

South Oxfordshire District Council

LEISURE FACILITIES ASSESSMENT & STRATEGY

2023 - 2041

Final Version

Produced by:



Produced for:



Version record

1 st draft (Steering Group)	December 2023
2 nd draft (Steering Group)	January 2024
Final draft (Steering Group)	February 2024
Consultation draft	March 2024
Final draft	September 2024
Final	November 2024

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Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
1. Introduction.....	12
2. The Study Area.....	14
3. Typology.....	15
4. Methodology.....	16
5. Consultation and Management of the Process.....	17
6. Responsibilities.....	18
7. Other Strategies & Plans and Funding Opportunities.....	19
8. Decarbonisation, Sustainable Travel and Climate Change.....	20
9. The Role of Strategic Housing Sites.....	21
10. The Vision for Leisure Facilities in South Oxfordshire.....	22
11. The Aims of the Leisure Facilities Strategy.....	23
12. Leisure Facilities Key Issues.....	24
Swimming pools.....	24
Sports halls.....	25
Activity halls, village halls, community centres and studios.....	26
Health and fitness suites.....	27
Squash courts.....	28
Gymnastics facilities.....	28
Archery ranges.....	29
Tennis courts.....	29
Netball courts.....	30
Cycling facilities.....	31
Athletics facilities.....	31
Bowls facilities.....	31
Croquet lawns.....	32
Water sports facilities.....	32
Skateparks.....	33
Multi Use Games Areas (MUGAs).....	33
Parkour facilities.....	34
Climbing walls.....	34
Horse-riding centres.....	35
carbon ne courses.....	35
13. District-wide Recommendations.....	36
14. Strategic Site On-site / Off-site Provision.....	38

15. Strategy Recommendations by Sub Area.....40
 Priorities in East Sub-area.....42
 Priorities in North Sub-area45
 Priorities in South Sub-area49
 Priorities in West Sub-area.....54
16. Scenarios.....63
 “Do nothing”67
17. Action Plan Framework and Delivery.....68
 Action Plan68
 Planning Officer Guidance on Using this Strategy.....68
 Guide to Interface between Delivery and Use of Strategy Recommendations to
 Inform Planning Applications.....69
18. Monitoring and Review71
Appendix 1: Summary of Other Strategies & Plans and Funding Opportunities72
Appendix 2: Action Plan77

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.

The Vision Statement for Leisure Facilities

“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 2045 and to reduce emissions across the district.”

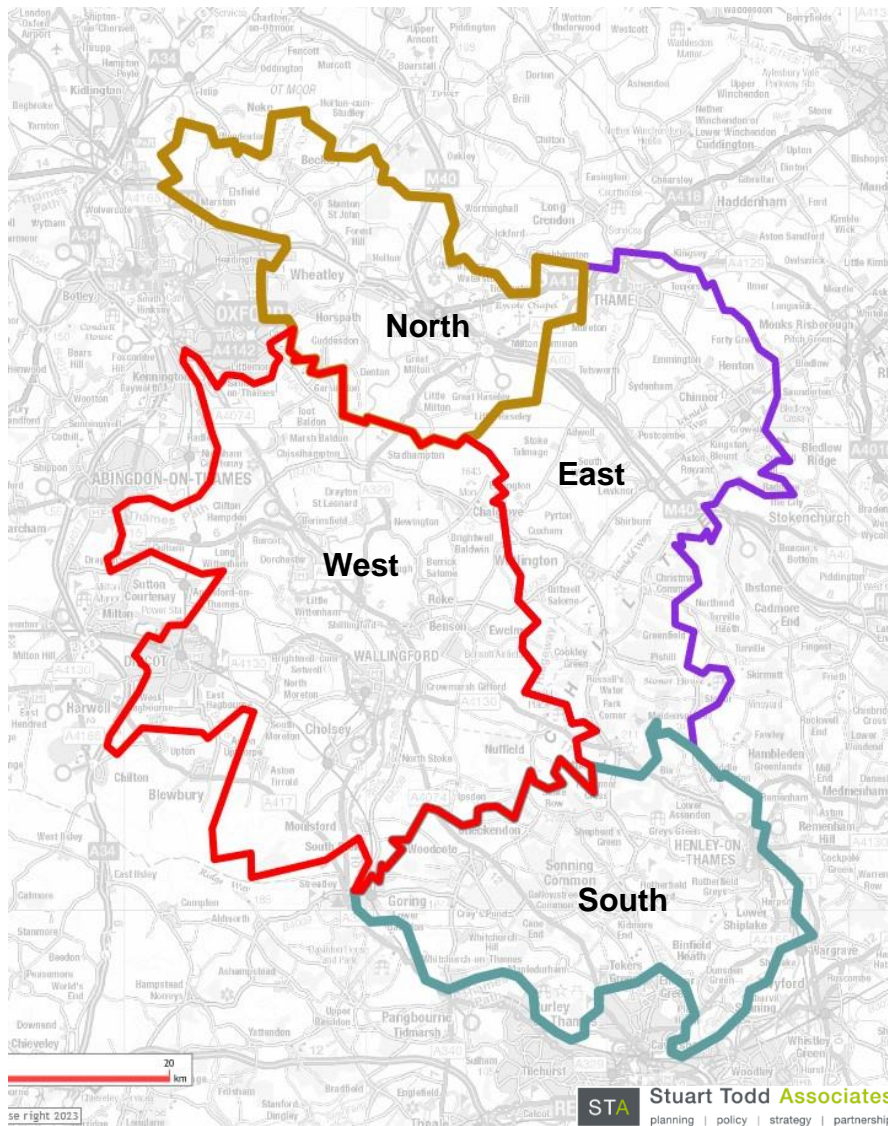
- EX3 The LFAS plays a number of important roles in sport, leisure and planning terms, and also has a direct link into the health and wellbeing agenda both in relation to formal club-based sport but also social, casual and informal sport aimed at getting people more active (with positive outcomes for 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) 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, however there are plans for a new facility at Riverside Park in Wallingford (2024 – flood waters permitting), which will be more accessible to people with disabilities.
- 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 are no skateparks in Wallingford or Chinnor.

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 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.

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.
- New skatepark in Chinnor.

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.
- New dedicated gymnastics facility 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 MUGA, tennis and netball courts in Wallingford (Bull Croft Park).
- New wheeled sports facility in Wallingford (e.g., BMX, skateboarding etc).
- New accessible boathouse at Riverside Park in Wallingford.
- New MUGAs at Northfield (Strategic Housing Site) and at Grenoble Road (Strategic Housing Site).
- New dedicated gymnastics facility in Didcot.

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;
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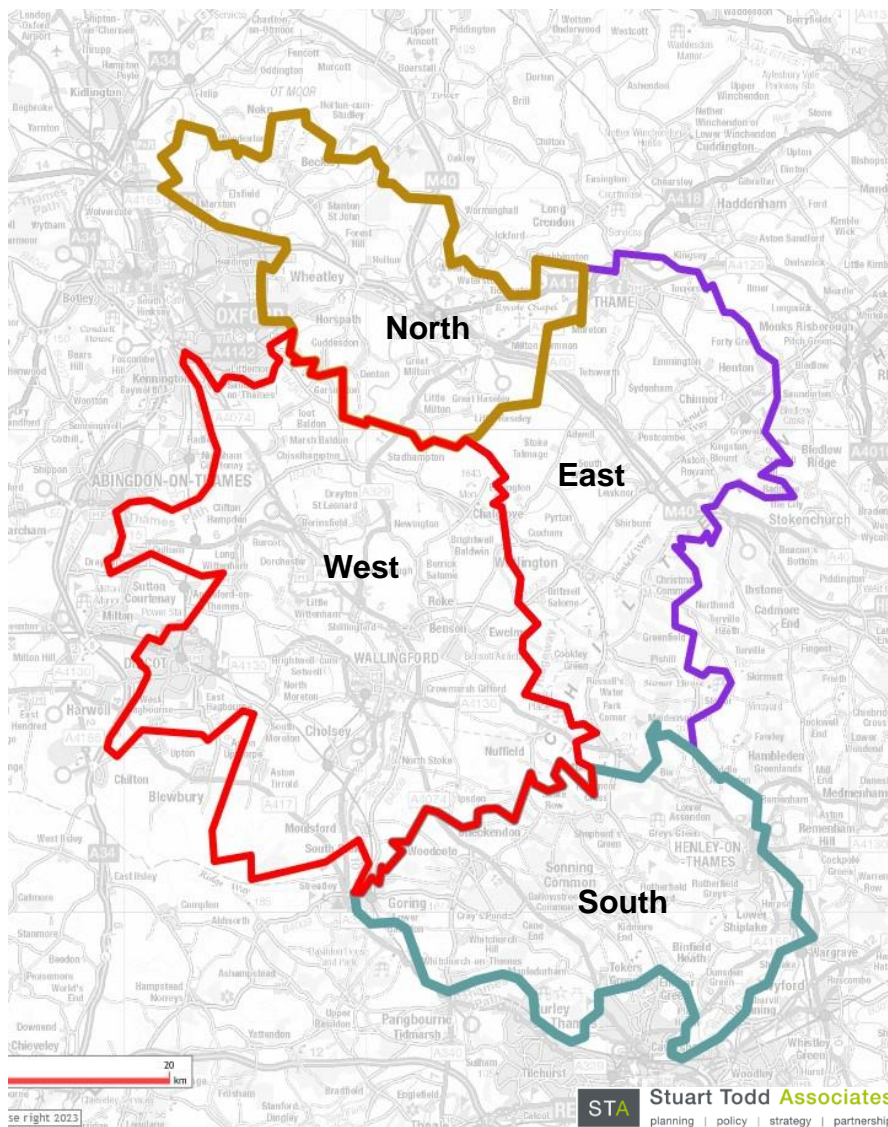
- 1.5 It is for these reasons, and to ensure that the district has an up-to-date LFAS guidance compliant strategy, that it was commissioned. What the strategy does not and cannot do is provide a blueprint for change to 2041. The strategy can present options based on evidence and assessment of it (and 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.

- 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
 - 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.
- 8.3 Clearly, for the environment, sport and health to benefit, and for solutions to be financially viable, a balance needs to be struck, as is the case throughout the planning system between provision of leisure facilities and resolution of adverse impact and satisfactory mitigation of these. For example, the Government has been looking at carbon assessments for developments to be brought in (which seem likely to be introduced anyway by many local authorities) and impact assessments for travel/transport and the environment already exist. Net gain (in biodiversity) for development proposals has been introduced through the Environment Act 2021 and many Local Plans already introduced such requirements through policy.

There is no reason why proposals for leisure facilities should not be required to demonstrate that they pass such tests. Authorities can already seek conditions on permissions including the design of schemes. There is clearly a role for the planning system (and planning policies in particular in Local Plans) to ensure that such tests and requirements for mitigations are introduced to ensure that communities and people's physical and mental health can still benefit from leisure facilities without compromising or having a net additional adverse impact on the environment. Much will need also to be done, outside of sport and the planning system, to help make the shift required to achieve net zero and to prevent, mitigate and adapt to climate change, while also providing fully for sport and health, within the context of the Council's commitment for South Oxfordshire to be carbon neutral by 2045. The Council is introducing mandatory use of a Climate Impact Assessment Tool by its staff which will help to understand potential impact of proposals which come forward for sport.

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.

