

## Rother District Council

### Executive Summary

#### Introduction

Our Vision for the future provision of leisure services and facilities in Rother is:

***‘Working in partnership to enable provision of good quality, accessible, and inclusive leisure for both residents of, and visitors to, Rother, because of the positive impact being active has on our health and wellbeing in our place.’***

In order to challenge and address inactivity in Rother our Shared Outcomes are:

- **Active Environments** – environments that support and facilitate every day physical activity for everyone
- **Active Communities** – supported and developed community assets to increase physical activity levels and build community resilience
- **Healthy Individuals** – decreasing inequalities, increased awareness and capability in our inactive population to change their behaviour and increase physical activity levels long-term
- **Partnerships and Collaborative Working** - improved partnership working to increase physical activity opportunities and participation across our population

#### Key Principles

The key Principles underpinning our Vision are:

Key Principles	
1. The council's role is one of enabler and sign-poster to opportunities to be physically active.	5. Leisure facilities are inclusive and sustainable and should create opportunities for residents and visitors to be active, irrespective of ability, age, gender, ethnicity, income and belief.
2. Mutually beneficial partnerships aligned to deliver on shared priorities and outcomes and maximise community access to existing leisure provision.	6. To promote and provide infrastructure to encourage and facilitate increased use of walking and cycling routes.
3. All new provision should be designed to achieve carbon neutrality.	7. The Leisure Strategy will co-exist with, and support, other relevant RDC and partner strategies, particularly the RDC Corporate Plan 2020-2027, the RDC Emerging Local Plan (to 2039) and the East Sussex Health and Wellbeing Board Strategy (draft) to promote amongst the residents of Rother the benefits of physical activity for good health, positive wellbeing, cultural diversity and economic development.
4. Enabling provision of accessible and inclusive place-based provision of leisure facilities is important to improve the health and wellbeing of residents and visitors to the district.	

Our approach will provide for residents who are socially and economically disadvantaged to ensure they are able to benefit from affordable and accessible opportunities which contribute to reduced health inequalities and improved quality of life.

Partnership is key to delivery of our Leisure Strategy and Options to ensure co-ordination across services, and that it co-exists with the policies and priorities of our local and wider partners.

## Why does RDC need a Health, Well-Being and Leisure Facilities Strategy?

The importance of physical activity for individual and community health has been highlighted through the impact of Covid 19 pandemic which has also exacerbated health inequalities across the UK. It has become more important than ever to focus on preventative health measures, including physical activity and to invest in those people who need it most. In Rother, 26.5% of the population is inactive, higher than regional and national averages. RDC needs a strategy against which it can make decisions about priorities for future leisure provision which will impact on community health and wellbeing.

Extensive community and stakeholder consultation were undertaken to inform this strategy:

**Table 1 Consultation Feedback Summary**

<b>Summary Consultation Feedback</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increasingly, Rother residents recognise the need to be more active to improve their health.</li> <li>Many of them are already active but there are issues e.g. cost, time, awareness that prevent individuals from taking part.</li> <li>Some residents responding to consultation want to be more active but have not yet changed their lifestyles – engaging them in opportunities to be active is key moving forward.</li> <li>Whilst many people use the existing RDC facilities there is a desire to see more modern facilities e.g. pools and gyms, and to be able to access provision during the day. This is an issue in respect of dual-use sites due to curriculum use.</li> <li>There is a desire to see a new swimming pool, preferably laned.</li> <li>The lack of any teaching pools impacts on the ability of children to learn to swim; in a coastal area this is a critical life skill.</li> <li>Many clubs have ambitions to grow and would like to see improved facilities to support this.</li> <li>Improved facilities for those with a disability are highlighted as a priority.</li> <li>Access to facilities in the daytime is key, particularly for older residents.</li> <li>There is a need to provide more physical activities for children</li> <li>The facilities most wanted in the district are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Laned swimming pool</li> <li>➢ Outdoor fitness facilities</li> <li>➢ Café <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Improved facilities for disabled</li> <li>➢ More local gyms</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The majority of residents want to travel no more than 15 minutes to a leisure facility (31.4%)</li> <li>Over 40% of residents said they wanted to do exercise outdoors (4 times more than any other response).</li> <li>Over 40% of residents said the cost of current facilities was too high.</li> <li>50% of respondents would like prices at RDC facilities to be 50% cheaper</li> <li>The vast majority of respondents (51%) want to see a laned swimming pool in the District, more outdoor fitness facilities, and more local gyms and studios</li> <li>Key barriers to residents being physically active include cost, awareness of facilities and activities, limited disability access, lack of provision for teenagers and young people, distance to travel</li> <li>The activities that people most want to take part in include walking, cycling, swimming,</li> <li>80% of residents said they did the same or more exercise since Covid.</li> <li>55% of residents said that the change in their exercise regime was permanent</li> <li>80% of residents wanted to be within 15 minutes of any centre or facility they used with 60% still travelling by car.</li> <li>At 30% swimming facilities were twice as much wanted as any other facility. Gyms attract 10% of respondents and studios/halls 20% of respondents.</li> <li>A very positive outcome from Covid is that 55% of residents have become aware that they need to be more physically active to improve their health.</li> </ul>

## Summary Consultation Feedback

- Partnership working is key, particularly in relation to swimming provision.
- Provision of inclusive and affordable activities is as important as good quality facilities

In terms of RDC's leisure facilities:

**Table 2 Summary Overview of RDC's Leisure Facilities**

Summary Overview of RDC's Leisure Facilities	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The leisure assets are ageing (community leisure facilities have a lifespan of 30-35 years, in general)</li> <li>• There is no teaching pool in the district</li> <li>• There is limited access to laned swimming pools in Bexhill</li> <li>• Bexhill Leisure pool is well-used but anecdotal feedback identifies it is challenging to do lane swimming in the leisure pool environment</li> <li>• The dual-use sites all have different arrangements; some are supported by RDC and others are not. These facilities do not provide daytime access to the Rother community, the majority of whom are ageing and want to use facilities during the day. Financially, RDC's subsidy should reflect the extent of community use provided, and the community benefit derived. Financial arrangements underpinning the dual-use agreements are outdated and are in need of review.</li> <li>• There is an under-supply of swimming pools to meet demand</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The future of Bexhill Leisure Pool needs to be considered; retention of the existing building will require significant investment, or there could be an option to retain the building but change what is provided or divest of the building. A decision is needed now given the existing lease has a surrender clause in it for 2024.</li> <li>• There is significant opportunity to work in partnership with Hastings Borough Council to invest in a range of sustainable swimming pool offers, that complement each other and offer best value to both communities</li> <li>• There is currently sufficient provision of sports halls, but none should be lost, and community access needs to be retained at all those that currently offer it. Moving forward, provision of multi-purpose hall space would offer increased flexibility offer a range of both formal and informal activity programmes, targeted at those who would benefit from being more active.</li> <li>• There is opportunity to develop increased use of the outdoor space and other informal assets e.g. community centres/village halls to reduce reliance on formal built provision, as well as the beach, seafront, recreational grounds and parks. This reflects the move for some residents to being active outside.</li> </ul>

## Strategy Aim

The aim of developing this strategy is to contribute to improved quality of life for Rother residents and visitors and facilitate provision of good quality opportunities to be physically active on a regular. The role of Rother District Council (the Council/RDC) in co-ordinating, facilitating, enabling, and in some cases delivering opportunities to be physically active is key e.g. Active Rother, whether provision relates to facilities or services, indoors and outdoors.

## RDC Objective

To provide the maximum access to residents for the various health, leisure and well-being activities they wish to engage in with specific regard for those living in deprived circumstances or who have disabilities/life-limiting conditions. Access to services must address affordability and find a balance between the needs of Bexhill and rural residents and be affordable in the long term to RDC.

The criteria for assessing proposed developments are identified as:

- Be or become accessible by public transport from those living in the most deprived communities and encourage alternative forms of transport where possible.
- Make a contribution to addressing health inequalities.
- Contribute to the goal of the Council achieving carbon neutral status by 2030
- RDC provision should complement that delivered by the private sector

## Strategy Implementation

RDC will be focusing on the points listed in paragraphs 6.9 to 6.20 of the Leisure Strategy report.

It is clear from the research that residents want a laned swimming facility. Primary research also shows a need for providing a learn to swim and exercise/pleasure pool facility. Rother has the opportunity to deliver a facility that services a much broader catchment area than the District.

The needs in the rural areas and Bexhill are broadly the same but when considering a pool facility regard needs to be given to location and the size and type of pool. The time taken to get to any facility will be a strong determinant in how much it is used.

Outdoor facilities are now a high priority for residents both in rural areas and Bexhill.

There is a need to consider the significant cost to invest in any facility given historic low user rates, and the significant increase in energy costs combined with the need to make any facility carbon neutral.

There is an opportunity to reduce the risk of the leisure operator's dependency on RDC through changing the parameters of the leisure contract.

Where possible RDC will work across boundaries with neighbouring authorities.

## Proposed Strategy

To become the provider of a swimming facility which is not offered by private providers and to become partners in providing 'dry' indoor services and outdoor built services.

To provide a pool facility which will maximise accessibility for residents. The location should be assessed on the current and future location of residents in the district taking into account the radius of travel for residents in different parts of the district. To provide specific focus on support for disabled and those from deprived areas. Any new facility should be designed to achieve carbon neutrality so location and building orientation will be a key determinant. To deliver the strategy without the need for closure of the existing facilities to ensure residents do not 'fall away' during any construction period.

1. Become a 'sign poster' rather than a 'provider of facilities' for residents.	3. Support all Towns and Parishes with the creation of better outdoor facilities where required. Town and Parish Councils have a clear understanding of their residents' needs and can create very successful facilities with high usage as demonstrated by the Battle model.
---	---

2. Optimise delivery of available non-swimming 'dry' facilities through joint arrangements with existing owners of private sports facilities including clubs and schools using subsidies to help offset the increasing cost those facilities are now facing. This approach will give RDC long term flexibility.	5. RDC will work in partnership to plan and deliver inclusive and accessible swimming pool facilities effectively across Rother and Hastings areas, given proximity of geographical boundaries.
3. RDC's swimming offer will complement facilities provided by the commercial sector, and will maximise accessibility for residents, assessed on both existing and future locations of residents. Any new swimming offer may need to be co-located with other provision that generates both throughput and revenue to ensure financial sustainability. Existing swimming provision would remain open until any new facility provision is developed.	6. To build on promoting and providing infrastructure to increase the use of cycling and walking.

RDC is clear it is a priority to improve community health and wellbeing; facilitating opportunities for physical activity and leisure can support people to be more active. This Health, Well-Being and Leisure Facilities Strategy provides a summary of need up to 2033 using technical analysis and consultation with partners and residents. It sets the strategic framework for addressing this need through a range of both formal and informal provision. This approach mirrors the feedback from the independent market research. The Strategy should be updated periodically alongside other RDC key corporate plans.

In order to deliver the Strategy, investment (resources, finance and time) will be required in outdoor places and spaces in which to be active, existing community facilities, partnerships, and indoor facilities, Innovative funding models, strong partnerships and collaboration will be required.

The next steps in Strategy delivery are:

- Production of a Delivery Plan with timescales
- Work with existing partners to identify options to meet priorities in existing facilities
- Identify new potential partnership working opportunities
- Establish the resources required to deliver the priorities
- Investigate external funding opportunities

The Delivery Plan will support this strategy, identifying priorities for action including how and when actions can be taken.