

# NEWS RELEASE



**WOKINGHAM  
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

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## **COUNCIL SET TO CONSIDER LEISURE STRATEGY**

Wokingham Borough Council's decision-making executive is set to consider a report to approve its new leisure strategy (2021-2025) following extensive public consultation in 2021.

The strategy sets out plans to support residents' physical and emotional wellbeing through the council's own leisure offering and through effective partnerships with a wide range of other organisations. This includes proposals to establish a new 'Active Wokingham' Partnership to support collective efforts to ensure that high-quality facilities and opportunities remain affordable, accessible and sustainable.

The plan supports the council's community vision for Wokingham Borough to 'be a great place to live, learn, work, and grow and a great place to do business'.

Wokingham Borough regularly tops national polls and was [named healthiest place to live](#) last year. As the Borough's population grows the council wants to ensure the leisure offer can play a significant role in enhancing wellbeing and enriching the lives of residents. This includes informal leisure opportunities across our wide range of high-quality open spaces and active travel as well our more formal sports and leisure facilities.

The strategy outlines four key priorities:

- Promoting health and wellbeing to residents
- Raising participation and reducing levels of inactivity
- Maintain and extend accessibility to indoor leisure facilities
- Maintain and extend accessibility to outdoor spaces

The council's executive agreed the draft leisure strategy as well as plans to consult with residents and stakeholders at its meeting last March (2021).

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Local residents, as well as sports clubs, the sports council, national governing bodies such as The Football Foundation, health partners and town and parish councils, completed online surveys or attended face to face sessions in Wokingham and Woodley town centres as well as at the council's leisure facilities to give their views during the consultation, which ran between April and July 2021.

The main areas of feedback from the consultation were:

- Residents wanted to see more sport facilities and classes
- More options for young people
- More outdoor activities

As a result of this feedback the final strategy and action plan has been amended to include:

- Working with the youth council and community teams to develop new programmes/facilities to encourage more young children/teenagers to get active. These will be incorporated into the council's well-established and successful facilities including the six leisure centres, 3G and grass pitches, BXGFIT, tennis, parks and open space as well as the vast number of sporting clubs
- More targeted sessions for the borough's black, asian and minority ethnic communities. The council will review its current programme of activities and identify sessions which are popular with this community to encourage more residents to get involved in physical activity. It will work jointly with the health and wellbeing board's physical activity sub-board to identify need and activities for this specific community
- More targeted sessions for older people. The extensive programmes the council currently offers older residents will be expanded. This includes: SHINE over 60s exercise classes, active ageing sessions offering seated and music-based exercise, dementia sessions, dedicated movement to music classes in care homes and assisted living sites, health walks, range of prevention programmes in council leisure facilities and community sessions and continued joint working with the local volunteer groups
- More outdoor gym facilities. The new facilities will follow on from the council's successful classes in the park which were introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic to encourage residents to continue with physical activity during periods of lockdown

Cllr Parry Batth, executive member for environment and leisure, said: "Wokingham Borough is an excellent place to live with high quality of life. And we are very aware that the quality of our leisure offer plays a significant role in enhancing wellbeing and enriching lives of our residents.

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“There are very significant health benefits for everyone – from the very young to the old. It helps to raise achievements in schools, enables self-care for those with long-term conditions and helps to prevent mental and physical illness. That’s why increasing the levels of sport and leisure participation, and reducing the number of inactive people, is so important.

“This strategy builds on the council’s ongoing programme of new and improved leisure facilities, with investment totalling more than £50million. Working with a range of partners, we have made a step-change in our levels of investment during recent years despite a very challenging funding environment. We are committed to providing the best leisure provisions and outdoor spaces for all of our residents, making Wokingham Borough the healthiest place to live in the UK.”

- ENDS -

**Further information:**

**1. The council’s existing leisure projects with more than £50million invested or committed, including:**

- **Bulmershe Leisure Centre (completed) £14.5m**
- **Ryeish Green & Arborfield leisure facilities (completed) £ 4.9m**
- **Parking and toilet facilities California Country Park (completed) £ 2.1m**
- **Loddon Valley Leisure Centre (completed) £2.2m**
- **Emmbrook 3G Football Pitch (completed) £800,000**
- **Cantley Park ‘Greenway’ enhancements (completed) £320,000**
- **Carnival Pool Leisure Centre (underway) £23m**
- **Cantley Park Enhancements (completed) £ 2.5m**
- **Dinton Pastures Country Park activity centre (completed) £ 2.4m**
- **Farley Hill Primary School 3G Football Pitch in Arborfield (completed) £800,000**

**2. The council already runs several prevention programmes which are aimed at those with long-term health conditions, including mental health and wellbeing support, cardiac rehabilitation and falls prevention. There are also classes for the wider public, including, SHINE (Some Health Improvements Need Exercise) which is a specialist over 60s exercise programme, Ageing Actively, a programme for older residents experiencing loneliness or isolation and dedicated disability sessions.**

**3. More from Cllr Parry Batth, executive member for environment and leisure at: [parry.batth@wokingham.gov.uk](mailto:parry.batth@wokingham.gov.uk) or 07969 683595**