

**Minutes of the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities
Scrutiny Board**

**27th February, 2020 at 5.45 pm
at Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

Present: Councillor Moore (Chair);
Councillors Akhter, Bawa, Bostan, Edwards, M
Gill, M Y Hussain, and Padda;
Mr J Cash (Co-opted member).

Apologies: Councillors P M Hughes, S Jones and Sandars.

In attendance: Councillor Gavan;
Ash Rai (Chief Executive – Sandwell Leisure
Trust);
Alison Knight (Executive Director –
Neighbourhoods);
Nicola Leavy (Senior Project Officer);
Martyn Roberts (Team Leader – Planning);
Gemma Ryan (Business Manager – Sports and
Leisure);
Tammy Stokes (Service Manager – Growth and
Spatial Planning);
Jayne Weaver (Business Services Manager).

7/20 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meetings held on 30th
January and 6th February, 2020 be approved as a correct
record.

8/20 **Brandhall Golf Course – Proposed Closure and Alternative
Future Uses**

The Scrutiny Board received the outcomes of the public consultation exercise that had been carried out in relation to the proposed closure and future alternative uses of Brandhall Golf Course and Club House. The consultation had been carried out from 7th November to 19th December 2019.

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The consultation had included:-

- Letters to residents and golf club members outlining the proposals and the consultation process;
- Public survey – both online and paper – that was promoted via letters, press releases and social media;
- Drop in sessions – three at a neutral venue near to the Course and one, arranged at the request of Brandhall Golf Club, at the Club;
- General enquiries submitted by letter or through an email address created specifically for the consultation.

The Council had engaged a consultant to prepare a Golf Needs Assessment and Golf Development Pathway. The Assessment had indicated that there was a high-level supply of golf courses in Sandwell and within 20 minutes' drive of the Borough boundary (which was in line with Sport England guidance) but that there was low latent demand for golf in the borough. Further, the Assessment found that Brandhall Golf Course was in poor condition and would need significant capital investment to bring it up to the required standard.

The Council developed proposals based on the findings of the Assessment and Development Pathway including utilising the site to build a new school (a replacement for Causeway Green Primary School), develop a new park and open space for the local community and housing. These options formed part of the consultation exercise.

It was reported that a total of 712 surveys were completed, either online or handwritten. Some questions allowed for free text responses and in total 3,473 specific comments were submitted by respondents to the survey. Feedback was collated and analysed, showing the views of all respondents and those of local residents only (identified as those who lived in the B68 postcode area). The majority of local residents had indicated that their everyday lives would not be affected at all or very much. Of those who indicated that they would be affected, the majority indicated that it would be due to them currently using the course for physical activity or walking the dog. Officers referred to the proposal to include a park on the site which would allow such activities to continue.

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The survey also sought feedback on how important the three aspects of the proposed future use (park, school and houses) were to the local community and for all three the majority of respondents said that they were important ‘to some extent’ or ‘a great deal’.

However, there was an objection to the proposals from some golfers and residents who lived in the immediate vicinity to the golf course. This was expressed at the drop in sessions and the main concerns of these course users and residents included-

- environmental concerns including loss of trees and increased flood risk;
- health concerns relating to the school and the nearby motorway and electricity pylons;
- loss of the club house as a social facility.

Local residents, members of Brandhall Golf Club and a local ward member attended the meeting and were invited by the Chair to ask questions in relation to the consultation and proposals for the future use of Brandhall Golf Course. Particular comments were made relating to the communication and survey process not being far reaching enough and the preference to retain the golf course, potentially under the management of the Brandhall Golf Club.

From the comments and questions raised by members of the Scrutiny Board, a local ward councillor and members of the public, the following responses were made and issues highlighted:-

- within the 20 minute drive of the borough boundary there were currently 26 18-hole golf courses and nine 9-hole golf courses;
- the option for retaining a 9-hole golf course at Brandhall had not formed part of the consultation or proposals;
- a high-level assessment on the site had been carried out, but any decision on uses for the site would require a range of technical assessments including ecological, viability, flood risk and road traffic impact assessments;
- Sandwell Leisure Trust advised that Brandhall Golf Course required £257,000 subsidy to operate. No further details were provided on what this figure comprised of and members felt further information was required on this aspect;

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- the costs of developing the site and ongoing costs relating to maintenance of the proposed park were unknown but would need to be understood and taken into account for an informed decision to be made on any closure of the existing golf course;
- members raised concerns about the potential for a decision to be made to close the golf course and club without knowing if the proposals for the future of the site were viable;
- additional housing in the area would place demands on existing public infrastructure such as roads, schools and health services;
- concerns were raised about air pollution levels and their potential impact on pupils at any new school located on the site;
- the estimated cost of renovating Brandhall Golf Course to a suitable standard was determined by consultants to be approximately £3million. This included the development of a driving range, a renovated club house, improvements to the greens and investment to encourage other uses (such as foot golf);
- there was a lack of community facilities in the area around Brandhall Golf Course and the loss of the clubhouse as an accessible social venue would be detrimental to local people, potentially impacting on isolation;
- it was suggested that there were other potential locations for a replacement for Causeway Green School that could be explored;
- Sandwell Leisure Trust operated the Ryland Centre in Bromsgrove but it was confirmed that no funds provided for Sandwell facilities were used in the running of that centre;
- letters had been sent to over 2000 local residents in an identified catchment area. The 173 closest households to the golf course received hand delivered letters to ensure they were aware of the proposals and the consultation;

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- golf club members felt that comparisons to other golf courses should only be with municipal courses rather than privately-owned courses as affordability was a factor in where people chose to play golf;
- it was highlighted that the survey did not include options for people to express a preference to retain Brandhall Golf Course;
- the members of Brandhall Golf Club would be willing to consider options for the Course to be transferred for the Club to operate;

The Chair thanked residents, observers and officers for attending the meeting and contributing to the discussion.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the Cabinet and Council be requested to note the comments and concerns expressed by the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board in relation to the proposed closure and alternative future uses of Brandhall Golf Course;
- (2) that the Sandwell Leisure Trust and Executive Director – Neighbourhoods submit a further report, as soon as possible, to the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board detailing:-
 - (a) a full breakdown of the operating and subsidy costs of Brandhall Golf Course;
 - (b) a copy of all assessments that been conducted by the Council to date on Brandhall Golf Course;
- (3) that prior to any final decision being taken on the proposed closure and alternative future uses of Brandhall Golf Course, the Cabinet be recommended to:-
 - (a) carry out further detailed assessments, modelling and technical assessments, including an assessment on social isolation and inclusion;

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- (b) carry out an assessment on the availability of affordable golf courses in the vicinity;
- (c) explore the feasibility of retaining an element of the Course by reducing it to a 9-hole course;
- (d) explore the feasibility of members of the Brandhall Golf Club and the local community taking on the running and operation of Brandhall Golf Course or a community asset transfer;
- (e) undertake further consultation with the community in the event that it is proposed to close Brandhall Golf Course.

(Meeting ended at 8.04 pm)

<p>Contact Officer: Alex Goddard Democratic Services Unit 0121 569 3178</p>
