

TITLE	Draft Leisure Strategy
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 25 th March 2021
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Environment and Leisure - Parry Batth

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

The report seeks approval for a new draft leisure strategy and to consult extensively with residents and stakeholders.

The Council's current strategy requires updating and broadening to incorporate the extensive provision for informal physical activity as well as sports. The strategy has the potential over time to significantly enhance the leisure offer in the Borough to the benefit of the vast majority of residents, improving quality of life and enhancing well-being. The strategy is closely aligned with the principles and priorities of key national agencies such as Sport England (SE) and Public Health England (PHE) and has the potential to leverage external funding. The strategy is potentially a key strand for delivering the Council's priority for Enriching Lives but it also contributes to the other priorities of: a Clean and Green Borough; Safe, Strong Communities; and Keeping the Borough Moving. At a time of enormous challenge to the health and well-being of us all, the strategy makes an important contribution to planning for recovery and to maintaining the Borough's reputation and Community Vision: for Wokingham Borough to be a great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive:

- 1) endorses the principles and content of the draft Leisure Strategy;
- 2) approves the draft Strategy for consultation with residents and stakeholders;
- 3) agrees to consider the results of the consultation and any resulting changes to the draft Strategy at a future meeting of the Executive;
- 4) notes that an initial Action Plan for implementing the Strategy will be presented alongside the consultation feedback to the Executive.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the context of a growing population and the Borough's reputation as an excellent place to live with a high quality of life, the quality of the leisure offer can play a significant role in enhancing well-being and enriching the lives of residents. An up to date strategy that aligns with both national imperatives and local priorities is extremely useful in shaping future provision, co-ordinating and aligning activity across a range of partners and stakeholders and for maximising the impact of collective resources.

The strategy builds on and will help realise the benefits of the Council's recent and ongoing transformational programme of new and improved facilities with over £50m invested or committed.

There has been a growing demand to enhance and improve access to the Borough's leisure offer with the benefits of physical activity to well-being thrown into stark relief by the impacts of the COVID pandemic, particularly with regard to more informal activity and use of outdoor spaces. The Borough's current Leisure Strategy focused on sports provision and in particular the Council's own leisure services in the, then, context of planning to contract out the management of leisure facilities to secure high quality and cost-effective provision. Now this process has been completed the Borough's contracted leisure provider is of course a key partner, particularly given the significant recent investment in new and improved leisure facilities, but this new draft strategy broadens its scope to incorporate the many opportunities provided by the extensive and growing network of high quality open-spaces. Embracing country parks, new 'greenways' linking our strategic development locations, children's play and encouraging active travel.

Effective delivery of the leisure strategy will be dependent on the actions and resources of a wide range of agencies, partners and stakeholders, including our residents. Extensive consultation and engagement is proposed as a means of further developing the strategy and related action plan, fostering positive relationships and joint working into the future through a new 'Active Wokingham' partnership. It is the intention to conduct this consultation exercise from April through to the end of June with the hope that by then the impact of the pandemic on our daily lives will have reduced and enable a face to face component of the consultation.

BACKGROUND

The Leisure Strategy is set firmly within our overarching community vision: 'A great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business.' Physical activity and sports play a fundamental role in supporting the well-being of the Borough's people and communities as is also explicitly recognised in the Borough's Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2018 -2021. Furthermore, the very significant health benefits of physical activity are universal, from the very young to the elderly: helping to raise achievement in schools, enabling self-care for those with long-term conditions and helping to prevent mental and physical illness across all age-groups. This is why increasing levels of participation in sports and active leisure pursuits, and reducing the numbers of people who are inactive, is so important. The draft strategy therefore reflects key national as well as local priorities:

HM Government Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation

This wide-ranging detailed strategy was launched in December 2015. The Government strategy aims to change the way in which sport and physical activity is considered, shifting from simply how many people take part, to what people and society get out of participating and what more can be done to encourage everyone to have a physically active lifestyle.

Sport England: towards an active nation, strategy 2016-2021

Sport England launched its new five-year national strategy in May 2016. It responds to the Government's Sporting Future strategy and has a stronger focus on reaching those who are least active and helping to deliver the strategy's wider outcomes.

Public Health England (PHE)

PHE have a strong influence on policy and practice nationally with regard to promoting increased levels of physical activity. They also have a strong evidence base of what works and are a key source of data for informing local strategies and priorities.

In their forward to the 2019 update of the physical activity guidelines the Chief Medical Officers re-emphasised the significance of physical activity:

'In 2010, we were among the first nations in the world to set out evidence for how much and what kinds of physical activity we need to do to keep ourselves healthy.'

Since then, the evidence has become more compelling and the message is clear:

"If physical activity were a drug, we would refer to it as a miracle cure, due to the great many illnesses it can prevent and help treat"

Physical activity is not just a health issue. It brings people together to enjoy shared activities and contributes to building strong communities whilst supporting the economy to grow.'

BUSINESS CASE

In the context of a growing population and the Borough's reputation as an excellent place to live with a high quality of life, the quality of the leisure offer can play a significant role in enhancing this reputation, enriching the lives of residents and building thriving

communities. Wokingham Borough performs very well in relation to levels of participation in physical activity compared to other areas of the country and indeed was recently given the accolade of being the healthiest place to live in the country (Health Index for England, Office for National Statistics 2021).

Nevertheless the numbers of residents across all age-groups who are overweight or obese has been increasing and the strategy aims to contribute to halting and then reversing this trend. An up to date strategy that aligns with both national imperatives and local priorities is extremely useful in shaping future provision, extending reach to more vulnerable cohorts and communities, co-ordinating and aligning activity across a range of stakeholders and for generating and maximising the impact of collective resources.

The strategy builds on and will help realise the benefits of the Council's recent and ongoing transformational programme of new and improved facilities with over £50m invested or committed, including:

- Bulmershe Leisure Centre (completed)	£14.5m
- Ryeish Green & Arborfield leisure facilities (completed)	£ 4.9m
- Parking and toilet facilities California Country Park (completed)	£ 2.1m
- Loddon Valley Leisure Centre (completed)	£2.0m
- Embrook 3G Football Pitch (completed)	£800,000
- Cantley Park 'Greenway' enhancements (completed)	£320,000
- Carnival Pool Leisure Centre (underway)	£23m
- Cantley Park Enhancements (underway)	£ 2.2m
- Dinton Pastures Country Park activities centre (underway)	£ 1.8m
- Arborfield Primary School 3G Football Pitch (underway)	£800,000

Physical activities are universal in their ability to contribute to well-being and impact on all residents across all age-groups. In addition they can support better outcomes for more vulnerable groups, be this tackling social isolation, improving health and well-being or educational attainment. The priorities in the strategy reflect both these universal and targeted strands of activity. The strategy has also been broadened to encompass more informal or 'non-sports' forms of physical activity that, in particular, are facilitated by the Borough's extensive network of high quality open-spaces and 'greenways', including 'active travel' initiatives that have strong links to our response to the Climate Emergency. Unsurprisingly the strategy therefore links to a range of the Council's key priorities and has touch points with a large number of Council services.

In order to effectively implement the strategy there is a need to reach out to and engage a wide range of stakeholders, operating within a complex ecosystem of delivery partners that will ultimately be pivotal to success. The strategy therefore also proposes the development of an 'Active Wokingham' partnership to further develop annual Action Plans as a vehicle for the implementation of the strategy into the future. It is therefore essential that there is an effective consultation and engagement process to ensure that the strategy is fit for purpose, stakeholders can align with and endorse key principles and contribute directly to more detailed plans focused on delivery.

Set within the context of national policy, the draft strategy sets out an ambitious vision, key priorities and desired outcomes, with a more detailed initial action plan to support delivery of the longer-term outcomes to be developed. All these elements will form part of the consultation in order to maximise the input and contribution of stakeholders at both strategic and operational levels. It is proposed that consultation on the strategy will

take place from April through to the end of June with the hope that by then the impact of the pandemic on our daily lives will have reduced and enable a face to face component of the consultation.

It is worth noting that the Council has in parallel developed an Arts & Culture Strategy (also on tonight’s agenda) and that both strategies play a complementary role in ‘enriching lives’, as well as having connections between them, particularly in relation to the shared use of indoor and outdoor leisure venues and country parks, creating animated spaces and some areas of activity, such as dance, contributing to both.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£0	Yes	
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£0	Yes	
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£0	Yes	

Other Financial Information
Additional capital resources will be sought on an ongoing basis from CIL and through funding bids to agencies such as Sport England and the Football Foundation, as well as elements of other capital funding streams such as housing and transport where applicable.
Revenue costs will be met from existing budgets with a strong focus on commercialisation and income generation to minimise net costs whilst maintaining programmes to increase access for more vulnerable residents.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation
Extensive stakeholder and public consultation on the draft strategy and action plan is planned to take place from April to the end of June. The early focus in April will be on organisational stakeholders with a more proactive public facing consultation in May and June.

Public Sector Equality Duty
Due regard has been taken to the Public Equality Duty and an Equalities Impact Assessment is attached to this report.

Climate Emergency – <i>This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030</i>
In promoting physical activity and the use of outdoor spaces the draft strategy both promotes and integrates with ‘active travel’ initiatives and the enhancement of publically accessible open-space. This contributes to reducing our carbon footprint by reducing

car use, enhancing bio-diversity and tree planting where this enhances the attractiveness of open spaces for public use.

List of Background Papers

None

Contact Grant Thornton	Service Growth & Place
Telephone 0780 166 4535	Email grant.thornton@wokingham.gov.uk