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CHELMSFORD CITY COUNCIL OPEN SPACE, SPORT & RECREATION STUDY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY DECEMBER 2024

QUALITY, INTEGRITY, PROFESSIONALISM

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INTRODUCTION

Chelmsford City Council (CCC) commissioned Knight Kavanagh & Page Ltd (KKP) to produce indoor and outdoor sports assessments and strategies and an Open Space Study. Collectively, this work has produced the following published documents which will provide evidence to support the development of an updated Chelmsford Local Plan:

- ◀ Indoor Sports Needs Assessment.
- ◀ Indoor Sports Strategy and Action Plan.
- ◀ Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Assessment.
- ◀ Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy and Action Plan.
- ◀ Open Space Study.

The purpose of the work is to ensure that the Council has a framework for the prioritisation, provision and development of open space, sports and recreation facilities across the public, private and independent sectors. It will support the implementation of the Local Plan policies relating to the protection, enhancement and provision of open space, community sport and physical activity facilities and provide an evidence based framework to support negotiations with developers who may provide funding or other assistance to improve local provision.

It will also provide a robust evidence base to support funding bids from national sports bodies like Sport England and national governing bodies of sport (NGBs).

The study and strategy will ensure that a planned approach to open space, sport and physical activity facilities takes place in the Council's area now and in the future, ensuring that the community has access to high quality facilities, helping communities to increase their levels of physical activity, improve their health and well-being.

PLAYING PITCH AND OUTDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY

This is the executive summary for the Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy (PPOSS) for Chelmsford City Council (CCC). Both the Strategy and Action Plan, and the preceding Assessment Report have been produced in accordance with Sport England guidance and both have achieved sign off from national governing bodies of sport (NGBs) and Sport England through a Steering Group.

Scope

The scope of the PPOSS focuses geographically on all local provision, regardless of ownership and management arrangements. Provision included within the project is as follows:

- ◆ Football pitches (grass, third generation turf (3G) and ancillary provision).
- ◆ Rugby union pitches.
- ◆ Cricket pitches.
- ◆ Hockey artificial grass pitches AGPs).
- ◆ Other grass pitch sports as relevant e.g., rugby league, lacrosse, baseball/softball and American football.
- ◆ Tennis courts (including padel and pickleball facilities).
- ◆ Bowling greens.
- ◆ Athletics tracks (and running).
- ◆ Netball courts.
- ◆ Golf courses.
- ◆ Cycling (learn to ride space, road circuits, pump tracks, mountain biking/off road trails)
- ◆ River use (e.g., paddle boarding and canoeing).

Headline findings (from the Assessment Report)

From a quantitative perspective, the existing position for all sports is either that demand is being met or that there is a shortfall. For most sports played on natural turf pitches there are identified current shortfalls, albeit the extent of this differs between the sports. The future position shows the exacerbation of current shortfalls and the creation of shortfalls for some sports and in some areas where demand is currently being met.

There are 3G pitch shortfalls for football training in most analysis areas with most in the Urban Areas analysis area (3.75 pitches currently). There is also the need to address match play shortfalls identified for adult, youth 11v11 and youth 9v9 football with shortfalls which are most apparent in the City Centre and South Woodham Ferrers analysis areas.

Rugby union has shortfalls apparent at three of the club sites for Chelmsford RUFC at Coronation Park, for Billericay RUFC at Willowbrook Sports & Social Club and for South Woodham Ferrers RUFC at Saltcoats Park. Most overplay is at Coronation Park (Chelmsford RUFC) as the site's three pitches are overplayed by 5.25 match equivalent sessions per week.

Although there appears to be a sufficient current supply of hockey suitable Artificial Grass Pitches (AGP) in the Chelmsford administrative area, some capacity pressures coupled with quality issues means there are significant issues to be resolved to adequately cater for existing demand.

Cricket is currently showing shortfalls for Saturday and Sunday cricket across the administrative area. Given the extent of the existing shortfalls across the Chelmsford administrative area, there is likely to be a need for additional grass wicket squares given that

it may not be feasible to undertake all the quality improvements and Non Turf Pitch (NTP) installations required.

For the non-pitch sports, tennis is showing identified shortfalls at four of the club sites. Both adult and junior netball demand is being accommodated although quality improvements are required. Demand for outdoor bowls is being accommodated with nine clubs operating at or above recommended capacity levels and therefore need to be monitored to ensure that supply remains adequate.

Athletics is currently adequately meeting demand although there is an opportunity to explore England Athletics' new track developments within major housing developments.

Although there is not necessarily a case to suggest a need for a new 18 golf course, with only three golf courses provided in the Chelmsford administrative area and each site having particularly high demand, these should be protected.

Where demand is being met, this does not equate to a surplus of provision, with any spare capacity instead considered a potential solution to overcoming shortfalls. As such, there is a clear need to protect all existing provision until all demand is met, or there is a requirement to replace provision to an equal or better quantity and quality before it is lost, in line with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Sport England's Playing Fields Policy. In addition, there remain some area and site-specific issues that need resolving despite no overall capacity issues, such as those relating to quality and security of tenure.

Although there is value in improving quality, installing additional sports lighting, improving ancillary facilities, and enabling access to existing unused provision, capacity improvements may not offer significant capacity gains in the peak period to meet all shortfalls expressed, particularly for football. A strategic solution is considered to be necessary involving new pitches to address this scale of shortfall. There is also an overall shortfall of 11v11 3G pitches identified across the Chelmsford administrative area and these shortfalls cannot be addressed unless this type of pitch is constructed.

Strategy and Action Plan vision

In line with existing corporate policies, the proposed vision for the PPOSS is:

"To work with partners to create high quality, inclusive and sustainable sports facilities which meet community need, increase participation and support health and wellbeing now and in the future."

Strategy aims

Based on the headline findings and sport-by-sport recommendations, the following overarching aims and their associated recommendations are considered key. These are based on three Sport England themes:

- ◀ To **protect** the existing supply of outdoor sport facilities where it is needed for meeting current and future needs.
 - ◀ Protect outdoor sport facilities through local planning policy.
 - ◀ Secure tenure and access to sites for high quality, development minded clubs, through a range of solutions and partnership agreements.
 - ◀ Maximise community use of education facilities where needed.
- ◀ To **enhance** outdoor sport facilities and ancillary facilities through improving quality and management of sites.
 - ◀ Maintain quality and seek improvements where necessary
 - ◀ Adopt a tiered approach (hierarchy of provision) to the management and improvement of sites.
 - ◀ Work in partnership with stakeholders to secure funding.
 - ◀ Secure development contributions.
- ◀ To **provide** new outdoor sport facilities where there is current or future demand to do so.
 - ◀ Identify opportunities to add to the overall stock to accommodate current and future demand.
 - ◀ Rectify quantitative shortfalls through the current stock.

Sport-by-sport recommendations

A number of relevant scenarios have been tested against key issues for each sport, resulting the following recommendations.

Football

- ◀ Protect existing pitches in line with national (i.e. the NPPF and Sport England's Playing Fields Policy) and local planning policy.
- ◀ Ensure that Local Plan strategic allocation sites provide adequate new provision to meet the new demand as directed in Part 7: Housing Growth Scenarios of the Strategy and Action Plan.
- ◀ Improve pitch quality with a focus on overplayed pitches and pitches assessed as poor quality and utilise the Football Foundation's PitchPower app to assist in the improvement and ongoing maintenance of provision.
- ◀ Support eligible organisations to access funding to improve pitches at their sites, such as through the Football Foundation's Grass Pitch Maintenance Fund (GPMF).
- ◀ Explore opportunities for more club-led management and maintenance models and subsequent opportunities to access external funding to improve facilities.
- ◀ Work with education sites to provide secured community use, with a focus on those currently in use by clubs.
- ◀ Work with education sites to encourage secured community access to sites not currently available, particularly where large quantities of pitches are provided such as William De Ferrers School and Kings Road Primary School where multiple teams play.
- ◀ Consider bringing disused pitches back into use, particularly when they reside in areas with existing shortfalls, such as at Chetwood Fields and Sandford Mill Lane, subject to a sustainable programme of use and appropriate quality being developed.
- ◀ Improve ancillary facilities where there is a demand to do so and where it can benefit the wider footballing offer, with a particular focus on multi-pitch sites and key sites for the growth of female and adult participation.

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- ◀ Work with Essex County Football Association and the Football Foundation to update the current Chelmsford LFFP with priority sites for improvement.
- ◀ Work towards transferring some match play to new 3G pitches and new strategic football sites (as part of the Local Plan strategic allocation sites) to provide space for expansion for meeting current needs as well as the needs of the growth.
- ◀ Support plans to relocate South Woodham Ferrers Rugby Union Football Club (RUFC) to the new sports ground as part of the residential housing development to increase the capacity for football pitches at Saltcoats Park.
- ◀ Consider the need for allocating land for new pitches outside of the residential housing allocations in the growth areas (See Part 7 of the Strategy and Action Plan for further information).

3G pitches

- ◀ Protect current stock of 3G pitches in line with national (i.e. the NPPF and Sport England's Playing Fields Policy) and local planning policy.
- ◀ Develop additional 3G pitches to alleviate identified shortfalls, with priority placed on establishing pitches in the Urban Areas analysis area.
- ◀ Explore creation of 3G pitches that are both football and rugby union compliant when alleviating shortfalls if they can cater for demand from Chelmsford RUFC or support the creation of additional 3G pitches above and beyond football training shortfalls if they can be sustainable.
- ◀ Carry out further feasibility work to identify suitable locations for new 3G pitches and ensure this is done in consultation with the relevant stakeholders including Sport England and the appropriate NGBs.
- ◀ Provision of 3G pitches should be a priority consideration for the Local Plan strategic allocation sites given these sites will provide opportunities for new sites such as secondary schools and sports hubs.
- ◀ Any proposals for new 3G pitches need to protect/replace any other pitches that would be affected given by the development, for example where cricket outfielders are affected.
- ◀ Any new 3G pitches should be based on the recommended dimensions for the sports that they will be established to cater for.
- ◀ Ensure that any new 3G pitches with external funding have community use agreements in place and seek to use this to also tie in access to grass pitch and other sporting provision, where relevant.
- ◀ Seek FIFA/FA testing of all existing and new 3G pitches and ensure they are on the FA 3G Pitch Register so that they can be used for competitive football matches and ensure re-testing is carried out when it is required.
- ◀ Ensure all current and future 3G providers have a sinking fund in place for long-term sustainability and seek to resurface provision when it is required.
- ◀ Encourage more football match play demand to transfer to 3G pitches, where possible, particularly from council sites and for mini demand.
- ◀ For any pitches built to Rugby Football Union specifications, seek World Rugby compliancy so that they can be used for full contact activity and ensure re-testing when it is required (every two years).

Rugby union

- ◀ Protect existing pitches in line with national (i.e. the NPPF and Sport England's Playing Fields Policy) and local planning policy.
- ◀ Ensure that Local Plan strategic allocation sites provide adequate new provision to meet the new demand as directed in Part 7: Housing Growth Scenarios of the Strategy and Action Plan.
- ◀ Improve pitch quality at sites used by clubs through improved maintenance and/or the installation of drainage systems, with a focus on those currently overplayed, such as at

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Willowbrook Sports & Social Club and Saltcoats Park (Chelmsford RUFC has been invited onto the GPMF as a result of its PitchPower report findings).

- ◆ Support clubs in taking part in the Grounds Maintenance Association (GMA) pitch advisory service to explore technical requirements to improve pitch quality to address overplay.
- ◆ Increase the level of sports lighting available to clubs with overplayed pitches, particularly those where a shortfall would remain following quality improvements.
- ◆ Explore the creation of a full size World Rugby Reg 22 compliant 3G pitch at Coronation Park that is both football and rugby union compliant when alleviating shortfalls if they can cater for demand from Chelmsford RUFC. It should be acknowledged that any proposal on this site would need to protect/replace any cricket pitches that would be affected.
- ◆ Where pitch quality improvements and increased sports lighting cannot fully alleviate overplay, explore opportunities to supply affected clubs with increased pitch provision and/or World Rugby compliant 3G provision.
- ◆ Where World Rugby compliant 3G provision is provided, seek the transfer of demand from overplayed grass pitches.
- ◆ Ensure future demand can be adequately accommodated, particularly in regard to women's and girls' demand.
- ◆ Improve the ancillary facilities servicing the clubs and ensure facilities are inclusive and have appropriate segregation.
- ◆ Seek to provide increased security of tenure for clubs at their home grounds where it is required.
- ◆ Support the relocation of South Woodham Ferrers RUFC to the new sports ground and ensure the club is adequately provided for, with at least three senior grass pitches (two serviced by sports lighting) or a World Rugby compliant 3G pitch and one senior grass pitch required.

Hockey

- ◆ Protect the five full size pitches currently provided for continued hockey usage.
- ◆ Explore options to provide an additional pitch to alleviate current and future shortfalls.
- ◆ Encourage football users to transfer to 3G pitch provision as and when new 3G pitches are provided to free up capacity for hockey.
- ◆ Resurface the pitch at Chelmsford County High School for Girls (CCHSfG) as it has reached the end of its recommended lifespan.
- ◆ Ensure sinking funds are in place at all sites to ensure long-term sustainability.
- ◆ Look to improve security of tenure for Chelmsford Hockey Club through a long-term community use agreement at Chelmer Park.
- ◆ Improve ancillary facilities where required.
- ◆ Support upgrade of LED lighting of all multi-sport AGPs where necessary.
- ◆ Work in conjunction with football stakeholders to identify suitable locations for new 3G pitches as an option to alleviate and ensure this is done in consultation with the relevant stakeholders including Sport England and the appropriate NGBs.
- ◆ Work towards transferring football usage from the pitch at CCHSfG to new 3G pitches (as part of the Local Plan strategic allocation sites) to provide space for expansion for meeting current needs from Chelmsford Hockey Club as well as the needs of the growth.

Netball

- ◆ Protect existing courts in line with national (i.e. the NPPF and Sport England's Playing Fields Policy) and local planning policy.
- ◆ Secure community use at sites that are currently in use or that could be used in the future.

- ◀ Improve court quality at sites assessed as poor or standard quality and sustain quality at sites assessed as good, especially at sites in use by clubs and for England Netball initiatives.
- ◀ Consider establishing additional sports lighting at venues in use for netball or at venues that could attract netball demand following installation.
- ◀ Further explore opportunity for provision of a floodlit multi-court Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) at the Garden Communities to help meet future demand for netball.

Cricket

- ◀ Protect existing quantity of cricket squares.
- ◀ Ensure that Local Plan strategic allocation sites provide adequate new provision to meet the demand as directed in Part 7: Housing Growth Scenarios of the Strategy and Action Plan.
- ◀ Improve quality at sites assessed as poor and standard quality and ensure quality is sustained at sites assessed as good through partnership working with Essex Cricket.
- ◀ Consider additional NTPs to accompany grass wicket squares (where space allows), particularly where overplay is present and where it cannot be eradicated via quality improvements and to support the recreational and informal game.
- ◀ Consider the need for hybrid wickets to further support providing additional capacity.
- ◀ Explore creation of additional squares could be co-ordinated with providing additional grass football pitches as both sports can co-exist in principle on the same site and contribute towards its sustainability.
- ◀ Explore future opportunities to access provision at New Hall School as it could help in reducing shortfalls for cricket demand.
- ◀ Encourage facility operators to provide improved security of tenure for clubs without ownership or a long-term lease arrangement in place such as Great Baddow Cricket Club.
- ◀ Consider bringing disused squares in instances where demand is present for this, at sites such as Little Waltham Cricket Club and Marconi Sports Club.
- ◀ Continue to support England & Wales Cricket Board (ECB) initiatives such as All Stars and Dynamos and ensure unaffiliated demand and recreational cricket is provided for.
- ◀ Continue to support the growth of women's and girl's cricket, which includes the new partnership between the ECB and Metro Bank with the purpose of increasing participation nationally by 2,000 clubs and 6,000 teams.
- ◀ Improve the changing facilities where there is a need to do so, with sites such as Beaulieu Park, Great Baddow Recreation Ground and Writtle Sports and Social Club.
- ◀ Consider options to increase and improve stock of suitable practice facilities where demand exists to do so and consider the creation of additional practice nets at publicly open sites (e.g., parks and recreation grounds) to encourage and increase recreational demand.
- ◀ Ensure that any large housing developments are provided for and assess the need for new pitch provision through master planning (i.e. via a sports needs assessment/feasibility study/assessment of need) on an individual basis.
- ◀ Where a development is not of a size to justify on-site cricket provision, or if sufficient demand cannot be attracted, consider using contributions to improve existing sites within the locality.
- ◀ Ensure that any developments nearby to existing cricket sites do not prejudice the use of the provision (e.g. through ball-strike issues).
- ◀ Review changes in participation over Stage E of the Strategy and Action Plan in case some of the recommendations need revising to account for growth in the women and girls' game.
- ◀ Support plans to relocate South Woodham Ferrers RUFC to the new sports ground as part of the residential housing development to increase the capacity for the cricket square at Saltcoats Park.

- Consider the need for allocating land for new pitches outside of the residential housing allocations in the growth areas (See Part 7 of the Strategy and Action Plan for further information).

Tennis

- Protect existing quantity of courts.
- Improve court quality at sites assessed as poor or standard quality and sustain quality at sites assessed as good, especially at sites in use by clubs or that are (could be) well used for recreational demand.
- Linked to the above, improve park courts as a priority to create a year-round recreational tennis option to meet local demand.
- Explore options to further improve the recreational tennis offer via utilisation of technology provided by the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) (e.g., Clubspark) to support the customer journey and through investment into facilities and accompanying ancillary provision.
- Consider development of additional courts for recreational demand, potentially through adding more courts to existing sites such as Admirals Park, Andrews Park and Great Baddow Recreation Ground.
- Where local authority courts are improved/established, ensure the operation of the provision is sustainable and in line with other recommendations.
- Ensure sinking funds are put into place by operators for long-term sustainability.
- Explore installation of additional sports lighting at club-based venues, particularly at sites such as Pleshey Village Hall & Playing Field that are operating above the capacity guidance.
- Provide additional court space for clubs operating above the capacity guidance, where it is required, potentially via better utilisation of existing provision.
- Improve ancillary provision servicing courts where demand is, or could be, high.
- Support opportunities to provide padel courts at suitable sites given its growing demand (separate to existing tennis courts) and seek to maximise activity, providing no existing in-use traditional courts are lost as a result. The LTA has identified the need for a minimum of 14 courts, evidencing a minimum current shortfall of 12 padel courts.
- Linked to the above, ensure other sports such as netball and basketball which use multi-sports courts are protected as there is an increasing number of padel court proposals coming forward that would displace netball and basketball.
- Explore the feasibility of formalising community use of educational sites in order to increase capacity for informal/recreational demand.
- Further explore opportunity for provision of a floodlit multi-court MUGA and padel courts at the Garden Communities to help meet future demand for tennis.
- As Chelmsford administrative area has been identified as a strategic location for covered/indoor tennis courts, explore the opportunity for future wider developments and/or enhancements to existing tennis provision across the Authority.

Bowls

- Protect existing quantity of currently used greens and, as a minimum, sustain quality.
- Ensure that any proposed development of currently used greens is done in line with NPPF.
- Improve green quality at sites assessed as standard quality and sustain quality at sites assessed as good.
- Seek to improve ancillary facility quality where it is necessary e.g. at Danbury Bowls Club.
- Support clubs operating with a high membership to ensure demand continues to be met on their existing provision.

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- Support the implementation of new products to increase participation within the Authority i.e., Bowls Bash (a shortened format) and Play Bowls (pay and play participation).

Golf

- Protect existing golf provision, including the pitch and putt course at West Park.
- Sustain course and ancillary facility quality and seek improvements where necessary.
- Support clubs in membership retention and potential growth and encourage clubs and providers to work more collaboratively in terms of creating pathways for players.
- Explore opportunities to provide other forms of golf provision, such as Par 3 courses and standalone driving ranges.

Athletics

- Protect existing formal athletics provision in the Chelmsford administrative area and consider further increasing provision to meet demand, specifically 'Active Track', particularly from the Garden Communities.
- Sustain quality and look to make improvements via resurfacing, when necessary to ensure demand can continue to be met and the track at Chelmsford Sport & Athletics Centre remains TrackMark accredited.
- Explore options of enabling community use access for the facility at New Hall School.
- Support clubs, running groups, events and England Athletics initiatives such as Parkrun and pursue increased participation, where possible.
- Ensure all clubs/groups continue to have home bases to operate from and pursue improved security of tenure where it is required.
- As part of the Garden Community developments, support the development of providing some form of alternative athletics provision, in line with England Athletics new generation of track products.

Cycling

- Protect existing provision.
- Ensure continued access to sites and routes used for formal cycling.
- Ensure all clubs/groups have home bases to operate from and pursue improved security of tenure where it is required.
- Consider creation of a Cycling Network that can link up with school and park sites.
- Support British Cycling initiatives and ensure appropriate infrastructure is in place to accommodate such demand.

Outdoor water sports

- Ensure existing provision is retained and supporting facilities remain of sufficient quality.
- Support clubs to maximise demand and fully utilise the facilities offered.

Other grass pitch sports

- Ensure continued access to existing sites and pitches to enable continued access for all relevant sports.
- Given the potential future demand for an American football team in the Chelmsford administrative area, the creation of a dedicated American football pitch should be considered a priority in order to provide a dedicated space for activity and to ensure that the potential demand can be met.
- Improve ancillary facilities at Melbourne Park.

- Any demand that does exist for rugby league should be directed to clubs in neighbouring authorities such as Colchester to ensure that it is catered for (e.g., Eastern Rhinos Rugby Club).
- Any demand that does exist for lacrosse should be directed to clubs in neighbouring authorities to ensure it is catered for (e.g., Buckhurst Hill Lacrosse Club).

Delivering the Strategy

The PPOSS seeks to provide the necessary robustness and direction to ensure that the Council has a framework for the prioritisation, provision and development of sports facilities across the public, private and independent sectors. It covers all formal playing pitch and outdoor sport facilities across the authority area to assist it to strategically plan for the future.

To assist with the above, the Action Plan (Part 6) is included within the PPOSS and recommends a number of priority projects relating to sports provision which should be realised over the Local Plan period. It provides a framework for improvement and, although resources may not currently be in place to implement it, potential partners and possible sources of external funding.

The Housing Growth Scenarios (Part 7) uses Sport England's Playing Pitch Calculator (PPC) and future demand (to 2041 in line with the review of the Local Plan). The PPC updates the likely demand generated for pitch sports based on housing and population increases and converts the demand into match equivalent sessions and the number of pitches required. This is achieved via team generation rates in the Assessment Report to determine how many new teams would be generated from an increase in population derived from housing growth and gives the associated costs of supplying the increased pitch provision.

It is important that there is regular annual monitoring and review against the actions identified in the Strategy. This monitoring should be led by the local authority and supported by all members of the steering group. As a guide, if no review and subsequent update has been carried out within three years, Sport England and the NGBs would consider the PPOSS and the information on which it is based to be out of date.

INDOOR BUILT FACILITIES STRATEGY

This is the executive summary for the Indoor Sports Needs Assessment and Strategy for the Chelmsford administrative area. Both the Strategy and the preceding Needs Assessment Report have been produced in accordance with Sport England guidance.

Scope

The Needs Assessment provides detail as to what exists in the Chelmsford administrative area and identifies need (demand) and gaps (deficiencies in provision) as well as the quantity, quality, accessibility and availability of facilities. It considers demand for facilities based on population distribution, planned growth, and takes into consideration health and economic deprivation. The facilities/sports covered include:

- ◆ Sports halls (and associated indoor sports).
- ◆ Swimming pools.
- ◆ Health and fitness.
- ◆ Dance/aerobic studios.
- ◆ Squash.
- ◆ Gymnastics and trampolining.
- ◆ Indoor tennis.
- ◆ Indoor bowls.
- ◆ Combat sports.
- ◆ Ice rinks.
- ◆ Village halls/community centres.

Headline findings (from the Needs Assessment)

CCC recognises the importance of its leisure facility stock to physical activity, health and wellbeing. It has a strong offer in terms of the quality of its principal-built leisure facility at Riverside Leisure Centre, which is well located to service demand from the most densely populated part of the Authority, provides a high degree of flexibility via its significant swimming pool, sports hall and health and fitness offer and provides a valuable asset via its ice rink which acts as a significant draw to the City Centre.

The principal opportunity/challenge for CCC is to ensure that its overall stock of facilities continues to be fit for the future and viable. There is a need to balance the requirements of the core market of people already taking part in sport and physical activity and meeting the needs of a growing, and ageing, population.

In general terms, there are good levels of accessibility to sports hall, swimming pool and health and fitness provision across the administrative area. High levels of current and projected demand have been observed in respect of swimming at the two CCC operated sites. Increasing the availability of swimming pool and sports hall provision at school sites (alongside improvements in quality) will better cater for current and future demand.

There is an identified need to improve the quality of swimming pool and sports hall provision located on school sites, on which an increasing reliance will be placed on by local residents when considering future population growth. Similarly, new sports hall provision due to be delivered via strategic housing growth should be designed in compliance with Sport England community design principles in order to offer maximum benefit to local residents.

Needs assessment findings confirm strong levels of club led demand for gymnastics, and for combat sports within commercial facilities. In respect of indoor tennis, the Lawn Tennis

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Association has identified Chelmsford as a priority area for new facility development. CCC should work alongside the relevant clubs and NGBs to support identified sport specific and individual club facility needs in this regard.

The Chelmsford administrative area is serviced by an extensive network of community and village hall facilities. They provide a varied programme of activity and provide a high level of accessibility to the more rurally isolated parts of the administrative area. There is an opportunity to consider where these facilities could provide an increased role in respect of supporting the health and wellbeing needs of residents, whilst recognising their reliance on a volunteer workforce and the need to identify where facility improvements could be made.

Key findings by facility type

The key findings from the assessment of indoor and built sports facilities Needs Assessment across the Chelmsford administrative area are summarised below on a facility type basis:

Sports halls supply and demand summary

- ✦ The Chelmsford administrative area has 53 sports halls containing 107 badminton courts.
- ✦ There are 16 sports halls with 3+ courts (73 badminton courts).
- ✦ There is a relatively good range and geographical spread of sports halls in the Chelmsford administrative area.
- ✦ There is spare capacity at some educational sites. A planned 4-court sports hall as part of the Chelmsford Garden Community could help to cater for future demand.
- ✦ One is rated good quality (six courts), nine are above average (40 courts) and seven are below average (27 courts).
- ✦ There are good levels of accessibility - 69% of the Chelmsford administrative area's population lives within a 1 mile walk from a community accessible sports hall.
- ✦ All residents live within a 20-minute drive of a sports hall with community use.
- ✦ 16 sports halls provide some form of community availability. 10 are operating at the Sport England threshold of 'comfortably full'.
- ✦ Six halls are operating below 70% and have capacity to accommodate increased demand.
- ✦ Four public leisure centres provide daytime availability.
- ✦ The Sport England Facilities Planning Model (FPM) has identified an uneven distribution in the quality and capacity of sports halls across the administrative area. The report has identified three key interventions that should be prioritised:
 - ✦ Increase access for community use at key sites and provide a more balanced distribution of met demand.
 - ✦ Modernisation of the sports halls is of increasing importance in order to maintain their attractiveness, ensure equity of provision across the administrative area, and continue to retain the very high level of Chelmsford's demand met within the administrative area.
 - ✦ The importance of community access to educational sports halls is evident. If not in place, a community use agreement should be put in place for the current supply. Looking ahead, it will be important to negotiate and secure a community use agreement at any new or replacement educational sports hall site.

Swimming pools supply and demand summary

- ✦ There is good geographic distribution of pools (16 across seven sites), including two publicly operated sites in the City Centre (Riverside) and South Woodham Ferrers. Eight are main pools larger than 160m²
- ✦ Residents have access to good quality swimming pools located at public leisure centres.
- ✦ Three pools are rated good quality, two are above average, three are below average.
- ✦ Accessibility generally to swimming pools in the Chelmsford administrative area is good. 62.2% of Chelmsford administrative area's population lives within one mile of a swimming pool that is 160m² or larger that has some level of community use. This increases to 100% when

calculating the number of residents in the Chelmsford administrative area who live within a 20-minute drive of a swimming pool.

- ✦ The FPM and audit identify that overall average used capacity for the Chelmsford administrative area pools is 71% in 2022 and 78% in 2041. Three sites are currently operating above the Sport England 70% comfort threshold. Used capacity at public leisure sites (at Riverside Leisure Centre and South Woodham Ferrers Leisure Centre) should be monitored closely.
- ✦ Relative access to pay and play sites is much lower, with 26.3% of the population living within a 1-mile walk of a pool.
- ✦ There is likely to be a need to consider how accessibility can be improved in the Northeast of the City given the new Garden Community development and associated population growth.
- ✦ Two pools are available for pay and play use. A further four can be accessed via registered membership. Four facilities, both located at schools, offer pool access to swimming clubs and commercial learn to swim schools.

Health & fitness gyms supply and demand summary

- ✦ There are 22 health and fitness suites containing 1,391 stations. 17 of the 22 are larger sites containing have 20+ stations.
- ✦ 16 sites providing 1,280 stations are available to the community. There are also 32 studios, 30 of which offer some form of community access.
- ✦ There is a current positive supply demand balance of fitness stations in the area. The audit also identified high local demand and participation rates.
- ✦ There is likely to be imported demand from neighbouring authorities.
- ✦ 56% of the Chelmsford administrative area residents live within a one-mile radius of a health and fitness suite. This increases to 100% when considering those who live within a 20-minute drive of a community accessible facility.
- ✦ There is a large supply (14) of gyms located in neighbouring authorities within 2 miles of the Chelmsford administrative area boundary
- ✦ Accessibility in the Chelmsford administrative area is good, with each of the main settlements in the Chelmsford administrative area having access to a good quality health and fitness facility.
- ✦ Given scale of development and population growth in the area South Woodham Ferrers Leisure Centre would benefit from a larger fitness facility which includes daytime community access.
- ✦ Current and future demand is well catered for, with Riverside Leisure Centre handling the vast majority of demand within publicly operated sites.
- ✦ The aging demographic profile should be strategically planned for with consideration to a health and wellbeing hub in the city.
- ✦ Future population growth, particularly in respect of the Garden Community developments is likely to generate a requirement for additional provision in the short/medium term.
- ✦ Future population growth in South Woodham Ferrers would see South Woodham Ferrers Leisure Centre fitness facilities benefit from an increase in size and daytime community access.

Squash supply and demand summary

- ✦ There are 10 traditional squash courts in the Chelmsford administrative area at four sites (of these, three are glass-backed and the others are traditional).
- ✦ A further five courts can be accessed within a 20-minute drivetime.
- ✦ Six courts are assessed as above average quality and the remaining four courts as below average quality.
- ✦ Based on England Squash's benchmark of one court per 10,000 people, the Chelmsford administrative area has an under supply of four courts. This under-supply is likely to increase to 6 by 2041.
- ✦ This theoretical position does not necessarily currently transfer to activity on site as the courts are reportedly underutilised and booking levels are relatively low.
- ✦ Over 99% of the Chelmsford administrative area's population lives within a 20-minute drive of a squash facility.

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- ▶ Pay and play opportunities are available at one site - Dovedale Sports Centre. Two are accessible via registered membership and the court at Writtle University College is private use only.

Gymnastics supply and demand summary

- ▶ There are two dedicated gymnastics facilities in the Chelmsford administrative area. These are used by Chelmsford Gymnastics Club and Swallows Gymnastics Club
- ▶ All clubs report a requirement for larger scale facilities to accommodate demand.
- ▶ All residents in the Chelmsford administrative area reside within a 30-minute drive time of a club/venue within the Authority.
- ▶ Both clubs in the Chelmsford administrative area report having capacity issues as a result of outgrowing their current facilities.

Indoor bowls supply and demand summary

- ▶ There is one indoor bowls facility in the Chelmsford administrative area, containing 8 rinks. The 9-rink facility is above average quality.
- ▶ All residents live within a 30-minute drive of an indoor bowls facility.
- ▶ Falcon Bowls Club provides access via a reasonably priced membership.
- ▶ Colchester Indoor Bowls Club and Rayleigh Leisure Centre are within 30-minutes of the Chelmsford administrative area border.
- ▶ There is no requirement for increased indoor bowling facilities in the administrative area. Falcon Bowls Club has spare capacity to accommodate new members.
- ▶ The increasing number of older people makes it likely that demand will increase but not to the extent that new provision is required.

Indoor tennis supply and demand summary

- ▶ There are no indoor tennis venues in the Chelmsford Administrative area.
- ▶ 14 sites in neighbouring authorities are accessible for a proportion of the Chelmsford administrative area residents. The Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) has identified the administrative area as an investment priority for an indoor venue.
- ▶ All residents within the Chelmsford administrative area live within a 30-minute drive time of an indoor tennis facility in a neighbouring authority.
- ▶ Pay and play access is available outside the administrative area at Southend Leisure & Tennis Centre.
- ▶ In the near future, CCC and the LTA should commence the formal process of identifying a site and undertaking a feasibility study.
- ▶ CCC should also monitor demand for indoor tennis facilities at outdoor court venues.

Combat sports supply and demand summary

- ▶ There are eight dedicated combat sports venues in the Chelmsford administrative area. In addition, combat sports activity is delivered in some form at five non-dedicated venues.
- ▶ All residents within the Chelmsford administrative area live within a 30 minutes' drive time of either a dedicated or non-dedicated combat sports facility.
- ▶ Clubs/operators generally operate on the basis of pay & play access with membership systems in place for regular members.
- ▶ There is a strong combat sports club presence in the Chelmsford administrative area, evidencing high participation levels. Given that clubs tend to be commercial operators, scope for support is limited however, it should be recognised that they can offer alternative routes into sports and physical activity and should therefore be supported where possible.
- ▶ There is a need to ensure where possible clubs have security of tenure, good quality facilities that are fit for purpose and are, thus, able to meet the demands of the population.

Ice Rinks supply and demand summary

- There is one ice rink in the Chelmsford administrative area which is above average in quality.
- There is no requirement for additional ice provision in the Chelmsford administrative area.
- CCC should undertake necessary refurbishment to ensure that the facility remains good quality for club and recreational use.
- All residents in the Chelmsford administrative area live within a 30-minute drive of Riverside Leisure Centre.
- CCC should continue to work with Ice Hockey UK and British Ice Skating to drive up participation.
- CCC should ensure that Riverside Leisure Centre continues to provide a programme which ensures that club use, learn to skate and pay & play users all have good affordable access to a range of ice activity.

Village halls supply and demand summary

- There are 57 village / community centres in the Chelmsford administrative area.
- They serve many more rural parts of the Authority. No specific deficiencies were identified.
- There is a good level of accessibility: 57% of the population lives within 800m catchment of a venue.
- They are often available during the daytime and evenings and at weekends – the operation of virtually all venues is to a degree reliant on volunteer goodwill.
- Activity on offer varies considerably between halls and is broadly reflective of interpreted local need.
- Activities tend to reflect the needs of the local community and halls open at time to suit demand.
- There may be options to increase physical activity provision and work with service delivery partners (e.g., the NHS) to ensure that all residents, particularly those in rural areas have improved access to sport/physical activity opportunity.
- Ensure that harder to reach groups and people with specific health needs can access health and wellbeing provision.

Strategy and Action Plan vision

CCC's vision for sport and leisure provision in the administrative area until 2041 reflects a clear ambition to ensure that facilities are attractive, accessible, and fit for purpose with a wide range of programming to meet the needs of all residents. The vision is:

“To work with partners to create high quality, inclusive and sustainable sports facilities which meet community need, increase participation and support health and wellbeing now and in the future.”

General strategic objectives

- In line with the Council's carbon reduction targets, ensure that existing facilities are made as energy efficient as possible, and that any new development considers energy efficiency as a high priority.
- Develop a system to, as early as possible, identify and tackle ongoing investment, maintenance, and refurbishment requirements to protect and improve existing sports facilities.
- Collaborate with education sites to ensure sports hall quality remains at/rises to an appropriate standard and that their venues continue to be made available for community use.

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- ◀ FPM findings in relation to sports halls identified an uneven distribution in the quality and capacity of sports halls across the Authority. The report has identified three key interventions that should be prioritised:
 - ◀ Increase access for community use at key sites and provide a more balanced distribution of met demand.
 - ◀ Modernisation of the sports halls is of increasing importance in order to maintain their attractiveness, ensure equity of provision across the Council area, and continue to retain the very high level of demand from the Chelmsford administrative area being met within the Council area.
 - ◀ The importance of community access to educational sports halls is evident. If not in place, a community use agreement should be put in place for the current supply. Looking ahead, it will be important to negotiate and secure a community use agreement at any new or replacement educational sports hall site.
- ◀ FPM findings in relation to swimming pools identified two key interventions that should be prioritised:
 - ◀ Achieve a better balance between the distribution of supply and demand by increasing availability and capacity at the key sites (South Woodham Ferrers Leisure centre and Chelmsford County High School for Girls).
 - ◀ Increase the hours for community use at the other educational pool sites and this should be investigated at Great Baddow High School and Moulsham High School.
- ◀ Consider whether CCC might be able to play a role brokering constructive links between combat sports clubs seeking new or additional venues at which to train and compete and 'right-sized' parish/village/community hall operators.
- ◀ Ensure that harder to reach groups and people with specific health needs can access health and wellbeing provision.
- ◀ New developments need to contribute towards providing additional capacity for the facility types for which there are deficiencies through financial contributions especially sports halls and swimming pools.
- ◀ Given the projected population increase in those residents over 65 years of age, seek opportunities to support providers to increase activities and opportunities for these people. This may include consideration to a health and wellbeing hub in the city and greater use of local village halls and community centres.
- ◀ Several clubs in the administrative area are at membership capacity due to current facility size. Look to support clubs seeking to access new/different facilities to enable them to grow their participation. This applies to sports such as badminton, volleyball and swimming.
- ◀ Consider options to support Chelmsford Table Tennis Centre to find additional space and/or a new facility to accommodate current and future demand.
- ◀ Ensure that memberships and specific activities are available to people living in the Authority's more deprived communities via enabling increased use of community facilities (e.g., activity halls and community centres).
- ◀ Future population growth in South Woodham Ferrers would see South Woodham Ferrers Leisure Centre fitness facilities benefit from an increase in size and daytime community access (shared with William de Ferrers School).
- ◀ Given demand for Council pay and play health and fitness facilities continue to pursue increased size and daytime community use at Dovedale Sports Centre (shared with Chelmsford College)
- ◀ Review the cost and the processes via which people are able to participate on a casual (pay and play) basis at the CCC public leisure centres. Ensure that this is straightforward and, for example, that the requirement for online membership and related sign up/booking processes do not function as a deterrent or digitally exclude key groups.
- ◀ Consider options to aid gymnastics clubs to secure larger or new dedicated facilities to accommodate all current and future demand.
- ◀ Given that CCC is an LTA priority investment authority for an indoor tennis facility, consider where and how it may be feasible to develop indoor tennis courts in the administrative area. While it is noted that no site has, as yet, been identified nor has funding been

ringfenced, CCC should look to take advantage of this opportunity to work with the LTA to progress this concept – and ensure that should a venue be developed, that it offers affordable pay and play access.

- ◆ Support other developments (via planning, developer contributions and officer expertise) to increase levels of sport and physical activity in the wider community.
- ◆ Work with local sports clubs (with/via the leisure operator) to ensure that facilities and workforce development programmes meet the needs of all clubs and residents.

Delivering the Strategy

The indoor needs assessment and strategy seeks to provide the necessary robustness and direction to ensure that the Council has a framework for the prioritisation, provision and development of sports facilities across the public, private and independent sectors. It identifies and recommends the investment and actions required to deliver and maintain high-quality built facilities infrastructure for the Chelmsford administrative area for the period up until 2041.

It provides clear direction for all partners so that they can collectively plan and develop the more modern, efficient, and sustainable range of community-based leisure, physical activity and sport facilities that the residents of Chelmsford require. Built upon a comprehensive, up-to-date evidence base in line with the Review of the Local Plan, it sets out a strategic, action plan-based approach to the enhancement of existing, and creation of new, sporting provision.

To assist with the above, the Action Plan (Part 4) is included within the Indoor Strategy and Action Plan, and recommends a number of priority projects relating to sports provision which should be realised over the Local Plan period.

The Housing Growth Scenarios (Part 3 of the Strategy and Action Plan) use Sport England's Sports Facility Calculator (SFC) and future demand (to 2041 in line with the review of the Local Plan). The SFC updates the likely demand generated for indoor facilities based on housing and population increases and converts the demand into equivalent required sports hall and swimming pool provision.

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OPEN SPACE STUDY

This is the executive summary for the Chelmsford Open Space Study which has been informed by best practice including the Planning Policy Guidance 17 (PPG17) Companion Guidance; Assessing Needs and Opportunities published in September 2002 and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

Scope

The table below details the open space typologies included within the study:

Typology	Primary purpose
Parks and recreation	Parks, formal gardens and recreation grounds, open to the general public. Accessible, high quality opportunities for informal recreation and community events.
Natural and semi-natural greenspaces	Supports wildlife conservation, biodiversity and environmental education and awareness.
Amenity greenspace	Opportunities for informal activities close to home or work or enhancement of the appearance of residential or other areas.
Provision for children and young people	Areas designed primarily for play and social interaction involving children and young people.
Allotments	Opportunities to grow own produce. Added benefits include the long term promotion of sustainable living, health and social inclusion.
Cemeteries, churchyards and other burial grounds	Provides burial space but is considered to provide a place of quiet contemplation and is often linked to the promotion of wildlife conservation and biodiversity.

Audit summary

Within the Chelmsford City Council administrative area, there is a total of 903 sites equating to 3,538 hectares. The largest contributor to provision is natural/semi-natural greenspace (2,780 hectares), accounting for 78%.

Open space typology		Number of sites	Total amount (hectares) ¹	Hectares per 1,000 population
Allotments		48	42	0.23
Amenity greenspace		163	96	0.53
Cemeteries/churchyards		38	37	n/a
Natural & semi-natural greenspace	Accessible	83	1,778	9.80
	Limited access	135	1,002	5.52
Outdoor sports ²		42	350	n/a
Park and recreation		223	223	1.23
Provision for children and young people		171	10	0.05
TOTAL		903	3,538	n/a

All cemeteries are included within the audit. However, no quantity standards are utilised for this typology. Consequently, no hectares per 1,000 population are calculated.

¹ Rounded to the nearest whole number

² Sites listed with site sizes in Appendix Two of Open Space Study Report

Outdoor sports are included in mapping data for completion but are not part of the audit analysis or within the setting of quantity/accessibility standards. Such sites have limited access for members of the public as recreational spaces. The demand for such spaces is detailed within the Chelmsford Playing Pitch Strategy and Action Plan.

Provision standards

To identify specific quantitative and qualitative deficits or surpluses of open space in a local area, provision standards focusing on Quality, Quantity and Accessibility are set and applied as part of the study.

Quality and value summary

There is a positive quality of open space. This is reflected in 78% of assessed sites scoring above their set thresholds for quality.

All sites are assessed as being above the threshold for value, reflecting the role and importance of open space provision to local communities and environments.

Accessibility

Accessibility catchments are a tool to identify areas currently not served by existing provision. It is recognised that factors underpinning catchment distances vary from person to person, day to day and hour to hour. For the purposes of this process the concept of 'effective catchments' are used, defined as the distance that most users would travel. The study displays the results of the catchment mapping to highlight any potential deficiencies in access to provision. This in turn helps to inform recommendations.

The catchment distances applied within the study are:

Open space type		Catchment
Parks & recreation		9-minute walk time (710m)
Natural & semi-natural greenspace		ANGST
Amenity greenspace		6-minute walk time (480m)
Provision for children and young people	Any site above 0.1ha	1000m
	Youth provision	1000m
	All other sites	400m
Allotments		1200m
Cemeteries		No standard set

Quantity

The setting and application of quantity standards is necessary to determine shortfalls in provision and to ensure new developments contribute to the provision of open space across the area.

Within the study, the current provision levels for open spaces in the Chelmsford administrative area are used to help identify where subareas may have a shortfall in quantity for each type of open space.

In addition, to help inform open space contributions as part of new housing development, the study also recommends quantity standards for use.

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Type		Quantity Standard (recommended) (Ha per 1,000 population ³):
Parks & recreation		1.23
Natural & semi-natural greenspace		1.80
Amenity greenspace		0.53
Provision for children & young people	Children	0.05
	Young people	0.05
Allotment		0.30
Total		3.96

Recommendations

The following provides a summary on the key findings from the review of the quantity, quality, and accessibility. It incorporates and recommends what the Council should be seeking to achieve in order to address the issues highlighted in the Open Space Study.

Several quantity shortfalls in the open space typologies are highlighted. However, creating new provision to address these shortfalls, particularly in quantity, is often challenging (as significant amounts of new forms of provision would need to be created). A more realistic approach is to ensure sufficient accessibility and quality of existing provision.

The report summarises the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1
Sites helping or with the potential to help serve areas identified as having gaps in catchment mapping should be prioritised as opportunities for enhancement.

These sites potentially help to meet the identified catchment gaps for other open space typologies. Where possible, the council may seek to adapt these sites to provide a stronger secondary role, to help meet the gaps highlighted.

These sites should therefore be viewed as open space provision that are likely to provide multiple social and value benefits. It is also important that the quality and value of these sites is secured and enhanced (see Recommendation 2).

The key focus should be to work to improving existing open space for more multi-purpose outcomes where appropriate. There are 119 sites highlighted as helping to serve gaps in accessibility catchments.

Recommendation 2
Ensure lower quality sites helping to serve potential gaps in accessibility catchments are prioritised for enhancement

There are eight sites to rate as below quality and/or value thresholds which are identified as helping to potentially serve catchment gaps in other types of open space.

These sites should first look to be enhanced in terms of quality. Consideration should be given to strengthening the secondary function of these sites, to one which they currently help to serve a gap in provision, even if their quality cannot currently be enhanced.

³ Based on the populations set out in Table 2.1

Recommendation 3

Recognise analysis areas with sufficient provision in open space and consider how they may be able to meet other areas of needs

This study identifies 44 sites currently below their quality and value thresholds. For an area with a quantity sufficiency in one type of open space, and where opportunities allow, a change of primary typology could be considered for some sites of that same type.

It is important that other factors, such as the potential typology change of a site creating a different catchment gap and/or the potential to help serve deficiencies in other types of provision should also be considered. The council may also be aware of other issues, such as the importance of a site for heritage, biodiversity or as a visual amenity that may also indicate that a site should continue to stay the same typology.

Recommendation 4

Keeping data and supporting evidence base up to date in order to reflect changes over time
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The study provides a snapshot in time. Whilst significant changes are not as common for open space provision, inevitably over time changes in provision occur through creation of new provision, loss of existing provision and/or alterations to site boundaries and management. Population change and housing growth are also another consideration to review when undertaking any form of update as this may impact on quantity provision levels and standards. It is therefore important, particularly given the growing recognition of open space provision, for the Council to undertake regular reviews of the data and/or actions informed by the Open Space Study.