

**Sport, Leisure & Active Recreation
Strategy
2022 – 2027**



**Introduction by Councillor Shane
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To follow

Introduction

The Communities Directorate have in recent years implemented two key strategies - Arts & Cultural Strategy and a Tourism & Heritage Strategy. The third related strategy is this Sport, Leisure & Active Recreation Strategy. Together this portfolio of strategies for the Communities Directorate will then help to provide a sound and coherent framework for improving and enhancing leisure, culture, and tourism, in its widest sense for the foreseeable future.

It is widely recognised that taking part in physical activity through sport and active recreation can improve the quality of life for individuals and communities and delivers a range of social, health, economic and environmental benefits. Gravesham has large scale health inequalities and, whilst improvements have been made in recent years, the difference experienced across the borough varies widely. Our Youth, Community, Health and Wellbeing Strategy will also work in tandem with this strategy focusing on improving health outcomes for residents.

With this in mind, the Sport, Leisure & Active Recreation Strategy will outline a number of key priorities and actions which will provide a framework for tackling inactivity, as well as linking into wider developments such as future facility provision within the borough.

Local Picture

The 2019 Public Health England Local Health profile summarises that the health of people in Gravesham is generally similar to the England average. However, estimated levels of excess weight in adults (aged 18+) and physically active adults (aged 19+) are significantly worse than the England average, with 67.2% classed as overweight or obese. For children in year 6, the prevalence of obesity, including severe obesity, is rated at 20.4%, compared to a regional level of 16.8%, although comparable to the England average of 20.2%.

Sport England's 'Active Lives' Survey is a capturing tool which provides insight into the physical activity habits of the nation. The data looks at national, regional and local participation levels. The most recent survey covers May 2020 to May 2021 and shows that residents in Gravesham (aged 16+) are the second least active in Kent with only 57.7%, reaching the recommended 150+ minutes of exercise per week. The national figures and those for Kent are currently 60.9% and 61.8% consecutively.

In addition to this, just under one third, 31.1% of residents in Gravesham are classed as inactive, meaning they do less than 30 minutes of physical activity per week. Nationally this figure stands at 27.5%. These figures demonstrate that efforts are required to encourage and to make it easier for the most inactive in the borough to do more physical activity.

With this in mind, the Borough's future sport and leisure offer cannot focus solely on formal participation at outdoor and indoor sports facilities, but there will be a need to reach under-represented groups and individuals who may not ordinarily be motivated to participate in sport, or who do not wish to pursue activities within a club environment, or perhaps find the traditional gym or leisure centre environment intimidating.

We will therefore need to make full use of all the Borough's assets, including parks and open spaces to provide opportunities for informal recreation and promote healthy activities such as walking, running and cycling.

The strategy is designed to ensure that the Council is better placed to deliver our own programmes, promoting a long-term vision for Sports, Leisure and Active Recreation to our residents but also wider afield. We recognise that no one organisation can influence the changes in perception and behaviour required to create a more active and healthy population. As a district authority, the provision of sport and recreation is a legally a discretionary function with a small core team of officers and so the need to work in partnership with other organisations across the public, private and not-for-profit sectors is vitally important to improve the sports and leisure offer, in order to help build stronger, healthier and more active communities.

The way we participate in physical activity has been significantly altered as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. With restrictions on movement, cancellation of grassroots sports and the closure of physical activity provision there have been fewer opportunities for people to take part in physical activity.

Sport England's research, 'Understanding the Impact of Covid-19' estimates that the proportion of the population classed as active has dropped over 7% which equates to approximately 3 million less active adults. A number of facilities, organisations and clubs will have been affected in many different ways during the last year and so the new strategy will need to reflect this recovery going forward.

National, County and Local Priorities

Encouraging more people to become physically active is a countrywide challenge. By looking at national, county and local strategies, Gravesham Borough Council can ensure that our objectives align with other organisations who seek to improve participation in sport, leisure and active recreation.

National Priorities

Sport England: Uniting the Movement 2021

Sport and physical activity have a big role to play in improving the physical and mental health of the nation, supporting the economy, reconnecting communities and rebuilding a stronger society for all. From this notion, Sport England (the national non-Governmental body for sport (formally known as The Sports Council) has recently released its new strategy, Uniting the Movement, which is a 10-year vision to transform lives and communities through sport and physical activity.

It seeks to tackle the inequalities long seen in sport and physical activity. Providing opportunities to people and communities that have traditionally been left behind, and helping to remove the barriers to activity, has never been more important.

There are three key objectives to the Strategy:

- ◀ Advocating for movement, sport and physical activity.
- ◀ Joining forces on five big issues
- ◀ Creating the catalyst for change

In particular, the five big issues are identified where the greatest potential is seen for preventing and tackling inequalities in sport and physical activity. Each one is a building block that, on its own, would make a difference, but together, could change things profoundly:

- ◀ *Recover and reinvent*: Recovering from the biggest crisis in a generation and reinventing as a vibrant, relevant and sustainable network of organisations providing sport and physical activity opportunities that meet the needs of different people.
- ◀ *Connecting communities*: Focusing on sport and physical activity's ability to make better places to live and bring people together.
- ◀ *Positive experiences for children and young people*: Unrelenting focus on positive experiences for all children and young people as the foundations for a long and healthy life.
- ◀ *Connecting with health and wellbeing*: Strengthening the connections between sport, physical activity, health and wellbeing, so more people can feel the benefits of, and advocate for, an active life.
- ◀ *Active environments*: Creating and protecting the places and spaces that make it easier for people to be active.

*Sport England - Understanding the impact of Covid-19*¹

Activity levels for adults had been increasing until coronavirus restrictions were introduced in March 2020. This led to unprecedented drops in activity during the first few weeks of full lockdown between mid-March and mid-May 2020. The proportion of the population classed as active dropped by 7.1%. This represents just over 3 million fewer active adults.

Some audiences found it harder to be active before Covid-19 and are finding it hard now. Inequalities between different groups have persisted since lockdown restrictions began in March. Those who have found it hardest to stay active include:

- ◀ People with long-term health conditions/disabilities
- ◀ People from lower socio-economic groups
- ◀ Women
- ◀ 16–34-year-olds
- ◀ 55 years and over
- ◀ Black adults, Asian adults and adults from other ethnic groups

The proportion of children and young people reporting that they were active during mid-May to late July 2020 (the summer term) fell by 2.3%, with just over 100,000 fewer children meeting the recommended level of activity compared to the same period 12 months earlier. The impact was greater for some groups than others. Whilst all groups have been impacted in terms of activity levels, girls fared far better than boys, whilst those from Black and Mixed backgrounds saw noticeable drops in activity levels.

Sporting activities saw a large decrease with over a million fewer children and young people (-16.3%) reporting they took part in swimming and team sports in the last week* compared to the same period 12 months earlier. Walking, cycling and fitness all saw large

¹ Sources:

Active Lives Adult Survey. Coronavirus (Covid-19) Report. Mid-March-Mid-May. Published October 2020

Active Lives Children and Young People Survey Coronavirus (Covid-19) Report. Mid-May-late July 2020. Published January 2021

increases in the numbers reporting they took part in the last week compared to the same period 12 months earlier. 1.6m more children and young people went for a walk (+22%) or did fitness activities (+22.1%), whilst 1.4m more cycled for fun or fitness (+18.4%).

In addition, lack of disposable income may lead to a reduction in sports sector spend and could impact activities which cater for children and young people as well as adults. Uncertain employment and financial circumstances mean that greater numbers of people will be looking for affordable and flexible opportunities to stay active. Fewer people will be able to make an ongoing financial commitment to participate.

Regional/County Priorities

'Towards an Active County 2017-21' is a strategic framework for Sport and Physical Activity in Kent and Medway, overseen and run by The Kent and Medway Active Partnership, known as Kent Sport and funded by Kent County Council and Sport England aims to complement Sport England strategies, whilst also providing a local context and nine priority themes. The framework document is being updated and out to consultation, but the current themes are:

- Increasing participation
- Supporting inactive people to become active
- Link to social agendas (health, education etc.)
- Opportunities for children & young people to be active
- Addressing inequalities in engagement with sport by targeting certain groups (Women, lower socio-economic populations, black & ethnic minorities, disabled & older people)
- improving facilities
- Supporting voluntary sector and volunteering
- Supporting talented performers
- Maximising the benefit of major events

The Corporate Plan - Gravesham Borough Council's 2019 to 2023 Corporate Plan has identified that physical activity is important in ensuring that residents are 'safe, healthy and active' Section two of the plan, 'Place' lays out the council's commitments towards this:

- Design a quality and affordable leisure offer – improved facilities and creative sports programmes to tackle local health inequalities
- Improve resident wellbeing – provide and preserve a suite of high quality play areas and promote opportunities for active lives
- Manage a programme of proactive healthy living interventions – work with partners to support and safeguard vulnerable residents.

Open Space, Sport & Recreation Assessment & Strategy

The new strategy will need to be read in conjunction with the Open Space, Sport and Recreation Assessment. This large piece of work was originally carried out in 2016, providing technical evidence-based assessments covering the current provision of indoor sports facilities, playing pitches and open spaces across the borough.

Further strategy and standards documents were also provided containing information on Gravesham's specific needs, plus any demand shortfalls or surpluses. These documents provide strategic recommendations and support to inform planning application decisions and future corporate/strategic development opportunities as and when they arise.

Leisure Centre Feasibility Study

As part of the consultation for our Corporate Plan in 2019 and focusing on the manifesto of the Administration there was a clear identified need from residents to develop and enhance our sport and leisure offer in the Borough and as a listening Council this is sought to met through this strategy and the development of our new leisure offer and leisure centre provision.

Building on the recommendations contained within the original 2016 Indoor Sports Assessment, a feasibility study for the future provision of council owned leisure centres within the Borough has recently been completed.

The key focus of the study was to refresh the Council's 2016 Indoor Leisure Assessment and to redefine its needs and options for investment in its facility portfolio, specifically in relation to Cascades and Cygnet Leisure Centres. It investigated replacement of one or both facilities, taking into account capital and revenue costs and future management options. It also recognised a changing context, including proximity of the development of the Lower Thames Crossing, potential developments within Ebbsfleet Garden City, and the impact of Covid-19 on the leisure industry.

The feasibility study recommended replacing the existing Cascades Leisure Centre at its existing site with a brand-new leisure centre, as opposed to a major refurbishment and remodelling of the existing site to address some of the Borough's current facility needs. Whilst proposals for a landmark leisure facility within Ebbsfleet Garden City have yet to be firmed up, it is assumed that this will be delivered as a replacement for Cygnet Leisure Centre with complications relating to the complexities of the Cygnet Leisure Centre site as part of the physical building is owned by Kent County Council. Hence the Council is concentrating on redevelopment of Cascades Leisure Centre at this point in time.

For the avoidance of doubt the Council's policy position for the amount of and provision of leisure centres in the Borough is that there should always be two leisure centres that are physically located to meet the needs of our residents. This includes any potential future new facility in the west of the Borough to replace the ageing site at Cygnet Leisure Centre. Gravesham Borough Council will be working with the Ebbsfleet Development Corporation to ensure that the leisure offer in any new centre in Northfleet meets the needs of local residents and provides an offer that matches the needs identified by our study and in consultation with local residents. We shall also seek to ensure that any centre or the land that it sits on has close formal or legal links with Gravesham Borough Council to ensure that there is some local accountability for the leisure offer and provision.

In the meantime, it is the policy of this Council that Cygnet Leisure Centre shall remain fully open and complement the new leisure centre and offer to replace Cascades once this has been built. Additionally, Cascades Leisure Centre shall remain open as far as practically possible during the construction of the new leisure centre.

Based on the findings of the needs assessment and strategic options appraisal (and on the assumption that the facility at Ebbsfleet will be delivered), it is proposed that developing a community health/well-being and family focussed leisure centre is the most appropriate course of action for the council's future leisure provision. Central to this will be a new swimming facility which is essential to meeting the Borough's existing and future shortfall in provision, specifically with lane swimming and learner pool provision. A higher capital cost of a new build can be balanced against the significant benefits provided in terms of its attractiveness, potential for co-location of health and wellbeing spaces, and greater capacity to generate revenue via a more cohesive and modern orientation of spaces. Development of a new-build facility will enable the Council to further deliver its ambition for its operations to be net-zero by 2030.

Our ambition for the leisure offer and provision at Cascades is that at a minimum there will be the ability for some Regional Level Competitive Sports and Leisure meeting the current requirements of various sports governing bodies for regional training and competitions. We will work with residents, clubs, and sport's governing bodies as well as regional and national bodies and funding bodies to maximise the potential for this site. While it is acknowledged that we will not necessarily be able to build an 'Olympic Park' and meet requirements and standards for international training and competition levels for every sport, this new provision could be a steppingstone towards many of the requirements and provide experience and opportunity that does not currently exist in the Borough.

Alternative sites for leisure centre development in the Borough are extremely limited and consequently Cascades Leisure Centre's existing car park has been appraised as the highest ranked site, given that it is in Council ownership, has the potential to create good visibility and a site frontage for a new leisure centre.

Steps are being taken to fund the capital cost of the project from a combination of the leisure centre earmarked reserve, attributable S106 contributions, capital receipts, revenue reserves and/or external grant contributions (where these can be secured), with the remaining balance funded through external borrowing funded from the forecast improved revenue income from the site. Should the improved revenue income from the site not be sufficient to meet the full cost of borrowing, the Council will need to consider other options for how these costs may be met in the longer term. Potential operating models for consideration include the setting up of a wholly owned company (WOC), a competitive procurement process (including commercial leisure operators) and a traditional trust management option.

The Vision

The council's overall vision is 'to have a Sport, Leisure and Recreation offer across the Borough that works with and encourages all local residents, visitors, organisations, businesses and communities to adopt a regular active and healthier lifestyle. Utilising the full range of provision, planned and available indoor and outdoor sports, leisure, play and recreational spaces and organisations while removing barriers to participation and inequalities and increasing accessibility for all and facilitate opportunities for all to train and develop sporting potential and have the ambition to represent the Borough locally, Regionally, Nationally and Internationally'.

Aims & Objectives

The Sport, Leisure & Active Recreation Strategy will set out the Council's aims, objectives, and priorities for developing sports opportunities and facilities in the borough and using sport and active recreation to develop and promote healthy lifestyles.

The strategy will:

- support continued work with partners at a local level, such as Kent Sport, Gravesham Community Leisure Limited (GCLL), The Grand etc. to implement a shared vision for a more active and healthy population and to support a reduction in health inequalities across support the borough and to encourage people to adopt healthier lifestyles.
- complement and support where possible the delivery of existing and future sport and physical activity services of local organisations and local clubs.
- provide a link with national, and regional strategies relating to sports and active recreation as well as existing local strategies, such as the Open Space, Sport & Recreation Assessment, Arts & Cultural Strategy, Youth and Community, Health and Wellbeing Strategy and a Tourism & Heritage Strategy.
- help to target Council resources and funding more effectively, in line with corporate priorities, and help to attract external funding for the delivery of infrastructure and facilities improvements where deficiencies are highlighted.
- provide further strategic support when considering sport and active recreation within the planning, policy and decision-making processes of the Council.
- consider both the strategic provision of formal and informal facilities, both indoor and outdoor; and their long-term management and the development of social infrastructure and support mechanisms to foster and support physical activity within the borough.
- Active Environments – Protecting and improving the places and spaces that make it easier for people to be active, including parks and open spaces, as well as active travel connections to these locations.

'Key outcomes within the strategy will be;

1. Reduced health inequalities and increase participation levels

For example, by;

- *Using local insight data tools and intelligence (E.g. Active Lives data etc.) to target future activities and interventions across the borough.*
- *Closer partnership working with the Gr@nd, Kent Sport etc. in developing new ways to support and to make it easier for the inactive to become active.*
- *Using the places and spaces that make it easier for people to be active.*
- *Focussing on sport and physical activity's ability to make better places to live and bring people together.*

- *Focussing on positive experiences for children and young people as the foundations for a long and healthy life.*

2. A network of accessible, flexible and sustainable facilities

For example, by;

- *The development of a new leisure facility at Cascades Leisure Centre that acts as a central hub to the wider leisure provision across the Borough.*
- *Completion of other externally funded planned facilities e.g. Former Fleet Leisure etc. as well as in planned new development areas, e.g. Ebbsfleet Garden City, London Resort etc.*
- *Support and guidance for local clubs and organisations applying for external funding for improvements to local facilities.*
- *Using strategic evidence base documents (E.g. Open Space, Sport & Recreation Assessment) to inform future provision across the borough, both for formal and informal facilities.*
- *By creating and maintaining a local directory of sports clubs and assist in the publicity of clubs with a named contact at the Council to assist with sports related queries, including assistance with applying for grants.*

3. To provide a programme of activities and interventions that will be attractive to all

For example, by;

- *To re-evaluate the council's own programme of activities, including the Summer Programme and Active Gravesham initiatives held throughout the year.*
- *Enhance usage of promotional tools, branding and web-based support for it to be easier for users to find activities and support/ advice to take part in physical activity.*
- *To work with local organisations in providing a range of activities, especially for those residents that are not normally active.*
- *To build on the success of alternative activities that have become popular in recent times including during Covid-19, such as active travel, walking routes, cycling and running.*

Gravesham's vision and priorities will only be realised by:

- Changing the culture and community view of sport, leisure and activity.
- Addressing key inactivity trends and barriers to participation
- Bringing together sport, health, education, community safety, and many others to use sport and activity to improve the quality of people's lives
- Partners working together in a co-ordinated way to create and sustain opportunities for 'more people, to be more active, more often' in sport and active recreation activities.
- To use non-traditional interventions where feasible that encourages and supports physical activity through new technology.
- Delivery of the new sports and leisure sites that include the new Cascades Leisure Centre, but also other provision done in partnership and also with Council

owned land such as the Former Fleet Leisure for which a lease has been agreed, planning permission has been granted for new football and sporting provision and work scheduled soon.

Next Steps/Consultation

Further refinement will be made to the Sport, Leisure & Active Recreation Strategy over the next few months, which will also coincide with the publication of the new Strategic Framework document for Kent & Medway from Kent Sport, as well as further detailed designs and agreed strategic outcomes of the proposed new leisure facility at Cascades and its future operation.

As a listening Council, Sports & leisure organisations and residents will have the opportunity to be consulted on the draft strategy in March/April 2022 once published via the council's website and social media channels and via email databases where held. These views will be analysed and incorporated into this strategy with a decision on its implementation taken by the Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure.

Action Plan & Resources

An action plan incorporating the objectives will be worked on and provided once the consultation process has been completed. Progress of the Action Plan will be monitored through the council's performance key indicators and reported through the Community and Leisure Cabinet Committee structure. Overall, it is anticipated that this action plan can be achieved through the council's current levels of budgetary provision. This will be reviewed on an annual basis and therefore may change. Some of the key areas that will require additional funding, could be partially funded, possibly through partnership working.