

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SC's Vision for future provision of sport and leisure facilities in Shropshire is:

'To deliver a network of modern, efficient and sustainable sports facilities in the County'

(Source: Shropshire Council Cabinet report 30 July 2014).

This is a vision clearly based on partnership and facilitation, as opposed to direct delivery.

AIMS

The aim of providing sufficient high quality, fit for purpose and accessible provision is to:

- **Increase participation for health benefits**
- **Increase regular participation amongst those who are inactive**

Shropshire's Indoor Facilities Strategy (2016), reflects the above Vision, current priorities and challenges of the Unitary Authority, as well as changes in national policy. This includes the requirement to produce a Community Plan under the National Planning Policy Framework, (NPPF) the 2014 Sport England Assessing Needs and Opportunities Guidance (ANOG) approach for facility planning, the national Sports Strategy, 'Sporting Future' (Department of Culture, Media and Sport 2016), and Sport England's 'Towards an Active Nation' (2016).

ANALYSIS OF FACILITY NEED

SPORTS HALLS

There is significant existing sports hall provision across Shropshire; importantly all identified spatial zones have access to a strategic –sized sports hall which is either protected for community use through a formal community use agreement, or is part of one of the three major community leisure facilities, located in Ludlow, Shrewsbury and Oswestry.

From the Sport England Facility Planning Model (FPM), which is only one element of the needs assessment, the simplistic analysis of supply versus demand in relation to sports halls within Shropshire has identified there are sufficient sports halls across the County to meet both current and future demand.

There is a good level of satisfied demand with 91.5% of the visits demanded being satisfied. The majority of demand from Shropshire residents is met at halls in Shropshire (i.e. demand is retained) and the hall network has significant spare capacity to provide for future demand.

Appendix 2

Based on the Sports Facility Calculator analysis there is a need for a further 16.69 badminton courts by 2027. This need can be met within the existing supply of sports hall across the county through a range of partnership and delivery arrangements.

The three main SC community leisure facilities provide a strategic-sized sports hall, and given that SC has limited future funding for non-statutory provision, there is a need to ensure a mechanism is in place to protect and continue community access to sports hall provision across Shropshire, but especially in the North East where all existing halls will be without formal community use arrangements by 2018.

Given the need to ensure all communities have access to a strategic-sized sports hall, there will be a need to consider future arrangements in the North East and the East areas. This is because there is no SC operated community leisure centre in these areas and the halls which provide community access are not all part of a formal community use agreement. Even where there is a formal community use agreement, these are all, with the exception of Much Wenlock, time limited.

As SC withdraws from funding/supporting existing community use agreements in the short to medium term, it is critical that the partnerships for the future provision of sports hall facilities continue to provide community accessible facilities. Without this, there will be a significant deficit in community accessible sports halls across Shropshire.

Securing community access arrangements beyond the life of existing SC supported agreements are a priority in these areas and across the county to retain access to strategic-sized sports all from every community. Given there is actually an over-supply in all areas of the county except the North East whilst retaining secured community access is important, it is not requisite that every sports hall on an education site provides community use. Some could continue to operate limited books, targeted at sports clubs, as they do now.

SWIMMING POOLS

There is sufficient provision of swimming pools now and in the future to meet current and future demand. In fact, there is an over-supply of provision (472.51sqm), equivalent to at least 1 x 4 lane x 25m pool in the north and south areas of Shropshire. This means that there is an opportunity to consider rationalisation of some smaller pools, particularly those which require significant investment, have high operational costs and low usage.

In the south, both SpArC and Church Stretton pools are small, costly to operate, require significant investment, and serve very small communities, so have low throughput. Both of these need to be considered for closure. The SpArC pool is in better condition and there could be more opportunity to work in partnership with a local organisation to take on the operation of this pool and the other adjacent sports facilities. The Church Stretton pool is in a very poor condition, and does not offer a fit for purpose environment in which to learn to swim.

If both Church Stretton (160 sqm) and SpArC (180 sqm) pools were to close, this would equate to a loss of 340 sqm of water, still well within the over-supply of 472.51 sqm (over-supply would reduce to 132.51 sqm). Even if these two pools closed, residents in both areas would still be within 30 minutes of a strategic size pool.

Replacement of the Quarry with less water space would effectively remove any surplus in provision of community accessible water space in Shropshire, but, this calculation excludes the smaller pools, and lidos available across the county. There would still be sufficient water space to meet current and future demand for swimming, and this would be further enhanced by provision of smaller pools across the county.

Appendix 2

Clearly any pool closures need to be accompanied by an overall review of pool programming in the area, to ensure that school swimming and Learn to Swim opportunities are programmed appropriately, to ensure they are available and accessible, and reflect potentially increased travel times to facilities.

Local communities and relevant organisations should be engaged as early as possible to seek opportunities for local communities to take over the operational responsibility for facilities which SC is no longer able to support. This is particularly relevant in relation to SpArC, Church Stretton, Market Drayton and Whitchurch pools.

The existing 3,888 sqm of community accessible water space in Shropshire more than meets both current and future demand to 2037. Allowing for increased demand from population growth, there is an over-supply of 472.51 sqm of water space; it is important to highlight that this excludes smaller pools which are not included in the FPM analysis.

In Shrewsbury, there is potential to consider siting the town's sport and leisure offer on one major site; this would increase participation opportunities, reduce operational costs and provide real savings moving forward, but not at the expense of community participation. Implementing this option would mean replacing the Quarry Swimming and fitness centre on the site of an existing multi-facility, owned and operated by SC. Equally, the fact that there is a current over-supply of water space in the county provides the opportunity to develop fit for purpose swimming pool provision in the town, based on recommended ASA and Sport England guideline for pool size and scale. Whilst potentially reducing the overall level of water space e.g. provision of an 8 lane x 25m pool plus a 10 x 10m learner/training pool would equate to 134.50 sqm less than the existing water space provided at the Quarry, this would improve the overall of provision, and would still provide for the demand in the town.

In the north of Shropshire, there are two similar swimming facilities in Whitchurch and Market Drayton. The latter also offers a learner pool and a fitness suite. It is considered that this facility should be retained as a priority. If there is a local party interested in taking responsibility for its future operational management, and this can be secured, then retaining Whitchurch should be considered. It may not however be sustainable to continue to provide both facilities within the same catchment area. SC's role in providing either facility should not be long term, but ensuring continued access to swimming facilities for the communities in both areas is a priority, because both towns are outside the 30-minute catchment drive of the

FITNESS PROVISION

There are sufficient fitness stations to meet current and future need across the county. There is a need for more community accessible fitness stations in Shrewsbury given that the majority of commercial provision is also in this area.

SUMMARY OF FACILITY NEEDS, PRIORITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES

SC needs to focus resources and provision in the three main towns of Oswestry, Shrewsbury and Ludlow; core provision is swimming, sports hall and fitness. Shrewsbury, as the main county town also provides the 'specialist' facilities e.g. cycling, indoor tennis, bowls and climbing.

Given the implication this has for swimming in particular, there is a need to re-think the programming of the pools to ensure school swimming is a priority - accessible, available, and can be done as effectively as possible (link here to the replacement for the Quarry which could have a room that could be used for lessons to enable schools to bring 2 or 3 classes at once and maximise water time, whilst minimising travel times and using space in the leisure centre to teach), plus also after school swimming lessons need to be planned realistically to allow for travel. Location of the Quarry replacement is crucial in this respect, as town centre could add significantly to travel times.

SC will need to continue to work in partnership, where budgets allow, to support swimming provision in the 'secondary' settlements - Market Drayton, Whitchurch (under contract until 2022), Much Wenlock (complete anomaly). These decisions can be tapered out by 2022 (except Much Wenlock), and where possible, handovers will by then have been negotiated with local partners. All these facilities are in better condition than the other secondary pools.

The geography and population distribution of the south of Shropshire is different from the north of the county and this reflected in the proposed future facilities network. Any changes in SC facility provision as a result of this Strategy will need to be reflected in future arrangements for the operational management of the three main hub sites.

There will be a need to continue supporting the operation of SpArC and Church Stretton for 12 months with a view to removing ongoing financial support after this time (no signed joint use agreements in place). On this basis, SC should not make any more capital investment in the pools, which are both in poor condition, small, and do not demonstrate financial viability in terms of the relationship between use and operational cost. If there is potential to encourage community management of these small pools, this should be undertaken; there are some other examples around the UK which function, although financially there is always some risk. It is also critical that any community organisation operating a swimming pool is clear about the operational risks.

The map of SC's direct facility provision will look very different in terms of direct provision moving forward, but overall, it should be possible, through partnership working, to retain many existing facilities, but operate them through different arrangements. This approach will optimise partnerships at local level, and importantly make best use of existing assets.

The facility needs to 2037 have been identified as a result of the qualitative, quantitative and accessibility analysis undertaken.

- **Swimming Pools – a replacement facility for the Quarry Swimming and Fitness Centre;**
- **Sports Halls – facilitating access to a strategic-size sports hall (i.e. 3 badminton courts +), with long term accessible community use in the North East area, and potentially in the East area, depending on what happens with the current joint use arrangement at Much Wenlock (William Brookes School), Market Drayton (Grove School - no formal community use agreement in place), Corbet School (no formal community use agreement in place). There is already community use at Oldbury Wells School in the East (no formal agreement in place).**
- **Facilities on Education sites due to age (sports halls could include: Idsall School, Ellesmere College, Moreton Hall, St Martin's, Wem – all built in the mid-1970s or earlier)**

- **To deliver and sustain these, there is a need for SC to develop a strategic framework, or hierarchy of provision, moving forward.**

PROPOSED HIERARCHY FOR FUTURE PROVISION OF SPORT AND LEISURE PROVISION IN SHROPSHIRE

In order to ensure that there remains sustainable and affordable SC provision of sports halls and swimming pools, there is a need to take a pragmatic view of how future provision is delivered, and how SC can best target its limited resources for non-statutory provision. Overall, in the interests of efficient, affordable and sustainable operation of non-statutory facilities, SC need to focus its future provision through a number of strategically-located, multi-facility sites. These need to provide for a minimum of a 30 minute drivetime catchment area, to be sustainable; clearly larger facilities have this capability more than smaller ones.

The above network of community facilities provides core sports facilities (sports hall, pool, fitness) within a 30 minute drivetime of all Shropshire's communities, except to the north east and east of the area; there are however existing facilities in both Market Drayton and in Bridgnorth which are community accessible. The latter is no longer operated SC but a funding agreement is in place with Bridgnorth Endowed School until 2020. There is potential for Market Drayton to be financed through an alternative source, thereby reducing the existing subsidy. This facility is currently part of the SC leisure contract, but in the longer term there may be potential for alternative delivery options for this facility.

The hierarchy proposed is based on strategic location, community accessibility, population growth, existing communities, ability to invest, and partnership.

- **3 (or 4) main multi-facility hub sites – Ludlow, Shrewsbury, Oswestry (South Shropshire Leisure Centre, Shrewsbury Sports Village (and /or the Quarry replacement facility), Oswestry Leisure Centre**

N.B Clearly, until a final decision is made on the future of the Quarry Swimming and fitness centre (replacement/refurbishment, and the location of this), it is difficult to state whether it should be 3 or 4 total sites i.e. 2 or 3 in Shrewsbury. In the context of achieving the most sustainable operational delivery one site in Shrewsbury would be the most effective and efficient.

- **Smaller swimming pools and fitness centres – one in the south and one in the north**
- **Secured community access arrangements to a number of sports halls, pools and fitness suites across the county – these would complement the main community sites.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above analysis and assessment, plus all other relevant factors, it is clear that the future distribution of directly provided SC swimming pools, sports halls and fitness centres could look very different. Although the extent of this provision may be reduced, whilst still ensuring access to all communities, it is also a fact that there is significant other provision of these types of facility across the county. The critical issue is that in SC's enabling and facilitating role it is able to ensure long term community access to these facilities.

Following from the analysis, the following draft recommendations are made:

RECOMMENDATION 1 (R1)

SC aims to invest in and support three main community leisure hubs – these will be strategically located, multi-facility sites in the market towns of Ludlow, Shrewsbury and Oswestry.

RECOMMENDATION 2 (R2)

The replacement Quarry swimming facility is developed on a site where there are existing leisure facilities to maximise participation and participative opportunities, optimize investment benefits and reduce overall operational expenditure.

RECOMMENDATION 3 (R3)

SC works in partnership with local partners and key organisations over the next 12 months to identify alternative future funding models to take on Market Drayton and SpArC facilities, particularly the swimming pools.

RECOMMENDATION 4 (R4)

Two swimming pools (Church Stretton Pool and SpArC) need significant investment, therefore based on the review, would not form part of SC's investment Strategy going forward. However, SC will need to work in partnership with these communities to support them in raising the necessary investment needed if these pools are still wanted by these local communities.

