

## **East Cambridgeshire District Council**

### **Outline Sport & Activity Strategy**

#### **1.0 Policy Background**

- 1.1. It is widely accepted that participation in active leisure carries benefits both to individuals and to the community – for example in health and social engagement. This belief underpinned the growth of public sports centres from the 1970s onwards, the ‘Sport for All’ campaigns of the 1980s, and more recently government support for the hosting of the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.
- 1.2. The wider context to this is generally recognised. In particular:
  - 1.2.1. The automation of work processes and increased car use, for example, have led to lower levels of physical activity for many of the adult population; while safety considerations and the growth of screen-based entertainment have had the same effect on children’s activity-levels.
  - 1.2.2. Potential consequences of this reduction in activity-levels are thought to include rising weight problems, increased incidence of certain major illnesses, and declines in mental health and community engagement.
  - 1.2.3. These consequences are accentuated by significant variances in activity-levels across society, which arguably exacerbate wider inequalities in (for example) health and social capital
- 1.3. These are pervasive and structural influences, and leisure activities alone may not wholly offset them; but they can make a significant contribution. This view has been reinforced in a succession of recent health policy documents (eg UK Department of Health 2004, 2009; World Health Organisation 2010; Public Health England 2014).
- 1.4. Against this background, a new government strategy for sport (December 2015) explicitly aims to increase participation in sport and leisure in the interests of health, and of personal, social & community development
- 1.5. This aim is however accompanied by a shift in focus. Continued support for formally organised sports, in specialised settings, is balanced by a more overt policy support for settings where activity can merge with everyday life;

and greater recognition of informal activities such as walking, cycling, and dance, and 'street' sports such as parkour and skateboarding.

1.6. For the Authority, all of this matters because:

1.6.1. The strategy explicitly recognises the importance of local authorities - both in connecting with local communities, and in providing the facilities and organisational resources for delivery. This can extend beyond pure leisure provision to (for example) planning and infrastructure.

1.6.2. The strategy aligns closely with our wider interest in public health (as expressed in our Health and Wellbeing Strategy); in the strength of our workforce; and in local quality of life – all of which help to shape the District's economic development and appeal as a living environment.

1.6.3. The government's approach frames the priorities of the national agencies, most obviously in sport and public health, which support and fund initiatives at local level.

1.7. It is therefore timely to review our purpose and approach in respect of sport and physical activity, placing these themes in local context. In doing so, this document also seeks to provide a coherent framework for our approach and support to leisure services and facilities in the District.

1.8. As reflected in the discussion above, the community benefits of such a strategy are driven by participation. The aims of the strategy are therefore

1.8.1. **To develop leisure-based participation-levels**

1.8.2. **That increases in participation reflect the whole community, and not just those who are easiest to reach**

It is not enough to merely build out from existing user groups, who comprise only half of the population. A meaningful increase in participation must include people to whom these activities may seem inaccessible, unfamiliar, or simply a low priority.

1.8.3. **To embed participation over an extended period of time**

The aim is to make sport and physical activity part of the local lifestyle, not an occasional visitor attraction. This means that the range of opportunities must be capable of holding people's interest over time, though not necessarily in one activity alone.

- 1.9. The mechanisms for achieving these aims will reflect wider participation factors and local context, and are outlined below.

## **2.0 Influences on participation**

- 2.1. Participation choices are subject to a range of influences, which can be loosely grouped into:

- 2.1.1. Personal factors - eg prior familiarity & skill; physical condition; personal priorities and work / family commitments

- 2.1.2. Social environment – such as personal networks & peer groups; and wider community values & beliefs

- 2.1.3. Practical factors - including facilities, booking & membership arrangements, programmes, and host culture (the informal characteristics which may suit regular participants very well, but can make others feel that they do not 'fit in', or see the appeal).

- 2.2. These influences may operate differently over time; and between individuals. In broad terms, they are reflected in participation patterns, with some demographic groups consistently under-represented in leisure participation – such as those on low incomes, or from certain ethnic minorities, and women and girls in general. Policy in this area has historically revolved around these social structure issues, and it is clear that they retain some relevance.

- 2.3. But the decision to participate (or not) remains an individual one - and an open-ended process, which may entail different forms of intervention at different stages, and for different individuals. Recent work for Sport England identifies five levels of engagement or non-engagement with sport, ranging from complete disinterest to firm adherence; and highlights the fact that while some people never engage, many will vary their level of involvement according to circumstances. Whatever the proportions of active / inactive across the population, they are not always the same people.

- 2.4. From either perspective, a multi-dimensional strategy is required, framed to fit local context, rather than a focus purely on supply-side factors such as facilities, costs, and access arrangements.

## **3.0 Local context**

- 3.1. Local participation levels are indicated by the Active People Surveys commissioned by Sport England since 2005. These surveys are national in scope, but the data is analysed (albeit with some technical limitations) to

provide a local participation picture. We also have available health and socio-economic data from the Cambridgeshire Observatory.

- 3.2. Adult participation levels in the District are below average for England as a whole, and slightly further below that for the region. There are however local variations, with participation above average in the centre of the district, and below average in some other localities. 39% of those who are currently inactive are interested in taking part in some form of activity (based on 2013 data). This suggests that participation levels may increase if appropriate opportunities can be created. The health profile of the District is generally better than the national average – with the relevant exception of excess weight, for which we come out somewhat worse.
- 3.3. Current activity provision has some significant strengths, and some weaknesses:
  - 3.3.1. Our leisure facility network is diverse and well distributed across the district; but recorded satisfaction-levels with local sports provision have fallen in recent years. This correlates with the findings of the recent Indoor Facilities Assessment and is reflected in our existing approach to the leisure centre network; but much remains to be done in this area.
  - 3.3.2. The sports club network – which is a principal channel for structured sports competition or coaching, and in some sports is critical to absorbing and retaining new participants – is uneven. The opportunities vary according to the facilities available, the level of support from the sport's governing body, the capacities of individual clubs, and the costs involved.
  - 3.3.3. School sport, particularly at primary level, is well supported by the School Sports Partnership based at Witchford Village College; but there are limitations to its reach. School swimming for example is organised by the schools themselves – and therefore varies significantly - and links from school to club sport depend largely on local connections, so whether children have the opportunity to develop their talents or are encouraged to continue in some form when they leave school, is somewhat a matter of chance. This and similar transitions have long been recognised as 'fault-lines' in sports participation.

#### 4.0 **Strategy Objectives**

4.1. Based on these considerations, there is clearly scope to improve provision at various levels, to increase opportunities across the district, and build on current levels of participation. In order to achieve this, a series of approaches are proposed, under four related headings:

#### 4.2. **Development of facility network and services**

4.2.1. Integration of new centre and wider facility network into coherent service approaches, eg

- Adoption of district-wide leisure card system (subject to feasibility and affordability)
- Adoption of professional quality management systems, and coherent approach to promotion and access / booking arrangements

4.2.2. Substantive upgrade to existing facility network

Options will be developed for consideration by stakeholders and potential funders as appropriate in each case

4.2.3. Review and development of outdoor sports provision (eg playing pitches, MUGAs) and 'open access' facilities - eg trails / cycle routes / outdoor gym installations – to support localised activity.

#### 4.3. **Development of activity-programmes**

4.3.1. Stronger linkages with health-led activity programmes - eg weight management, falls prevention – in collaboration with health-agencies

4.3.2. Promotion of local activity-programmes in collaboration with County Sports Partnership and County Health agencies

Work in these areas will include creation of easy pathways from these programmes into 'mainstream' leisure programmes

4.3.3. Development of more 'open access' programming, incl sport-specific and target-population activities (eg youth, older people)

4.3.4. Targeted provisions to address specific barriers & target populations, eg people on low incomes, women & girls, people with disabilities, over-60s

- 4.3.5. 'Enabling' teaching programmes for key skills, eg swimming
- 4.3.6. Promotion of more structured junior development programmes & pathways

#### **4.4. Development of local sports network capacity and organisation**

- 4.4.1. Support for capacity-building including coaching, club organisation, volunteer development & training
- 4.4.2. Promotion of stronger cross-provider linkages between community, education, health & sport sectors, including clearer programme linkages and support arrangements for new & transferring participants

#### **4.5. Development of community engagement & awareness**

- 4.5.1. Engagement (including programming and pricing initiatives) with community organisations, schools, health agencies, workplaces and low-participant groups
- 4.5.2. Active participation in national sports body & agency campaigns (eg Amateur Swimming Association, Sport England, Public Health England)

#### **5.0 Constraints and resources**

- 5.1. Co-ordination of these activities will form part of the work programme for the Senior Leisure Services Officer, in collaboration with partner organisations.
- 5.2. Resources for service delivery – for example in the leisure centres, or for community-based programmes – will generally be funded from existing budgetary provisions, revenue generation or external partner funding, based on the business case.
- 5.3. Facility developments will – excepting the new district leisure centre, and any localised provision – focus on upgrading present facilities and infrastructure. Investments will be funded from existing budgetary provisions, revenue generation, development contributions, and external grants on a case-by-case basis.
- 5.4. Resources aside, the principal constraint upon the implementation of the strategy is securing the commitment of partners, both within the district (eg the local trusts) and more widely (eg sports governing bodies, education and health agencies). While the principles and aims are not contentious,

differences in focus and priority are to be expected, and work to build the necessary consensus will be a continuing requirement.

## **6.0 Evaluation**

6.1. It is proposed to evaluate the outcomes of the strategy over the medium term (5 – 7 years), at three levels:

6.1.1. Attendances by programme or service – eg activity programmes, health referrals, etc

Targets at this level will be adopted on a case-by-case basis, reflecting the relevant business case or usage projections

6.1.2. Facility-attendances, including both the existing network and the proposed new centre

Targets will require baseline data, so will be finalised following more detailed analysis of current usage (and early results for the new centre).

6.1.3. Activity levels across the District population, as recorded by Sport England surveys (Active People / Active Lives)

Nationally, changes in activity levels have proved problematic. The government strategy does not attempt to set a target, and Sport England is currently engaged in a review of the data. Local targets will be set when that data is available.

## **7.0 Summary**

7.1. The developments in the policy landscape, and the commitments which the Authority has already made in respect of leisure facilities across the District, point towards the need for a coordinated strategic approach, which:

7.1.1. Provides a coherent framework for our continuing support to leisure services and facilities

7.1.2. Complements and builds upon elements of the Authority's recently adopted Health and Wellbeing Strategy

7.1.3. Helps to identify current gaps and priorities for development

7.2. This paper seeks to address these issues and opportunities.