



BEDFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Sport and Leisure Strategy 2024 – 2034

Foreword

As we look toward the next decade, the importance of promoting active, healthy, and connected communities in the UK has never been more apparent. Our Local Authority Sport and Leisure Strategy 2024-2034 reflects our commitment to fostering environments that enhance the well-being of all residents, irrespective of age, ability, or background.

This strategy is guided by the principles of inclusivity, sustainability, and community collaboration and is led by the corporate plan. With public health challenges such as increasing obesity, mental health concerns, and the widening gap in physical activity levels, local leisure services play a pivotal role in addressing these issues head-on. By creating welcoming, accessible spaces where residents can enjoy sports, recreation, and cultural activities, we aim to support healthier lifestyles and contribute to a thriving, resilient society.

We also recognise the role that leisure services play in environmental stewardship and the development of sustainable communities. Our focus on “active environments” goes beyond physical health - it encourages the use of natural spaces, promotes walking and cycling, and integrates leisure facilities into the broader network of community venues, parks, and open spaces.

This high-level Sport and Leisure Strategy outlines the development of high-quality, multi-functional leisure facilities that cater to the diverse needs of our communities. Whether through enhanced partnerships with healthcare providers, education institutions, or sports clubs, we are committed to creating spaces that serve as hubs for community connection, personal growth, and wellness.

As we embark on this journey, we invite collaboration from residents, volunteers, local organisations, and charities. Together, we will ensure that leisure services continue to evolve and play a crucial role in improving the health, well-being, and happiness of our communities.

We are excited by the potential of this Sport and Leisure Strategy to transform lives and deliver lasting positive impacts over the next decade.

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Statement from our Portfolio Holder

In the development of a Sport and Leisure Strategy, the Council has an opportunity in its continuing commitment to overcome increasing inequalities and providing opportunities for local people. It also has an opportunity to consider its current leisure portfolio, provision of built leisure facilities and its strategic alignment with the future corporate direction of travel and other key local outcomes.

The Sport and Leisure Strategy will support the wider national strategies of Sport England – Uniting the Movement and supports the priorities for Public Health England Strategy 2020-25 - to promote a healthier nation along with our Active Partnership - Be Active.

The Sport and Leisure Strategy brings together the themes from several key Council strategies to underpin the local desire for affordable physical activity opportunities and access to new and improved facilities.



Councillor Sarah-Jayne Gallagher
Portfolio Holder for Customer Experience, Leisure and Culture

Where are we now?

Bedford Borough is at a pivotal point in shaping its leisure and physical activity landscape. While we benefit from a range of leisure facilities, parks, and sports provisions, we face significant challenges in health inequalities, as evidenced by a stark gap in life expectancy between the most and least deprived areas of up to 9 years.

The Governments new sports’ strategy “Get Active: a strategy for the future of sport and physical activity” sets targets to get 2.5 million more adults and one million more children active (nationally) by 2030. This includes specific targets for the least active groups. With activity levels returning to pre covid levels with the exception of people living in deprived areas there is a clear requirement to support people to create equity in the access of physical activity and sport.

In 2019, the Chief Medical Officers released guidelines on how much and what kind of physical activity people should do to stay healthy. The report emphasises the importance of regular activity for people of all ages, and for the first time presents additional guidance on being active during pregnancy, and after giving birth, and for disabled adults.

Looking at the whole population overall in Bedford Borough, we can see (Table 1) that there are more ‘Active’ people in Bedford Borough than there was prior to the pandemic and the percentage of ‘Inactive’ and ‘Fairly Active’ people has decreased post-pandemic. This is a positive outlook for Bedford Borough, but further investigation into the varying groups of people shows a different side to the impact of COVID-19 on activity levels in Bedford Borough.

Figure 1: Participation in physical activity across the whole population

	May 18/19	Nov 18/19	May 19/20	Nov 19/20	May 20/21	Nov 21/22	May 22/23
Inactive (less than 30 mins a week)	28.9%	27.7%	26.9%	27.5%	24.8%	24.0%	16.1%
Fairly Active (30-149 mins a week)	12.1%	9.8%	9.6%	10.0%	9.8%	12.3%	11.1%
Active (150+ mins a week)	59.1%	62.5%	63.5%	62.5%	65.4%	63.6%	72.8%

Despite an overall increase in physical activity across the Bedford population, significant disparities remain, particularly among certain demographic groups and in certain areas. Lower-income communities, ethnic minorities, children and young people, and individuals with disabilities continue to face barriers to regular participation in physical activity.

These inequalities contribute to higher rates of inactivity, which in turn exacerbate health and wellbeing challenges. Addressing these gaps requires targeted interventions and inclusive sport and leisure strategic objectives that ensure access to opportunities for all, fostering healthier and more active lifestyles across every segment of society.

How do we know this?

The local disparities described can be seen in the local data and helps us to better understand these priority areas.

- Areas of Deprivation
- Gender
- Disability / Long Term Health Conditions
- Children and Young People

Figure 2: National Child Measurement Programme - Year 6 Excess Weight, 2021-22

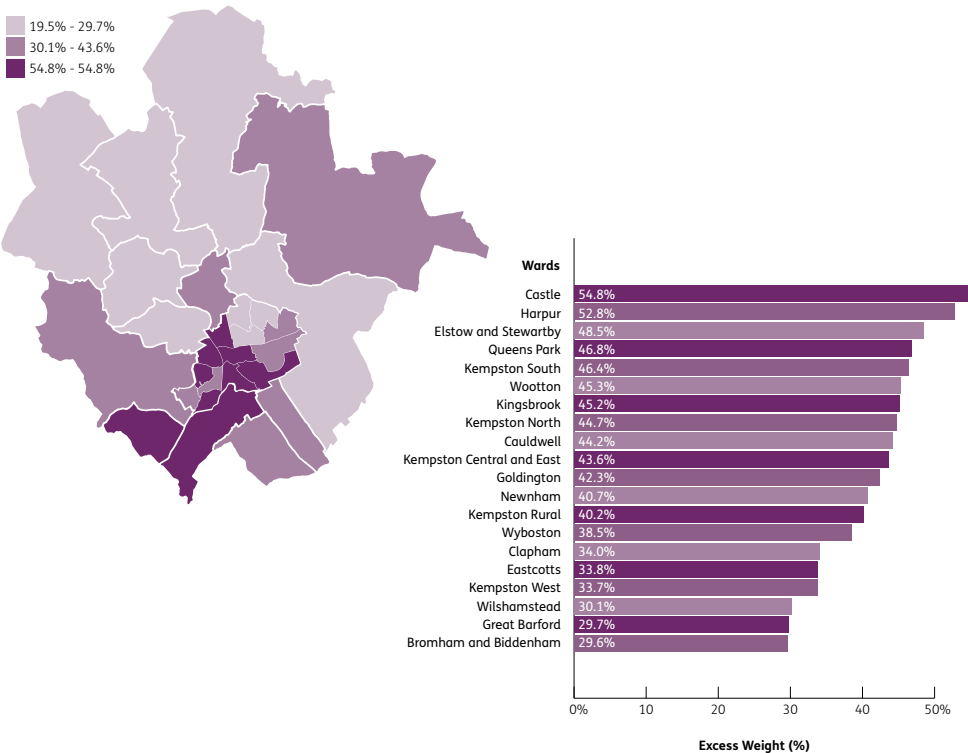


Figure 3: Levels of Activity (Main - 3 Categories) - Inactive less than 30 minutes a week, Local Authority and County Council - Disability, Nov 22-23

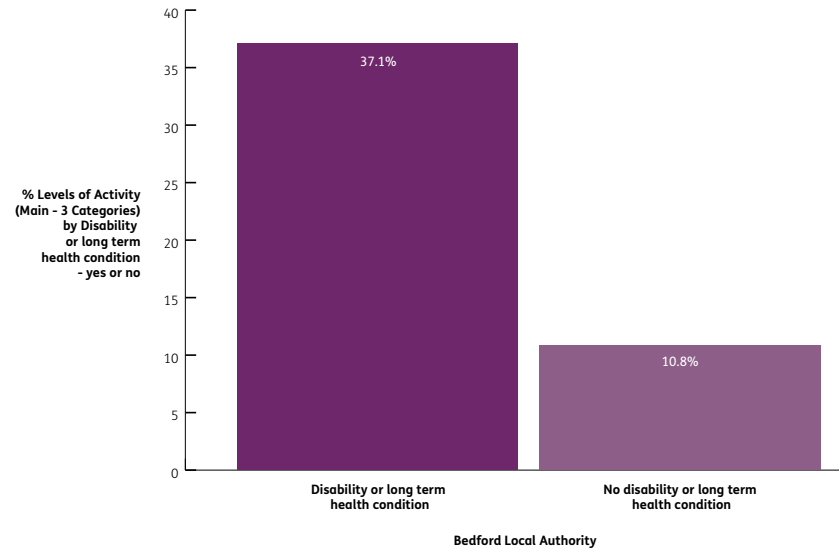


Figure 4: Inactivity and Deprivation, 2022-23

	22/23
Whole Population	16.1%
Most Deprived Areas (decile 1)	37.8%

Figure 5: Inactivity and Gender, 2022-23

	22/23
Males	12.7%
Females	18.2%

Sources: JSNA Bedford Borough, July 2024 & Sport England Active Lives Survey 22-23

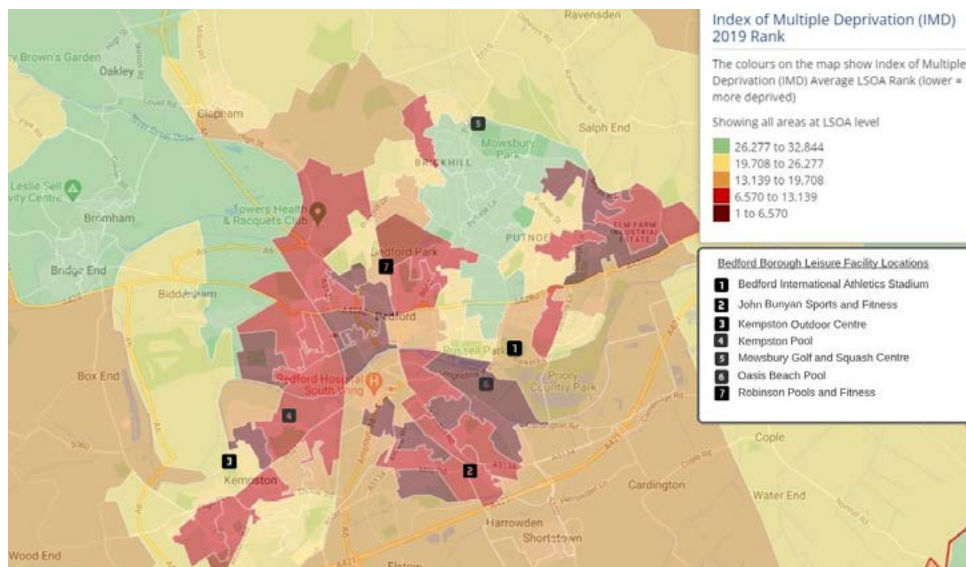
Why do these inequalities matter?

The Bedford Borough Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2024-2027 highlights and explains why these inequalities matter.

People living in poorer parts of Bedford Borough live shorter lives than people living in more affluent areas. The difference in life expectancy between people living in the most and least deprived areas is on average 8 years for women and 9 years for men. These differences are amongst the largest of any local authority in the East of England.

The reason why some communities and people living in less affluent areas of Bedford Borough are dying years earlier than they should, is because they don't have all the things they need to live healthy lives.

Figure 6: Bedford Leisure site locations and the IMD areas of Bedford*



We know the transformative power of sport and physical activity and this strategy is a commitment to increasing its availability for those who it will benefit most is a catalyst for change.

What does this mean for Leisure Facilities?

We are fortunate to have leisure sites in and around key areas of Bedford however the facilities need short, medium and long-term investment therefore a first stage strategic review of the Council's leisure sites has been completed.

The strategic review of all the leisure facilities is important as several of the facilities are aging and there is now an urgent need to plan and understand what their future maintenance costs will be for the Council's capital maintenance programme and what can the Council realistically afford over the next 10 to 20 years with the budgetary pressures being faced.

The challenges outlined in the report and within the Sport and Leisure Strategy whether it is planning the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan or trying to meet the leisure needs of all our communities (both existing and planned) means we will require the Strategy to help us carefully plan our future decisions.

* The Indices of Deprivation 2019 are a relative measure of deprivation for small areas (Lower-layer Super Output Areas) across England. The overall Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019 combines together indicators under seven different domains of deprivation: Income Deprivation; Employment Deprivation; Education Skills and Training Deprivation; Health Deprivation and Disability; Crime; Barriers to Housing and Services and Living Environment Deprivation. Data shows Average LSOA Rank, a lower rank indicates that an area is experiencing high levels of deprivation. Date: 2019 Source: Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019>)

The Sport and Leisure Strategy & Sport Facilities Strategic Review will ensure that the Council now has the evidence base and the strategic framework to make those decisions through a better understanding of the sport and leisure needs of its communities. The Council will also need to be clear on what its improvement and investment strategy will look like in future years and what savings could be achieved in relation to asset provision.

The Council portfolio of leisure sites includes:

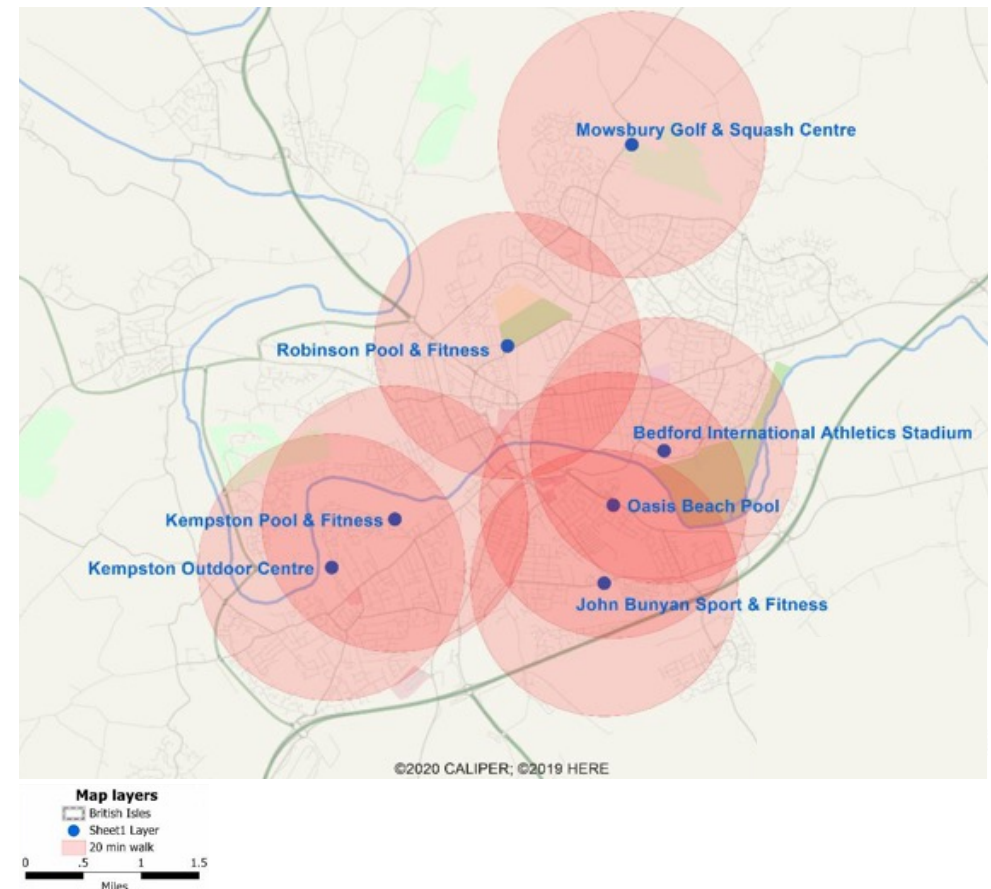
- Robinson Pools & Fitness;
- Kempston Pool & Fitness;
- John Bunyan Sports & Fitness;
- Bedford International Athletic Stadium;
- Mowsbury Golf & Squash Complex;
- Oasis Beach Pool;
- Kempston Outdoor Centre;
- White & Blue Peris Mountain Centre (located in North Wales).

As part of the review of the portfolio other potential sites for development in key strategic locations have also been identified and investigated for consideration within the themes of the sports facilities strategic review. An initial review with key NGBs (National Governing Bodies) and stakeholders has been undertaken and a wider consultation is the next step as the options are reviewed and developed for a future investment plan.

The Sport and Leisure strategy has also taken into account the role of the education and private sectors in maintaining and enhancing service provision.

Maintaining robust education and private sector facilities is crucial to a successful leisure strategy, as it fosters community engagement, lifelong learning, and accessible recreational opportunities, thereby enhancing overall quality of life.

Figure 7: Bedford Borough Council (BBC) Leisure site locations with a 20 minute walking catchment area



Social Value of Sport

The benefits of physical activity can create tangible monetary impact. In 2017/18, Sport England commissioned research to understand the social impact of sport and physical activity.

Nationally, for every £1.00 invested in community sport and physical activity, a return on investment of £3.91 of social value is generated across health and wellbeing, stronger communities, and the economy.

For Local Authorities, Sport England calculated the social value of community sport and physical activity by multiplying the rates of active adults (those completing at least 150 minutes of physical activity a week) by the value per person for all health outcomes.

The October 2024 Sport England Report “The Social Value of Sport and Physical Activity in England” provisionally estimates the annual social cost of inequalities in adult physical activity levels to be £15.6 billion across the country.

Not only is this a huge amount of unrealised social value for society, but it also demonstrates the potential that can be unlocked if we are able to better confront the deep inequalities in participation that are still experienced by too many people in our society.

Our publicly owned leisure facilities where concession access is available are shown with a 20 minute walking radius. Their proximity to areas of deprivation is critical as most people who have no transportation will need to walk to an affordable facility to seek physical activity opportunities.

In order to see the impact of the social value of sport and physical activity we know that we need to create inclusive and accessible spaces for all residents of the Borough. It is not one size fits all and to ensure there is equity of accessibility it will be key to utilise the Sport England Accessible and inclusive sports facilities guidance (AISF) which will ensure that our facilities are safe, welcoming and inclusive for our communities.



The Mixed Economy of Sport and Leisure

Over the next ten years, our Sport and Leisure Strategy will focus on fostering a mixed economy that blends public, private, voluntary, and community sector contributions to create a sustainable and inclusive sporting landscape. By leveraging the expertise and resources of local businesses, sports clubs, charities, schools, and volunteers, we aim to offer a wide range of accessible opportunities for all residents, regardless of age, background, or ability.



This collaborative approach will help ensure that everyone, from grassroots participants to elite athletes, has the chance to engage in sport and physical activity. Recognising the distinct role each sector plays, we will work to strengthen partnerships that support the development of facilities, coaching, and participation pathways across our communities.

Bedford is fortunate to have an incredible range of sports available and local clubs, voluntary groups and community leaders support in ensuring these opportunities are accessible for all.



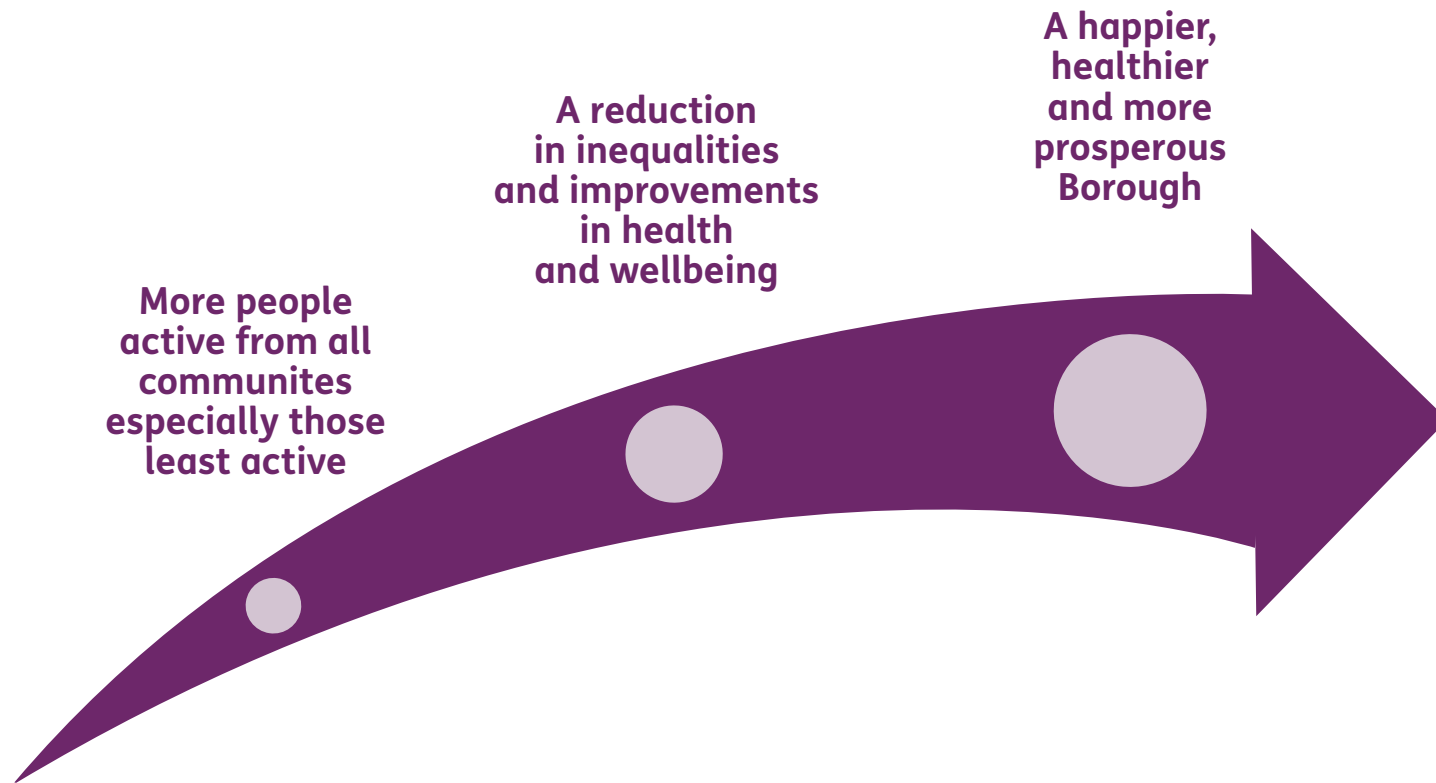
At the heart of this Sport and Leisure Strategy is the belief in the social value of sport. Sport and physical activity are key drivers of social cohesion, mental and physical wellbeing, and community pride. We are committed to maximising the impact of sport beyond the playing field by fostering inclusivity, reducing inequality, and offering opportunities for social interaction and personal growth.

We will actively support local clubs and volunteers who create welcoming environments, offer structured programmes for young people, and provide vital leadership in our communities. By investing in the power of sport to inspire and unite, we will ensure that the social benefits of physical activity extend across all corners of our local authority, helping to build healthier, more resilient communities for generations to come.

Long Term Vision

Our long-term vision for physical activity and sport is to create an active and healthy Borough where every resident has access to opportunities that promote physical well-being. Guided by key supporting documents – The Physical Activity Vision, Playing Pitch Strategy, and Sports Facilities Strategic Review – we are committed to delivering inclusive, sustainable, and fit-for-purpose leisure facilities.

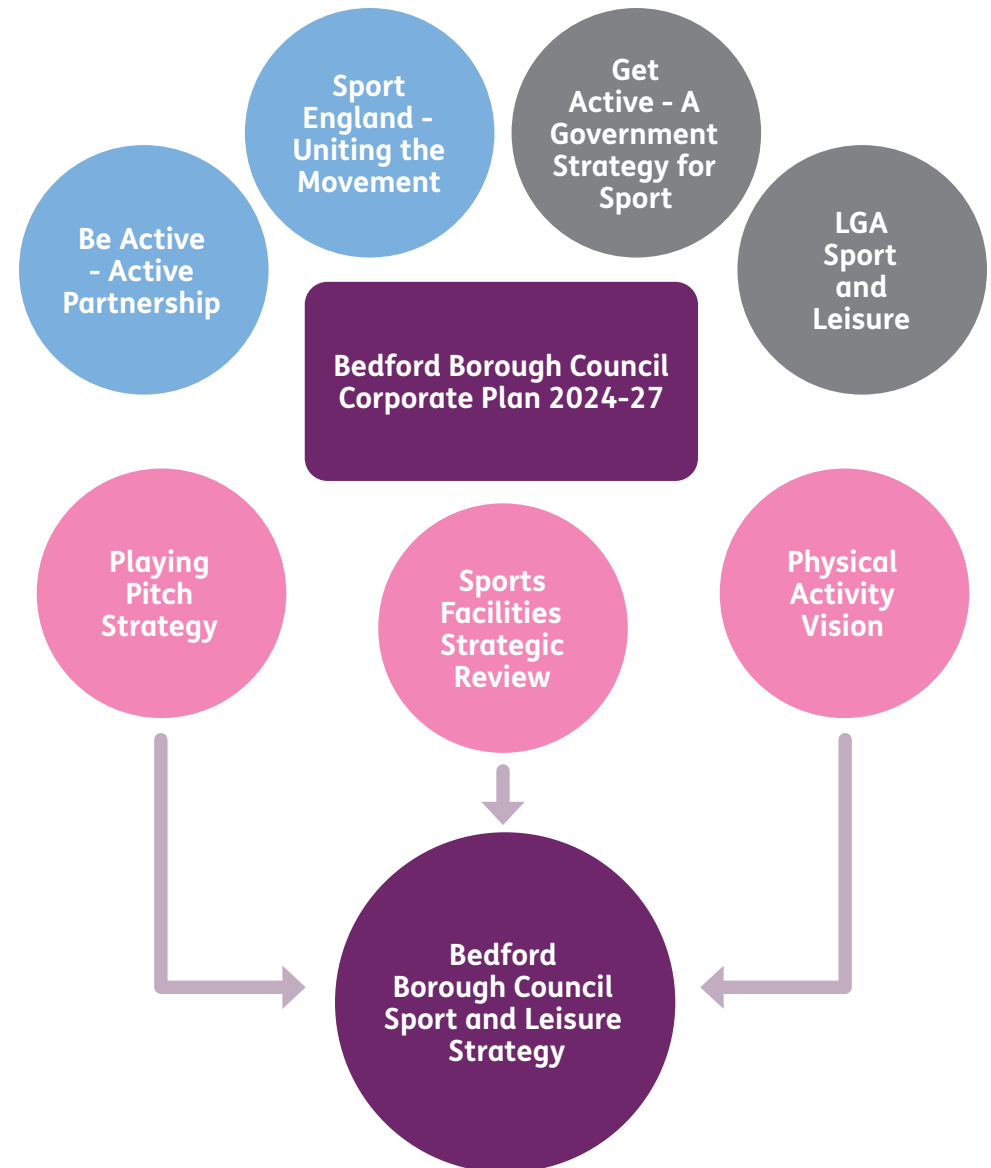
These strategies will ensure that we meet the diverse needs of our community, offering high-quality spaces and programs that encourage lifelong participation in sport and physical activity, while fostering a healthier and more connected Borough for future generations.



Underpinning Principles

This Sport and Leisure Strategy is closely aligned to the Council's new proposed Corporate Plan 2024-2027, the Local Plan 2040, The Physical Activity Vision 2023, Sports Facilities Strategic Review 2024 and the Playing Pitch Strategy 2021.

These existing detailed strategies provide the foundations and evidence base for this high-level Sport and Leisure Strategy. Bringing together the conclusions of these evidence-based documents has shaped the plan for the future of leisure in Bedford which will ensure that all residents of Bedford have the best start in life and the same opportunities to live happy and healthy lives.



How have the Themes of the Strategy been developed?

There are common themes that run throughout the key national and local strategies which inform the aims and the actions of this high-level Sport and Leisure Strategy. The themes of the corporate plan align with the national objectives of the Sport England Uniting the movement. The actions will aim to create positive change locally but will also support the objectives of the national Sport England Strategy.

Strategy	Key Themes				
Bedford Borough Council (BBC) Corporate Plan 2022-2026	Supporting our families and the vulnerable	Protecting the environment	Stimulating economic growth	Promoting health and wellbeing	
Sport England - Uniting the Movement	Positive experiences for children and young people	Active environments	Recover and reinvent	Connecting health and wellbeing	Connecting communities
Bedford Borough Council (BBC) Physical Activity Vision 2023-2030	Positive experiences for children and young people	Active environments		Connecting health and wellbeing	Connecting communities
Bedford Borough Council (BBC) Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2024-2027	Best start in life	Sustainable built and natural environment	Inclusive employment, lifelong education and workplace health	Healthy homes	Creating strong communities
Be Active 2021-2026	People driven	Places	New audiences	Sustainable communities	



Strategy	Key Themes				
Bedford Borough Council (BBC) Sport and Leisure Strategy 2024-2034	Positive experiences for children and young people	Enhancing and sustaining Bedford's sport and physical activity sector	Active environment	Connecting health and wellbeing	Connecting communities

Strategic Themes

1. Connected Communities



Focusing on reducing inequalities by bringing communities together and utilising sport and physical activity opportunities to connect communities.

- Ensuring the Council provides value for money across the leisure service.
- Working with education sector in developing broader access to leisure facilities, community use of school facilities and pathway opportunities to the sector. Sport and Physical Activity enables people to have fun make friends be healthy and build stronger community connections. Whilst not losing the opportunities participating in individual and teams sports has on both personal performance and wellbeing as well as sporting pathways to excellence. The Council will continue to support clubs and National Governing Bodies (NGBs) in enabling access for all to reach their full potential.'
- Creating strong partnerships to connect communities: Council – Education Sector – Private Sector – Voluntary Sector.
- Promoting inclusive access to sports and physical activity at leisure sites and in green spaces by ensuring promotion of services and events in diverse communities and in range of language formats and for those with sensory needs.

2. Positive Experiences for Children and Young People



We want all young people to enjoy being active throughout childhood and as they move through into adulthood.

We know that physical activity has an important part to play in mental health and wellbeing and a diverse provision to welcome young people from all backgrounds is important.

- Supporting the education sector to encourage young people in physical activity and sports coaching pathways.
- Work with less active young people and their families including those with SEND and young people from a deprived background, can access physical activity easily.
- To increase physical activity levels amongst children and young people living in the least active and deprived areas of the Borough.
- Recognising that the whole family is an important part of a child's participation physical activity.

3. Connecting Health and Wellbeing



The Council will collaborate with health partners to enable people to maintain an active and healthy lifestyle throughout life.

- To increase physical activity levels amongst groups of people where inactivity inequalities are the greatest.
- Continue to integrate physical activity into social prescribing and recognise the importance that local facilities can have in supporting this can have in supporting physical health and mental health.
- To encourage leisure providers and facilities to commit to healthy food standards and sustainable environment objectives.
- Supporting NHS programs and health interventions such as strength and balance, long term health conditions and mental health pathways.

4. Active Environments

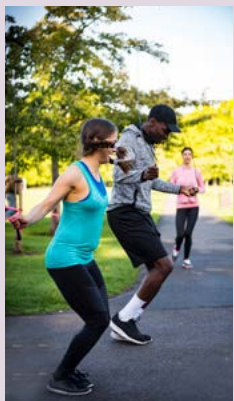


The Council will prioritise the design of safe and environmentally sustainable neighbourhoods. We will support the most deprived areas to have equitable access to sport and leisure and ensure that active travel can be a part of everyday lives.



- Supporting the development of safe cycling and walking routes and better access to green, blue and grey spaces.
- Support development of a range of sports across the Borough including golf, tennis, squash, badminton, padel, pickleball, table tennis, football, netball, rugby, hockey, cricket, athletics, gymnastics, swimming, basketball, squash, volleyball, watersports, martial arts, bowls, cycling, bmx, dodgeball, handball and more.
- Agree the long-term contract for the built leisure facilities management and develop third party partnerships, ensuring health services and schools are included and healthy eating options are considered.
- Proposals and opportunities to develop sustainable facilities following active design principles that serve the Borough and residents over the next 25 years. These could include renovations to existing facilities along with the introduction of new activities to the Borough.
- Continue to support the playing pitch strategy (PPS) and its future reviews along with the implementation of the new Sports Facilities Strategic Review.
- Showing a strong desire to embed the Sport England and Office for Health Improvements and Disparities developed [Active Design Guidance](#) in the design and development of urban and rural developments and regeneration schemes, supporting residents and the wider community to be more physically active in the places where they live, work and go about their daily business, reducing vehicle usage, thereby reducing carbon emissions, contributing towards the Borough's net zero targets.

5. Enhancing and Sustaining Bedford's Sport and Physical Activity Sector



The Council will invest its available resources in high quality indoor and outdoor sport and leisure facilities, prioritising access for those with the least resources and reflecting the desire to minimise any impact on the environment. The Council will work with partners to support and enhance coaching pathways so that local talent can reach its full potential, and clubs can provide welcoming and inclusive opportunities for all residents.

Encouraging clubs and community groups to prioritise environmental sustainability enhances their knowledge of its importance and equips them with practices for ongoing improvement. This collective effort supports the Borough in reaching its net zero target by 2030.



- Supporting clubs and community groups to provide safe and inclusive environments that embrace safeguarding, welfare, equality, diversity and inclusion through their policies and practices.
- Supporting the development of coaching pathways and opportunities via our Active partnership, CIMPSA and our sport specific NGBs.
- Supporting access and maintaining robust education and private sector facilities is crucial to a successful leisure strategy, as it fosters community engagement, lifelong learning, and accessible recreational opportunities, thereby enhancing overall quality of life.
- Assisting clubs and community groups in strengthening their governance activities, processes, and structures to meet the requirements of Tier 1 in the Good Governance Code. Sport England's Code for Sports Governance.
- Supporting clubs and community groups to access the support services of Be Active (our County Sport Partnership) to prepare funding bids for funding that becomes available nationally, regionally or locally or to access support for strategic development from Sport England and or the Council.

Our Theory of Change

Theory of Change can be a method used to describe projects that are intended to have a positive impact on society. The process involves outlining the thought processes behind a given project, using several factors. Bedford Borough Council (BBC) has leisure as part of health and wellbeing as a high priority even though it is not a statutory obligation; it becomes a valuable asset for reducing inequalities.

Situation:

There is a need for a clear policy position through a long-term Sport and Leisure Strategy.

Aim:

To develop a Sport and Leisure Strategy, underpinned by the Sports Facilities Strategic Review and local population data.

Inputs:

These are the specific inputs and activities that bring about the outcomes...

- Access to resources
- Collaboration with internal and external partners.
- Background data.
- Existing short, medium and long-term recommendations.
- Bedford Borough Council (BBC) Policies and strategic plans.

Outputs:

Outputs are the activities undertaken that allow us to achieve the outcomes...

- An evidence lead understanding of facility need and mix for the future.
- A position statement that articulates the facility mix and need.
- A clear indication of any further evidence that is required.
- A clear outline of the further consultation processes and audiences required to inform the decision-making process.



Change Mechanism:

The actions and processes that will win hearts and minds, facilitate great decision making and introduce processes and mechanisms that delivers the Council's Corporate Plan outcomes...

- Community engagement work.
- Strong governance processes.
- Bedford Borough Council (BBC) internal departments.
- Bedford Borough Council (BBC) external partners.
- A mechanism for identifying and articulating need that leads to appropriate developer contributions.

Outcomes:

The precondition for the impact... A change that you expect to observe as a result of your work...

- We will establish an affordable leisure estate that meets the needs of all residents and reduces health inequalities.
- We will deliver a strong leisure contract.
- We will see increased levels of customer satisfaction with leisure services and facilities.
- We will deliver increased physical activity participation rates.
- We will provide environmentally sustainable solutions.

Impact:

What are the impacts and how do they fit with departmental and governmental priorities...

- We will increase the number of quality-of-life years and life expectancy lived by the whole population of Bedford and reduce the gaps that exist between the least and the most affluent.
- We will establish a Council owned leisure and sport facility stock that is positively contributing towards the carbon emission targets and aspirations of the Council.
- We will enhance levels of pride in place.
- We will increase prosperity, opportunity and retention within the sport and leisure sectors workforce.

Next Steps

To achieve the goals outlined in the Sport and Leisure Strategy, we will establish dedicated Strategic Implementation Groups and subgroups responsible for driving forward key actions across physical activity, playing pitches, and leisure facilities.

These groups will work collaboratively to ensure that each element of the strategy is implemented effectively and sustainably. Progress will be regularly reviewed and reported to the Leisure Board, which will oversee and coordinate efforts, ensuring alignment with the overarching vision.

This structure ensures clear accountability, continuous monitoring, and the ability to adapt our approach where necessary, ensuring we deliver a healthier, more active Borough for all.

Following a full public consultation and series of stakeholder workshops, this draft strategy shall be reviewed, and the priorities reevaluated to create a detailed strategic delivery plan with specific actions.

- ‘You said, we did’ details added to the Sport and Leisure Strategy document with actions for each theme.
- Finalised Sport Facilities Strategic Review with its actions informed by and in line with the Sport and Leisure Strategy.
- A number of new strategic implementation groups will be established to achieve its objectives. These groups will include community and voluntary sector organisations, offering them a significant role in guiding the strategy’s future direction.
- Detailed action plans will be produced which will be managed and owned by each implementation group.



Notes

Finding out more

If you would like further copies, a large-print copy or information about us and our services, please telephone or write to us at our address below.

Për Informacion	معلومات کے لئی	برای اطلاع	للمعلومات	Za Informacije
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