

**South Oxfordshire District Council**

**LEISURE FACILITIES ASSESSMENT & STRATEGY**

**2023 - 2041**

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## Executive Summary

- EX1 This South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) Leisure Facilities Assessment and Strategy (LFAS) updates and supersedes the previous strategy for leisure facilities. It covers the period between 2023 and 2041 in alignment with the likely planning period to be used for the emerging new Local Plan. Given the breadth of sports played in South Oxfordshire, as well as the intention of SODC to incorporate as many types of sports and physical activity as possible, the assessment considered; swimming pools, sports halls, activity halls, village halls, community centres, dance / fitness studios, health and fitness suites (gyms), squash courts, gymnastics facilities, archery ranges, tennis courts, netball courts, cycling facilities, athletics facilities, bowls facilities, croquet lawns, water sports facilities, skateparks, multi-use games areas (MUGAs), parkour facilities, climbing walls, horse-riding centres and golf courses.
- EX2 The development of the strategy, which is compliant with Sport England guidance, has been shaped and overseen by a steering group formed of officers from SODC, sports governing bodies (NGBs) and Sport England, and consultation has been undertaken (with clubs and providers / owners of facilities) as part of the process.

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### ***The Vision Statement for Leisure Facilities***

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*“South Oxfordshire should provide a good supply of well managed and maintained leisure facilities and ancillary facilities, which are fit for purpose, meet identified needs and encourage all residents to take part in sport and physical activity.*

*There will be a positive reaction to the impacts of climate change through leisure provision, seeking to contribute to opportunities for the community to access leisure facilities and ancillary facilities without the need to use unsustainable forms of transport and support access to the facilities through active travel means. The strategy will support the Councils’ vision to become carbon neutral by 2030 and to reduce emissions across the district.”*

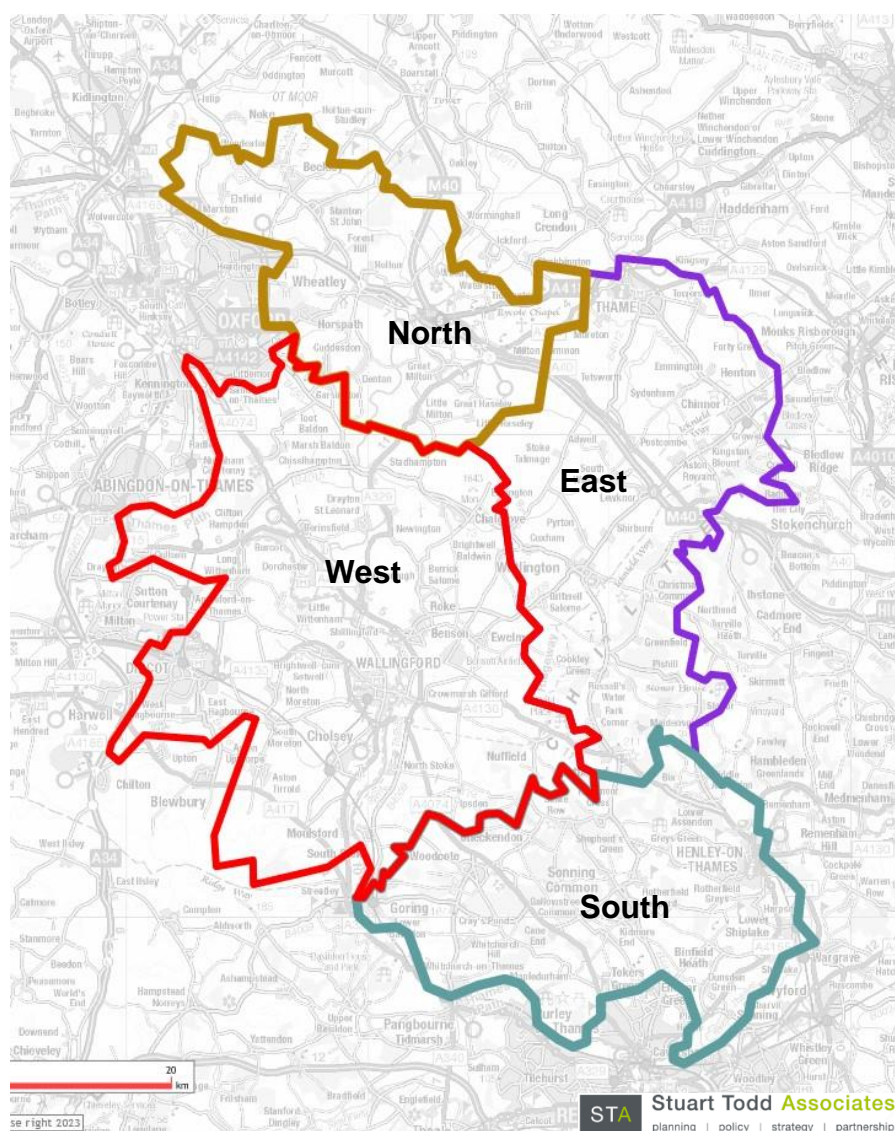
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- EX3 The LFAS plays a number of important roles in sport, leisure and planning terms, and also has a direct link into the health and wellbeing agenda both in relation to formal club-based sport but also social, casual and informal sport aimed at getting people more active (with positive outcomes for mental as well as physical health). At its basic level, the LFAS provides an audit of the quality, quantity and accessibility of leisure facilities, establishes the current levels of demand (and therefore whether facilities are being over or under used) and projects forward demand likely to arise by the end of the strategy period so that the appropriate level of provision can be planned for the future. The LFAS:
- Can be used as robust evidence to protect existing leisure facilities;
  - Can and should be used in the planning of new developments to include leisure facilities on-site or contribution to off-site;

- Can help to improve the quality of offer and provision by identifying and quantifying issues relating to the quality of leisure facilities and ancillary facilities;
- Can be used by clubs and teams and facility providers to support applications for funding for the improvement of the quality, quantity and accessibility of provision;
- Helps to defend against inappropriate development or loss of facilities;
- Informs planning policy development;
- Provides a strategic view and options for the provision of facilities during the strategy period;
- Forms an important part of the “package” of strategies, evidence and actions which can contribute towards improving the physical and mental health and wellbeing of those who live and work in the district.

EX4 What the LFAS does not and cannot do is provide a blueprint for change to 2041. The strategy can present options based on evidence and assessment of it (and indeed recommendations) but cannot do the work necessary (for example, logistical, feasibility and viability work) required to confirm actions with 100% certainty and make things happen “on the ground”, which is the task of the many stakeholders (such as clubs, providers, owners and managers of facilities) and bodies (such as the District Council, sports governing bodies and Sport England) responsible for delivery of facilities following the strategy’s adoption.

EX5 The delivery of the strategy should include 6 or 12 monthly meetings of the steering group to monitor, action and help deliver change. If this approach is carried out on an annual basis then it should become clear at which point a significant number of changes have occurred which may significantly affect the key issues and priorities. At this stage a full review of the evidence base including the supply and demand information and assessment details may be required. A wider strategy review should take place every 5 years.

**Figure EX1: The Study Area and Sub-Areas**

EX6 The largest settlements in each sub area are Didcot and Wallingford (West), Henley (South), Thame and Chinnor (East) and Wheatley (North). The M40 motorway (to London/Birmingham) runs through the East and North sub areas; and the River Thames flows through Henley and Wallingford (in the South and West sub areas).

### **Leisure Facilities Key Issues**

EX7 The assessment data and discussion with members of the steering group suggest the following key issues are most prominent:

#### **Swimming pools**

- Didcot BSC reports a lack of pool time and a reliance on swimming pools at education sites, particularly at the Oratory School pools.



- All South Oxfordshire residents are within a 20-minute drive-time of a large swimming pool (at least a 4 lane 25m pool). However, all public leisure centre pools are 'uncomfortably busy' during peak periods. It is recommended that a new learner pool be considered further at Didcot Wave Leisure Pool.

### **Sports halls**

- All South Oxfordshire residents are within a 20-minute drive-time of a large sports hall (four courts or more). However, education sites play an important role and should these sites be removed from the model there would be insufficient supply to meet demand (particularly at the Oratory School Sports Centre).
- The sports hall with the lowest quality rating is at Park Sports Centre; the quality of these facilities should be improved, as they currently do not meet consumer expectations.
- To meet high future demand for sports-hall sports activities, it is recommended that a new sports hall at Didcot North East Leisure Facility (L:34.5m x W:20m x H:7.5m) be provided. This new hall should be able to provide for all sports at the recreational level and for club development with CUAs.

### **Activity halls, village halls, community centres and studios**

- Activity halls (ie sports halls that are less than 4 badminton courts in size), village halls, community centres and studios are an important element of the wider health, fitness and conditioning market. All residents in the district can access provision within a 15-minute drive-time of a facility that has secured community use and there is recorded sport / physical activity taking place.
- The local share of provision (considering deprivation) is poorest in Berinsfield, Thame and Wallingford. To improve 'equity' of provision across the district, new activity halls (1-3-courts in size) / dance studios should be considered in these areas.

### **Health and fitness suites**

- All South Oxfordshire residents are within a 20-minute drive-time of a gym. However, the gyms at Thame LC, Park SC, Henley LC, Didcot Wave Gym and Abbey SC are all 'uncomfortably busy' during weekday evenings. The gym at Thame LC has been extended to alleviate capacity issues.

### **Squash courts**

- There were no issues with capacity, availability, cost or security of tenure raised by squash clubs as part of this study and it is expected that future demand can be met within existing squash facilities / club capacities.

### **Gymnastics facilities – artistic, rhythmic and trampolining**

- All South Oxfordshire residents are within a 20-minute drive-time of a gymnastics facility. However, clubs located in the South and the West sub areas have large waiting lists. A continual ambition for the clubs is to each have a dedicated single facility in order to offer more time/space to meet demand.

### **Archery ranges**

- There are no archery clubs in the East, North and South sub areas of the district. Wallingford Castle Archers (West sub area) has reported a lack of capacity to accommodate new members, due to limited space and time at sports halls for winter training.
- New sports hall provision at Didcot North East Leisure Facility should be able to provide for all sports at the recreational level and for club development (including archery).

### **Tennis courts – outdoor and padel**

- To meet the current demand for tennis, new outdoor tennis courts at Culham Science Centre and at Land North of Bayswater Brook should be considered further, as well as re-reinstating courts at Bull Croft Park, Edmonds Park and Ladygrove Park. These courts should be available for public use; managed via online bookings and have the ability to accommodate 'pay as you play' sessions (e.g., through use of ClubSpark).
- Former tennis courts at Oxford Brooks (Wheatley Campus) and at Holton Playing Fields should be mitigated through financial contributions secured towards four new macadam tennis courts (with fencing and sports-lighting) in the vicinity of Holton Playing Fields.
- To increase the capacity at Henley Tennis Club, install sports lighting on its three unlit courts and explore the possibility of indoor tennis (e.g. canopy) at the club.

### **Netball courts**

- Security of community use needed for netball clubs using the education sites (Lord Williams, Henley College and Rupert Park School). New sports-lights are required at Rupert House School so that more netball can be played throughout the year.
- New sports hall provision at Didcot North East Leisure Facility should be able to provide for all sports at the recreational level and for club development (including netball).

### **Cycling facilities – off-road circuits**

- A key initiative for British Cycling is to provide dedicated cycling facilities in safe, traffic-free environments for any cyclist of any ability to participate, train and compete. The nearest outdoor cycle circuit is beyond a 40-minute drive-time.

### **Athletics facilities**

- There are no gaps in provision in South Oxfordshire for a 400m synthetic surfaced track with full field events provision (all residents are within a 40-minute drive-time). However, there are no Compact Athletics Facilities in the district and no dedicated running tracks, and therefore residents have little exposure to Sprint Run, Throw, Jump athletics.

### **Bowls facilities – flat Green**

- There are no outdoor bowling greens in the North sub area and therefore a new bowling green at Oxford Brookes Wheatley Campus should be supported to meet demand.
- The clubhouse facilities at Watlington Bowls Club do not meet consumer expectations and need to be improved.

### **Croquet lawns**

- There were no issues with capacity, availability, cost or security of tenure raised by croquet clubs as part of this study and it is expected that future demand can be met within existing croquet club capacities.

### **Water sports facilities – rowing, canoeing, sailing, jet skiing and water skiing**

- Wallingford Accessible Boat Club does not have a base but has advised that water sports facilities in the area should be more accessible to people with disabilities. For example, sufficient wheelchair access to boathouses.
- Wallingford Rowing Club boathouse limits the club's growth potential.

### **Skateparks**

- Existing skateparks are located in most of the largest villages and towns. However, there is no skatepark in Wallingford.

### **Multi Use Games Areas (MUGAs)**

- Existing MUGAs are located in most of the towns and largest villages in South Oxfordshire. However, there are no publicly-accessible MUGAs in Thame, nor in Henley.

### **Parkour facilities**

- There are no parkour facilities in South Oxfordshire. The closest facilities are located in Littlemore (Oxford City), Faringdon (Vale), Rickmansworth and Milton Keynes.

### **Climbing walls**

- There are no climbing walls in South Oxfordshire. However, the majority of residents in South Oxfordshire are within a 30-minute drive-time of the existing climbing walls in Oxford, Reading and High Wycombe.

### **Horse-riding centres**

- The majority of residents in South Oxfordshire are within a 30-minute drive-time of the existing horse-riding centre. However, centres are running at 75% capacity due to issues around workforce, both paid and volunteer, suitable and affordable horsepower, and skyrocketing costs.

### **Golf courses**

- The majority of residents in the Vale are within a 30-minute drive-time of the golf courses and facilities. There were no issues with capacity, availability, cost or security of tenure raised by England Golf as part of this study and it is expected that future demand can be met within existing golf course facilities / club capacities.

## **Main Recommendations by District and Sub-area**

EX8 The main recommendations which apply across the district, are set out below. These set out only “headlines” and full detailed recommendations are presented in the main body of the Strategy. Sub-area recommendations are limited, in this Executive Summary, to presenting headlines for future provision.

### **District**

- Avoid, where possible the loss of strategically valuable sports facilities that are available for community use or could contribute to meeting future community needs, unless replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location.
- Improve access to meet demand, and to continue to develop the community use of sport facilities on private and education sites.
- Ensure, as far as possible, that any new sports facilities, provided as part of future educational provision in South Oxfordshire, are designed for curricular, extra-curricular, community and sports development use and made available for community use out of school hours.
- Support proposals that help address the need for sports facilities in the district (subject to the outcome of any options appraisal and feasibility study for the development of sports facilities across the district).
- Ensure that new facilities and their use are planned, managed and promoted to ensure that they lie at the heart of their local communities.

Ensure they are easily accessible to all, thus reducing the need to travel, and / or work is progressed to help ensure that transport connectivity (while prioritising low carbon and active modes of travel first) are delivered in South Oxfordshire.

- When planning for major new developments and links to sports facilities, planning officers should consider the principles established by Sport England / Public Health England's Active Design Guidance.
- Ensure that new developments (e.g. residential, commercial and retail) contribute where appropriate towards the development and enhancement of financially viable sports facilities to meet identified needs, priority being given to projects identified in this Strategy. Develop costed facility priorities and incorporate these into the Community Infrastructure Levy.

### **Priority recommendations**

EX9 The following recommendations are to 'provide' new facilities to meet demand / expansion of existing ones to meet new demands that cannot be met by existing provision.

#### **East Sub-Area**

- New activity hall / dance studio(s) in Thame.
- New MUGA in Thame.

#### **North Sub-Area**

- New outdoor bowling green and clubhouse in Wheatley (Oxford Brookes campus development).
- New activity hall / dance studio(s), skatepark, MUGA, tennis and netball courts at Land North of Bayswater Brook (Strategic Housing Site).

#### **South Sub-Area**

- New Padel tennis courts at Oratory School Sports Centre.
- New MUGA in Henley.

#### **West Sub-Area**

- New learner pool (20m x 10m) at Didcot Wave Leisure Pool.
- New 4-court sports hall at Didcot North East Leisure Facility (L:34.5m x W:20m x H:7.5m).
- New activity hall / dance studio(s) at Berinsfield (Strategic Housing Site)
- New MUGA, tennis and netball courts in Culham (Strategic Housing Site).

- New activity hall / dance studio(s) in Wallingford.
- New skatepark, MUGA, tennis and netball courts in Wallingford (Bull Croft Park).
- New MUGAs at Northfield (Strategic Housing Site) and at Grenoble Road (Strategic Housing Site)

### **Monitoring and Delivery**

EX10 Following consultation on the draft strategy and any changes made as a result, confirmed recommendations and actions will be set out and monitored in a “live” action plan framework which members of the steering group will have a responsibility to update and implement. Implementation will depend on steering group members co-ordinating and working closely with clubs, teams, league organisers, providers / operators, owners of current facilities and owners of facilities and potential sites for additional facilities. The action plan framework will, in time, be updated by the District Council and delivery informed by other priorities such as (but not limited to) response to the climate emergency, economic recovery and levels of deprivation. The delivery stage will also confirm options for change presented in this strategy as further work during implementation is done on feasibility, viability and implications of other actions. However, LFAS guidance recommends that an action plan is consulted upon as part of the strategy. Therefore, a “headline” action plan table is included in this draft Strategy setting out priority actions in broad terms.

EX11 To aid use of the strategy by local authority planning officers, the strategy also provides brief guidance for local authority officers in how to use and apply this strategy. The importance of the delivery stage (Stage E of the LFAS guidance and process) must not be underestimated.

## 1. Introduction

### (What is a Leisure Facilities Assessment and Strategy and why has it been developed?)

- 1.1 In Autumn 2022, we (Stuart Todd Associates Ltd.) were commissioned to develop a new Leisure Facilities Assessment and Strategy (LFAS) for South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC). The strategy is compliant with the most up-to-date Sport England Assessing Needs and Opportunities guidance (issued in October 2013). This document is the Strategy and Action Plan – the Assessment Report is presented in a separate document.
- 1.2 Development of the strategy necessitates a lengthy process to gather and analyse data across different sports, consult with key stakeholders and ensure agreement of the strategy's content by sport governing bodies and Sport England. Where possible, the approach to the strategy's development has sought to expedite this process, without compromising the need to meet the requirements of the guidance. The strategy covers the period between 2023 and 2041.
- 1.3 A LFAS plays a number of important roles in sport, leisure and planning terms, and also has a direct link into the health and wellbeing agenda both in relation to formal club-based sport but also social, casual and informal sport aimed at getting people more active (with positive outcomes for mental as well as physical health). At its basic level, the LFAS provides an audit of the quality, quantity and accessibility of leisure facilities, establishes the current levels of demand (and therefore whether facilities are being over or under used) and projects forward demand likely to arise by the end of the strategy period so that the appropriate level of provision can be planned for the future.
- 1.4 The LFAS:
  - Can be used as robust evidence to protect existing leisure facilities;
  - Can and should be used in the planning of new developments to include leisure facilities on-site or contribution to off-site;
  - Can help to improve the quality of offer and provision by identifying and quantifying issues relating to the quality of leisure facilities and ancillary facilities;
  - Can be used by clubs and teams and facility providers to support applications for funding for the improvement of the quality, quantity and accessibility of provision;
  - Helps to defend against inappropriate development or loss of facilities;
  - Informs planning policy development;
  - Provides a strategic view and options for the provision of facilities during the strategy period;
  - Forms an important part of the “package” of strategies, evidence and actions which can contribute towards improving the physical and mental health and wellbeing of those who live and work in the district.

- 1.5 It is for these reasons, and to ensure that the district has an up-to-date LFAS guidance compliant strategy, that it was commissioned. What the strategy does not and cannot do is provide a blueprint for change to 2041. The strategy can present options based on evidence and assessment of it (and indeed recommendations) but cannot do the work necessary (for example, logistical, feasibility and viability work) required to confirm actions with 100% certainty and make things happen “on the ground”, which is the task of the many stakeholders (such as clubs, providers, owners and managers of facilities) and bodies (such as the District Council, sports governing bodies and Sport England) responsible for delivery of facilities following the strategy’s adoption.
- 1.6 The delivery of the strategy should include 6 or 12 monthly meetings of the steering group to monitor, action and help deliver change. If this approach is carried out on an annual basis then it should become clear at which point a significant number of changes have occurred which may significantly affect the key issues and priorities. At this stage a full review of the evidence base including the supply and demand information and assessment details may be required. A wider strategy review should take place every 5 years.

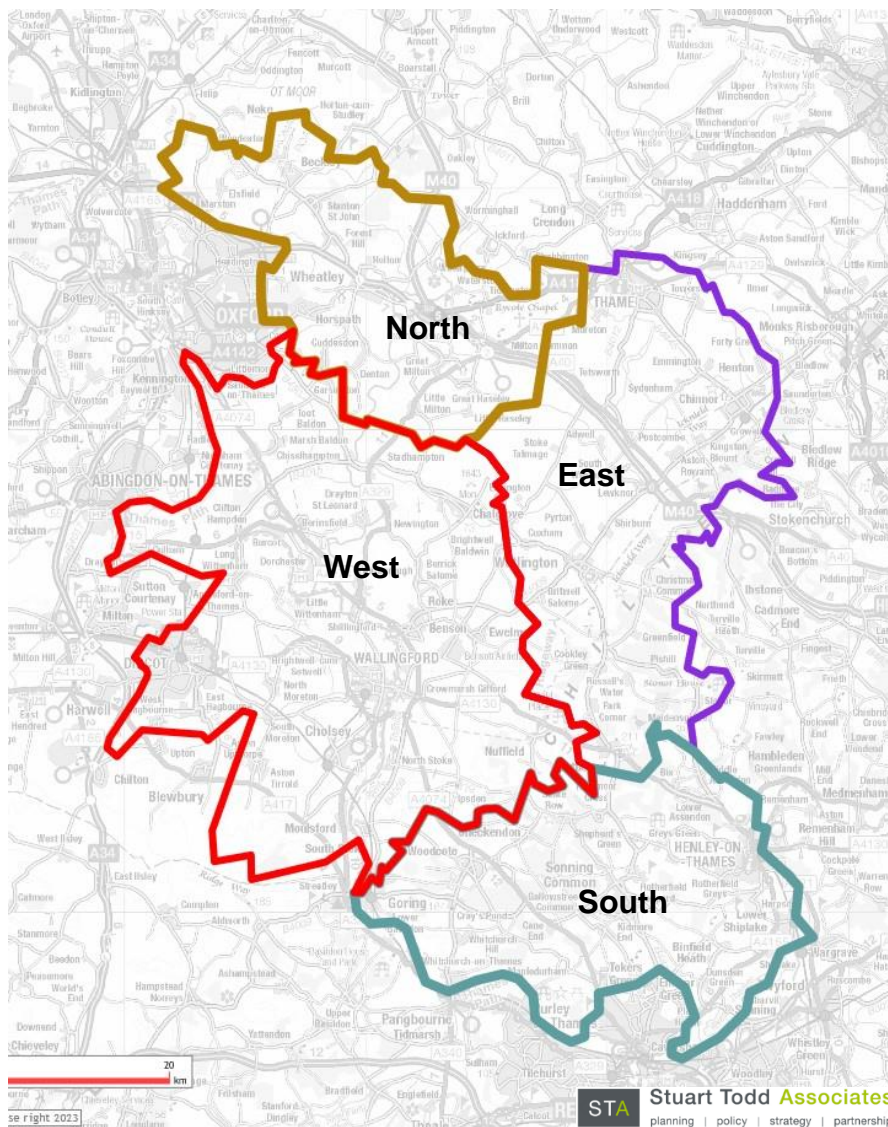


## 2. The Study Area

### (What is the extent of the study area?)

- 2.1 The study area for the LFAS is the whole of the SODC area, as shown on the map below (Figure 1). The locations of all facilities identified in the study are shown in the Assessment Report which accompany this strategy document.
- 2.2 Much of the data on facilities is listed and broken down into sub-areas within the district. This has been done to help provide more localised assessment than that which can be provided at a district-wide scale. The sub areas used, as shown in Figure 1, are consistent with those used in the previous sports strategy and by SODC in delivering community services and facilities. Use of these sub areas for this LFAS was confirmed by the Steering Group overseeing the work.

**Figure 1: Study Area and Sub-Areas**



- 2.3 The largest settlements in each sub area are Didcot and Wallingford (West), Henley (South), Thame and Chinnor (East) and Wheatley (North). The M40 motorway (to London/Birmingham) runs through the East and North sub areas; and the River Thames flows through Henley and Wallingford (in the South and West sub areas).

### **3. Typology**

#### **(What sports and types of pitches does the strategy cover?)**

- 3.1 Given the breadth of sports played in South Oxfordshire, as well as the intention of SODC to incorporate as many types of sports and physical activity as possible, the assessment will consider the following facility types):
- Archery ranges
  - Athletics 'track & field' facilities
  - Basketball courts
  - Badminton courts
  - Bowling greens
  - Boxing gyms
  - Climbing walls
  - Croquet lawns
  - Cycling facilities
  - Dance halls and studios
  - Golf courses
  - Gymnastics halls
  - Health and fitness suites (gyms & fitness studios)
  - Martial arts facilities
  - Multi Use Games Areas (MUGAs)
  - Netball courts
  - Parkour provision
  - Polo pitches and horse-riding centres
  - Skateparks
  - Sports halls (including community and village halls with sports facilities)
  - Squash courts
  - Swimming pools
  - Table tennis provision
  - Tennis courts
  - Volleyball courts

- Water sports (rowing, sailing and canoeing).
- 3.2 It should be noted that in parallel to the LFAS, the Council has also commissioned a Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS), to provide a strategic analysis of grass and artificial pitch supply and demand across the district. In conjunction with the PPS, the LFAS will provide a holistic analysis of sports facilities across the study area, leading to a comprehensive set of recommendations for the future development of facilities, in line with the needs of local residents.
- 3.3 It should also be noted that the Oxfordshire Cricket Board has recently completed their facility strategy and have identified key priorities to address.

These have been reflected in the PPS assessment for club cricket, but they have also identified a need for performance cricket which is hosted within a community setting. It is Oxfordshire Cricket Board's intention to seek a county ground and indoor centre (that could be multi-sport) to cater for all levels of cricket, from grassroots all the way to National Counties Cricket Association and to host showcase fixtures with first class counties.

## 4. Methodology

### (How has the strategy been developed?)

- 4.1 This LFAS is based on an assessment of indoor and outdoor leisure facilities in accordance with Sport England's Guidance: Assessing Needs and Opportunities Guide (ANOG) for indoor and outdoor leisure facilities. This methodology has been followed to develop a clear picture of the balance between the local supply of, and demand for, leisure facilities.
- 4.2 The LFAS is based on a considerable amount of background research work regarding the future needs for sport and recreation provision. It has been developed using a number of recognised sport facility planning tools and a wide-ranging consultation with relevant stakeholders. Recommended facility planning tools were applied including Sport England's Active Places and Active People data. The strategy is also informed by detailed analysis of the results of Sport England Facility Planning Model for sports halls and swimming pools (December 2023). These reports were commissioned specifically for this purpose.
- 4.3 A comprehensive audit of provision in the district was completed in December 2022 and January 2023. The audit provides a snapshot of the situation at that time and sites were reviewed on a like-for-like basis on their ability to provide for any increase in participation. A range of elements including accessibility, service provision, catchment (travel time) and affordability were assessed.
- 4.4 Consultation and research are fundamental to the validity of the strategy and key stakeholders and partners were consulted in addition to a comprehensive audit of facilities. The LFAS has been developed in partnership with a range of agencies including national governing bodies of sport (NGBs) plus local clubs and SODC. It will also be influenced by other councils and organisations such

as Parish and Town Councils as well as local schools and other private providers.

## 5. Consultation and Management of the Process

### (Who has been involved in the strategy's development?)

#### Steering Group

5.1 ANOG guidance requires the development of the strategy to be steered and managed by a “steering group”. This typically includes (at least) the commissioning local authority, Sport England and sports governing bodies (NGBs). The involvement of a steering group is particularly important given the importance of its members in the “grounding” and delivery of the strategy. The steering group plays a significant role by:

- considering (through “check and challenge”) information and data during the process;
- verifying and helping to localise data;
- providing a connection with local providers, clubs and teams;
- helping to put locally gathered information into a strategic context; and,
- commenting on and shaping the outputs of the study at each stage in the process and giving approval required by the ANOG guidance prior to the process moving to the next stage.

5.2 NGBs have played a key role, in particular, and their role and commitment to the process is set out in the ANOG guidance.

Organisation	Organisation
South Oxfordshire District Council	Lawn Tennis Association
Badminton England	Parkour UK
Basketball England	Skateboarding GB
Bowls England	England Squash
England Boxing	Swim England
British Canoeing	Table Tennis England
British Cycling	Volleyball England
British Gymnastics	Sport England
England Athletics	Active Oxfordshire
England Netball	Stuart Todd Associates Ltd.

- 5.3 Communication with the steering group has not simply been through meetings at key stages of the process. We have kept an ongoing dialogue with members of the steering group throughout the process.

### Consultation

- 5.4 Consultation is an integral and important part of the LFAS' development, as set out above. Consultation has been undertaken, prior to the strategy being produced, in the following ways:
- Online surveys early in the process sent to relevant clubs, facility owners, facility managers, facility providers / operators and the education sector to ascertain up-to-date baseline information about quality, accessibility, demand for leisure facilities and ancillary facilities being reviewed and other important issues of concern; and,
  - Face-to-face on-site meetings with some of those providers and operators managing and maintaining sites during the facility audit process.
- 5.5 This strategy is subject to wider consultation and views will help to inform and confirm the strategy's content. Any changes in data identified through consultation will only be updated further at this stage if it would be likely to require a fundamental change to the conclusions overall for that sport or facility type. The use of facilities and issues of concern can change from year to year and so some flexibility in the interpretation of results at the facility specific level will be required, something which will need to be acknowledged as the strategy is delivered and as solutions are identified. This is one of the reasons why the strategy cannot provide a blueprint for change but instead focuses on key actions and options for change to improve the quality of provision and respond appropriately to changes in demand now and in the future. Within this context, the actions which arise from the process are considered to be "live".

## **6. Responsibilities**

### **(Who has ownership of the strategy and who will deliver its actions?)**

- 6.1 While the development of the strategy was commissioned by the District Council (and therefore ownership of the strategy rests principally with the local authority), this does not mean that any additional facilities proposed to fill identified shortfalls or future provision must be funded and / or delivered and / or maintained by the local authority. The nature of leisure facility provision has been changing over the last decade or so nationally with the role of local authorities now moving away from that of a provider, maintainer and operator of facilities to that of a facilitator and enabler. However, the strategy has an



important role in informing the current and future reviews of the Council's Local Plan, Infrastructure Delivery Plan, Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and approach to CIL and s106 planning obligations<sup>1</sup>. It will also play an important role informing the decision-making process as the Council considers planning applications (as the local planning authority) which relate to the protection, enhancement and provision of facilities.

- 6.2 New facilities are most likely to be provided in partnership by the local authority, sports organisations, national sports governing bodies, the education sector / establishments, clubs, businesses and operators, or more commonly by a combination of one or more of these. The local authority is likely to play a key enabling and co-ordination role in planning for and the delivery of new facilities across the district. The same applies to the improvement of existing facilities, where management and / or ownership of existing facilities is no longer (or never has been) the responsibility of the Council. The current landscape of facility provision therefore requires the steering group members each to (continue to) play an important role in helping to deliver the strategy's recommendations and action framework.

## **7. Other Strategies & Plans and Funding Opportunities**

**(What key strategies & plans and funding opportunities are relevant to the LFAS?)**

- 7.1 There are a number of important strategies and plans which are relevant and link to the LFAS, both on the sport and planning side which are briefly summarised below. It is important to note the context that they provide, both for the strategy to be produced and also for the recommendations and actions it presents. There are other strategies and plans with which this strategy has a connection. However, these cannot all be summarised here.
- 7.2 We acknowledge and recommend, however, that important links should continue to be made by appropriate bodies between this strategy for facilities and sport and those produced for issues such as health & wellbeing (including leisure and active lives), green infrastructure, transport, economic development and wider planning programmes. Appendix 1 provides a contextual summary of these various documents and of current funding opportunities.
- Current District-wide Adopted Planning Policies (Local Plan) (and Emerging Joint Local Plan 2041)
  - South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Active Communities Strategy
  - South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Infrastructure Delivery Plans
  - Neighbourhood Plans

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<sup>1</sup> Subject to any changes being brought about to the s106 and CIL regime by changes to the planning system during the strategy period.

- National Planning Policy Framework and National Planning Practice Guidance
- Sport England: “Uniting the Movement” 2021-2031
- Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Active Design
- South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Local Transport & Connectivity Plan (LTCP5)

## **8. Decarbonisation, Sustainable Travel and Climate Change**

### **(What are the key issues for sport in relation to the changing climate?)**

- 8.1 When considering the decarbonisation, sustainable travel and climate change agendas, there are several ways that the sport can help to minimise impact and contribute positively towards mitigating and adapting to the changing climate.
- 8.2 For example, clubs in control of their facilities and providers / owners of facilities, measures such as solar pv and heat pumps can help to secure a local supply of energy and contribute towards lowering energy costs, as can retrofitting insulation to buildings. Small, yet important measures, like making secure and well-lit cycle storage available at sites and facilities can make a small difference and many sites already have good levels of cycle parking in appropriate locations on sites. However, this type of infrastructure provision can only be part of the answer. Leisure facility providers, nor NGBs or the local authority alone cannot be expected to provide all solutions to deliver this type of change “on the ground”. Cultural shift is also required across sport with many players using cars to get to matches and training, and a continuing challenge is likely to be that there are not and cannot be a sufficient number of facilities provided in all locations to enable a 20-minute cycle or walk to them – it seems unlikely to be viable to provide that number for each sport. Cultural shift will be difficult to embed in many sports, also because many players will simply not have the time in their day to factor in a longer journey time to play and many will not be prepared to cycle or walk significant distances to play matches or train after playing their sport for anywhere between one and several hours (and particularly if the weather is poor and they play outside). This is not to say that this is a challenge not worth addressing, but the LFAS cannot provide full answers and proposals to resolve such issues, particularly as they go beyond the remit of the strategy and will require cross-discipline, cross-department and cross-sector working within and with organisations and other stakeholders outside of sport and planning. For example, it will be the role of other strategies and plans such as Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans and Active Travel Strategies and Action Plans to help ensure that key sports hubs, in particular, which see a substantial amount of demand, are well connected by safe cycling and walking networks, while it is the role of public transport providers and local authorities to ensure that public

transport also serves such facilities at the right times, right frequencies and to the most likely destinations of leisure facility users.

## **9. The Role of Strategic Housing Sites**

### **(How can major housing developments contribute towards leisure facility provision?)**

- 9.1 The assessment report captures the results of individual assessments of the demand likely to arise from the strategic housing development sites in the district, where the LFAS can still have an influence on provision (some allocations already have agreements in place for provision of leisure facilities which the assessment and strategy consider as “pipeline” commitments to additional supply). The amount of land required to accommodate these significant scales of housing also means that they present the best opportunity for provision of new leisure facilities where required, to serve both demand from the housing site, and additional and future demand from a growing population to 2041. However, when considering how best to plan for and accommodate demand arising from major developments, it is dangerous to assume that in every instance provision for leisure facilities should be provided.
- 9.2 Careful thought must be given the appropriateness, viability and practicalities of use, running and maintaining a facility if in a location away from an existing club’s facilities. Economies of scale and critical mass of members and volunteers required are also important factors, with provision of single sport sites rarely representing good value or a practical solution when split sites draw members away from an existing facility (therefore, introducing additional travel for some existing members / players) and where ancillary facilities also need to be provided at significant cost.
- 9.3 Pooling or securing contributions from multiple sites can often be a more workable and appropriate solution for formal sports provision where funds can be used to strengthen and improve capacity at existing club sites or can be channelled into strategic sports hub sites within a major development site to replace existing club sites where improvements and expansion of capacity could prove challenging in the longer-term.
- 9.4 These factors have all been taken into account as the role of strategic housing sites has been considered and recommendations made about provision on each site later in this strategy.



## 10. The Vision for Leisure Facilities in South Oxfordshire

### (What should the strategy seek to achieve?)

- 10.1 At the start of the LFAS process, the Steering Group overseeing the strategy's development agreed a Vision for the strategy. The Vision, set out below, sets the tone for the treatment of leisure facilities in the district during the strategy period to the year 2041.

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### ***Vision***

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*“South Oxfordshire should provide a good supply of well managed and maintained leisure and recreation facilities, which are fit for purpose, meet identified needs and encourage all residents to take part in sport and physical activity.*

*There will be a positive reaction to the impacts of climate change through sports provision, seeking to contribute to opportunities for the community to access sports facilities and ancillary facilities without the need to use unsustainable forms of transport and support access to the facilities through active travel means. The strategy will support the Councils' vision to become carbon neutral by 2030 and to reduce emissions across the district.”*

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## 11. The Aims of the Leisure Facilities Strategy

### (How will the strategy meet the aspirations set out in the Vision?)

11.1 Accompanying the strategy's Vision, a set of aims has also been developed which set out what the strategy is seeking to achieve. They reflect the role of the strategy in contributing towards sport, activity, health and wellbeing; and, providing up-to-date evidence and strategy framework to help protect, enhance and provide leisure facilities and demonstrate the demand and need for leisure facilities, with the aim of provision in the right places and at the right time.

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### Aims

- To protect, enhance and provide leisure facilities and ancillary facilities and address any shortfalls in quantity and quality.
  - To help direct investment to where improvements can have the greatest impact.
  - To encourage community access to the site by active travel means or more sustainable methods of transport.
  - To include recommendations that take account of the need to achieve carbon neutral districts and have measures in place to help ensure that facilities can be managed sustainably
  - In the approach and preparation of the needs assessment and strategy, to consider and incorporate the councils' duties under Equality Act 2010 in its recommendations.
  - The assessment will help to ensure that the planning policies in the Joint Local Plan are based on a robust and up-to-date assessment of the needs for sports facilities.
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## 12. Leisure Facilities Key Issues

12.1 This section presents a summary of the key issues for each sport facility type, providing context for the sections which follow. Headlines only are provided to give brief context for each sport facility type, with much more detail provided in the Assessment Reports.

### Swimming pools

12.2 The assessment data and discussion with members of the steering group suggest the following key issues are most prominent:

- Didcot BSC reports a lack of pool time is the first barrier to club expansion. It must run its Swim School at Oratory Prep School in order to meet demand.
- All South Oxfordshire residents are within a 20-minute drive-time of a large swimming pool (at least a 4 lane 25m pool). However, there is a need to enhance the security of community use at swimming pools on education sites, particularly at the Oratory School Sports Centre. Community use agreements should be sought for Woodcote SC and Henley SC at Oratory School Sports Centre, and Woodcote SC, Didcot BSC and Henley SC at the Oratory Prep School.
- Abbey Sports Centre pool is old and outdated. The facility is unattractive to customers and does not meet basic expectations. However, the changing facilities (wet-side changing rooms) were refurbished in 2023 and are 'Good' quality. The pool is being under-utilised; it is only full 56% of the hours open during peak periods (70% or above would be deemed 'uncomfortably busy'). It is recommended that the quality of the pool be improved to meet consumer expectations.
- Thame Leisure Centre is the busiest pool in South Oxfordshire – it is full-to-capacity during 96% of the hours open during peak periods. There is a need to enhance the capacity at Thame LC by increasing the hours that the learner pool is available for in the weekly peak period.
- SODC recognises the potential of developing a 20m x 10m teaching pool at the existing Didcot Wave Leisure Pool site. The existing Leisure Pool is full 90% of peak times and therefore a new teaching pool will alleviate these capacity issues.

## Sports halls

12.3 The assessment data and discussion with members of the steering group suggest the following key issues are most prominent:

- The district benefits from eight 4-court halls which meet the court dimensions recommended for a 4-court hall (34.5m x 20m). These dimensions provide a sports hall that can cater for all hall sports at the community level of participation; and the scale also meets the requirements for hall sports club development. However, there are seven 4-court halls that have slightly smaller 4-court halls with dimensions of 33 x 18m which provides for hall sports at the community level but has less space between and behind individual courts. In addition to the 15 four-court halls in the district, there is also a 5-court hall at Park SC (Wheatley).
- The vast majority of sports clubs using sports halls in South Oxfordshire report a lack of availability at peak times is the first barrier to club expansion. Other barriers for clubs include having enough coaches and the rising costs to hire halls, which is prohibiting new members joining.
- As a guide, the Sport England suggests that when 80% of a hall's capacity is used then this indicates that sports halls are becoming uncomfortably busy. This should be seen only as a guide to help flag when facilities are becoming busier, rather than as a 'hard threshold.' Park SC has the busiest sports hall in South Oxfordshire – it is full-to-capacity during 83% of the hours open during peak periods. The remaining four sports halls are full-to-capacity during c.50% of the hours available during peak periods; Thame Leisure Centre (54%), Didcot Leisure Centre (53%), Willowbrook Leisure Centre (53%) and Henley Leisure Centre (51%).
- Lord William's School is nearby to Thame LC and less utilised, therefore, there is scope to manage demand across the two sites to achieve a more balanced level of community use in Thame.
- Didcot Girls' School has scope to increase availability in the weekly peak period to reduce the proportion of capacity used to a comfortable level. Wallingford School has the only large sports hall in Wallingford and, therefore, important in terms of accessibility. There is scope to increase availability in the weekly peak period.
- All South Oxfordshire residents are within a 20-minute drive-time of a 4+ court sports hall. However, education sites play an important role and should these sites be removed from the model there would be insufficient supply to meet demand. This is particularly important in the South sub

area where four 4-court sports halls with community access are located on educational-owned sites.

- Across the district there are number of sports halls with cricket nets that are of an acceptable standard for indoor cricket, however securing access to these facilities has been identified as difficult. This is a challenge for both the Oxfordshire Pathway planning and the clubs, whose winter programmes are restricted. Quality does need to improve but access is the biggest issue. The other issue is that new sprung-loaded floors are unsuitable for cricket, so the Oxfordshire Cricket Board should be consulted in the design phase of any new sports hall to ensure an appropriate multi-use flooring is installed.
- Sports clubs are reliant on the education sector for the supply of halls. Community use agreements should be sought at Oratory School Sports Centre, Langtree School, Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge School and Shiplake College, as well as Didcot Girls School and Wallingford School (both in West sub area) and Lord William's School (East sub area)..
- The sports hall with the lowest quality rating is at Park SC ('Below Average'). The quality of these facilities should be improved as they currently do not meet consumer expectations.
- New sports hall provision needed to meet high future demand for sports-hall sports activities in West sub area. It is recommended that a new 4-court (L:34.5m x W:20m x H:7.5m) sports hall be provided at Didcot North East Leisure Facility. New sports facilities should be able to provide for all sports at the recreational level and for club development with CUAs.

### **Activity halls, village halls, community centres and studios**

12.4 The assessment data and discussion with members of the steering group suggest the following key issues are most prominent:

- Activity halls (ie sports halls that are less than 4 badminton courts in size), village halls, community centres and studios are an important element of the wider health, fitness and conditioning market. They vary in size, shape, quality, access to sprung wooden floors and level of ancillary facilities. Activity types vary from low-impact to high intensity classes.
- Although all village/community halls rely mainly on volunteers to operate, many offer facilities to local communities at the times needed i.e. morning, afternoon and evening. The majority of facilities are available 7 days a week for community use but must be pre-booked as they do not have extensive opening hours.

- The village halls and community centres have an important role enabling local people to access a range of local activities. They cater for older people as well as those living in more rural areas. Given the rural nature of the district, the importance of village halls and community centres cannot be underestimated. Activity programmes within facilities can contribute to getting the inactive active or retaining the already involved. These facilities can meet the needs of the ageing population and/or those suffering from rural isolation.
- There are no geographical gaps in the provision of activity hall, village hall, community centre and studios in South Oxfordshire. Catchment mapping (using a 15-minute drive-time) shows all residents can access provision that has secured community use and there is recorded sport / physical activity taking place.
- The local share of sports halls, which considers deprivation, is poorest in Berinsfield, Thame and Wallingford. To improve 'equity' of provision across the district, new activity halls (i.e., 1-3-courts) should be considered in Berinsfield, Thame and Wallingford.
- The location where the most unmet demand can be met is northwest of Wheatley on the A40. This is within close proximity to Land North of Bayswater Brook development site and therefore an activity hall (at least 1-court in size) should be provided. However, further need assessment work (e.g, viability testing/ feasibility study) is required in order to determine the exact size of the hall, which should be based upon local identified demand. The local community could access sports facilities and ancillary facilities without the need to use unsustainable forms of transport, and the strategy should support access to the facilities through active travel means.

## Health and fitness suites

12.5 The assessment data and discussion with members of the steering group suggest the following key issues are most prominent:

- There are residents in the western part of the South sub area and in the southern part of the East sub area that are not within a 20-minute drive-time of a public leisure centre gym. However, the gym at Oratory Sports Centre is within a 20-minute drive-time of these residents.
- There were no issues raised with disability access of facilities as part of this study. The gyms at Thame LC, Park SC, Henley LC, Didcot Wave Gym and Abbey SC are all 'uncomfortably busy' (ie, 80% or more used-capacity) from 17:00 to 21:00 on Monday to Friday. The gym at Thame LC has been extended to alleviate capacity issues.

## Squash courts

- 12.6 The assessment data and discussion with members of the steering group suggest the following key issues are most prominent:
- There are squash courts located in all sub areas and no geographical gaps in provision (ie, all residents are within a 20-minute drive-time of a court). However there are only private-member clubs in the East sub area (ie no 'pay and play' opportunities). There is a need to offer cheaper squash membership options in the East sub area as there is a reliance on expensive membership clubs.
  - Didcot Leisure Centre squash courts were unaffordable for Didcot Squash Club so the club moved to Wallingford Sports Park. No capacity issues raised by squash club sites in South Oxfordshire; Wallingford Sports Park, Racquets Fitness Centre and The Watlington Club).
  - Analysis of peak-time usage shows there is spare capacity at all of the public leisure centres with squash courts. Park Sports Centre squash courts have the most used-capacity during weekly peak periods (43%), followed by Henley Leisure Centre (35%) and then Didcot Leisure Centre (22%).
  - No capacity issues raised by squash clubs at Wallingford Sports Park, Racquets Fitness Centre and The Watlington Club. The quality of the squash courts at Park LC and Didcot LC should be improved as they do not meet customer expectations.

## Gymnastics facilities – artistic, rhythmic and trampolining

- 12.7 The assessment data and discussion with members of the steering group suggest the following key issues are most prominent:
- There are gymnastics facilities located at seven sites across all four sub areas. However, six of these sites are shared facilities (with other sports) – there are four sports halls, one community centre and one church hall. The only dedicated gymnastics venue is located at Abingdon Gymnastics Club (North sub area).
  - Abingdon Gymnastics Club's main focus in the short-term is to secure the tenure of its venue in Berinsfield. The long-term aim for the club is to re-model the buildings to open up access for beginners (including a spectator viewing area).

- All South Oxfordshire residents are within a 20-minute drive-time of a gymnastics facility. However, Vision Gymnastics and Kinetics Gymnastics have large waiting lists and are using multiple venues – a dedicated single facility is a continual ambition for the clubs in order to offer time/space to meet demand. There is high demand for new dedicated provision for Kinetics Gymnastics in the West sub area and Vision Gymnastics in the South sub area.

## **Archery ranges**

12.8 The assessment data and discussion with members of the steering group suggest the following key issues are most prominent:

- There are no archery clubs (and therefore geographical gaps in provision) in the East, North and South sub areas of the district.
- Wallingford Castle Archers are based at Wallingford Sports Park in the West sub area (with unlimited length of tenure) during the summer and use the sports halls (hired on an hourly basis) at Didcot Girls' School and Wallingford School during the winter for indoor training sessions.
- The club is struggling to keep up with demand for new members due to limited space at all three sites. The club would like to have a single venue (outdoor and indoor range) where all demand can be accommodated and take place all year round.
- New sports hall, including at Didcot North East Leisure Facility (4-courts) should be able to provide for all sports at the recreational level and for club development (including archery).

## **Tennis courts – outdoor and padel**

12.9 The assessment data and discussion with members of the steering group suggest the following key issues are most prominent:

- There are no indoor tennis courts in South Oxfordshire, and there are no outdoor tennis courts in the North sub area; only former courts at Oxford Brookes Wheatley Campus and Holton Playing Fields in Wheatley.
- Former tennis courts at Oxford Brookes (Wheatley Campus) and at Holton Playing Fields should be mitigated through financial contributions secured towards four macadam tennis courts (with fencing and sports-lighting) in the vicinity of Holton Playing Fields.
- Thame TC, Dorchester TC and Shillingford Warborough Tennis Association need to resurface their courts; and Goring TC and Stoke Row Sports & Leisure Club need clubhouse refurbishments. Goring TC require a long-term lease from the Parish Council.



- Future demand for tennis is highest in the West sub area and this could be met by improving the quality of the tennis courts at Bull Croft Park, Edmonds Park and Ladygrove Park (all in West sub area).
- Current and future demand for tennis (including Padel) could be met with new 'pay and play' courts at Culham Science Centre and Land North of Bayswater Brook.
- New Padel Tennis courts at the Oratory Sports Centre to be for public use and managed via online bookings and has the ability to accommodate 'pay as you play' sessions (e.g., through use of ClubSpark).
- Clubs across South Oxfordshire are a total of 502 tennis players over-capacity. The clubs in the South sub area are the most over-capacity (594 in total and 85 on average). The clubs with the largest over-capacity are Sonning Common & District Tennis Club, Henley Tennis Club and Peppard Lawn Tennis Club.
- Support Henley Tennis Club (who already offer pay and play) to install sports lighting on its three unlit courts and explore the possibility of indoor tennis (e.g. canopy) at the club. Adding sports lighting to the three courts would alleviate capacity by approx. 60 members and indoor tennis significantly more.

### **Netball courts**

12.10 The assessment data and discussion with members of the steering group suggest the following key issues are most prominent:

- Security of community use needed for netball clubs using the education sites (Lord Williams, Henley College and Rupert Park School).
- New sports-lights are required at Rupert House School so that more netball can be played throughout the year.
- The sports hall with the lowest quality rating is at Park SC ('Below Average'). The quality of these facilities should be improved as they currently do not meet consumer expectations.
- New sports hall at Didcot North East Leisure Facility (4-courts) should be able to provide for all sports at the recreational level and for club development (including netball).

### **Cycling facilities – off-road circuits**

12.11 The assessment data and discussion with members of the steering group suggest the following key issues are most prominent:

- A key initiative for British Cycling is to provide dedicated cycling facilities in safe, traffic-free environments for any cyclist (including disabled cyclists) of

any ability to participate, train and compete. British Cycling's latest facility strategy aims for no one to travel more than 40 minutes to an 'off-road' cycle circuit. The nearest outdoor cycle circuit is beyond a 40-minute drive-time in the London Borough of Hillingdon.

### **Athletics facilities**

12.12 The assessment data and discussion with members of the steering group suggest the following key issues are most prominent:

- There is one 400m synthetic surfaced track with full field events provision at Horspath Sports Ground (North sub area). The resident club, Oxford City AC, reported no waiting list due to new membership management system. No quality issues were identified or reported as part of this study.
- England Athletics has confirmed that a 40-minute drive time is realistic for 400m synthetic surfaced track with full field events provision. When considering neighbouring provision, there are no geographical gaps in athletics provision in South Oxfordshire.

### **Bowls facilities – flat Green**

12.13 The assessment data and discussion with members of the steering group suggest the following key issues are most prominent:

- That there are gaps in provision of outdoor bowling greens in the North and the West sub areas. However, residents in the West sub-area are within a 20-minute drive-time of outdoor bowling greens in Abingdon, Milton and Harwell (Vale of White Horse). There are no outdoor bowling greens in the North sub area and therefore a new bowling green at Oxford Brookes Wheatley Campus should be supported to meet demand.
- The clubhouse facilities at Watlington Bowls Club do not meet consumer expectations and need to be improved.
- The East and the West sub areas have short-mat bowls clubs using village halls. However, there are no short-mat clubs in the North or the South sub areas.

### **Croquet lawns**

12.14 The assessment data and discussion with members of the steering group suggest the following key issues are most prominent:

- There is a gap in community club croquet lawn provision in the East and in the West sub areas. However, residents in these areas are within a 20-

minute drive-time of Thames Valley Croquet Club (Abingdon) and High Wycombe Croquet Club. There were no issues with capacity, availability, cost or security of tenure raised by croquet clubs as part of this study and it is expected that future demand can be met within existing croquet club capacities.

### **Water sports facilities – rowing, canoeing, sailing, jet skiing and water skiing**

12.15 The assessment data and discussion with members of the steering group suggest the following key issues are most prominent:

- The majority of residents in South Oxfordshire are within a 30-minute drive-time of the water sports facilities. There were no issues with capacity, availability, cost or security of tenure raised by water sports clubs as part of this study and it is expected that future demand can be met within existing water sports facilities / club capacities.
- Wallingford Accessible Boat Club does not have a base but has advised that water sports facilities in the area should be more accessible to people with disabilities. For example, sufficient wheelchair access to boathouses.
- Wallingford Rowing Club boathouse is severely restricted (It is a cramped, Grade 2 listed building) and this limits the club's growth potential. The Club report a lack of finances to move into bigger premises.
- An [appeal](#) against enforcement action at Caversham Lakes has been dismissed by the Planning Inspectorate. The use of the lakes for water-based sports and recreational uses does not therefore benefit from planning permission, and does not form part of this strategy.
- As a method of good-practice, informal access to waterways in South Oxfordshire should follow the '[Paddlers Code](#)', which advises how to protect, respect and enjoy the waterways. To improve access to sustainable recreational pursuits, it is recommended that the local authority joins the '[Clear Access Clear Waters](#)' campaign.

### **Skateparks**

12.16 The assessment data and discussion with members of the steering group suggest the following key issues are most prominent:

- Existing skateparks are located in most of the largest villages and towns. However, there is no skatepark in Wallingford. It is recommended that a new skatepark at Bull Croft Park (Wallingford) is considered further, and that it has 'open-access' for public use.
- Skateparks in the district are available for use during daylight hours only. None of the skateparks have sports-lights. Consideration should be given

to sports-lighting the existing skateparks, but this is dependent upon local demand being identified.

### **Multi Use Games Areas (MUGAs)**

12.17 The assessment data and discussion with members of the steering group suggest the following key issues are most prominent:

- Existing MUGAs are located in most of the towns and largest villages in South Oxfordshire. However, there are no publicly-accessible MUGAs in Thame, nor in Henley. Therefore, residents of these towns are not within a 20-minute walk-time of existing provision (the normal acceptable standard for adequacy of coverage).
- The provision of new MUGAs should also be considered at the Strategic Housing sites, including Bayswater Brook (North sub-area), Culham Science Centre (North sub-area), Northfield and Grenoble Road (both in the West sub-area).
- Consider improving the condition of MUGAs with open access that are 'Poor' or 'Below Average' quality, including; Little Milton Recreation Ground, Bull Croft Park, Edmonds Park, Ladygrove Park, Whites Field and Chalgrove Recreation Ground.
- Also consider increasing the number of hours available for use at existing MUGAs by installing sports-lights where appropriate, including; Southern Community Centre, Bull Croft Park, Edmonds Park, Ladygrove Park, Whites Field, Chalgrove Recreation Ground and Great Western Drive Park.

### **Parkour facilities**

12.18 The assessment data and discussion with members of the steering group suggest the following key issues are most prominent:

- Parkour is primarily a non-competitive physical discipline of training to move freely over and through any terrain using only the abilities of the body, principally through running, jumping, climbing and quadrupedal movement. Parkour provision may be indoor (with high ceilings and a part sprung floor, static bars and box equipment) or outdoor. Generally an outdoor training area would have a spongy floor (i.e., rubbery material – the same as in a children's Play Area) and have posts, metal bars and concrete walls/ramps installed.
- There are no parkour facilities in South Oxfordshire. The majority of residents in the West and North sub areas are within a 30-minute drive-time of the existing parkour provision at Oxford Academy in Littlemore.

However, the majority of residents in the East and South sub areas are more than a 30-minute drive-time from parkour provision in Faringdon, Rickmansworth and Milton Keynes. New indoor / outdoor parkour provision in South Oxfordshire would meet current demand that is leaving the district to access provision.

## **Climbing walls**

12.19 The assessment data and discussion with members of the steering group suggest the following key issues are most prominent:

- A climbing wall is an artificially constructed wall with grips for hands and feet, usually used for indoor climbing, but sometimes located outdoors. Some are brick or wooden constructions, but on most modern walls, the material most often used is a thick multiplex board with holes drilled into it. Recently, manufactured steel and aluminium have also been used. The wall may have places to attach belay ropes, but may also be used to practice lead climbing or bouldering.
- There are no climbing walls in South Oxfordshire. However, it is likely that residents of South Oxfordshire are using the five indoor climbing centres in neighbouring authorities; Oxford, Reading (two centres), Newbury and High Wycombe. There is also a new climbing centre due to open in Oxford in late 2023. The majority of residents in South Oxfordshire are within a 30-minute drive-time of the existing climbing walls in neighbouring authorities.
- All neighbouring centres have extensive opening hours (typically 10:00-22:00 on weekdays and 09:00-18:00 at weekends) with permanent equipment set-up for climbing. It is likely that facilities are available to users that want to use them.

## **Horse-riding centres**

12.20 The assessment data and discussion with members of the steering group suggest the following key issues are most prominent:

- A horse-riding centre is an equestrian facility created and maintained for the purpose of accommodating, training or competing equids, especially horses. Based on their use, they may be known as a barn, stables, or riding hall and may include commercial operations described by terms such as a boarding stable, livery yard, or livery stable.
- The majority of residents in South Oxfordshire are within a 30-minute drive-time of the existing horse-riding centre.

- British Equestrian research data shows over two-thirds of centres are currently struggling to keep up with enquiries and take on new clients, creating a barrier to increasing participation. Conversely, on average, centres are running at 75% capacity due to issues around workforce, both paid and volunteer, suitable and affordable horsepower, and skyrocketing costs.
- There is a need to support existing horse-riding centres in addressing capacity issues caused by a lack of suitable workforce, horsepower and costs. There are horse-riding centres in all sub areas, but the West sub area has the fewest number and this is where future demand is highest.

### **Golf courses – 18-hole courses, driving ranges and Par-3 (practice / coaching)**

12.21 The assessment data and discussion with members of the steering group suggest the following key issues are most prominent:

- The majority of residents in South Oxfordshire are within a 30-minute drive-time of the golf courses and facilities. There were no issues with capacity, availability, cost or security of tenure raised by England Golf as part of this study and it is expected that future demand can be met within existing golf course facilities / club capacities.
- There has been a proposal for outline planning permission at Waterstock golf course (North sub area). The demolition and clearance of existing buildings and structures to allow for the construction of up to 120,000sqm of Use Class E employment floorspace comprising Research and Development units, Light Industrial units, ancillary offices, ancillary amenity buildings (up to 2,400sqm), Creche (up to 600sqm), Forest School (up to 150sqm), along with new site accesses, internal roads and footpaths, surface and multi storey car parking and open space.

## 13. District-wide Recommendations

13.1 The general district-wide strategic recommendations and the actions required to deliver them are presented below. These recommendations have been identified as common themes following research and stakeholder consultation.

### PROTECT

- Avoid, where possible the loss of strategically valuable sports facilities that are available for community use or could contribute to meeting future community needs, unless replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location. Continue to review plans for developments involving strategically valuable sports facilities. Ensure any loss in provision is replaced by equivalent or better provision.
- Protect and enhance community use of sports facilities on educational sites, where required. Promote partnership working between schools, Council and other facility operators in the district to develop community use and maximise utilisation of existing facilities.

### ENHANCE

- Develop a funding strategy to maintain / enhance facility stock. Identifying lead personnel to drive this and confirm requirement for funding strategy. It is also recommended that the Council with partners could commission a full buildings survey on the swimming pools and sports halls, where necessary, to understand the cost and feasibility of bringing the stock up to date, if possible.
- Improve access to meet demand, and to continue to develop the community use of sport facilities on private and education sites. It is recommended that further work be completed to ensure longer-term community access at sites with unsecured access for community use.
- The Active Partnership for Oxfordshire; Oxfordshire Activity and Sports Partnership (OASP), have a dedicated team that engage with education facilities across the county and work with local authorities to improve access to current facilities and invest in new facilities that meet the needs of both the schools and local residents. It is suggested that further support is sought from OASP to deliver this recommendation.
- Ensure that sports facility charges are reasonable in terms of affordability to residents, and are comparable with similar facilities elsewhere. To keep community accessible sports facility charges under review and benchmark against nearest neighbouring authorities.



**PROVIDE**

- Ensure, as far as possible, that any new sports facilities, provided as part of future educational provision in South Oxfordshire, are designed for curricular, extra-curricular, community and sports development use and made available for community use out of school hours. Statement to be included within appropriate planning policy, if possible, so it can be carried through into decisions on development. Check that any proposed school sports facilities in South Oxfordshire have appropriate external lighting, car parking and changing facilities to enable community use.
- Support proposals that help address the need for sports facilities in the district (subject to the outcome of any options appraisal and feasibility study for the development of sports facilities across the district). Provide support to ensure development meets the needs of the district. Help guide investment into new facilities and the expansion of existing ones to meet new demands that cannot be met by existing provision. Consideration should also be given to the delivery of Sport England's Local Leisure Offer to give a greater spread of provision within the district in part to reduce reliance on car/reduce the length of journeys required to access a facility.
- Ensure that new facilities and their use are planned, managed and promoted to ensure that they lie at the heart of their local communities. Ensure they are easily accessible to all, thus reducing the need to travel, and / or work is progressed to help ensure that transport connectivity (while prioritising low carbon and active modes of travel first) are delivered in South Oxfordshire.
- When planning for major new developments and links to sports facilities, planning officers should consider the principles established by Sport England / Public Health England's Active Design Guidance. Good design incorporating low carbon and carbon-reducing measures and innovations such as sustainable drainage systems, rainwater recycling, electric car and bike charging points, biomass boilers, the greater use of natural light / passivhaus design and underfloor heating, solar power for electricity generation should be considered wherever feasible.
- Ensure that new developments (e.g. residential, commercial and retail) contribute where appropriate towards the development and enhancement of financially viable sports facilities to meet identified needs, priority being given to projects identified in this Strategy. Develop costed facility priorities and incorporate these into the Community Infrastructure Levy.
- Explore opportunities for collaborative working between neighbouring authorities to maximise cross-boundary usage. Maintain and develop relationship with Oxford City, Reading and Buckinghamshire councils.
- Develop partnerships working between Council departments, health agencies, facility operators, schools, colleges, NGBs, and local sports clubs to expand the range of affordable and accessible opportunities for both residents and visitors to South Oxfordshire.



## 14. Strategic Site On-site / Off-site Provision

- 14.1 As already noted above, strategic housing allocation sites present a significant opportunity to host facilities required as a result of demand which arises from their population, and also as locations for new facilities to help address wider demand across the sub-area or reasonable functional or spatial catchment.
- 14.2 The tables below include recommendations for the contribution that the strategic housing sites in all sub-areas can make to provision of facilities. These are based on the sites that we have been advised can still be influenced / informed by the outcomes of the LFAS. Off-site contributions for some sports are also summarised here, but are set out in detail in the assessment reports.
- 14.3 Recommendations for non-pipeline sites are flexible, however, as opportunities presented are a starting point which should continue to be informed by detailed discussions during the delivery phase of the strategy (Stage E).

### **Summary of On-site / Off-site Sport and Leisure Facility Provision at Strategic Housing Sites**

<b>Strategic Site</b>	<b>On-site requirements</b>	<b>Off-site requirements</b>
<b>Wheatley (Oxford Brookes campus development) (North sub-area)</b>	Flat bowling green: continue to support the development of a new outdoor bowling green and clubhouse to fill the geographical gap in bowls provision in the North sub area (currently no outdoor bowling greens in the sub-area). The clubhouse should be able to accommodate Short-Mat Bowls.	Financial contributions should be secured towards the off-site leisure facilities in Wheatley including sports hall improvements at Park Sports Centre and four new outdoor tennis courts within the vicinity of Holton Playing Fields.
<b>Bayswater Brook (North sub-area)</b>	New MUGA, tennis and netball courts: explore opportunity for a new multi-use games area that can be used for netball and tennis, and can be made available for extensive public use. Consideration should be given to sports-lighting the MUGA, in order to maximise the community use throughout the year.  An activity hall (at least 1-court in size) / dance studio(s) should be provided. Further need assessment work is required in order to determine the exact size of the hall/ no. of studios.	Financial contributions should be secured towards the off-site leisure facilities including sports hall improvements at Park Sports Centre in Wheatley.

<b>Chalgrove Airfield (West sub-area)*</b>	New MUGA, tennis and netball courts: explore opportunity for a new multi-use games area that can be used for netball and tennis, and can be made available for extensive public use. Consideration should be given to sports-lighting the MUGA, in order to maximise the community use throughout the year.	Financial contributions should be secured towards the off-site leisure facilities including the existing MUGA at Chalgrove Recreation Ground ('Below Average' quality).
<b>Northfield (West sub-area)</b>	New MUGA, tennis and netball courts: explore opportunity for a new multi-use games area that can be used for netball and tennis, and can be made available for extensive public use. Consideration should be given to sports-lighting the MUGA, in order to maximise the community use throughout the year.	Financial contributions should be secured towards the off-site leisure facilities including sports hall improvements at Park Sports Centre in Wheatley and swimming pool improvements at Abbey Sports Centre in Berinsfield.
<b>Grenoble Road (West sub-area)</b>	New MUGA, tennis and netball courts: explore opportunity for a new multi-use games area that can be used for netball and tennis, and can be made available for extensive public use. Consideration should be given to sports-lighting the MUGA, in order to maximise the community use throughout the year.	Financial contributions should be secured towards the off-site leisure facilities including sports hall improvements at Park Sports Centre in Wheatley and swimming pool improvements at Abbey Sports Centre in Berinsfield.
<b>Berinsfield (West sub-area)</b>	New activity hall (at least 1-court in size) should be considered further to meet high future demand. The new facilities should be able to provide for all sports at the recreational level and for club development.	Financial contributions should be secured towards the off-site leisure facilities including swimming pool improvements at Abbey Sports Centre in Berinsfield.
<b>Culham (West sub-area)</b>	New MUGA, tennis and netball courts: explore opportunity for a new multi-use games area that can be used for netball and tennis, and can be made available for extensive public use. Consideration should be given to sports-lighting the MUGA, in order to maximise the community use throughout the year.	Financial contributions should be secured towards the off-site leisure facilities including swimming pool improvements at Abbey Sports Centre in Berinsfield.

<b>West of Wallingford (West sub-area)</b>	No on-site contributions have been identified as part of this study.	No off-site contributions have been identified as part of this study.
<b>Didcot North-east (West sub area)</b>	A new 4-court (L:34.5m x W:20m x H:7.5m) sports hall at this site. New sports facilities should be able to provide for all sports at the recreational level and for club development with CUAs.	Financial contributions should be secured towards the off-site leisure facilities including new learner pool at Didcot Wave Leisure Pool.

\* The adopted South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 allocates Land at Chalgrove Airfield for 3,000 homes. As of January 2024, there is no live planning application for this site. The emerging Joint Local Plan proposes to de-allocate this site for residential development. However, for the purposes of this strategy we have assessed the need generated by this allocation as it currently forms part of the development plan, and may be needed if the council receives a planning application on this site prior to the adoption of the Joint Local Plan. If the Joint Local Plan is adopted on the basis of removing the allocation, and no planning permission is in place, then the requirements from this strategy for Chalgrove Airfield will not be implemented.

## 15. Strategy Recommendations by Sub Area

15.1 The following strategy recommendations are identified from the assessment of need identified within the LFAS Assessment Report. The recommendations reflect the strategic drivers highlighted by Sport England's Strategic Planning Model (i.e. Protect, Provide, Enhance). The recommendations reflect these drivers and draw together the overarching need in the area for key stakeholders to work together and deliver.

15.2 In practice, the objectives are to:

- **Protect existing facilities:** Sport England seeks to help protect sports and recreational buildings and land, and expects these to be retained or enhanced as part of redevelopment unless an assessment has demonstrated that there is an excess of provision and they are surplus to requirements or clear evidence supports their relocation.
- **Enhance the quality, accessibility and management of existing facilities:** to make the best use of existing sports facilities through improving their quality, access and management. Using the supporting advice of Sport England and NGBs, ensure efficient facility management for community access to school sites.
- **Provide new facilities to meet demand:** Sport England seeks to ensure that communities have access to sufficient, high-quality sports facilities

that are fit for purpose. Guiding investment into new facilities and the expansion of existing ones to meet new demands that cannot be met by existing provision.

15.3 The following tables contain a list of the priority recommendations to 'enhance' existing facilities and 'provide' new facilities, where necessary, relating to facilities in each sub area and the actions required to deliver them. The facilities to be 'protected' as part of this strategy have been included in the full Action Plan shown in Appendix 2.

15.4 Indicative time frames and/or priorities could be as follows (although it is recognised that many actions will run concurrently and/or take advantage of opportunities arising):

- Short term (1-3 years): Ongoing and very important; to be addressed now.
- Medium term (3-8 years) and long term (8+ years): Important: to be addressed and planned for in Council decision making and policy.

**Priorities in East Sub-area**

Site Name	Facility Type	Issue / Opportunity	Key Action(s)	Lead Partners to deliver action	Timescale (Priority)	Resources
<b>Chinnor Tennis Club</b>	Outdoor tennis courts	The tennis club has two sports-lit courts and would like to install sports lighting on its third court.	<b>Protect and Enhance</b> – Maximise use of existing assets by supporting Chinnor TC’s plans to install sports lighting on its remaining unlit court.	LTA	Short	CIL
<b>Lord William’s School</b>	Sports hall	Lord William’s School is nearby to Thame LC and less utilised, therefore, there is scope to manage demand across the two sites to achieve a more balanced level of community use in Thame.	<b>Protect and Enhance</b> – Work with the school to increase the number of hours available for community use.	SODC	Short	Officer time
<b>Racquets Fitness Centre</b>	Squash courts	There are only private-member squash clubs in the East sub area (ie no ‘pay and play’ opportunities). There is a need to offer cheaper squash membership options in the East sub area as there is a reliance on expensive membership clubs.	<b>Protect and Enhance</b> – Squash courts should be retained to meet the demand for squash in Thame. The Centre should be encouraged to offer ‘pay and play’ squash sessions to meet future demand for squash.	SODC	Medium	Officer time

Site Name	Facility Type	Issue / Opportunity	Key Action(s)	Lead Partners to deliver action	Timescale (Priority)	Resources
<b>Thame Leisure Centre</b>	Swimming pool Sports hall Gym Studios	Swimming pool, sports hall, gym and studios are ‘uncomfortably busy’ (above 80% used capacity) during peak periods. Thame Swimming Club are regular users of the pool.	<b>Protect and Enhance</b> – Work with facility provider to provide more availability for clubs to use the facilities at peak times.	SODC	Short	Officer time
			<b>Enhance</b> – Continue to retain the attractiveness of facilities to residents.	SODC	Ongoing	Various resources (see Funding Opportunities in Appendix 1)
<b>Thame Tennis Club</b>	Outdoor tennis courts	The quality of the four clay-surface outdoor tennis courts at Thame TC are in need of refurbishment, which is a priority project for the club.	<b>Protect and Enhance</b> – Maximise the use of existing assets by improving the quality of the four clay courts at Thame TC.	SODC, LTA	Short	LTA / CIL
<b>Watlington Tennis Club</b>	Outdoor tennis courts	The tennis club is 48 players over-capacity. The club has three courts, two of which are sports-lit. It would like to upgrade to LED sports-lighting courts and also install new sports-lighting on its third court.	<b>Protect and Enhance</b> – Maximise the use of existing assets by supporting Watlington TC’s plans to install sports lighting on its remaining unlit court and upgrade to LED	LTA	Short	CIL

Site Name	Facility Type	Issue / Opportunity	Key Action(s)	Lead Partners to deliver action	Timescale (Priority)	Resources
			sports lighting on two of its courts			
<b>Whites Field (Chinnor)</b>	MUGA	MUGA is 'Below Average' quality. It is usable but does not meet consumer expectations.	<b>Protect and Enhance</b> – Maximise the use of existing assets by improving the quality of existing MUGA.	SODC	Medium	CIL
<b>Site(s) not yet identified</b>	New MUGA New Activity Hall / Dance Studios	There is no MUGA in Thame. The local share of sports halls, which considers deprivation, is poorest in Thame.  Further need assessment work is required in order to determine the exact size of the hall; with a detailed business plan to test the viability, which his based upon local identified demand.	<b>Provide</b> – explore the opportunity for a new MUGA in Thame that is publicly accessible.  <b>Provide</b> – An activity hall (at least 1-court in size) / dance studio(s) should be provided in Thame.	Thame Town Council	Medium	CIL



**Priorities in North Sub-area**

Site Name	Facility Type	Issue / Opportunity	Key Action(s)	Lead Partners to deliver action	Timescale (Priority)	Resources
<b>Abingdon Gymnastics Club</b>	Gymnastic facility	Abingdon GC has a short-term lease of its facility but is currently working towards a funding package for the purchase of the freehold.	<b>Protect and Enhance</b> – Continue to support Abingdon GC with securing the long-term use of its facility.	SODC, British Gymnastics	Short	Officer time
<b>Holton Playing Fields (Wheatley)</b>	Tennis and netball courts New Skatepark	Netball courts are used by England Netball for 'Walking Netball' and 'Back to Netball' sessions. There are no skateparks in Holton or Wheatley.	<b>Protect / Provide</b> – Former tennis courts at this site should be mitigated through financial contributions secured towards four new macadam tennis courts (with fencing and sports-lighting) in the vicinity of the site.  <b>Provide</b> – New skatepark to meet unmet demand.	SODC, Wheatley Parish Council,  England Netball  LTA	Short	CIL
<b>Horspath Sports Ground</b>	Athletics track	No issues with the athletics facilities have been identified as part of this study.	<b>Protect and Enhance</b> – Maintain TrackMark accreditation and seek to improve the infield sports lighting to meet minimum NGB standards.	EA	Ongoing	CIL

Site Name	Facility Type	Issue / Opportunity	Key Action(s)	Lead Partners to deliver action	Timescale (Priority)	Resources
<b>Land North of Bayswater Brook</b>	New MUGA, tennis and netball courts, Activity Hall / Dance Studios	There are no community-accessible outdoor tennis courts in the North sub area. Local share of sports hall provision (considering deprivation) is poorest in this area.	<b>Provide</b> – Explore opportunity for new MUGA, tennis and netball courts, Activity Hall / Dance Studios. Further need assessment work is required in order to determine the exact size of the hall/ no. of studios.	SODC	Short	S106
<b>Little Milton Recreation Ground</b>	MUGA	MUGA is worn and/or damaged, barely usable and does not meet basic expectations.	<b>Protect and Enhance</b> – Maximise the use of existing assets by improving the quality of existing MUGA.	SODC	Medium	CIL
<b>Park Sports Centre (Wheatley)</b>	Sports hall Gym Studios Squash courts	Sports hall, gym and studios are ‘uncomfortably busy’ (above 80% used capacity) during peak periods. Sports clubs report high demand at peak times. The squash courts have 43% used-capacity during peak periods from ‘pay and play’	<b>Protect and Enhance</b> – Work with facility provider to provide more availability for clubs to use the sports hall at peak times.  <b>Enhance</b> – Continue to retain the	SODC  SODC	Ongoing  Ongoing	Officer time  Various resources (see Funding

Site Name	Facility Type	Issue / Opportunity	Key Action(s)	Lead Partners to deliver action	Timescale (Priority)	Resources
		sessions. The quality of the courts should be improved to meet consumer expectations.	attractiveness of facilities to residents. <b>Protect and Enhance</b> – Squash courts should be retained and the quality enhance to meet the demand for 'pay and play' squash in the North sub area.	SODC	Short	Opportunities in Appendix 1)
<b>Waterstock Golf Club</b>	Golf course	The owners of Waterstock Golf Club have submitted outline planning permission for the development of new buildings on part of the golf course.	<b>Protect</b> – This facility should be retained or enhanced as part of redevelopment unless an assessment has demonstrated that there is an excess of provision and they are surplus to requirements or clear evidence supports their relocation.	SODC	Ongoing	Officer time
<b>Wheatley (Oxford Brookes campus development)</b>	New outdoor bowling green	There is a need to meet current demand in the North sub area (currently no outdoor bowling greens in the sub-area).	<b>Provide</b> – Continue to support the development of a new outdoor bowling green and clubhouse, which is of suitable size to	SODC, Bowls England	Medium	S106

Site Name	Facility Type	Issue / Opportunity	Key Action(s)	Lead Partners to deliver action	Timescale (Priority)	Resources
			accommodate Short-Mat Bowls.			

**Priorities in South Sub-area**

Site Name	Facility Type	Issue / Opportunity	Key Action(s)	Lead Partners to deliver action	Timescale (Priority)	Resources
<b>Goring Tennis Club</b>	Tennis courts	The club’s current lease with the Parish Council has less than one year left and negotiating an extension is proving difficult. The clubhouse is in need of refurbishment and the club require a new lease for security of tenure.	<b>Protect and Enhance</b> – Support Goring TC and Goring Parish Council with negotiating a new lease for the club. Also provide support with refurbishing the tennis clubhouse.	SODC, LTA	Short	Officer time
				LTA	Medium	LTA
<b>Henley Leisure Centre</b>	Swimming pool Sports hall Gym Studios Squash courts	Swimming pool, sports hall, gym and studios are ‘uncomfortably busy’ (above 70% used capacity) during peak periods. Henley Swimming Club are regular users and report	<b>Protect and Enhance</b> – Work with facility provider to provide more availability for clubs to use the facilities at peak times.	OSAP	Short	Officer time
				SODC	Ongoing	

Site Name	Facility Type	Issue / Opportunity	Key Action(s)	Lead Partners to deliver action	Timescale (Priority)	Resources
		poor availability of pool space at peak times.	<b>Enhance</b> – Continue to retain the attractiveness of facilities to residents.			Various resources (see Funding Opportunities in Appendix 1)
<b>Henley Tennis Club</b>	Outdoor tennis courts	Tennis clubs in the South sub-area are over-capacity, especially Sonning Common & District TC, Henley TC and Peppard Lawn TC. Adding sports lighting to three courts would alleviate capacity by approx. 60 members and indoor tennis significantly more.	<b>Protect and Enhance</b> – Support Henley Tennis Club to install sports lighting on its three unlit courts and explore the possibility of indoor tennis (e.g. canopy) at the club.	LTA	Short	CIL
<b>Rupert House School</b>	Outdoor netball courts	Henley Hawks Netball Club uses this site and reported that new sports-lighting of these courts would mean it can host competitive matches and improve player safety. It would also be able to reduce its current waiting list for new members.	<b>Protect and Enhance</b> – Continue to support user club and work with facility provider to secure CUAs for existing user (Henley Hawks Netball Club). <b>Enhance</b> – Investigate whether the school would increase the community usage of these facilities.	England Netball	Short	CIL

Site Name	Facility Type	Issue / Opportunity	Key Action(s)	Lead Partners to deliver action	Timescale (Priority)	Resources
			<p>It may be difficult due to the nature of this site, but this increased community offer may help to meet unmet demand.</p> <p><b>Enhance</b> – Work with the user club and facility provider to provide sports-lighting for the netball courts.</p>			
<p><b>The Oratory School Sports Centre</b></p>	<p>Swimming pool Sports hall Gym Studios Squash courts Tennis courts New Padel tennis courts</p>	<p>Sports clubs using the swimming pool, sports hall and studios do not have a long-term agreement in place (i.e., no security of use). Improved access is required to meet demand, and to continue to develop the community use of sport facilities at the school.</p> <p>The school has proposed development of new Padel tennis courts at this site.</p>	<p><b>Protect and Enhance</b> – Continue to support user clubs and work with facility provider to secure CUAs for existing users. These clubs include, but are not limited to, Woodcote SC and Henley SC (pool), and Vision Gymnastics (sports hall). <b>Provide</b> – Support the development of new Padel tennis courts proposed by the school. These courts are to be for public use and managed via online booking and ability to pay as you play (e.g., through use of ClubSpark).</p>	<p>OSAP</p> <p>LTA</p>	<p>Short</p> <p>Short</p>	<p>Officer time</p> <p>LTA rep. time</p>

Site Name	Facility Type	Issue / Opportunity	Key Action(s)	Lead Partners to deliver action	Timescale (Priority)	Resources
<b>The Oratory Prep. School</b>	Swimming pool	<p>Sports clubs using the swimming pool do not have a long-term agreement in place (i.e., no security of use).</p> <p>Improved access is required to meet demand, and to continue to develop the community use of sport facilities at the school.</p>	<p><b>Protect and Enhance</b> – Continue to support user clubs and work with facility provider to secure CUAs for existing users (Woodcote SC, Didcot BSC and Henley SC and Wallingford Triathlon Club).</p> <p><b>Enhance</b> – Investigate whether the school would increase the community usage of these facilities. It may be difficult due to the nature of this site, but this increased community offer may help to meet unmet demand.</p>	<p>OSAP</p> <p>OSAP</p>	<p>Short</p> <p>Short</p>	<p>Officer time</p> <p>Officer time</p>
<b>Thames Valley Gym</b>	Community Centre	<p>Kennylands Gymnastics are full to capacity and is unable to provide some of its gymnasts with the facilities required for higher skill levels.</p>	<p><b>Protect and Enhance</b> – Explore the opportunity for Kennylands Gymnastics to expand the size of Thames Valley Gym to cater for latent demand, and highly skilled gymnasts.</p>	<p>SODC, British Gymnastics</p>	<p>Short</p>	<p>Officer time</p>



Site Name	Facility Type	Issue / Opportunity	Key Action(s)	Lead Partners to deliver action	Timescale (Priority)	Resources
<b>Site(s) not yet identified</b>	New MUGA	There are no MUGAs in the South sub-area.	<b>Provide</b> – Explore the opportunity for a new MUGA in Henley that is publicly accessible.	Henley Town Council	Medium	CIL

### Priorities in West Sub-area

Site Name	Facility Type	Issue / Opportunity	Key Action(s)	Lead Partners to deliver action	Timescale (Priority)	Resources
<b>Abbey Sports Centre (Berinsfield)</b>	Swimming pool Sports hall Gym	Swimming pool needs to be improved to meet the expectations of users. The facility is unattractive to customers and does not meet basic expectations.	<b>Protect and Enhance</b> – Maximise the use of existing assets by improving the quality of existing facilities, including the swimming pool.  <b>Protect / Provide</b> – Protect this site unless replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location.	SODC  SODC	Short  Medium	S106  Various resources (see Funding Opportunities in Appendix 1)
<b>Bull Croft Park (Wallingford)</b>	Outdoor tennis and netball courts	Tennis courts, netball courts and MUGA are old and outdated. The facilities are unattractive	<b>Protect and Enhance</b> – Maximise the use of existing assets by improving the quality of existing facilities.	SODC, LTA	Short	LTA, DCMS

Site Name	Facility Type	Issue / Opportunity	Key Action(s)	Lead Partners to deliver action	Timescale (Priority)	Resources
	MUGA New skatepark	to customers and do not meet basic expectations. There is no skatepark in Wallingford.	<b>Provide</b> – Explore the opportunity for a new skatepark to meet unmet demand.	Wallingford Town Council	Short	CIL
<b>Chalgrove Recreation Ground</b>	MUGA	MUGA is 'Below Average' quality. It is usable but does not meet consumer expectations.	<b>Protect and Enhance</b> – Maximise the use of existing assets by improving the quality of existing MUGA.	SODC	Medium	CIL
<b>Culham</b>	New MUGA	In order to meet future demand from new residents, a new MUGA should be considered at this Strategic Housing site.	<b>Provide</b> – Continue to support the development of a new multi-use games area that can be used for netball and tennis, and can be made available for extensive public use.	SODC	Medium	S106
<b>Didcot Wave Leisure Pool</b>	Swimming pool Gym	Swimming pool and gym are 'uncomfortably busy' (above 80% used capacity) during peak periods. Didcot BSC are regular users, but must also use pool at Oratory Prep. School to meet demand.	<b>Protect and Enhance</b> – Continue to retain the attractiveness of facilities to residents. <b>Provide</b> – Explore the opportunity for a new 20m x 10m teaching pool annexed to the current Leisure Pool building, to provide additional water space on-site that can	SODC  SODC	Ongoing  Short	Various resources (see Funding Opportunities in Appendix 1)

Site Name	Facility Type	Issue / Opportunity	Key Action(s)	Lead Partners to deliver action	Timescale (Priority)	Resources
			free up space in the Leisure Pool.			
<b>Didcot Leisure Centre</b>	Sports hall Squash courts	The squash courts are 'Below Average' quality and need to be improved to meet the expectations of users.	<b>Protect and Enhance</b> – Squash courts should be retained and the quality enhanced to meet the demand for 'pay and play' squash in the West sub area. Courts should be retained to meet future demand for squash.	SODC	Short	CIL
<b>Didcot Girls' School</b>	Sports hall	Didcot Girls' School has scope to increase availability in the weekly peak period to reduce the proportion of capacity used to a comfortable level.	<b>Protect and Enhance</b> – Continue to support user clubs and work with facility provider to secure CUAs for existing users. <b>Enhance</b> –Work with the school to increase the number of hours available for community use.	SODC	Short	Officer time
<b>Didcot North-East Leisure Facility</b>	Sports hall	There is high future demand for sports-hall activities in the West sub-area.	<b>Provide</b> – Explore opportunity for a new 4-court (L:34.5m x W:20m x H:7.5m) sports hall at this site.	SODC	Medium	Various resources (see Funding Opportunities)

Site Name	Facility Type	Issue / Opportunity	Key Action(s)	Lead Partners to deliver action	Timescale (Priority)	Resources
			New sports facilities should be able to provide for all sports at the recreational level and for club development, and have CUAs.			in Appendix 1)
<b>Dorchester Tennis Club</b>	Tennis courts	The tennis courts are 'Below Average' quality and do not meet the expectations of users. The Club plan to refurbish the courts in the next few years.	<b>Protect and Enhance</b> – Maximise the use of existing assets by improving the quality of existing tennis courts.	SODC, LTA	Short	LTA, CIL
<b>Edmonds Park (Didcot)</b>	Tennis courts Netball court MUGA	Tennis courts, netball courts and MUGA are old and outdated. The facilities are unattractive to consumers and do not meet basic expectations.	<b>Protect and Enhance</b> – Maximise the use of existing assets by improving the quality of existing facilities.	LTA, Didcot Town Council	Short	CIL
<b>Europa School</b>	Sports hall	Oxfordshire National Badminton are the main junior badminton providers in South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse. The organisation runs	<b>Protect and Enhance</b> – Continue to support user clubs and work with facility provider to secure CUAs for existing users.	SODC	Short	Officer time

Site Name	Facility Type	Issue / Opportunity	Key Action(s)	Lead Partners to deliver action	Timescale (Priority)	Resources
		weekly county-level sessions for 100 junior (5-18-year-olds) at Europa School.				
<b>Grenoble Road</b>	New MUGA	In order to meet future demand from new residents, a new MUGA should be considered at this Strategic Housing site.	<b>Provide</b> – Explore opportunity for a new multi-use games area that can be used for netball and tennis, and can be made available for extensive public use.	SODC	Medium	S106
<b>Great Western Drive Park (Didcot)</b>	MUGA	MUGA is 'Below Average' quality. old and outdated. The facility is usable but does not meet consumer expectations.	<b>Protect and Enhance</b> – Maximise the use of existing assets by improving the quality of existing MUGA.	Didcot Town Council	Medium	CIL
<b>Ladygrove Park (Didcot)</b>	Tennis courts Netball court MUGA	Tennis courts, netball courts and MUGA are old and outdated. The facilities are unattractive to consumers and do not meet basic expectations.	<b>Protect and Enhance</b> – Maximise the use of existing assets by improving the quality of existing facilities.	LTA, Didcot Town Council	Short	LTA, CIL
<b>Northfield</b>	New MUGA	In order to meet future demand from new residents, a new MUGA should be considered at	<b>Provide</b> – Explore opportunity for a new multi-use games area that can be used for netball and tennis, and can be	SODC	Medium	S106

Site Name	Facility Type	Issue / Opportunity	Key Action(s)	Lead Partners to deliver action	Timescale (Priority)	Resources
		this Strategic Housing site.	made available for extensive public use.			
<b>Shillingford Warborough Tennis Association</b>	Tennis courts	The tennis courts are 'Below Average' quality and do not meet the expectations of users. The Club plan to refurbish the courts in the next few years.	<b>Protect and Enhance</b> – Maximise the use of existing assets by improving the quality of existing tennis courts.	SODC, LTA	Short	LTA, CIL
<b>Southern Community Centre</b>	MUGA	Install sports-lights where appropriate (i.e., demand identified) to increase availability of MUGAs.	<b>Protect and Enhance</b> – Maximise the use of existing assets by installing sports-lighting for all-year utilisation of MUGA.	Didcot Town Council	Medium	CIL
<b>Wallingford Rowing Club</b>	Water sports	Wallingford Rowing Club boathouse (Grade II listed building) limits the club's growth potential. The Club report a lack of finances to move into bigger premises.  Wallingford Accessible Boat Club does not have a base but has	<b>Protect and Enhance</b> – Explore the boathouse relocation options for Wallingford Rowing Club.  Any new boathouse development should be accessible to people with disabilities.	SODC	Medium	SODC, Sport England

Site Name	Facility Type	Issue / Opportunity	Key Action(s)	Lead Partners to deliver action	Timescale (Priority)	Resources
		advised that water sports facilities in the area should be more accessible to people with disabilities.				
<b>Wallingford School</b>	Sports hall	Wallingford School has the only large sports hall in Wallingford and, therefore, important in terms of accessibility. There is scope to increase availability in the weekly peak period.	<b>Protect and Enhance</b> – Continue to support user clubs and work with facility provider to secure CUAs for existing users. <b>Enhance</b> –Work with the school to increase the number of hours available for community use.	SODC	Short	Officer time
<b>Wallingford Sports Park</b>	Archery range (outdoor) Squash courts	Wallingford Castle Archers shoots over grass rugby pitches at the back of Wallingford Sports Park. The club reported sufficient space for outdoor sessions, but a lack of available sports halls for indoor training sessions is	<b>Protect</b> – The squash courts and outdoor archery range should be retained on this site unless replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location.	SODC	Short	Officer time

Site Name	Facility Type	Issue / Opportunity	Key Action(s)	Lead Partners to deliver action	Timescale (Priority)	Resources
		prohibiting the club from growing. The club would like to have a single venue where everything can take place all year round.				
<b>Willowbrook Leisure Centre (Didcot)</b>	Sports hall Studios	Issues with staffing means the hall must be booked by clubs well in advance. At weekends, the sports hall is used solely for the 'Bounce Park'.	<b>Protect and Enhance</b> – Investigate whether the Centre would increase the opening hours of these facilities. It may be difficult due to the nature of this site, but this increased community offer may help to meet demand.	SODC	Short	Officer time
<b>Site not yet identified</b>	New Activity Hall / Dance Studios	The local share of sports halls, which considers deprivation, is poorest in and Wallingford.	<b>Provide</b> – An activity hall (at least 1-court in size) / dance studio(s) should be provided. Further need assessment work is required in order to determine the exact size of the hall/ no. of studios in Wallingford.	Wallingford Town Council	Medium	CIL



## 16. Scenarios

- 16.1 For this study we have used Sport England's Facilities Planning Model (FPM) data for swimming pools and sports halls in South Oxfordshire. The FPM is a computerised model which helps assess the strategic provision of community sports facilities. It has been developed as a means of assessing requirements for different types of community sports facilities on a local, regional or national scale; and helping local authorities determine an adequate level of sports facility provision to meet their local needs.
- 16.2 The FPM uses census information at output area level to help establish the profile of the population, including, age, gender, and Index of Multiple Deprivation scores. These are all used in the model to estimate the demand for sports facilities.
- 16.3 The FPM also uses the information on the road network (Ordnance Survey MasterMap Highways Network) to estimate how people are prepared to travel. This is essential in helping to understand whether the current supply of sports facilities are in the right place to meet the potential demand.
- 16.4 An important feature of the FPM is that it's prescriptive and not predictive in that it does not provide precise estimates of the use of proposed facilities. Instead, it prescribes an appropriate level of provision for any defined area in relation to demand – this reflects national expectations and policies. The actual usage of a facility will be determined by a range of factors including management and promotional policies, programming and the quality or attractiveness of the facility concerned.
- 16.5 As the demand parameters are based on achieved levels of participation, Sport England believes this level of provision represents good practice rather than some unattainable ideal. This is because the levels of use/demand/throughput visits are what could be produced based on what has been observed at existing facilities. This makes the broad estimates of potential throughput generated by the FPM potentially useful when considering policy options.
- 16.6 The outputs from the FPM assessment provide a needs assessment and evidence base that contributes to securing inward investment for swimming pool and sports hall modernisation and possible further provision, and development of planning policies for the provision of indoor sports facilities. The main report (displayed in the LFAS Assessment Report Appendices) sets out the full set of findings under each of the assessment headings. It has provided a useful starting point and baseline for understanding the supply and demand balance for these sports facilities.
- 16.7 The 'local bespoke' FPM has tested different 'what if' scenarios in provision and changes in demand, this includes testing the impact of opening, relocating and closing facilities and the impact population changes would have on the needs of the sports facilities.
- 16.8 The FPM modelling runs are to provide:
  - Run 1 – a baseline assessment of provision in 2023
  - Run 2 – a forward assessment of demand for pools and halls and their distribution, based on the projected changes in population between 2023 and 2041 and changes in supply

- Run 3 – an assessment of the impact of the modelled options for changes in supply in South Oxfordshire (and Vale of White Horse) has in meeting the demand for pools and halls and their distribution up to 2041.

### **Swimming pools**

16.9 The changes in swimming pool supply in South Oxfordshire included in the modelling runs are:

- Run 2 – Addition of a learner pool at Didcot Wave Leisure Centre, which is modelled to open in 2025.
- Run 3 – Existing Abbey Sports Centre swimming pool (3 lane 18m) replaced with a newer larger pool (4 lane 25m) is modelled to open in 2031.
- Runs 2 and 3 also include a new learner pool at Wantage Leisure Centre in Vale of White Horse modelled to open in 2025.

16.10 The headline strategic finding is that the current and future demand for swimming pools can be met by the available supply. Replacement of Abbey Sports Centre on the same site with a larger pool is included as an option in this assessment and is not a commitment. Its provision is supported by the FPM findings at the scale modelled in Run 3. It improves the quality of the public leisure centre offer and is located in an area where demand increases significantly to 2041.

### Interventions

16.11 Modernisation of the swimming pools is the key intervention. Based on the FPM findings the centres for modernisation, in order, are:

- Thame Leisure Centre:
  - Opened in 2003 and unmodernised
  - Important site in terms of accessibility as it is the only public leisure centre in the northeast of the district
  - Good community swimming offer of a 25m pool, which provides all swimming activities in suitable pool
  - Estimated peak period utilisation of 67% in 2023, increasing to 71% in both runs in 2041 due to the increase in demand
- Henley Leisure Centre:
  - Opened in 1977 and unmodernised
  - Important site in terms of accessibility as it is the only public leisure centre in the southeast of the district
  - Smallest public leisure centre pool in Run 3, at 25m x 9m, but it has the third largest capacity in the district in the weekly peak period
  - Estimated peak period utilisation of 23% in all runs
  - Scale of site is suitable for demand in the area and could reduce the hours available in the weekly peak period to decrease the capacity if required.

16.12 Based on the quantitative assessment there does not need to be further provision at either site. Requirements for modernisation should be based on condition surveys and be subject to a feasibility study focusing on modernisation that enhances the offer and provides a more cost-effective site.

### **Sports halls**

16.13 The changes in sports hall supply in South Oxfordshire included in the FPM modelling runs are:

- Runs 2 and 3 – Didcot North East Leisure Facility (4-courts) is modelled to open in 2028
- Run 3 – Existing Abbey Sports Centre sports hall (4-courts) replaced with a newer larger sports hall (5-courts) is modelled to open in 2031

16.14 The changes in supply in Vale of White Horse also included in the modelling runs are:

- Runs 2 and 3 – St John’s Academy is modelled to open in 2025
- Run 3 – Potential Wantage Leisure Facility is modelled to open in 2028.

16.15 The headline strategic overview is that South Oxfordshire’s sports halls can comfortably meet the current and future demand. However, five sites are uncomfortably busy in 2041 (more than 80% of capacity used). South Oxfordshire’s population and demand for sports halls increase significantly to 2041. Provision of Didcot North East Leisure Facility is supported. Didcot has the greatest demand in the district in 2023 and 2041 but in each run only one sports hall in the town is uncomfortably full. There is a large increase in demand in Berinsfield between 2023 and 2041.

16.16 There is no identified need to increase provision beyond that modelled. However, there is still a need to increase availability for community use in parts of the district. This will achieve a better overall balance between supply and demand. The educational supply offers the most scope.

### *Interventions and Next Steps*

16.17 The quantitative findings identify that there is sufficient supply across the district to meet demand in 2023 and 2041. However, the distribution of demand and the hours the sports halls are available for community use, especially in the areas of highest demand in Didcot, mean that some sports halls are uncomfortably full at peak times. Therefore, the interventions in order are to:

1. Increase access for community use at key sites and provide a more balanced distribution of met demand across the district.
2. Protect the educational sports hall supply for community use by provision of community use agreements (CUA).

### First Intervention

16.18 Based on the FPM findings, there are four sites that are uncomfortably full and have scope to increase availability and, therefore, capacity at peak times. The sites are:

- Abbey Sports Centre:
  - Demand in Berinsfield is high in 2041
  - Estimated to be full at peak times and meet the second most visits in Run 3
- Didcot Girls School:
  - Four-court hall (33m x 18m) and activity hall (18m x 10m), which allow flexibility in programming activities and maximises occupancy
  - Not been modernised, the main hall is currently 17 years old and the activity hall 43 years old
  - Located in the area of highest demand in the district
  - Estimated to be uncomfortably busy at peak times in Runs 2 and 3 and meet the fifth most visits at a site
  - Scope to increase availability in the weekly peak period to reduce the proportion of capacity used to a comfortable level
- Thame Leisure Centre:
  - Four-court hall (33m x 18m) and activity hall (18m x 10m), which allow flexibility in programming activities and maximises occupancy
  - Opened in 1982, main hall modelled by the FPM to be modernised in 2025
  - Only public leisure centre in the north of the district and, therefore, very important in terms of accessibility
  - Estimated to be full in Runs 2 and 3 and meet the most visits at a site
  - Lord William's School is nearby and less utilised, therefore, there is scope to manage demand across the two sites to achieve a more balanced level of community use in Thame
- Wallingford School:
  - Four-court hall (34.5m x 20m), which is the size supported by Sport England and National Governing Bodies for all hall sports and club development
  - Opened in 1999 and unmodernised
  - Only sports hall in Wallingford and, therefore, important in terms of accessibility
  - Estimated to be uncomfortably busy at peak times in Runs 2 and 3
  - Scope to increase availability by 13 hours in the weekly peak period to reduce the proportion of capacity used to a comfortable level

### Second Intervention

- 16.19 The educational sector is the largest provider of sports halls in South Oxfordshire, at 11 sites in 2023 and 12 sites in 2041, they account for between 65% and 67% of the total sites across the runs. As evidenced by the first intervention, the schools are important in meeting demand.
- 16.20 While there is sufficient capacity to meet demand across the district, this will be jeopardised if access to educational sites is not protected and enhanced selectively. Therefore, it is important to protect the educational sports hall supply for community use. If CUAs are not in place, these need to be negotiated and agreed.
- 16.21 If there are any new or replacement educational sports halls planned, then it will be important to negotiate a CUA as part of the planning process. Sport England will advise on the requirements as part of this. Beyond putting the CUA in place, it is essential that South Oxfordshire Council monitors the actual delivery of the CUA.

### **“Do nothing”**

- 16.22 A “do nothing” or absence of a strategy scenario has major implications for providing for both formal and informal sport. Demand is not fully catered for by supply at the current time in most sport facility types, particularly swimming pools and sports halls. With projected population and participation growth there would be a very significant lack of provision with major impacts on physical, mental and social health. Doing nothing also implies no improvements to facility quality, meaning that capacity to accommodate even current levels of play would be substantially reduced over time, particularly as sports hall surfaces degrade and require replacement. Doing nothing also implies that new provision or financial contributions would not be sought from development, a key source of funding and locations of new additional facilities.

## **17. Action Plan Framework and Delivery**

### **(What needs to be done to implement the strategy?)**

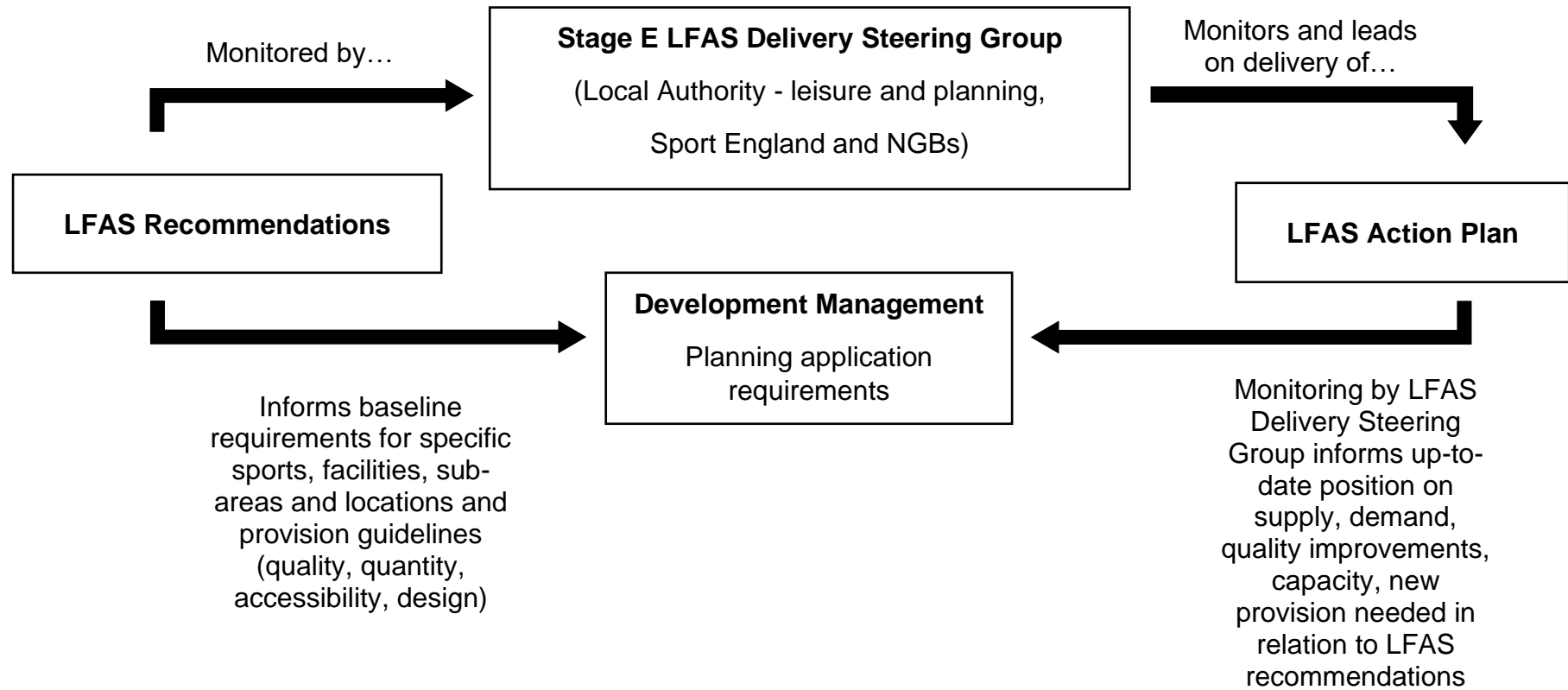
#### **Action Plan**

- 17.1 Following consultation on the draft strategy and any changes made as a result, confirmed recommendations and actions will be set out and monitored in a “live” action plan framework which members of the steering group will have a responsibility to update and implement. As noted earlier this implementation will also depend on steering group members co-ordinating and working closely with clubs, teams, league organisers, providers, owners of current facilities and owners of facilities and potential sites for additional facilities. The action plan framework will, in time, be updated by the District Council and delivery informed by other priorities such as (but not limited to) response to the climate emergency, economic recovery and levels of deprivation. The delivery stage will also confirm options for change presented in this strategy as further work during implementation is done on feasibility, viability and implications of other actions.

#### **Planning Officer Guidance on Using this Strategy**

- 17.2 To aid use of the strategy by local authority planning officers, the diagram below aims to guide local authority officers on the key factors to think about when considering development proposals / planning applications.

**Guide to Interface between Delivery and Use of Strategy Recommendations to Inform Planning Applications**



- 17.3 Within this context, the following figure provides a guide for planning officers to aid use and application of this strategy when considering planning proposals.

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### Guidance / Thought Process

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The LFAS deals with facilities and sports defined in the typology. It has had input from local clubs, sports governing bodies, Sport England and key stakeholders. Consider the diagram above for context and relationship between DM and this strategy.

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The Executive Summary provides a useful overview of the strategy and its findings in broad terms.

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If you think that the proposal does or is likely to have an impact on existing or future provision / needs/ demand, or you simply do not know, initially discuss with 'Planning Policy' officers and or 'Leisure' officers.

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Identify where in the study area the proposal is and which sub-area it is within (and if it is on the edge of a sub-area).

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If on the edge of a sub-area, bear in mind that an appropriate response to development proposals may need to take into account demand from other adjoining sub-areas.

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Appropriate provision for sport to respond to demand from development may not require an on-site solution but instead require off-site provision or contributions to such provision, often at an existing facility or club base.

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Early consideration is required of how financial contributions should be collected for sport (i.e. through CIL or s106, subject to the adopted CIL regime and also whether negotiation with the Parish or Town Council is appropriate with regard to use of their CIL proportion to deliver enhancements from demand from the new development.

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Contributions are most likely to be required to focus on addressing capacity at existing sites nearest to the proposal, although this will not always be the case. This should be discussed with NGBs and / or Sport England in the first instance who maintain a strategic picture of demand during LFAS delivery.

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When considering recommendations of the strategy, they are split by sport in the main body of the strategy and by sub area. In both of these sections, recommendations are set out under the headings of "PROTECT", "ENHANCE" AND "PROVIDE".

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Loss of facilities. The "bottom-line" in this strategy is protect all facilities from loss and to protect mothballed / closed / unused facilities for future use and to accommodate potential future demand. If unavoidable, replacement could be a solution.

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## **18. Monitoring and Review**

**(How will the implementation of the strategy and action framework be monitored and reviewed?)**

- 18.1 As referred to in the strategy recommendations, it is important that the strategy and impact of its actions are monitored to ensure that supply matches demand "on the ground". This is particularly important later during the strategy period given that future demand in the longer-term is less accurate given that it is based on projections. As actions are implemented, a "plan, deliver, monitor, manage" approach should be employed.
- 18.2 It is recommended that the strategy is reviewed after a period of 5 years or before this time should substantive changes be made to supply, demand or implications of change likely to take place during the strategy period (such as significant confirmed or adopted changes in levels of housing or population growth). Equally, other triggers for a review before this time could be changes to planning or sports policy or the methodology used to assess facilities or the desire to better understand likely provision required beyond the current adopted development plan periods.

## **Appendix 1: Summary of Other Strategies & Plans and Funding Opportunities**

**(What key strategies & plans and funding opportunities are relevant to the LFAS?)**

### National Planning Policy Framework and National Planning Practice Guidance

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires that planning policy making and decision taking should consider the role of health and wellbeing in planning and has stringent policies around the protection of sports facilities, the disposal of which can only be considered if robust evidence can be provided to support alternative, equal and replacement provision. Particularly since county and district local authorities took on new public health responsibilities in 2013, an increasing range of statutory, corporate and planning documents, including Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), Sport England and National Governing Body (NGB) strategies, reiterate the importance of creating healthy environments which can support and benefit people's wellbeing – both physical and mental.

The Government's Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) helps the policies in the NPPF to be interpreted and appropriately applied through a series of questions and answers for various topics. The guidance refers to Sport England guidance in relation to assessing needs for sport and offers advice on how open space should be taken into account in planning. Again, this ties in the importance of the consideration of facilities in a wider context including health, recreation and landscape.

### Current District-wide Planning Policies

The key (non-site-specific) policies relating to leisure facilities for the local authority area are reproduced below. South and Vale district councils Emerging Joint Local Plan has the following draft policies:

- Healthy Places Policy 2 – Community facilities and services. This policy protects community facilities and services from loss; supports new or extended facilities and requires contributions for new infrastructure.
- Healthy Places Policy 4 – Education Provision. This policy ensures school and college facilities are designed to encourage community use outside school opening hours.
- Healthy Places Policy 5 – Existing open space, sport & recreation facilities. This policy seeks to protect existing open space, sport and recreation and play facilities from development.
- Healthy Places Policy 6 – New facilities for sport, physical activity and recreation. This policy supports the provision of new facilities for sport and recreation.
- IN1 – Infrastructure provision. This policy ensures new development is served and supported by appropriate infrastructure.
- Planning contributions collected to provide infrastructure and to support the maintenance for infrastructure through planning obligations, through the Community Infrastructure Levy or other mechanisms.

This LFAS and its recommendations can inform the review of these planning policies at the appropriate time. The strategy can also inform the review of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) alongside the use of section 106 planning obligations.

### Neighbourhood Plans

Neighbourhood plans are statutory development plans which can be prepared by parish and town councils and neighbourhood plan forums in unparished areas. They provide a layer of local detailed planning policy within the context of national and district planning policies. In SODC, the following parishes are developing or have an adopted neighbourhood plan. The SODC or individual parish councils' website should be viewed to understand the up-to-date position at any point during the strategy period.

These plans are important to take into account in terms of how the strategy deals with facilities in those areas relative to policies in the plans. There is also a connection between the priorities that a community identifies in terms of infrastructure provision (including facilities), the recommendations made for specific sites in this strategy and any Community Infrastructure Levy payments made to the local community which should be recognised by all of those organisations and providers with an interest and / or responsibility in maintaining and delivering high quality spaces, sports facilities and ancillary / associated facilities.

### Health and Wellbeing

The LFAS has clear links to helping maintain and improve the physical and mental health and wellbeing of residents in the district through the use of facilities by both formal sports clubs and teams, informal and social use of facilities such as swimming pools and sports halls, and also the use of outdoor facilities where it is part of an area of open greenspace such as a park or recreation ground.

The public health agenda and provision for sport is becoming more focused on provision for informal, casual and social play in addition to formal / competitive play, in order to help get people more active in their day to day lives. Coronavirus has brought this into perhaps sharper focus. There is also a clear role for multi-purpose community facilities in the promotion and use of facility space for sport and other wider health and recreation activities. It will be important, therefore, for the LFAS to inform the next review of SODC's Active Communities Strategy. There are also close links between the provision of good quality facilities and facility infrastructure with the work of the Oxfordshire Activity and Sports Partnership (OASP) whose Vision is to "Achieve healthier and happier communities in Oxfordshire through physical activity."

The LFAS also has clear links between levels of deprivation (identified by the Indices of Multiple Deprivation) across the district and impacts on health. Levels of deprivation will need to be considered alongside future programmes of improvement of existing facilities (where needed) in the district and how best to utilise greenspace for improvement in levels of activity, which may or may not involve built sports facilities. Many of the recommendations of the strategy link closely with some of the principles of "Active Design" supported by Sport England, and the appropriate provision of facilities and associated facilities (in terms of location and quality) can help contribute positively to achieving the delivery of active places "on the ground".

Sport England: “Uniting the Movement” 2021-2031

In 2021, Sport England published their latest strategy, “Uniting the Movement”<sup>2</sup>, a 10-year vision to transform lives and communities through sport and physical activity. The strategy has three objectives: advocating for movement, sport and physical activity; joining forces on five big issues (recover and reinvent, connecting communities, positive experiences for children and young people, connecting with health & wellbeing, and active environments); and, creating the catalysts for change.

The LFAS will play a clear role in helping to achieve some of these objectives in the local land-use context and there is a very clear and direct link with objectives such as supporting and delivering active environments and positive experiences for children and young people.



The Strategy’s Relationship with Health and Wellbeing and Active Travel

The LFAS has clear links to helping maintain and improve the physical and mental health and wellbeing of residents in the District through the use of pitches by both formal sports clubs and teams, informal and social use of facilities. The public health agenda and provision for sport is becoming more focused on provision for informal, casual and social play in addition to formal / competitive play, in order to help get people more active in their day to day lives. Coronavirus brought this into perhaps sharper focus. There is also a clear role for multi-purpose facilities in the promotion and use of facility space for sport and other wider health and recreation activities.

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.sportengland.org/why-were-here/uniting-the-movement>

It will be important, therefore, for the LFAS to inform the Health and Wellbeing Board's next review of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2024-2030<sup>3</sup>. There are also close links between the provision of good quality sports facilities and facility infrastructure with the work of the Active Partnership whose Vision is "Everybody in Oxfordshire is physically active".

The data which underpins the Health and Wellbeing Strategy is set out in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA)<sup>4</sup> which, amongst other data, cites the link between levels of deprivation (identified by the Indices of Multiple Deprivation) across the District and impacts on health. Levels of deprivation will need to be considered alongside future programmes of improvement of existing pitches and facilities (where needed) in the District and how best to utilise greenspace for improvement in levels of activity, which may or may not involve sports facilities.

Many of the recommendations of the strategy link closely with some of the principles of "Active Design" supported by Sport England<sup>5</sup>, which centre around accessibility, awareness and amenity, and the appropriate provision of sports facilities and associated facilities (in terms of location and quality) can help contribute positively to achieving the delivery of active places "on the ground".

Linked closely to the opportunity for more people to be more active through sport is the desire for a greater number of people to take active travel options more often. The Oxfordshire Local Transport and Connectivity Plan 5<sup>6</sup>, sets out the strategic plan for transport with a vision "to deliver a net-zero Oxfordshire transport and travel system that enables the county to thrive while protecting the environment and making Oxfordshire a better place to live for all residents". Other plans, such as the Active Travel Strategy<sup>7</sup> and the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) being developed across the county (for example, and related to the District, are the plan in place at Abingdon and plans to develop a LCWIP for Didcot) seek to enable active travel change through improvements to walking and cycling infrastructure.

At the District level, there is a joint South and Vale Districts Active Communities Strategy now in place. The strategy sets out how the Councils' plan to improve the health and wellbeing of its residents and the key role that the authorities play in providing high quality active opportunities for our communities, to contribute to tackling inactivity and addressing the inequalities that challenge society. The main themes in the strategy are: enabling everyone to be active, create healthier communities through walking and cycling, maximise the potential of our natural environment, building the skills base of our communities, effective communication, promotion and consultation, and collaborative partnerships and funding advice. The LFAS should play a key component part in helping the Councils deliver improving health and wellbeing, alongside a multitude of other action plans, programmes and strategies all seeking or contributing to improved health outcomes for the residents of the Districts.

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<sup>3</sup> See <https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/health-wellbeing>

<sup>4</sup> See <https://insight.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/joint-strategic-needs-assessment>

<sup>5</sup> See <https://www.sportengland.org/facilities-planning/active-design/> for Active Design guidance. For all other Sport England advice and guidance relating to planning for sport see <https://www.sportengland.org/how-we-can-help/facilities-and-planning/planning-for-sport>

## Funding Opportunities

The nature of funding for sports facilities is constantly changing and evolving, and particularly so in light of the coronavirus pandemic. This strategy, therefore, given that it covers an extensive period of time, does not seek to define what current funding opportunities are in detail due to changes which will undoubtedly occur over time. However, the list below provides a brief (but not exhaustive) summary of funding opportunities across sports. Readers should not rely on this list being either comprehensive or up-to-date and those with an interest in funding facility maintenance, improvement or additional new provision should discuss funding opportunities available to them at the time of interest with the local authority, Sport England, Sports Governing Bodies and other relevant organisations such as the Lawn Tennis Association.

- Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)<sup>8</sup>
- Section 106 planning obligations<sup>9</sup>
- Sport England Small Grants Programme<sup>10</sup>
- Sport England Active Together<sup>11</sup>
- Big Lottery Fund<sup>12</sup>
- Public Work Loans Board (PWLB)<sup>13</sup>
- Multi-sport Funding<sup>14</sup>

In addition to accessing capital funding opportunities, those providing additional facilities must take into account the long-term revenue implications of running, managing, maintaining and replacing facilities as they plan for the future. Many funders providing capital grants and loans will likely require a sustainable viability test and / or business plan to be in place (particularly where large sums of money are involved).

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<sup>8</sup> a charge on new developments applied by the local authority to developments which meet certain criteria and is most often collected for housing schemes on a charge per square metre – see <https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/community-support/infrastructure-to-support-communities/community-infrastructure-levy-or-cil-header-page/community-infrastructure-levy-cil-payments-and-procedures/> for more information.

<sup>9</sup> Section 106 planning obligations deliver infrastructure and site specific requirements related to a development that cannot be delivered through CIL but are necessary in order for planning permission to be granted. Contact the local authority for further information on the application of section 106 to sports facilities and pitches outside of CIL.

<sup>10</sup> See <http://www.lotterygoodcauses.org.uk/funding/small-grants>

<sup>11</sup> See <https://www.sportengland.org/funds-and-campaigns/our-funds>

<sup>12</sup> See <https://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/>

## Appendix 2: Action Plan

A detailed Action Plan and delivery monitor spreadsheet will be provided to the District Council for use with the LFAS steering group to track and monitor change and delivery of the actions and priorities during the strategy period. (Separate document – excel spreadsheet).

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