



Central Bedfordshire Council Leisure Facilities Strategy

Summary of the Facilities Assessment Findings

Key Issues and Options

December 2019

Introduction and Purposes of this Report

In June 2019 Central Bedfordshire Council commenced work to prepare an indoor leisure facilities strategy for the Council's area for 2019 to 2035.

The Council's current Leisure Strategy was adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPD) in 2014 to inform the Council's Core Strategy. It comprises three chapters covering indoor sport, recreation open space provision and outdoor sport.

The current Leisure Facilities Strategy, which covers indoor sports facilities, has been successful in securing new facilities and s106 contributions from housing growth and has guided the Council's capital investment in leisure facilities. The updated strategy will continue and develop this work, to ensure new housing development makes appropriate contribution to leisure centre facilities.

Within the Local Plan period 2018-2035, Central Bedfordshire will see approximately 20,000 new homes delivered. The strategy is required to ensure that the Council has an up-to-date evidence base and policy for the provision of new, and the improvement of existing indoor sports facilities. This is in response to the demands of growth and to support residents to improve and maintain their health and well-being.

The Facilities Assessment Report is the first stage of the strategy development and provides the assessment of need and evidence base for each of the identified facility types. It combines the Sport England Facilities Planning Model (FPM) findings for sports hall and swimming pools, with feedback from a range of stakeholder and facility inspections. These are combined with assessment of the other sports facilities which usually comprise an indoor leisure centre.

The Issues and Options Report is the second stage in the production of the new strategy, and it sets out:

- A description of each of the indoor sports and leisure facility types included in the strategy
- A summary of the key findings from the assessment stage of work
- The issues and options that arise from the key findings

Consultation on the issues and options will be undertaken to help develop the key themes that will shape the strategy. A draft indoor Leisure Facilities Strategy will then be produced for formal public consultation.

The consultation findings on the draft strategy will be considered and a final strategy will then be produced for adoption by the Council's Executive. It is anticipated the new strategy will be formally adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance in Summer 2020.

Scope of the Strategy

The indoor sports and leisure facility types included in the strategy are:

- Swimming Pools
- Sports Halls
- Indoor Tennis Centres
- Indoor Bowls Centres
- Squash Courts
- Studios
- Health & Fitness (gyms)

Facility Assessments

The assessment for each facility type is based on:

- The Sport England four components of the Assessing Needs and Opportunities Guidance (ANOG) for undertaking a needs assessment and developing an evidence base.
- Studios includes all types of studios for spinning, aerobic dance and exercise classes, pilates and yoga, strength and conditioning exercise, martial arts.
- Netball is included in the brief due to its requirement for indoor facilities and the findings are included in sports halls.
- In 2016 Central Bedfordshire Council undertook an indoor bowling study and this has been updated to 2019

The summary of key findings for each facility type, followed by the issues and options are set out in the following section.

Swimming Pools

In 2018 Central Bedfordshire Council commissioned a Sport England Facilities Planning Model (FPM) study to review the current provision of swimming pools and assess the future needs to meet demand across the Council area. It will also assist in reviewing the Local Plan policy HQ4 *Indoor Sports and Leisure Facilities* and the reasoned justification for that policy.

The overall aims of the FPM study were to:

- Assess the extent to which the existing supply of swimming pools meets current levels of demand across the Central Bedfordshire Council area and a wider study area in 2018;
- Assess the extent to which the projected population increase, along with committed residential development across Central Bedfordshire, has on the future total demand for swimming pools and its distribution; and

- Model changes in the supply and location of swimming pools within Central Bedfordshire, and the quadrants the Council uses for planning purposes, to assess the impact of these changes on the demand for swimming pools and its distribution

The FPM modelling runs are:

- **Run 1** – supply, demand and access to swimming pools, in 2018. Run 1 provides an assessment of current provision and how well it is meeting demand; it provides a baseline from which to measure change;
- **Run 2** – supply, demand and access to swimming pools in 2028, based on the projected increase in demand for swimming pools, from population growth and the committed residential development identified in the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan. This run includes the committed changes in swimming pool supply up to 2028, in the neighbouring authorities. This run also includes the projected population growth in each of the surrounding local authorities. Run 2 also includes the re-opening of the modernised Dunstable Leisure Centre in 2019.
- **Run 2** provides a forward projection of the demand for swimming pools and its distribution, based on the impact of all these changes. It can be compared to run 1 to identify the scale of change from the baseline in 2018;
- **Run 3** models a new swimming pool for Leighton Linlade, with a 25m x 6 lane main pool, plus a teaching/learner pool 17x10m. The pool site is modelled to open in 2021. The existing Tiddenfoot LC pool is kept OPEN in run 3.
- **Run 4** is as run 3 for Leighton Linlade but the existing Tiddenfoot Leisure Centre Pool is closed.
- **Run 5** models a new swimming pool in Houghton Regis, with a 25m x 8 lane main pool, plus a teaching/learner pool of 17x10m. The new pool is modelled to open in 2023, and on the same site as the existing Houghton Regis Leisure Centre and the existing centre would close. This run echoes the modelling for the 2014 strategy, and confirms the scale and location of facility required.
- **Run 6** models a new swimming pool in the Arlesey area (modelled on the Arlesey Cross development). The Arlesey area swimming pool is a 25 m x 6 main pool, plus a learner pool 17m x 10m. The site is modelled to open in 2025.
- **Run 7** models a new swimming pool in the Sandy area (modelled on Tempsford airfield) with a 25m x 6 lane main pool, plus a teaching/learner pool 17m x 10m. The site is modelled to open in 2028.
- **Run 7A** was undertaken after the findings for run 7 were reviewed, it included a change in the option for locating a new swimming site for Sandy in the town itself, not at the former Tempsford airfield site. The option modelled is a 25m x 6 lane main pool, plus a teaching/learner pool 13m x 10m. The site is modelled to open in 2028.
- **Run 8** models a new swimming pool in the North Luton area (centred on the North Luton housing allocation site). The new site includes a 25m x 8 lane main pool, plus a learner pool of 17m x 10m. The site is modelled to open in 2028.



The **key strategic finding from the FPM assessment for swimming pools** was that Run 7a provides the best overall balance in meeting the Central Bedfordshire demand for swimming pools over the strategy period.

The issues and options which emerge from the FPM study and the assessment stage of the strategy are set out below.

Swimming Pools Issues and Options

- The extent of overlap in the catchment area of (1) Houghton Regis and Dunstable and (2) to a much lesser extent, Houghton Regis and Leighton Linlade.
- Is there a need for swimming pool sites in each of the three locations, or could one major swimming pool complex serve both Houghton Regis and Leighton Linlade?
- The membership mapping of the Central Bedfordshire leisure centres sites, identifies small catchment areas for the majority of the membership, with most in the 0 – 5 kilometres catchment area and far less in the 5 – 10 kilometres catchment. This does support very local catchments and questions whether residents would travel to a major centre – but is the major centre more swimming/cost effective?
- The need/viability of a new swimming pool in the Arlesey area has been challenged. There is an overlap in the drive time catchment area with the cluster of 4 swimming pool sites in North Hertfordshire, and to a much lesser extent, Saxon in Biggleswade, and the site for the Arlesey pool option. Is there sufficient projected demand to justify a new pool in Arlesey at all?
- Similarly, the need/viability for a swimming pool in Sandy. There is very limited new residential development in the Local Plan for Sandy. A lot of the justification for a swimming pool in Sandy is due to its almost unique catchment area, with its nearest pools located in Biggleswade and Bedford. (No pool sites in South Cambridgeshire or Huntingdonshire close to the Central Bedfordshire boundary).
- A swimming pool in Sandy would meet a lot of the demand in these two neighbouring authorities and in Bedford BC area. There is some viability but is meeting the needs of these authorities of interest to Central Bedfordshire?
- Should a new pool site be provided in the east of Leighton Linlade AND/OR the existing Tiddenfoot site be kept open? The need for both has been assessed and the evidence data supports the needs for only one centre. Consultation feedback has suggested the desire to retain both Tiddenfoot and create a new centre elsewhere in LL.
- Would the operation of two centres be financially viable and sustainable? Who would operate Tiddenfoot if it is retained and a new centre is opened elsewhere in LL?
- Which are the priority projects AND AREAS for development? In the current Strategy period, new leisure centre provision has been concentrated in Chiltern Vale and West Mid Beds (due to the highest housing growth planned when the strategy was written). In numbers terms Ivel Valley loses out but in absolute terms it has least choice. Should the new strategy balance provision across all of Central Bedfordshire?
- Is the delivery of the residential development on track to support this scale of provision?

Sports Halls

The 2018 FPM study also included sports halls with the same objectives as for swimming pools.

The FPM modelling runs for sports halls were:

- **Run 1** – supply, demand and access to sports halls in 2018. Run 1 provides an assessment of current provision and how well it is meeting demand; it provides a baseline from which to measure change;
- **Run 2** – supply, demand and access to sports halls in 2028, based on the projected increase in demand for sports halls from population growth and the committed residential development identified in the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan. This run includes the committed changes in sports hall supply up to 2028, in the neighbouring authorities. This run also includes the projected population growth in each of the surrounding local authorities. Run 2 also includes the re-opening of the modernised Dunstable Leisure Centre in 2019.
- **Run 3** new sports halls for Leighton Linlade, with a 4 badminton court sports hall 34.5m x 20m. The location is within the East Leighton Linlade Growth Area and the sports hall site is modelled to open in 2021. The existing Tiddenfoot Leisure Centre sports hall is KEPT OPEN IN Run 3.
- **Run 4** is as run 3 for Leighton Linlade but the existing Tiddenfoot Leisure Centre sports hall is closed.
- **Run 5** models a new 6 badminton court sports hall 35m x 27m, located at the existing Houghton Regis Leisure Centre site. The new sports hall is modelled to open in 2023 on the same site and replace the existing 4 badminton court sports hall. This run echoes the modelling for the 2014 strategy, and confirms the scale and location of facility required.
- **Run 6** models a new 4 badminton court sports hall 34.5m x 20m in the Arlesey area (modelled on the Arlesey Cross development). The site is modelled to open in 2025.
- **Run 7** models a new 4 badminton court sports hall 34.5m x 20m in the Sandy area (modelled on the Tempsford airfield site) The site is modelled to open in 2028.
- **Run 7A** was undertaken after the findings for run 7 were reviewed, it included a change in the option for locating a new sports hall in Sandy town, not at the former Tempsford airfield site. The option modelled is unchanged with a 4 badminton court main hall 34.5m x 20m.
- **Run 8** models a new 4 badminton court sports hall 34.5m x 20m in the North Luton area (modelled on the North Luton housing allocation). The site is modelled to open in 2028.

The **key strategic finding from the FPM assessment for sports hall** was that run 7A provides the best overall balance in supply, demand and access to sports halls over the strategy period.

The issues and options which emerge from the FPM study and the assessment stage of the strategy are set out below.

Sports Halls Issues and Options

- Is there a need for a combined sports hall/swimming pool site in each of the three locations, or could one major mega wet and dry centre serve both Houghton Regis and Leighton Buzzard?
- The FPM modelling does support a 6-badminton court size sports hall at Houghton Regis. Should the Houghton Regis provision be more flexible – a 4 court main hall with a second flexible space for dance/exercise classes, or does this just duplicate studios? Should an 8 court hall be provided to allow indoor netball?
- Is there a need to retain the Tiddenfoot centre and provide a new centre with a swimming pool and sports hall elsewhere in Leighton Linlade?
- If Tiddenfoot was closed what would have happened to the facilities; would they be returned to management by the school for the pool and/or sports hall?
- Is there a need/viability for a new public leisure sports hall in Arlesey? There are sports hall at Etonbury Academy (Pendleton Centre which provides for community use through membership) and new sports halls at Henlow Middle School and Pix Brook Academy – so 3 new sports halls on education sites in close proximity. Community Use Agreements for new school facilities will secure community access.
- For Arlesey, a new public leisure centre will duplicate the education sports halls – should the answer be more access for community use at the schools NOT providing more halls?
- Where should the sports hall for Sandy be located? There is a need for a 4 badminton court size sports hall for Sandy. If it is not provided at the existing location, then this dilutes the critical mass at the existing Sunderland Road recreation area i.e. athletics track/Jenkins Pavilion and outdoor pitches.
- How should demand in Shefford and Cranfield be met? Is this by access to the education sports halls in Arlesey, facilities in the planned Marston Vale development, or is there a need for a Silsoe Community Sports Centre-type size/mix centre in these areas?
- Which are the priority projects/areas for development in Central Bedfordshire - same issue set out for swimming pools?
- The changing role and use of sports halls – should the future public leisure centre provision be flexible indoor space which provides for dance/exercise physical activity? Then education sports halls provide for sports club use and community recreation for hall sports activities?

Netball

Netball was included in the project scope as it requires both outdoor and indoor courts to support all year-round play. Netball participation in Central Bedfordshire is increasing, there are 3 main leagues: Bedford & District Netball League, with 71 teams playing in this league and there is also a junior league which has over 30 junior teams. Heritage Netball League has 35 teams playing in this league and this includes Hertfordshire. The Dunstable District Netball League has 23 teams playing in this league.



In 2019 the Bedford League had 7 new teams enter their winter league and the Heritage League has 6 new teams entered.

Netball's National Governing Body for Sport (NGB), England Netball's view there is the need to provide more sports hall time for netball and support netball programmes, for example the '*Back Into*' programmes and Walking Netball. Within Bedfordshire the Heritage League is the only League where there is no central venue to host its matches. The Heritage League is based in the Bedfordshire/Hertfordshire area and provides for all abilities aged 14 upwards.

England Netball's view is there is a need for a double indoor court facility, the closest is at Inspire in Luton but there are none in Central Bedfordshire.

At a strategic level, establishing netball as a core sport for sports halls provides stability and supports viability for use of sports halls and offers real potential to increase netball participation. Increasing sports and physical activity participation by girls and women is a key priority for Central Bedfordshire Council.

Through the assessment stage of work the scope to develop netball facilities, identified opportunities to consider:

- Van Dyke Academy in Leighton Buzzard - development of outdoor courts and establishing local netball clubs at the school
- Samuel Whitbread Academy in Shefford - scope to increase community use at the school and provide access for local netball clubs to the 8 outdoor courts and the sports hall. PFI agreement is in place.

England Netball's view is that if Van Dyke Academy gained an additional court, so a minimum of 4 courts, it will open up much more opportunity for netball. It would allow a league to be run from the school and local England Netball Tournaments to be hosted there. The school and local clubs are looking to speak with Mavericks, the local Superleague Team, to potentially work with the school and base a netball hub there.

Netball Issues and Options

- Are there aspirations in Central Bedfordshire to provide a double court sports hall (8 badminton courts) to support netball as a core sport for events use?
- Should the two potential netball opportunities at Samuel Whitbread School and Van Dyke Academy (outdoor project) be supported?
- In the Shefford area netball could be a core sport in the development of community use at Samuel Whitbread School, local netball clubs are "looking for a home".
- At Van Dyke Academy, the need is to provide one more outdoor court and floodlight the outdoor courts. The floodlighting would allow clubs to base themselves at the school and the England Netball programmes to be developed and provide overall critical netball sporting mass.

Indoor Tennis

There are no indoor tennis centres located in Central Bedfordshire but there are 9 indoor tennis centres with a total of 42 indoor courts in the neighbouring local authorities. The largest centre is the Milton Keynes David Lloyd Club, with 3 individual tennis centres and 18 indoor courts.

The centres nearest to Central Bedfordshire are in Milton Keynes, Letchworth and Bedford. The drive time catchment area for the centres combined, does include all of Central Bedfordshire, except for the north east of the authority in the Pottton area.

All the centres are owned and operated by either sports clubs or commercial organisations, so availability is for people who are members of the sports club/centre. There is limited availability for pay and play by non-members of the centres.

There is not one consistent source/methodology to calculate the demand for indoor tennis, however, the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) guideline is one indoor court can serve 200 regular tennis players.

Applying the East Region 0.22% of adults playing indoor tennis to the Central Bedfordshire adult population in 2019, would generate 514 adult indoor tennis players, sufficient for an indoor centre of 2-3 courts.

The Lawn Tennis Association indoor tennis strategy (June 2019) has identified 72 priority target areas in England ranked in order of priority, for the development of new indoor courts. In the list there are two Central Bedfordshire locations Luton/Dunstable (ranked number 20) and Biggleswade (ranked number 66).

Indoor Tennis Issues and Options

- Does Central Bedfordshire need an indoor tennis centre – given the provision in neighbouring local authorities and access for Central Bedfordshire residents?
- Based on the indoor tennis assessment and the LTA strategy – there is sufficient demand for the provision of an indoor tennis centre(s). Is this a priority for Central Bedfordshire?
- An alternative to the LTA strategy could be to develop at an existing and viable outdoor tennis club, such as the Flitwick and Ampthill Tennis Club. (Note: provision of 2 – 3 indoor courts equates to the existing provision in the neighbouring local authorities, apart from Milton Keynes)

Indoor Bowling

In 2016 Central Bedfordshire Council completed an indoor bowling centre assessment because of the consideration at that time to remove the indoor bowling hall from the modernisation of Dunstable Leisure Centre. The key finding from the 2016 study was that there is sufficient capacity at the indoor bowling centres closest to Dunstable to accommodate the Dunstable indoor bowling club bowlers at Luton, Harpenden, Stevenage, Watford and Bletchley.

The 2016 survey of the bowling clubs/members who used the DLC facility, were unlikely to transfer to the other centres, only around 10% of the survey respondents said they would like to bowl elsewhere,



however, Central Bedfordshire Council provided financial support for those bowlers who did want to transfer and over 20% took up this offer.

The Luton Indoor Bowling centre is understood to have a lease which expires in 2022. The Luton Borough Local Plan identifies the site as a mixed use site for residential and leisure facilities, and the long term future of the centre is uncertain. Should the Luton centre close (beyond 2022) there will be a deficit of indoor bowling provision in the Luton/Central Bedfordshire area.

Indoor Bowling Issues and Options

- In the longer term does Central Bedfordshire Council want to work with Luton Borough Council on the feasibility of a new indoor bowling centre to serve both areas?

Or shorter-term options could be:

- Promote carpet mat bowls, played on a rectangular carpet (15m x 2m), carpet mat bowls tends to be played at a recreational level
- Investigate the scope to provide a longer version of carpet mat bowls, over a 30m x 6m length at the leisure centres. This would require a new carpet and could only be played at the recreational level. It is, however, more likely to appeal to regular bowlers who are not challenged by the current short mat bowls game. It would also provide a new (and day time) use of sports halls

Squash

There are 20 squash courts located at 10 venues within Central Bedfordshire in 2019. All of the main settlements in the authority have provision of squash courts. Biggleswade Rugby and Squash Club, has 4 courts, all other venues have 2 courts.

Six of the venues are owned by Central Bedfordshire Council and have a total of 12 courts. Access to the local authority courts is for pay and play.

Consultation findings showed that pay and play is the use at the Central Bedfordshire leisure centres. Courts are fully booked at peak times (weekday evenings September – April) but there is no day time off peak use (no different from other centres). So the centres/courts meet a recreational demand and with leagues/ladders organised by centre users.

Squash participation nationally has declined with 428,400 people playing squash at least once a month in 2011/12 and 325,000 playing in 2014 /15. England Squash attributes this to (1) decreasing popularity of the sport after the very extensive rise in participation in the 1970's and 1980's. The sport could not retain the levels of participation, estimated at over 2m players at its height. (2) Increasing attractiveness of other activities, most noticeably health and fitness, which appeals to the same demographic (16 – 44) as squash; (3) an ageing average age of squash participation, it is currently estimated to be between 52 – 55.

Squash Issues and Options

- The key issue is squash participation now and in the future. It has declined nationally but may have now stabilised – will this continue or will participation decline?
- Central Bedfordshire seems to have bucked the trend and noticeably there are seven squash venues that opened in the 1970's squash boom, and remain open in 2019. Testament to a retained level of squash participation in Central Bedfordshire over four decades.
- The overall assessment is that for pay and play, there is a good distribution of courts at centres, supply is meeting demand and there is no need for new provision.
- Is there demand/justification to develop an existing squash centre?
- In terms of squash development, there is one club venue, the Biggleswade Rugby and Squash Club which has 4 courts, available through membership of the club. The Biggleswade club organises internal leagues and participates in both the Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire Squash Leagues.
- England Squash consider Central Bedfordshire is an important area for squash because of the demographics. The Governing Body is trying to stimulate squash participation and development – the scale of the Biggleswade club could offer scope for this to happen.
- An option is to support the club with England Squash in developing its facilities for competition programmes. The network of squash courts in the leisure centres will continue to provide for recreational pay and play squash.

Studios

The project brief includes facilities for indoor cycling on fixed machines (spinning), which is one of the functions/activities of studios, but it is more valid to assess the need for all sports/activities that take place in studios, cycling, aerobic dance and exercise classes, pilates and yoga, strength and conditioning exercise and martial arts.

There is no established methodology for assessing the demand for studios - it is a subject currently being researched by Sport England.

Demand seems to be influenced by trends and changes in all the range of activities provided by studios, and to some extent the provision of studios is following this demand lead.

There are no fixed dimensions for studios and they can be 13m x 10m to 27m x 18m.

There are 26 individual studios within Central Bedfordshire in 2019 with 10 studios at the Central Bedfordshire leisure centre sites, 10 at school/college/higher education sites and 6 studios at commercial sites

There is no one source of data that defines or collects participation data "in studios" and for all studio activities.

Studios Issues and Options

- The key issue is how to assess the future demand for studios, when the range of activities they deliver can be up to 10 different types of activities that change frequently.
- The participation profile for the full range of activities is changing/blurring, with all ages doing all activities. Developing demand and participation rates in this dynamic changing environment is very challenging.
- It is not possible to generate a needs assessment for studio provision because of the limitations in the demand data and participation information on the full range of activities which take place in studios.
- In the absence of an established demand methodology and a changing profile of studio activities, assessing the need for future studio provision in Central Bedfordshire has to be pragmatic.
- The best approach/methodology is checking trends. If there is a sustained demand for classes over time, which cannot be met by the current supply of studios/programming, then this identifies the need for more studios. This may lead to the "adaption approach" taken at Flitwick Leisure Centre, with an increase in the number of studios based on sustained demand/providing for new activities and the business case.
- Is this approach to studio assessment the one to follow and then apply it in projects proposing studio provision?

Health and Fitness

Sport England defines health and fitness suites as facilities providing fitness stations for both cardiovascular and strength training, more commonly known as gyms.

In 2019 there are 20 health and fitness centres, located at 20 sites in Central Bedfordshire, they provide a total of 1,012 health and fitness stations, an average of 50 stations per venue. The largest health and fitness centre is DW Sports Fitness in Dunstable with 150 stations.

The public leisure centres have 120 stations at Flitwick Leisure Centre, 100 stations at Dunstable Leisure Centre, 102 stations at Saxon Leisure Centre, 55 stations at Houghton Regis Leisure Centre and 30 stations at Sandy Upper School and Sports Centre and 30 stations at Tiddenfoot Leisure Centre.

The public leisure centre sites total of 437 stations, 43% of the total number of stations. The Flitwick, Dunstable and Saxon centres are the largest sites after DW Sports Fitness.

There are nine commercial venues with 447 stations, 44% of the total supply. The largest commercial gym, as reported, is DW Sports Fitness in Dunstable, then Energie Fitness Club in Leighton Buzzard with 68 stations. Bannatynes Health Club in Dunstable has 47 stations and Anytime Fitness in Leighton Buzzard with 45 stations. The other 5 commercial gyms are not national gym chains but small scale independent gyms, with an average of 27 stations per venue.

There are 3 gyms located at educational institutions with 79 stations, the Central Bedfordshire College with 25 stations is available for community use. There are 2 gym located at Ministry of Defence sites with a total of 39 stations but are unavailable for community use.

Of note, is there are no sports clubs which have a gym or fitness equipment. Again reflecting the scale of Central Bedfordshire settlements without major multi sports clubs of a sufficient scale to provide a gym for the club membership and wider community use.

The oldest gym is located at Tiddenfoot Leisure Centre opened in 1975. Two gyms opened in the 1980's, three in the 1990's, five in the 2000 decade and then nine post 2010. The most recent gym to open is the modernised Dunstable Leisure Centre.

Health and Fitness Issues and Options

- The supply of gyms is evenly balanced between the public leisure centres and the commercial gyms. In developing new public leisure centres, it will be essential to balance the public leisure centre offer with the projected demand for gyms at the new locations. In essence, the business case has to identify the new demand and scale of provision does not compete/draw the same demand from other centres.
- Linked to the above point is the finding that there have been no new gyms opened in Central Bedfordshire since 2016, this suggests most strongly that at present the supply and demand for gyms are in balance.
- The changing types of gym provision and content: the example being indoor cycling evolving into part of the fixed cardiovascular equipment in gyms – now an activity in itself and the provision of spinning studios now changed to immersive cycling studios. Defining the content of gyms in terms of activity and the business case is central to new gym provision.
- The above points indicate that long term strategic planning for gyms is very challenging and cannot be undertaken at the Central Bedfordshire level over the strategy period – the product/content/providers and specialist types of gym will emerge and change.
- The way forward and suggested option is that gym provision will be integral to the development of new indoor leisure centres. The scale and type of gym provision has to be determined at the detailed feasibility stage for each project, based on participation trends, and commercial judgment at that time.



Summary and Next Steps

The Issues and Options report brings together the Facilities Planning Modelling results for swimming pools and sports halls, with data on other facilities which usually comprise a public multi-facility leisure centre, for example studios. The next steps in the process are to explore what the evidence means in terms of supply and demand, growth locations, synergies and co-location of facilities considerations, and how this shapes the policies for the draft strategy.

The draft strategy will include evidence-based recommendations regarding the optimum locations for new or improved facilities which focus on maximising accessibility for the greatest number of residents, and this means focussing on the larger towns. The data from the 2014 Leisure Facilities Strategy is confirmed by the current assessment and shows that CBC's current leisure centres are already in the best locations to be accessible to the most residents, either by foot, public transport or by car.

The assessment has considered how and where leisure centre facilities at the right scale, can meet the needs of current and future CBC residents. This assessment includes the Local Plan housing growth locations within Central Bedfordshire. With the exception of the North Luton Growth Area, which may require an additional leisure centre to meet the needs of growth; all the existing leisure centres are highly accessible for most of Central Bedfordshire residents.

Key Considerations for the Strategy

- The new evidence confirms the 2014 Strategy requirement for a replacement leisure centre for Houghton Regis within the Kingsland site, and feasibility work is already under way on this project.
- Provision of a new centre for the Leighton Linlade area has been modelled to test for the best location and scale for it, and detailed feasibility work will give detailed consideration to the location and facility mix required.
- CBC has an ongoing programme of investment in maintaining and improving its centres but the assessment has highlighted a number of projects which will enable the centres to cope with current and planned demand; for example at Saxon in Biggleswade an extension to the sports hall is required and demand for studio activities highlights the need for additional studio space. The popularity of the spin studio at Flitwick suggests consideration be given to the inclusion of this type of facility at other centres.
- The contribution of education facilities to their communities is highlighted; in the Stotfold / Arlesey area in particular, there is a high number of sports halls which if accessible, can deliver a range of activities to the local community. Working with Sport England, CBC Leisure has been successful in securing Community Use Agreements for a number of new/planned schools with 3 or 4 court sports halls, as part of the planning application process. This should continue and secure community access to education facilities and inform the design stage with regard to safeguarding measures/facilities.

- Given the mix of urban and rural settlements in Central Bedfordshire the strategy shows that there are some locations which lie at the edge of the accepted 20-minute drive time to a CBC multi-facility leisure centre. The strategy recognises the need to consider formal indoor sports provision for residents in these key locations of a scale and type that meets the needs of the areas and is viable. The Silsoe centre-scale of project provides an example, but facilities should consider the needs of each area - they could comprise a studio plus a small gym or be combined with a new facility for outdoor sports.
- Shefford and Cranfield have been identified as the key settlements which lie at the edge of the 20 minute drive-time to a main leisure centre.



Consultation / Evidence Gathering Process

Facilities Assessment Consultation

Initial consultation was undertaken with a range of stakeholders at the evidence gathering stage. Following completion of the Sport England Facilities Planning Model (FPM) modelling, stakeholders were contacted to provide comments on facilities, their usage and views on future requirements. This is detailed below.

Leisure centre facilities / usage – user/non-user online survey.

All Town and Parish Council - online survey. Survey included smaller facilities where a range of sports / leisure activities take place e.g. village and community halls.

Interviews with the major Town and Parish Councils and those settlements where high levels of housing growth are planned in the emerging Central Bedfordshire Local Plan (listed below):

Ampthill
Arlesey
Biggleswade
Dunstable
Flitwick
Houghton Regis
Leighton Linlade
Sandy
Shefford
Stotfold

Sports Clubs users/non-users of leisure centres – online survey.

Leisure Management Contractor – leisure centre site visits including dual use sites / meetings.

Sport England – Member of Steering Group.

National Governing Bodies for Sport – questionnaire / discussions.

Issues and Options

From the FPM findings and the responses to the consultation above, an Issues and Options report was drafted to assess responses and translate these into facility options.

The Issues and Options report will be circulated to the stakeholders for information and verification of their feedback. Comments received will be included in an updated report.

CBC Ward Councillor consultation

On 13 February 2020 CBC ward councillors will receive a presentation from WYG Ltd and Leisure officers detailing the following information:

- Research methodology
- FPM findings
- Initial consultation feedback
- Facilities Assessment Report
- Emerging Issues and Options for facility requirements



- Options for draft Leisure Facilities Strategy

Members will be able to feedback on the presentation and discuss issues / facilities that will help shape the Leisure Facilities Strategy. Following the event Members will also have the opportunity to provide more detailed feedback which will be incorporated into the issues and options and emerging strategy.

Executive

A draft strategy will be submitted to the council's Executive on 7 April 2020 to seek their authority to carry out public consultation on the draft strategy. The strategy will be put out to 8 weeks formal public consultation in April / May 2020.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

On 21 May 2020 the draft strategy will be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Committee will be updated on the following stages in the development of the strategy:

- Research methodology
- Facilities Assessment Report
- Consultation including Issues and Options
- Options proposed in draft Leisure Facilities Strategy

Committee will provide comments on the draft strategy which will be incorporated with the feedback from the formal consultation period.

Executive

Following the formal consultation period above, the strategy will be updated to reflect feedback received from public consultation and Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and a final strategy will be submitted to Executive in August 2020 for adoption as a Supplementary Planning Document to inform the Local Plan.