

VALE OF WHITE HORSE

Leisure and Sports Facilities Strategy 2013 - 2029

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

March 2013



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	2
SUMMARY OF MAIN FACILITY PROPOSALS	2
Participation	3
Population growth	3
Methodology	3
KEY FINDINGS	4
Sports halls	4
Swimming pools	4
Artificial grass pitches	5
Athletics tracks	5
Health and fitness	5
Indoor bowls	5
Indoor tennis	6
Outdoor tennis	6
Squash	6
Multi Use Games Areas (MUGAs)	6
Grass playing fields	6
SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS	7
Planning standards	7
Facility proposals	7
Planning obligations (s106) and CIL	7
IMPLEMENTATION	10
Phasing and funding	10
Procurement and management	10
Review and monitoring	10

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Summary of proposed planning standards.....	8
Figure 2: Main facility proposals and costs.....	9

INTRODUCTION

1. This Leisure and Sports Facilities Strategy covers the period up to 2029 and is required for the effective delivery of leisure services across the Vale of White Horse District, and to ensure that a strategic network of facilities are in place to cater for the needs of the current and expected future population. The Strategy will also provide the evidence base for relevant planning policies contained within the Local Plan, giving guidance on the phasing of facilities to meet new growth, and the priorities for other investment. The end point for this Strategy, at 2029, is consistent with the Local Plan.
2. The Leisure and Sports Facilities Strategy addresses the major facilities used by the community for sport and physical activity. The key drivers behind the Strategy are:
 - The proposed major areas of housing growth planned around Didcot, Wantage/Grove and Faringdon, together with other smaller areas of growth scattered across the authority.
 - The need to identify what additional sports facilities needs there will be, linked directly to the housing proposals.
 - The need for the authority to develop a Local Plan in line with the 2012 National Planning Policy Framework.
 - The need to make effective use of mechanisms to lever funds from developers, linked directly to the new housing.
 - The need to respond to the forecast changes in the population.
 - The need to consider trends in sports participation.
 - The need to deal with the age and condition of some of the facilities.
3. The priorities of the Vale of White Horse are set out in a number of key policy documents and these provide the justification for the authority's and its partners' investment in sport and active recreation. These policy documents include the Corporate Plan and the Community Strategy, both of which give very strong weight to the importance of sport and recreation, and the health and well-being of the community.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FACILITY PROPOSALS

4. The following list shows the main facility proposals emerging from the strategy:
 - **New replacement Leisure Centre for Wantage or Refurbishment of existing Wantage Leisure Centre with addition of teaching pool *plus* joint use 4 court sports hall in Grove.**
 - **Full size 3G AGP at new Grove Airfield Secondary School (unless AGP adjacent to Wantage LC is developed).**
 - **Full size AGP (either 3G or sand) at Faringdon Secondary School.**
 - **Re-carpet of AGPs at Tilsley Park in 2013.**

Participation

5. For good health individuals should ideally exercise at least 5 times per week, but a key performance indicator is the rate of participation in moderate physical activity for at least 30 minutes 3 times per week. Overall on this indicator, the Vale is more active than either the south east region or England as a whole at about 25%, however there has been no significant change in this figure from 2005 to 2012.
6. The Vale's participation rates in swimming, cycling, and athletics is higher than either the national or regional averages, reflecting the excellent network of facilities and opportunities in the Vale, plus the relatively high levels of affluence of the area. The main reasons why people do not do more physical activity are the same as the barriers faced elsewhere, primarily a lack of time followed by cost.
7. The strategy also takes into account the key findings and sports development aspirations emerging from the Vale's parallel strategy, the Participation Action Plan.

Population growth

8. The population of the Vale is expected to increase by about 14,200 in the period up to 2026. The main areas of housing growth are those identified in the Local Plan and include: Grove Air Field (2,500 dwellings); Crab Hill at Wantage (1,500 dwellings); North Grove/Monks Farm (700 dwellings); Great Western Park (600 dwellings) and Valley Park (2,150 dwellings) on the edge of Didcot; Harwell Oxford Campus (400 dwellings); and South of Park Road, Farringdon (400 dwellings).
9. Given this growth, there is a need to unlock monies from the developers to help increase the capacity of facilities nearby to cater for the new demand. The recommendations arising from this Strategy will be used to update the 2008 SPD on Open Space, Sport and Recreation Future Provision (2008 SPD).

Methodology

10. The facility assessment has used a range of modelling tools and the findings from these have then be tempered by the consultation findings prior and during the strategy process. The findings for each facility type have then be summarised, and planning standards and changes to the facility mix proposed.

KEY FINDINGS

11. The following are the key findings for each facility type addressed by the strategy.

Sports halls

12. Although there appears to be sufficient capacity across the Vale as a whole to cater for all of the additional demand from the housing growth, the natural population growth and increase in participation up to 2029, there is actually a specific need around Wantage and Grove. The Wantage Leisure Centre is already operating at full stretch and there is no capacity to cater for any additional demand. The existing unmet demand plus the potential new demand from the housing growth at Grove Air Field, North Grove/Monks Farm and Crab Hill mean that at least one new 4 court sports hall is required.
13. There is a firm proposal to develop a new leisure centre in north east Didcot and this is included within the infrastructure programme. Commitment has been given to some funds towards it from the Great Western Park housing site. However no decisions have been made in relation to developers' contributions from Valley Park or from Harwell, and it seems fully justifiable that at least a proportion of funds from these developments are directed towards the Wantage/Grove facility(ies) because they are within the catchment thereof.
14. There is potentially sufficient capacity at Faringdon to meet the needs of both the new housing and the existing population, even with an enhanced level of participation. If an AGP (full size) or small sided boxes were to be developed in the town and some or all of the 5-a-side football moved out of the hall, then there should be sufficient capacity in the long term. Developers' contributions should therefore be focussed on improving the quality of the facility at Faringdon and towards the development of an AGP.
15. A number of sports hall sites are located at schools, both independent and community schools, and almost all are sited in and around Abingdon. They are outside the control of the Vale of White Horse District Council and the security of community use is therefore uncertain. However, given the high level of sports hall provision within Abingdon, some loss of community time or even the closure of a sports hall on a school site should not be a serious issue.

Swimming pools

16. Across the Vale there is currently a mixture of public, independent school and commercial pools which together provide much more water space than is actually needed by the community. However the pool at Wantage Leisure Centre is aging and is likely to become over full due to a combination of housing growth and generally increasing demand for swimming in the period up to 2029. Some additional pool provision is likely to be needed in this area, estimated to be approximately the size of a teaching pool (which the current centre lacks).

Artificial grass pitches

17. If the 3G proposed pitch adjacent to Wantage Leisure Centre is developed and it has significant amounts of community use during weekday evenings and weekends, then community access to another AGP in the Wantage/Grove area is not essential. However given the uncertainties in relation this pitch, the development of an alternative 3G pitch, ideally as a dual use facility in association with the proposed Grove secondary school, is a high priority.
18. If an opportunity arises, a further full-size floodlit AGP should be developed in Faringdon, ideally as a dual-use facility to maximise its use.
19. The existing sand based pitches at Tilsley require re-carpeting; this will be undertaken during 2013.

Athletics tracks

20. The current distribution of tracks is not ideal, but an additional 8 lane track is not sustainable and is not required in the period up to 2029. Consideration however could be given to an outdoor athletics training facility somewhere in the Faringdon area.

Health and fitness

21. Some additional provision is likely to be required, and most will be directly associated with the new housing growth. In particular there will be a need for additional provision in the Wantage/Grove area of at least 50 new stations. This will be increased if the leisure centre site (or its replacement) also attracts users from Valley Park and Harwell.
22. As health and fitness is largely commercially provided this need might be met by the private sector. However if the Wantage Leisure Centre is to be substantially refurbished or potentially replaced, then there would be a case to consider enhanced gym provision with new health and fitness stations linked to the leisure centre. In turn this would help support the viability of the leisure centre. The remaining new demand is likely to be met via the existing sites including those which are commercial.

Indoor bowls

23. There is clearly some unmet demand for indoor bowls in the authority, particularly around the Wantage and Grove areas. The level of interest and demand should be kept under review, and if appropriate, consideration should be given to developing a centre as part of a multi-code bowling facility.

Indoor tennis

24. The White Horse Leisure and Tennis Centre is an important tennis facility, hosting the Oxfordshire LTA. Although the LTA national strategy (currently being reviewed) suggests that more indoor tennis provision is required in the District, there is limited justification for additional indoor court space. Participation in tennis has slightly decreased nationally over the past 5 years and the sport indoors is not generally able to attract those groups who are currently least active in the Vale. Direct investment in additional indoor tennis provision by the Vale is not therefore a sports development priority, and the LTA itself is unlikely to see new provision in the district as a high priority for their grant aid investment. However if a commercial proposal comes forwards, it should be welcomed as a positive addition to the sports facility opportunities. As developers' contributions are not being sought towards new indoor tennis provision no specific standard is being proposed for this facility type.

Outdoor tennis

25. The baseline sites information for outdoor tennis courts is now a number of years old, and it is likely that the both the number of tennis courts available to the community and their quality will have changed. It is therefore appropriate to work with the national governing body to update the facility and club information, and to identify the priorities for investment, both authority-wide and in relation to the proposed housing growth. Vale District Council will endeavour to do this review in 2013.

Squash

26. The trend in squash is for a very gradual decline in the sport. Although some additional potential demand has been identified, there is probably sufficient capacity in the existing sites to cope.

Multi Use Games Areas (MUGAs)

27. As the site and usage information for MUGAs is now a number of years old, the Vale District Council will endeavour to update it in 2013, to enable a full review of the planning standards for this type of facility.

Grass playing fields

28. There is a need to update the playing pitch strategy for the Vale. New guidance is awaited from Sport England but the Council intends to complete a playing pitch strategy as soon as possible once it is released. In order to make this review a success, it will require significant support from the national governing bodies for football, cricket and rugby to identify key issues and priorities for future investment.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Planning standards

29. A key output from the strategy is a review of the relevant standards in the 2008 SPD Open Space, Sport and Recreation Future Provision. The revised quantity and accessibility standards and justification are summarised in Figure 1 below. The quality standards (including design and layout) should generally be based on current best practice or current guidance notes from the relevant sport's national governing body or Sport England. The justification and details behind the updating of each of these planning standards are contained within the assessment section of the main report.
30. The term "fully available at peak time" means that the facilities are available during weekday evenings and weekends to the community. This will be measured through Sport England's Facilities Planning Model annual National Run.

Facility proposals

31. Figure 2 brings together the facility specific proposals. The most important facility proposal is that relating to the future sports facilities in Wantage/Grove as this potentially brings together the sports hall, swimming pool, AGP and tennis court provision. The decision on future options is dependent upon detailed feasibility studies and negotiations with a number of parties.
32. Many of the built facilities identified could be potentially developed for dual use, i.e. school and community. This would bring opportunities to share both capital and revenue costs although this approach requires formal joint agreements covering issues such as hours of use, shared costs, management etc.
33. Grass playing fields are usually not able to be shared on a dual use basis, and should be separately and specifically developed for community use.

Planning obligations (s106) and CIL

34. The Vale intends to introduce a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) by early 2014. Once the CIL has been adopted, most of the larger sport and leisure facilities will need to be funded through this route. However developers can still be required to mitigate the specific and direct impact of their development through either a planning condition or a planning obligation.
35. The Infrastructure Development Plan should include all the main facilities such as the new leisure centre at Wantage/Grove, and the AGPs. Other facilities such as outdoor tennis courts and MUGAs will be better delivered as part of either a planning obligation or planning condition. As the dwelling numbers begin to be confirmed in the strategic housing sites, it should be possible to estimate the costs for each development.

Figure 1: Summary of proposed planning standards

Facility type	2008 SPD Open Space, Sport and Recreation		Proposed new planning standards		Comment
	Quantity per 1000	Accessibility (time by car)	Quantity per 1000 population	Accessibility (time by car)	
Sports Halls	0.6 courts	15 minutes	0.36 badminton courts fully available at peak time*	20 minutes	Revised standards based on different parameters and latest research.
Swimming pools	14 sq m	15 minutes	12.4 sq m water space fully available at peak time*	20 minutes	
Artificial Grass Pitches (full size)	0.03 pitches	15 minutes	0.03 pitches	20 minutes	No change in quantity. Travel time reflects latest research.
Health and fitness	Not covered in SPD		5.06 stations	20 minutes	New standard
Indoor tennis	0.7 courts	30 minutes	NONE		No standard now required.
Outdoor tennis	1.2 courts	15 minutes	1.1 courts	15 minutes	Interim standard. To be updated.
Multi-use games area (MUGA) aka Multi-court	0.76 site	15 minutes	0.76 site	One per parish but may be shared	Interim standard. To be updated.
Grass Playing Pitches	1.6 ha	900 m urban areas, 15 minutes drive in rural areas	1.6 ha	900 m urban areas, 15 minutes drive in rural areas	Interim standard. To be updated.

Note: * fully available at peak time means open to community use in the evenings and weekends.

Figure 2: Main facility proposals and costs

Facility	Location	Cost ¹	Priority for investment and timescales
<p>New replacement Leisure Centre for Wantage (Sports hall, pool, health and fitness)</p> <p>Or</p> <p>Refurbishment of existing Wantage Leisure Centre with addition of teaching pool</p> <p>Plus</p> <p>Dual-use 4 courts sports hall</p>	<p>TBC</p> <p>Existing site</p> <p>New Grove Secondary School (Airfield)</p>	<p>Estimated £10-15m</p> <p>Refurbishment: approx £5-10m</p> <p>Teaching pool: £1-2m</p> <p>£2,715,000</p>	<p>High priority.</p> <p>Urgent decisions about sites required.</p> <p>Delivery required by 2029 but ideally linked to development timescale of Grove Air Field, including secondary school</p> <p>Strategic priority for authority</p>
<p>Full size 3G AGP</p> <p>[unless proposed AGP adjacent to leisure centre has full community use]</p>	<p>New Grove Secondary School (Airfield)</p>	<p>£840,000</p>	<p>High priority</p> <p>Urgent decision about site / investment required</p>
<p>Full size AGP (either 3G or Sand)</p>	<p>Faringdon Secondary school site</p>	<p>3G: £840,000</p> <p>Sand-based: £700,000</p>	<p>Medium priority</p> <p>Will require lead from external partner e.g. school</p> <p>Deliver when opportunity arises.</p>
<p>Re-carpet AGPs</p>	<p>Tilsley Park</p>	<p>Cost dependent upon nature of surface.</p>	<p>High priority</p>

¹ All costs based on Sport England Planning Kitbag Facilities cost Q2 2012. These figures do not include land, abnormals, VAT or inflation beyond Q2 2012. Where data is not available, costs from actual examples have been used or estimated based on recent examples. Costs are indicative and should be used as a guide only. See Costs section earlier in Strategy for more details.

IMPLEMENTATION

Phasing and funding

36. In the current economic climate it is important to ensure that all of the available resources are carefully targeted and tailored to meet the needs of the whole community. The proposals arising from the strategy are likely to be funded and supported by a range of partners and new facility provision might be via a mix of public and private sources. There are likely to be an increasing number of innovative partnership arrangements over the next few years both in relation to capital and revenue projects, and consideration should be given by the Council to exploring all of the available options as each facility proposal comes forward to enable the delivery of the strategy's proposals.
37. It is not anticipated that all of the proposals within this document will be implemented at the same time. Some sites/proposals require more urgent action than others, and where facilities relate to new housing growth, the speed of development will necessarily impact upon the speed of provision of new facilities. However, all of the identified facilities and proposals should be developed by 2029.

Procurement and management

38. The nature and process of the procurement of the facilities covered by this strategy and their long term management will fundamentally depend upon the type and scale of facility. Those which are small scale or on-site will be the responsibility of the developer in the larger housing schemes. Those which are off-site will often be the responsibility of the district council, directly or indirectly.

Review and monitoring

39. The strategy will have an interim review in 2015 to take account of any changes in housing growth figures, the decision in relation to the sports facilities at Wantage/Grove, and to take account of the recommendations in the playing pitch strategy, and MUGA and tennis reviews. A full review will be undertaken in 2018.