

Wokingham Borough Council

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21st Century Leisure Strategy

A Vision for Leisure in the Borough

October 2016

SUMMARY

The principle reason that Wokingham Borough Council needs a leisure strategy is to guide the specification of and procurement to a new leisure centres' operational contract or contracts, from May 2018. The current 15 year contract was extended by a further three years so now needs to be openly tendered to elicit the best provision for the next 10-15 years. The procurement and re-specification is in its preliminary stages, but is expected to begin in December 2016 and will create one contract for all our Leisure Centres to achieve best value for the council and best integrated access provision for residents who may wish to use different venues for different facilities.

Whilst the contract(s) will cover the operation of our centres, the buildings also require improvements to ensure they provide the best value in operational terms as well as the safest and most accessible facilities. Within the period 2017-2018, major improvements are required at the Bulmershe Leisure Centre to ensure its ongoing sustainability, which may involve a full refurbishment or rebuild on the same site. The Carnival Pool centre will be upgraded to include a new multipurpose sports hall, and will create an enhanced leisure offer within the plans for Wokingham Town Centre's regeneration by 2020. The Arborfield Sports Centre will be opening to the public as part of the new leisure contract(s) from May 2018, and a new swimming pool will be provided here within the period 2020-2026. These are identified in the council's ongoing 5-year capital programme. The remaining centres at Loddon Valley and St Crispin's will be maintained to ensure continued operation.

With the Playing Pitches Strategy nearing completion and the Council's stated proposal to provide many of the additional pitches required at Grays Farm south of Wokingham Town, to be funded through developer contribution, the detailed design and engagement with likely users will begin within the next few years.

Wokingham Borough Council must always ensure the best value to its residents and the provision of leisure facilities will always need to be weighed against other priorities the council faces. The Council may not necessarily always be the direct provider or owner of the leisure facilities within its current portfolio. Parish or Town Councils, and community groups may well seek to become the providers or owners of facilities to ensure their sustainability, with the Council acting as facilitator or commissioner.

The future sustainability of the Council and its new 21st Century operating model, together with its responsibilities for health and wellbeing, have provided a complex set of challenges to be resolved within its inherited leisure services and facilities. This strategy sets out a bold vision to give direction and focus for the detailed business cases; plans and strategies to come. The time is now right to seek the very best value for the Council Taxpayer to maximise incomes to cover all costs and to ensure the enormous opportunities afforded through capital investment made via developer contributions are used wisely across the Borough.

1. INTRODUCTION

Wokingham Borough Council recognises the significant benefits that the provision of sport and leisure activities and facilities can bring to the physical, social and economic health of our communities. Physical activity raises achievement in our schools and can engage those who are isolated. Recent research has concluded that for every £1 spent on sport and physical activity, £1.91 worth of social benefits are generated (Sports Industry Research Centre, 2016). With a growing focus on developing resilience within our communities, self-care for those with long-term health conditions and the need to prevent illness and immobility throughout life stages, the council seeks to maximise the benefits of its community assets: leisure centres; country parks and open spaces; rights of way and cycling infrastructure to meet these agendas. To gain maximum benefit, including the reduction of future demands being placed on both Council and NHS services, a degree of targeting of certain programmes and initiatives will be expected, alongside differential support to, for instance, vulnerable groups of both children and adults and to provide specialist input.

Sport England, the English non-departmental public body for building the foundations of a community sports system notes the changing sporting landscape during the last decade. Shifting social patterns have given rise to new activities while others have declined in popularity due, in part, to unprecedented pressure on leisure time and competing demands for people's attention.

Wokingham Borough Council, as with all local authorities, faces a difficult financial future as it plans for the complete withdrawal of its Government support grant during the next two years, and is therefore embarking upon a radical approach to future sustainability – The 21st Century Council. Establishing core business for the future sees leisure services and the Council's leisure facilities being reviewed so that the Council concentrates its resources on targeted provision to improve health, independence and self-determination amongst the most vulnerable, whilst enabling and sustaining the universal provision of facilities. However, there is an expectation that these generate the income required to cover their costs. It is in this context that the need to envision the Councils leisure offer to its residents has been established.

2. WHY DO WE NEED A LEISURE STRATEGY?

Councils have legal duties for promoting wellbeing, both to individuals (Care Act 2014) and to the population across their areas (Local Govt. Act 2000). Intrinsic in this are new public health duties for improving the health of their populations including “giving information, providing services or facilities to promote healthy living and providing incentives to live more healthily” (Department of Health, 2012). There is therefore a strong legislative framework within which local authorities should invest in the provision of sports, leisure, physical activity and open space services and infrastructure, although many leisure services and facilities are discretionary functions. Physical activity does not just include sporting and fitness activities. It includes casual walks in our open spaces and public rights of way, play in our play areas and country parks, the use of allotments and community gardens and orchards in areas across the borough and of course the contribution to active travel – walking and cycling. The Borough now boasts many cycle paths and will soon have a network of Greenways across

the borough to supplement existing rights of way, for members of the public to use safely for enjoyment and active travel. With a new playing pitch strategy, there are opportunities to increase the quality and quantity of pitch provision across the borough, and opportunities to secure external funding will be explored from sports governing bodies for facilities to be upgraded to meet the appropriate standards.

There are an increasing number of national strategies, and local programmes and needs assessments that focus on the importance of increasing participation in sports and physical activity. These include:

- Sport England: Towards an Active Nation Strategy 2016-2021
- Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation, HM Government 2015
- A Sporting Habit of Life 2012-2017: Sport England Strategy
- Healthy Lives, Healthy People: White paper published by the Department of Health 2010
- Places People Play: Nationwide large scale funding programme that focuses on the legacy of London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics

Wokingham Borough Council needs an up-to-date, overarching 21st Century strategy to highlight our ambitions, and give future direction for sport, leisure and physical activity provision and support across the Borough. This can be sustained for current and future populations, and maximises the positive individual and community benefits for all. We don't need to bring together the detailed plans covering the various contributory services and infrastructure which support physical activity and sport; but we do need to set out our Council's vision and principles for sport and physical activity.

3. WHAT DO WE WANT TO ACHIEVE?

Our Vision for the Borough is, *"a great place to live, an even better place to do business."* Having a strategy for sport and leisure will demonstrate their contribution to this vision.

This strategy sets the high level vision of the authority. Many of the detailed plans which meet the aims of this vision are contained within other strategies and work plans, and investment in facilities and maintenance are included in the business cases that set out the detail for each individual scheme. As a local authority committed to open government, all of these documents are or will be, when prepared, available to the public.

In the current and future context, our new vision for leisure should be to:

- Be an Authority which promotes opportunities for all residents to be active and to participate in sporting and leisure activities to improve health and wellbeing, in high quality facilities or environments.
- Enable an increase in the proportion of the adult population achieving the CMOs physical activity guide levels from 66% to 70%; and to reduce those who are deemed inactive from 20.9% to 16% by 2021 (measured by Public Health Outcomes Framework).

- Support the aims of the Childhood Obesity Plan (HM Government, 2016) for children to engage in 60 minutes of physical activity each day, with half of this being delivered in schools.
- Maintain leisure centre provision through a model of community facilities (which include both wet and dry-side activities) in each of the Borough's main localities (Wokingham, Woodley, and Earley), with Arborfield & Ryeish Green facilities being added to the borough's leisure assets in the near future. The development of Grays Farm will provide an excellent new additional sporting hub.
- Enable the provision of other facilities across the Borough which offer multiple use and not exclusivity for one group or activity, and which make use of the Borough's open green spaces.
- Support the contribution made by voluntary organisations to grassroots sports clubs in promoting sporting excellence, attainment of sporting success inclusion and volunteering.
- Deliver services and facilities which cover their delivery and maintenance costs, providing a significant and maximised income for the Council, which provides value to the council tax payer and gains maximum return on investment and sets fair levels of charges for the population.

4. THE STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The illustration below shows the importance of this leisure strategy across many areas of the council's business. The Leisure Strategy translates the Council Plan and aspects of the Core Strategy and Health and Wellbeing Strategy into the individual work plans strategies and service specifications which contribute to the delivery of our aims. These relationships are not hierarchical, but show the inter-dependencies of policy and strategies both detailed and high-level across the authority. The strategy is shaped by the evidence base and national policies supporting sports and physical activity in the post London 2012 Olympics legacy period, as we celebrate and capitalise upon the unprecedented success of Team GB at the 2016 Rio Olympics.

The most recent Government strategy: Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation (2015) sets a bold and ambitious direction for sport policy which goes beyond simple participation to how sport changes lives and becomes a force for social good. At its heart are five outcomes that are reflected and embedded in our vision:

- physical wellbeing;
- mental wellbeing;
- individual development;
- social and community development; and
- economic development.

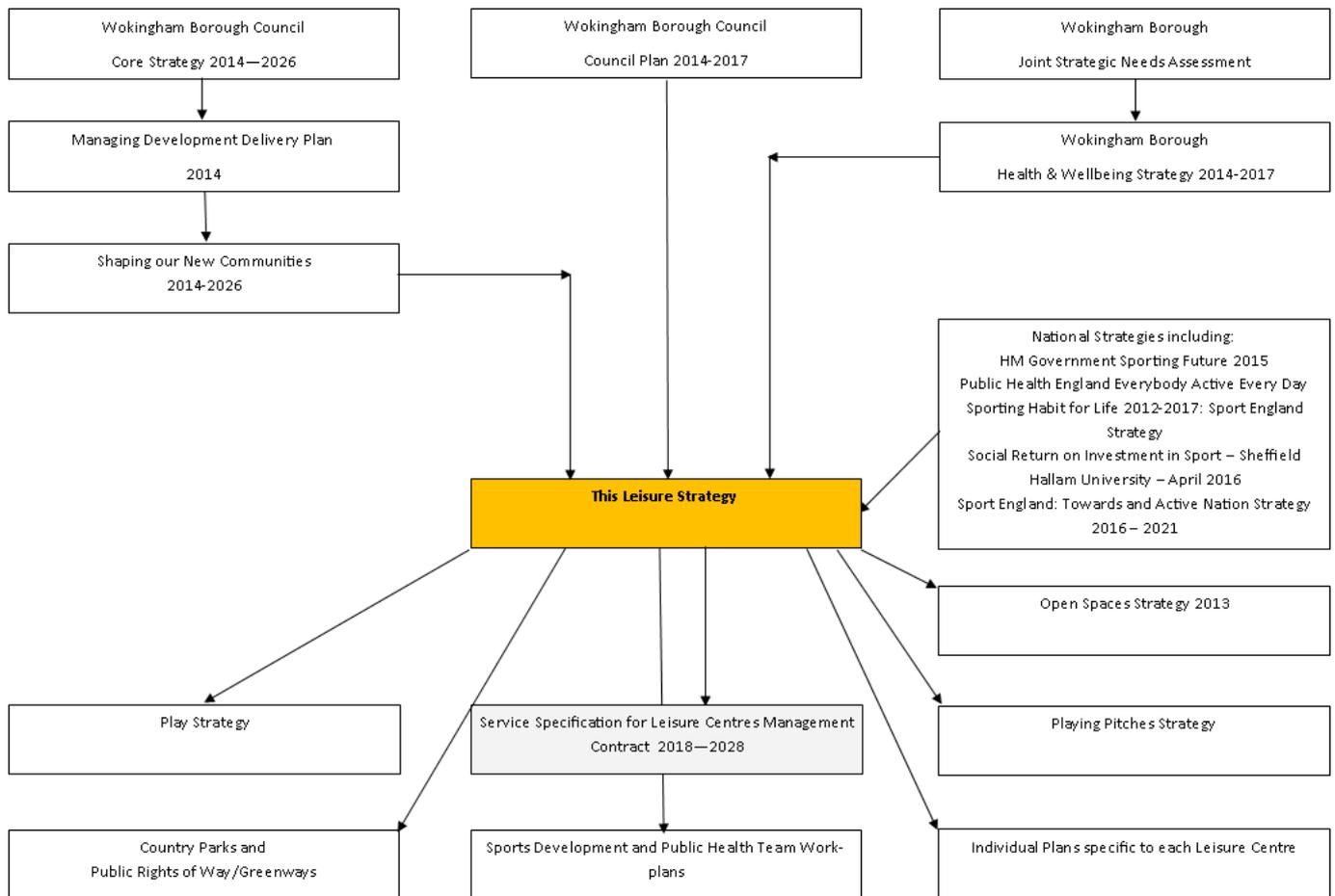


Image: The Leisure Strategy in context

5. PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELLBEING

From 1 April 2013, the council received its new responsibility for public health outcomes. Our statutory Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and Health and Well-being Strategy are overseen by the Wokingham Borough Health and Well-being Board, and drive much of the integration between council, NHS and associated services.

The Council recognises in the way it works the strong integration between public health and leisure by maintaining a sports development team to commission and deliver specialist targeted and more universal programmes. Both leisure and clean and green services in Wokingham Borough are seen as an important resource for improving public health and well-being and in addressing priority public health concerns. For example, service provision encourages more active and healthy lifestyles through increasing participation in physical activity and sport and increasing people's access to and use of green space which can have a lasting positive effect on resident's mental and physical well-being and quality of life.

Participation in physical activity plays an essential role in the prevention of ill-health, reducing health inequalities and improving mental health. These improvements in turn have an impact on reducing costs to the wider economy, the council (especially in adult social care services) and the NHS in the long-term. This is even more pressing due the Borough's

ageing population and the growth of the population across all groups due to the housing growth within the Borough's Strategic Development Locations. The Chief Medical Officer CMO recommends that adults should undertake 150 minutes (2.5 hours) of moderate physical activity per week, in sessions of at least 10 minutes.

The Public Health Outcomes Framework 2016, Sport England and Active People Survey find that 66% of Wokingham Borough's population are active. This percentage is higher than the England prevalence where 57% are considered active. 20.9% of people are inactive in Wokingham and 13.1% are insufficiently active comparing with 27.7% inactive and 15.2% insufficiently active in England. National data states that the participation gap between higher and lower socio-economic groups has increased in recent years, 39% of adults in higher socio-economic groups played sport once a week, compared to 26% of those in lower socio-economic groups. In Wokingham Borough, 41.5% of surveyed people with limiting illness or disability are active and 39.2% are inactive.

Based on these facts, we aim to increase adults' participation in physical activities by 20 % during the next 5 years. There appears to be an awareness that there are health benefits in being active, however our leisure and sport centres accommodate different people's demands and preferences. In line with Wokingham Borough Council goal to improve the whole population health and wellbeing, additional efforts to raise the population awareness and support existing projects and venues will be dedicated to ensure achieving the above target, focusing also on people that are less active due to their limiting illness or disability, or to due to their socio economic circumstances. Overweight (BMI >25) and obese (BMI>30) status increases the risk of: vascular diseases, diabetes, bone diseases, joints problems and depression. The rates of obesity (8%) and of being overweight (62%) in Wokingham are slightly lower than the national averages, however, they are disproportionately higher in those who are inactive or who are in lower socio economic groups.

To maintain basic level of health; NHS Guidelines recommend that children and young adults aged between 5-18 years need to have at least 60 minutes of physical activities every day ranging from moderate activities such as cycling and playground activities to vigorous activities such as running and tennis. For children under 5 years old, three days a week, physical activities have to include exercises for strong muscles such as push-ups and exercises for strong bones such as jumping and running (NHS Choices, 2015). Providing enhanced access and support for physical activity to the Borough's most vulnerable children and young people will improve a range of measures for these residents and may begin to tackle intergenerational inactivity in some families and communities.

The Care Act 2014 put new responsibilities on local authorities with the overarching principle of well-being, meaning that the services commissioned by local authorities have to focus on maintaining physical and mental health as well as independence. This sets the context in which under the 21st Century Council, the council recognises in the way it works the strong integration between public health and leisure. Most targeted physical activity and leisure interventions will continue to need to be provided, both for adults and for vulnerable children and young people.

6. INDIVIDUAL, SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: THE LOCAL SPORTS LANDSCAPE

The Wokingham Borough Sports Council has been established for over 30 years and have excellent knowledge of the Borough's sports clubs and societies and their needs and aspirations. The WBC Sports Development Team works with sports clubs in the borough to increase participation, ensure that there are pathways from grass roots sports to the elite pathway, supported in part by the Sports Sponsorship Fund, which has enabled over 50 young people per year for the past 20 years to develop and enhance their sporting achievement by way of a small grant. The team also works with selected sports clubs to achieve governing body accreditation. This ensures that clubs are compliant with the appropriate policies and procedures in place, including safeguarding. This ensures that all members of the public wanting to join a club can be assured that it is a safe recognised club within which they can achieve their goals.

Facility development for all sports and providers is key to increasing participation from grass roots to elite sports. Working with clubs, the borough council has managed to secure funding to help clubs develop their facilities and capacity. Funding streams from Sport England include small grants, and facility development grants, and certain sports governing bodies including Cricket, Rugby, & Football have funding schemes that are available. The WBC Sports Development Team working through the Sports Council to bring clubs and resources together can often add enormous value to the resources being realised for facilities within the Borough. An example being the Piggott School in Wargrave, which required a 3G pitch for school use, and it was found that four local large clubs also required improved training facilities. The clubs and school were brought together, and WBC took the lead on a Football Foundation bid for £275k, identified and secured Section 106 funds and a contribution from the school and clubs to enable a total project value of £550k for the new 3G pitch which the school now have, and the four clubs can now access as their training facilities throughout the year.

The Government has placed the importance of volunteering at the heart of its Sporting Future strategy. Volunteering for its own sake as well as an enabler for others to engage, and contribute to all of the five values – physical wellbeing, mental wellbeing, individual development, social and community development and economic development. Across the Borough there are over 170 clubs and societies known to the Sports Council or Sports Development Team whose sporting activities in the Borough involve some 1600 volunteers on a regular basis, adding hugely to the borough's social capital.

7. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

There is a recognition that investment in sports and leisure brings about a heightened return in social benefit. However, as the Council embarks on its new way of working under the 21st Century Council model, it needs to guarantee that any investment in leisure covers its costs, and sets up a stream of revenue to cover lifecycle maintenance costs. The re-procurement of the management contract for the Council's leisure centres should seek to maximise

income generation whilst meeting the targeted objectives necessary to meet its health and wellbeing responsibilities.

Some major Infrastructure costs for the extension, refurbishment or replacement of facilities are linked to the Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) contributions made by developers who are building new houses in the Borough. The ongoing maintenance of facilities which can include items of high cost such as swimming pool plant, heating and ventilation services, and the building structures themselves, should have planned programmes and the costs for works hypothecated against the income from running the facilities. The ability of the council to generate income through the leisure contract should be seen in the context of the investment in maintaining the facilities to the quality level required for them to operate at a viable level of return.

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