

Sports Hub task and finish group report

Introduction

The task and finish group had seven objectives, taken from the terms of reference agreed by Scrutiny Commission.

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).
7. To determine what lessons can be learned from this project.

For each of the first six objectives, the report provides 'Background information and evidence provided'. Objective seven is fulfilled by providing 'Recommendations' for those six objectives.

Members of the task and finish group included Councillor Carolyn Culver (chairman), Councillor Jeremy Cottam, Councillor Paul Dick, Councillor David Marsh and Councillor Chris Read. Gordon Oliver (Principal Policy Officer for Scrutiny & Democratic Services) was clerk to the task and finish group. The task and finish group met four times: three times to take evidence, and once to finalise the report.

Members of the task and finish group consider this to be an evidence-based and robust report and support its recommendations.

For the avoidance of doubt, where this report refers to 'Members', it is referring Members of the Task and Finish Group unless stated otherwise.

Witnesses (in alphabetical order)

- Sharon Armour (Legal Services Manager)
- Laura Callan (Service Lead - Planning)
- Sarah Clarke (Executive Director – Resources)
- Shannon Coleman-Slaughter (Chief Financial Accountant)
- Bob Dray (Development Manager)
- Councillor Nigel Foot (Executive Portfolio Holder: Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside)
- Joseph Holmes (Interim Chief Executive)
- Peter Lambert (Newbury Rugby Club)
- Paul Martindill (former Leisure Consultant)
- Lee McDougall (Newbury Community Football Group)
- Drew McHenry (Principal Sport and Leisure Officer)
- Paul Morgan (former member of Newbury Community Football Group)
- Alan Pearce (claimant in judicial review)
- April Peberdy (Service Director - Community Services)
- Jude Thomas (Sport and Leisure Manager)
- Councillor Howard Woollaston (Shadow Portfolio: Housing, Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside; Public Safety)

Documentary evidence

The documentary evidence considered by the task and finish group included the following.

- Sports Hub project documents supplied by sport and leisure officers
- Cost figures provided by officers and the current portfolio holder
- Playing Pitch Strategy and Stage E Review 2022
- National Planning Policy Framework
- Western Area Planning Committee agenda pack (15 December 2021)
- Executive decision 4149 (16 December 2021)
- District Planning Committee (2 March 2022)
- Executive decision 4332 (23 March 2023)
- LRIE task and finish group
- Indicative Business Plan for the Newbury Football Ground - provided by Newbury Community Football Group
- Six page document of observations and costings provided by Newbury Community Football Group
- Claimant Skeleton Argument (relating to the judicial review)
- WBC 'Defendant's Detailed Grounds of Resistance' presented to the High Court (22 September 2022)
- Approved judgment (relating to the judicial review)
- Meeting minutes and emails between the Council and Sport England
- Various emails from witnesses providing information ahead of, and following, the witness sessions they attended

Detailed minutes of the four evidence sessions were drafted and their contents were also used to inform the content of this report.

Objective One: To determine whether the Sports Hub project was value for money

Background information and evidence provided

- The Council's Playing Pitch Strategy, adopted in February 2020, identified its number one priority as 'Faraday Road Stadium' and the relocation thereof. The Playing Pitch Strategy Stage E Review of September 2022 confirmed that this remained the number one priority and identified the need for 9-11 artificial grass pitches in total. A budget of £5.6m was allocated. However, this was insufficient, so the Council was only seeking to deliver six 3G pitches in a five-year period. Construction inflation post-Covid and the declaration of war in Ukraine took the cost of a 3G pitch from £650,000 - £750,000 to around £1m.
- The procurement strategy dated 10 March 2021 states a budget of £1.79m, a sinking fund of £25,000, and a revenue budget of £103,000.
- The cost of the proposed Sports Hub was £3.878m according to Executive decision EX4332 of 23 March 2023. Officers said this figure was only an estimate of the construction cost. Consultation and design costs were separate.
- Newbury Community Football Group submitted a document to the task and finish group, claiming that the total cost of ownership of the Sports Hub to the Council, excluding loan interest, over a 40-year period was a minimum of £11,580,000 including capital construction, lease premium, annual rent, sinking fund, annual subsidy and grass pitch loss mitigation. Noting that in March 2023, when the revised capital costs for the Newbury Sports Hub were approved by Executive, the Public Works Loan Board Annuity Rate was 5.03 per cent, the

Group argued that this would equate to interest payments of circa £137,000 per annum for 40 years.

- Newbury Community Football Group said that prematurely closing Faraday Road had resulted in loss of income for the Council from lease payments. They made the case that the Council could meet its target of six new 3G sports pitches in a five-year period, for the same cost as the Sports Hub project. Officers were unable to confirm whether a comparative analysis had been carried out between the cost of the Sports Hub and the cost of providing six 3G pitches in other locations across West Berkshire.
- At the time of giving evidence to the task and finish group, officers said a full size 3G pitch with no additional facilities costs around £1m. For such a pitch Sport England suggests a sinking fund of 2.5 per cent (£25,000) and maintenance fund of 0.5 per cent (£5,000).
- Officers said that it is their understanding, through conversations with Jon Wood at Berks and Bucks FA, that grant funding from the Football Foundation is awarded on a case-by-case basis and it would be difficult to determine the amount that could be saved across multiple pitch builds within the district. The Football Foundation analyses how well demand is met in an area, therefore the first pitch would likely secure grant funding of up to 80% of the total cost (due to a lack of artificial grass pitches in the area), but subsequent builds may not be entitled to similar funding, or indeed any funding.
- In 2021, Newbury Community Football Group published a business case to reopen Faraday Road, approved by Sport England. The scheme would cost £1.1m for a 3G pitch and floodlights and provide a football ground for the whole community seven days per week from 9am to 10pm throughout the year. This would include a 3G football pitch with changing rooms that could be used for training sessions and organised football matches at all levels, with a valid performance test that could be used for league matches and FA competitions, and a clubhouse that could be used as a source of income. This option would have had an advantage over the Sports Hub where the Rugby Club would have been given priority at weekends, which would have restricted use for football at the very times when demand was highest. The Football Foundation and Sport England had offered to fund 75% of the cost of the works. A self-sustaining business case had been approved by Sport England, which would not have required the Council to pay any subsidy, rent, or sinking fund.
- The Newbury Community Football Group prepared a business case in January 2021 included a total cost (excluding VAT) £727,000 for the pitch including legal and professional advice, excavation, preparation, drainage, lighting, fencing, goals. It also included a total cost (excluding VAT) £1,051,000 for the clubhouse and pavilion including demolition of existing buildings, construction and fit out of pavilion, covered stand, turnstiles, kiosk and PA system.
- Councillor Woollaston was unable to confirm if this option had been explored. From the above figures it appears that reopening Faraday Road would have provided better value for money than the Sports Hub, but there is no evidence that the Council ever considered this as an option. It should be noted that the LRIE task and finish group report in 2020 recommended 'For future large-scale projects OSMC should satisfy itself that the Council tests the market fully and assesses partners to ensure value for money'.
- NCFG obtained full planning permission for a 3G pitch and outline permission for a clubhouse. However, at the time of giving evidence to the task and finish group, these planning permissions were about to expire. The Council owned the site and had made it clear that the planning permission would not be utilised.

- Manor Park was earmarked as a replacement for the loss of a grass pitch at the Rugby Club. It had an oil pipeline underneath it and the Council was liaising with the pipeline's owner. It was estimated to cost £400,000 including importing material and levelling the site. It was noted that Henwick Worthy also lay on the pipeline, but it had been levelled without the need to import material. Officers said Sport England recommends for full size grass football pitches a sinking fund of 3.2 per cent (£12,800) and maintenance budget of 16.5 per cent (£66,000), amounting to a total yearly expenditure of £78,800. Officers said there were options for replacement grass pitches at Thatcham and Linear Park in Calcot, but Members were not shown any costings for those sites.
- The Council engaged consultants, Sports Turf Research Institute, to evaluate two sites as potential mitigation for the loss of the grass rugby pitch at Monks Lane. The STRI recommended the Holybrook Linear Park site in December 2021 and could hardly have been more damning of the alternative, at Manor Park, Cold Ash. It said the soil was “not conducive to the development of a rugby/football pitch surface”; the site was on a flood plain and drainage was too poor to ensure year-round playability; it was on a slope and “quite a considerable amount of material would need to be imported to create a pitch platform”; an oil pipe crossed the site; there was not enough parking; there were no changing or toilet facilities; the proposal contained a threat to “good trees and ecological elements”. It concluded: “It is recommended not to develop this site due to the limiting factors and it is recommended to develop the Holybrook Linear Park as an alternative.” This report, presumably commissioned at some expense to the Council (how much remains unclear), was inexplicably not taken into consideration, and in May 2022 a public consultation was launched into the Manor Park site (but not the Linear Park one). Councillor Woollaston defended the choice of Manor Park for a grass pitch (Newbury Today, 5 August 2022) as “the best short-term [sic] solution”, referring to the Playing Pitch Strategy and the need for more artificial pitches.
- Councillor Woollaston wrote to the task and finish group following his evidence to say agricultural land was investigated but no sites were found that the Planning Team deemed would be acceptable. These discussions were informal and not recorded in minutes. The lack of documentation means Members are unable to confirm whether these discussions took place, or judge whether the use of agricultural land would have provided better value for money. Members are of the opinion that it should have been recorded in the ‘decision log’ of the project. Evidence of request for sites with landowners should also have been maintained for audit purposes.
- Of the top three priorities in the current Playing Pitch Strategy, only John O’Gaunt School (priority three) had been delivered. A Stage E Review of the Playing Pitch Strategy is supposed to be undertaken annually with national Governing Bodies (the Berks and Bucks FA in the case of football) but has not happened since September 2022. There had been no responses to a tender exercise, which had resulted in additional delay. Officers confirmed that the Council started a new Stage E review, but the feedback from the National Governing Bodies was that the Playing Pitch Strategy should have a full refresh because much had changed since Covid, so the review was halted. The process of producing a new strategy is being led by the same provider that prepared the Henwick Worthy Masterplan, and the aim is to complete it by June 2025.
- There had been a contractual agreement with joint venture partner, St Modwen, that required vacant possession of the Faraday Road football ground. Members suggested that when the deal with St Modwen was found to be unlawful, there was no need for vacant possession and the ground should have been reopened. Furthermore, Faraday Road could have been reopened following the dismissal of the Newspaper House (19/01281/OUTMAJ) planning appeal on 8 October 2020, on flooding grounds. At that point it was clear that built

development on the site of the Faraday Road pitch would be unviable for the same reason. However, officers said the majority of the Faraday Road Football pitch site is in Flood Zone 1, so the site could be suitable for development without conflicting with planning policy, albeit flood risk would need to be addressed. The Faraday Road pitch site is not allocated in the Local Plan and planning applications on unallocated sites would be considered on their merits. Officers said the planning position is fundamentally different on the Newspaper House and Faraday Road sites despite their proximity.

- Newbury Community Football Group said that by funding and subsidising the Sports Hub via the taxpayer, rather than applying for external funding to the Football Foundation, the Council had no obligation to adhere to Sport England's guidance regarding financial sustainability. In October 2021, in response to the Council's business plan, Sport England challenged the rationale for the Council providing £90,000 revenue support per annum, warning that it was 'a major risk if this were to be reduced or removed'. They continued 'Over the 40-year lease period and excluding any inflationary increases, this as minimum would equate to £3.6m, which would be much better spent on addressing the facility needs across West Berkshire'. Sport England also said the £41,000 rent was extremely high and asked whether this was sustainable, to quote 'Over the 40 years lease as a minimum (excluding rent reviews/increases) this would equate to £1.64m income to the Rugby Club, as well as the free use of the 3G'. In a second response in November 2021, Sport England said they had consulted the FA and RFU who both had concerns about the project's reliance on Council subsidy.
- Officers told Members that such levels of revenue support were considered overblown by all contractors that responded to the sports and leisure management contract tender. The winning bidder thought the Sports Hub could break even within the first year, but Members were not shown an evidenced justification for the winning bidder's claim.
- The Sports Hub project would have represented considerable financial benefit for Newbury Rugby Club. Providing funds to the Rugby Club to help keep it afloat was viewed as a bonus by the Council. Payments due to be made to the Rugby Club included an initial payment of £250,000, £41,000 per annum for 40 years once the pitch was playable (with a break clause at 20 years), and £11,000 in legal fees. In the end, only the £11,000 legal fees were paid, and they went directly to solicitors. The £250,000 lease premium would have been given on condition that it was used to improve the club's facilities.
- The Rugby Club witness confirmed that the project came into being because they had been approached by the Council. The Council was stuck, and this option was the last resort, which the Rugby Club considered in its negotiations. The Rugby Club incurred no expenditure. It would have benefited from the initial lump sum payment and the annual rental income. Long-term maintenance would have been the Council's responsibility.
- The Rugby Club had only considered the proposal because of its financial position. Whilst once very successful, with first class facilities, the Club had been repeatedly relegated, had lost sponsorship, could no longer afford to pay its players, and was left with a ground that was expensive to maintain. It had survived by selling off land, but it had spent the proceeds of these sales. The Club had no more land that it could sell, so it had welcomed the approach from the Council. The Rugby Club was aware the Council had decided to offer this opportunity to no other landowner and hence had the upper hand in negotiations. The Rugby Club had not felt like a partner in negotiations. There had been no interest in what the Club wanted to do for rugby and the community.
- The Rugby Club is now in a much stronger and sustainable financial position.

- The Council did not negotiate aggressively enough with the Rugby Club, bearing in mind the latter had existing facilities, including a club house, changing rooms and showers, and physio room, which are all underutilised.
- Members were concerned that the Council was proposing to use public funds to favour external entities, the Rugby Club in the case of the Sports Hub, and Newbury Town Football Club in the case of the reopening of Faraday Road where it was still unclear whether, and how often, any other groups could book the facility.
- Members invited Sport England to give evidence directly to the task and finish group but they responded, "Sport England made its planning recommendations on the evidence presented to it during the life of the relevant planning applications. We consider your current deliberations to be an internal matter and must therefore respectfully decline to attend".
- Members asked for all Sports Hub project costs to date, and officers provided the following from the November 2023 Executive report that proposed the Council would not proceed with the Sports Hub project. The total figure was £214,537.90-£219,537.90.

Pre-construction costs	£126,585.00
Legal fees, in respect of the land transaction documentation and DMA	£46,802.90
Legal fees in respect of planning including the Judicial Review: Planning advice: £3,401.50 Judicial review: £33,748.50 Sub-Total: £37,150.00 Less recovered costs (Judicial Review): £11,000.00	£26,150.00
Additional estimated legal costs of decoupling the Sports Hub from the Everyone Active contract	£5,000-£10,000
Adjustment in management fee to Everyone Active, should the Sports Hub be removed from the contract (not yet confirmed)	£0
NRC's legal costs – due	£10,000
Total	£214,537.90- £219,537.90

- Officers said the cost of the interim consultant was met through capital cost centres. They then said the leisure consultant worked on several projects and they do not believe these were coded separately. Members were not given a figure for total staff time spent on the project. Officers stated that leisure team time is not coded to specific projects. This seems to be at odds with usual Council practice. It should be noted that the LRIE task and finish report in 2020 recommended 'All officers' time should be recorded when dealing with large scale projects'.
- Members are of the opinion that revenue costs must not be used to subsidise capital projects. If a capital project uses 'business as usual' staff, their hours must be tracked against the project, otherwise the project is cutting into revenue costs which are under great pressure. The council can claim back tax against capital investment projects, but not against revenue spend.

Recommendations	Priority
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

Objective Two: To determine whether the project would have delivered on the Council's strategic objectives

Background information and evidence provided

- The Playing Pitch Strategy of 2020 states that the number one priority was Faraday Road Stadium and the relocation thereof. This was reiterated in the Stage E Review of 2022.
- Based on the findings relating to objective one above, it could be argued that the best way to have achieved the number one priority in the Playing Pitch Strategy would have been to re-open Faraday Road. This would have represented better value for money and been quicker to achieve. The Sports Hub would not have been a replacement *in fact* because it did not have the capacity to develop beyond Step 4, whereas Faraday Road had the potential to

achieve Step 2. (Step 1 is the highest step.) It is worth noting that Hungerford is currently playing at Step 3 and Thatcham at Step 4, so it would not be unreasonable to expect that Newbury FC could progress beyond Step 4. Also, the Sports Hub was only intended as a base for Newbury Football Club. Other 3G pitches within the PPS would have replaced provision for children's football and other uses. However, it must be borne in mind that the Sports Hub was intended to be a 3G pitch and could therefore be used more often than the grass pitch at Faraday Road.

- While Newbury Community Football Group were supportive of the Sports Hub as a standalone facility, they did not consider the Sports Hub to have the capacity to be a replacement for Faraday Road, and therefore did not agree that it met the number one priority of the Playing Pitch Strategy. They had the following concerns about the Sports Hub project:
 - There was a planning restriction preventing football matches being played on Saturdays if there was also a rugby match being played.
 - Peak time for children's football was Sunday morning, which would not have been permitted under the lease agreement.
 - There was no guarantee of access on Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday evenings.
 - The site was very constrained. The pitch was too small for rugby, there was insufficient space for spectators and the site restricted the aspirations of Newbury FC.
 - The clubhouse proposed for Monks Lane was much smaller than at Faraday Road and could not be used to generate revenue on non-match days. This would have fundamentally affected the financial viability of the club.
 - Parking would have been run by a third party.
- Members noted the update report to Western Area Planning Committee, which highlighted that the requirements of the Playing Pitch Strategy and the fact it was a replacement for Faraday Road were relevant material considerations. Therefore, Council strategies not only guide how public funds are spent, but they also carry weight in planning decisions.
- One limited consultation (see appendix one) took place in January-March 2021, which contained no detail about the project and asked only about the general principles. There was no opportunity to opt for retaining the pitch at Faraday Road. The Executive decided in April 2021 not to proceed to a full public consultation, despite the scale of the project and the financial implications. The council failed to engage with the Newbury Community Football Group or Newbury Town Council at any stage of the process. It should be noted that the LRIE task and finish report in 2020 recommended 'The Council should review and improve how it consults and engages with those who may be affected by the Council's proposals. Significant projects such as this should have a clear communications plan with a list of key stakeholders'.
- There are further references to the Playing Pitch Strategy under objective four below.

Recommendations	Priority
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	High

transparency, and strategies and business cases refreshed accordingly.	
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.) 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.	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

Objective Three: To determine whether the project was well managed

Background information and evidence provided

- At the task and finish group's first meeting in November officers responsible for sport and leisure were not able to answer many of the Members' questions because they said they had not been involved in the Sports Hub project. At the second meeting in December, officers said that the development of the project, and associated project management, was outsourced to Alliance Leisure Services (ALS). They are an established developer within the industry and were procured via the UK Leisure Framework as a 'one-stop' solution for complete design and build from inception to delivery. Officers said ALS would have maintained much of the detailed project documentation.
- Although a business case had been developed for the Sports Hub, it had not been updated. Officers provided project board agendas, minutes, and action logs, but they could not confirm which documents were shared at each meeting. Minutes were sparse and lacked context, and there were no gateway reviews. Officers also provided a communication strategy, risk management strategy and risk register, and procurement strategy. Officers said they had submitted all project documentation that they could draw from the Sports Hub project files, but because the project was managed externally, and owned by officers no longer at the Council, that was all that could be found in the accessible folders. Documentation is important for the purposes of audit and scrutiny, but it is clear that record keeping was poor. It should be noted that the LRIE task and finish report in 2020 recommended 'The Council's Record Retention Policy should be reviewed to consider whether it is fit for purpose and being implemented uniformly across the organisation'.
- Officers said because this was never an established project, some documents may not have been developed (however it is evident that the project entered the Planning Stage or Design Stage which is an established in-project stage). It was suggested that officers may have been waiting for approval of the implementation phase before adopting the full project management approach. However, it was acknowledged that this was not within the strict interpretation of PRINCE2. It is concerning to Members that officers do not consider it an

established project when it was agreed by Executive in December 2021 to allocate £3.351m to complete the development of the Sports Hub, and according to a November 2023 Executive report the total costs to date were £214,537.90-£219,537.90.

- ALS were contacted and sent the Council the following documents: proposed planning conditions tracker, risk register, indicative programme, programme narrative, and cost certainty report. Officers believe the project manager for the Sports Hub no longer works with ALS. In Members' opinion it should not matter whether personnel at the Council or at one of its contractors have changed because the documentation should be properly archived.
- Officers confirmed that the Council's Project Management Methodology followed the principles of PRINCE2 while ALS used their own project management framework. Members noted the lack of PRINCE2 documentation such as the RAID log, information on assumptions, issues, dependencies, decisions logs, and so on. It was noted that PRINCE2 could be implemented at a reduced level, but any changes in approach should be agreed at the outset. Officers said that because the project did not progress beyond the planning stage, and a contract was not signed for delivery of the project, there would be less project documentation, and they would not expect to have a lessons learned document for a project. It would only have been considered a major project when it progressed to the construction stage. Members were not convinced by this and are of the opinion that documentation should be produced from project initiation, not after planning permission has been secured.
- Officers said the principal project risk register was held by ALS as project managers and WBC held a client risk register. They said they did not believe that a RAID log is part of the Council's project management methodology. An action log was held by the Council. Bearing in mind a paper went to Executive in March 2023 containing updated costs for the project, the last updates on the risk register were 16 May 2022 and the last update on the action log was 24 August 2022, according to the documents shared with Members. Members are concerned that insufficient attention was given to updating information.
- ALS would have managed change control and, as they were procured to deliver the project at an agreed cost, the Council would expect ALS to deliver to budget and not expect to see budget accounts unless there was an issue. Officers provided a Cost Certainty Report dated February 2023, Phoenix Report (breakdown of costs changes between Cost Confidence and Cost Certainty) and an Exception Report seeking additional funding and extension to time dated October 2021.
- It is not clear why the project managers did not follow the project management methodology and why the governance boards did not spot that the required PRINCE2 products were not being produced. There is no evidence that either the project board or the project managers can demonstrate that the products were produced, reviewed and signed off, or formally requested exemption from the delivery of the required products. Members believe there is clear evidence that both governance boards and project managers did not know what they should have known.
- The task group considers that the project was not properly controlled or managed, and project tolerances including scope, time and costs, were either not established or monitored. Project management good practice was not followed. It is not clear that decisions were made based on all the information available or that appropriate information was sought for the best value outcome of taxpayers and service users.
- The LRIE task and finish group report in 2020 states 'OSMC should satisfy itself that the Council has in place appropriate project management methodology. This should be tested in

order to provide assurance that this is now operating effectively and consistently across the organisation.’ At the OSMC meeting when the report was presented, Councillor Jeff Brooks expressed his frustrations regarding project management and project documentation. The Executive response stated: ‘The Council has a PMM which is continually being updated and improved. Training is currently being rolled out to managers across the Council. Checks are undertaken by the corporate programme office to ensure compliance / exception reports are taken to Corporate Programme Board.’ The Executive response concluded ‘No further action – in place’. More recently the Risk Management Strategy document presented to Executive on 12 December 2024 stated ‘The Council’s approach to risk management from a project and programme perspective has improved through increased training on the Project Management Methodology (PMM) based on PRINCE 2 principles’.

- Officers could not recall whether lessons learned from the LRIE task and finish group had been shared.
- It was confirmed that in 2023, internal governance training had been provided to all senior staff (Service Leads and above). This had covered the Council’s project management methodology and governance structure. There is a step-by-step guide to project management toolkit on the intranet. Members found no evidence of training about the Council’s project management methodology when taking evidence from officers responsible for sport and leisure.
- An officer told Members that training in PRINCE2 for new project managers, and refresher training for qualified practitioners, had not taken place since 2021 because there is no budget for training. The Interim CEO acknowledged that training budgets had been squeezed in recent years, but assurance was given that relevant staff had been trained in PRINCE2, Agile or Waterfall, and there were also some project management apprentices. In terms of training budgets, it was confirmed that any bids would be assessed in accordance with current priorities.
- In terms of governance, the Sports Hub was reporting to Corporate Projects Board until 2022. The Council then changed its governance arrangements, so the reporting pathway for major projects is now to Corporate Board before going to Corporate Programme Board, which includes all the relevant Executive Portfolio Holders. This is in addition to any project/programme specific governance (e.g., PPS Steering Group).
- It was confirmed that the Council’s Programme Management Office (PMO) had grown over time, to deliver increased internal support for project management. Projects were tiered according to risk via an online tool, which defined reporting and governance.

Recommendations	Priority
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.) Executive should commit to providing project leaders with the (refresher) training they need to perform their role effectively and monitor its use and effectiveness.	Medium
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

Objective Four: To determine whether reliable and consistent advice was given to Members about the project to assist them in their decision-making roles

Background information and evidence provided

- Former portfolio holder Councillor Woollaston announced in a public webinar on 17 March 2021 that Monks Lane was a replacement for Faraday Road, saying “We started off from the presumption that we needed to find an alternative site” because Faraday Road was needed for “economic regeneration”. Three other sites they had looked at were unsuitable, so they spoke to the Rugby Club, and this was the “very best option”. At Western Area Planning Committee on 15 December 2021 Councillor Woollaston was minuted as saying “The Council’s aspiration for economic and housing regeneration on the London Road Industrial Estate necessitated a replacement for the pitch on Faraday Road”.
- The Sports Hub application was considered at the Western Area Planning Committee on 15 December 2021 and District Planning Committee on 2 March 2022. Readers of this report might find reference to the timeline, appended to this report, useful to understand how the narrative around the Sports Hub project changed.

- The Sports Hub was described as a replacement for Faraday Road in the following documents:
 - Page 44 of the agenda pack for Western Area Planning Committee on 15 December 2021 states: 'The Playing Pitch Strategy includes the specific objective of providing a replacement football facility for the Faraday Road Ground' and 'WBC and Sport England have submitted a joint statement which states that they are both jointly supporting the development proposals at Newbury Rugby Club as an enhanced replacement... for Faraday Road Stadium, in line with the Playing Pitch Strategy.' The update report for the meeting stated: '...it is clear from the report and recommended conditions that the requirements of the Playing Pitch Strategy are the relevant material consideration in the case of this application.'
 - In Executive decision 4149 of 16 December 2021 'To approve the allocation of £3.351M to complete the development of Newbury Sports Hub and thereby achieve the delivery of the number one priority in the Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS)' and 'The Newbury Sports Hub provides an enhanced replacement for the Faraday Road Stadium. If the Newbury Sports Hub project is not brought forward, an alternative replacement site will need to be found before the LRIE regeneration project can be progressed.'
 - In Executive decision 4332 of 23 March 2023 'RESOLVED that Executive approve the allocation of £3.878M to complete the development of Newbury Sports Hub and thereby achieve the delivery of the number one priority in the Playing Pitch Strategy...'
- However, the Sports Hub was described as not being a replacement for Faraday Road in the following documents:
 - Page 20 of the agenda pack for District Planning Committee of 2 March 2022 stated: '... there is no formal link between the current application and any separate development plans or planning application that may emerge in the future in relation to the Faraday Road Stadium, London Road Industrial Estate or its replacement'.
 - Page 15 of the Defendant's Detailed Grounds of Resistance of 22 September 2022 (the Council's defence in the judicial review) stated: 'In short, officers correctly advised Members that the application for the Proposed Development was indeed a "stand-alone" proposal with "no formal link" to FRS.' Page 17 says, 'The Council therefore rejects the submission in the Speaking Note that "the development of the two sites were part and parcel of the same overall scheme" and that "the decision to grant permission for the NRC [Rugby Club] site was intrinsically bound up with the future of the FRS" and "would lead directly to the permanent loss of the FRS sports ground".'
- Between the Western Area Planning Committee meeting on 15 December 2021, and the District Planning Committee meeting on 2 March 2022, Alan Pearce made the Council aware of his intention to make a legal challenge. He did this in a planning objection letter of 31 January 2022, published on the Council's planning website on the 4 February 2022.
- Officers told the task and finish group that they were content that the advice had been factually correct at both planning committee meetings, and there had been no intentional misdirection.
- The grounds for the judicial review were:
 - Ground 1(i): Members were materially misled insofar as they were directed to treat the application as a "stand alone proposal" with "no formal link" with the Faraday

Road Site and that the future of the Faraday Road Site formed “no part” of the consideration of the planning application

- Ground 1(ii) the Defendant erred in law by treating, on the one hand, the proposed development as a replacement for the provision at the Faraday Road Site, but on the other hand treating the proposed development as a “stand alone proposal” and in failing and expressly refusing to consider or compare the implications of the proposed development for the Faraday Road Site
- The claimant’s submission said: ‘It appears that between the Western Area planning committee meeting and the District planning committee meeting, it must have been recognised that recommending the Sports Hub for approval as a replacement was inconsistent with the position reached with Sports England, but the implications of that were not grappled with properly, clearly or consistency. Hence the position at District planning committee: an attempt to present the Sports Hub proposal as something other than it was.’
- The Defendant’s Detailed Grounds for Resistance said:
 - Ground (1) para 47 ‘In short, officers correctly advised Members that the application for the Proposed Development was indeed a “stand-alone” proposal with “no formal link” to FRS. The Permission does not, and does not purport to, authorise any development of any kind at FRS.’
- The judicial review was rejected, concluding that the claim failed on both grounds. The judgment was handed down on 3 February 2023. The judge said in paragraph 29 ‘The permission does not involve the loss of the football stadium and that is why it was considered, as it should have been, on a stand-alone basis. That emphasis was needed to make clear that the permission would not result in the loss of the football stadium within the meaning of CS18 and or result in the football stadium being built upon within the meaning of NPPF paragraph 99.’
- The aforementioned legal documents were all made available to the task and finish group by judicial review claimant Alan Pearce. The chairman of the task and finish group contacted the Monitoring Officer on 23 January 2025 asking to see the legal advice given to the council ahead of its defence in the High Court. A document was shared with the chairman to assist with the task and finish review, but she was advised that it could not be shared in whole or part with any third party.
- If one accepts the advice given to Members of District Planning Committee and the conclusions in the High Court, it surely follows that the Council was incorrect to claim at Western Area Planning Committee and in Executive papers that the Sports Hub was intended to replace Faraday Road and thereby meet the number one priority of the Playing Pitch Strategy. This poses questions: what is the point of a strategy if it is not going to be used to guide the Council’s actions and why were Members of Western Area Planning Committee advised in an update report just ahead of their meeting that ‘...it is clear from the report and recommended conditions that the requirements of the Playing Pitch Strategy are the relevant material consideration in the case of this application’? An Executive paper, published the week before Western Area Planning Committee and presented at Executive 24 hours after the planning meeting, said the Sports Hub was a replacement. Members of Western Area Planning Committee voted for what they were told was a replacement, not ‘a “stand-alone” with “no formal link” to FRS’ as the Council’s legal defence later stated.
- On 13 July 2021 there was a meeting involving former Council leader Councillor Lynne Doherty, former portfolio holders Councillor Howard Woollaston and Councillor Ross Mackinnon, former CEO Nick Carter, former officers including one of whose names was

redacted, Charles Johnston (Property Director, Sport England) and one of his colleagues. The minutes quoted: “[Redacted] added that any planning application for the Sports Hub needed to clearly state that Monks Lane was a direct replacement for Faraday Road.” When Nick Carter “sought clarification on the rationale for this link to be identified”, the unidentified officer “confirmed that the link needed to be made in order to satisfy the NPPF”.

- The National Planning Policy Framework is a material consideration in determining planning applications. Paragraph 99 states ‘Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless... b) the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location’. Faraday Road had the potential to be a Step 2 facility, while the Sports Hub did not have the capacity to progress beyond a Step 4 facility. The Western Area Planning Committee paperwork described the Sports Hub as a replacement for Faraday Road, but internal witnesses to the task and finish group including Councillor Woollaston claim it was only intended to be a ‘partial’ replacement: a base for Newbury Football Club, while other 3G pitches within the PPS would have replaced provision for children’s football and other uses. Members at District Planning Committee were told that there was ‘no formal link’ between Faraday Road and the Sports Hub. If it was intended to be a ‘partial’ replacement, or not a replacement, in either case it was non-compliant with the ‘equivalent or better’ stipulation in NPPF paragraph 99.
- The Sports Hub was not described as a ‘partial’ replacement in the Executive or planning documents. It is not clear to Members whether this is an attempt to create a rationale after the facts, or further illustrative of the confusion about what the Sports Hub project really represented. To be clear, Manor Park was intended to be a replacement for the loss of an existing grass pitch at Monks Lane where the Sports Hub was to be built. It was not the case that Sports Hub + Manor Park = replacement for Faraday Road.
- Officers told the task and finish group that the role of the Local Planning Authority was different to that of the Council as scheme promoter. For the project team, the funding picture and Faraday Road were primary considerations, but not for the Local Planning Authority. In officers’ opinion, the application was to replace the fifth training pitch at Newbury Rugby Club with the Sports Hub, and although it was presented as a partial mitigation for Faraday Road the granting of planning permission would not have forced the closure of Faraday Road. They said a replacement for Faraday Road would only become an issue once a planning application was submitted for that site.
- Officers said policy CS18 (Green Infrastructure) of the Local Plan was the focus for the planning decision. This required green infrastructure, including outdoor facilities, to be protected, or if lost, to be replaced by an equal or better facility. The Sports Hub was considered a betterment when compared to training pitch 5, given that it could be used more intensively. However, the task and finish group note that the application was never presented as a ‘partial’ replacement in planning or Executive papers, and in Western Area Planning Committee and Executive papers it was presented as a replacement for Faraday Road not a betterment compared to training pitch 5. Officers reiterated there was no scope for the Local Planning Authority to refuse the application on the grounds of what was happening at Faraday Road. The learning that officers had taken away was that advice needed to be clearer about the key consideration, in this case compliance with CS18.
- Paul Morgan, Chair of Newbury Community Football Group until September 2023, said members of the group submitted FOI requests to the Council and to Sport England for all correspondence between the Council and Sport England, during the period 31 March 2021 to 30 April 2022, regarding the Sports Hub and Faraday Road. He said pre-application discussions between the Council, Sport England, the Football Association and the Football

Foundation had been clear that the Sports Hub was intended as a replacement for the Faraday Road facility. Discussions indicated that failure to link the Faraday Road site to the planning application would result in objections and the application being rejected. At a meeting in May 2021, Sport England highlighted the inherent links between a.) Faraday Road, b.) the Sports Hub and c.) a replacement for the loss of a grass pitch at the Rugby Club, and they suggested that three planning applications should be submitted at the same time. The Council's response to the FOI requests contained considerably less than the Sport England response. The Council's response only contained documents from the planning team.

- Members asked to see the final statement that Sport England made on the Sports Hub project. Nothing could be found on the Council's document system and nothing was forthcoming from Alliance Leisure Services. This is concerning because they were a key consultee. This document should have been kept along with other documentation.
- Officers said there was no requirement to provide replacement facilities until the LRIE development had started. The Executive paper of 16 December 2021 stated, 'If the Newbury Sports Hub project is not brought forward, an alternative replacement site will need to be found before the LRIE regeneration project can be progressed'. External witnesses were concerned that the longer Faraday Road stayed closed and degenerated as a site (including an abandoned pitch, loss of spectator stand, and the clubhouse's destruction by fire), the less likely the Council would feel obliged to replace what had been there originally.
- Officers said Monks Lane was the best option available given that the political administration at that time did not want football to return to Faraday Road. There had been a contractual agreement with joint venture partner, St Modwen, that required vacant possession of the football ground. The aspiration had been to redevelop the whole of the Faraday Road Industrial Estate to create high quality jobs in an accessible location close to the town centre and public transport interchanges.
- The then Council leader attended Western Area Planning Committee as a substitute on the evening the application was determined and voted to grant planning permission, when the following evening's Executive paper supporting the Sports Hub was already in the public domain. Members believe that where the Council was the applicant and the Executive were advocating for the application, it follows that Members of that Executive attending a planning committee are pre-determined. A Committee member challenged this at the start of the meeting and the legal officer advised it was up to individual Members, if they were concerned they might be biased or prejudiced, to seek advice from the Monitoring Officer.
- Officers said that if Members of the Executive were required to consider such an application at a planning committee in future, the Monitoring Officer should advise them to abstain in the vote. The Task Group did not think this went far enough because this would still allow the Executive Member to influence the debate. Members asked if such applications could be referred straight to District Planning Committee. While officers said this was not permitted currently, the Constitution could be changed. It was noted that the whole Council had determined the planning application for the Vodafone HQ site. However, this would require all Members to have received planning training.
- Members of the task and finish group conclude that if one accepts the advice given to Members of District Planning Committee and the conclusions in the High Court, it follows that the advice given to Western Area Planning Committee – that the Sports Hub was a replacement for Faraday Road – was incorrect. Officers and the former portfolio holder described the project as only a 'partial' replacement when giving evidence to the task and finish group, suggesting they knew it was not a full replacement for Faraday Road. The Sports Hub was not a replacement *in fact* because it was intended as a Step 4 facility, not capable of reaching Step 2 as Faraday Road was. However, it is acknowledged that a 3G pitch at the Sports Hub could have been used more heavily than the former grass pitch at

Faraday Road. There was no shared understanding among the then Executive Members and Council officers about the rationale for the Sports Hub, which there should have been because the Council had a Playing Pitch Strategy that clearly stated that the number one priority was Faraday Road and the relocation thereof. The alternative to this conclusion is that the then Executive and officers really did believe it was intended to be a replacement, in which case the advice given at District Planning Committee and the Council's defence in the High Court is called into question.

- Note that the project was described as having 'no formal link' at District Planning Committee on 2 March 2022 and in the High Court defence between August 2022 and January 2023, but it would 'achieve the delivery of the number one priority in the Playing Pitch Strategy' (ie Faraday Road and relocation thereof) in the Executive of 23 March 2023. While the legal defence was ongoing the Playing Pitch Strategy Stage E Review took place in September 2022 and confirmed that the number one priority was still Faraday Road and relocation thereof. So, the Sports Hub was presented as a replacement at Western Area Planning and an Executive, then described as 'no formal link' at District Planning Committee and in the High Court, and then a replacement again at Executive. Despite the Council's successful High Court defence arguing that the Sports Hub had 'no formal link' to Faraday Road, the Executive continued to justify it on the grounds of its link to the number one priority in the Playing Pitch Strategy – ie Faraday Road and the relocation thereof.
- The Group considers that the Council's advice and decisions regarding the Sports Hub were contradictory and confusing. It appears that the High Court defence hung by a thread from the word 'directly' (page 17 of the Defendant's Detailed Grounds of Resistance referred to above) because one might argue that a planning approval letter for the Sports Hub would not in and of itself have set in stone the final abandonment of Faraday Road for sport, but it certainly would have given the Executive the green light they sought.
- At an additional evidence session on 16 June 2025, Members asked why the narrative had changed between Western Area Planning Committee and District Planning Committee which had seen the Sports Hub go from a replacement for Faraday Road to a stand-alone scheme. Officers explained that Sport England had requested a condition linking the two facilities for the Western Area Planning Committee application, but they had subsequently withdrawn the request for the District Planning Committee application. The High Court had agreed there was no link when the application was considered by DPC. It was noted that the Western Area Planning Committee update sheet had indicated that 'the requirements of the Playing Pitch Strategy are the relevant material consideration'. The number one priority in the Playing Pitch Strategy is Faraday Road and the replacement thereof. Officers stressed the differences between the functions of the Local Planning Authority and the Executive. It was confirmed that the Playing Pitch Strategy had been considered by the High Court. When taken as a whole, the proposal was considered to be compliant with the PPS. The key difference between Western Area Planning Committee and District Planning Committee was the withdrawal of the Sport England condition.
- The Task Group considers that this testimony creates the impression that a request from Sport England was the reason the Sports Hub and Faraday Road were linked. Sport England submitted their comments to the Council before Western Area Planning Committee, not afterwards. Sport England was only able to comment on the Sports Hub planning application on a Sport England Exception 5 basis (rather than an Exception 4 basis) because there was no live planning application for Faraday Road. It is clear from the Western Area Planning Committee papers considered on 15 December 2021, Executive decisions 4149 and 4332, meeting minutes and email correspondence between the Council and Sport England (which is all publicly available following FOI requests) that it was the Council driving the narrative that the Sports Hub was a replacement for Faraday Road.

- Officers stressed that the High Court had been told everything about the history of the case, and this had been cited in the judgment. Officers confirmed that Members were told of the differences in the Council's roles as Local Planning Authority and landowner. Officers accepted that there may be learning points around how to communicate the separate legal functions of the Council acting as LPA and the Executive acting as landowner/scheme promoter. It was acknowledged that this may be confusing to the average layperson and required 'mental gymnastics'. Officers stressed the need to be clear and transparent about the separation of the functions of the Local Planning Authority and the Executive. Planning could only have regard to relevant planning matters at the time that an application was considered. It was suggested that there should be learning from this case to ensure explanations were clearer in future. Officers suggested that training and communications could be improved.
- Officers indicated that while planning reports were not routinely checked by Legal due to resource constraints, more scrutiny was provided where reports were referenced up to District Planning Committee. The Sports Hub report had been discussed with Legal and Planning Officers' views had been further refined.
- What is in no doubt is that reliable and consistent advice was not given to Members about the project to assist them in their decision-making roles. This is unacceptable and must not happen again. It has eroded trust in the Council.

Recommendations	Priority
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.) When the Council is the planning applicant and/or the project concerned is being promoted by the Executive, Members of the Executive should not vote on that application at planning committee meetings. They should either be substituted for that meeting or, if present, they should declare that they are predetermined and take no part in the debate or vote while the application is being considered. This is essential to retain the trust of the public in the planning decision making process. This should be added to the Constitution.	High
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.) The Council must refer itself to the Local Government Ombudsman and ask them to consider the contents of this report.	High

Objective five: To determine whether the Council's decision to abandon the project in its original form was a strategically and financially sound decision

Background information and evidence provided

- Councillor Foot, Executive Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside gave evidence to the task and finish group. He said the Liberal Democrats election manifesto of 2023 made it clear that they intended to bring football back to Faraday Road. This had since been achieved, with the site passing its Step 7 ground inspection. It was recognised that the current facilities did not fully replicate those that had been present in 2018.
- Cllr Foot felt that reopening Faraday Road would help to deliver the Playing Pitch Strategy and was a strategically and financially sound decision. Faraday Road had the scope to be developed, as the men's and/or women's teams progressed up the leagues, while the Sports Hub would have been constrained to Step 4.
- At Executive on 7 November 2024, Council Leader Councillor Jeff Brooks responded to a public question regarding the costs of restoring football to Faraday Road. He said, "Since November 2023 the costs and commitments to date are as follows: The preparation of the football pitch and the surrounding grounds including the ball catch fencing is £79,500; The Installation of previously supplied changing rooms, clubhouse and toilet facilities is £58,500; The covered stand cost £17,000; The Portable and moveable flood lighting cost £5,000; The Portacabin connection to utilities cost £17,000; The Security fencing and pitch side spectator barriers cost £16,600; The short-term hire of a portalo for public use cost £485; The Plumbing cost £27,500; The provision of electrical connections cost £23,700. Therefore, a total of £395,000".
- The Countryside Manager provided the following figures to the task and finish group: 2023/24 £239,000 and 2024/25 £191,500 totalling £430,500. The Service Director – Environment provided the following information for the Scrutiny Commission action log: 'Phase 1, which involved returning the pitch to football use, was completed in November 2023 and cost £239,000. Phase 2 involved upgrading the facilities to allow league matches to be played completed at the end of November 2024 and cost an additional £244,000. The next stage is to understand the feasibility of constructing a 3G pitch at the site. Consultants have been appointed to undertake the design and investigation, which is due to be completed by the end of the financial year and will cost £27,000'. This totals £510,000. Following the conclusion of the task and finish group meetings, but before publication of the report, Councillor Foot provided a figure of £499,720.62 spent between the start of the 2023/24 financial year and 12 February 2025.
- The plan is to increase use at Faraday Road. Although it was currently a grass pitch, junior matches were being played in addition to senior matches. There would have been limited scope to accommodate women's football at the Sports Hub. Prior to 2018, this had been accommodated at Faraday Road. The aspiration for Faraday Road was to provide a facility that was big enough to accommodate training sessions, and matches for adult men and women, as well as juniors. Over time, the administration would look to improve the stands and clubhouse, with existing facilities repurposed elsewhere in the district.
- A feasibility study was being carried out to inform the new Playing Pitch Strategy. Consideration would be given to how a 3G pitch could be achieved at Faraday Road.
- Members were told that the refurbishment of Faraday Road was funded through Countryside Service budgets and the Playing Pitch Strategy budget. The Playing Pitch Strategy budget contributed £100,000. Officers said no projects had to be shifted back in the programme, nor

dropped because of the work on Faraday Road. They were not asked to offer up a capital saving because of Faraday Road. They said the Faraday Road funding came from what was allocated to the Sports Hub at the Rugby Club. However, when Members requested the Sports Hub costs to date (ie at November 2023 when the Council decided not to proceed with the project) Faraday Road costs were not included (see table above in this report).

- Members sought clarification as to how much was left in the Playing Pitch Strategy budget. Finance officers confirmed the following total spend per year and said further spend is expected against this budget in 2024/25.

2021-22	142,850.00
2022-23	142,852.15
2023-24	16,629.32
2024-25	13,776.62
Total	316,108.09

- Officers said capital bids have been submitted for future years and are as follows: 2025/26 £340,000, 2026/27 £500,000, 2027/28 £500,000, 2028/29 £500,000.

Recommendations	Priority
26.) The Sports Hub project should have been promptly closed after the Executive decided they were not going to proceed with it. All project accounts should be completed.	Medium
27.) A project like the Faraday Road refurbishment project should start with a new baseline, be a distinct project, and have its own budget line.	Medium

Objective six: To establish whether the Council intends to deliver any elements of the original project at Monks Lane

Background information and evidence provided

- The current administration does not have any plans to implement the original Sports Hub proposal at Monks Lane, despite the fact it is the second biggest project in the 2024/25 capital budget (note that at the time of writing this report we are still in the 2024/25 financial year), but it was suggested that there may be potential to deliver a playing pitch at the site as part of the new Playing Pitch Strategy.
- The project is in the process of being closed so there is no funding in the budget for 2025/26.

Appendix one: Consultation

There were two aspects to the consultation, carried out in March-April 2021. The first was a webinar, conducted on 17 March 2021 by Paul Anstey (the then officer responsible for the project) and Councillor Howard Woollaston (the portfolio holder) who made it clear that from the start that Monks Lane was being pursued because a replacement was needed for the Faraday Road ground. He told the webinar: "We started off from the presumption that we needed to find an alternative site." The second was an online consultation carried out in March-April 2021, which attracted 349 responses. (This was obtained only after a member of the public made an FoI request.)

The questions were:

- How far to you agree with our proposals to provide a new sports ground at Newbury Rugby Club?
- How far do you agree with our proposal that the new sports ground should be a Step 6 facility?
- How far do you agree that different sports sharing a facility is a good idea?
- How far do you agree with our proposal that the playing pitch constructed at the new sports ground is artificial?
- What facilities would you like to see provided at the proposed sports ground? (Options were: bar and kitchen; car parking; club house, including welfare facilities; floodlights; seating; other)
- Do you think we should prioritise access for particular age groups?
- Do you think this proposal will improve your opportunities to participate in sport and physical activity?

At this stage (it had only been announced a matter of weeks earlier) there was very little detailed information about the proposal. For example, the nature of the deal with the rugby club and its associated costs, or the implications of replacing a grass pitch with an artificial one (and thereby having to find and fund a "replacement for the replacement"). So no one had a chance to raise these crucial issues.

The task group considers that the questions, which appear to have been specifically designed to elicit favourable answers (with very little for anyone to object to), did not include the alternative of retaining the existing ground at Faraday Road, as many of the responses pointed out. Despite its limitations, the fact that it received a patchy reception, and that no further public consultation of any kind was carried out throughout the lifetime of this project, this survey was used by the council leader to claim repeatedly that the Monks Lane proposals had popular support and had been subject to thorough public consultation. In reality, no one, including Council Members, had a chance to seriously question or have a say about this until the planning committee meetings, much later.

Appendix two: Timeline

See separate document.