

**Meeting:** Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
**Date:** 13 December 2012  
**Subject:** Draft Leisure Facility Strategy  
**Report of:** Cllr Brian Spurr, Executive Member for Sustainable Communities - Services  
**Summary:** The report provides an overview of the Leisure Strategy, progress to date and sets out emerging preferred options for the Leisure Facility Strategy for comment prior to Executive on 8 January 2013.

---

**Advising Officer:** Gary Alderson, Director of Sustainable Communities  
**Contact Officer:** Jill Dickinson, Head of Leisure Services  
**Public/Exempt:** Public  
**Wards Affected:** All  
**Function of:** Executive

## **CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

### **Council Priorities:**

1 The Leisure Facility Strategy will support the following Council priorities;

- Enhancing Central Bedfordshire – creating jobs, managing growth, protecting our countryside and enabling businesses to grow.
- Promote health and wellbeing and protecting the vulnerable.
- Great universal services – bins, leisure and libraries.
- Value for money – freezing council tax.

### **Financial:**

2 The Leisure Facility Strategy will be used to guide investment priorities including CBC capital investment. The capital programme, approved at Council on 23 February 2012 includes funds for Leisure Strategy Implementation and together with Saxon Pool and Leisure Centre sports hall extension totalled £8m over 4 years from 2012/13 to 2015/16.

3 In order to support the emerging themes of the Leisure Strategy a range of potential schemes have been considered which limit the cost to the Council of borrowing capital funds, either by providing income for the Council and/or can be supported by third party contributions. Two schemes at Tiddenfoot and Saxon Pool Leisure Centres were approved by Executive on 2 October 2012 totalling £3.1m. These two projects are in detailed design stage for commencement towards the end of March 2013.

- 4 Initial affordability modelling has started to identify costs and CBC capital investment for refurbishment and/or rebuilding facilities from 2013/14 onwards on a phased basis which will also propose use of the capital budget that has not been spent in 2012/13 as set out in the Executive report of 2 October 2012. Additional capital requirements may be necessary in 2013/14 not currently budgeted for if Houghton Regis Leisure Centre swimming pool is reopened.
- 5 It is also intended for the Leisure Facilities Strategy to be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to secure Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy funds.

**Legal:**

6. Public authorities have a statutory duty to promote equality. This is dealt with in detail in the Equalities section of Corporate Implications.

**Risk Management:**

7. The following risks have been identified, which are considered in more detail below:
  - Failure to deliver the Council's priorities
  - Reputational risks
  - Risk to customer satisfaction
8. The development of the Leisure Facility Strategy, part of the Council's Medium Term Plan is planned for approval by Executive in January 2013. Emerging preferred options aim to address key issues which have been tested by member and stakeholder consultation. The approved capital programme includes funds for Leisure Strategy Implementation.
9. Sport England methodology used to assess the quality, quantity and accessibility of a range of specific sports facilities shows the Council has aging leisure centres operating at capacity and in some cases operating above the threshold for comfortable use at peak times. Additional capacity is required to reduce pressure on these facilities and prevent a decline in customer satisfaction levels.
10. Other risks, such as failure to discharge statutory responsibilities, failure of partnership working, procurement, environmental and financial risks could also be incurred during the implementation of the strategy. The strategy serves to minimise these risks by setting an agreed framework for development.

**Staffing (including Trades Unions):**

11. Not Applicable.

**Equalities/Human Rights:**

12. Public authorities have a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics; age disability, gender re-assignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

13. The improvements to the leisure facilities aim to enhance customer experience and promote equality of opportunity, and make sport and physical activity a regular part of life for all.

#### **Public Health**

14. Leisure facilities are a key community health resource. The Leisure Facility Strategy aims to ensure there is a sustainable and high quality sport and physical activity infrastructure for local communities to engage in regular physical activity to help prevent ill health, generate long term improvements in overall levels of health and wellbeing and thereby reducing the costs to society for the NHS and social care.

#### **Community Safety:**

15. Under section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act the Council has a statutory duty to do all that is reasonable to prevent crime and disorder with its areas. Leisure facilities and the activities that they offer provide positive opportunities, particularly to young people, who may otherwise engage in activities that may be considered anti-social.

#### **Sustainability:**

16. The Leisure Facility Strategy will seek to extend and improve facilities so that our customers participate in sport and physical activity through a network of good quality accessible and readily available public sport and recreation facilities, reducing the need for customers to travel to other local authority areas to participate in these activities.
17. Leisure Centres are significant contributors to the Council's carbon footprint (12%) and improving energy consumption/efficiency (which also has benefits in terms of running costs) will be an important consideration as part any key emerging preferred options.

#### **Procurement:**

18. Procurement of consultants to support CBC in developing all chapters of the Leisure Strategy was undertaken via a Sport England framework compliant with CBC procurement rules.
19. The Leisure Facility Strategy will guide the Council's leisure facility investment decisions, and any future Executive approval for capital investment in leisure facilities will be followed by a procurement process to identify appropriate professional project management consultants to undertake detailed design, engineering and quantity surveying services. The procurement of these services will be carried out in consultation with the Council's procurement team via an existing local authority purchasing and distribution framework agreement known as Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation (ESPO) approved by CBC. Procurement for a construction contract to undertake the capital investment works will then be procured.

20. The Leisure Management contract for Sandy Sport and Community Centre, Saxon Pool and Leisure Centre, Flitwick Leisure Centre and Houghton Regis Leisure Centre will be procured with the support of the Council's procurement team using a restricted tender route for a contract start date of 1 October 2013.

#### **RECOMMENDATION(S):**

**The Committee is asked to:-**

- 1. Comment on the process and progress to date and emerging preferred options for inclusion in the Leisure Facility Strategy to be approved by Executive on 8 January 2013.**
- 2. Comment on emerging capital investment priorities for phased CBC capital expenditure from 2013/14 onwards.**

#### **Introduction**

21. The Leisure Strategy is part of the Medium Term Operational Plan and will provide;
- a comprehensive picture of leisure facilities and opportunities within Central Bedfordshire up to 2031
  - Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) strategies in compliance with Local Development Framework (LDF) requirements for securing and spending Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy funds
  - strategic direction for the delivery of leisure facilities and opportunities for all potential stakeholders across the area
  - direction for CBC capital investment proposals to meet customers needs

- 22 The Leisure Strategy is broad in scope and the timetable for its development is phased.
- Chapter 1 Leisure Facilities (indoor sport and leisure centres, comprising a range of sport and leisure activities) commenced in January 2012 and will be completed and ready for SPD consultation by January 2013. The need for subsequent research on facilities in community and village halls has been identified and commissioned. Results will be added to the Chapter 1 findings in January 2013.
  - Chapter 2 – Recreation and Open Space (a defined range of green spaces, providing formal and informal recreational activity facilities and opportunities) commenced in July 2012 and will be completed by June 2013.
  - Chapter 3 – Playing Pitches (outdoor formal, grass and artificially-surfaced sports playing pitches) commenced in October 2012 and will be completed by June 2013.
  - Chapter 4 – Physical Activity (a defined range of physical activity classes, sports, exercises etc. undertaken indoors and outdoor) commenced in October 2012 and will be completed by May 2013.
- 23 The project is managed in line with Prince 2 methodology, with a Project Board comprising Assistant Director, Executive Members and a range of internal and external stakeholders including Neil Allan Associates the consultants appointed to support project delivery. The Board has met on five occasions since approving the Project Initiation Document and Communication and Consultation Strategy on 30 January 2012.

## **METHODOLOGY**

24. An audit and assessment of leisure facilities has involved undertaking desk based research using Sport England tools, facility inspections, stakeholder consultation and two Facility Planning Model runs (Sport England modelling of supply and demand of existing facilities in 2012 and 2022). This approach is considered to be best practice by Sport England.
25. A third Facility Planning Model run prepared in consultation with the Leader, Deputy Leader, and Executive Members for Sustainable Communities Services modelled specific scenarios for pools and sports halls to test locations of new facilities and/or extensions to existing facilities, and/or rationalisation of facilities and their impact on meeting demand and capacity issues.
26. The Audit & Assessment Report details the evidence on facility quality, quantity and future needs of leisure facilities and is available for public view and comment at [www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk).
27. The key findings from the audit and assessment as summarised in Appendix A and described in paragraph 30 of this report shaped the Issues and Options for leisure facilities. Early consultation with members and wider stakeholders in May 2012 considered initial findings.

28. The Issues and Options report, at Appendix B, has been subject to consultation with members on 8 November 2012 and wider stakeholders on 19 and 21 November 2012. The consultation has validated the audit and assessment and gained broad consensus on the key findings and issues and options.
29. As a result of that consultation on the Issues and Options, emerging preferred options have been identified which will form the basis of the draft leisure facility strategy.
30. On 8 January 2013 Executive will consider for approval the Leisure Facility Strategy. The report will make recommendations on policy, and investment priorities prior to consultation for adoption as a Supplementary Planning Document. The same report will also provide an update on leisure management contract procurement.

## **KEY FINDINGS FROM AUDIT AND ASSESSMENT**

31. A summary of the key findings is set out in Appendix 1. The main themes can be summarised as follows;
  - There is a low supply of facilities in Central Bedfordshire. This relates to swimming pools, sports halls, squash courts, indoor bowls, indoor tennis and health and fitness equipment.
  - Facilities are well located to serve the needs of local residents
  - Overall demand for these facilities is met because residents also use facilities in neighbouring authority areas.
  - The leisure facility stock is aging with the need to invest to prevent a decline in use.
  - Facilities are at capacity and in some cases operate above the threshold for comfortable use at peak times. Additional capacity is required to reduce pressure on these facilities.
  - Rationalisation of the existing stock with newly built facilities in new locations within the growth area of Leighton Linlade and Houghton Regis do not serve those growing populations any better than the existing facility locations do and may disadvantage existing users.

## **EMERGING PREFERRED OPTIONS**

32. Emerging preferred options are starting to set a direction of travel to form the basis of the Leisure Facility Strategy to be approved by Executive on 8 January 2013. These emerging preferred options include;
33. (a) Develop an approach to planning standards for facility provision to;
  - i. identify planning policy approach to new provision
  - ii. ensure consistency of approach in dealing with planning applications
  - iii. ensure provision is appropriately targeted in relevant areas of Central Bedfordshire
  - iv. provide clear and reasoned justification for S106 / CIL negotiations and contributions

34. (b) Extend capacity and make significant improvements to the quality of customers experience within CBC's current leisure centres by;
- i. considering the facility needs by Place making area to ensure the current level of demand for leisure facilities can be maintained
  - ii. identifying capital investment priorities for refurbishment and improvements
  - iii. identifying capital investment priorities where rebuilding is more cost effective than refurbishment
  - iv. Ensuring Council revenue and capital investment is cost effective and achieves value for money via invest to save, procurement, and maximising opportunities for securing external funding.
35. (c) Maximise the capacity of existing supply across Central Bedfordshire so that customers can access a broader range of facilities not in direct control of CBC;
- i. Seeking to increase community access to leisure facilities at schools and other education and military establishments and village and community halls to ease capacity at peak times.
  - ii. Considering how CBC can increase access to current facilities by improving transport options.
  - iii. Enabling and facilitating National Governing bodies sporting aspirations rather than directly provide
- 36 The draft Leisure Facility Strategy will detail requirements for facilities by Place making area. In summary, the following preferred leisure facility provision is emerging;
- West area: New Leisure Centre at Flitwick comprising 8 lane 25m pool and 4 court sports halls.
  - Leighton Linsalde/Rural South: Refurbishment of Tiddenfoot Leisure Centre. New sports hall in the growth area.
  - Dunstable/Houghton Regis: Refurbishment of Dunstable Leisure Centre. Consider reopening Houghton Regis swimming pool at existing centre for short term provision. Longer term, in the context of Houghton Regis North development, New Houghton Regis Leisure Centre comprising 6 lane 25m pool and 6 court sports hall.
  - East: Refurbishment of Saxon Pool and Leisure Centre. New sports hall at Saxon Pool and Leisure Centre and at Eatonbury School.

## **OTHER RELATED WORK**

37. **CBC Capital Programme**

Two significant schemes to refurbish and extend the facilities at Tiddenfoot and Saxon Pool Leisure Centres were approved by Executive on 2 October 2012. These were developed in consultation with the Leader, Deputy Leader, and Executive Members for Sustainable Communities Services to support the emerging themes and priorities of the Leisure Strategy. The proposals aim to limit the cost to the Council of borrowing capital funds, either by providing income for the Council as a result of that investment and/or aim to be supported by third party contributions.

38. This decision has enabled the council to demonstrate it is responding quickly and directly to key issues emerging from the Leisure Strategy audit and assessment including high usage and aging stock.

39. Phasing further capital investment to ensure the remaining facilities benefit from significant improvement include;

- A new facility at Flitwick Leisure Centre and any enabling work to be planned from 2013/14,
- Refurbishment at Dunstable and at Houghton Regis Leisure Centres. This will need to be determined within the context of Houghton Regis North development and the associated provision for new leisure facilities in Houghton Regis, along with the outcome of the procurement process for Houghton Regis Leisure Centre which may conclude to re open the swimming pool prior to any further longer term investment that may be concluded for Houghton Regis North.
- Other cyclical investment for essential maintenance and refurbishment of Council leisure facilities.

40. **Leisure Management Contracts**

A related issue is the leisure facilities management contracts at Sandy, Saxon Pool, Flitwick and Houghton Regis Leisure Centres.

41. On 14 February 2012 Executive awarded a one year leisure management contract for Houghton Regis Leisure Centre (HRLC) to start on 1 April 2012 with an option to extend year on year.

42. The reason given to Executive on 14 February 2012 for recommending the appointment of a contractor to operate and manage HRLC in 2012/13 for one year was so that CBC could consider and determine its longer term role in respect of the provision and operation of leisure facilities in Central Bedfordshire, as it develops its Leisure Strategy.

43. On 15 May 2012 Executive considered an extension period for the leisure management contract at Flitwick Leisure Centre, Saxon Pool and Leisure Centre and Sandy Sport and Community Centre which would have expired on 31 March 2013. Executive approved an extension for 6 months from 1 April 2013 to 30 September 2013 with an option to extend for up to a further 6 months to 31 March 2014.



44. The reason given to Executive on 15 May 2012 for recommending the extension on this contract was so that the Leisure Facilities Strategy could be developed and for the Council to use that information to consider its priorities for investment. In turn, its investment priorities will inform the specification of the leisure facility management contract to be procured in 2013 for a longer term contract.
45. Following a 6 month review of the HRLC contract in October 2012, Executive Members for Sustainable Communities Services are supportive of including HRLC in the procurement process of a longer term contract so that the financial viability for HRLC and any economies of scale can be tested. It also gives the Council an opportunity to test the market with regard to reopening HRLC swimming pool and harmonise 4 of the 6 leisure centres currently under contract.
46. A pre procurement phase started in the summer of 2012 and has considered current leisure market trends and potential investment opportunities in order to establish the type of contract to be tendered.
47. An initial market overview shows a positive interest in the potential for a contract with CBC from a range of commercial providers and Trusts in the industry. It has also confirmed that no private leisure operators are interested in bidding mainly due to the limited scope for delivering sufficient financial profit margins.
48. The contract period is likely to be in line with industry norms which are in the region of 10 years with an option to extend for a further 5 years which enables any capital investment to be recovered. There are additional benefits for CBC to consider a slightly different contract period of 10 years with an option to extend for a further 7 years as this would mean there would be a coterminous end date with the leisure management contract at Dunstable and Tiddenfoot Leisure Centres in 2030.
49. The procurement timetable will allow for a contract start date of 1 October 2013 and progress will be reported to Executive on 8 January 2013.

### **Conclusion and Next Steps**

50. The report seeks to provide an overview of approach and progress to date on the first chapter of the Leisure Strategy setting out key findings and emerging preferred options for the Leisure Facility Strategy along with an indication of potential phasing of capital investment at the Council's leisure centres, for comment prior to approval at Executive on 8 January 2012.

### **Appendices:**

Appendix A – **Audit & Assessment Key findings**

Appendix B – **Issue ad options report**

**Background papers and their location:** (open to public inspection)

Audit and Assessment at [www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

## Appendix A

### Audit & Assessment Key findings

The draft Audit & Assessment comprises facility evidence gathered with some specific scenarios modelled to test refurbishment and/or new provision.

#### Sports halls and swimming pools

- 1 The assessment includes all halls of 3+ courts which include the sports halls in the Council's Leisure Centres and a number of schools. The assessment includes fifteen indoor pools on 11 sites within Central Bedfordshire. Eight are accessible to the public on a pay and play basis and the remaining 7 are for registered members or clubs on a block booking system.
- 2 The supply of these facilities in Central Bedfordshire is below average but overall demand is well met because the public use facilities in neighbouring Council areas. Even by 2022 with significant increase in population and demand, overall demand is well met because Central Bedfordshire increasingly exports its demand for facility use.
- 3 High usage of the facilities exceeds 'comfortable' usage levels by 2022. Specifically the dual use site sports halls are at capacity at peak times.
- 4 Facilities are not in prime condition and are unlikely to be fully fit for purpose without significant investment. Attractiveness of these facilities declines over time resulting in a reduction in use as customers can access other facilities outside Central Bedfordshire.
- 5 A small proportion of the population cannot access swimming pools and sports halls either in Central Bedfordshire or in neighbouring authorities because they do not have access to private transport. The amount of unmet demand is equivalent to about 1 additional 4 court sports hall and 1 additional 6 lane 25m pool over the whole district, but none of this demand is in sufficient concentration to warrant an additional hall or pool in one location to meet this issue alone.
- 6 The stock of swimming pools and sports halls is well located across Central Bedfordshire. Rationalisation of the existing stock with newly built facilities in new locations within the growth area of Leighton Linlade and Houghton Regis do not serve those growing populations any better than the existing facility locations do.
- 7 Additional capacity is required particularly at peak times to reduce pressure on these facilities. Major refurbishment and the provision of additional halls and pools have the benefit of increasing supply and creating a very modern stock benefiting Central Bedfordshire residents (drawing back users who currently use halls in other local authority areas). An outcome is also likely to be that comfortable levels of use are exceeded in some locations, particularly Dunstable and Houghton Regis where throughput is particularly high from local residents, those accessing the facilities on foot and from residents living in Luton.

8. Additional capacity for sports halls should also be considered by expanding the use of school halls for the community to help alleviate high use at peak times but management and access is a key concern.

### **Other built facilities**

- 9 For Health & Fitness there are 19 health and fitness venues providing a total of 844 health and fitness stations. Whilst quality is good, there is a localised undersupply of up to 600 fitness stations in gyms across Central Bedfordshire within the public leisure centres.
- 10 For Squash there are 9 venues with 18 courts equating to supply in line with the national average. There is a high demand for squash concentrated at peak times of the day, 10-20% above the national average, resulting in a shortfall of approximately 3-5 courts to meet current demand.
- 11 For Indoor Bowls there is one facility providing 6 rinks (or lanes). This is very low provision when compared to the region and poorly located to meet the needs across Central Bedfordshire. However spare capacity at local indoor bowls clubs suggests the level of supply is adequate.
- 12 For indoor tennis there is no provision in Central Bedfordshire and 5 centres with 13 courts in adjacent authority areas. Further work is required to assess whether additional courts in Central Bedfordshire are required by local clubs to meet local demand.