

RE-VISIONING OF SPORT & PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Background

The North West Plan for Sport and Physical Activity 2004 – 2008, produced by Sport England (North West), recommends a target of increasing participation in sport and physical activity by 1% year on year, leading to 50% participation across the North West by 2020. Achieving this target and getting Wigan physically active will provide a major challenge for the Council, the Trust and key partners over the next ten years and beyond.

The Public Health Annual Report 2003 for Wigan Borough highlighted that only 30.5% of the population of Wigan is physically active enough to benefit their health. A major section of the population (29.8%) is sedentary and takes no form of physical activity, and 51.2% of the population are overweight or obese.

Many areas of the borough are amongst the most deprived areas in the country. In some wards, health deprivation indices and multiple deprivation indices are high and car ownership is extremely low. Allied to this, the public transport infrastructure is also patchy, which makes travelling across some parts of the borough difficult.

The Trust conducts twice-yearly sports centres user surveys. These surveys indicate that very few people travel to centres via public transport, and the majority of users of facilities are drawn from the immediate population, which surrounds the facilities.

It is therefore considered reasonable to assume that, in order to increase participation, it will be necessary to make more opportunities available for people to participate in sport and physical activity at a local level, especially where car ownership is low and public transport is inconsistent.

Strategic Partnership

A number of National strategies and reports have recently been produced by different agencies which provide a different perspective on the problems of inactivity, however, all the agencies agree that no one organisation can make a major impact on increasing participation. The agencies all propose that partnership and inter – agency working between stakeholder organisations is vital if we are to succeed in making the population more active.

It is proposed that a Strategic Partnership is established within Wigan involving the Council and the Trust, the health service, the education service and schools and the private and voluntary sectors. These key stakeholder organisations must work collaboratively to ensuring that the people become and remain more active.

Framework of Future Facility & Service Provision

It is proposed that the following framework for future facility and service provision be adopted:

Two Centres of Excellence:- Robin Park and Leigh Sports Village. These Centres will provide a range of facilities, which serve both the district and the local communities.

Three Premier Sites:- Ashton Leisure Centre, Hindley Leisure Centre and Pool and Howe Bridge Sports Centre. These facilities will provide a range of wet and dry facilities, which serve the local community.

New Swimming Pool Facilities

The Council provides the majority of swimming pools across the Borough. Some private sector health and fitness clubs provide swimming pools but they are used exclusively by the club membership, and it is difficult to imagine any radical change in this basic market factor.

The Council will have to play the leading role in the provision of sufficient swimming pool facilities to meet the demands of the general public, the schools and the swimming clubs. Particularly important is the National Curriculum requirement on swimming (target at Key Stage 2) for swimming provision. The Council currently owns three stand-alone swimming pool facilities – Atherton Baths, Tyldesley Pool and Wigan International Pool.

Atherton Baths – Atherton Baths is an aged, under-used and inflexible building that would require considerable investment to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act and to bring the property up to a reasonable modern day standard. Usage at the Baths has reduced considerably in the past 5 years and the existing customer base could be accommodated at Howe Bridge Sports Centre and Tyldesley Pool.

If Atherton Baths were closed, it would generate savings of c. £100,000 per annum, as staff would be re-deployed to vacant posts at other centres. The closure would also reduce the level of repair backlog, enabling more efficient use of both planned and reactive maintenance funding.

If Atherton Baths were to remain open beyond 2004, the Council would have to fund the replacement of the 60-foot high chimney, which is currently being supported by scaffolding. The capital cost of a replacement chimney is £26,000.

It is proposed that Atherton Baths should close no later than 31 December 2004 and that the revenue savings from Atherton Baths be used to support fund free junior swimming (all year round) for all children across the borough from 1 April 2005. This would signal a real commitment from the Council and the Trust to Getting Wigan Active and would help to tackle the increasing problem of child obesity.

Glasgow City Council is the only authority in the UK to provide free junior swimming all year round. The free junior swimming initiative in Glasgow has been in place for 4 years. In the first year of operation, Glasgow Council reported a 120% increase in junior swimming, which reduced to a 70% increase in subsequent years.

Tyldesley Pool – Tyldesley Pool is a converted cinema, which has limited swimming and ancillary facilities. There is a large dilapidated heritage store adjacent to the swimming pool. The usage of the pool is extremely low in comparison to the other pools across the Authority, and due to the age and condition of the premises, the centre has a relatively short life-span of 5-7 years.

In order to provide sufficient and sustainable pool facilities in the East of the Borough it is proposed that a new public swimming pool is built on the Leigh Sports Village site and is linked to the sports hall and other leisure facilities. The combination of the pool, the sports hall and fitness suite under one roof would provide a first class range of wet and dry sports facilities for local communities in the East of the borough.

When these facilities open to the public (circa January 2007), it is proposed that Tyldesley pool should close and the existing customer base be relocated to Howe Bridge Sports Centre and Leigh Sports Village.

Wigan International Pool – Wigan International Pool is the busiest pool within the borough. The pool attracts more casual swimmers than any other pool, with the exception of Howe Bridge Sports Centre. The pool is used extensively for swimming lessons, school swimming sessions and accommodates the Wigan Swim Scheme of Excellence.

The pool is an integral part of a Corporate Private Finance Initiative (PFI). A bid is scheduled for submission to the ODPM in December 2004. If the PFI bid is successful, the pool and associated facilities at Wigan International Pool would be replaced by a modern, purpose-built complex, consisting of a new 25 x 21 metre pool, a small teaching pool and a new health zone and fitness suite on the existing pool site.

These new facilities would, in turn, form part of a proposed new Joint Service Centre with a new library and a range of other Council services and Health services. The outcome of the PFI bid should be known by April 2005.

If the PFI Bid is not successful, it is proposed that the Trust works in partnership with the Council to secure external funding to build a new 25 x 21 metre pool at the rear of Robin Park Sports Centre where the outdoor tennis courts are located. This would provide a first class range of wet and dry sports facilities for local communities in Wigan.

Mixed Economy of Provision

The Council has been the main provider of sport and leisure facilities and services for local residents for over forty years. However, the pattern of sport and leisure provision is rapidly changing.

There are four major private health and fitness clubs in the Borough and a number of smaller independently owned clubs. At present, these private clubs operate almost exclusively for their membership with no general community access.

Secondary schools are playing an increasing role as community sports providers. By 2006, 13 secondary schools will have benefited from the installation of a new all weather pitch as a result of New Opportunities funding. The all weather pitches will be open for community access. However, in many cases, school sports halls and playing fields remain closed or the access is limited and unstructured.

There is a thriving voluntary sports club infrastructure within Wigan, and many clubs have successfully attracted substantial external funding from Sport England and the Football Foundation to develop their club facilities. A total of 38 sports clubs currently receive 100% rate relief from the Council in recognition of their active role in developing sport within the communities that they serve.

As part of the re-visioning, the Trust would negotiate with the Education sector (secondary schools), the private sector and the voluntary sports clubs to increase community access to facilities and services on their respective sites.

This would involve the Sports Development Unit and the Active Living Team working in partnership with the aforementioned facility providers to develop programmes of sport and physical activity within different settings to meet the needs of local communities across the whole borough.

Coaching, Instruction and Intervention Programmes

It should be acknowledged that increasing community access to sport and leisure facilities will not necessarily result in an increase in participation from those sections of the community which are considered priority groups, due to their low level of participation.

The Public Health Report 2003 evidenced that school children, teenagers, unemployed, the elderly, disabled people, ethnic minorities and women are less likely to participate in sport and physical activity and should be considered priority groups for future action. Particular emphasis will need to be given to the least active posts of the Borough (from 2001 Health Survey).

Therefore, in addition to providing increased access to facilities, the Trust would also provide a range of coaching and instruction programmes and intervention programmes that are specifically targeted to the aforementioned priority groups.

Conclusion

The revisioning of sport and physical activity must result in new, better quality, better maintained Council-owned facilities.

The major stakeholders within the borough who will benefit from a substantial increase in sport and physical activity are the Council, the Trust, the Education sector, the voluntary sector, the health sector and the private sector.

The major stakeholders will have to work in partnership at a strategic level and operational level in order to achieve a substantial increase in participation.

Existing and new facilities and services must meet the needs of all the community and not exclude sections of the population. The most effective means of engaging with many sections of the population is through targeted interventions to support them to become physically active and enable them to remain so.

The re-visioning of sport and physical activity will be further developed and supported through the creation of a combined Sport, Health and Physical Education (SHAPE) Strategy 2005 – 2010 which will supersede the Sport and Active Recreation Strategy 2001 – 2005 and The Physical Activity Strategy 2000 – 2005. It is intended that the Sport, Health and Physical Education Strategy 2005 – 2010 will be presented to Cabinet for approval in Summer 2005.