



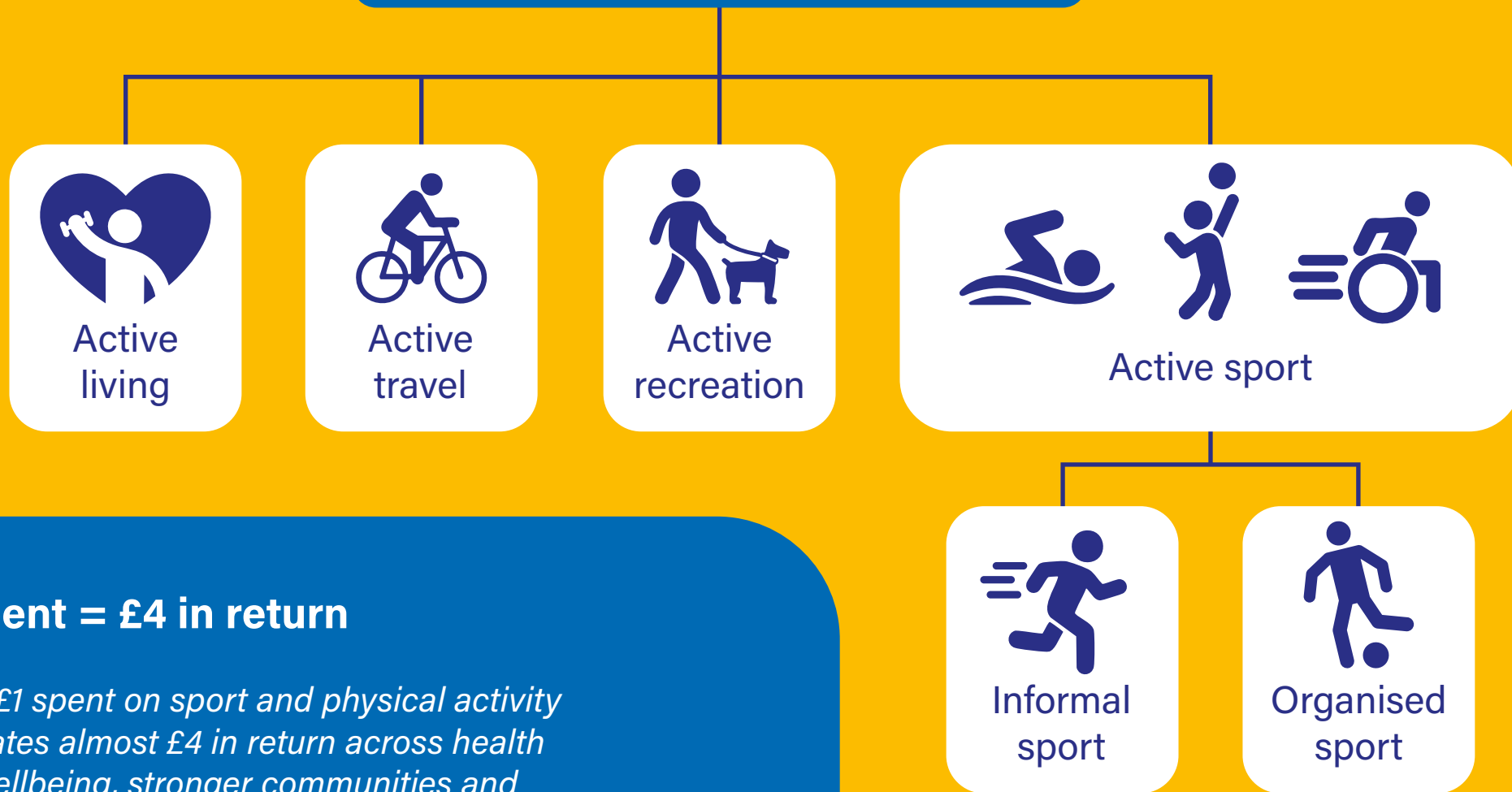
# Active Places and Spaces

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Our vision for facilities for physical  
activity and sport in Buckinghamshire  
2025-2029



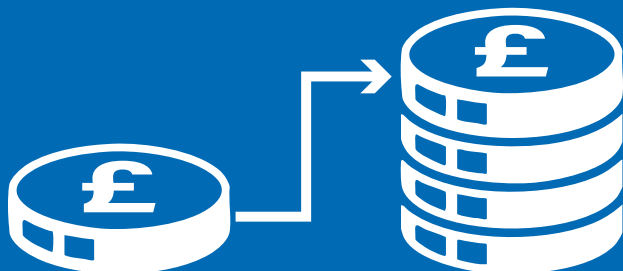
# Physical Activity



## £1 spent = £4 in return

*Every £1 spent on sport and physical activity generates almost £4 in return across health and wellbeing, stronger communities and the economy\**

\*Measuring the social and economic impact of sport in England 2020 - Sport England



# Introduction

Buckinghamshire benefits from a variety of places and spaces for people to be physically active and to play sports: leisure centres and swimming pools, sports halls, pitches and courts, facilities in schools, other community venues, and recreation spaces such as parks. As the birthplace of the Paralympics, we understand the value of these places in promoting inclusivity, health and wellbeing for all.

Good local facilities matter, because they are critical infrastructure when it comes to tackling inequalities and promoting positive health. Being physically active can improve health and help to manage or prevent physical and mental health conditions, so that people can thrive in their work, education and their community. Physical activity is protective against some of the leading health conditions that drive economic inactivity. Being active can support people to remain independent, and those who engage in sport and physical activity are less likely to feel lonely than those who are inactive. All this requires accessible, affordable places to be active, and a focus on prevention of ill health through joined up working.

Places to be active also strengthen our communities by bringing people together, helping to break down social and cultural barriers, creating common ground and a sense of belonging. Good sports and fitness facilities boost the local economy by attracting visitors, generating revenue, and creating jobs. They enhance our quality of life and are important to ensuring our towns and villages remain vibrant, appealing places to live, work and visit.

Demand for these types of facilities will continue to increase and evolve in line with significant housing and population growth across the county, as well as wider societal trends. To support the developing Local Plan for Buckinghamshire, we need a shared vision for how the Council and partners will work together to build on the existing good provision, to continue to meet the needs of our diverse communities.

The purpose of this strategy is to define our approach for the future development of facilities for active wellbeing across the county. It sets out our priorities to support healthy lifestyles and reduce inequalities, and to collectively plan to make the most of available funding and create a sustainable network of provision, with infrastructure targeted to where it is needed.

None of this can be delivered in isolation, and we are fortunate to work with a range of partners who are committed to good quality, inclusive, enjoyable and sustainable sports and community facilities, for their many benefits for people's health and happiness.

**Cllr Peter Brazier, Cabinet Member for Culture & Leisure\***

*\*Updated as successor to former Cabinet Member Clive Harriss, whose contributions are gratefully acknowledged.*

# Strategic Context

This strategy links to other key Council and partner strategies and plans.

## Protecting the vulnerable

- Our Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy explains what we've agreed to do to improve the health and wellbeing of residents and reduce health inequalities.
- The Healthy Ageing Strategy describes how Buckinghamshire can be a better place for older residents to live healthy and active later lives.
- Moving More, our multi-agency Physical Activity Strategy is committed to encouraging everyone in Buckinghamshire to move more and be more active.

## Increasing Prosperity

- The emerging Local Plan for Buckinghamshire will consider the provision of facilities to meet the needs of increased residents.
- Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans recommend improvements to walking, cycling and wheeling routes.

## Improving our Environment

- Our Climate Change and Air Quality Strategy sets out how we are reducing carbon emissions, working towards making Buckinghamshire carbon neutral by 2050.

## Strengthening our Communities

- The Opportunity Bucks programme is working with local partner organisations to improve outcomes for people in identified wards who are experiencing the most hardship.
- The Buckinghamshire Children and Young People Partnership Plan describes priorities for improving children and young people's health and wellbeing.

## Our Partners

This strategy aligns with our partners' objectives to:

Improve the lives of residents through regular movement, physical activity and sport.

### Leap

Transform lives and communities through sport and physical activity and tackle inequalities.

### Sport England (Uniting the Movement)

Keep people healthy and well and ensure safe and accessible options for exercise and active travel.

### Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Berkshire West ICB (Integrated Care Strategy)



# Why move more?

## Economy



**£7.4 billion\***

approx. cost of physical inactivity across the country each year

Businesses with active employees are more **productive** and have a **lower** staff turnover



Active employees take **27%** fewer days sick leave than inactive employees<sup>5</sup>

## Health

**20**

Number of chronic health conditions that physical activity can help prevent and treat

Inactive adults have a 30% higher risk of high blood pressure than active adults



Physical inactivity directly contributes to **1 in 6** deaths in the UK

Active adults have approx. **20% - 30%** lower risk of<sup>7</sup> depression and dementia



## Physical activity can help with:



Improving sleep



Maintaining weight



Managing Stress



Improving quality of life

## Education



Improves concentration and learning

GCSE results of active young people are **10-20%** higher than those of inactive young people



Participating in extra-curricular activities has a positive effect on attainment

Physically active young people are **15%** more likely to go to university



The Buckinghamshire Physical Activity Strategy 2024-2029 sets out our vision of people moving more, more often, to create a future where all residents lead an active and healthy lifestyle.

It describes the evidence base, the groups we will be targeting, what residents and stakeholders have told us, the outcomes that partners are working to achieve and how the impact will be measured.

This facilities strategy aligns to the Physical Activity Strategy's focus on **Active Environments, Active Communities, Skilled Workforce and Working Collaboratively.**

# Buckinghamshire Council's facilities for sport and physical activity

Since 2020, the Council has invested over £40m in new and improved spaces and places for people to move more and be active, including:

- New gyms at the Swan Pool & Leisure Centre in Buckingham and Aqua Vale Swimming & Fitness Centre in Aylesbury
- The award-winning Chilterns Lifestyle Centre in Amersham
- New swimming pool, cycling studio and bigger gym at Chalfont Leisure Centre
- New children's splash pad at Wycombe Leisure Centre
- Interactive group exercise and cycling studios, improved gym and children's soft play and sensory area at Chesham Leisure Centre
- Over £3m on improving environmental sustainability across our leisure estate, including energy-efficient pumps and heating systems, solar panels and LED lighting
- Upgrades to outdoor facilities such as the athletics track at Little Marlow, sports pitches at Farnham Park Playing Fields, Aqua Vale and Fairford Leys in Aylesbury, resurfacing tennis courts, and installing skate parks, Multi-Use Games Areas and new children's play areas in various towns across the county
- Contributions to wider community facilities and 'free to access' facilities supporting people to be active, from children's play to club facilities, including through Community Board funding and developer contributions.

*Sport England, national bodies such as the Football Foundation and the LTA, and our leisure operators have also provided significant investment to support improvements in these facilities, for which we are very grateful.*



10 leisure centres



9 swimming pools



90+ outdoor sports pitches and courts



45+ country and town parks



Facilities for children and young people



## Community-based facilities

Many facilities for sports and physical activity are owned and/or operated by town and parish councils, local clubs and associations, schools, charities and other partners; complemented by a range of private sector gyms and clubs. This adds up to a vibrant sector with lots of choice and opportunities for people to be active in their local community.



300+ village halls and community buildings



50+ swimming pools and lidos



School facilities for community use



140+ sports halls (300+ courts)



Hundreds of town and parish parks and recreation spaces



**Leap (Buckinghamshire's Active Partnership)** has been working with partners to support schools across the county to deliver extra-curricular activities and open their sports facilities outside of the normal school day, to allow children and young people and the wider community to access more opportunities to be physically active, with a particular focus on areas of greatest need.

*This work is funded through the Department for Education.*



## **Stoke Mandeville Stadium**

*- the birthplace of the Paralympic Movement - is owned by WheelPower, the national charity for wheelchair sport. As well as being a nationally important centre for disability sport, the stadium is well-used by the local community for swimming and keeping fit.*

*In 2023, the Council allocated a £50,000 contribution from local housing development to help replace the sports hall floor.*



## Our priorities

*We have looked at relevant local and national strategies and identified the following priority outcomes for facilities for physical activity and sport:*



### **Improving access:**

*Ensuring more residents have access to good quality places and spaces to be active*



### **Increasing sustainability:**

*Improved energy efficiency, financial sustainability and social value*



### **Stronger partnerships:**

*Proactive planning for active lifestyles and the needs arising from housing growth*



## Improving access:

*Ensuring more residents have access to good quality places and spaces to be active*

We will focus on the range of locations for people to be active and healthy, not just the traditional leisure centre offer. This includes facilities within school grounds and other community settings, parks and informal spaces for playing sports and being active. We will make sure these facilities are accessible and available to many different groups of people, and for a wide range of activities.

Wherever possible, we will locate facilities in shared 'hubs' alongside other key services, providing places for communities to come together and making it easier to meet people's needs. This is more efficient for everyone, and helps support a wider range of people - including priority groups such as low-income households, ethnically diverse communities, disabled residents and those living with long-term health conditions.

We will design facilities to be inclusive and accessible to people of all ages and abilities, in line with Buckinghamshire's proud heritage as the birthplace of the Paralympic Movement.



*The Chilterns Lifestyle Centre in Amersham brings together a huge variety of activities and services under one roof: swimming and diving, a multi-use sports hall, gym and fitness studios, squash courts, a library, nursery, community centre, spa, café, plus outdoor sports facilities and children's play areas.*

*With a strong focus on local partnership working and expanding access to new groups and non-traditional leisure customers, this centre now sees around a million visits per year from people of all ages and abilities.*

## Areas for action:

### We will:

- Plan for a brand new flagship sports and leisure facility to meet the needs for the growing population in the north of Buckinghamshire.
- Target investment into local community facilities which support priority groups to be more active, with a particular focus on Opportunity Bucks wards (examples: working with local communities to improve access and usage of local parks).
- Develop facilities that are accessible and inclusive for all, drawing upon Sport England guidance and other relevant best practice in design (examples: inclusive equipment in children's play areas; active environments and active travel as part of future developments).





## Increasing sustainability:

*Improved energy efficiency, financial sustainability and social value*

We will prioritise environmental sustainability, both in the design of new facilities and the operation of existing assets. We will support the development of active environments and active travel.

In most instances, sports and leisure facilities will be run by and for the community. Given the wider pressures on public finances, sites which are owned by Buckinghamshire Council will be operated as cost-neutral to the taxpayer wherever possible, while recognising the importance of good quality local facilities for residents' health. We will support other organisations to take on and develop facilities where this will increase quality and financial sustainability.

Changing demographics and customer expectations mean local facilities must continue adapting to meet the needs of their local communities to deliver the greatest benefits. We will co-design new facilities with local communities through partnership work, such as the Opportunity Bucks programme, and work with providers and operators so that facilities deliver maximum social value in terms of impacts on health, local employment opportunities and more.



*We have secured £398,000 through the Government's Swimming Pool Fund to improve energy efficiency at leisure centres in Aylesbury and Buckingham. Reducing energy consumption also reduces running costs, supporting the continuing provision of these important public facilities.*

*The Council has also invested in heat pumps at several sites, and our leisure operators have appointed 'Green Champions' at centres around Buckinghamshire.*

## Areas for action:

### We will:

- Pursue opportunities for investment to reduce the carbon footprint of our facilities (examples: installing renewable energy sources, providing bike parking and electric vehicle charging points).
- Support grass roots organisations to take on long-term leases for Council-owned playing pitches and pavilions, where this will deliver benefits to residents and users and increase sustainability (examples: local football clubs).
- Maximise social value delivered through contracts for operating Council facilities (examples: programmes to support people with health conditions, providing local employment opportunities and apprenticeships).
- Work with Leap and CIMPSA (the professional development body for the sport and physical activity sector), to support leisure providers to develop their staff in key skills such as health instructors.





## Stronger partnerships:

*proactive planning for active lifestyles and the needs arising from housing growth*

Developing and delivering attractive and accessible local infrastructure for physical activity, leisure and sport requires effective partnership working with a wide range of stakeholders, across Buckinghamshire Council, town and parish councils, schools, sports clubs, national governing bodies of sport (NGBs), health and social care partners, housing providers, the private sector, voluntary organisations and our local communities.

We will collaborate across the system on developing plans and funding bids and securing developer contributions; this is key to successfully resourcing and delivering the ambitions of this strategy.

Working together, we can influence facilities for sports and physical activity to be used most effectively to tackle inequalities and deliver long-term health benefits. There are many good examples of this already, including:

- **Wycombe Wanderers Foundation** have a thriving programme of low cost, inclusive Walking Football sessions using community-based facilities, including Wycombe High School, Buckinghamshire College Group's Wycombe campus, Cressex Football Centre and Wycombe Leisure Centre.
- **Active in the Community** work in partnership to deliver community use of schools and diverse activities to help people be active: from women's only swimming at Aylesbury Grammar School to helping older adults become more active by connecting them to existing programmes and spaces in their community.
- **Parkinson's UK** are working with leisure operators including Everyone Active and Places Leisure to help people in Buckinghamshire to manage their symptoms through physical activity. This includes health and fitness memberships, training staff to be Parkinson's aware and pilot projects like 'Shout and Move', focused on being active in a fun, social way, with structured exercise classes that encourage shouting and singing to help with breathing control and voice projection.
- **Big Sister Project** Designed by girls, for girls, this partnership between Places Leisure and Women in Sport empowers girls aged 9-15 to enjoy sport and exercise and encourages them to take on leadership roles. At Wycombe Leisure Centre, 'We Move' group exercise sessions delivered by female instructors allow girls to exercise in a safe space with their peers; Big Sister memberships provide girls with discounted access to facilities.



# Areas for action:

## We will:

- Develop updated needs assessments for indoor and outdoor facilities, informed by engagement with local clubs, town and parish councils, Opportunity Bucks ward partnerships, national governing bodies and other key partners. This will support partners with evidence in securing and prioritising available funding.
- Support community-led initiatives to fund new or improved facilities (examples: local fundraising to deliver a new BMX pump track in Bedgrove Park, Aylesbury).
- Increase access to and use of school facilities by local communities and clubs outside of school hours (examples: working with Leap, schools partners and Active in the Community).
- Seek new ways to use our facilities to help prevent and manage health conditions through movement and physical activity (examples: developing a physical activity pathway with the NHS, using the Joy app for social prescribing, BetterPoints initiatives to encourage use of local facilities).





## Measuring impact

How we will measure success:

- Increased number of visits to local leisure centres.
- Increased customer and resident satisfaction with facilities.
- Increased amount of accessible and inclusive provision.
- Increased number of community-led initiatives for provision and/or redevelopment of leisure facilities.
- Increased proportion of Buckinghamshire residents who are achieving recommended activity levels.

This facilities strategy is designed to support the delivery of the shared outcomes set out in the multi-agency Physical Activity Strategy. Please refer to the 'Measuring Impact' section of the Physical Activity Strategy for details of how partners are measuring achievement of key aims.