



Leisure, Sport & Physical Activity Strategy Summary

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils





Foreword

Our goal is to encourage people who live and work in Babergh and Mid Suffolk to lead more active lives.

We have published our first Leisure, Sport and Physical Activity Strategy, which spans the next decade and beyond, up to 2030, which sets out the opportunities and challenges this presents.

Being active does not necessarily mean going to the gym or signing up for exercise classes and the rural nature of our communities means that we cannot rely solely on leisure centres to provide opportunities to get more people involved in sport. Although we are continuing to invest in improving our facilities in Kingfisher Leisure Centre in Sudbury, Hadleigh Pool and Fitness, Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre Stowmarket and Stradbroke Pool and Fitness Centre, this is only part of the solution.

We want to support volunteers and community groups, sports clubs, schools and town and parish councils to create more local opportunities for people to take part in a range of activities. These could include a kickabout on the sports field on a Saturday afternoon, yoga in the village hall or bringing parents back to the playground after school for a tennis match.

We are also looking at ways to encourage people to make exercise part of their daily routine, for example making a short journey on foot or by bike rather than driving.

Small lifestyle changes can make a big difference as rising obesity levels put more adults at risk of ill health.

Keeping active has numerous benefits not only for physical health but also mental wellbeing. It can help to reduce isolation among older people, instil the importance of teamwork in children and ease the symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Health and wellbeing is key to improving people's quality of life, particularly for those from a disadvantaged background, people who have physical or learning disabilities and an increasingly older population.

Our Councils' vision is to support, encourage and inspire our communities to be more active and we look forward to working with you to achieve this.



Margaret Maybury

Babergh Cabinet Member for Communities



Diana Kearsley

Lead Member for Health and Wellbeing



Contents

7	Introduction
9	Vision, Strategic Aim and Priorities
15	Why do we need a strategy
18	Horizon Scanning - A look to the future
24	Making it happen
27	Summary





1. Introduction

Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils are proud to present our first Leisure, Sport and Physical Activity Strategy from 2017 to 2030.

This district-wide long-term Strategy has been developed as a result of a recent strategic review of existing leisure services, local sports and recreational infrastructure and partnerships across both our Districts.

It identifies future needs, trends and opportunities to support an increasing ageing population in leading a more active lifestyle. This is within an environment where resources will become increasingly scarce and we need to be focused on achieving clear, identified outcomes.

Our shared challenge in the Strategy is physical inactivity.

Non-traditional sport and physical activity and informal active recreation are now recognised as being of equal importance to formal sports activities and provision. Our Strategy seeks to acknowledge the shift in emphasis to a health and wellbeing based approach rather than just a focus on a sport for sport's sake.

The rural nature of our communities means that we cannot rely solely on core leisure facilities, but need to maximise the potential of our open spaces, playing fields, community centres and schools.

The need to enable our community groups, sports clubs and volunteers to bring local opportunities to life for people of all ages and abilities is a fundamental challenge – and one we are fully committed to supporting within our means.

Our strategic Partners have highlighted the importance of shifting the Leisure, Sport and Physical Activity Strategy more towards health and wellbeing through behavioural change, integrated working and pooling resources and expertise. We fully embrace this approach.

This Strategy will support us in making some key decisions relating to the future operation and investment in our leisure facilities. This has been explored through the development in parallel of our Leisure Facilities Strategy which has identified 'invest to save' opportunities to redirect funding from efficiency savings to support our wider strategic priorities in our communities.

Linked to a strategic Vision, we have developed a set of clear strategic priorities which are directly linked to national policies on behaviour change and addressing inactivity. They will underpin any future grant aid, partnership working and community engagement with schools, sports clubs, the private sector and third sector groups.

The role of this Strategy in leading a coordinated approach to the provision of Leisure, Sport and Physical Activity is vital to maintaining and enhancing the social and physical infrastructure within Babergh and Mid Suffolk to support people of all ages to live active and healthier lives.

We look forward to working with you to play your part to achieve our Vision.



Below are the top six Strategic Priorities for leisure, sport and physical activity within Babergh and Mid Suffolk developed through detailed consultation with elected Members and strategic partners.

1

Children and Young People

Increase the number and frequency of children, young people (1-18 years) and families across the district regularly taking part in traditional and non-traditional sport and physical activity.

2

Older People

Increase the number and frequency of older people regularly taking part in traditional and non-traditional sport and physical activity to reduce social isolation and to improve health and wellbeing.

3

Volunteers

Increase the volunteer base of sport and physical activity clubs and groups to build capacity, resilience and support growth in participation levels.



2. Vision, Strategic Aim and Priorities

Our Vision for leisure, sport and physical activity seeks to provide guidance and inspiration as to what we and our partners are focused on achieving up to 2030.

“Mid Suffolk and Babergh will support, encourage and inspire their communities to be more active and achieve a better quality of life.”

4

Mental Health

Increase active participation and benefits to participants with mental health issues through sport and physical activity.

5

Physical and Learning Disabilities

Improve the engagement and uptake of those with physical and learning disabilities into community and leisure facilities, ensuring that facilities are accessible and activities are available to all.

6

Sports and Leisure Infrastructure

Support the provision of sustainable community sport and leisure facilities and the spaces and infrastructure that individuals, clubs, schools and groups can access and use to take part.

Our strategic aim is:

“To support and enable increased levels of sport and physical activity participation across Babergh and Mid Suffolk; to support the improvement of health and well-being within our communities, particularly those from disadvantaged groups.”

Playing our part in the Strategy

We will have four key areas of focus to play our part in supporting the Strategy and its strategic priorities which are summarised below:

Direct provision of leisure facilities

We will continue to provide core leisure facilities up to 2030, subject to affordability, and consider invest to save opportunities to ensure we operate them through the most efficient management model as soon as practicable. This is to optimise their financial performance as currently the Council is providing a significant subsidy to its two operators in Mid Suffolk and Babergh.

We will look to improve the core facilities through targeted investment at Sudbury's Kingfisher Leisure Centre, Hadleigh Pool and Fitness and Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre Stowmarket subject to financially sustainable business plans. These investments would maintain and improve levels of participation, ensuring that the offer meets the future needs of residents.

The cost of investment will be met through the improved financial performance over the life of the contract at Mid Suffolk which will run until 2030. It is anticipated that this contract will deliver significant savings over the ten years, compared to the current levels which could be redirected to supporting the wider Leisure, Sport and Physical Activity Strategy.

We are also working closely with South Suffolk Leisure, our operating partner in Babergh on reducing their management fee through operational efficiencies,

supported by investment in Hadleigh Pool and Fitness and Sudbury's Kingfisher Leisure Centre.

The Council's leisure operating contract in Mid Suffolk will be retendered in 2020 with a view to secure the very best partnership and financial return. We will explore the feasibility and opportunities of combining the management arrangements of all of the leisure facilities to optimise economies of scale and our return on investment.

Enabling support

We will continue to provide support for voluntary groups, schools, sports clubs, communities, Town and Parish Councils, particularly in supporting their contribution to the six strategic priorities and promoting positive behaviour change. The role we require of our operators in future will shift to play a proactive role in enabling and supporting outreach support for schools, communities and sports groups.

The funding for this would be through the improved performance of our leisure facilities.



Partnership Working

We will continue to play a proactive role with our strategic partners through commissioned programmes and support, working with Sport England, Suffolk Sport, Most Active County Programme, Public Health, Suffolk County Council, One Life Suffolk and Education partners. Given the challenges on future public funding, any external funding secured will be focused on achieving specific outcomes for identified target groups and promoting long term behaviour change.

Encouraging investment from the private sector

We will use our planning powers and economic development role to support and enable private sector investment in improving the Leisure infrastructure where this can be sustainable and compliments existing provision. We acknowledge that this is likely to be limited whilst our core leisure provision is still sustainable. We will support the Town and Parish Councils that are significantly affected by large scale developments through CIL and Section 106 agreements to identify, evidence and define their needs and liaise with developers to ensure that the greatest possible benefit for residents is achieved.

We have developed the following policy position underpinning the Strategy.

It sets out what involvement we will have in funding, delivering or enabling leisure, sport and physical activity provision.



What we will continue to do - *Building on success of the past*

- Supporting local providers in recognising the important role leisure, sport and physical activity can play in reducing health inequalities
- Encourage the wider use of community use in schools
- Support communities and individuals who wish to take greater responsibility for their own health and wellbeing through improvements in leisure, sport and physical activity provision
- Recognise local achievements of volunteers who make leisure, sport and physical activity opportunities happen in the districts.
- Facilitate partnership and collaborative working across the public, private and voluntary sectors to provide local leisure, sport and physical activity opportunities
- Support sustainable facility developments that are evidence based on needs of the local community
- Maximise opportunities with partners to encourage active and healthy lifestyles throughout the district through active promotion and community engagement
- Seek to identify opportunities to enable and attract external investment in sport and leisure facilities in the districts in the public, private and voluntary sectors
- Facilitate partnership and collaborative working with partners across the public, private and voluntary sectors.



What we will support and enable - *New ways of working*

- Specify through our leisure operating contracts the key priority outcomes we wish our Leisure Operators to deliver over the life of the contract, which include greater outreach and community engagement
- Recognition of local resources and support for strengthening the ability of communities to develop local solutions to meet local needs
- Encourage shared use of sports facilities and infrastructure to support sustainability of local sports clubs
- Commission targeted interventions based on strategic need - e.g. directing scarce resources at those who will benefit from it the most in the long term
- Continue to proactively seek to encourage long term behaviour change across the community to improve health and wellbeing.

What we will no longer do - *Promoting self- reliance*

- Subsidise sport and leisure facilities and services that should be self-sustaining
- Provide financial support based on historical arrangements and previous policy decisions
- Commit to re-provision of sport and leisure facilities that come to the end of their operating life.





3. Why do we need a strategy?

The joint Councils of Babergh and Mid Suffolk have a critical role to play in providing, supporting and enabling opportunities for residents across both districts to tackle physical inactivity. Directing effort, avoiding duplication and targeting limited resources to achieve the right outcomes are our key priorities moving forwards.

At the heart of a strategic framework

The Leisure, Sport and Physical Activity Strategy forms part of an integrated strategic framework of strategies which is linked to our overarching priorities, a national and county-wide commitment to health and wellbeing, local sports and recreation infrastructure, and sustainable leisure facilities. This ensures that we are making the very best use of resources and expertise available to support a more active community.





The opportunities ahead

We see this Strategy as an opportunity to shift the emphasis away from traditional leisure provision over the next two decades to a more dynamic, holistic approach supporting community health and wellbeing, presenting an opportunity to:

- **Target the current and future inactive and their behaviours (rather than provide new facilities for the already active)**
- **Provide clarity on how we will play our part in working with other organisations to address the huge social care challenge and the wellbeing and ageing well agenda for our elderly population**
- **Support and enable others to deliver targeted services through outcome based commissioning**
- **Directly deliver only where considered essential and not otherwise possible**
- **Develop a more joined-up approach with partners e.g. Public Health, Clinical Commissioning Groups, Suffolk Sport and Most Active County Team.**

Our role as local authorities (and those of our partners) in supporting the Strategy will continue to evolve and highlight what changes are needed in future to take account of meeting the needs of the community, linked to:

- **The future of our leisure facilities and related services**
- **How we will support and enable the voluntary sector, sports clubs, schools, Town and Parish Councils to support behaviour changes in the community**
- **How we will work with County wide partners such as Suffolk Sport, Suffolk County Council, Most Active County Programme and One Life Suffolk through commissioning of services and sharing resources**
- **How we will create opportunities for private sector investment in Leisure, Sport and Physical Activity in the longer term through planning and economic development.**

This is explored in the next sections, Horizon Scanning and Making It Happen.

4. Horizon scanning - a look to the future

The key issue to be tackled

Our population is getting older and placing greater pressure on social care and health interventions. By enabling and supporting individuals at greatest risk to take care of themselves and their health, this will take pressure off the system and assist in reducing social care and healthcare costs.

The role of leisure, sport and physical activity in maintaining an individual's mental health, healthy weight and physical health cannot be overstated. Looking ahead to the future the following key factors have been taken into account to support the development of the Strategy.

Population and health trends

Over the next 13 years we need to ensure that the Strategy is closely aligned to future population changes and growth in the Districts. Key considerations are as follows:

There will be increasing demand on leisure facilities in areas experiencing housing growth - approximately 355 new homes per year in Babergh and 450 new homes per year in Mid Suffolk.



The overall population of the joint Councils is also forecast to shift demographically towards the older age groups.

Both districts have a significantly higher than average proportion of residents living in rural areas.

13.4% of the Babergh's population and 10.7% of Mid Suffolk's does not have access to private transport and would be limited in their ability to travel to core leisure facilities.

Research suggests that less than a third of the population are physically active at least once a week.

The top three sports locally in order of popularity, are cycling, swimming and gym sessions and this trend is likely to continue. Walking is still hugely popular as a recreational activity.



C.1,900 children in Babergh and c.1,600 in Mid Suffolk live in poverty and may not be able to access or afford mainstream leisure activities and opportunities.

15% of children are obese and this trend is rising.

Over 65% of adults are obese and this figure is rising.

Over 22% of adults are classed as inactive and at risk of health issues.

More than 50% of adults would like to be more active and do more sport

50%

Sports volunteering in Babergh has significantly reduced, down to 11% with the figure at 17% for Mid Suffolk





Future needs

The Built Sports Facility Audit and emerging Leisure Facility Strategy has identified that there is a shortfall of swimming pool provision in Mid Suffolk – equivalent to 2 x 25m pools. This will remain a challenge looking ahead, given the limitations on funding or other commercial provision.

In Babergh, there is an identified need to retain provision of existing swimming pool capacity with the need to provide some additional capacity by 2030.

The emerging Leisure Facility Strategy has also identified opportunities to optimise the health and fitness provision (gyms and studios) in Sudbury and Stowmarket, which would enable facilities currently funded by the Council to move towards becoming break even or provide a surplus to fund the wider Strategy across the District.

Existing Sports Halls provision in Babergh will need to be maintained, replaced or refurbished in order to meet sports hall demand up to 2031, albeit there is a current oversupply of 10 courts reducing to 9 courts in 2031. However, many of these courts have restricted access.

There are a significant number of public use sports hall facilities distributed across Mid Suffolk, a number of which have been refurbished in the last 10-15 years. As with Babergh, access to school sports halls in Mid Suffolk can be restricted and is an area where further community use can be explored through partnership working.

The majority of both districts falls within a 20-minute drive time catchment of a publicly accessible main sports hall facilities; nonetheless, there are some gaps in provision in both districts.

The role of community and village halls cannot be overstated and the network of 150 across both Councils plays a vital role in providing low cost indoor provision.

The Council has recently commissioned a Playing Pitch Strategy (2016) which highlights future needs for provision, an assessment of quality and under/over-supply of main outdoor sports. This will enable us to plan the right number of facilities to meet population growth and the needs of individual sports.



What our consultation exercise told us

We talked to strategic partners, schools, voluntary groups and sports clubs in developing this Strategy.

Strategic Partners have highlighted the importance of shifting the Leisure, Sport and Physical Activity Strategy more towards health and wellbeing through behavioural change and integrated working with key partners, pooling resources and expertise. They emphasised the need to address physical inactivity.

With Suffolk aiming to be the Most Active County – the partnership infrastructure is well positioned to enable us to gain maximum support and leverage for the Strategy in the future.

Sports Clubs have highlighted that the biggest barrier to growth is a lack of volunteers and coaches. Sports Clubs have also highlighted the issues of funding for their own facilities / pitches and the need to improve them through investment.

95% of schools have identified a key role for us and our leisure facility operators including facilitating school/club links, enabling community use of facilities, support with grant applications and networking.

There is a compelling need to support schools in opening up their community facilities to the public to optimise opportunities for greater participation and engagement.

There is a commitment from us to target available resources at those individuals that would most benefit from support and enable those who can take greater responsibility for their own health and wellbeing.

Voluntary Organisations have identified a number of opportunities to support them in creating more opportunities in rural areas for people to become more active – many quite similar to the needs of schools.

The role of us leading a coordinated approach to enabling the provision of Leisure, Sport and Physical Activity has been reinforced as being vital to support people living active and healthier lives.

Our core leisure facilities

The Council's very popular Leisure facilities are ageing and at some point in the future will not be able to continue to operate sustainably. Recent condition surveys have highlighted the following:

- **Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre in Stowmarket and Stradbroke Swimming Pool and Fitness will need to be replaced by c 2030.**
- **The Swimming Pool at Hadleigh Pool and Fitness will need to be replaced in the next 1-2 years.**
- **Kingfisher Leisure Centre at Sudbury will need to be replaced by c 2035-40.**

The strategic review of our leisure facilities has identified opportunities for investing in Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre, Kingfisher Leisure Centre and Hadleigh Pool to improve their financial performance in the longer term with a view to becoming revenue neutral or positive –provided at no cost to the Councils.

We will need to start planning for the longer-term re-provision of Leisure Facilities, seeking to work in partnership with private sector investors and education partners.

The Council is not currently in a position to commit to replace these facilities post 2030 and will be working proactively to find a sustainable solution for the future. The Leisure Strategy does provide a sustainable way forward to continue to provide these highly-valued facilities in the medium term to 2030.

Future sustainable models

Several Councils similar to us are able to provide their core leisure facilities at no cost to the Council Tax payer through

the right investment in modern facilities and management operating model. This is reliant on new facilities, low borrowing costs facilitated by the Council and efficient procurement of a leisure operator to get the very best value for money.

Looking ahead to post 2030, a mixed model of provision is likely to emerge through some private sector investment in the major population areas of Stowmarket and Sudbury. However, provision for swimming is likely to require public sector investment given the high operating costs.

There is an exciting opportunity through targeted investment in the Councils Leisure Facilities and in procuring the most cost effective operational partners to fund a significant amount of development activity in rural parts of the District.

This will be delivered by a number of partners in the voluntary and third sector with the Leisure Operator playing a key role in delivery. This is the only way to ensure a sustainable future and core funding to support specific initiatives and programmes to support the community in becoming more active.



5. Making it happen

We will need to ensure the Strategy is resourced, embedded, communicated, delivered and has impact up to 2030. In order to do this, the Strategy will need to be embraced and integrated by all Council Departments.

The Strategy is inextricably linked to the recommendations in the emerging Leisure Facilities Strategy. This relates to recommended future investment in the three leisure facilities, the business plans of our operating partners in Mid Suffolk and Babergh in realising that investment and how the Council plans to manage the facilities to optimise their financial performance post 2020.

There are a number of key leisure facility related decisions that we will need to manage in the short term to progress the investments in the facilities and unlock funding and resources for the Leisure, Sport and Physical Activity Strategy. These relate to:

Mid Suffolk

The Council's two core leisure facilities, Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre and Stradbroke Swimming and Fitness Centre play a critical role currently in providing publicly accessible sports and leisure facilities for residents of the District. We intend to retain these facilities, continue to invest in them and continue to recognise their importance in meeting local need subject to affordability.

The re-procurement of the Mid Suffolk contract in 2020 is integral to the Council's strategic decision making regarding future investment into facilities and presents an ideal opportunity to secure a long-term business case for investment in partnership with its appointed operator.

Critical to any future investment at Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre is the negotiation with Stowmarket High School regarding the transfer of land that part of the centre sits on. We will seek to secure agreement regarding the transfer and establish a constructive partnership with the school going forward.

Prior to 2020, we will seek to negotiate a commercially acceptable business case with the incumbent operator, SLM for investment in Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre prior to 2020 if agreement can be reached.

In the event that we are not able to secure a commercially acceptable business case, we will wait until the re-procurement to invite proposals from the market. This provides a lower risk route to investment as we will have a secure and contractually binding financial offer and business case where all of the risk on achieving the projected income is held by the appointed operator.

Babergh

Our two core leisure facilities in Babergh, Kingfisher Leisure Centre and Hadleigh Pool and Leisure play a critical role currently in providing publicly accessible sports and leisure facilities for residents of the District. We intend to retain these facilities, continue to invest in them and continue to recognise their importance in meeting local need subject to affordability.

Critical to the future affordability and sustainability of our leisure facilities provision will be our approach to our existing management contract with SSL. Advice provided by specialist consultants has highlighted the extent of achievable savings if the Council chooses to review the arrangement with SSL and consider amalgamating the contract with Mid Suffolk in 2020. Whilst this represents a potential saving there are risks and costs associated with this approach.

We will provide SSL with the opportunity to develop a revised management fee offer linked to the delivery of investment at Kingfisher Leisure Centre and Hadleigh Pool and Fitness. We will continue to 'underwrite' the investment and will continue to be exposed to third party income and expenditure risk in the event that SSL are not able to achieve the business plan projections.

In the event that a commercially acceptable business case cannot be agreed with SSL, we will explore alternative options with SSL.

Concurrent to the above negotiations, we will undertake detailed design and costings for the replacement pool at Hadleigh Pool and Leisure. This investment option is arguably the most pressing due to the current condition of the pool but also the option that relies most heavily upon savings secured across the contract as a whole in order to help subsidise its delivery.

Joint recommendations

We will also explore options for 'invest to save' investments in new plant technology in our leisure facilities. The leisure industry is beginning to see significant savings on utilities costs (circa 40%) generated through new innovative energy saving plant.

We will need to ensure that the Leisure, Sport and Physical Activity Strategy is embraced by all our relevant services and teams. This may require some reorganisation of internal resources across services making better use of existing and future available resources.

The management of the Strategy will need to be linked to the strategic review of our Leisure Facilities and the upcoming Leisure Procurement Strategy (due for consideration in mid 2018) in preparation for the retendering of the Mid Suffolk Leisure Contract in 2020.

Given the partnership based approach that will be essential to ensure the delivery of the Strategy, a Strategic Body will be established to provide oversight and scrutiny of the Strategy.

Membership of this Strategic Body should include the partners that have supported the development of the action plan and also co-opt additional members as and when required based on their specialism and expertise.

This will be critical to ensure that baseline data is established to support the development of the Strategic Priorities and key performance indicators.

Dedicated resource in the form of a full-time Leisure, Sport and Physical Activity Officer is recommended to lead the development of the Strategy.

We will review our current structure and resourcing for Community Grants, Sports Development and Community Development and seek to optimise structures and funding to support the Strategy and its strategic priorities.





Summary

The recommendations in terms of the preferred investment options are clear. Investment at Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre provide an improved revenue position for us and help meet demand for health and fitness facilities, indoor activity space and more flexible pool space. Investment at Kingfisher Leisure Centre provides an improved revenue position for the Council and at Hadleigh Pool is critical in meeting strategic need and protecting the future of this important community facility.

Only by taking strong decisions on operational models and investment, can we unlock resources to financially support the Strategy.

We will need to take a clear leadership role working alongside our strategic partners and leisure operating partners who will be best placed to lead on a number of our strategic priorities in the future.



Leisure, Sport & Physical Activity Strategy Summary

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils



This strategy was developed with the support of the Sport Leisure and Culture Consultancy. SLC are specialist consultants who advise organisations develop effective strategies, planning sustainable leisure facilities and procuring successful leisure operational partnerships.