



**THE FUTURE OF WOODGREEN LEISURE
CENTRE AND OPEN AIR POOL**

**A Task & Finish Panel Report
for the**

**ENVIRONMENT & COMMUNITY
SELECT COMMITTEE**

SEPTEMBER 2007



Contents

		Page
1	Executive Summary & Recommendations	
2	Introduction	
3	Context	
4	Key Findings	
5	Conclusions	
6	Appendices (separate volume)	
Appendix 1	Scrutiny review scoping document	
Appendix 2	Details of site visits and of organisations and individuals giving evidence	
Appendix 3	Reference documents and websites	
Appendix 4	Timeline of key events in the history of WLC	
Appendix 5	Options analysis	
Appendix 6	Value For Money analysis	

Glossary & definition of terms

BCIBC	Banbury Cross Indoor Bowls Club
BTC	Banbury Town Council
CCC	Cherwell Canoe Club
CDC	Cherwell District Council
DDA	Disability Discrimination Act
OCC	Oxfordshire County Council
SCM	Sports Centre Modernisation
VFM	Value for Money
WLC	Woodgreen Leisure Centre (used to describe both the community hall and bowls facilities as well as the open air pool)

1. Executive Summary & Recommendations

- 1.1 The role of the Task & Finish Panel was to consider the future for the whole of the Woodgreen Leisure Centre (WLC) including the community hall and bowls club and not to focus on the emotive issue of whether or not the open air pool should be recommissioned. It was our job to look at the evidence objectively and come to a reasoned conclusion.
- 1.2 That is not to say that there wasn't any passion or emotion in our discussions. Indeed throughout this scrutiny review we have had to wage a battle between hearts and minds. Most of us have fond memories of our youth spending hot summer days by the pool (if not in Banbury then somewhere else in Oxfordshire or further afield) and we could have been seduced by the prospect of recreating such an idyllic poolside paradise for our children and grandchildren.
- 1.3 However, the cold, wet summer of 2007 with its torrential rainstorms and severe flooding has served as something of a reality check. Climate change and global warming does not necessarily mean that we would be guaranteed the long, hot summers needed to give open air pools even a chance of being financially viable.
- 1.4 We have listened to passionate and persuasive arguments from local people who use the facility, from town councillors who are willing to provide some funding for the facility and from fellow councillors and officers who operate sports facilities and open air pools.
- 1.5 We recognise that the WLC facility plays a vital role for the local community and to a broader group of residents in Banbury and immediate villages. We are all agreed that we need to maintain that focal point and invest in its future. But we have not yet been able to reach a unanimous decision; the outstanding issue is two-fold:
- What range of facilities should we offer at WLC?
 - How much can we afford to invest?
- 1.6 Cherwell District Council (CDC) needs to find a sustainable solution for WLC that takes into account the historic legacy of the lido tradition, offers the right mix of services and facilities, addresses the wider socio-economic needs of the local community and which is affordable and appropriate for the whole district.
- 1.7 This report explores some of the options for the future of WLC and addresses some of the arguments for and against the provision of an open air pool. It identifies two preferred options but does not come to a firm conclusion because the Panel believes that further work needs to be done to develop the proposals and in particular to explore the financial implications and canvass public opinion. The Panel does not feel that it is best placed to do that and urges the Executive to commission a feasibility study.

Cllr Lynn Pratt (Chairman)

Cllr Alyas Ahmed

Cllr Colin Clarke

Cllr Surinder Dhesi

Cllr David Hughes

Cllr Devena Rae

Cllr Leslie Sibley

Woodgreen Leisure Centre Task & Finish Panel

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Insert text here.

Recommendation 2

Insert text here.

Recommendation 3

Insert text here.

Recommendation 4

Insert text here.

Recommendation 5

Insert text here.

2. Introduction

Membership & Methodology

At the start of the 2007/08 council year the Environment & Community Select Committee convened a scrutiny Task & Finish Panel (the Panel) to review the future of the Woodgreen Leisure Centre and open air pool. Councillors appointed to serve on the Task & Finish Panel were:

Cllr Lynn Pratt (Chairman)
Cllr Alyas Ahmed
Cllr Colin Clarke
Cllr Surinder Dhesi
Cllr David Hughes
Cllr Devena Rae
Cllr Leslie Sibley

The Panel met on eight occasions over the summer months, initially at Woodgreen Leisure Centre (WLC). A copy of the scrutiny review scoping document is attached at Appendix 1.

In the course of the scrutiny review the Panel received evidence from a number of organisations and individuals and went on 3 site visits. The details are listed in Appendix 2. The key findings and conclusions drawn by the Panel from these site visits and evidence sessions are set out in sections 4 and 5 of this report. A list of the key documents and reference material used by the Panel can be found at Appendix 3.

Public Opinion Survey

At the outset of the review the Panel considered the merits of conducting some form of broad public opinion survey about the future of the WLC. They concluded that a survey at this time would have to be somewhat simplistic and aspirational in content and would not inform the issues underlying the debate.

The Panel agreed that it would be better for CDC to conduct a more detailed public consultation programme once further evidence was available and specific options had been explored.

3. Context

3.1 Woodgreen Leisure Centre

- 3.1.1 Banbury Open Air Pool opened at Woodgreen in 1939 and was located on land adjacent to the Woodgreen Hall. Banbury Borough Council was responsible for the facilities until they were transferred to Cherwell District Council in 1974.
- 3.1.2 A timeline of the key events in the history of Woodgreen Leisure Centre and the open air pool is set out in Appendix 4.
- 3.1.3 The facilities at WLC consist of the open air pool, wet changing rooms, the indoor bowls rink, dry changing rooms, sports / community hall, meeting

room, kitchen area and bar and 2 sun-bed rooms. Oxfordshire County Council lease space in the main building for the Neithrop library.

- 3.1.4 Cherwell District Council took the decision to close the Open Air Pool in July 2003. The reasons behind the decision to close the pool are summarised in Appendix 4 and are fully documented elsewhere. The Panel reviewed this information and considered the chain of events leading to the pool closure. They took the view that they should be forward looking and focus on the future of WLC and not to spend more time going back over the arguments and recriminations associated with the pool closure.

3.2 Sports Centre Modernisation

- 3.2.1 In 2001 a review of CDC's main sports facilities identified the need for investment and modernisation in the four main sports centres in the district (which included WLC). CDC subsequently launched a project to consider the options for sports centre modernisation (SCM) of those four sports centres.
- 3.2.2 In 2005 CDC decided to exclude WLC from the final proposals for SCM, for financial reasons, and to balance the investment on the sports facilities at Banbury (Spiceball), Bicester and Kidlington. Contracts for the modernisation programme were let at the beginning of 2007 and work commences in the autumn. At that time the management of WLC will be taken "in-house" by CDC.

3.3 Options & issues for Cherwell District Council

- 3.3.1 The Panel began the scrutiny exercise by considering the key issues associated with WLC as summarised in the following SWOT analysis:

SWOT	
<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historical legacy of 1930s lido culture • Local public support for open air pool • Serves as a community centre/focal point • Network of local user groups for the WLC facility as a whole 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capital investment for refurbishment • Ongoing revenue costs for operation and maintenance • Loss of investment income • WLC site in poor state of repair and seen as "crime hot spot"
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of leisure resource against corporate priorities of healthy Cherwell and a District of Opportunity • Create a revitalised community facility • Banbury Town Council financial support for open air pool • Cherwell Canoe Club financial support 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pool income vulnerable to weather • Pool support does not equate to pool use • Impact on SCM • Additional funding (grants) not guaranteed

- 3.3.2 The Panel considered four possible scenarios for the future of WLC:
- Option 1: CDC close all facilities at WLC and quit site
 - Option 2: CDC close pool but invest in WLC dry-side facilities
 - Option 3: CDC invest in WLC dry side facilities & refurbish pool
 - Option 4: CDC redevelop all WLC to accommodate an Aquatic Centre or similar

- 3.3.3 The analysis is presented in Appendix 5.
- 3.3.4 A sub group of the Panel was set up to review the value for money (VFM) considerations relating to the options for the future of the centre. The sub group consisted of Councillor Mrs Rae and Councillor Mrs Pratt, with support from CDC officers. Appendix 6 sets out in summary some of the key financial and VFM considerations around the four options for WLC.

4 Key Findings

4.1 Banbury Town Council

- 4.1.1 The Panel interviewed representatives of Banbury Town Council (BTC) on 31 July 2007. The BTC position is very clear and well publicised. They support the restoration of pool to a level capable of accommodating canoe polo for majority of the year and swimming during the summer holidays. BTC would be prepared to make a contribution to the operating costs of the pool only but would look to CDC to find the capital funds required to re-open the pool. BTC is not in a financial position to operate the pool which they regard as a district wide asset and consequently a CDC responsibility.
- 4.1.2 BTC do not see WLC as a Banbury facility but rather one serving the whole of North Oxfordshire. As the only open air pool in the District, they believe that residents living further afield would both support the re-opening and make use of the facility during the summer holidays, subject to fine weather.
- 4.1.3 BTC has taken into consideration what the Banbury council tax payer would be willing to pay and judge that £50,000 p.a. is a reasonable figure. The contribution would be funded from the precept and represents a 3.5% increase. They would be looking for a long term management / partnership agreement with CDC and the £50,000 was to be paid each year on the condition it was ring fenced for the continuation of the use of the pool (and the other facilities at WLC) in future years.
- 4.1.4 BTC believe that the demand for the facilities was clearly demonstrated given the furore locally when CDC decided to close the pool. All Town Councillors were to stand for election in 2008 and the support of local people for the pool would be reflected at the ballot box. They did not believe there was any need for a Town poll on the issue.
- 4.1.5 BTC advocates a holistic approach for the future of WLC. Banbury also lacked a large venue for meetings and functions, especially for the Asian community, which meant that the community hall at Woodgreen could be a significant income generator. Initiatives which encouraged a more flexible use of the facilities, volunteer fund-raising and teaming up with local sports clubs such as the tri-athletes and Cherwell Canoe Club could all contribute to the financial viability of WLC.
- 4.1.6 BTC argue that re-opening the pool would deliver clear community benefits to the Ruscote area and would be a tangible demonstration of CDC's commitment to its corporate priorities.
- 4.1.7 **The Panel appreciate BTC's offer of funding for the pool and applaud its commitment to WLC. They hope that both Councils will be able to continue to work together to deliver an appropriate solution.**

4.2 Woodgreen Users Group

- 4.2.1 The Panel interviewed representatives of the Woodgreen Users Group (the Group) on 9 August 2007. They followed this with a letter to each of the 13 individual organisations involved in the Woodgreen Users Group inviting them to make a written submission (see Appendix 2). They received 2 written responses and 1 phone call advocating the continued provision of the WLC facilities and the re-opening of the pool. During the course of the review CDC also received 1 letter from a resident calling for the pool to be re-opened.
- 4.2.2 The Group was set up to ensure that all of the users of WLC had a voice in discussions about the future of the facility. Previously there had been a tendency for the three main users (pool, bowls and canoe) to dominate discussions. The Group was focussed on the future and did not want to dwell on past problems. In the longer term they would like the Group to have a role in the management of a revitalised WLC.
- 4.2.3 Initially the Group want to see the pool re-opened and available for use as it was before the closure in 2002/03. They advocate an incremental approach believing that if a positive decision is made about the facility and that the pool is re-opened that will attract more organisations and public customers and act as a building block for future improvements and new ideas. They are concerned that unless a decision is made about the pool the rest of the facility will be forced into further decline.
- 4.2.4 They propose a management model based on CDC, the Group and an incentivised management team. They believe that the management team/operators need to be independent of CDC so that they can offer a more flexible and responsive operation. They do not feel that a large leisure management company would be in tune with the community focus of the facility.
- 4.2.5 The Group has not undertaken any fund-raising in its own right. But the separate organisations and individuals within them have had experience of raising or accessing quite considerable sums of money.

4.3 Cherwell Canoe Club

- 4.3.1 The Panel interviewed representatives of Cherwell Canoe Club (CCC) on 9 August 2007.
- 4.3.2 CCC was formed in 1996. It currently has 80 members and operates from a number of indoor pools across the region (e.g. Stratford on Avon, Coventry etc) and also in the open water around Banbury (canal, reservoir etc). The membership was about 130 when the club was based at WLC but numbers have declined because of the lack of a permanent and local home base and because travelling long distances is a major problem especially for the younger teenage members of the club. CCC specialises in paddling and canoe polo and has several members who are at Olympic and National level in the sport and also in terms of training and refereeing.
- 4.3.3 CCC are confident that they can access a range of grant funding, given their national and Olympic standing which could contribute to future costs of a facility at WLC. In 2005 CCC produced a report setting out various options for water based sports at WLC. They used this to secure a funding commitment from Sport England for £100K for a roofed national canoe centre at WLC. However, the funds needed to be accessed by the spring of 2007

and when it became clear that this was not feasible CCC withdrew the application. CCC believes that a similar sum would be made available in the future for a similar project at WLC. The next funding cycle begins in the spring of 2008.

- 4.3.4 CCC explained that although their preference would be for a year round facility with a roof they would support the BTC proposal¹ for the restoration of the pool to a level capable of accommodating canoe polo for a majority of the year and swimming during the summer holidays.

4.4 **Banbury Cross Indoor Bowls Club**

- 4.4.1 The Panel interviewed representatives of Banbury Cross Indoor Bowls Club (BCIBC) on 9 August 2007.
- 4.4.2 BCIBC has been based at WLC since 1993. The facility is the only indoor bowls club within the District. In the 2007 season BCIBC had 8 mid-week league games and 50 weekend matches (34 at home and 16 away). BCIBC compete at club, county and national level.
- 4.4.3 BCIBC currently has about 220 members of which more than 80% are senior citizens. About half the members live within a 10 minute drive of WLC. Membership has dropped in recent seasons in part due to the uncertainty about the future of WLC.
- 4.4.4 CDC has engaged external consultants to assist BCIBC with the development of plans for self-management. This work included the production of business, marketing and sports development plans, operational procedures and financial planning.
- 4.4.5 The BCIBC representatives said that they had found the work with the consultants extremely valuable. They acknowledged that previously they had been sheltered from many of the costs and the financial issues associated with the operation of the bowls facility. They now had a more realistic view and were planning for the future. They are developing plans for accessing grant funding, developing the coaching and training skills of the members, promoting school and youth activities to broaden the membership base and encourage new, younger players. They are also looking at the needs of disabled and other community groups. They would like to hold more social events and develop the non-playing aspects of the club but feel that the amenities at WLC would need to be upgraded first. Their aspiration is to be an independent bowls club operating within the overall framework of a revitalised community facility at WLC.
- 4.4.6 The Handy Cross Indoor Bowls Club at the Wycombe Sports Centre was identified as a good role model. Members of the Panel visited the facility on 18 July 2007. It operates in similar facilities and provides a 7 month autumn/winter season; in the remaining summer months the bowls area is covered with a wooden floor and leased out for other activities (e.g. kids clubs, craft fairs, dancing etc). Costs associated with the installation / removal of the floor and inspections were estimated to be about £4000 p.a. set against potential income of up to £1000 per day for children's activities in the summer holidays. Subject to proper care and maintenance arrangements

¹ KKP report Option 3: Restoration of pool to level capable of accommodating canoe polo for majority of the year and swimming during the summer holidays.

for the rink and especially the carpet BCIBC would be amenable to releasing the indoor facility to other users in the summer months.

4.4.7 In 2006 CDC invested £25,000 on a new carpet and improvements to the heating system for the indoor bowls facility.

4.4.8 The Panel was encouraged by the positive steps that BCIBC is taking to address the needs of the future and its constructive approach to finding an appropriate solution in dialogue with CDC. However, they recognise that BCIBC are not in a position to take on any wider responsibility for the operation and management of the other facilities at WLC.

4.5 Open Air Pool Site Visits

4.5.1 Members of the Panel undertook site visits to open air pools in Droitwich Spa, and Abingdon. They also toured the pool at High Wycombe as part of a site visit to the bowls facility. All three pools date from the 1930s and offer some similarities and points of reference for WLC.

4.5.2 **Abbey Meadows:** the Abingdon pool was closed by the Vale of the White Horse District Council (VWHDC) at the end of 2004 for financial reasons. It remained closed during the 2005 season but re-opened in 2006, (after a refit, mainly for DDA compliance) as a result of public pressure.

4.5.3 The “L” – shaped pool is in a town centre location in a park (tennis courts, pitch and putt, playground) on the banks of the river Thames. The original 1930s paddling pool has been removed (for health and safety reasons) and replaced with a splash play area located in the park. There is extensive pay and display parking nearby. There is a refreshment kiosk serving both the pool and the park.

4.5.4 VWHDC pay a management fee to a sports and leisure contractor to operate the pool for a 100 day season between the late May Bank Holiday and the August Bank Holiday. Abingdon Town Council makes an annual contribution towards the operating costs of the pool. These arrangements will run for five years until 2010.

4.5.5 The pool is open seven days per week in two sessions (morning and afternoon). It does not cater for corporate events. Pool usage is very variable. There were 4000 visits in 2004; pool closed in 2005; 13000 in 2006 (a hot summer and publicity surrounding the re-opening) but is predicted to be less than 2000 in 2007 (very bad weather). Abingdon has 36,000 residents and the Vale population is about 115,000.

4.5.6 The adjacent children’s splash play area has proved to be far more popular with mothers and young children and indeed with young teenagers. However, this is in the main riverside park and there is no charge for its use.

4.5.7 **Droitwich Spa Lido:** Wychavon District Council (WDC) reopened the brine-filled spa pool on 18 June 2007 following a five year closure and an extensive refurbishment programme costing in the region of £1.5M. The new lido offers a 44 yard by 22 yard heated swimming pool with a 'beach' area at one end and an integrated fountain. The “deep end” has been reduced and the pool depth ranges from 1 – 1.5 metres. There was also significant refurbishment of the poolside area, plant and equipment, changing rooms and other facilities.

4.5.8 The lido is located very close to the town centre location in a Victorian park (part of a conservation area). The original 1930s paddling pool has been

removed (for health and safety reasons) and replaced with an integral splash play area or “beach” in the lido itself. There is pay and display parking nearby (capacity increased as part of the refurbishment). There is a refreshment kiosk serving both the pool and the park.

- 4.5.9 The pool closed for financial reasons and was re-opened in response to public pressure. The pool is operated by WDC’s not-for-profit sports and leisure contractor. They are also pursuing a sports centre modernisation programme in the district.
- 4.5.10 The local catchment area population is about 30,000 but this increases to about 1 million within a 60 minute drive of the pool. In the season before the pool closed there were 8000 visitors; the short season and very bad weather in 2007 suggests that visitor numbers will be much lower.
- 4.5.11 Both pool operators recommend diversification to maximise the customer base and in particular to target young families rather than adult swimmers. Hence emphasis on splash areas and shallow beach areas rather than just lane swimming.
- 4.5.12 **Brockwell Park Lido:** The Panel also spoke informally with Mr Paddy Castledine and Mr Andrew Sparks who had previously held a management lease for the Brockwell Park Lido in Lambeth. Mr Castledine and Mr Sparks were working with the Pool Support Group and had expressed an interest in re-opening the pool at WLC.
- 4.5.13 They highlighted the importance of building on a strong sense of community identity and advocated a three point management arrangement (professional managers, support group and the Council). They emphasised the need for managerial flexibility which they did not believe was compatible with the Council’s policies and procedures. They also emphasised the importance of local sponsorship and volunteer fund-raising activities.

4.6 Neithrop Library, WLC Community Hall and Meeting Room

- 4.6.1 Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) operates the Neithrop library from leased premises on the WLC site. The current library opening hours are within the overall operating hours for the Leisure Centre and as such do not present any issues regarding accessibility or security, however, this would need to be reviewed if the operating hours and staffing levels for the Leisure Centre were to change.
- 4.6.2 The overall footprint of the library is not that large and if the space was vacated in the future it is unlikely to cause any significant difficulties as it could be assimilated into the overall facility as another meeting room.
- 4.6.3 **The Panel agreed that although the library might present some local operational issues these could be addressed through dialogue between CDC and OCC. They did not consider that the library was a critical element in their deliberations about the future of the WLC.**
- 4.6.4 The community hall and meeting room at WLC are relatively modest and would benefit from some modernisation, particularly the associated kitchen, bar and toilets. There is an established pattern of use from a relatively short list of local organisations. Many of these organisations (e.g. Horton Bingo Club) stressed the importance of having a local facility as many of their members were elderly. Several of the organisations had moved to other venues as a result of the uncertainty or increased costs but expressed an

interest in returning to WLC in the future. The community hall is a popular venue for private parties and weddings.

4.6.5 The Panel acknowledge that there is a demand for some form of facility which would serve as a focal point for social and sports activities amongst the local community.

4.7 Crime and Disorder

4.8 The Panel met with the Community Safety Officer and Banbury Neighbourhood Estates Sergeant to discuss crime and disorder issues at WLC and the surrounding area. They explained that WLC and the surrounding area was recognised as a “crime hot spot”. Factors contributing to this were the general deprivation, the fact that WLC and the local shops served as a “meeting place” and it was on an exit route from Banbury town centre.

4.9 The area had a history of crime and disorder problems and these had not escalated significantly following the closure of the pool. CDC had implemented a number of new security measures in the spring of 2007 (anti-climb paint, CCTV etc) and the incident rate at WLC had dropped over the summer. The officers emphasised that these measures had not solved the problems merely displaced them.

4.10 The officers also commented on some of the initiatives that were being progressed by the Neighbourhood Action Group and partner organisations as part of the community strategy. A survey of local teenagers indicated that they wanted something to do, that they wanted somewhere to play sport and they want it on their doorstep. The officers expressed the view that the whole community, and especially the teenagers, would benefit from the provision of some form of sports and recreation facility at WLC. They stressed that this would not solve the crime and disorder issues but it would help to contain them.

4.11 These views were borne out by the Panel’s own observations; when they had met at WLC earlier in the summer they had seen youths playing cricket in the car-park as well as climbing on the roof of the Youth Centre.

4.12 Insurance issues

4.12.1 The WLC is covered by the CDC public liability insurance (i.e. covering injuries to the person or damage to belongings) for all activities with the exception of water based activities in the pool. Public liability insurance in respect of injury to users of the pool was withdrawn in 2003 because CDC was unable to prove conclusively what had caused the minor toe injuries.

4.12.2 The professional advice to CDC is that an insurance company will not provide cover for use of the pool for any water related sports unless CDC can demonstrate that the risk of the minor toe injuries re-occurring has been removed. Essentially this means that CDC would only be able to secure public liability insurance cover for the open air pool if the programme of pool refurbishment was on a significant scale and could effectively be regarded as a “new build”. It is unlikely that any agreement to reinstate cover for use of the open air pool would result in a significant increase in the premium paid.

4.12.3 The Panel took the view that the condition of the open air pool, associated plant and equipment and the poolside area is such that a substantive programme of refurbishment and “re-build” (or “new build”) would be required. They did not consider the insurance issues to be a potential “show-stopper.”

4.13 Legal issues

4.13.1 There are four covenants associated with the WLC site, the key one of which states that:

“the Corporation (Banbury Borough Council) and their successors in title shall use the land only for the purpose of constructing and maintaining a swimming pool for use by the public and no other recreation or amusement band or other concerts shall be allowed to take place on the land.”

4.13.2 The covenants appear to be personal covenants between Mr J A Gillett and Banbury Borough Council (the successor in title being CDC). The key issue is whether or not Mr Gillett transferred or bequeathed those covenants to his heirs as only those persons who have the benefit of the covenant could take legal action for breach. In 1991 CDC contacted the known heirs of Mr J A Gillett about the proposals for WLC (new bowls hall & sports centre and “activities ancillary to swimming and bathing by the general public”) and seeking their agreement to relax the covenants. All of the respondents said that they had no claim to the benefit of the covenant and in any case did not have any objections to the proposals for development of the site. In any event CDC took out a restrictive covenant indemnity policy at the time of the Pool Side Close development in 1992.

4.13.3 As there is no apparent evidence that the covenants were assigned or bequeathed to any of Mr Gillett’s descendants there is some doubt as to whether there is anyone who could make a legal claim for breach. However, the Open Air Pool Support Group claims that it has support from Gillett descendants who have rights to the covenants.

4.13.4 So there is a risk that CDC might face a legitimate challenge for breach of covenant. But the likelihood of any claim for breach being upheld would depend on the exact circumstances and nature of any proposed change of use at the WLC pool site.

4.13.5 The CDC legal team suggest that once a preferred course of action has been identified for the future of WLC and the open air pool, CDC should seek Counsel’s opinion. This is likely to incur modest expenditure and will afford CDC a clearer understanding of the likelihood and strength of any possible challenge.

4.13.6 The Panel endorsed the advice of the CDC legal team.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1 At the very outset of this scrutiny review the Task & Finish Panel agreed that “do nothing” was no longer an option for WLC. It was clear that something had to be done and soon. Equally the Panel were agreed that “Option 1: CDC close all facilities at WLC and quit site” was not tenable as it would be an abrogation of all of the Council’s corporate priorities and responsibilities.
- 5.2 The Panel debated at some length the feasibility of “Option 4: CDC redevelop all WLC to accommodate an Aquatic Centre or similar”. The Panel agreed that in an ideal world the option had much to commend but the reality is that the Council simply cannot justify such an investment when seen in the context of the SCM programme and a leisure and recreation service which has been charged with delivering budget efficiencies or budget cuts in 2007/08.
- 5.3 This leaves Option 2: “CDC close pool but invest in WLC dry-side facilities” and Option 3: CDC invest in WLC dry side facilities & refurbish pool”. The Panel are convinced that all of the evidence they have heard demonstrates the need for the Council to “invest in WLC dry-side facilities” and create a community focused facility at WLC. The unresolved issues are whether or not an open air pool should be a part of the investment programme at WLC and how much the Council can afford to invest without compromising its vfm principles or detracting from the services offered across the rest of the district.
- 5.4 Swimming pools, especially open air pools, with their high cost base, short season and variable customer loading do not make money. That is a fact. But it does not stop local authorities (or private sector organisations) including a swimming pool as part of its sports and recreation service offering. Public expectations and the obvious health benefits outweigh the financial arguments.
- 5.5 But public demand does not necessarily equate to usage. Some 6000 people signed the petition to re-open the Abingdon pool but there were only 13,000 visits in the hot summer of 2006 (about one third of the town population) – which breaks down as about 2 visits per petitioner over a 100 day opening period.
- 5.6 We have heard arguments to suggest that the WLC pool will be a tourist attraction and draw residents from across the district and neighbouring authorities. There are many anecdotal examples but there is no evidence that this will be the case. It is not obvious that residents in the south and west of Cherwell will come to Banbury; many will already have an established pattern of usage at Hinksey or Abingdon or Chipping Norton. WLC is not of itself as an attractive a setting as the banks of the Thames.
- 5.7 Then there are the environmental arguments. Reducing the depth of the deep end and installing new and efficient heating plant would go some way towards moderating the environmental footprint. But is a heated outdoor pool really a “green” option?
- 5.8 The counter arguments are that investment in an open air pool would:
 - satisfy public demand
 - meet the needs of specialist user groups
 - provide a readily accessible leisure facility for local residents

- promote a healthier lifestyle
- remove a local eyesore and create a cleaner, greener space in Woodgreen
- could offset some of the CDC costs through
 - o a guaranteed funding contribution from the Banbury Town Council
 - o a call on a committed volunteer groups to generate sponsorship and additional fund-raising
 - o an income generating tourist attraction.