



Rhondda Fach Leisure Centre Consultation

*Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
Leisure Services/Consultation Team*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This report presents the findings of the consultation on proposals to invest £500,000 in Rhondda Fach Leisure Centre to change it to a sustainable dry side Leisure facility, concentrating on fitness and indoor Leisure.
- The consultation ran from the 6th October to the 3rd November 2017. The approach taken was face to face engagement with users of the centre at peak times in the reception area, using boards as visual aids with an artist's impression of the proposed changes to the swimming pool hall.
- The other methods included; an online questionnaire, a mobile tablet questionnaire available during the drop in sessions at the centre, hardcopies of the survey available in the centre at all times and a webpage outlining the proposals with a 'Changes to Rhondda Fach Leisure Centre' sheet.
- Proposals were promoted via press releases, social media and the Council's website with consultation events advertised on social media. Letters and emails were sent to all centre users, both individuals and groups, detailing proposals and how they could have their say. There was also engagement with Ferndale Community School and the Playscheme which ran during October half term at Rhondda Fach Leisure Centre.
- Overall, over **250 people** engaged directly in the consultation process. Of the 156 online respondents, 67.7% were Rhondda Fach Leisure Centre users.

Response breakdown

- 156 online responses
- 1 Letter
- 5 emails
- 72 people attended the 2 drop in sessions held in the centre.
- A large poster from young people who attended the play scheme
- 8 posters and letters from young people
- 21 young people engaged at the play scheme directly
- 21 young people attended the session in Ferndale Community School

Results

- 156 responses were received to the online survey. 77.6% of respondents think the council should invest £0.5m in Rhondda Fach Leisure Centre to make it more sustainable. There was wide spread support for investment in the centre. However this was often

suggested on the basis that the pool would remain open, or be part of the investment.

- 43.2% of respondents to the online survey support the preferred option for investment in Rhondda Fach Leisure Centre. The majority of the 49.7% of respondents who do not support the preferred option thought that the pool should not be closed.
- 40.9% of respondents said they would be more likely to use the centre if the preferred option went ahead. Of those who said no, the responses were again based on the swimming aspect of the proposal;
- 64.5% of respondents stated that if the facility was remodelled the Council should increase the capacity of the nearby alternative pools (Bronwydd Pool, Ystrad Sports Centre and Ferndale Community School.
- 47.4% of people who took part in the survey said that they would make use of a new fitness facility if there was investment. Of those who said they would not use the facility, they were respondents who stated they either only use the swimming pool or use both, but would not use the gym if the pool was to close. In addition there were those that thought that the current gym was adequate.
- 25.8% of respondents said that they would use a new 3G facility.
- 58.3% of respondents to the online survey stated other options that the Council should consider in relation to the proposed remodelling of the Leisure centre. There were a large number of responses that related to the existing swimming pool, as well as some other suggestions, shown in the main report.
- There were 43 additional/other comments, most of which reiterated previous views, expressing support for investment and various parts of it, whilst displaying dissatisfaction with the closure of the swimming pool. Again, these can be found in the report.
- The majority of respondents were Rhondda Fach Leisure Centre users (67.7%). 12.4 % of respondents stated that they had a disability.
- Under the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duties, the Council has a legal duty to look at how its decisions impact on people because they may have particular characteristics. Of the 52 people who answered the question, 50% stated that the proposals would impact upon them because of their gender and/or age and 30.8% suggested the same because of their disability.
- 72 people attended the drop in Engagement events. The following themes summarise the discussions that took place;

- Investment is needed in the centre
 - Positive response to the new gym from existing users
 - Issues with the existing swimming alternatives being too busy/waiting lists
 - The existing Pool should be invested in
 - Health impacts of closing the swimming pool
 - The impact on children and young people
 - The impact on people with a disability
 - Impact on Older people
 - Transport issues for getting to other alternatives
- Engagement with young people had a mixed response, but the general consensus was that they liked the idea of the proposed new 3G pitch, but not at the expense of the swimming pool. If the swimming pool closes some would stop swimming and swimming lessons, reporting that they wouldn't be able to get to the alternatives.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report presents the findings of the consultation on proposals to invest £500,000 In Rhondda Fach Leisure Centre to change it to a sustainable dry side Leisure facility, concentrating on fitness and indoor Leisure.
- 1.2 Section 2 outlines some brief background.
- 1.3 Section 3 details the methodology.
- 1.4 Section 4 presents the results from the online survey.
- 1.5 Section 5 presents the views that were received at the engagement events and from any written responses.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Rhondda Borough Council built Rhondda Fach Leisure Centre in 1995. The centre itself is the largest in RCT, and provides a range of Leisure opportunities including Leisure pool, health suite, fitness suite, free weights areas, 2 Leisure halls (1 x 8 court, 1 x 3 court), and 2 squash courts.
- 2.2 The centre has always struggled to generate the level of custom appropriate to a building of this size. Whilst the cost of the facility has been significantly reduced over the past 10 years, largely by a reduction in staff costs to reflect the level of activity, the building is still under utilised.
- 2.3 In particular, the swimming pool has always under performed in comparison to other Council run pools
- 2.4 Overall, usage at Rhondda Fach pool during 2016/17 was 26,885, which is significantly lower than all the other pools.
- 2.5 The dry side and fitness usage has remained stable over the past few years, and Leisure for Life membership has levelled off, with an average of 477 members over the past 3 years. This represents 68% of the current latent demand for this centre.
- 2.6 Officers have considered a number of options for redevelopment of the centre, with a view to increasing the number of customers. The Council has two options; to invest in the enhancement of the current Leisure offer at the facility through its remodelling or to leave the facility as it is. The latter of these two options would result in the centre continuing to be underutilised.
- 2.7 **The proposals are;**
- A new fitness facility
 - A new indoor 3G Leisure pitch
 - Closure of the swimming pool and increasing the swimming capacity nearby in other Leisure facilities within the Rhondda area
 - Develop partnerships with local sporting clubs to create sporting pathways
 - New Council office accommodation
 - Working with Ferndale School to improve access to their pool

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 The consultation ran for 4 weeks, from the 6th October to the 3rd November, 2017.

3.2 The aim of the consultation was to gather the views of Rhondda Fach Leisure Centre users and other interested parties on the proposals.

3.3 The following methods were used to consult with stakeholders;

- An online questionnaire.
- 2 Drop in Engagement events on the 19th October and the 2nd November.
- 3 separate visits to the Centre by consultation staff with tablet surveys to target respondents using the classes, gym and swimming pool at peak times.
- An email to all Leisure 4 Life members at the centre.
- A Letter or email was sent to all Leisure centre clubs and groups who currently have bookings at the centre or have in the past.
- A Letter to local Councillors, AM's and MP's
- A letter to other key stakeholders, including Swim Wales, Leisure Wales and local netball and swimming groups
- An engagement session with young people at Ferndale Community School.
- Engagement with young people aged 5-11, at a half term playscheme which ran during October half term at Rhondda Fach Leisure Centre.
- Information regarding the proposal and the consultation process was published on the Council's website. Engagement events were advertised via social media.
- A dedicated email address (consultation@rctcbc.gov.uk) and freepost address if needed.

3.4 The following responses were received;

- 156 online responses
- 1 Letter
- 5 emails
- 72 people attended the 2 drop in sessions held in the centre.
- A large poster from young people who attended the play scheme
- 8 posters and letters from young people
- 21 young people engaged at the play scheme directly
- 21 young people attended the session in Ferndale Community School

4 Online Survey Results

4.1 156 responses were received to the online survey. This section outlines the results of the survey and the open responses received. It also includes comments derived from the small number of emails/letters.

4.2 **77.6% of respondents think the council should invest £0.5m in Rhondda Fach Leisure Centre to make it more sustainable.**

Counts Analysis % Respondents	
Base	152 100.0%
Q2) Do you think the Council should invest £0.5m in Rhondda Fach Leisure Centre to make it more sustainable?	
Yes	118 77.6%
No	23 15.1%
Don't know	11 7.2%

4.3 There was wide spread support for investment in the centre

“long overdue”

“It’s needed as the building is very dated”

“welcome the investment planned”

However this was often supported on the basis that the pool would remain open, or be part of the investment. The following summarises the main comments received;

Main themes:

- Investment, but not at the expense of the pool
- Improve the pool
- Re open fun/activity pool/slide

“The extra funding could be used to refurbish the pool...”

“yes..but by improving the current swimming facilities not closing them”

“Open the slide and make it a fully functioning leisure pool”

4.4 **43.2% of respondents to the online survey support the preferred option for investment in Rhondda Fach Leisure Centre.**

Counts Analysis % Respondents	
Base	155 100.0%
Q7), do you support the preferred option for investment in Rhondda Fach Leisure Centre?	
Yes	67 43.2%
No	77 49.7%
Don't know	11 7.1%

- 4.5 There was a large amount of support for the preferred option, and the majority of the 49.7% who do not support the preferred option disagreed on the basis that the option includes the closure of the pool. The following are a selection of the comments received;

Agree

"Completely support and agree with the proposals"

"Good to see investment in the Fach"

"If the pools going to go its better to invest than shut it"

"Do what is best for the community, just hope the investment pays off"

"Rhondda Fach is too big for the area, making better use of the space and investing in a 3G and new gym may help increase usage"

Disagree

"Any investment is good, but a shame to get rid of the pool"

"I don't think the proposal matches the local demographic..."

"I support investment, but not closure of the swimming pool"

"...explore leisure trust or joint management of the facility"

"this seems to border on discrimination towards the elderly, disabled and those with other needs"

"keep the pool"

4.6 40.9% of respondents said they would be more likely to use the centre if the preferred option went ahead.

Counts Analysis % Respondents	
Base	154 100.0%
Q3) If the preferred option went ahead would you be more likely to use the leisure centre?	
Yes	63 40.9%
No	79 51.3%
Don't know	12 7.8%

4.7 Of those who responded yes, the following are a selection of comments;

“3G indoor pitch sounds great, big improvement.....fees need to be appropriate level for the clubs..”

“great idea”

“I think the investment will provide a long term (future proof) plan for the centre and maximise the resources it will bring”

Mini Rugby – “indoor Ystrad sports hall or outdoor isn’t the best surface for rugby.....A 3G indoor facility would be much more suitable”

“I’d buy a corporate membership”

“while I do sometimes swim there, the pool is poorly used with only a few of us ever in the pool”

4.8 Of those who said no, the responses were again based on the swimming aspect of the proposal;

“As I use the swimming pool, the refurbishment will prevent my use of the centre”

“As we only use the pool with children aged 1-8”

“Because the new proposals identified would be of no interest to me”

“I bring my children swimming. I don’t bring them to the gym”

“I use the pool with my grandson and don’t drive, so would be too expensive to use public transport”

“We already have a good gym and I use the pool regularly”

- 4.9 **64.5% of respondents stated that if the facility was remodelled the Council should increase the capacity of the nearby alternative pools (Bronwydd Pool, Ystrad Sports Centre and Ferndale Community School).**

Counts Analysis % Respondents	
Base	152 100.0%
Q4) If the facility is remodelled, should the Council increase the capacity of the nearby alternative pools? (Bronwydd Pool, Ystrad Sports Centre and Ferndale Community School)?	
Yes	98 64.5%
No	41 27.0%
Don't know	13 8.6%

4.10 Comments included;

- The costs associated with public transport would be an issue to get to the alternatives

“Transport is a big issue”

“Transport is an issue for local people”

- This would be essential

“I think this would be essential as there are hundreds of users that would be displaced...”

- Improvements would be needed to Ferndale school swimming pool

“The changing facilities are the same as when I went swimming as a child”

“particularly at Ferndale School as swimming in the Rhondda Fach would be very limited otherwise”

- Alternatives are not adequate

“The pool at Bronwydd is too small and very busy”

“All other centres are full to capacity and with waiting lists...”

“Ystrad have schools there all the time and they need to make time for the public”

“swimming classes are full”

4.11 47.4% of people who took part in the survey said that they would make use of a new fitness facility if there was investment.

Counts Analysis % Respondents	
	Base
	154 100.0%
Q5) If there was investment in a new and improved fitness facility , would you make use of it?	
Yes	73 47.4%
No	67 43.5%
Don't know	14 9.1%

4.12 Of those who said they would not use the facility, they were respondents who stated they only use the swimming pool or use both, but would not use the gym if the pool was to close. In addition there were those that thought that the current gym was adequate.

“If the pool wasn't available, I couldn't see me using the gym”

“Only use it for the pool”

“There is adequate space in the fitness suite in Tylorstown”

4.13 Of the 47.4% who would use any new facility, the following are a selection of comments;

“Always loved fitness and it will encourage young and old.... to come to the centre”

“I only use the gym at the leisure centre so this will be a fantastic upgrade”

“Other Council gyms are new and modern and if the Rhondda Fach had the same I would use it”

“providing there is a focus on weigh machines and free weights”

4.14 25.8% of respondents said that they would use a new 3G facility.

Counts Analysis % Respondents	
Base	155 100.0%
Q6) If there was investment in a new and improved fitness facility, would you make use of it?	
Yes	40 25.8%
No	106 68.4%
Don't know	9 5.8%

4.15 The following are a selection of the 40 comments that were provided for this question;

Positive

"We would love to return to use a 3G facility in Tylorstown" (email)

"Football"

"I think the 3G is a good investment, we think it should be the whole area not half"

"My club may use this to train, especially when weather is bad"

"Possibly. I don't live in the area but these new 3G facilities are fantastic and would no doubt increase the use if it was installed"

"The children in my family would"

Negative

"By making a 3G pitch you are limiting the type of people who can use the centre. How can babies, toddlers and the elderly make use of a 3G pitch"

"I think this would be a mistake, who would use it"

4.16 A number of respondents said they would use a new 3G facility, if the price was competitive.

"It depend on the price to use the 3G"

4.17 58.3% of respondents to the online survey stated other options that the Council should consider in relation to the proposed remodelling of the Leisure centre.

There were a large number of responses that related to the existing swimming pool, as well as some other suggestions. The comments can be summarised as follows;

Existing Pool

- Remodel the pool to make it suitable for schools and clubs
- Convert the family pool into a full size lane swimming pool
- Open slide/fun pool
- Keep the pool, use the rest of the space to provide investment proposals
- Leisure trust or joint management of the facility

Other

- More classes/more gym classes
- Increase provision for older people/social opportunities
- Improve the function area and promote as a wedding venue
- Improve transport links to the centre/free transport
- Reduce fees for those on low incomes/families
- Reduce fees for groups to encourage use by the community
- Crèche facility
- Keep sauna and steam room
- Martial Arts – matted room, equipped with several punch bags (email)

4.18 There were 43 additional/other comments, most of which reiterated previous views, expressing support for investment and various parts of it, whilst displaying dissatisfaction with the closure of the swimming pool. Below are a number of the comments received.

“Make sure you keep the squash courts”

“..there should be a service to show people around the new gym..”

“Shame more don’t use the pool”

“This area has already had cuts. It would be devastating to the community to lose the pool”

“Human beings like what they like, some like gym, some like swimming”

“We don’t have a lot in the Fach should keep our pool”

“people complain they may lose the pool, but these are the same people I speak to that say they don’t use the centre”

Note: All comments from all questions will be provided to Cabinet Members and Officers to inform the decision making process.

Respondent Profile

4.19 The majority of respondents were Rhondda Fach Leisure Centre users (67.7%).

Counts Analysis % Respondents	
	Base 155 100.0%
Q1) Are you....	
Rhondda Fach Leisure Centre user	105 67.7%
An occasional visitor to Rhondda Fach Leisure Centre?	36 23.2%
A member of a sports or other group that visits/uses the centre?	9 5.8%
Other	5 3.2%

4.20 The tables below show the gender and age profiles of online respondents.

Counts Analysis % Respondents	
	Base 151 100.0%
Q12) Age:	
16-24	19 12.6%
25-34	37 24.5%
35-44	37 24.5%
45-54	27 17.9%
55-64	14 9.3%
65+	17 11.3%

Counts Analysis % Respondents	
	Base 153 100.0%
Q11) Gender:	
Male	75 49.0%
Female	78 51.0%

- 4.23 The following are a selection of comments that were made to support the above;

Gender

“Female, as I feel this is very male orientated.... a big open plan gym would leave me feeling too self conscious”

“mothers like activities with their children that are locally accessible and have health benefits”

Age

“Older people use the pool to keep fit and for gentle exercise as prescribed by the Welsh Government, gym and 3G are for younger people to use”

“there will be nothing here for my age”

Disability

“having fibromyalgia helps to go swimming so this would not be beneficial to me not having a local pool”

“I have problems walking”

“I suffer from fibromyalgia, a warm swimming pool is very beneficial to keeping my muscles in use..”

“low impact exercise due to arthritis”

5 Engagement Events

Drop In events

5.1 72 people attended the drop in Engagement events on the 19th October and the 2nd November.

The following themes summarise the discussions that took place;

New Gym

The majority of current gym users were very positive about the investment.

- *“like the idea of the proposal, we love the gym and spin”*
- *“should be well used”*
- *“this will work”*
- *“Needs longer opening hours”*

Negative comments included;

- *“The gym is under-utilised now as it is!”*
- *“Why are they investing in a gym when it’s under-utilised?”*
- *“Ystrad too much equipment”*
- *“What is the business case for a new gym?”*

Alternative Swimming Pools

- *“Ystrad packed/Ystrad already at capacity”*
- *“Swimming lessons oversubscribed”*
- *“Long waiting lists”*
- *“Ystrad parking issues”*
- *“3G already available in Tylorstown”*

Health

- *“Rehab in the pool after operations”*
- *“keeps NHS costs down”*
- *“Recovery”*
- *“Obesity levels are high”*
- *“What about reducing obesity & improving fitness – now you’re closing the pool.”*
- *“Lots of people use this pool for rehab..Reablement pool.”*

Children/Y/P

- *“should be putting the kids future first”*
- *“Special needs... Ystrad too busy”*
- *“Learner pool ideal for kids”*
- *“nothing in the proposals for young people”*
- *“Changes have to revolve around children”*
- *“How’s it benefiting the children if they take the pool?”*
- *“If you close the pool, what would the young kids do? There would be no reason to come here.”*

Disability

- *“Autism and people with disabilities... “in this pool they can have fun”*
- *“This pool is good for children with disabilities etc. We can’t go to Ystrad as the pool is busy – too busy”*
- *“You can’t take children with special needs to a busy pool”*

Older people

- *“Over 60’s would pay to save the pool”*
- *Health of older people*
- *“The doctor is telling people over 60 to swim, not use the gym”*
- *“Some older people aren’t able to use the gym, swimming is all the exercise they have (or can do)”*
- *“Some people can hardly walk... when they’re in the pool they’re more active”*
- *“Social aspect as well... we’ve all met through coming here”*

Existing Centre

- *“I would prefer re-investment in the pool to change it to bring it back up to scratch to create additional space and introduce lane swimming, bring usage back up. “*
- *“Existing £30,000 spent on the pool in the past”*
- *“Slide should be brought back”*
- *“Gym is underutilised”*
- *“plenty of other rooms for other suggestions, without getting rid of the pool”*
- *“Should be marketing this centre now.”*
- *“They need to advertise what we have rather than what we could have!”*
- *“people think it will close and be totally turned into offices”*

Identifying a need/existing competition

- *“Market research needed to find out if there is a need for 3G pitches”*
- *“Not enough background research has been done to find a need”*
- *“Too many gyms in the Valley – too much competition”*
- *“We already have a gym, why do we need another?”*
- *“There are already 2 gyms in Maerdy”*

Transport / access

- *“Lots of people in this area who don’t drive use this leisure centre. How do they get to the leisure centre in other areas?”*
- *“Unless you’ve got a car, you can’t go to Bronwydd Pool.”*
- *“Kids can’t get in the car and drive”*
- *“If you don’t have a car... there’s one bus an hour!”*

Alternative Options

- *“Soft play area”*
- *“Climbing Wall”*
- *“Community group to take over the pool”*
- *“Put into a Trust”*
- *“Put Library in here”*
- *“Do something special for the kids on a weekend.”*
- *“Rock climbing here would be unique and draw people from all over the place.”*
- *“Use the cafe room for other options”*

Young People

- 5.2 The following section outlines the discussion that was held with young people in Ferndale Community School.

Rhondda Fach Sports Centre Consultation with young people from Ferndale Community School

- 21 young people attended the session
- 8 young people attended Rhondda Netball
- 8 young people swim in the pool at Rhondda Fach Sports Centre
- 6 young people agreed that the Council should re-model the pool area
- 14 young people disagreed that the Council should re-model the pool area

Comments included (sic):

- “I think that they should improve the facility but keep it the same prices”
- “I would like to have a new 4g but I think the costing for people to us it will be way to much!”
- “No”
- “Y – for an updated netball court”
- “I think they should keep it the same as it is closer but they could just upgrade it.”
- “They should keep the pool there but use the money that they were going to use to improve the pool and other facilities”
- “I think we should help it the same but make improvements to the pool”
- “Make the pool better”
- “Yes – because the 3g football field is a good idea”
- “Friendly receptionists – young people feel that sometimes staff on reception areas can be unfriendly / unhelpful”
- “ need to be improved”
- “Could we have subsidised courts for any use? Could young people book a court for cheaper?”
- “On the other hand I think it would also be a very good thing because more people would go there and they need to upgrade and improve the facility. Make the place bigger, running clubs, walking clubs”
- “No”
- “Keep the pool but add a indoor 4g pitch. I think that they should improve the gym

- “I think it should same the same because it prefer the way it is and a lot of people would be upset and find it hard because it the preface distance from Marady and people living in Toyortown. So my point of views is not to do it but update the facilities and the money can be put to something that don’t need changes.”
- “Yes because the pool is underused and the changes could help the sports centre more well known”
- “I think we should keep Rhondda pool the same as the closest one otherwise is Ystrad or Maerdy as from Tylorstown you can’t really”
- “I think you should keep the pool but also add a 4g to the sport centre and also improve the pool”
- “Walk there”
- “I think they should keep the pool and upgrade the pool facilities”
- “They shouldn’t change the centre because it’s great! All they could do is update the pool like improve the slide. They should add netball courts if they are making a 3g pitch.”
- “I think you should keep it the same but change the things that need changing.”
- “Yes – football pitch – more netball facilities”
- “Make the pool more like Ystrad”
- “For younger people”
- “Less money”
- “Keep both”

Playscheme

- 5.3 A member of staff discussed the proposals for Rhondda Fach Leisure Centre the young people in the play scheme setting. 21 young people took part. The general consensus was that they liked the idea of the proposed new 3G pitch, but not at the expense of the swimming pool.
- 5.4 As the children in the play scheme are local children, they can currently walk to the centre to go swimming. They suggested that without the existing pool they would need to travel to other centres and they would not be allowed or able to get there on their own or as easily as they can now. They also mentioned that they can’t use any new gym as you can’t use until at least the age of 11. If the swimming pool goes some would stop swimming and swimming lessons, as they wouldn’t be able to get to the alternatives.

Some of the comments included;

- *“Nothing for under 8’s if the pool closes.”*
- *“Young people won’t be able to use the gym”*
- *“Would use the 3G pitch everyday”*
- *“Can’t we have the pool and the 3G pitch”*
- *“The pool is fun”*
- *“What about our Swimming lessons”*
- *“I practice here on my own, I wouldn’t be able to go on my own elsewhere”*

5.5 The following poster was submitted by young people who attended the play scheme. A number of other smaller poster and letters were handed in that were against the closure of the pool.

