Fact Sheet 5

Other built leisure facilities
Introduction

In 2017, SNC commissioned a series of research studies (completed according to national guidelines and methodology) as an evidence base to inform the development of our Local Plan Part 2. These are high level studies, focusing on sports facilities, playing pitches and open space. Factsheets 5, 6 and 7 summarise the key findings from these studies. The assessments completed in the studies are based on a number of factors which change over time therefore the recommendations need to be kept under review.

Summary

The Nortoft Sports Facilities Study considers built facilities used by the community for sport and physical activity. Apart from the council-owned leisure centres all other larger community sport facilities are on education sites, and other than the Willison Centre at Roade, are only available through club bookings. There is also a network of other private and third sector sites providing built facilities with varying amounts of public access. The other main facility is the private sector Whittlebury Hall Leisure Club and Spa.

Sports Halls

Sports halls are one of the prime facilities for community sport, providing a venue for a wide range of activities, including badminton, martial arts, indoor 5-a-side football, volleyball and netball. In addition to our two Leisure Centres there are sports halls at eight secondary schools across the district that should be protected and maintained to ensure their affordability and accessibility to clubs and individuals.

Specific recommendations in relation to sports halls were:

• There is sufficient capacity within the existing sports hall network in Towcester to meet the extra demand for sports hall space, even with local housing growth. The priority in Towcester is to retain, refurbish and improve existing sports halls, rather than provide additional capacity.
• Reduce the programming pressures on the sports halls in Brackley, for example, by ancillary halls and investment in 3G pitch space
• Support Magdalen College School (Brackley) and Chenderit School (Middleton Cheney) to extend their opening hours as demand develops and to refurbish their facilities as required, to improve community use
• Support village and community halls across the district to enable them to cater for hall based activities

Village and community halls

There are more than 78 village, community and church halls in the district. Most residents have access to a hall within a 10 minute drive time and many within a 10 minute walk. Our halls vary from large multi-room complexes, such as Grange Park Community Centre, to smaller aging halls within the smaller villages. Halls can provide a valuable local venue for a range of sports and physical activities, accessible to people within their locality.

Recommendations were that:

• Existing halls should be protected and improved to enable them to host a range of sports and physical activities for all age ranges
Swimming

Swimming pools are an important sports facility as they are used by most of the community, from the very youngest through to people in older age. There are five indoor swimming pools in our district, at Brackley, Roade, Tiffield, Towcester and at Whittlebury Hall. Two are public pools, three are at schools with limited community access and one is commercial.

Specific recommendations relating to swimming pools were:

• Construct and open a replacement pool in Brackley
• Close the old pool in Brackley for community use
• Retain, maintain and improve the pools at Towcester Centre for Leisure, the Willison Centre (Elizabeth Woodville School, Roade) and The Gateway School pool (Tiffield)
• The needs of the Northampton Related Development Area Sustainable Urban Extensions (SUEs) will be met by a new leisure centre in the Kings Heath SUE, or at Upton or at the Duston Sports Centre

Health & Fitness

Indoor fitness facilities include fitness gyms and studio space (multi-purpose rooms used for a range of fitness activities and dance that are usually an integral part of a leisure centre of commercial fitness site).

The delivery priorities for health and fitness were:

• Delivery of the new Brackley Leisure Centre extension with expanded health and fitness
• Design a large fitness gym studio into the proposed Kings Heath Leisure Centre
• Enable changes to the commercial sector provision of health and fitness facilities as the market alters
• Refurbishment/upgrade of Towcester Centre for Leisure gym and changing rooms

Athletics

Participation in athletics includes track and field events, cross-country running, road running, marathon/ultra-marathon running and jogging. There is one eight lane floodlit track at Moulton College serving much of West Northamptonshire. Most residents of our district have access to athletic track facilities within a 30 minute drive time. There are two established running clubs in the district, Brackley and District Running Club and Silson Joggers Athletic Club, which meets at and uses Silverstone Circuit as a venue.

Specific recommendations relating to athletics are:

• Improvement of the training facilities at Silverstone in association with the clubs
• Development of measured walking and running routes, in Towcester, Brackley and other locations, in association with England Athletics and other partners, utilising open spaces, parks and traffic free routes

Gymnastics

Participation in gymnastics is increasing rapidly. Growth of British Gymnastics membership has been more than 7% each year since 2011. More teenagers and adults (11-25 year olds) are taking part in gymnastics regularly, due to the increased opportunities and suitable activities available within the clubs. There is one specialist gymnastics and trampoline centre in the district, at Wade Gymnastics Club, in Warkworth.

Recommendations for gymnastics are:

• Retain and support the existing gymnastics facilities, which should be protected and maintained at high quality
• Enhance provision by supporting community centres or village halls to have additional storage to enable the provision of gymnastics both during the school day and for after school sessions
• In the longer term, additional or expanded dedicated gymnastics facilities should be developed within the district to respond to demand
Indoor Bowls
There is one specialist indoor bowls site at Brackley and District, which is reported to have large amounts of spare capacity. A high proportion of members of indoor bowls clubs are aged 60+ years.

Outdoor Bowls
There are eight bowling green sites with affiliated clubs in the district. The Nortoft study suggests that if the existing outdoor bowling greens within district are retained and maintained at a high quality, there is sufficient capacity to cater for both the increases in population and aging population within their catchments.

Cycling
Northamptonshire is lacking cycling facilities to meet local demand and there are currently no cycle sport facilities in the county.

Tennis
There is no indoor tennis provision in our district. There are currently 30 dedicated tennis courts with regular community use across the district, 22 of which are courts on LTA affiliated club sites. The Harpole courts are immediately on the boundary of the Upton Lodge / Norwood Farm development, it is considered likely that these courts will meet some of the tennis demand arising from the NRDA.

All of the courts across the district are above average quality, and several are good, including all of the affiliated club sites. All sites, except Silverstone and Harpole have suitable changing provision. The only sites with floodlit courts are Brackley, Nether Heyford and Towcestrians; the provision of floodlighting extends court capacity as it allows facilities to be used in the evenings.

Recommendations for outdoor tennis are:
• Floodlight all the tennis courts at Roade Tennis Club and Silverstone Tennis Club, or
• Provide 2 additional community courts in both Roade and Silverstone
• Provide a clubhouse at Silverstone Tennis Club
• Improve the clubhouse at Roade Tennis Club to support the further expansion of the club
• Delivery of three tennis courts at Towcester South SUE as part of the S106 agreement
• Improve the existing Harpole tennis courts provision to improve accessibility and ancillary facilities. Protect all of the LTA community club tennis sites and ensure that they are maintained at high quality

Golf
Golf has a significant commercial element. Provision for this sport is likely to respond most to economic conditions and will change to reflect patterns of demand. Golf clubs will need to respond to changing customer expectations to keep their facilities as viable. It is anticipated that the increase in housing delivery in West Northamptonshire will generate more demand for golf.

Recommendations are to:
• Retain and maintain the existing golf courses and facilities and support the golf sites to remain open in economically challenging times. There may be a need to enable the development of new courses and driving ranges where appropriate. Positive planning policies are required which enable the offer at golf courses to evolve. These planning policies must balance with other policies relating to the impact on the countryside