

# Leisure Strategy 2022-32



# Contents

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1.	Foreword	3
2.	Introduction	4
3.	The context for West Berkshire	6
3.1	Strategic	6
3.2	Population Health	7
3.3	Geography	7
3.4	Physical Activity Levels	8
3.5	Active Leisure Facilities in West Berkshire	9
3.6	The Impact of Covid	10
3.7	Partnerships and Funding	11
4.	Our Vision and Aims for Leisure in West Berkshire	12
4.1	Our Vision	12
4.2	Our Aims	12
5.	The Case for Change	13
5.1	Increase participation for all, but with an emphasis on those less physically active, and maintain improved activity levels throughout lives	13
5.2	Facilitate access to a network of modern and sustainable indoor sports and leisure facilities	14
5.3	Improve the quality, accessibility and awareness of outdoor sports facilities and play areas	15
5.4	Measurably enhance access to, and utilisation of greenspace and bluespace, through improving accessibility to open water, waterways, parks, commons and Public Rights of Way	16
5.5	Further develop partnerships (with town and parish councils, sport governing bodies, health organisations and the voluntary sector), with an emphasis on actively encouraging volunteering	17
6.	Our Objectives	18
7.	Delivery, Monitoring and Resourcing of this Strategy	20
8.	Conclusions	21
9.	References	22
10.	Figures	24
11.	Appendices	
	Appendix 1 Summary of data including 'What's Your Leisure?'	
	Appendix 2 Get Berkshire Active – Leisure Strategy Consultation Report – September 2021	
	Appendix 3 West Berkshire Council Facilities Planning Model summary	



# 1. Foreword

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Leisure, in all its forms, is vital to individual wellbeing and quality of life. In our District, we want to ensure that the leisure opportunities, whether through formal leisure facilities, parks and green spaces, or otherwise, are integral to what makes West Berkshire such a great place to live.

In the [West Berkshire 2036 Vision<sup>1</sup>](#) we committed, to maintaining a strong local leisure offering, recognising the importance of doing so in securing good outcomes for residents of all ages, as well as attracting newcomers to the District. The Covid pandemic has brought this commitment into particular focus. The importance of sustaining good mental and physical health is increasingly apparent.

To facilitate this commitment, we will deliver an ambitious, revitalised offering of which the District can be proud. This strategy, and its delivery plan, which we will develop once the strategy has been adopted, outlines how we intend to work with our residents and partners to develop leisure opportunities and increase accessibility to meet the needs and wishes of the local community and, in so doing, increase participation. Whilst health and wellbeing is central to this strategy, we will also ensure that

environmental sustainability and its impact is fully considered. We also recognise that Leisure, through its role as an employer and a local attraction, supports the local economy.

Where there is clear evidence of local demand for new facilities we will explore ways to deliver them, whether on our own or in partnership, or with the many volunteers who contribute hugely to the diverse range of sport and leisure opportunities already available in the District. Equally, where investment would benefit existing facilities, we will work to offer this, ensuring the sustainability of community assets.

During the lifetime of this strategy, we will scope and deliver projects which enable local people to be more active in the community and engage in a variety of leisure pursuits, adding value to their lives and to the vibrancy of the District.

## Howard Woollaston

*Executive Member for Internal Governance, Leisure & Culture*





## 2. Introduction

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“  
*In the context of the strategy, we mean ‘active’ leisure, where the activity involves physical effort that will deliver health and wellbeing benefits to the individual.*”

The term ‘Leisure’ means something different to all of us, with personal preference dictating how we choose to spend our time away from work, home or school. In the context of the strategy, we mean ‘active’ leisure, where the activity involves physical effort that will deliver health and wellbeing benefits to the individual. We recognise that there are many other non-active leisure activities that play a critical role in people’s lives, but these are outside the scope of this Strategy.

As a society, we are less active than we used to be and, regardless of how active we have, or have not, been in the past, and of our age and ability, there is strong scientific evidence that being physically active can help us to achieve a healthier and happier life. Research

shows that those who exercise regularly reduce their risk of significant health issues including dementia, depression, diabetes and some cancers. Indeed, it is increasingly accepted that ‘exercise is medicine’ and it has even been called the ‘wonder drug’ and a ‘miracle cure’. Incorporating physical activity into our daily lives has also been shown to boost self-esteem and mood, improve sleep quality and energy levels, and reduce the risk of chronic stress.

There is also evidence to suggest other social and economic benefits to exercise such as long term educational attainment, supporting social inclusion, increased workplace productivity and reduced absenteeism at work.

Leisure activity has become increasingly important through Covid, and the benefits, both physical and mental, are clearly recognised. The refreshed [Council Strategy](#)<sup>2</sup> incorporates our updated [Covid-19 Recovery and Renewal Strategy](#)<sup>3</sup> which prioritises the recovery of West Berkshire’s health and social wellbeing, the delivery of which will be supported by the new

Health and Wellbeing Strategy. This Leisure Strategy is timely and will help deliver recovery for the District.

The pandemic has demonstrated that active leisure is undertaken in many ways, often outside a formal leisure facility or programme. West Berkshire is rich in opportunities to enjoy the countryside and we want to ensure that these opportunities are maximised for all.

We wish to support everyone, particularly those people that are not currently partaking in active leisure, to get involved and enjoy the benefits, and will be seeking ways of improving accessibility and variety of opportunities.

This strategy will not be delivered in isolation. We will work with partners and volunteers to deliver the objectives and will ensure that our ambitions are consistent with our other strategies and priorities, by seeking to integrate transport links, reduce carbon emissions, and harness technological advances to reduce health inequalities, and to break down barriers to sport and leisure opportunity.

This strategy explains the plans we have, as a Council, for the District's leisure offering through to 2032. It builds on our commitment to maintain West Berkshire's status as a great place to live and also contributes to our shared aspiration to deliver good health and wellbeing opportunities for residents of all ages and backgrounds, as outlined in the West Berkshire 2036 Vision. The formal West Berkshire Council leisure offering will be delivered, in the main, through the renewed Leisure Management Contract, due to commence in 2023. Improved access to the countryside and greenspaces will be delivered through the Council's [Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan](#)<sup>4</sup> which is currently undergoing consultation prior to publication in 2022.

In writing this strategy, we have engaged with the public to understand their active leisure priorities and the barriers to participation, via an online [‘What’s your Leisure?’](#)<sup>5</sup> survey. To support this we also commissioned Get [Get Berkshire Active \(GBA\)](#)<sup>6</sup> to undertake focussed [workshop sessions](#)<sup>7</sup> with representatives of specific, ‘seldom heard’ groups. We have also engaged directly with our leisure partners.

We look forward to working with our community to shape the future of leisure provision in our District and to deliver an ever more varied and inclusive range of lifestyle opportunities for local people.

# 3. The context for West Berkshire

## 3.1 Strategic

In order to support people to become more active, updated weekly physical activity [guidelines](#)<sup>8</sup> for [different population groups](#)<sup>9</sup>, were published by the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) in 2019. For the general population, a combination of 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity and/or 75 minutes of vigorous intensity activity is recommended, on a weekly basis across four or more days. Additionally, it is recommended that we partake in strength-building activities at least twice a week; engage in activities that maintain and improve balance at least twice a week; and minimise our sedentary time by breaking up periods of inactivity as often as possible.

To support this, [Public Health England](#)<sup>10</sup> identified three focus areas in its strategy 'Everybody Active Every Day'<sup>11</sup>: Making physical activity the social norm; Making environments accessible for all; and Making physical activity inclusive for everyone. In a similar vein, Sport England in 'Uniting the Movement'<sup>12</sup> set out five key priorities in 2021: Recover and Reinvent; An Active and Healthier Life; Fairer Access to Physical Activity; Strengthen Communities; and Active Environments.

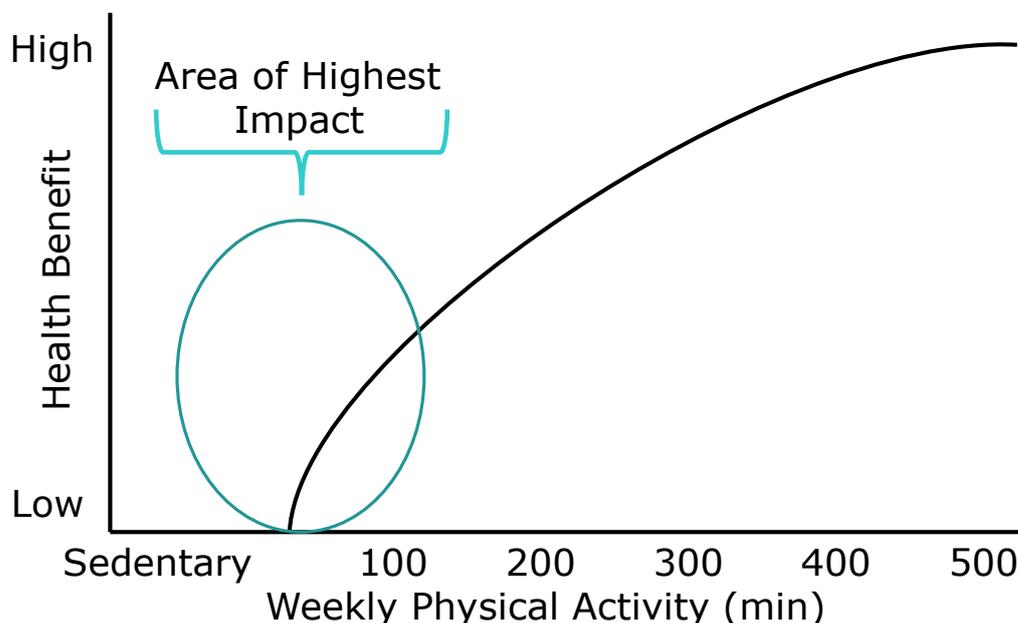
Ultimately, those who are currently considered 'inactive' – defined as doing less than 30 minutes of physical activity per week – stand to gain the most. As demonstrated in Figure 1, these people will see the most health benefits from becoming more active, even if it is just by a few minutes at a time.

This Strategy is being developed with reference to the national context of a focus on longer and healthier lives, particularly for disadvantaged communities, as part of the 'Build Back Better'<sup>13</sup> and levelling up ambitions set out by central government.

Reflecting the national view, in 2019, the [Health and Wellbeing Boards \(HWBs\) for Reading, West Berkshire and Wokingham \(Berkshire West\)](#)<sup>14</sup> developed a shared [Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#)<sup>15</sup> with the [Berkshire West Integrated Care Partnership](#)<sup>16</sup> (ICP), to improve population and community health.

The Leisure Strategy sits within the wider strategic context for West Berkshire Council; supporting some strategies, being delivered through others and using others for that delivery. Figure 2 shows the Leisure Strategy in relation to other key Council strategies, including the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

**Figure 1 Exercise and Benefits to Health** (Source: Adapted from [Wen CP et al, 2011](#))





### 3.4 Physical Activity Levels

In our District, [Office for Health Improvements and Disparities \(previously Public Health England\) data](#)<sup>18</sup> shows that 77.3% of [adults](#)<sup>19</sup> are considered physically active which is significantly higher than the average in England of 66.4%. However, 14.2% of adults in West Berkshire are physically inactive, which translates to around [18,000](#)<sup>20</sup> people. Whilst this may be lower than the national average, we believe this is still too high.

Recent regional estimates indicate that 49.9% of children in West Berkshire are considered to be physically active which implies that half of the children in West Berkshire, nearly 16,000 individuals under 16, are not getting enough physical activity.

Findings from the West Berkshire Council [‘What’s Your Leisure?’](#)<sup>5</sup> survey show that, whilst club membership and organised leisure is important, less structured or formalised activities such as ‘Walking for Leisure’ and running are among the most popular forms of active leisure. The data also shows that there is significant demand for swimming, fitness classes and gyms.

This broadly reflects the ‘Active Lives’ data for West Berkshire from [Sports England](#)<sup>21</sup> for 2019/20, with the exception of adventure sports.

To ensure we identified the needs of groups who are traditionally harder to reach, we engaged Get Berkshire Active (GBA) to work

with organisations and charities representing elderly, disabled, youth and ethnic minorities, through [workshop sessions](#)<sup>7</sup>.

The GBA analysis indicates that walking is a very popular activity for both elderly and many with health conditions and disabilities, with dementia walks highlighted. For the frail elderly, low impact activities such as chair-based sessions, tai chi and swimming are popular, and for under 18s, the opportunity to try something new can be a good motivator.

The GBA research broadly supported the findings of the ‘What’s Your Leisure?’ Survey, but did highlight, for both young and elderly, that the social aspect of activity is a more important factor than the type of activity or sport.

### 3.5 Active Leisure Facilities in West Berkshire

A wide range of leisure facilities is available within West Berkshire, across the public, private and voluntary sectors.

The public sector has seven leisure centres (four with swimming pools), Newbury Lido, the Henwick Worthy Sports Ground and the emerging Newbury Sports Hub. In addition, many secondary schools and academies across the District have facilities which can be booked for use by local sports clubs and community associations. Figure 4 shows the locations of the Council’s indoor leisure facilities.

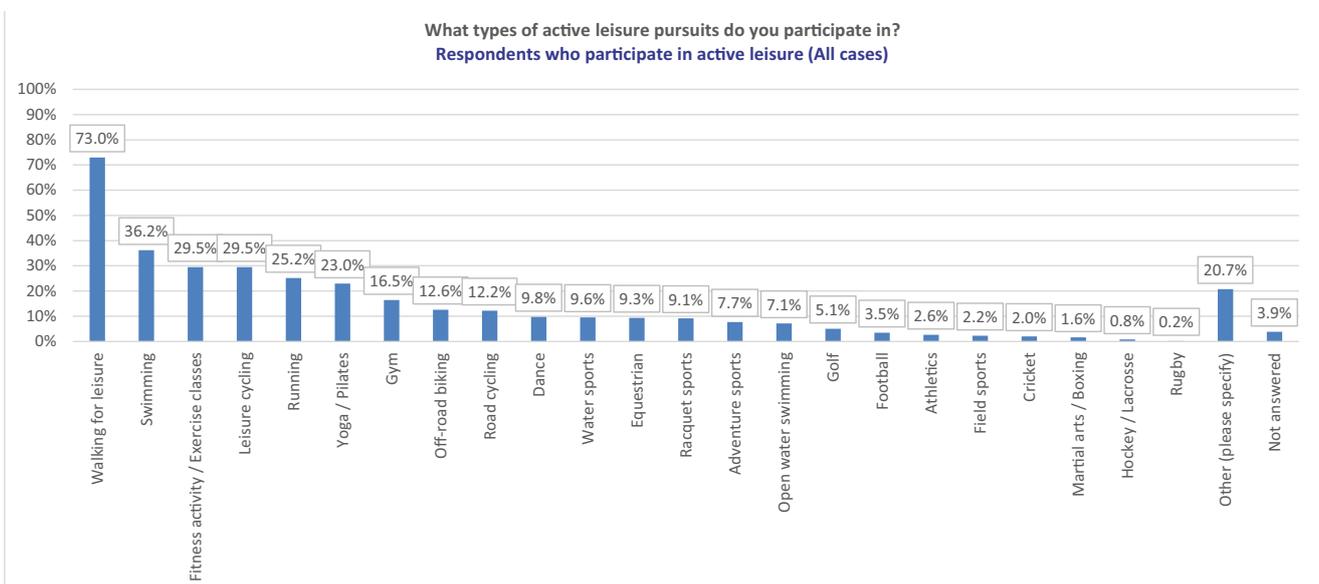
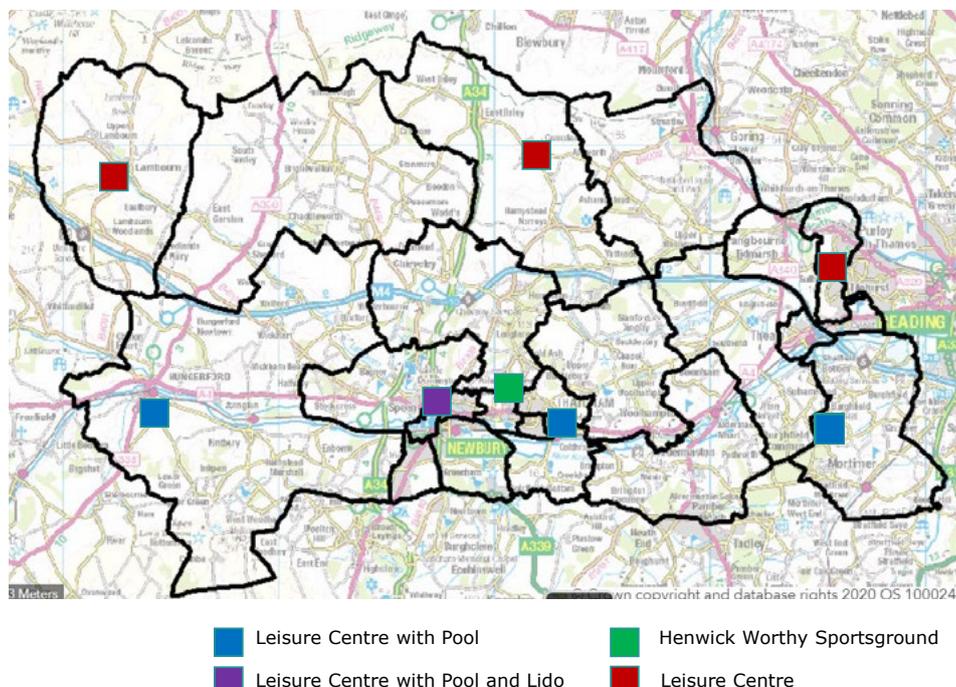


Figure 3 Activity type and participation levels (Source: WBC ‘What’s your Leisure?’ survey)

**Figure 4 - Location of West Berkshire Leisure Centres**  
(Source: WBC)



Northcroft, Kennet, Willink and Hungerford Leisure Centres are owned outright by the Council. Northcroft is a standalone facility, whilst the others were developed on school sites and are subject to Joint Use Agreements with the local town and parish councils and the schools. The Cotswold Sports Centre was developed by the local community and is owned by Tilehurst Parish Council and is leased to West Berkshire Council. The Lambourn Centre is a small facility owned by the Council but subject to a Joint Use Agreement with the Parish Council. Downlands Sports Centre is part of the Downs School in Compton and made available for community use in the evenings.

The seven leisure centres, and Lido, are operated under a leisure management contract with Parkwood Leisure Limited, sublet to their charitable arm, Legacy Leisure. The current contract commenced in 2007 and is due to expire in early 2023; a retendering of the leisure management contract is underway and scheduled to commence in April 2023.

The facilities vary in age, with most of the sports halls on school sites dating back to the 1960s. The Northcroft Leisure Centre was opened in 1980 on the site of the Lido which dates back to 1870. The indoor swimming pools all date to 1996/97 as part of a development programme at the time which included a full refurbishment of the

Northcroft indoor pool. The Lambourn Centre was constructed on the site of a former village school in 1992.

Private leisure centres within the District mostly operate on a membership basis and range from budget gyms to premium health clubs. There are also various classes established by local private instructors, both indoors and outdoors, e.g. boot camps.

In addition to leisure centre and gym facilities, there are a number of more specialist facilities within West Berkshire, providing access to athletics, racquet sports, gymnastics, golf, bowls and BMX cycling. There are also a number of skateparks.

Equestrian pursuits are fundamental to the identity of West Berkshire, and whilst horse racing, and its associated commercial activity, is outside the scope of this Strategy, equestrian leisure activity is significant, with a number of private facilities and public bridleways.

The District has a range of playing pitches, from semi-professional facilities, to school sports grounds and recreational pitches in villages. In 2019, the Council developed the [Playing Pitch Strategy \(PPS\)](#)<sup>33</sup> following a detailed assessment of the supply of, and demand for, all types of pitches across West Berkshire. This identified a shortage of accessible pitches relative to both the current

## Facilities within West Berkshire, as of 31 March 2021

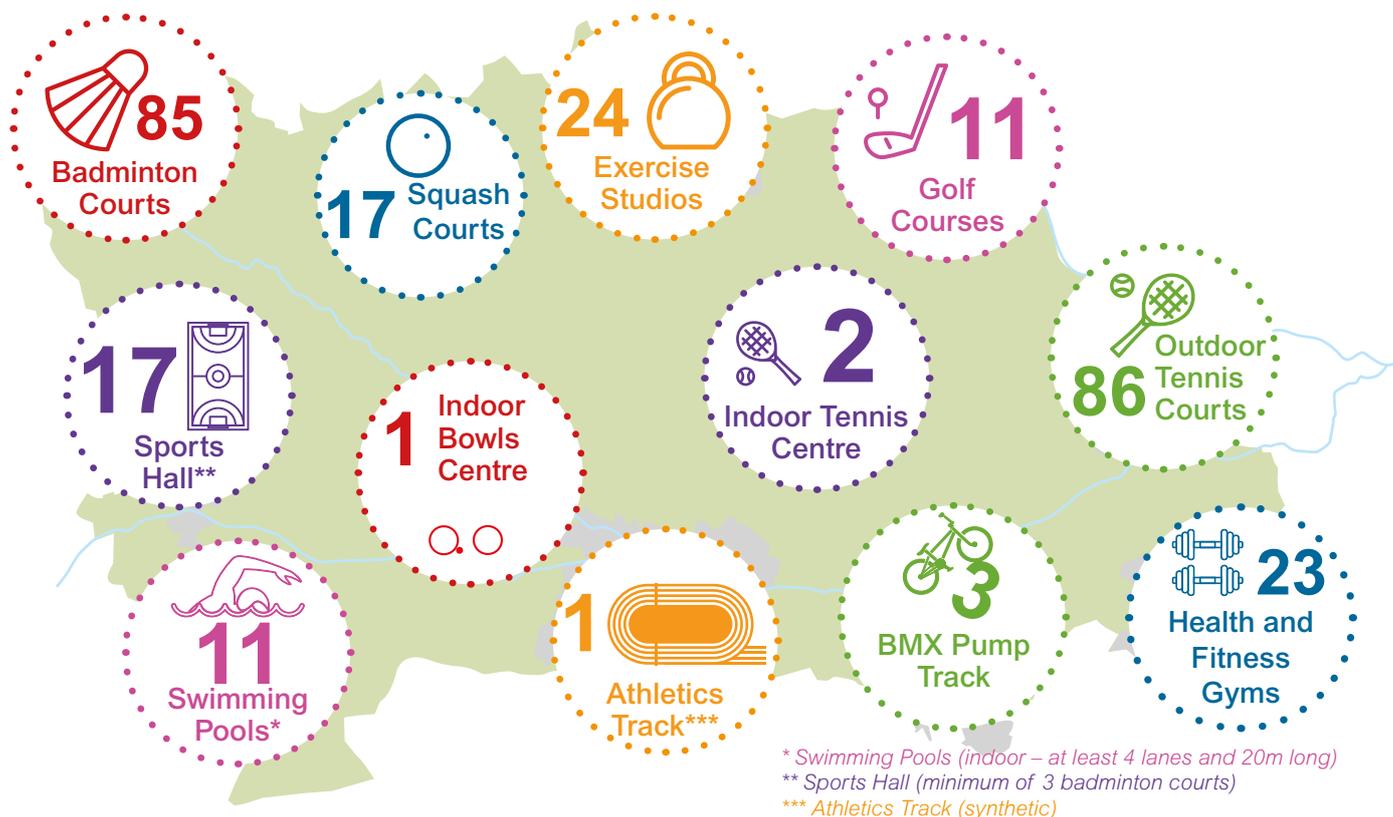


Figure 5 - Summary of Leisure Facilities in West Berkshire (Source: [Active Places Power](#))<sup>22</sup>

and future (to 2037) population of West Berkshire, based on Sport England guidelines.

An extensive network of waterways and lakes exists within West Berkshire which currently supports sports such as sailing, paddleboarding and canoeing.

There are over 200 sports clubs in West Berkshire, some with their own facilities. These vary in size and facilities but support sports such as rugby, cricket, football and hockey, as well as activities such as dance and martial arts. Some of these larger clubs are semi-professional.

Village and community halls also vary in size and quality of facilities, but play host to activities such as fitness classes/yoga, children's groups, short mat bowls, badminton and table tennis, and there is at least one in every parish within the District.

It should be noted that there are some popular activities for which there are limited opportunities available to the general public within West Berkshire e.g. open water swimming and indoor climbing.

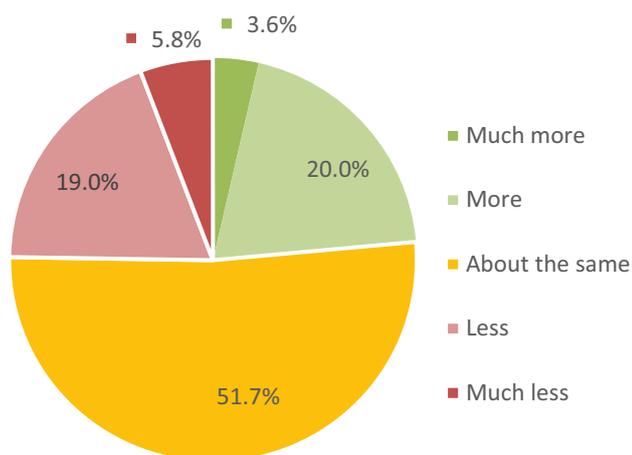
### 3.6 The Impact of Covid

The impact of Covid on physical activity levels has been much debated, with more time at home for walking, offset by the closure of leisure centres, gyms, clubs and classes. Evidence from our survey indicates that as many people increased their activity levels as decreased them, with half remaining unchanged. [National data](#)<sup>21</sup> indicates that activity levels fell by around 2% in the year to May 2021, with the greatest impact on those aged 16-34.

Undoubtedly the type of leisure activity did change, with a significant increase in walking, running and cycling, as other opportunities for leisure were closed. Many organisations sought to address this through online activities but, whilst these were popular, they were less accessible for those with limited digital access or awareness and did not offer the same level of social benefit.

The GBA analysis highlighted that many of the elderly, and more vulnerable, were significantly impacted, as venues closed, and that the social, as well as physical, opportunities were lost. This has discouraged some from returning, as it has increased their frailty. Many

**How does your current level of participation in active leisure compare to before the Covid pandemic (pre March 2020)?**



**Figure 6 - Impact of Covid on Participation Levels** (Source: WBC 'What's your Leisure?' survey)

are also still concerned by the Covid risk, itself. Young people also suffered, losing both clubs and school activities. While the popularity of cycling and walking increased significantly, the former is less accessible to those on low incomes. Additionally, people from diverse ethnic communities are significantly under-represented, nationally, in outdoor activities.

The current pandemic provides an opportunity to reflect on the value of the Council's greenspace and current provision, as part of the post Covid recovery planning process. During the recent lockdowns, our residents and communities were unable to participate in nearly all formal out-of-home leisure activity and, consequently, demand for open spaces, greenspace and countryside increased as residents sought out alternative opportunities to maximise their leisure time. As many residents were unable to work, they had more time to engage in leisure and outdoor recreation.

### 3.7 Partnerships and Funding

Partner organisations are key to the facilitation of physical activity in West Berkshire. These partners range from national organisations such as Sport England and individual sports' bodies, to regional health partners, and town and parish councils, local clubs and the voluntary sector.

Town and parish councils are vital partners in providing active leisure facilities such as village

halls, local sports grounds and play areas, with West Berkshire Council often playing an enabling role in developing plans and funding through Parish Plans and Members' grants; over £30,000 of funding was granted for active play facilities in 2019 and 2020. Larger sums are also granted, such as a £100,000 from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) in October 2021, to develop outdoor play and multi-sports facilities in Theale.

The '[Let's Get Active' fund](#)<sup>23</sup>, a partnership between West Berkshire Council and the Greenham Trust has made available £33,000 to support access to physical activity including a community basketball hub in Theale, free chair yoga sessions at Educafe in Newbury, netball equipment for Kintbury Jubilee Centre, and CrossFit sessions for West Berkshire Muslim Centre.

The Council works with the voluntary sector organisations focussed on youth services. In 2021, [£250,000](#)<sup>24</sup> was given to [Berkshire Youth](#)<sup>25</sup>, as a contribution to the redevelopment of the Waterside Centre, and it is in the process of transferring the Dolphin Centre at Pangbourne to the [Adventure Dolphin](#)<sup>26</sup> (Pangbourne) Charity to safeguard the future provision of watersports and climbing, for organised youth groups.

We also work with Public Health and the NHS, along with voluntary sector organisations, to provide activity sessions, many with links to social prescribing. Examples in place at present include [Activity4Health](#)<sup>27</sup> exercise referral, [Walking4Health](#)<sup>28</sup> and Activ8 Gym sessions for young people. These often address the demand for activities with 'people like me' raised by many who are anxious about starting participation.

Help with information and grant access is provided by Get Berkshire Active which delivers Sport England's strategic objectives throughout Berkshire, through the development of partnerships with sporting and non-sporting bodies to provide opportunities for engagement in physical activity. As a registered charity, Get Berkshire Active is able to access non-traditional funding opportunities and to work to develop programmes in the heart of community settings or the work place.



## 4. Our Vision and Aims for Leisure in West Berkshire

### 4.1 Our Vision

By 2032 we will have an **increased participation in active leisure** for all, with a **particular focus on those least active**, through access to a network of **modern and sustainable indoor facilities** together with a **diverse mix of accessible public outdoor sports facilities and greenspace and bluespace**.

We will further develop **partnerships** with public, commercial and voluntary organisations to drive participation in a wide range of activities.

We will deliver this vision for the District's future leisure offering by focusing on five strategic aims. These aims have been identified through consultation with the public (including seldom heard groups) and partners, as well as analysis of current use of facilities and modelling of future demand. We have also taken into consideration a number of key strategic documents including the West Berkshire Vision 2036, West Berkshire Council strategies for [Cultural Heritage](#)<sup>29</sup>, [Environment](#)<sup>30</sup>, [Economic Development](#)<sup>31</sup>, and Health and [Wellbeing](#)<sup>32</sup>.

### 4.2 Our Aims

1. Increase participation for all, with an emphasis on those less physically active, and maintain improved activity levels throughout lives;
2. Facilitate access to a network of modern and sustainable indoor sports and leisure facilities;
3. Improve the quality, accessibility and awareness of outdoor sports facilities and play areas;
4. Measurably enhance access to, and utilisation of [greenspace](#)<sup>36</sup> and [bluespace](#)<sup>37</sup>, through improving accessibility to open water, waterways, parks, commons and Public Rights of Way;
5. Further develop partnerships (with town and parish councils, sport governing bodies, health organisations and the voluntary sector), with an emphasis on actively encouraging volunteering.

# 5. The Case for Change

The impact of Covid on physical and mental wellbeing has placed a greater than ever emphasis on the importance of physical activity and the need for all stakeholders, including the Council and its partners, to examine how we can stimulate engagement and understand and meet new expectations.

## 5.1 Increase participation for all, with an emphasis on those less physically active, and maintain improved activity levels throughout lives;

Research shows that an individual's age and origin, including ethnicity or socio-economic background, have been key determinants of the level of opportunity available and the health and wellbeing outcomes. In line with [Sport England's own strategy](#)<sup>11</sup> we wish to re-balance this, ensuring that our District's offering is more inclusive than ever before and that everyone in West Berkshire is given the opportunity to thrive.

It is clear from our survey feedback that these challenges exist in West Berkshire. When asked about what needed to change to encourage participation, the top three issues, that the Council could impact, were cost, confidence and the need for accessible information on what is available.

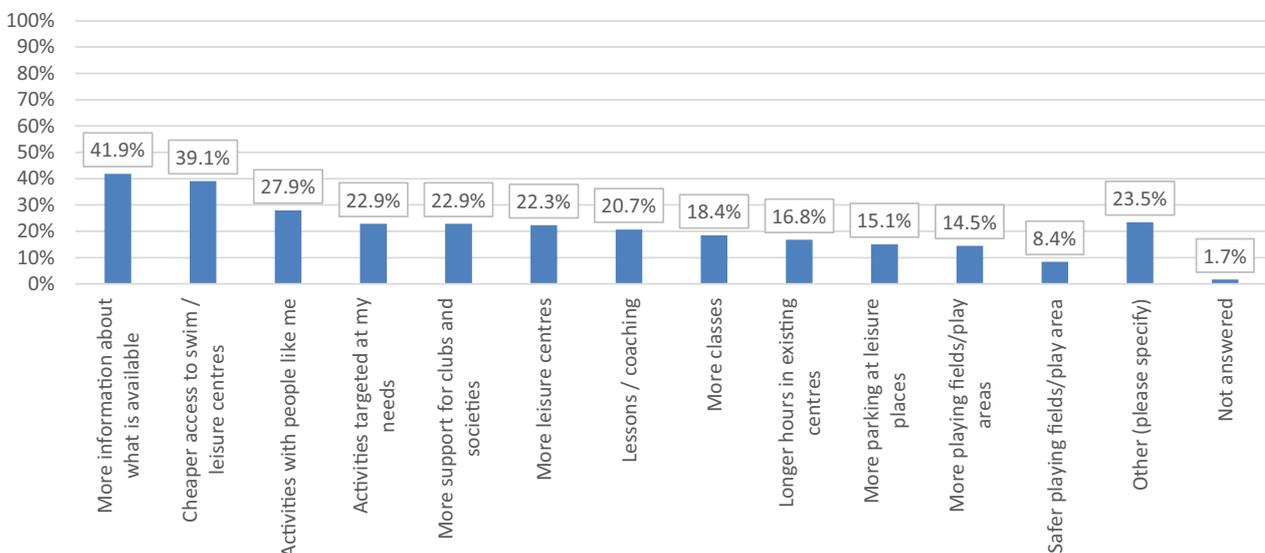
When asked what could be done to encourage people to do more, the responses mirrored the barriers and there was also a strong emphasis on the need for classes and activities for 'people like me'. Relatively inactive individuals can feel excluded from some activities; the success of programmes such as Park Run and 'Couch to 5k' has been to stress inclusivity.

These views are reflected in the GBA analysis. There are a number of barriers that affect different audiences and make it hard for them to be active, including location and accessibility of venues, the need for better customer service and well-trained staff to run and facilitate sessions, better messaging, advertising and signposting, and activities tailored to specific audiences and their needs, in order to make individuals feel welcome. More flexible booking systems are also identified as a need.

The GBA analysis reinforces the importance of keeping physically active, particularly acknowledging the health and social benefits.

The social benefit of active leisure is a motivator in bringing people to physical activity and keeping them involved, and support networks are also key in motivating and facilitating individuals to partake. Leisure

**What, if anything, would encourage/enable you to participate, or participate more regularly, in an active leisure pursuit? Respondents who don't participate in active leisure more than twice a week (All cases)**



**Figure 7 Potential Triggers to increase participation**  
(Source: WBC 'What's Your Leisure?' survey 2021)

opportunities need to be flexible and tailored to different audiences and a more specific approach to meet the needs of a particular group can make active leisure fully inclusive. A 'one size fits all' does not necessarily work.

These findings demonstrate that, often, the barriers to active leisure are similar for everyone, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, disability or socioeconomic group; everybody wants to feel welcome and that they fit in and are comfortable in their environment. What differs is what provides these assurances and, through this Strategy, we will explore the facilitators and barriers to being active, to understand what is required in order to make everyone feel welcome and motivated to engage in active leisure. This is particularly important as we work to recover from Covid.

We also wish to encourage people to maintain higher levels of activity throughout their lives. The type and intensity of activity, the timing, and even accessibility will change through age, health and life-stage changes and it is important that the classes, facilities and communication reflect these needs, and that opportunities are clearly signposted as needs change. We can address many of these issues directly in respect to our leisure centres, through the structuring of the new Leisure Management Contract, or by signposting information to residents.

We have also developed opportunities for social prescribing, through engagement with Healthcare Professionals (HCPs) and partners and we can widen and further develop these partnerships to increase the range and accessibility of activities to drive up participation.

With rising demand, we can protect and enhance the range of tailored leisure opportunities delivered in our leisure centres for those groups with specific needs, who may need additional support, e.g. people with learning disabilities and those with conditions such as diabetes, or those recovering or living with cancer. We should also ensure continued provision for those in the community who, due to health or age, may be at risk of falling by ensuring that we have opportunities for these individuals to improve strength and balance, we can reduce negative health outcomes such as fractures from falls or social isolation from

lack of confidence. As some activities may also be addressed in the Cultural Heritage Strategy, we will ensure that our approach is consistent.

## **5.2 Facilitate access to a network of modern and sustainable indoor sports and leisure facilities;**

Although West Berkshire Council has a good range of leisure centres appropriately located throughout the District, the most modern facilities are now 25 years old and have significantly outlasted their expected lifecycle. Improvements have been made, as lifecycle replacement of plant and equipment has been required, and when opportunities have presented themselves, but challenges still remain to provide an estate which meets modern expectations. Similarly, much of the supporting infrastructure (e.g. pool plant, heating systems, air handling units) is ageing and not all areas meet requirements under equality legislation.

The facilities are less energy efficient than those of a more modern design and would need to be re-engineered to be more environmentally friendly and reduce their carbon footprint.

Data analysis of need suggests that we have leisure centres in the right location, with the possible exception of the Cotswold Centre in Tilehurst. However, customer survey feedback highlights concerns over conditions of the facilities, particularly cleanliness and the state of the building fabric.

Since the centres were designed, customer requirements have changed, with a general move away from traditional sports and activities. This is coupled with a growing awareness of the needs of specific targeted audiences e.g. different requirements for children as opposed to older people, and especially the needs of people living with disabilities.

In exploring the case for investment in facilities, Sport England has been commissioned to run the Facilities Planning Model in relation to West Berkshire – this has ascertained the current demand for leisure facilities and how this may change with projected population growth, demographic change and housing development up to 2037. The results will be



used to inform planning for new or refurbished facilities ensuring that West Berkshire maintains modern, accessible facilities moving forward.

It is important to recognise that the 'network of leisure centres' extends beyond West Berkshire Council facilities. We should be open to exploring options to work with private sector providers and neighbouring authorities such as Reading and South Oxfordshire, where this may best meet the needs of residents.

### **5.3 Improve the quality, accessibility and awareness of outdoor sports facilities and play areas;**

Leisure is diverse in its form and so are the locations in which it is undertaken. In addition to reviewing the formal leisure offering in West Berkshire, through the new Leisure Management Contract, it is crucial that opportunities for formal and informal recreation, utilising outdoor facilities, parks and play areas,

are reviewed to ensure they are good quality, accessible and that the public is aware of their existence.

As already noted, in 2019, supply and demand analysis for formal sports pitches in West Berkshire was developed through the [Playing Pitch Strategy \(PPS\)](#),<sup>33</sup> which assessed the existing position and need projected through to 2037. The PPS helps support the planning process and provides key information to protect and expand the provision of pitches in the District, as residential developments proceed in line with the Local Plan.

The key findings were that there was a specific shortfall in relation to 3G artificial turf pitches and also grass pitches with secure access for community clubs and organisations. The PPS has been signed off by West Berkshire Council, Sport England and the governing bodies of football, rugby union, cricket and hockey.

Through the PPS, the Council engages with, and delivers support for, the many sports clubs across the District which provide a range of opportunities for all ages and levels of skill to engage in team sports, and we would encourage the adoption of its recommendations, as far as possible, as these are aligned with our leisure objectives.

Parish and town councils provide a range of spaces available for active outdoor recreation, with most villages having open space, play grounds, and pitches. These are a vital resource and the Council will consider how it can best support the provision and development of these with local communities.

There is also need to create 'safe spaces'; well-lit and well-designed parks with safe access routes where people can exercise and play without feeling at risk. Access for the disabled has improved, but more can be done to ensure equality of access to parks and open space.

There is a need to reinforce the public's awareness of the facilities on offer in West Berkshire, and to maintain that in the long-

term. A structured long-term Communications campaign should be delivered as part of the Strategy.

#### **5.4 Measurably enhance access to, and utilisation of greenspace and bluespace, through improving accessibility to open water, waterways, parks, commons and Public Rights of Way;**

A recent [RSPB study](#)<sup>34</sup> revealed that use of the outdoors increased substantially over the periods of lockdown, far exceeding that expected under normal conditions. This trend has led to speculation that the Covid lockdowns have precipitated widespread 're-engagement' with outdoor recreation and is, perhaps, evidence of a structural shift in preferences for greenspaces.

To help people make the most of greenspace, they need to have the opportunity to use it, feel they have the capability to do so, and see a benefit to their lives. This may be through specific initiatives, which support more active lifestyles and enrich experiences, or simply by normalising greenspace within the community.



Well-designed greenspace will appeal to different groups. It must be inclusive and accommodate people with a range of needs, offering opportunities for play, relaxation, social interaction and stimulation.

We must also ensure that the [Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan](#)<sup>35</sup> reflects the importance of active leisure, and we will work with colleagues to make sure this Plan explicitly supports our leisure goals, by considering enhanced accessibility to urban green space, countryside and leisure facilities, as a core aim.

There are a number of open spaces within the District, with trails for walking, running and cycling. We should be actively exploring, with voluntary organisations and town and parish councils, what further facilities and activities, such as outdoor gyms, 'boot camps', children's trails etc., could be developed, ensuring the needs of those with disabilities are explicitly considered.

There is no better time to mark the ongoing Covid recovery process by reevaluating recreational provision in our parks and open spaces.

### **5.5 Further develop partnerships (with town and parish councils, sport governing bodies, health organisations and the voluntary sector), with an emphasis on actively encouraging volunteering.**

The Council recognises that, often, its role is to work with, and through, local organisations and individuals to maximise the impact of programmes on the local community. There are many opportunities to tap into the enthusiasm, experience and knowledge of local communities and individual volunteers to encourage wider participation.

In some cases, the role of the Council may be as simple as signposting organisations to alternative funding sources and assisting groups in accessing grants from charities and sporting bodies. The Council is licensed for Grantfinder, a database for funding sources for charities and community needs. There is an opportunity to build on this through a role that proactively seeks, and supports the sourcing, of funding.

Whilst it is appropriate that the Council leads on major development programmes such as upgrading the leisure centres and building the Newbury Sports Hub, we should be encouraging others to develop and lead additional facilities and activities, especially where these support and focus on under-represented groups, and on increasing participation e.g. Park Runs. There is then a communication role for the Council in the provision of information services so that residents can be signposted to what is available locally.

The redevelopment of the Waterside centre in Newbury with a modern climbing wall is the type of facility where joint working (in this case with [Berkshire Youth](#)<sup>25</sup>) could open up access that could excite interest in a new activity. Similarly the watersports provided by Berkshire Youth offer a model that could be expanded in West Berkshire, given the significant amount of accessible waterways and lakes.

As part of the ['Build Back Better'](#)<sup>13</sup> Health and Social Care Plan, there may be a case to reassess the function and funding level of the ['Let's Get Active'](#)<sup>23</sup> fund, Parish Plans and Members' Grants. The voluntary and community sector participants in the GBA analysis, expressed an interest in further developing targeted programmes, which would benefit from additional funding and support, and potentially be more expressly integrated into the West Berkshire Council and Health offerings for certain groups. Partners with a specific outdoor/exercise focus such as the Ramblers Association and the Bucks, Berks and Oxon Wildlife Trust should also be actively engaged.

The role of volunteers is fundamental to the provision of many of the active leisure opportunities within the District, and the Council may wish to explore whether there is any benefit in developing a pool of volunteers who are trained and experienced to support local initiatives.

# 6. Our Objectives

To deliver this vision, we have chosen to focus our resources on the areas in which we believe we can make the most positive contribution to the overall health of our community.

The challenge for us, like many organisations, is to ensure that our approach is both representative of the majority and inclusive of those who have traditionally been under-represented in terms of participation. This strategy has been informed by feedback from the public, including seldom heard groups, and we would hope to work in partnership with these groups to deliver this strategy. These strategic objectives will help shape our thinking and the delivery plan will show how, in practical terms, we can turn that thinking into action.

## 1. Increase participation for all, with an emphasis on those less physically active, and maintain improved activity levels throughout lives:

- 1.1. Significantly increase the provision of activities targeted at the less physically active, with a strong emphasis on activities for 'people like me';
- 1.2. Increase the provision of targeted activities for individuals with challenges resulting from health issues or disabilities, through active collaboration with health and voluntary sector partners;
- 1.3. Work across the Council to improve use and accessibility of leisure activities, facilities and greenspace;
- 1.4. Develop low/no cost activity options for low-income individuals and families;
- 1.5. Ensure the provision of leisure opportunities responds creatively to evolving demand;
- 1.6. Create a communication strategy to raise awareness of the benefits and local availability of physical activity opportunities.



## 2. Facilitate access to a network of modern and sustainable indoor sports and leisure facilities:

- 2.1 Through the Leisure Management Contract, operate a network of attractive, well-run and vibrant leisure centres focussed on delivering a great user experience;
- 2.2. Deliver an infrastructure improvement plan, giving consideration to significant changes in the network of facilities including consolidation, new delivery models and co-location of Council services and those of community partners;
- 2.3. Improve physical access to leisure facilities for people with health or disability needs;
- 2.4. Invest to reduce the carbon footprint of current facilities, with a focus on smart technologies;
- 2.5. Ensure that access to facilities takes account of opportunities provided by the private sector and neighbouring authorities.



### 3. Improve the quality, accessibility and awareness of outdoor sports facilities and play areas:

- 3.1. Deliver the recommendations of the Playing Pitch Strategy;
- 3.2. Pro-actively engage with town and parish councils to create a District-wide long-term development plan for local facilities, underpinned by appropriate resource support from the Council;
- 3.3. Improve physical access to outdoor sports facilities and play areas for people with health or disability needs;
- 3.4. Work with voluntary and private sector organisations to increase awareness and utilisation of sports facilities, parks and open spaces in a sustainable way.



### 4. Measurably enhance access to, and utilisation of greenspace and bluespace, through improving accessibility and awareness of open water, waterways, parks, commons and Public Rights of Way:

- 4.1. Explore new and additional leisure activity options where there is a clear demand;
- 4.2. Work with partners and residents to develop and deliver a programme of work to make our parks 'safe spaces' for all users;
- 4.3. Invest in improving accessibility to greenspace through provision of safe routes and facilities for disabled access;
- 4.4. Improve the provision of facilities for young people in parks and open spaces, considering both physical and social needs;
- 4.5. Ensure the recommendations of the Environment Strategy and the Rights of Way Improvement Plan, related to activity, are supported and adopted.



### 5. Further develop partnerships (with town and parish councils, sport governing bodies, health organisations and the voluntary sector), with an emphasis on actively encouraging volunteering:

- 5.1. Engage with partners across the voluntary and private sector to improve the level of co-ordinated services delivery;
- 5.2. Engage with health organisations to enhance accessibility to services via social and health prescribing opportunities;
- 5.3. Co-create a 'volunteering network strategy' with voluntary and community groups to increase the level of volunteering in support of physical activity;
- 5.4. Invest in provision of advice and support for voluntary groups, with a focus on access to funding;
- 5.5. Develop a focussed programme to engage with target groups, particularly children and young people, to co-create plans that address their leisure aspirations and needs;
- 5.6. Work with partners to reduce their cost and access issues for Council facilities.



# 7. Delivery, Monitoring and Resourcing of this Strategy

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On agreement of this Strategy, a Delivery Plan will be developed to outline the projects and actions required to fulfil the aims and objectives of the Strategy. These projects will be incorporated into the Culture and Leisure Programme and their adoption and progress will be monitored and governed by the Culture and Leisure Programme Board.

Specific measures of success and performance indicators will be established through the Delivery Plan, and its projects, but the following data will be used to measure the overarching success of the Strategy:

- Active Lives data
- Leisure Centre data
- Leisure Centre surveys

Funding for the Council's Leisure Services supports works to create or enhance leisure assets which will provide long term benefit to residents (capital expenditure), or to meet day to day operational (revenue) costs of the Council's leisure provision.

Expenditure is funded either directly by the Council, through council tax or use of reserves, or derived from external sources. The Council may also borrow in support of capital works.

Sources of external funding include:

## **S106 Developer Contributions**

Under Section 106 of the Town and County Planning Act 1990, as amended, contributions can be sought from developers towards the capital costs of providing community and social infrastructure, the need for which has arisen as a result of a new development taking place.

## **Community Infrastructure Levy**

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is a levy charged on most new development within an authority's area. The money is used to pay for new infrastructure supporting the development of an area by funding the provision, replacement, operation or maintenance of the infrastructure.

## **Grant or other third party funding**

The Council may receive grants from Government or other sources, which may be given in support of either revenue and/or capital costs. This includes contributions received from bodies such as Sport England or other third parties. Any such contributions received will be applied to support leisure activities in accordance with any conditions or restrictions.

## 8. Conclusions

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There are many benefits to being physically active and we have set ourselves the challenge of doing everything we can to increase participation in active leisure, within the District, by developing the opportunities for people to enjoy our local leisure offering. We particularly want to support those people that are not currently active to improve their activity levels.

The Covid pandemic has reminded us of how important it is to sustain good mental and physical health, and that this can be supported through a more active lifestyle.

We will deliver ambitious plans to develop the leisure offering and revitalise local facilities, in a sustainable way, and co-ordinate a wide range of projects which will serve West Berkshire well.

West Berkshire is a great place to be if you want to be active, and we wish to make the most of the opportunities that our natural environment offers.

This work will require considerable effort to understand the local demands, finding ways to work with a range of partners and ensure that all investment is made with our vision and strategic objectives in mind. We will work to ensure our District's offering is more inclusive than ever before and that everyone in West Berkshire is given the opportunity to thrive.

# 9. References

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In this Leisure Strategy 2022-2032, we lay out our aspirations for Leisure within West Berkshire, in order to enable local people to be more physically active in the community, and to experience the resulting health benefits. Below are the links to other documents and data sources that present evidence for the Strategy:

1. West Berkshire 2036 Vision - [West Berkshire Council - Strategies, Policies, and Plans](#) - Information
2. West Berkshire Council Strategy 2019-2023 - [West Berkshire Council - Strategies, Policies, and Plans](#) - Information
3. West Berkshire Council Covid-19 Recovery and Renewal Strategy - [West Berkshire Council - Strategies, Policies, and Plans](#) - Information
4. West Berkshire Council Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan [West Berkshire Council - Strategies, Policies, and Plans](#) - Information
5. West Berkshire Council – ‘[What’s Your Leisure?](#)’ survey report
6. Get Berkshire Active - [Get Berkshire Active – GBA Strategic Intent 2021-2026](#)
7. Get Berkshire Active – ‘[What’s Your Leisure?](#)’ workshop report
8. NHS - Physical Activity Guidelines for Adults - [Exercise - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)
9. GOV.UK - Physical activity guidelines: infographics - [Physical activity guidelines: infographics - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
10. Public Health England – now Office for Health Improvements and Disparities
11. Everybody Active Every Day - [Everybody active, every day: framework for physical activity - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
12. Sport England - [Uniting the Movement Uniting the Movement | Sport England](#)
13. Build Back Better - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/build-back-better-our-plan-for-growth>
14. [Health and Wellbeing Boards \(HWBs\) for Reading, West Berkshire and Wokingham \(Berkshire West\)](#)
15. Berkshire West Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy - <https://www.berkshirewestccg.nhs.uk/get-involved/joint-health-wellbeing-strategy-for-berkshire-west/>
16. Berkshire West Integrated Care Partnership - [Berkshire West Integrated Care Partnership \(ICP\) | Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Group \(berkshirewestccg.nhs.uk\)](#)
17. ONS Health and Disability index - [West berkshire - Deprivation - UTLA | West Berkshire | InstantAtlas Reports \(berkshireobservatory.co.uk\)](#)
18. Fingertips (2020) [Public Health Profiles - PHE](#)
19. ‘Adults’ defined as residents of West Berkshire over the age of 16.
20. Calculated from population data available through the Berkshire Observatory [West Berkshire - Population - UTLA | West Berkshire | InstantAtlas Reports \(berkshireobservatory.co.uk\)](#)

21. Sport England - [Active Lives data for West Berkshire https://activelives.sportengland.org](https://activelives.sportengland.org)
22. Sport England - [Active Places Power - Active Places Power](#)
23. Greenham Common Trust and West Berkshire Council – [Let's Get Active Fund https://info.westberks.gov.uk/article/36079/Lets-Get-Active-Fund](https://info.westberks.gov.uk/article/36079/Lets-Get-Active-Fund)
24. Newbury Weekly News - <https://www.newburytoday.co.uk/news/250k-boost-for-waterside-centre-project-9203071/>
25. Berkshire Youth - <https://www.berkshireyouth.co.uk>
26. Adventure Dolphin - [Adventure Dolphin – Experience a Sense of Adventure](#)
27. West Berkshire Council - [Activity for Health - Exercise Programmes - Information](#)
28. Walking for Health - [Walking for Health | Home](#)
29. West Berkshire Council Cultural Heritage Strategy - [West Berkshire Council - Strategies, Policies, and Plans](#) - Information
30. West Berkshire Council Environment Strategy 2020-2030 - [West Berkshire Council - Strategies, Policies, and Plans](#) - Information
31. West Berkshire Council Economic Development Strategy 2020-2023 - [West Berkshire Council - Strategies, Policies, and Plans](#) - Information
32. West Berkshire Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2021-2031 - [West Berkshire Council - Strategies, Policies, and Plans](#) - Information
33. West Berkshire Council Playing Pitch Strategy - [West Berkshire Council - Strategies, Policies, and Plans](#) - Information
34. Royal Society for the Protection of Birds – [Recovering Together 2020 - recovering-together-report-nature-and-green-recovery\\_rspbyougov\\_june-2020.pdf](#)
35. West Berkshire Council Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan - [West Berkshire Council - Strategies, Policies, and Plans](#) - Information
36. Greenspace is defined as parks, gardens, playing fields, children's play areas, woods and other natural areas, grassed areas, cemeteries and allotments, green corridors like paths, disused railway lines, rivers and canals.
37. Bluespace is defined as all areas dominated by surface waterbodies and water courses.
38. Office of National Statistics - [Subnational population projections for England: 2018-based https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/bulletins/subnationalpopulationprojectionsforengland/2018based](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/bulletins/subnationalpopulationprojectionsforengland/2018based)

## 10. Figures

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Figure 1	Exercise and Benefits to Health (Source: Adapted from Wen CP et al )	6
Figure 2	West Berkshire Council Related Strategies	7
Figure 3	Activity Type and Participation Levels (Source: WBC 'What's your Leisure?' survey)	8
Figure 4	Location of West Berkshire Leisure Centres (Source: WBC)	9
Figure 5	Summary of Leisure Facilities in West Berkshire (Source: Active Places Power)	10
Figure 6	Impact of Covid on Participation Levels (Source: WBC 'What's your Leisure?' survey)	11
Figure 7	Potential Triggers to Increase Participation (Source: WBC 'What's Your Leisure?' survey)	13

## 11. Appendices

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Appendix 1	Summary of data including 'What's Your Leisure?'
Appendix 2	Get Berkshire Active – Leisure Strategy Consultation Report – September 2021
Appendix 3	West Berkshire Council Facilities Planning Model summary



