

Epping Forest District Council

Leisure and Cultural Strategy



2015 - 2025

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INTRODUCTION

The Purpose of this Strategy:

This document is Epping Forest District Council's (EFDC) Leisure and Cultural Strategy. Its purpose is to provide a policy focus for EFDC in its role in supporting the future provision of leisure and cultural opportunities, to meet the needs of residents and visitors to the District.

The overarching aim is to increase the number and frequency of people, participating in leisure, cultural and community activities, by ensuring that local provision is accessible and of the highest affordable quality. This is based on the rationale that if achieved, this will help improve health and wellbeing, raise aspiration and attainment, improve community cohesion and enhance the local economy. **(Recommendation 1)**

How has this Strategy been developed:

The development of the Strategy has been steered by a Portfolio Holder Advisory Group, led by the Council's Leisure and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder.

The Terms of Reference of the Portfolio Holder Advisory Group are as detailed below:

- To assist in the development of a new Leisure and Cultural Strategy for the District;
- To seek to establish priorities for the future provision of Leisure and Cultural Services by the Council;
- To define the role that the District Council should play in addressing Leisure and Cultural need in the future;
- To identify any emerging socio-economic and demographic factors and their potential impact on the future provision of Leisure and Cultural Services;
- To review how the Council's services can help meet the aspirations of the West Essex Health and Wellbeing Strategy;
- To review the current services delivered under the existing Leisure Management Contract and to consider the type and level of future service provision to be sought, in any new contract.

- To critically review the Sports and Leisure Centres owned by the Council, giving consideration to their location, age, condition, costs/subsidy and make recommendations on future provision/investment.

The Advisory Group have met on a number of occasions and received presentations by a range of relevant officers engaged in the delivery of leisure and cultural services. The Group have also undertaken site visits to the Council's Leisure facilities.

What is Leisure and Culture:

There are numerous definitions of both Leisure and Culture to be found. However, what is apparent is that for each of us, it can often mean different things. For some, it can mean playing sport or participating in the arts, for others it can involve enjoying our heritage, architecture and landscape, or simply spending time with friends or family.

Regardless of interpretation, there is a strong link between actively engaging in leisure and cultural activity and leading a better quality of life. Indeed, there is considerable evidence to suggest that such benefits include:

- Improving physical and mental health and wellbeing;
- Raising aspirations and achievements;
- Enhancing a sense of identity, building individual self-confidence and development;
- Contributing to community development, cohesion, inclusion and sustainability;
- Driving economic development – cultural and leisure employment, visitor economy, and inward investment.
- Reducing crime and anti-social behaviour.

Why is a Strategy needed:

In common with other districts, a wide range of agencies work to develop and deliver leisure and cultural activities across Epping Forest. In addition to EFDC, these include community groups, private and voluntary sector clubs and organisations, the City of London Corporation, the Lea Valley Park Authority, Essex County Council, Town and Parish Councils, schools and colleges.

This Strategy creates the opportunity to improve co-ordination both within EFDC and in the context of its work with partners. Whilst the document will, therefore be of interest to anyone involved with, or who has a stake in the future provision of leisure and cultural opportunities, it should be stressed that the primary focus of the Strategy is the District Council's role going forward, identifying the Council's future priorities.

This emphasis has been driven by the fact that the Council is currently operating in an environment of constrained resources, a situation which is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future. The Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy requires the achievement of in excess of £2m of efficiency savings in the period 2015-2019. The provision of leisure and cultural services is the largest area of discretionary expenditure that the Council incurs, of some £3.6m per annum. (Net Expenditure 2014/2015 – Leisure Centres £2m, Arts £30k, Museum £437k, Sports and Health Development £291k, Community Development £251k, Limes Farm Centre £47k, Grants to Voluntary Organisations £210k). Therefore, there is a clear need to ensure that priorities are clearly established and that services are being provided in the most efficient way possible. It is also important that there are monitoring and evaluation processes in place, to ensure that desired policy outcomes are delivered and value for money is achieved.

For these reasons, it has been necessary not only to adopt a strategic approach, but also to primarily focus on the range of Leisure and Cultural opportunities directly provided or actively facilitated, by the District Council. Notwithstanding, the document does demonstrate the links to other strategic documents and as such, has not been developed in isolation. This is because as highlighted earlier, Leisure and Cultural activities have the ability to deliver across a number of broader themes such as Health and Wellbeing, Social Inclusion, Regeneration, Skills and Employment, Community Safety and Economic Development. Therefore, the relationship between this strategy and existing and emerging strategic documents, such as the Local Plan, the West Essex Wellbeing Strategy, the Local Strategic Partnership's Tourism Strategy and the work that has commenced on the emerging Corporate Plan and new Economic Development Strategy for the District, has been considered.

(Recommendation 2)

The Period of the Strategy:

In terms of the length of this Strategy, a balance has needed to be struck between taking a longer term view, for example, the new Local Plan will cover a 20 year period up until 2033, and a shorter term more pragmatic view, given the current uncertainty with regard to local government funding and legislative change.

A review of strategic documents, produced by other local authorities, shows a typical range of between 5-15 years. Given that the Council's own Corporate Plan, set for renewal in April 2015, covers a five year period, it has been determined that a

medium term vision of ten years (the potential length of any new Leisure Management Contract) with a formal five-year review, to coincide with the cycle of the Corporate Plan, was the most appropriate time frame for this Strategy.
(Recommendation 3)

SECTION TWO – THE EPPING FOREST DISTRICT - NOW AND IN THE FUTURE:

Character of the District:

Epping Forest District Council abuts Greater London yet is dominated by open countryside. Over half of the approximately 124,700 residents live in the areas of Loughton, Buckhurst Hill, Chigwell and Waltham Abbey, which account for only 5% of the area of the district. Epping Forest is therefore, a largely rural district (over 92% Green belt), with individually distinct towns and villages, set in generally attractive countryside.

The key natural feature is Epping Forest itself, which runs along the north-west boundary of Buckhurst Hill and Loughton to the southern end of Epping. This part of the Forest (which extends south to Wanstead in London) is designated as a Special Area of Conservation, an acknowledgement of its international importance for nature conservation. There are several other ancient woods in the district, including part of the remnants of Hainault Forest. The district has a total of eight SSSIs although some of these straddle the boundary with other authorities. There are nine Local Nature Reserves and over 200 Local Wildlife Sites (LoWs).

Waltham Abbey, Epping and Chipping Ongar are market towns of medieval original, and the centres of several towns and villages, are also designated as conservation areas. The district currently has over 1,300 listed buildings, 34 scheduled monuments, and five registered parks and gardens. The Council has identified over 300 locally listed buildings. The built heritage is also therefore, very important with respect to the special character of the District.

The development of the Central Line in the mid to late 19th century led to huge expansion of Buckhurst Hill and Loughton and these two settlements now comprise the largest urban area in the district. The District is served uniquely in Essex by eight underground train stations. The M25 runs east-west almost through the middle of the district, with a local road interchange at Waltham Abbey. The M11 runs north-south, with a full interchange at Hastingwood, just south of Harlow, and a northward-off/southward-on interchange at Loughton. The A414 is a key east-west route in the county, crossing the district from Harlow to Ongar, on the way to Chelmsford and the Essex coast.

Demographic Considerations:

The district's population has grown steadily over the last 50 years, from 108,000 people in 1961 to almost 124,700 in 2014. Population estimates and projections issued since the 2011 Census indicate that the population could potentially continue to rise to a total of approximately 142,900, by 2033.

The largest proportion of the population in the district (39.4%) lives within the more urban areas of Loughton, Grange Hill, and Buckhurst Hill. The market towns of Epping, Chipping Ongar and Waltham Abbey have 29.9% and the rural areas (including the large villages such as North Weald, Theydon Bois and Nazeing) account for the remaining 30.7%.

In terms of internal migration, the trend in recent years is for people to leave London to come to the district, and for local residents to leave the district to go to other areas. Within the region, the main exchange of population takes place between the district and other Essex districts.

The district's population is older than the average for Essex, and for England and Wales as a whole. Epping Forest District has less people in the 20 to 39 age bracket compared to Essex. Conversely, the district has more people within the 40 to 59 bracket (28.6% compared to 27.4% in Essex and 26.8% in England and Wales).

Projections suggest that this situation will become more pronounced in the next 20 years, as the large, already 'older' population ages further, leading to a higher 'average age' for the district. It is estimated that by 2020 over 55% of the District's population will be 60 years+.

Life expectancy in Epping Forest District is higher than the national average, and is rising steadily, following the national trend. Male life expectancy is 77.9 years, with female life expectancy 82.1 years, in both cases above the national averages. However, there is a variation of 8.8 years in life expectancy between the more affluent ward of Chigwell Village and some of the more deprived wards in Waltham Abbey.

The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and Health Profiles for the District, indicate that 22.9% of the local adult population is classified as being obese with 17.8% of local children in school year six, being similarly classified.

The vast majority of the population remains White British, although the percentage of non-White British people has risen to over 20% since the 2001 census figure of 8.8%.

The population of the district is on average fairly affluent, but there are particular pockets of deprivation generally in the larger towns and urban areas, e.g. Waltham Abbey, Loughton Broadway and Grange Hill.

Economy and Employment

The number of residents in full time employment is above the national average with 2.6% of the resident population being unemployed. However, there are currently

16% of children living in poverty in the district, with their families living on 60% of the national median average wage. Young people NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) is below the Essex Average, and has shown a continuing decrease in recent years.

The most dominant sectors for employment in the district are distribution, hotels and restaurants, banking and finance, and the public services. Recent growth in employment has been strong as the economy moves out of recession, particularly in the construction, transport and communication sectors. The District's business structure is dominated by micro businesses of 1 to 10 employees with a strong entrepreneurial spirit evident. Although formal educational attainment levels are Below average, despite some high performing schools, household income levels are above.

As might be expected due to the availability of transport links, there is a strong commuting pattern into London, with an estimated 65% of the working age population out commuting.

Epping Forest in the Future

Some of the trends evident in the current profile of the District, that have been highlighted in the previous section, will occur naturally and will be taken into account in meeting future leisure and cultural needs. However, the Council's role as Planning Authority will be a key determinate of future change and provision for the District.

Previous Central Government regulations required every local authority to produce a Local Development Framework. However, change in regulation introduced by the coalition government, under the National Planning Policy Framework, now mean the Council must prepare a full Local Plan.

The Local Plan will set out the planning policies and land allocations that will guide development in Epping Forest District over the next 20 years. The Local Plan will use the views of the local community, coupled with a robust evidence base, to establish a Vision for how the district will develop (to include aspirations in relation to Leisure and Culture), along with detailed planning policies and specific land allocations.

There are a number of stages in the preparation of the Local Plan. The Council has published its revised timetable called the Local Development Scheme, which anticipates going out to consultation in May 2015 on Preferred Options. However, at an earlier stage in the process, a Community Visioning exercise was conducted, in the winter of 2010/2011.

This district-wide public Consultation gave local people the opportunity to say how they would like the area to develop over the next 20 years, identifying what issues were important to them in terms of future life in Epping Forest.

The key issues identified by the Community Visioning Consultation where:

- Conservation and enhancement of the **natural and historic environment**, including landscape;
- The need for homes and jobs in the areas;
- The provision of retail, **leisure** and other commercial development;
- The provision of infrastructure for transport, energy, telecommunications, waste management, water supply, waste water and flood risk management;
- The provision of health, security, **community and cultural services** and other local facilities; and
- Climate change mitigation and adaptation.

From the key issues identified by residents, it can be seen that considerable importance is placed on the natural and historic environment, leisure opportunities and community and cultural services.

Based on the key issues, a draft Vision Statement has been developed, which will shape the Local Plan and outline the community aspirations that the plan will be required to deliver. **(Recommendation 4)**

Draft Local Plan Community Vision for Epping Forest District:

“Epping Forest District residents will continue to enjoy a high quality of life where the built and natural heritage is highly valued and conserved. The District will meet its development needs in the most sustainable locations where there is the greatest capacity for utilising existing infrastructure and delivering new infrastructure, least impact on the natural and historic environment and where the Green Belt will continue to serve its purposes of keeping settlements separate and retaining their identities.

Epping Forest will be conserved and enhanced and will continue to form a key part of the District’s identity. Residents will have excellent access to open and natural spaces including the Lea Valley Regional Park and the countryside. Development will utilise the latest technology to deliver resource efficient development and ensure resilience to climate change.

The District’s economy will retain its strong links with London whilst developing a more sustainable local economy which builds on its strengths and assets including

tourism, aviation related industry, research and development, food production and the building industry.

A distinctive and attractive network of towns and village centres which can be accessed by well serviced public transportation, walking and cycling will continue to be at the heart of the District's communities. Residential development will be located to meet the needs of the housing market area whilst supporting economic development. Towns and Villages will benefit from appropriate scale development that meets local need and ensures their vitality".

SECTION THREE – LINKS TO OTHER STRATEGIES:

It is important that this Strategy takes account of the current national and regional context for the development of culture and leisure. Relevant policies have been reviewed and summarised to assess their “fit” with the Strategy proposed for Epping Forest. It should be noted that national and regional policies could be subject to amendment over the next year, in the event of a change in Government priorities, post the May 2015 general election. **(Recommendation 5)**

National Policy:

Providing access to high quality leisure provision, maximising the role of culture in building sustainable communities and supporting the creative and cultural economy, are key elements of current national policy.

The stated aim of the Department for Culture, Media and Sports (DCMS) is to “improve the quality of life for all through cultural and sporting activities, to support the pursuit of excellence and to champion the tourism, creative and leisure industries”.

Levels of participation in physical activity and the resulting positive impact on the health and well-being of the nation, are also the focus of attention for many national policy documents.

The National Policy statements of intent, with respect to Culture and Leisure, that are of direct relevance to Epping Forest, can be summarised as follows:

- Supporting vibrant and sustainable arts and culture nationally and locally, by continuing to fund arms-length bodies like the Arts Council England, giving incentives to the creative industry;
- Maintaining world-leading museums and galleries and supporting the wider museum sector by providing funding for national museums and galleries, providing free public access to the permanent collections of national museums and galleries, and funding the Arts Council England to provide support to “non-national” museums;
- Promoting the understanding and enjoyment of the historic environment through funding English Heritage, protecting nationally important sites and monuments of archaeological or historic interest, by granting them scheduled status;

- Ensuring as many people as possible are playing sport by funding Sport England to help community sports grow, (including helping 14-25 year olds to keep playing sport through their lives), expanding the School Sports Programme, maintaining and improving Britain's elite sports performance and building a lasting legacy from the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games;
- Helping people to make healthier choices by providing advice on a healthy diet through the Change 4 Life Programme, and giving guidance on how much physical activity people should be undertaking;
- Supporting marketing campaigns to attract visitors to the UK in the years following 2012, increase the proportion of UK residents who holiday in the UK, and broaden the tourism offer, by creating alternative attractions that match London.

Regional Policy:

There are a number of agencies who are responsible for delivering national policy on a regional basis, to include Arts Council England, Sports England, English Heritage and the Museums, Libraries and the Archives Council (which are now part of Arts Council England). These regional bodies are supported in practical delivery initiatives, by a number of sub-regional/county wide partnerships, such as Active Essex, Museums East of England and Museums Essex, Essex Arts, Culture First, Visit Essex and with respect to Health Improvement, the County Council's Directorate of Public Health and local Clinical Commissioning Groups.

Whilst each of these bodies/partnerships have their own individual priorities and action plans, they generally sit within the policy umbrella provided by Central Government. They provide a key interface with the National Lottery and other External Funding streams with respect to Arts, Heritage and Sports, by providing technical and professional input into the evaluation, award and monitoring of funded projects.

As the Council's Leisure Management, and in particular Community and Cultural Services, have an excellent track record in securing external funding and grants, to extend service provision (totalling over £5M in the last ten years), it will remain important to maintain alignment of future service delivery, to locally relevant regional grant making priorities. **(Recommendation 6)**

Local Policy:

This Strategy does not seek to simply replace the various existing strategies that influence how culture and leisure opportunities are provided in Epping Forest. Many current initiatives have been developed by local partnerships such as Active Epping

Forest, Epping Forest Disability Forum, Think Family (previously the Epping Forest Children's Partnership), Epping Forest Youth Strategy Group, Epping Forest Health and Wellbeing Partnership, Visit Epping Forest and the numerous local Historical Societies and Conservation Groups

Rather this Strategy seeks, as previously stated, to focus on the District Council's role and priorities for action, whilst being complementary to the aspirations of national government, regional agencies and local partners.

The District Council's desired policy outcomes, with respect to direct provision and partnership working in Leisure and Culture, are currently contained within a number of strategic documents. These are highlighted below:

The Community Strategy 2010-2031

One Epping Forest is the Local Strategic Partnership for the District. The Partnership is made up of representatives from local councils, education, the police, health services, business and community groups. Its key role is to deliver the shared vision, outcomes and values, enshrined in the Community Strategy, many of which can be practically delivered through participation in Leisure and Cultural activities.

The Community Strategy is the long term overarching plan to deliver better quality of life and improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the Epping Forest District over the next 20 years and beyond. Based on local needs and residents priorities, it seeks to support 'sustainable communities' for the future. The central element of the strategy is a statement of joint ambitions, a shared vision of what collectively are the outcomes to be achieved, on behalf of the District's communities. This has been articulated as:

"Together making Epping Forest a great place to live, work, study and do business".

It should be noted that the Council's Community Services currently plays a major role in delivering on key aspects of the Community Strategy, including health and wellbeing, children's and young people's services, community cohesion and capacity building, in order to build sustainable communities.

The Corporate Plan 2010-2015

The District Council's current Corporate Plan has identified the authority's Medium Term Aims, from which the Cabinet's Key Objectives are developed on an annual basis. The Corporate Plan and Cabinet Key Objectives are an integral part of the Council's Performance Management Framework, setting out corporate priorities and policy objectives. These are practically delivered through Departmental Business Plans and supporting service strategies.

The Corporate Plan Medium Term Aims 2010/11 to 2014/15 are:

- Safeguard frontline services that our local residents tell us are important;
- Have the lowest District Council Tax in Essex and maintain that position;
- Be recognised as an innovative and top performing Council in Essex;
- Continuously improve efficiency by adopting new ways of working with our partners and maximising revenue from our assets;
- Provide clear community leadership and be a strong advocate, championing the interests of the people of Epping Forest and protecting the special character of the District.

The Council is currently in the process of developing a new Corporate Plan, effective from April 2015.

Council's Current Service Strategies:

The following section highlights a number of existing Council service strategies and their key aims. These are not only important in delivering desired outcomes in relation to the previous two high level plans, i.e. Community Strategy and Corporate Plan, but give an important context for the development of the new Leisure and Cultural Strategy. It should be noted that for a number of these documents, the end date is 2015 and therefore the new Leisure and Cultural Strategy is timely, with respect to identifying future priorities.

Sports and Health Development Strategy 2010-2015:

The Council seeks to secure and develop a broad spectrum of sports, health and physical activity provision across the District, by providing advice, support and direct services and through the establishment of partnerships, collaborations and co-operation between clubs, organisations, agencies and individuals involved in sport. The Council aims to co-ordinate the district's sports, health and physical activity provision and to ensure a wide range of opportunities are available for people of all ages and abilities to take part in quality sports experiences including exercise to improve health and general well-being, leadership and volunteering.

Epping Forest Arts Strategy 2012-2015:

The Council seeks to provide a service which enables residents of all ages, abilities and backgrounds to access, and engage with high quality arts provision, and to experience the benefits that the arts can provide. The Council will provide a professional and high quality arts programme that includes targeted activities and events for socially excluded groups, including older people in residential care, people with learning disabilities, people with physical disabilities, and young people with low

educational attainment. In addition, the Council will not only provide arts activities for all, but also advice and support to communities arts groups and artists resident in the District. This will be supported by grant-aid to groups and individuals.

Community Development Strategy 2010-2015

The Council seeks to support the development of active, sustainable communities, with a particular focus on the District's for local super output areas, namely Limes Farm Estate in Chigwell, Ninefields Estate in Waltham Abbey, Oakwood Hill Estate in Debden and Shelley Estate in Ongar.

Epping Forest Play Strategy 2007-2017

Produced in conjunction with the Epping Forest Play Partnership, this Strategy seeks to inform the future development and delivery of high quality, safe, challenging and suitable play facilities and opportunities.

Epping Forest District Museum Service Strategy

The Council seeks to celebrate the social history of the Epping Forest District, with an emphasis on people and the environment in which they live. This is achieved through exhibitions, collections and records which are conserved. The aim is to ensure that the service is accessible to everyone, and can contribute to the quality of life in the District.

Leisure Management Strategy

Epping Forest District Council's Key Objectives with respect to the management of its Leisure facilities, are to increase use and activity for all residents, to provide services which are complimentary to and not in competition with facilities provided by others in the District, to improve the range of service offered, maximise external capital investment in the Council's facilities and reduce revenue costs by the minimisation of management fees, to any external management partner.

Playing Pitch Strategy

The Council has mapped a way forward for the provision of pitch sports facilities in the District. The Strategy gives direction and guidance to all those involved in providing outdoor sports facilities in Epping Forest and is also important in supporting applications to external bodies to increase and improve the existing stock of pitches.

Voluntary Sector Grants

Epping Forest District Council supports voluntary sector organisations involved in providing community work, culture and/or sports activities by providing financial assistance to enable them to deliver successful services. Small grants are also made available to talented Artists and Sports people to assist their development.

West Essex Health and Wellbeing Strategy (Draft)

In collaboration with the West Essex Clinical Commissioning Group and the neighbouring authorities of Harlow and Uttlesford, the District Council seeks to ensure that West Essex is “A place with the highest standards of health and wellbeing that prioritises promoting innovation and new ways to meet growing health needs. Where local communities and individuals are enabled to help themselves wherever possible, but with excellent services for those that cannot, provided through a framework of innovation and genuine partnership between all concerned local stakeholders”.

Epping Forest Biodiversity Action Plan

This action plan contains a range of targets aimed at conserving and enhancing biodiversity across the district in the key habitats, of woodland, farmland, urban open space and species rich grassland and heathland. The plan seeks to balance conservation and protection of the natural environment with the promotion of active recreational and leisure use.

SECTION FOUR – PROVISION FOR LEISURE AND CULTURAL

Current Opportunities

As highlighted earlier, there are a significant number of providers and partner agencies in the statutory, private and voluntary sectors who currently deliver a diverse range of leisure and cultural opportunities. These opportunities are located not only within the main urban conurbations, but also across the rural parts of the district, with the voluntary/community sector, in particular, playing an important role in many rural areas, delivering accessible leisure and cultural opportunities in areas of poor public transport, helping to develop community cohesion and combating isolation for the elderly.

Performing Arts Facilities

The District currently has limited provision with respect to purpose built arts rehearsal and performance space. Whilst there are drama studios at a number of the secondary schools, Zinc Arts in Ongar and Epping Forest College, the East Fifteen Acting School in Debden, has the only permanent fully equipped theatre. Although the physical proximity of London provides opportunities for residents of the district to access high quality performing arts, this may be restrictive for some local people due to other access barriers such as cost. However, the regional Playhouse Theatre in Harlow, does provide affordable access by audiences to performances, on a more local basis.

Whilst this choice exists, there has not been pressure and demand for the provision of a dedicated arts facility to be directly provided by the Council. Rather, the Council has adopted a policy of outreach and over many years has developed a comprehensive community arts programme. An audit of current activities provided by the Council's Community and Cultural Services, to include arts development activity, was undertaken as part of the development of this Strategy. This illustrates the depth and range of Community and Cultural activity, across the District.

Museums and Galleries

The Council provides the Epping Forest Museum Service. Whilst based at the District Museum in Sun Street, the Service also operates on an outreach basis through a programme of temporary exhibitions, education visits, loan boxes, lectures and seminars. The Council also supports the North Weald Airfield Museum through its grant programme and through professional support.

The museum collection celebrates the social history of the District. In 2013, the service was successful in securing a major Heritage Lottery Fund grant of £1.65m which will enable the provision of new space to significantly extend the museum's

exhibition, and on-site storage, as well as providing complete, step-free access for people with disabilities. The funding additionally covers the appointment of two posts to develop volunteering and community engagement with museum services. The Council also manages the Borough of Broxbourne's Museum Service, based at Lowewood Museum in Hoddesdon, through a Service Level Agreement. The Museum has also been commissioned to provide a specialist resource for the preparation of touring exhibitions which are toured across the East Region. This programme is funded by Arts Council England at a sum of £145,000.

Currently there is limited community gallery and exhibition space located in the District. However, with the extension of the Council's Museum in Waltham Abbey and a planned new initiative at Epping Forest College, the deficit of gallery space will be partially addressed. As in the case of access to performing arts venues, the numerous galleries in the capital and the Gibberd Gallery in Harlow Town Centre, assist in meeting some local requirements.

Outdoor Sports Facilities

The provision of facilities to play outdoor sports is met primarily by voluntary sports clubs and Town and Parish Councils. There are currently 78 adult football pitches, 26 junior football pitches, 13 mini soccer, 32 cricket pitches and 16 adult rugby pitches.

The District Council's role is largely one of advice and facilitation, although in recent years the Council has provided direct funding to develop a full-sized 3G floodlit artificial pitch at Town Mead, Waltham Abbey, managed in partnership with Waltham Abbey Town Council. This facility met a gap in provision, complementing the other all-weather pitches at Debden High School, Roding Valley High School, St John's Epping, Old Loughtonians and Spurs Lodge, Chigwell, the Academy in Debden, and Upper Clapton Rugby Club in Thornwood.

Community Halls

There are 43 community halls provided by local town and parish councils, voluntary clubs and village hall committees, equivalent to one hall per 2,907. Whilst the Council directly provide a range of services from the Limes Farm Centre, Chigwell, its current role is again in facilitating and providing a level of capital funding for improvements through the Community Grants Scheme. Access to community halls plays an important role in the local provision of leisure and cultural opportunities.

Tourist Facilities

The District Council does not play a direct role in the management of any specialist tourist facilities, with the exception of the District Museum which attracts visitors from

outside of the area. However, the authority has an active role in the management of conservation and wildlife areas through its Country care Service, which plays an important part of the visitor offer. Similarly, North Weald Airfield with its event programme and outdoor market also attracts a significant number of visitors per annum.

The Council does, however, appreciate the importance of tourism to the local economy, with visitor spend estimated at over £20m per annum in the District.

As such, the Council plays an important ongoing role in the Tourism Taskforce established by the Local Strategic Partnership, recently funding a dedicated Tourism Officer post to co-ordinate and develop their work. Their Website, Visit Epping Forest, has proven highly successful in increasing awareness of key visitor attractions such as the Ongar Epping Heritage Railway, the Royal Gunpowder Mills, Epping Forest and the Lea Valley Regional Park.

Sports and Physical Activity

Utilising Sport England Surveys (Active People), and market segment information from Expedia, the patterns of demand for open space, sport and recreation in the District have been identified. Whilst the results primarily relate to formal sports activities, this also included “moderate intensity activity”, comprising non-competitive activities such as jogging, walking and recreational cycling, which make use of the open space in the District.

Most current indices of participation in sport and active recreation in Epping Forest, are just above the median for our geographic neighbours, demographic comparator authorities, and regional/national averages. However, it can be observed that participation in organised competitive sport is lower than the comparators, which suggests that provision for recreational level and informal participation is important locally.

Levels of satisfaction are a little below the regional and national averages, which may imply that there is some dissatisfaction with the quality and quantity of local provision. The market segmentation analysis suggests that demand for swimming, golf and water sports, is likely to be higher than the national average, as is demand for open space that provides for outdoor activities.

The District Council currently promotes leading an active and healthier lifestyle, through its Sport and Health Development Team, working with partners and supporting the voluntary sector. Much of this work is funded through external funding secured via competitive process and over the last few years this has been in the region of £250,000. This is complementary to the Council’s main leisure facility provision. These activities have also been audited and mapped.

Leisure Centres and Swimming Pools

The District is currently served by a number of providers with respect to leisure/sports centres and swimming pools. The private sector has a presence ranging from small gym facilities to larger health and fitness clubs, operated by national companies such as Virgin Active and David Lloyd. Other facilities can be accessed outside of curriculum use, at the 6 state funded secondary schools, comprising of primarily sports halls and outdoor courts, although Davenant and West Hatch Schools have swimming pools, which are hired to the public.

In addition to these facilities, in the private and education sector, the District Council has four purpose built community leisure centres which are currently managed under contract by an external leisure management partner, SLM, up until January 2016. These facilities are Epping Sports Centre, Loughton Leisure Centre, Waltham Abbey Swimming Pool and Ongar Leisure Centre. Combined they represent by far the largest area of direct leisure service provision by the Council and incur the highest level of discretionary expenditure by the Council. For these reasons, the future level of provision and delivery is covered in some depth later in this Strategy. An audit of existing provision in the District and in near neighbouring authorities has been undertaken and mapped to show the distribution of opportunities.

(Recommendation 7)

Future Need

In April 2012, as part of the compilation of the evidence base for the Local Plan, the Council appointed specialist external consultants to analyse the differing needs of the District’s population for open space, built sports facilities and active recreation. This report, the “Epping Forest Open Space, Sport and Recreation Assessment”, will not only inform the Local Plan, but contains detailed research on which to base this Leisure and Cultural Strategy. This is with respect to evidence of current supply, identification of existing facilities in need of enhancement, and to plan for any new future facility requirements. The scope of the study covered an extensive list of types of provision, including:

- | | | |
|--|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Allotments | Cricket Pitches, | Health and Fitness facilities |
| Cemeteries & Graveyards | Swimming Pools | Indoor Sports facilities |
| Informal Recreation Grounds | Synthetic Athletic Tracks | Equestrian facilities |
| Children’s Playgrounds | Artificial Pitches | Airfields |
| Woodlands and Semi-Natural Open Spaces | Sports Halls | Shooting facilities |
| Football Pitches | Tennis Courts | Village and Community Halls |
| Rugby Pitches | Squash Courts | |
| | Golf Courses and Driving Ranges | |

The development of the Assessment Study was supported by a stakeholder consultation group comprising Town and Parish Councils, Sport Essex, Essex Wildlife Trust, EF Youth Council, Lea Valley Regional Park Authority, City of London, Sport England and Natural England.

Whilst the Assessment Report is therefore a key piece of evidence in the Local Plan process, this Leisure and Cultural Strategy focuses on the District Council's future role. Therefore, there is no further analysis of provision for those types of facilities for which the Council makes no direct investment or indeed, does not play an enabling/supporting role.

Other providers i.e. Town and Parish Councils, statutory partners, the private and voluntary sectors, can access the conclusions of the Assessment Report which is published on-line on the Council's Website, under the Local Plan section. This is not to say that these other providers' services are not important in meeting future leisure and cultural need, but rather sit outside of the scope of this Strategy. The Council will be giving due regard to the recommendations around these other types of provision, as part of the key deliverables in the Local Plan. **(Recommendation 8)**

Therefore, for District Council direct and enabled services going forward, the following assessment of future need has been established.

Community and Cultural Services

The current aims and description of these services including Arts, Community, Sports and Health Development and the Museum Service have been outlined earlier in the Strategy. It can be observed that in order to compensate for the lack of some specialist, particularly arts and gallery provision, and to reflect the nature and demography of the District, Community and Cultural Services are primarily delivered on an outreach basis, with an ethos of community development. This is a cost effective approach which does not incur the expense of built facilities and delivers activities on an ongoing self sustaining basis, once the initial set up work is completed, building community capacity and enabling self help.

Additional Value for Money is also achieved by the long-standing success of external funding applications which have enabled a level of participation in excess of what core Council funding could provide alone. The role of the Council and its staff is, in this regard, to act as a facilitator and a "hub" to identify, seek access and deliver external funding opportunities for community and cultural services.

Given the reputation and success of the Council's current Community and Cultural Services, it is assessed that demand for these services will continue in future. However, as discretionary services, the Council will need to ensure that it is achieving Value for Money and that the service is targeted at those in the greatest

need and likely to benefit the most. The proposed future priorities for Community and Cultural Services are outlined later in the Strategy.

Indoor Sports Halls

For the purposes of this Strategy, sports halls are defined as indoor halls with a minimum dimension of 33m x 17m x 7.6m, equivalent to four basketball courts. Currently there are 6 sports halls with community access in Epping Forest, equivalent to one facility per 20,833 people.

| Sports Hall | Address | Dimensions |
|-----------------------------|---|------------|
| Epping Sports Centre | Hemnall Street, Epping CM16 4LU | 33m x 18m |
| St John's CoE School | Bury Lane, Epping CM16 5EN | 33m x 18m |
| Debden Park High School | Willingale Road, Loughton IG10 2BQ | 33m x 18m |
| Roding Valley High School | Alderton Hill, Loughton IG10 3JA | 33m x 17m |
| Waltham Abbey Sports Centre | Broomstick Hall Rd, Waltham Abbey EN9 1LF | 40m x 17m |
| Ongar Leisure Centre | The Gables, Ongar CM5 0GA | 33m x 18m |

In addition to the regulation sized sports halls in the district, there are a number of smaller halls, which, whilst unable to accommodate the full range of sports hall activities by virtue of their limited dimensions, nevertheless serve to supplement local provision:

| Facility | Address | Dimensions |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------|
| Chigwell School | High Road, Chigwell IG7 6QF | 25m x 18m |
| Davenant Foundation School | Chest Road, Loughton IG10 2LD | 18m x 17m |
| David Lloyd Club (Chigwell) | Roding Lane, Buckhurst Hill IG9 6BJ | 18m x 17m |
| Guru Gobind Singh Khalsa College | Roding Lane, Chigwell IG7 6BQ | 25m x 18m |

Sports Hall provision in neighbouring local authorities is tabulated below. Epping Forest has the second lowest per capita rate of sports hall provision and number of badminton courts per capita, well below the median figure for both measures.

| Local Authority | No. Sports Halls | Sports Halls per capita | No. Courts per capita |
|----------------------|------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Uttlesford | 6 | 1: 12,600 | 1: 3,150 |
| Havering | 16 | 1: 14,756 | 1: 3,689 |
| Brentwood | 8 | 1: 14,960 | 1: 2,394 |
| Harlow | 5 | 1:16,340 | 1: 4,085 |
| Enfield | 18 | 1: 16,383 | 1: 4096 |
| Waltham Forest | 13 | 1: 17,469 | 1: 4,367 |
| Broxbourne | 5 | 1: 18,120 | 1: 4,118 |
| <i>Median Values</i> | <i>9.1</i> | <i>1: 18,643</i> | <i>1: 4,359</i> |
| East Hertfordshire | 7 | 1: 19,586 | 1: 3,917 |
| Epping Forest | 6 | 1: 20,833 | 1: 5,000 |
| Chelmsford | 7 | 1: 23,971 | 1:5,413 |
| Redbridge | 9 | 1: 30,056 | 1: 7,512 |

Sport England recommends that for rural areas, the recommended travel time to a sports hall should be twenty minutes or less by car and that for urban areas up to twenty minutes walking time. On this basis, taking into account facilities in neighbouring authorities, these criteria are largely met. However, the Assessment Study did conclude that the current provision of six sports halls is inadequate with an assessed demand for one additional sports hall, bringing the total to seven, the preferred location being in the more densely populated South of the District.

Indoor Swimming Pools

There are five facilities, comprising a collective total of 1,713.5sq.m of water space, with community access in Epping Forest, equivalent to one facility per 25,000 people, or 13.71sq.m of water space per 1,000 people:

| Swimming Pool | Address | Dimensions |
|-------------------------------|--|------------------------|
| Virgin Active Club (Chigwell) | Woolston Manor, Abridge Rd, Chigwell IG7 6BX | 20m x 11m |
| Loughton Leisure Centre | Traps Hill, Loughton IG10 1SZ | 25m x 12 m 18m x 7m |
| Ongar Leisure Centre | The Gables, Ongar, CM5 0GA | 25m x 12.5m |
| David Lloyd Club (Chigwell) | Roding Lane, Buckhurst Hill IG9 8BJ | 25m x 10m 20m x 6m |
| Waltham Abbey Pool | Roundhills, Waltham Abbey EN9 1UP | 25m x 9m 12m x 5m |

In addition to the swimming pools in the district that meet the minimum 20m length criterion to accommodate a full range of swimming activities, there are a number of smaller pools, which, whilst unable to accommodate a full range of activities by virtue of their limited dimensions, nevertheless serve to supplement local provision:

| Facility | Address | Dimensions |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------|
| Marriott Leisure Club (WA) | Old Shire Lane, Waltham Abbey EN9 3LX | 15m x 6m |
| Davenant Foundation School | Chester Road, Loughton IG10 2LD | 18m x 6m |
| Woolston Manor Golf Club (Outdoor) | Abridge Road, Chigwell IG7 6BX | 18m x 6m |
| West Hatch High School | High Road, Chigwell IG7 5BT | 18m x 8m |

The provision of swimming pools in neighbouring local authorities is tabulated below and shows that Epping Forest has the third highest figure for both pools and water space per capita, well above the median figure for both measures of provision (based on data from 'Active Places').

| Local Authority | No. pools | Pools per capita | Water space | Sq.m per 1000 people |
|----------------------|------------|------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| Brentwood | 6 | 1: 12,467 | 1,906.0sq.m | 25.48sq.m |
| Broxbourne | 5 | 1: 18,120 | 1,307.5sq.m | 15.12sq.m |
| Epping Forest | 5 | 1: 25,000 | 1,713.5sq.m | 13.71sq.m |
| Waltham Forest | 8 | 1: 28,388 | 2,796.25sq.m | 12.31sq.m |
| Uttlesford | 3 | 1: 25,200 | 907.5sq.m | 12.00sq.m |
| <i>Median values</i> | <i>5.5</i> | <i>1: 30,465</i> | <i>1,735.0sq.m</i> | <i>11.97sq.m</i> |
| Havering | 9 | 1: 26,233 | 2,796.25sq.m | 11.84sq.m |

| | | | | |
|------------|---|-----------|--------------|-----------|
| East Herts | 5 | 1: 27,420 | 1,603.5sq.m | 11.70sq.m |
| Enfield | 8 | 1: 36,863 | 2,581.75sq.m | 8.75sq.m |
| Harlow | 2 | 1: 40,850 | 660.0sq.m | 8.08sq.m |
| Chelmsford | 3 | 1: 55,933 | 1,141.5sq.m | 6.80sq.m |
| Redbridge | 7 | 1: 38,642 | 1,731.5sq.m | 6.40sq.m |

Sport England have established a standard of provision that is utilised in establishing need and on which they determine capital grants. This was the case for the Sports Lottery Award for Loughton Leisure Centre. On the basis that the entire population of the District is within 20 minute drive to their nearest pool, it can be concluded that quantitative need is met. However, in terms of quality and condition, a number of areas of concern are highlighted in the next chapter.

Squash Courts

For the purpose of this Strategy, squash courts are defined as specialist courts, complying with dimensions specified by England Squash and Racketball. There are 11 courts at five locations in the district, equivalent to one court per 11,363 people.

| Site | Address | No. courts |
|--------------------------------|--|------------|
| Epping Sports Centre | Hemnall Street, Epping CM16 4LU | 4 |
| Old Chigwellians SC | Roding Lane, Chigwell IG7 6BA | 1 |
| Ongar Squash Club | Love lane, Ongar CM5 9BL | 2 |
| Waltham Abbey Sports Centre | Broomstick Hall Road, WA, EN9 1LF | 2 |
| Metropolitan Police (Chigwell) | Chigwell Hall, High Road, Chigwell IG7 6BD | 2 |

The provision of squash courts in neighbouring local authorities is tabulated below. The data shows that Epping Forest has a per capita rate of provision well above the median.

| Local Authority | No. courts | Courts per capita |
|----------------------|-------------|-------------------|
| Brentwood | 18 | 1: 4,156 |
| Broxbourne | 13 | 1: 6,969 |
| East Hertfordshire | 16 | 1: 7,038 |
| Epping Forest | 11 | 1: 11,363 |
| Uttlesford | 6 | 1: 12,600 |
| Harlow | 6 | 1: 13,617 |
| Chelmsford | 12 | 1: 14,125 |
| <i>Median values</i> | <i>11.6</i> | <i>1: 15,231</i> |
| Enfield | 18 | 1: 16,383 |
| Waltham Forest | 12 | 1: 18,925 |
| Havering | 9 | 1: 26,233 |
| Redbridge | 6 | 1: 45,083 |

As a specialist sports facility, squash court users typically travel by car to reach their chosen facility. On the basis of current provision, the entire population is again within 20 minute drive at their nearest facility. It should be noted that the popularity of squash has declined over the last 10 years, as alternative means of keeping fit in the

form of fitness suites and movement classes have increased. This has led to poor uptake of courts particularly at non-peak times, and as such, many squash courts are being used to host alternative activities such as yoga, and children's play.

Health and Fitness Facilities

Health and Fitness facilities for the purpose of this Strategy are deemed to comprise of specialist indoor area with a mixture of cardio and resistance exercise equipment and areas for movement classes. There are 12 health and fitness facilities, collectively providing 715 stations in the district, equivalent to one facility per 10,417 people and one station per 175 people.

| Site | Address | Stations |
|--------------------------------|--|----------|
| Concept Fitness | 224 High Street, Epping CM16 4AQ | 15 |
| Epping Sports Centre | Hemnall Street, Epping CM16 4LU | 35 |
| Marriott Leisure Club (WA) | Old Shire Lane, Waltham Abbey EN9 3LX | 18 |
| Pro SW Gym | Sterling House, Langston Road, Loughton IG10 3TS | 24 |
| Simply Fitness | Old Station Road, Loughton IG10 4PE | 18 |
| Virgin Active Club (Chigwell) | Woolston Manor, Abridge Road, Chigwell IG7 6BX | 150 |
| Metropolitan Police (Chigwell) | Chigwell Hall, High Road, Chigwell IG7 6BD | 20 |
| Loughton Leisure Centre | Traps Hill, Loughton IG10 1SZ | 90 |
| Waltham Abbey Pool | Roundhills, Waltham Abby EN9 1UP | 40 |
| Krunch Gym | Ability House, Brooker Road, Waltham Abbey EN9 1JH | 85 |
| David Lloyd Club (Chigwell)) | Roding Lane, Buckhurst Hill IG9 6BJ | 165 |
| Ongar Leisure Centre | The Gables, Ongar CM5 0GA | 55 |

The provision of fitness facilities in neighbouring local authorities are tabulated below and show that Epping Forest is above the median figure for the number of facilities and has the second highest level of per capita provision of stations.

| Local Authority | No. facilities | Facilities per capita | No. stations | Stations per capita |
|----------------------|----------------|-----------------------|--------------|---------------------|
| East Hertfordshire | 14 | 1: 9,793 | 849 | 1: 161 |
| Epping Forest | 12 | 1: 10,417 | 715 | 1: 175 |
| Harlow | 7 | 1: 11,671 | 453 | 1: 180 |
| Uttlesford | 11 | 1: 6,873 | 383 | 1: 197 |
| Chelmsford | 17 | 1: 9,871 | 836 | 1: 201 |
| Brentwood | 8 | 1: 9,350 | 366 | 1: 204 |
| <i>Median value</i> | <i>12.4</i> | <i>1: 12,811</i> | <i>688</i> | <i>1: 228</i> |
| Havering | 12 | 1: 19,675 | 956 | 1: 247 |
| Broxbourne | 6 | 1: 15,100 | 366 | 2: 248 |

By mapping the geographic location of the current health and fitness facilities in Epping Forest, it can be seen that the entire population is within a 15 minute drive time. As such, it can be concluded that provision is adequate.

Synthetic Sports Pitches

Definition: For the purposes of the Strategy, synthetic sports pitches are defined as artificial grass playing surfaces, with dimensions of 101.4m x 64m (including run-offs) with sand-filled, rubber crumb or water-based pitch surface variants. There are six pitches with community access in the district, equivalent to one facility per 25,000 people.

| Site | Address | Type |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------|
| Debden Park High School | Willingale Road, Loughton IG10 2BQ | Sand-filled |
| Roding Valley High School | Alderton Hill, Loughton IG10 3JA | Sand-filled |
| Chigwell School | High Road, Chigwell IG7 6QF | Sand-filled |
| Old Loughtonians HC (x2) | Luxborough Lane, Chigwell IG7 5AB | Water-based |
| Town Mead Recreation Ground | Townmead, Waltham Abbey | Rubber Crumb |

In addition to the synthetic turf pitches in the district that meet the minimum dimensions of 101.4 x 63m, there are a further two small facilities which serve to supplement local provision.

| Site | Address | Type | Dimensions |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------|------------|
| Old Loughtonians HC | Luxborough Lane, Chigwell IG7 5AB | Sand-filled | 50m x 50m |
| Upper Clapton RFC | Upland Road, Thornwood | Rubber Crumb | 50m x 50m |

By mapping the location of synthetic sports pitches in Epping Forest, together with the 20 minute drive time catchment standard. It shows that the entire population of the district is within 20 minutes' drive of their nearest pitch, and as such provision is adequate.

Future Provision Conclusions

On the basis of the analysis provided, it can be seen that the District Council plays a role in the direct provision of sports halls, swimming pools, health and fitness facilities and synthetic pitches. With the exception of sports halls, a picture of adequate access to provision is evident with the number of facilities generally above the median figure in comparison to neighbouring authorities and within the access catchment criteria established by Sport England.

The exception to this is with respect to the provision of sports halls, where there is a deficiency of one sports hall. An opportunity exists to fill this need in the south of the District, as Epping Forest College have expressed an aspiration to provide a new sports centre to serve both their students and the community at their site in Borders Lane. The Council has previously sought a commitment from the College in the form of a letter of intent that they would seek to re-provide such a facility, as and when financial circumstances allowed, to compensate for the loss of the previous Debden

Community Association Sports Centre, which was redeveloped for an older people's care home. If this was to proceed it could meet an identified strategic need.

The analysis shows that the District's current population is within a 15-20 mile drive time of swimming pools, health and fitness facilities and synthetic pitches. Whilst the Objectivity Assessed Housing Need figure within the Local Plan is yet to be established, the Issues and Options consultation expressed a preference from the community for incremental development around existing settlements. On this basis, there is therefore, given current provision serving such existing settlements, not a future need for more quantitative provision. The caveat to this proposition is if any neighbouring authority was to close a major facility, creating a deficit for residents of the district on the borders.

Similarly, to close an existing provision in the District, particularly a Council community facility would also create deficit. However, with an ageing stock of, in particular, sports halls and swimming pools, there is a qualitative issue that is sought to be addressed in the following section on Future Provision and Management of the Council's Sports and Leisure Centres. **(Recommendation 9)**

SECTION FIVE – DISTRICT COUNCIL PRIORITIES AND PROVISION

Leisure Facilities

Background

In 2005, as a result of a recommendation of a Best Value inspection of Leisure Services, and against a backdrop of increasing pressure on revenue and capital budgets, the Council undertook a comprehensive review of the alternative options available, to manage its leisure facilities. Following this review, the Council elected to pursue the appointment of an external “partner” to manage and develop its major leisure facilities and swimming pools.

By engaging an external “Partner”, the Council aimed to achieve a number of key Objectives:

- To manage the Council’s Leisure Facilities by the most cost effective means possible, therefore reducing the level of revenue support necessary in the future;
- To alleviate the financial risks to the Council and in particular to release the Council from the threat of VAT penalties deriving from exempt incomes;
- To invest in the facilities to ensure that the internal fabric is maintained to current standards and that capital refurbishments and new facilities are provided where possible;
- To ensure that high quality and diverse opportunities remain available and accessible to all sections of the local community, and to seek continuous improvement to the Service.

Following a competitive procurement process, the Council awarded the contract to Sport and Leisure Management Limited (SLM). The contract for Loughton Leisure Centre, Ongar Leisure Centre and Waltham Abbey Swimming Pool, was initially for seven years with an option to extend it for a further three years based on satisfactory performance. This option was exercised in 2011 and involved the contractor submitting proposals, which were financially advantageous to the Council’s revenue position.

In relation to Epping Sports Centre, this had originally been tendered for a period of three years, due to uncertainty about the position regarding the possible relocation of the Centre, as part of the redevelopment of a new secondary school in Epping. However, when the option was not pursued, the contract timescale for Epping

Sports Centre was realigned with the rest of the overall contract which is currently due to terminate in January 2016.

As is the case with the vast majority of local authority leisure provision throughout the country, and in particular, those councils who have an ageing stock of buildings, an element of subsidy is required as generally income from fees and charges does not cover the operating costs. A key objective of seeking alternative management of the Council's facilities had been the transfer of risk of under-achievement of income and the minimalisation of the level of revenue support required. As a result, tenders were sought on a "deficit guarantee management fee basis", i.e. after the contractor had met all their obligations regarding staffing, maintenance, and operating costs, and based on their estimate of income from users, which they retained, what level of "deficit" payment or management fee would they require.

The contract with SLM commenced on 3 January 2006, and the Council's Leisure Centre staff, at that time, were TUPE transferred to SLM.

Shortly after the commencement of the contract, as per SLM's tender bid, a capital improvement programme involving some £1.6 million of expenditure commenced. This resulted in a major refurbishment of both the wet and dry changing rooms at Ongar Leisure Centre combined with the conversion of the squash courts to provide a fitness suite and movement studio. In addition, at Waltham Abbey Swimming Pool, the changing rooms were refurbished and reconfigured to provide internal access to the fitness suite and the construction of a new extension incorporating a movement studio. SLM designed, specified, procured and funded the works, managing the building contracts directly.

The Council had sought a "hybrid" contract with the intention of ensuring that the specification of requirements achieved a balance between protecting the Council's long term interests in the buildings, and guaranteed an affordable accessible programme of activity to meet the needs of all sections of the community, whilst ensuring that any contractor had the flexibility to develop the business. SLM's charitable trust status also produced financial advantages, in terms of business rate relief, VAT exceptions and corporate tax advantages.

Financial Performance of Current Contract

The current management fees paid to meet the deficit of operating the four centres are detailed below. Due to the quality of the modern facilities provided by Loughton Leisure Centre and its premium location, it does not currently require a deficit payment, rather SLM pay the Council a management fee reflecting the Centre's high revenue potential.

By bringing together cost and performance considerations, it is possible to apply a relative ranking to the current facilities. In summary, Loughton Leisure Centre has the lowest management fee, the highest participation figure and the lowest subsidy per user. This is in contrast to Waltham Abbey Swimming Pool which has the highest management fee, the second lowest participation figure and the highest subsidy per user. **(Recommendation 10)**

| 2013-2014 Subsidies | | | | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|------------------|
| | Management Fees | EFDC Costs | Total Cost | Subsidy per head of population | Subsidy per user |
| Epping Sports Centre | £301,916 | £46,604 | £348,520 | £2.81 | £2.08 |
| Loughton Leisure Centre | -£182,730 | £103,700 | -£79,030 | -£0.64 | -£0.18 |
| Ongar Leisure Centre | £286,336 | £46,044 | £332,380 | £2.68 | £1.69 |
| Waltham Abbey Pool | £498,278 | £48,672 | £546,950 | £4.41 | £2.66 |
| | £903,800 | £245,020 | £1,148,820 | £9.27 | £6.25 |

Attendances 2013 – 14

Based on SLM supplied site attendances

| | |
|-------------------------|---------|
| Epping Sports Centre | 167,603 |
| Loughton Leisure Centre | 432,603 |
| Ongar Leisure Centre | 197,137 |
| Waltham Abbey Pool | 205,502 |

Condition of Current Facilities

As part of the budget process for 2014/15 the Council made provision for and has commissioned full building condition surveys for all centres. A breakdown of current known maintenance issues and each centre's relative strengths and weaknesses is attached at Background Paper 1. However, subject to formal confirmation by the building surveyor's reports and based on pre-tender estimates it has been established that Waltham Abbey Swimming Pool has effectively reached the end of its viable life. To invest the significant sums of money, estimated in excess of £1m to refurbish a building some 45 years old, would not make economic sense, given its inherent problems with layout and its current financial performance. Therefore, there is a need to re-provide a pool, elsewhere in Waltham Abbey. **(Recommendation 11)**

Epping Sports Centre is a conversion of an army drill hall and whilst significant sums have been spent on the roof and tanking the sports hall, the building has very poor access for people with disabilities and has restricted car parking. Again, the building does not lend itself to modern flexible use and has an awkward layout. Despite not reaching the unviable position of Waltham Abbey Pool, serious consideration should be given to its replacement in the medium term. A key consideration of future

location will be the Local Plan and where future growth is delivered. However, the Masterplanning Exercise recently submitted into the evidence base for North Weald Bassett and the Deloitte Report on North Weald Airfield, both suggest that future provision may be required. This will need to be kept under review and reflected in any future management contract. **(Recommendation 12)**

Ongar Leisure Centre, whilst of a similar age to Epping Sports Centre, in part because of its original specification as a dual use centre with higher quality mechanical and electrical plant (accepting that the flat roofs may need to be refurbished in 5-10 years), coupled with investment by SLM of over £1m on the changing facilities and new fitness suite conversion, has a longer viable life than the other two older centres. With the success of the bid to provide a new secondary school in Ongar under the “free schools” programme on the site, an opportunity exists to revert back to the previous dual use arrangements, which would potentially enable a cost sharing arrangement on repairs and running costs to be negotiated. **(Recommendation 13)**

Future Leisure Management Contract Options

As part of the Council’s initial decision to seek an alternative provider, extensive consideration has been given to the respective management options available, namely direct management, private sector operator, in-house trust or established trust. An evaluation was undertaken of the benefits of adopting the particular options, and a firm conclusion was reached that outsourcing to a private sector partner or external trust was the preferred option in relation to the delivery of the Council’s Key Objectives

A recent review of these options has reached the same conclusion, particularly as a result of recent number of visits to other authorities who have recently re-let large contracts, coupled with the increasing feature in the leisure contracting market of private sector companies being willing to invest capital or enter into joint development arrangements, for new or extensively extended leisure facilities, to include where appropriate facilities for participation in arts and cultural activities. **(Recommendation 14)**

Procurement Approach

There is a considerable amount of complexity in relation to the procurement of a new leisure management contract for the Council, particularly given the number of variables and unknowns in relation to the condition of buildings and future provision options. Whilst it would be possible to replicate the previous approach, where the Council had specified its requirements in detail through the contract specification, this would have a limiting effect on the contractor. The Council’s current operator has

already referred to this restriction and has indicated that an alternative approach of competitive dialogue may be preferable. **(Recommendation 15)**

Competitive Dialogue was used to let the Council's new Waste and Street Cleansing Contract and to date has proved to be a positive experience, allowing contractors to be innovative and bring forward their own ideas based on their experience on how services could best be delivered. Braintree District Council and Hinkley Borough Council have recently let their new leisure management contract by way of competitive dialogue, with considerable benefits in terms of reduced revenue costs and capital investment. **(Recommendation 16)**

Community and Cultural Services

In Sections 3 and 4 of the Strategy, the Council's range of Community and Cultural Services including Arts, Community Development and Sports/Health development, as well as the District Museum Service, were outlined along with the aims of their current service strategies.

It was explained that they operate on largely an outreach basis, working closely with other partners in the public and voluntary sector, with a good track record of accessing external funding. The exception to this work has been the direct management of services for the Limes Farm Hall, which underwent an extensive refurbishment, under a project led by Community and Cultural Services. A similar opportunity has been identified to provide a community hub in an area of social deprivation at Hillhouse, in Waltham Abbey.

The management of the service, which now lies in the Council's Communities Directorate, has recently been reviewed and has brought together the four teams, who have always undertaken work on a complementary basis, into two teams reflecting the synergies between the Arts and Museum Service and Sports/Health and Community Development.

Whilst these discretionary services at the initial time of establishment, used to work primarily within their own particular professional discipline, delivering arts, sports, community and museum activities, they have over a period of years operated on a much more thematic basis recognising their ability to impact a wider policy objectives in relation to health inequalities, social inclusion, anti-social behaviour, youth empowerment and active ageing.

As a result, a number of review workshops, future forecasting and self evaluation exercises, including the active engagement of Members of the Portfolio Holder Advisory Group for the development of this Strategy, the following priority areas for the future work of the Council's Community and Cultural Services have been identified to be delivered through programmes of partnership work.

(Recommendation 17)

- Community and Cultural Cohesion
- Health Inequality
- Young People and Youth Unemployment
- Anti-Social Behaviour
- Ageing Population
- Rural isolation.

Health and Wellbeing

Introduction

The health and social care system, nationally and locally, is undergoing major structural change at a time of increasing demand. The gap between what is needed to maintain services in their current configuration, and the needs of a growing and increasingly aged, higher need population are stretching resources at a time of budget constraint. With patients' expectations and the costs of health care, and infrastructure also increasing, there are significant challenges to be addressed in the short, medium and longer term to respond effectively.

As an integral part of planning for health care in West Essex, the Clinical Commissioning Group and the three West Essex Local Authorities, namely Epping Forest, Harlow and Uttlesford District Councils, have built on their history of collaborative working, to formally constitute the West Essex Wellbeing Board. This co-ordinating partnership has sought to clarify its future priorities through the development of "Better Together" the West Essex Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

The strategy attempts to ensure that all stakeholders are enabled to contribute and play their role in meeting these challenges in a coherent and co-ordinated way. It starts from the proposition that the issues and factors which generate and sustain a healthy and successful community are not simply within the gift of the statutory health services to remedy.

The work to integrate Health, Social Care and District Council Services, such as Housing, Planning and Leisure and Culture, goes beyond simply having closer links between the CCG District Councils and ECC. Resources that can have a critical impact on these factors exist within communities and the many services which are geared to support them either at a community level through publicly funded public services or increasingly through private sector organisations.

Key Priorities

The Strategy contains 5 main health and wellbeing priorities, which will be the key areas where action by the Council and all other partners, collectively and individually, will be focused for the next five years. These are the issues where a joined up partnership approach will deliver the greatest added value in service delivery and will impact the most on delivering the vision.

Three of the priorities have been set out at the level of West Essex, and two have been identified by the Local Partnership in each district as the areas of particular concern of them, and where they feel the greatest improvement can be made. The sixth priority running through everything, is to drive service improvement and efficiency in the management of scarce resources through joined up, strategically focused services.

These priorities will be reconfirmed on an annual basis at a West Health Stakeholder Conference, and will be addressed through the production and agreement of an Annual Delivery Plan in each area and pan West Essex. This will also contain detailed targets.

The agreed West Essex Priorities are:

1. Divert and manage demand for publically funded health services, focusing on community mobilisation and collective and individual resilience.
2. Establish joint critical pathways from the NHS into social care.
3. Establish new innovative solutions to meeting care needs, using tele-care etc.

In Epping Forest this will be complemented by the following priorities:

4. Mitigating the impact to accessing services to vulnerable groups, particularly linking to social deprivation, age and Rural Isolation; and
5. Investing in services to Young People, improving sexual health, child and adolescent mental health (CAMH's) and tackling childhood obesity.

These priorities have been established on the evidence of the health profiles produced by the County Council's Director of Public Health and the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.

Given that the determinants of good health are wider than simply access to primary care services, for example, poor housing, lack of access to services by public transport, poor diet and lack of exercise and social isolation, the District Council

clearly has a vital role to play. This is not only restricted to direct service delivery, but also in its role as Planning Authority, ensuring that access to appropriate health care is delivered as part of the Local Plan, commensurate with levels of growth.

The District Council will continue to be actively engaged in the West Essex Wellbeing Board and maintain its role in delivery of the West Essex and local Epping Forest priorities. These will be reviewed along with the agreed delivery plan at the annual stakeholder conference. An opportunity exists for the priorities contained in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy to be incorporated in the service specification for any new leisure management contract, as the Council's contractor could have a significant contribution to make, in addressing health inequalities.

(Recommendation 18)

At the local level, the Council participates in the Health Sub Group of the Local Strategic Partnership, a multi-agency group, co-ordinating practical local delivery initiatives. It is anticipated that emerging initiatives such as Social Prescriptions, will have positive results in addressing isolation for the elderly.

Voluntary Sector and Partnership

Reference has been made earlier in the Strategy to the role that the Council plays in supporting the voluntary sector through its Community Grants Scheme. The Council are also committed to its obligations to support the voluntary sector through the Local Compact. To date, the Council has retained its level of funding to the Voluntary Sector, despite the requirement to make substantial efficiency savings in recent years.

This reflects the fact that many voluntary sector clubs in the area of Leisure and Culture are actively engaged in partnership delivery of services to the local community i.e. sports clubs, heritage societies etc. However, this is becoming more difficult within restricted resources, and the Council has established a Task and Finish Panel of Councillors to review both the methodology for agreeing grant funding and the total amount to be provided. The Task and Finish Panel will also consider the inter-relationship with discretionary rate relief given to voluntary organisations.

(Recommendation 19)

Since its inception in 2000 as part of the Community Wellbeing Act, the Council has played a leading role in the District's Local Strategic Partnership "One Epping Forest". Not only has the Leader of Council chaired the Partnership for the last six years, demonstrating clear Community Leadership, but also the Council hosts the Partnership Manager.

An ongoing commitment to the work of the LSP and its delivery groups i.e. Safer Communities, the Epping Forest Think Family Forum, Sustainable Communities and

Health and Wellbeing, would help the delivery of future leisure and cultural policy outcomes and opportunities.

The structure and role of the LSP is due to be reviewed by the Partnership in December 2014 and any new focus or implications will be taken on board with respect to this Strategy.

Tourism and Visitors

Tourism initiatives to attract visitors to the District, are co-ordinated through the Epping Forest Tourism Task Force. The idea for a tourism taskforce emerged at the One Epping Forest annual stakeholder conference (2012) looking at potential areas for growth and economic returns to the district. Partners, local business and tourism attractions felt that this was already a significant element of the local economy, and there were real opportunities for growth in terms of jobs and income while enhancing rather than despoiling the green and unique character of the area.

Following discussion with representatives from the private sector and major attractions, a taskforce was established which met in March 2012 for the first time. Initial investigatory work undertaken by the Task Force revealed that –

- The area already had a significant tourism and visitor economy: this comprised a significant percentage of local jobs and generated almost £20m locally. This is a much greater return than other districts in West Essex or nearby. The Forest alone is estimated to have 6 million visits annually. Investment by individual organisations in promotion is substantial and the district funds the Waltham Abbey Tourist Information Centre (TIC) (£15,000 pa and Visit Essex £1,500 pa).
- Visits were mostly related to people visiting friends or relatives, daytrips rather than significant overnight/longer term stays.
- The accommodation sector is thought to be under developed (there are no 5 star hotels), but partners were unsure this was a significant barrier.
- However, this return was generated without any local leadership, support or coordination. Unlike other areas with significant similar sectors, there was no active committee to coordinate or lead, no single promoted brand or website resource, no single promotional leaflet/posters, banners, presence at tourism fairs or exhibitions, cross ticket promotions, etc. Basically none of the infrastructure to support a sustained growth of such a significant element of the local economy was in place.

- Returns from and engagement with Visit Essex, the current platform for driving visitor numbers, was poor. This site was felt to be cumbersome and focused on promoting the coastal areas and sites in the East of the county. The site originally promoted only two places to stay in the district, one of which was in Harlow.
- The major strength of the area, its unique selling points, remain its green and unique nature; over 90% green belt, with two major parks, and a significant number of SSSI's and nature reserves, coupled with its proximity and easy connections to London. The area also boasts an enviable number of key attractions that augment and enhance the green and unique offer, particularly around the historical theme, and adrenaline sports.
- Many of the 'attractions' in and close to the district were dependent on the role played by volunteers (the resurgence of the Epping-Ongar railway being a good example of this), the wider voluntary sector and the support of infrastructure bodies such as Voluntary Action Epping Forest.

On the basis of the above, the taskforce has developed an Action Plan to address these issues, the key recommendations of which are detailed below:

- That a standing committee, of either One Epping Forest or Epping Forest District Council, under the Chairmanship of an elected member, remain in place to lead, coordinate, champion and promote the growth of the Tourism and Visitor economy locally. The Committee should also look at establishing sector-led groups e.g. hotels, restaurants, pubs to promote work and coordinate activity in their specialist areas.
- Commission work on the longer term branding of the district, and assessing the potential to grow the sector into overnight, weekend and longer stays, particularly around exploring London. The key priority to be to increase numbers but also maximise the retention of spend in the district.
- Exploratory work on the potential of growing eco/green tourism offer, and the development of a Hot (High Octane Triangle) Zone based on the White Water Centre in Waltham Abbey, Gunpowder Mills and Mountain Biking in the Forest, should be undertaken as a priority.
- That a submission be prepared on behalf of the sector, identifying physical investment programmes to support the industry, in particular re-opening the rail connection from Ongar to Epping to a scheduled service, providing bridges linking the LVRPA White Water Centre, the Royal Gunpowder Mills, and Waltham Abbey, looking at enhanced opportunities for higher-end accommodation sites in the district.

- Through the London Stansted Cambridge Corridor partners, and the West Essex Alliance, look to ensure connections are made with neighbouring areas' tourism promotion, in particular developing new trails from central London northwards to Cambridge. The Tri-council group (Enfield, Broxbourne and Epping Forest) should also be approached to develop cross border working. More detailed bids for external funding should also be prepared for these groups and be included in the Integrated County Strategy, or any other appropriate source of funding.
- Repeat Annual Tourism and Visitor Value research to chart longer term the health locally of the sector, and the impact of interventions.
- Partners should investigate as a matter of urgency the capacity required to deliver these improvements. It is clear that this report sets out an ambitious programme of work, but there remains a deficit in capacity in terms of staff time and resources to ensure the programme is delivered. It is suggested that a part-time post is established to support the ongoing work of the tourism partnership, the remuneration and location (which organisation hosts) of the post to be decided by the committee.

The District Council has adopted the recommendations of the Tourism Taskforce. To reflect the importance placed on the sectors contribution to Economic Development, (one of the Council's Key Objectives), and to address the final recommendation around capacity, the Council has already funded a Tourism Development Officer for an initial one year period. **(Recommendation 20)**

SECTION SIX – RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTIONS

Summary of Key Recommendations

1. That the key aim of the District Council with respect to the future provision of Leisure and Cultural activity, is to increase the number of people actively participating, by ensuring that provision is accessible and of the highest affordable quality.
2. That the ability of Leisure and Cultural activities to deliver across a number of broader themes, such as Health and Wellbeing, Social Inclusion, Regeneration, Skills and Employment, Community Safety and Economic Development, is acknowledged and as such, is considered important to delivering policy objectives in these areas.
3. That the Leisure and Cultural Strategy sets out a medium term vision of 10 years, with a formal review after 5 years, to coincide with the length of the District Council's Corporate Plan.
4. That the Draft Vision Statement developed by the Community Visioning consultation exercise of the Local Plan, steers the longer term aspirations of the Leisure and Cultural Strategy.
5. That the Council's Leisure and Cultural Strategy takes account of National and Regional Policy, which should be kept under review.
6. That future service provision delivered by the Council maintains alignment to the locally relevant priorities of National/Regional supervisory and grant making bodies, to maximise external funding opportunities.
7. That since the Council's investment in purpose built leisure facilities, represents the largest area of discretionary spend, future provision should be delivered by the most cost effective means possible and that maximum Value for Money is sought in terms of cost and quality.
8. That whilst this Leisure and Cultural Strategy focuses on the role of the District Council, with respect to the services it delivers directly or plays a significant role in enabling, the conclusions of the "Epping Forest Open Space, Sport and Recreation Assessment" should form part of the key deliverables with respect to the Local Plan.
9. (a) That the conclusions of the Assessment Report with respect to future provision are accepted with regard to the quantitative adequacy of Swimming Pools, Health and Fitness Facilities, Squash Courts and Synthetic Pitches, based on current and future demand.

(b) That the need to provide additional sports hall provision is accepted and that the opportunity to meet the deficiency by working with Epping Forest College, is positively explored.

(c) That it is acknowledged that the current level of provision is adequate with respect to catchment standards, (although age and condition of the Council's facilities will need to be addressed), but that future leisure facility provision is kept under review, as growth scenarios develop as part of the Local Plan.

(d) That provision of dual purpose spaces and facilities, where practically possible and affordable, are included within any development of new Leisure Facilities in the district, in order to accommodate arts, cultural and community activity.

10. That the current relative performance of the Council's Leisure Facilities with respect to cost, participation and subsidy, be noted and form a key consideration with respect to future provision.
11. That subject to confirmation of the final results of the building condition surveys, that Waltham Abbey Pool is deemed to have reached the end of its viable life, and be replaced by a new facility in Waltham Abbey, the part of the District with amongst the poorest health outcomes, with further work undertaken on the most suitable location, and how it may be funded.
12. That in the medium term, depending on growth in the locality, the opportunity to re-provide a replacement facility for Epping Sports Centre should be investigated and that any new Leisure Management Contract has appropriate break clauses to enable relocation.
13. That now confirmation of funding for the new Ongar Academy has been confirmed, and on the basis that the site adjacent to the existing Leisure Centre remains the preferred location, negotiations are entered into with respect to a dual-use arrangement for the Leisure Centre, with the intention of increasing use and sharing cost.
14. That the Council's Key Objectives with respect to Leisure management are re-affirmed as the basis for any future management contract, with the preferred option being to outsource to either the private sector or external trust.
15. That the procurement approach to the new Leisure Management Contract be by Competitive Dialogue, seeking to deliver flexibility for any partner to develop income streams to reduce costs, whilst still meeting the Council's Key Objectives with respect to participation and community access.
16. That based on the success of other authorities, any new management partners are encouraged to invest in new facilities, which may involve the Council in providing capital finance.
17. (a) That the future Community and Cultural Priorities for the Council are Community and Cultural Cohesion, Health Inequalities, Young People and Youth Unemployment, Anti-Social Behaviour, Ageing Population and Rural isolation.

- (b) That the potential for a further community hub development at Hillhouse, Waltham Abbey, be positively explored with the aim of co-locating health and wellbeing services to improve the quality of life of residents, in this area of health inequality.
18. That the Council adopts the priorities of the West Essex Health and Wellbeing Strategy and continues to play a key role in the local delivery of services, which have a positive impact on addressing health inequality, allowing people to live a longer more active life.
 19. That the Council, whilst acknowledging the important role of the voluntary sector, undertakes a review of its Grant Aid Policy and Discretionary Rate Relief Policy for Voluntary Organisations to ensure that resources are used in the most efficient way possible, and that policy priorities are met.
 20. That the Council continues to support the work of “One Epping Forest” generally, but specifically the work of the Tourism Taskforce in delivering their Action Plan, given the economic and social benefits that increased visitors to the District can bring.

Performance Indicators

A suite of Key Performance Indicators will be developed to monitor the delivery of the Strategy once the Strategy has received consideration by the Cabinet.

Culture and Leisure Action Plan

An Action Plan with appropriate timeframes and targets will be developed by the Portfolio Holder Advisory Group, to practically implement the key recommendations once the Strategy has received endorsement by the Cabinet.

SECTION SEVEN – BACKGROUND PAPER

- 1. Leisure Centre, Facilities, Strengths/ Weaknesses and Maintenance Issues.

Epping Sports Centre

The Centre was originally developed from a former Army Drill Hall and opened in 1975.
The facility consists of;

- Sports Hall with viewing balconies at two levels,
- Activity Hall (former drill hall/gymnasium with wooden floor)
- 4 Squash Courts with viewing gallery above (one with glass back for exhibition or competition)
- Fitness studio with CV and resistance machines and small free weights area.
- Therapy room (operated by a third party)
- Creche (not registered under Children's Act)
- Lounge area
- Bar & kitchen
- Male and female changing rooms with showers
- Additional changing room with showers
- Parking for 27 cars

Maintenance Issues

Basement flooding issues – under sports hall floor needs tanking

Sports Hall - sprung floor needs replacing

Car park drainage issues caused by tree roots

Out dated plant & equipment

Thermally inefficient

Strengths

Well supported community centre

Good decorative order

Established management team

Weaknesses

Age & design of building

Accessibility issues throughout building

Insufficient car parking spaces

No swimming pool

Waltham Abbey Swimming Pool

Opened in 1969, originally consisted of a swimming pool and football changing rooms. The teaching pool was a later addition. The football changing rooms have since been converted into the fitness gym
The facility consists of;

- Main Pool 25m x 9m; depth from 1m to 3m with ground floor viewing gallery
- Teaching Pool 12.2m x 6.14m, depth 1m throughout
- Sauna and steam
- Fitness studio with CV and resistance machines and free weights area
- Movement Studio
- Beauty salon (operated by a third party)
- Male and female changing rooms and showers - main pool & teaching pool
- Foyer with seating and refreshment vending
- Garden area with play equipment
- Parking for 86 cars

Maintenance Issues

Roof needs replacing

Air handling plant & ductwork needs replacing

Thermally inefficient (all windows are single glazed)

Car park surface needs replacing

Inefficient plant & equipment

Strengths

Well supported community based centre

Experienced long serving staff

Weaknesses

Age & condition of building

Poorly located

Poor decorative order

Car park closed in bad weather due to slope

Limited space for dry activities

Loughton Leisure Centre

Opened in January 2003 on the site of the old Loughton Swimming Pool.
The facility consists of;

- Main Pool 25m x 12.5m depth from 0.9m to 2.2m. with water features and viewing balcony
- Teaching Pool - 17m x 6m with viewing gallery
- Fitness Studio CV & resistance equipment and free weights area
- Movement Studio with wood floor and mirrored walls
- Coffee Pod
- Function Hall (Octagon) – available to hire as meeting / function room
- Sauna & Steam rooms
- Changing village for swimming pools with both communal showers and separate men's & ladies showers
- Male and female dry sports changing rooms with showers & toilets
- Reception area / Foyer with vending machines and seating
- Adjacent public pay & display car park for 180 cars (this is outside the lease)

Maintenance Issues

Numerous roof leaks

Worst energy efficiency rating

Poor standard of construction workmanship & wrongly specified material during construction

Strengths

Good location

Extremely busy centre (centre income accounts for nearly 50% of income for contract)

Good accessibility for people with physical disabilities

Weaknesses

Lack of understanding of Building Management System

Weak management team

Cleanliness issues

Octagon out-dated and unsuitable for most fitness classes

Ongar Leisure Centre

Situated on the site of the Ongar Comprehensive School, the centre was opened in 1977 with a swimming pool and sports hall and extended in 1979.

The facility consists of;

- Swimming Pool - 25m x 12.5m, depth from 0.9m to 2.2m with poolside showers
- Sports Hall one court granwood floor hall with glazed viewing balcony/ activity area
- Activity area (1) laminated wood floor and partially mirrored, overlooking sports hall
- Activity Area (2) Vinyl floor, overlooking sports hall
- Beauty Room (hired to third party).
- Fitness Studio with CV and resistance machines and free weights area
- Outdoor Multi Use Games Area - floodlit, 2 tennis / five-a-side areas
(This area needs refurbishment due to the surface condition)
- Viewing area with restricted view of the swimming pool, seating & vending machines
- Male and female dry sport changing rooms
- Swimming pool changing village with men's & ladies showers and toilets
- Playing Fields - 22 acres - marked out for junior football as required
- Parking for 180 cars – to be shared with Enterprise Centre and Adult Education Centre.

The use of the car park is subject to a car park agreement.

Maintenance Issues

Roof will need replacing in near future (probably 5 -10 years)

Thermally inefficient

Poor energy efficiency rating

Strengths

Only wet & dry facility and playing fields in the district

Good decorative order (recently refurbished)

Room to enlarge facility

Good accessibility for people with physical disabilities

Weaknesses

Rural location

Poorly located (edge of town)

Poor highway signage

No changing facilities for outdoor pitches

Multi use games area surface needs replacing

No teaching pool