

Cabinet

Report Title	Harry Mitchell Leisure Centre - Options Appraisal
Date of Meeting	Wednesday, 11 March 2026
Report Author	Nicola Leavy Principal Officer – Sport & Leisure
Lead Officer	Luke Dove Service Director – Property and Assets Alan Lunt Executive Director - Place
Lead Cabinet Member(s)	Councillor Suzanne Hartwell Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods & Community & Deputy Leader
Why is this a key decision?	To result in the Council incurring expenditure, the making of savings or the generation of income amounting to £1m or more.
Wards Affected	Smethwick;
Identify exempt information and exemption category	Open
Is the report urgent?	No
Reasons for urgency (only where applicable)	N/A
Appendices (if any)	1 - Site Plan for Harry Mitchell Leisure Centre 2 - Planning Development Brief

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out a range of options relating to the future of the council owned property Harry Mitchell Leisure Centre, Broomfield, Smethwick, B67 7DH and seeks approval to progress proposals for the disposal and development of the property.

2. Recommendations

For the reasons set out in the report, Cabinet is recommended to:

- 2.1 Declare Harry Mitchell Leisure Centre, Broomfield, Smethwick, B67 7DH as being surplus to all council use as detailed in the site plan at appendix 1.
- 2.2 Subject to 2.1 above, delegate authority to the Executive Director of Place in consultation with the Executive Director of Finance and Transformation to progress the demolition of Harry Mitchell Leisure Centre (HMLC) and progress the subsequent appropriate form of development of the site fully in accordance with existing land use allocations under relevant local planning policies subject to completion and approval of an acceptable business case and capital appraisal.
- 2.3 Subject to 2.2 above, delegate authority to the Executive Director of Place in consultation with the Executive Director of Finance and Transformation to procure and agree contracts to support delivery of the demolition and development of the site in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods and Community, Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Infrastructure and Cabinet Member for Housing & Sustainable Development.
- 2.4 Subject to 2.2 above, delegate authority to the Monitoring Officer and Service Director - Governance to take all actions necessary to give effect to the actions and contractual commitments set out in recommendation 2.3 above.
- 2.5 Subject to 2.2 above, approve the appropriation of Harry Mitchell Leisure Centre, Broomfield, Smethwick, B67 7DH (asset reference RK1) from the General Fund to the Housing Revenue Account if applicable and delegate authority to Executive Director of Finance and Transformation to make the appropriate financial adjustments to reflect the appropriation between the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account at an appropriate market value contingent on the form of land use identified through recommendation 2.2 above.
- 2.6 Subject to 2.2 above, delegate authority to the Executive Director of Place to manage and let the new properties as part of the councils (Housing Revenue Account) housing stock if applicable.
- 2.7 If no suitable business case is developed to enable the course of action as outlined in 2.2 above to proceed, delegate authority to the Monitoring Officer and Service Director - Governance to dispose of the identified properties freehold (as per appendix 1) to facilitate development, on terms and conditions to be agreed by the Executive Director of Place in consultation with the Executive Director of Finance and Transformation and the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Infrastructure and Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods and Community following an open market exercise.
- 2.8 Subject to 2.7 above, delegate authority to the Monitoring Officer and Service Director - Governance to take all actions necessary to give effect to a freehold disposal of the site.

3. Proposals – Reasons for the recommendations

Background

- 3.1 External benchmarking (LG Futures 24/25) analysis indicated that Sandwell Council's spend per head of population on recreation and sport was £19.16 compared to a statistical neighbour average of £12.53. As agreed by Leadership Team in November 2024, a review of operating models is underway to ensure the optimal model is identified and can be implemented by April 2027, when the current arrangements with Kore Sandwell expire.
- 3.2 In lieu of that wider strategic review, there is an opportunity to rationalise the leisure estate. Whilst Sport England modelling does not identify surplus provision in Sandwell, Sandwell's direct provision of leisure facilities is far in excess of that of the other Black Country Boroughs. Walsall, Wolverhampton and Dudley each operate four leisure centres. By comparison Sandwell currently operates nine including Sandwell Aquatics Centre – the largest leisure centre in the West Midlands.
- 3.3 When considering reducing the number of centres, attention falls on Harry Mitchell Leisure Centre due to:
- 3.3.1 Age / condition
 - 3.3.2 The opening of Sandwell Aquatics Centre only 0.7 miles away with an extensive range of facilities to support the needs of the local community, offering a wider range of programming
 - 3.3.3 The fact that Harry Mitchell Leisure Centre was always intended to close upon the opening of the Sandwell Aquatics Centre.
 - 3.3.4 Facility mix and the absence of a swimming pool - research suggests that swimming is a key activity for encouraging Sandwell residents to become more active.
- 3.3 The Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) included a £540k saving from leisure management in 2025/26. The budget consultation included reference to the Council's options for some of the older leisure centres in Sandwell that could save money. This included the option to close HMLC.
- 3.4 The closure of HMLC was initially considered as part of the development of the Sandwell Aquatics Centre. Some parts of HMLC are 125 years old and deteriorating and combined with the attraction of the state-of-the-art facilities at the nearby Sandwell Aquatics Centre which has now been operating successfully for more than two years, there was a continued drop in usage at HMLC.
- 3.5 Although the MTFS £540k saving from leisure management in 2025/26 was met through alternative sources, resolving the future of the site will also support the wider strategic review. Taking the site and its associated liabilities out of the leisure management portfolio will make Sandwell's leisure estate more sustainable.

Harry Mitchell Leisure Centre – Condition and Strategic Context

- 3.6 Harry Mitchell Leisure Centre (HMLC) is the oldest centre in the poorest condition as indicated by a £1.5m medium-term maintenance liability for what is a comparatively small and straightforward facility. The building is poorly

presented cosmetically and in need of complete refurbishment – new roof, new boilers and re-wiring. Substantial repairs to the roof are now considered to be urgent.

- 3.8 The report to Cabinet authorising the development of the Sandwell Aquatics Centre (31 January 2018) highlighted that HMLC, Smethwick Swimming Centre and Langley Swimming Centre were all in a deteriorating and increasingly unsustainable condition. It also recognised that the creation of the Sandwell Aquatics Centre - an exceptional, modern, state-of-the-art facility designed to serve the whole community of Smethwick and beyond - provided the opportunity to review the long-term future of these ageing sites.
- 3.9 Following the opening of the Aquatics Centre, both Smethwick and Langley Swimming Centres were closed, reflecting a strategic shift towards a significantly higher-quality, more accessible and more inclusive leisure offer for residents. HMLC has remained open on a short-term basis only.
- 3.10 Importantly, the enhanced, purpose-built facilities at the Sandwell Aquatics Centre directly support the council's Growing Up Healthy ambition. Sandwell Aquatics Centre offers a vastly improved environment for children, young people and families, providing safe, modern, and inspiring spaces that promote physical activity, wellbeing and lifelong healthy habits. The superior quality, capacity and accessibility of Sandwell Aquatic Centre ensures that residents continue to benefit from a far stronger, future-proofed leisure provision that meets the needs of all of Smethwick and the wider borough.
- 3.11 The proximity of these improved facilities (HMLC is 0.7 miles from SAC) and the deterioration of HMLC have led to the relocation of all the previous community usage. The ladies gym provision and users were successfully relocated to Sandwell Aquatics Centre in 2024 as the persistent roof leaks and water ingress at HMLC made the ladies gym unsustainable. Kore prudently relocated HMLC staff to other sites incrementally.
- 3.12 The HMLC site was gifted by Harry Mitchell to Smethwick Urban District Council in 1899. This gift was understood to restrict the usage of the site. However, SMBC commissioned a title report in 2024 which identified that these restrictions were released by a deed dated 1967.
- 3.13 Given the poor building condition, the need for urgent repairs and unrestricted title, HMLC closed for casual use at the end of May 2025 and full closure on 31 October 2025.

3Ks Judo Club

- 3.14 3Ks Judo Club has a 50-year lease dated 1996 and currently still occupy a self-contained building at the edge of the site. They are able to access this building independently, so are able to remain on site (at least temporarily) irrespective of decisions about the wider HMLC site. There are 2 electrical supplies to the site, and the Judo building has its own supply/meters.
- 3.15 Work is ongoing with Property Services to identify alternative options for 3Ks Judo Club who have confirmed they are willing to relocate to an alternative location in Smethwick. There is no break option available in their lease, and it's protected under the Landlord and Tenant Act. On that basis they are

afforded occupation until the end of lease save for any material breaches of the lessee's covenants or the Club agree a mutual surrender of the lease.

- 3.16 The council have recently had the former neighbourhood office on Ford Street, Smethwick, returned to their portfolio. The site was visited by 3Ks, and the committee initially felt that the property would not be a suitable match for their club, primarily due to ceiling height restrictions and the associated costs of making improvements. However, following more recent discussions, Kore Sandwell and council officers are exploring the possibility of removing the false ceiling to assess whether this would provide the necessary height for the club.

Disposal, demolition and development

- 3.17 The site has been subject to review following the 2018 Condition Survey, which identified approximately £1.5m of medium-term maintenance requirements for what is a comparatively small and straightforward facility. Since that survey, further deterioration has occurred, including significant roof leaks and water ingress, resulting in urgent repair needs.
- 3.18 The building is now considered to be in extremely poor cosmetic condition and requires complete refurbishment, including a new roof, boilers, and re-wiring. Given the escalating costs of repair, the limited scale of the facility, and the availability of high-quality alternative provision in the surrounding area, retention is no longer considered financially viable.
- 3.19 Disposal of the site is therefore recommended. This will:
- 3.19.1 Release the Council from substantial ongoing maintenance liabilities and the pressure on the Property Maintenance Account (PMA).
 - 3.19.2 Free up capital resources for reinvestment in modern, fit-for-purpose facilities, particularly Sandwell Aquatics Centre.
 - 3.19.3 Enable the land to be repurposed for alternative uses that better serve community and economic priorities.
- 3.18 Disposal represents the most cost-effective and strategic option, ensuring resources are directed towards sustainable, high-quality housing for residents.
- 3.19 Planning Officers have drafted a Planning Development Brief. Early indications show a potential for 30 – 45 dwellings on the site, a mix of apartments / family homes. The density could be assessed to increase the number of units towards circa 80 on the site but at this stage this is a good starting point for the purposes of furthering the site strategy. This is attached as appendix 2.
- 3.20 The recommendation aligns with the Sandwell Local Plan, which actively supports the development of new council housing by allocating land for residential use, prioritizing affordable housing delivery, and promoting the regeneration of underutilized sites across the borough. It reinforces the policy focus on directing development toward brownfield and regeneration sites, helping the Council avoid building on protected green belt land.
- 3.21 Additionally, the Local Plan complements Sandwell's Housing Strategy 2023 – 2028, which emphasizes meeting local housing needs through affordable provision. It integrates housing growth with essential infrastructure such as

transport links, schools, and green spaces, ensuring new council estates are both sustainable and well-connected.

4. Alternative Options Considered

4.1 The recommendations set out in section 2 of this report is the preferred option. However, Members are advised that other options were considered as set out below.

4.1.1 **Option 1 - Community Asset Transfer.** The neighbouring Gurdwara and Food Bank have approached the Council on several occasions with a proposal to use the facility for community purposes. This proposal includes the expansion of Smethwick Cricket Club and use of the car park for events held at the Gurdwara. However, given the current investment required into the property it is not felt that this would be a sustainable option for progression as it does not address the underlying issues related to the poor condition of the facility. As such, capital and revenue costs would still be incurred by the Council unless the food bank could independently secure sufficient funding to restore the property to an acceptable condition. Even in that case, the longevity of such improvements remains uncertain, given the buildings' age and ongoing deterioration.

4.1.2 **Option 2 – Continue operating as a leisure centre.** Due its proximity to Sandwell Aquatics Centre, the current condition of the property and required investment, alongside the current budgetary pressures on the operator to reduce annual expenditure, this is not a viable option to be progressed.

4.1.3 **Option 3 – Freehold disposal via Auction.** The council could choose to dispose of the property via auction; however, this would not afford the council any form of control over the delivery of any future development for the site.

5. Consultation

5.1 The project is subject to ongoing internal consultation with key stakeholders from finance, legal, property, and community partnerships services alongside lead Cabinet Members. Decision-making governance gateways that require consultation or delegated authority will be obtained in accordance with the relevant policies and procedures.

6. Financial Implications

6.1 Harry Mitchell Leisure Centre currently requires significant expenditure to ensure it can continue to be maintained and operate effectively. Following the last Condition Survey carried out in 2018, an estimated £1.5m worth of medium-term maintenance is required for what is a comparatively small and straightforward facility. The building is poorly presented cosmetically and needs complete refurbishment, including a new roof, new boilers, and re-wiring.

- 6.2 Since this survey was carried out, additional issues have occurred including substantial roof leaks and water ingress in the floors. Substantial repairs to the roof are now considered to be urgent.
- 6.3 It has been identified that funding totalling £667k for actual demolition and £49k for pre demolition is required. Capital budget costs for this activity have been allocated and assessed as affordable within the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy with associated Revenue borrowing costs also included. Approval of the proposed capital project remains subject to completion and approval of a satisfactory capital appraisal.

7. Legal and Governance Implications

- 7.1 S.123 of the Local Government Act 1972 permits a principal council such as Sandwell to dispose of land in any way it wishes, except that it shall not (without the Secretary of State's consent) dispose of land for a consideration less than the best that can reasonably be obtained.
- 7.2 The Secretary of State issued a General Disposal Consent in 2003 (Circular 06/03) which states that specific consent is not required for the disposal of any interest in land which the authority considers will help it to secure the promotion or improvement of the economic, social, or environmental well-being of its area. Where applicable, authorities should also have regard to their community strategy. Any disposal must not have an undervalue of more than £2m.
- 7.3 Should the primary recommendation be progressed for residential development, Harry Mitchell Leisure Centre, Broomfield, Smethwick, B67 7DH will require appropriation. S.122 of the Local Government Act 1972 allows a council to appropriate land that belongs to the council which is no longer required for the purposes it was acquired for and subsequently held. The capital value for the property held on the asset register is £1,549,200 as of 2024/25.

8. Risks

- 8.1 The following risks have been considered –
- 8.1.1 **Security of site** - now the facility is vacated, the site may become vulnerable to trespassing, vandalism, theft, or anti-social behaviour. This could lead to damage to property, increased liability for the Council, and reputational concerns if the site is perceived as unsafe or neglected. Additional costs may also arise from the need for enhanced security measures such as fencing, CCTV, or patrols.
- 8.1.2 **Delays with demolitions** - demolition works may be delayed due to contractor availability, unforeseen structural complexities, or environmental considerations such as asbestos removal. Such delays can extend the period during which the Council remains liable for site maintenance and security, increase project costs, and potentially impact the timeline for redevelopment or disposal of the land.

- 8.1.3 **Delays with planning** - planning approvals or regulatory permissions may take longer than anticipated, particularly if objections are raised or additional assessments are required (e.g., environmental impact, heritage considerations). This can stall the overall project, create uncertainty for stakeholders, and risk escalating costs. Extended delays may also reduce confidence in the Council's ability to deliver on strategic priorities.

9. Equality and Diversity Implications (including the public sector equality duty)

- 9.1 The continued review of the council's asset portfolio and any associated rationalisation will ensure all groups are considered and appropriate facilities are continued to be provided across the borough in a more targeted manner.

10. Other Relevant Implications

- 10.1 N/A

11. Background Documents

- 11.1 Harry Mitchell Leisure Centre – future options. November 2025.

12. How does this deliver the objectives of the Strategic Themes?

- 12.1 This report will support the delivery of the following Strategic Themes: -

12.1.1 **Growing up in Sandwell** – the proposals in this report will remove unsafe, outdated facilities ensures children and young people are not exposed to poor environments. It creates the opportunity to invest in modern, accessible housing that better support health, wellbeing, and youth development. Demonstrates commitment to providing safe, high-quality infrastructure for future generations.

12.1.2 **Living in Sandwell** – Demolition removes a deteriorating building that negatively impacts the local environment and community pride. The proposal paves the way for improved housing and green space that enhances residents' quality of life and reduces ongoing maintenance liabilities, freeing resources to improve other Sandwell assets for residents.

12.1.3 **Thriving Economy in Sandwell** – Disposal of the site can unlock land for redevelopment, attracting investment and creating jobs. Modern facilities such as housing stimulate local economic activity. Demonstrates efficient asset management, ensuring public funds are directed toward sustainable, value-adding projects.