

TITLE	Leisure Strategy
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 27 January 2022
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 the leisure strategy which has previously been approved in its draft form in the March 21 executive.

The Council's current strategy was updated broadening to incorporate the extensive provision for informal physical activity as well as sports.

The strategy will enhance the already successful leisure offerings in the Borough to the benefit 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 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.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive

- 1) endorses the principles and content of the Leisure Strategy;
- 2) approves the Leisure Strategy and action plan with the amendments incorporated following consultations and feedback from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

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 and local priorities is extremely useful in shaping future

provision, co-ordinating and aligning activity across a range of partners and stakeholders.

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. 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 the new strategy incorporates 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 took place between April and July 21 completed through an online survey, face to face sessions in Wokingham and Woodley town centres and our leisure facilities. We obtained feedback from sports clubs, sports council, national governing bodies (e.g. Football Foundation), GBA, PFP), Health Partners, Town and Parish councils, staff and councillors.

The strategy was presented, and feedback given by the Overview and Scrutiny board in Oct 21 adding to the changes now incorporated in what was draft strategy.

The main areas of feedback from the consultation results were:

- Received 526 responses from ages ranging between 16-75+.
- 67% wanted to see more sport facilities and classes.
- More options for young people.
- More outdoor activities
- More cycleways and dog bins (These have been feedback to the appropriate teams within WBC to incorporate in their own actions).

Following feedback from all areas, the keys additions made to the final strategy and action plan were:

- More targeted offerings for our younger population, working with key groups such as the Youth Council and community teams to adapt offerings to encourage higher attendance.

The offerings will be incorporated in our well-established and successful facilities already in place around the Borough; 6 leisure centres (carnival to re-open summer 2022), 3G and Grass pitches, BXGFIT, Tennis, Parks and Open spaces along with a vast number of sporting clubs.

- Action points under Priority 1 (Health and Wellbeing (General)) within the action plan.

- Targeted sessions for our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic community working jointly with the health and wellbeing sub board 'Physical Activity' and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic forum and incorporating the key objectives within the Wokingham Equality Plan.

The sessions will be incorporated in the already established health and wellbeing subgroup for physical activity where this has been one of the priorities for the group, previously positive joint working with the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic forum once returned will support the actions.

- Action points under Priority 2 (Raising Participation and Reducing Levels of Inactivity (Targeted)) within the action plan.

- Targeted sessions for our older people, looking broadly to incorporate all levels and needs in our offerings utilising our volunteers to encourage participation.

Sessions will expand on the already extensive programmes we currently offer our older residents within the Borough; SHINE over 60's exercise classes, active ageing sessions offering seated and music based exercise, dementia sessions, dedicated music to movement classes in care homes and assisted living sites, health walks, 1:1 moving with confidence sessions, range of prevention programmes in our leisure facilities and community sessions and continued joint working with the local volunteer groups.

- Action points under Priority 2 (Raising Participation and Reducing Levels of Inactivity (Targeted)) within the action plan.

- Offer more outdoor gym facilities in line with some of the new ways in which residents exercise following the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The new facilities will follow on from our successful classes in the park which were introduced during the lockdown of our leisure facilities to encourage where possible the continuation of physical activity.

- Action points under Priority 4 (Outdoor spaces) within the action plan.

BACKGROUND

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. Therefore, increasing levels of participation in sports and active leisure pursuits, and reducing the numbers of people who are inactive, is so important.

The final 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)g

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 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)	£2.2M
Bulmershe Leisure Centre (completed)	£14.5M
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 (completed)	£1.8M
Arborfield Primary School 3G Football Pitch (completed)	£800,000
Outdoor play facilities at California Country Park (completed)	£300,000

Physical activities 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.

The priorities in the strategy reflect both these universal and targeted strands of activity. The strategy also incorporates 'non-sports' forms of physical activity, high quality open-spaces and 'greenways', including 'active travel' initiatives that have strong links to our response to the Climate Emergency.

Set within the context of national policy, the final strategy sets out an ambitious vision, key priorities and desired outcomes, with a more detailed three-year action plan following consultations to support delivery of the longer-term outcomes to be developed.

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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 took place between April and July 21.

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 – *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*

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 publicly accessible open space. This contributes to reducing our carbon footprint by reducing car use, enhancing biodiversity and tree planting where this enhances the attractiveness of open spaces for public use.

List of Background Papers

None

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