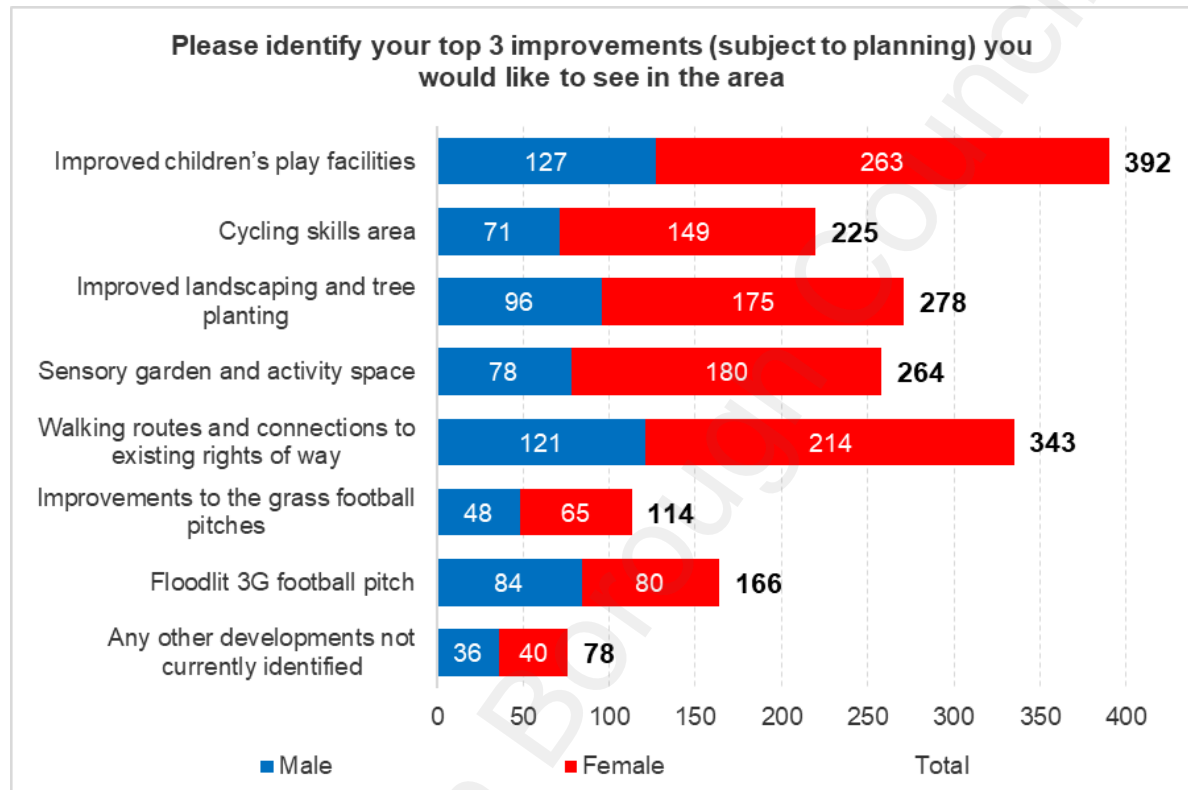
A word cloud visualization showing various terms related to leisure facilities. The most prominent words are "pool", "swimming", "area", "facilities", "suite", "need", "fun", "children", "flumes", "outdoor", "cours", "machine", "new", "space", "clubs", "something", "community", "accessible", "equipment", "fitness", "Indoor", "Better", "pitches", "facility", "well", "recently", "time", "now", "lanes", "football", "really", "hall", "areas", "good", "just", "exercise", "important", "opportunity", "see", "must", "lap", "Netball", "think", "fit", "soft", "built", "without", "sp", "many", "changing", "gym", "current", "w", "saurs", "cygnets", "mainly", "track", "50m", "kids", "classes", "one", "Running", "incl", "park", "don", "communit", "people", "wave", "room", "use", "sports", "like", "children", "slides", "local", "Spa", "times", "ties", "af", "part", "s", "el", "ts", "n", "ve".

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### OPEN SPACE PROVISION

The survey responses clearly identified that open spaces and outdoor facilities are valued community asset and that it requires investment to bring it up to a better quality.



In relation to investment, respondents were asked to identify their top three improvements to open space in and around the site. Given the nature of the responses, five key improvements were identified which include:

- ✦ Improved children's play facilities
- ✦ Walking routes and connections to existing rights of way
- ✦ Improved landscaping
- ✦ Sensory garden (quiet activity space)
- ✦ Cycling skills area

These responses have been used to inform the landscaping design and outdoor activity space proposals for the development.

Again, there was no significant level of response to raise concern about the direction of travel of the design process. Many responses reflected the range of sports that can be accommodated within the new centre and the fact that the new centre will have full disability access. These are potential communication elements that need to be considered by the Council as it progresses with the facility and establishes its website to keep residents informed about the progress of the facility. That is, there is an opportunity to explain the range of sports and activities the new centre can accommodate.



Within the survey, the opportunity to identify any other comments raised a wide range of insight from respondents. This included concerns about the potential closure of Cygnet LC, the provision for events, retention of the leisure water, the retention of the heritage of the site and provision for young people in the area.

[illegible]