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# Sports Hub – Response to Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Group Report

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<b>Committee considering report:</b>	Executive
<b>Date of Committee:</b>	18 December 2025
<b>Portfolio Member:</b>	Councillor Nigel Foot
<b>Report Author:</b>	Clare Lawrence
<b>Forward Plan Ref:</b>	EX4757

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## 1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To respond to the Task and Finish Group report and recommendations presented to the Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2025 which sought to determine whether there was a strategically and financially sound business case for the Monks Lane Sports Hub, whether the project was well managed, and whether reliable and consistent advice was given to members about the project to assist them in their decision-making roles. This report considers any lessons learnt and responds to the recommendations to inform the Council's approach to future sports and leisure projects.

## 2 Recommendations

That Executive considers the proposed responses to the recommendations of the Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee as set out at 5.4 and agrees the responses and to undertake the following actions:

1. Strengthening the Projects service to centralise project delivery including a review of the Council's project management methodology to ensure that key projects are governed by and monitored through appropriate, robust processes from inception to closure.
2. Undertake a review of project management documentation including business case templates, prioritisation tools and project health checks.
3. Embed the output of this review through training for all who have roles within project delivery (i.e. PMs, sponsors)
4. Introduce quarterly status reporting for all Tier 1 projects in an appendix to the finance quarterly monitoring reports to the Executive
5. Review how time recording can be implemented and the level/type of projects that this would apply to.
6. Share the recommendations of this Sports Hub Task and Finish Group and the LRIE Task and Finish Group of 2020 with the Chairman of the Project

Management Task and Finish Group and log the Sports Hub Task and Finish Group the report in the central Corporate Programme Office repository.

### 3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary			
<b>Financial:</b>	There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.			
<b>Human Resource:</b>	There are no HR implications arising directly from this report.			
<b>Legal:</b>	No Legal Implications arising directly from this report			
<b>Risk Management:</b>	There are no risk management implications arising directly from this report. The recommendations will ensure that project management methodology and documentation is improved to minimise risk			
<b>Property:</b>	There are no property implications arising directly from this report.			
<b>Policy:</b>	There are no policy implications arising directly from this report.			
	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
<b>Equalities Impact:</b>				
<b>A</b> Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		x		There are no equalities implications arising directly from this report.

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<b>B</b> Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		x		The proposed decision does not have any impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics.
<b>Environmental Impact:</b>		x		There are no environmental impacts arising directly from this report.
<b>Health Impact:</b>		x		There are no health impacts arising directly from this report. However, the recommendations refer to the Playing Pitch Strategy and Faraday Road project which will impact positively on sport and leisure activity.
<b>ICT Impact:</b>		x		There are no ICT impacts arising directly from this report.
<b>Digital Services Impact:</b>		x		There are no impacts for Digital Services arising directly from this report.
<b>Council Strategy Priorities:</b>		x		There are no Council Strategy Priorities arising directly from this report although the Task and Finish Group's recommendations relating to project management will support the council to deliver on the Administration's key priorities.
<b>Core Business:</b>	x			Improving project governance is part of the core business of delivering services.
<b>Data Impact:</b>		x		There are no data impacts associated with this report.
<b>Consultation and Engagement:</b>	A full list of stakeholders and expert witnesses consulted through the work of the Task and Finish Group's is set out in the attached report.			

## **4 Executive Summary**

- 4.1 A Task and Finish Group was established by the Scrutiny Committee (now the Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee) to review the Sports Hub Project and had six objectives primarily focussed on determining if the proposal represented value for money to deliver council objectives and whether consistent advice was given to members. The group also considered the way that the project was managed.
- 4.2 This report, and the recommendations made, were considered by the Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2025. The original report contained 27 recommendations although recommendations 23 and 25 were not supported by the Committee.

## **5 Supporting Information**

### **Introduction**

- 5.0 A Task and Finish Group was established by the Scrutiny Committee (now the Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee) to review the Sports Hub Project. Its report was presented to the Scrutiny Committee on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2025.
- 5.1 This report reviews and responds to the 25 recommendations of the Committee based on the conclusions of Task and Finish Group made in light of evidence it considered. The Task and Finish Group's report is contained in Appendix 1 and sets out the objectives of the group, the witness and documentary evidence considered, and its findings based on the key objectives. The recommendations are set out in the report. Appendix 2 contains the report to the Resources and Place and Scrutiny Committee on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2025.

### **Background**

- 5.2 The Task and Finish Group was established to focus on the following six objectives:
- (1) To determine whether the Sports Hub project was value for money.
  - (2) To determine whether the project would have delivered on the council's strategic objectives.
  - (3) To determine whether the project was well managed.
  - (4) To determine whether reliable and consistent advice was given to members about the project to assist them in their decision-making roles.
  - (5) To determine whether the council's decision to abandon the project in its original form was a strategically and financially sound decision.
  - (6) To establish whether the council intends to deliver any elements of the original project at Monks Lane (bearing in mind planning permission remains and project funds are being carried forward).
- 5.2 The 25 Task and Finish Group recommendations agreed by the Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee are set out below:

Ref	Recommendation	Task and Finish Group Priority
<b>Objective One: To determine whether the Sports Hub project was value for money</b>		
1.	Council projects must achieve policy and strategic objectives while maximising value for money. There must be documentation demonstrating that all options have been considered, including cost comparisons.	High
2.	The business case must be maintained throughout the project and reviewed at any major change or stage gate by the project board.	High
3.	Projects must have clear tolerance thresholds, including budget and timescale.	High
4.	Hours spent on capital projects by 'business as usual' staff must be recorded and allocated against the correct capital project code. Each project should have a 'partner' in the finance team to help the project manager ensure they are recording this information correctly.	Medium
5.	The council should be fully transparent about its rationale for major decisions that involve large amounts of public money, and in particular its reasons for not following the advice of experts it has commissioned.	High
6.	The Council should have the courage to abandon a project if it is apparent that more cost-effective options are available.	High
7.	When members of the public or community groups present a serious alternative project (having a business plan backed by Sport England and receiving planning permission is an indicator of seriousness), the Council should consider whether this alternative fulfils the strategic need identified by the Council and whether it represents value for money. The relevant portfolio holder should respond formally to the alternative project proposal, in the interests of transparency and accountability.	High
8.	If the Council enters a partnership with a private entity, the Rugby Club in this case, it must be able to justify that it meets strategic need and is value for money compared with other options. Taxpayers' money must not be used to subsidise private entities when the funds could be spent more effectively elsewhere.	High

<b>Objective Two: To determine whether the project would have delivered on the Council's strategic objectives</b>		
9.	Executive should ensure that Council projects meet objectives laid out in strategic documents. If it becomes apparent that strategic objectives cannot be met by the options available to the Council, this should be explained to the public in the interests of accountability and transparency, and strategies and business cases refreshed accordingly.	High
10.	The new Playing Pitch Strategy should look at all options including agricultural land and the North-East Thatcham area where large scale development is planned. If members ask in future what options have been considered, there should be documentary proof including cost comparisons.	High
11.	Stage E Reviews of the Playing Pitch Strategy should be undertaken with governing bodies including Berks and Bucks FA, 'to ensure delivery against the recommendations and action plan and ensure that it is kept robust and up to date' as the Sport England Playing pitch Strategy guidance recommends, so that information is no more than two years' old. Any material changes must be captured.	Low
12.	The council must fully engage with stakeholders on projects of this scale. This should include a full public consultation. Town and parish councils, when a scheme affects their area, should be consulted.	High
<b>Objective Three: To determine whether the project was well managed</b>		
13.	All Council ventures from initial inception through to delivery and closure should be run with the most appropriate project management method, with full traceability of Risks, Issues, Actions committed to and undertaken, Dependencies and Decisions made captured. All project board meeting documentation (not just an agenda and action log per meeting) should be retained and decisions captured. All options should be documented by officers, and decisions on those options by councillors and senior management/executive should also be documented. This aids sound and transparent decision making, and auditability. It also protects the reputation of the Council.	High
14.	Project officers must make use of the document templates in the intranet project management toolkit. Any exceptions should be agreed by the project board.	High
15.	The Executive Leadership Team should commit to providing project leaders with the (refresher) training they need to perform their role effectively and monitor its use and effectiveness.	Medium

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16.	Project management records should be kept in good order. If some elements of a project are managed in house, and some by external consultants, there still needs to be a well-ordered archive of documents so that future officers can find the documents. Project management documentation should be shared on a continuous basis and kept in a single repository for aid of audit. The Council might choose to outsource project management but should not outsource project governance.	High
17.	Senior managers and Executive members overseeing major projects should be able to articulate the objectives clearly and know where the relevant documents are.	High
18.	All projects need to have a project closure report.	High
19.	The findings and recommendations of this Sports Hub task and finish group and the LRIE task and finish group of 2020 must be shared with the chairman of the project management task and finish group, so that the learnings can be considered when they examine other Council projects. They are due to begin their work after the Sports Hub task and finish group completes its work.	High
20.	The final copy of the task and finish group report (this document) should be logged in a central repository along with the other documentation collated by WBC Programme Management Office (PMO) for the Sports Hub Project.	Medium
<b>Objective Four: To determine whether reliable and consistent advice was given to members about the project to assist them in their decision-making roles</b>		
21.	Consistent, evidence-based advice must be given to members of planning committees. The legal team should check all planning reports where the Council is the applicant. Members of District Planning Committee should not be given advice that is contradictory to what was previously presented to Western or Eastern Area Planning Committee. If the Council decides that its advice to a committee was incorrect or misleading it should be transparent about this and re-present the application to Western or Eastern Area Planning Committee using correct and clear advice.	High
22.	When members of Corporate Board are aware of contradictory and confusing advice relating to council applications and Executive papers, they must ensure members and the public receive clear communication.	High
23.	Recommendation not supported by the Resources and Place Committee	

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24.	Complete records of FOI requests must be kept, including reasons for responses to requests. This will allow audit to understand why certain documents may or may not have been released.	High
25.	Recommendation not supported by the Resources and Place Committee	High
<b>Objective five: To determine whether the Council's decision to abandon the project in its original form was a strategically and financially sound decision</b>		
26.	The Sports Hub project should have been promptly closed after the Executive decided they were not going to proceed with it, and all project accounts completed.	Medium
27.	A project like the Faraday Road refurbishment project start with a new baseline, be a distinct project, and had its own budget line.	Medium
<b>Objective six: To establish whether the Council intends to deliver any elements of the original project at Monks Lane (bearing in mind planning permission remains and project funds are being carried forward)</b>		
n/a	There were no recommendations arising.	

## Response to Task and Finish Group Report and Recommendations

5.3 The Task and Finish Group considered background information and extensive information from local community representatives. Based upon the information the group considered, it concluded that there were other options available to the Council to deliver the sporting facilities that represented better value for money than the Sports Hub proposal and that there is no evidence that the Council ever considered these options.

5.4 The response to the recommendations is set out below:

### Response to recommendations

	Recommendations	Response	Action
1	Council projects must achieve policy and strategic objectives while maximising value for money. There must be documentation demonstrating that all options have been	Agreed - It is important that all policy and strategic objectives are considered and it is acknowledged objectives often compete or overlap. Prior to the initiation of projects, project	Undertake review of project management documentation including business case templates,



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	considered, including cost comparisons.	briefs and business cases are taken through robust member and officer governance groups to ensure that their delivery aligns with these objectives.	prioritisation tools and project health checks.
2	The business case must be maintained throughout the project and reviewed at any major change or stage gate by the project board.	In place for major projects through current project management methodology	No further action-in place
3	Projects must have clear tolerance thresholds, including budget and timescale.	Agreed	No further action-in place
4	Hours spent on capital projects by 'business as usual' staff must be recorded and allocated against the correct capital project code. Each project should have a 'partner' in the finance team to help the project manager ensure they are recording this information correctly.	Partly Agreed – The Council will review how it can record officer time against capital and high priority projects.  It is considered that project managers and staff would not require finance officer support if training is provided about time recording.	Review how time recording can be implemented in a cost effective manner and the level/type of projects that this would apply to.
5	The Council should be fully transparent about its rationale for major decisions that involve large amounts of public money, and in particular its reasons for not following the advice of experts it has commissioned.	Agreed – this is the current approach	No further action-in place
6	The Council should have the courage to abandon a project if it is apparent that more cost-effective options are available.	Agreed – the Council reviews projects and will not progress these if there are other alternatives that meet strategic objectives in a more cost effective to	No further action-in place

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		meet the desired outcomes.	
7	When members of the public or community groups present a serious alternative project (having a business plan backed by Sport England and receiving planning permission is an indicator of seriousness), the Council should consider whether this alternative fulfils the strategic need identified by the Council and whether it represents value for money. The relevant portfolio holder should respond formally to the alternative project proposal, in the interests of transparency and accountability.	Agreed - The Council will consider appropriate alternatives if they are supported by robust and quality assured business cases to demonstrate that they are viable, meet the strategic objectives and follow necessary legal requirements including procurement regulations.	No further action- in place
8	If the Council enters a partnership with a private entity, the Rugby Club in this case, it must be able to justify that it meets strategic need and is value for money compared with other options. Taxpayers' money must not be used to subsidise private entities when the funds could be spent more effectively elsewhere.	Partly agreed- Business cases are submitted for all capital projects. Some projects include partnership with private entities when there is a strong reason to do so and these private entities will expect to be recompensed accordingly.	No further action
9	Executive should ensure that Council projects meet objectives laid out in strategic documents. If it becomes apparent that strategic objectives cannot be met by the options available to the Council, this should be explained to the public in the interests of accountability and transparency, and strategies and business cases refreshed accordingly.	Agreed in principle- Funding for projects is set out in the capital budget and further in year proposals are considered, debated and agreed in public by the Executive.  It is not feasible for all projects to be presented in detail in the public arena due to the number of these but all funding bids are subject to business cases which will be available to	Introduce quarterly status reporting for all Tier 1 projects in an appendix to the finance quarterly monitoring.

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		the public in line with Freedom of Information Request Regulations. In addition, there are mechanisms open to residents to ask public questions about projects at Executive and Council	
10	The new Playing Pitch Strategy should look at all options including agricultural land and the North-East Thatcham area where large scale development is planned. If Members ask in future what options have been considered, there should be documentary proof including cost comparisons.	Agreed - The new playing pitch strategy is considering all deliverable viable options including agricultural land and land at North East Thatcham. Deliverable options will be tested on a value for money basis	No further action-in place
11	A Stage E Review of the Playing Pitch Strategy should be undertaken with governing bodies including Berks and Bucks FA, 'to ensure delivery against the recommendations and action plan and ensure that it is kept robust and up to date' as the Sport England Playing pitch Strategy guidance recommends, so that information is no more than two years' old. Any material changes must be captured.	Agreed- All governing bodies for Sport are part of the steering group informing the development of the Playing Pitch Strategy based on the evidence base	No further action-in place
12	The council must fully engage with stakeholders on projects of this scale. This should include a full public consultation. Town and parish councils, when a scheme affects their area, should be consulted.	Partly agreed - The Council has a range of processes for public consultation and with town and parish councils. These include Community Forums and the District Town and Parish Forum.	No further Action

		<p>The Council also undertakes full public consultation on new and amended strategies and delivery plans in line with the constitution and where it considers there will be a public interest. However, not all</p> <p>However, given the number of projects delivered, it is not possible to undertake full public consultation on all on these. However, should they require planning permission, consultation will be undertaken at this stage.</p>	
13	<p>All Council ventures from initial inception through to delivery and closure should be run with the most appropriate project management method, with full traceability of Risks, Issues, Actions committed to and undertaken, Dependencies and Decisions made captured. All project board meeting documentation (not just an agenda and action log per meeting) should be retained and decisions captured. All options should be documented by officers, and decisions on those options by councillors and senior management/executive should also be documented. This aids sound and transparent decision making, and auditability. It also protects the reputation of the Council.</p>	Agreed	<p>This is in place, however the newly restructured Projects Service will undertake a review of project management documentation including business case templates, prioritisation tools and project health checks.</p>
14	<p>Project officers must make use of the document templates in the intranet project management toolkit. Any</p>	Agreed	<p>No further action-in place</p>

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	exceptions should be agreed by the project board.		
15	Executive should commit to providing project leaders with the (refresher) training they need to perform their role effectively and monitor its use and effectiveness.	Agreed	Skills audit of project delivery officers to be undertaken. Further training to be provided to project leaders to reflect new methodology
16	Project management records should be kept in good order. If some elements of a project are managed in house, and some by external consultants, there still needs to be a well-ordered archive of documents so that future officers can find the documents. Project management documentation should be shared on a continuous basis and kept in a single repository for aid of audit. The Council might choose to outsource project management but should not outsource project governance.	Agreed	No further action- in place
17	Senior managers and Executive Members overseeing major projects should be able to articulate the objectives clearly and know where the relevant documents are.	Agreed – Major project documents are stored by Corporate Programme Office.	No further action - in place
18	All projects need to have a project closure report.	Agreed- in place and closure reports are signed off by senior officers and members as well as used for lessons learnt reviews.	No further action - in place

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19	The findings and recommendations of this Sports Hub task and finish group and the LRIE task and finish group of 2020 must be shared with the chairman of the project management task and finish group, so that the learnings can be considered when they examine other Council projects. They are due to begin their work after the Sports Hub task and finish group completes its work.	Agreed	Documents to be shared. These are publicly available documents
20	The final copy of the task and finish group report (this document) should be logged in a central repository along with the other documentation collated by WBC Programme Management Office (PMO) for the Sports Hub Project.	Agreed	To log the Task and Finish Groups report in the central repository
21	Consistent, evidence-based advice must be given to members of planning committees. The legal team should check all planning reports where the Council is the applicant. Members of District Planning Committee should not be given advice that is contradictory to what was previously presented to Western or Eastern Area Planning Committee. If the Council decides that its advice to a committee was incorrect or misleading it should be transparent about this and re-present the application to Western or Eastern Area Planning Committee using correct and clear advice.	<p>Partly agreed – If the Planning service considers that there is a need for the Legal team to check planning committee reports, these are referred to them. The Legal Team do check those that need their input and attend planning committees to advise</p> <p>Should the position change between a planning application being considered by the Western or Eastern Area Planning Committees when presented to the District Planning Committee, this change will be reported. However, when applications are referred to District Planning Committee, it will be this</p>	No Further Action

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		committee's responsibility to determine the application without reference back to the area committees in line with the Councils constitution.	
22	When members of Corporate Board are aware of contradictory and confusing advice relating to council applications and Executive papers they must ensure Members and the public receive clear communication.	Agreed- Planning Committee and Executive reports should be clear and transparent addressing relevant issues	No Further Action – in place
23	Recommendation removed		
24	Complete records of FOI requests must be kept including reasons for response to requests. This will allow audit to understand why certain documents may or may not have been released.	Agreed	No Further action – in place
25	Recommendation removed.		
26	The Sports Hub project should have been promptly closed after the Executive decided they were not going to Proceed with it and projects Accounts should be completed	Agreed	To ensure that following Executive decisions, projects are updated/closed as agreed
27	A project like the Faraday Road refurbishment project should start with a new baseline, be a distinct project,	Agreed in Principle	The Council is strengthening the Projects service

	and have its own budget line.		to centralise project delivery including a review of the Council's project management methodology to ensure that key projects are governed by and monitored through appropriate, robust processes from inception to closure.
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## **6 Other options considered**

- 6.1 The Council could agree with all of the recommendations of the Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee but some of these are considered to be not appropriate to adopt for the reasons set out above.
- 6.2 The Council could agree not to adopt the recommendations set out in this report but this would undermine the opportunity to make improvements to project management which would undermine the Council's ability to deliver on its priorities.

## **7 Conclusion**

- 7.1 The Council is committed to ensuring that Council projects achieve policy and strategic objectives while maximising value for money. The Council is transparent about the rationale for supporting projects which is set out in reports to Executive or through business cases which are available to the public in line with Freedom of Information Regulations.
- 7.2 The Council continuously reviews projects against its strategic objectives and refreshes business cases accordingly. The Council has the courage to abandon proposals as evidenced by the recent decision not to progress with the Resource Centres proposal. It is also open to considering alternative viable proposals supported by the community.
- 7.3 The Council is supportive of many of the recommendations by the Resource and Place Scrutiny Committee and in many cases, these are in place requiring no further action.
- 7.4 The Council is actively strengthening the Projects Service in response to the administration's strategic objective to centralise project delivery to ensure it is



consistent and of high quality. Key improvements underway include a comprehensive review of the Council's project management methodology (PMM) to ensure that all projects are governed by and monitored through appropriate, robust processes from inception to closure. This review encompasses the standardisation and quality assurance of project documentation, including business case templates, prioritisation tools, and project health checks, to enhance transparency and auditability. Further training to be provided to project leaders to reflect new methodology.

- 7.5 The Projects Service structure has also been refined to clarify roles and responsibilities, with a particular focus on ensuring that project leaders receive appropriate training and support, and that the skills of those within the service align with the needs of the organisation. This has also seen the move of a number of officers from across the Council into a centre team which further improves assurance.
- 7.6 These actions collectively aim to embed a culture of continuous improvement, accountability, and strategic focus within the Projects service, ensuring that future projects maximise value for money and deliver positive outcomes for West Berkshire.
- 7.8 The supported recommendations of the Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee requiring further action are:
- Recommendation 1 - Undertake a review of project management documentation including business case templates, prioritisation tools and project health checks.
  - Recommendation 4 - Review how time recording can be implemented and the level/type of projects that this would apply to.
  - Recommendation 9 - Introduce quarterly status reporting for all Tier 1 projects in an appendix to the capital quarterly monitoring
  - Recommendation 13 – While this is place, the newly restructured Projects Service will undertake a review of project management documentation including business case templates, prioritisation tools and project health checks.
  - Recommendation 15 - Further training will be provided to project leaders to reflect new methodology
  - Recommendation 19 – Share the recommendations of this Sports Hub Task and Finish Group and the LRIE Task and Finish Group of 2020 with the Chairman of the Project Management Task and Finish Group
  - Recommendation 20 – To log the Task and Finish Group's report in the central repository in the Corporate Programme Office
  - Recommendation 21 - Strengthening the Projects service to centralise project delivery including a review of the Council's project management methodology to ensure that key projects are governed by and monitored through appropriate, robust processes from inception to closure.

## **8 Appendices**

8.1 Appendix A – Task and Finish Group Report

8.2 Appendix B – Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee Report 16<sup>th</sup> September 2025

**Subject to Call-In:**

Yes: ☒ No: ☐

The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval ☐

Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council ☐

Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position ☐

Considered or reviewed by one of the Council's Scrutiny Committees or associated Task Groups within the preceding six months ☐

Item is Urgent Key Decision ☐

Report is to note only ☐

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