

**ST ALBANS CITY AND DISTRICT
SPORT & RECREATION FACILITIES STRATEGY**

**A
REPORT
BY
PMP**

DECEMBER 2005

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

- i) St Albans City and District Council appointed PMP to produce three inter-linked strategies:
- Green Spaces Strategy
 - Playing Pitch Strategy
 - Sport and Recreation Facilities Strategy.
- ii) This report contains the Sport and Recreation Facilities Strategy which:
- analyses the current level of public, private, dual and voluntary sport and recreational provision (quality and quantity) within the City and District
 - identifies and evaluates strategic options for enhancing provision
 - provides information to inform decisions and help determine future development proposals in the area and feed into the Development Plan Documents (which are currently being prepared)
 - makes clear recommendations used to inform the Council's five year action plan.
- iii) The Sport and Recreation Facilities Strategy includes an assessment of:
- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| • athletics | • leisure centres |
| • bowling greens and indoor centres | • netball courts |
| • community centres/village halls | • outdoor water space |
| • golf courses | • racket sports courts |
| • health and fitness gyms | • sports halls |
| • swimming pools | • wheeled sports parks. |
- iv) For each of the above facility types, the strategy provides answers to the following questions:
- what does the Council provide?
 - what do others provide?
 - what is the quality of the provision?
 - where are the gaps in provision?
 - what needs to be done and what are the priorities?
 - where should resources be targeted?

Methodology

- v) The strategy has been prepared through consultation with a range of agencies and it is important that all stakeholders continue to be involved in the ongoing implementation of this strategy.
- vi) Table E1 below describes the various tools used during the preparation of this strategy and how they have helped the process.

Table E1 - Methodology used to assess facility supply and demand

Method	Supply analysis	Demand analysis
(a) Desk research	Information relating to provision/quality of existing facility provision.	Council, clubs, governing bodies, etc. Information relating to demand/need for existing/additional facilities.
(b) Consultation (internal and external)	Confirmation of the range and quality of facilities provided.	Feedback on facility needs/demands based on work with local clubs/providers/other stakeholder groups.
(c) Household survey	Assesses current usage of sport and recreation facilities and provides feedback on the quantity, quality and accessibility of existing provision.	Identifies priorities for new or improved provision to satisfy local needs.
(d) Club survey (including postal survey and follow-up telephone survey)	Identifies facilities currently used and quality of provision.	Feedback on priorities for improvements to existing facilities and additional facility needs which exist.
(e) School survey	Identifies facilities currently provided/used and feedback on quality of provision.	Feedback on priorities for improvements to existing facilities, additional facility needs which exist and current demand for the facilities from clubs.
(f) Facility audit/ research (including site visits, telephone consultations and PI analysis)	Detail of level and quality of existing facility provision. Analysis of the current performance of the centres.	Priorities for improvement/redevelopment.
(g) Demand modelling	Provides context for facility audit.	Indicates shortfalls/surpluses of major sports facilities.
(h) Demographic analysis	Provides baseline data against which the adequateness of supply can be assessed.	Defines the potential leisure market.

- vii) Full details of each stage of the methodology and the levels of response can be found in section 1 of the full report.

Context

Wider national policy

- viii) There are many national strategies and policy documents that impact upon the Sport and Recreation Facilities Strategy for St Albans City and District. These include:
- Game Plan (DCMS 2002)
 - DfES: Learning through PE and Sport
 - Choosing Health: Making healthy choices easier (2004)
 - Choosing Activity: A physical activity action plan (2005)
 - Walking & Cycling: An Action Plan (June 2004)
 - PPG17
 - National Framework for Sport (Sport England)
- ix) The key messages from these documents are the need to:
- acknowledge and promote the wider benefits of sport and recreation and physical activity and attempt to increase participation
 - take into account the need to provide new and innovative solutions
 - set targets to achieve wider health benefits, and target resources on priority groups.

Local context

- x) In addition to the national context, the local context of St Albans City and District is most important in determining the detail of the sport and recreation facilities strategy. Relevant generic strategic documents which have been reviewed include:
- the two linked strategies– the Playing Pitch Strategy and the Green Spaces Strategy. Together these documents will help form an important strategic direction for sport and leisure provision within St Albans City and District
 - The District Local Plan Review, adopted 1994
 - Corporate Development Plan
 - A Vision for St Albans and District: Community Strategy, 2003
 - Life and Soul - Cultural Strategy 2005
 - Local Agenda 21
 - Community Safety Strategy 2005 - 2008
 - Herts Sports Partnership Annual Reports
 - Herts Sports Partnership

- The Leisure Strategy (1995)
 - A Leisure Needs Survey of 11-18 year olds (1999).
- xi) The key conclusions drawn out of the local and national context are:
- the strategy should take into account national priorities of increasing participation in sport and physical activity, particularly amongst groups which do not traditionally take part
 - the strategy should consider innovative new solutions to facility development, combining a range of activities, rather than traditional sports centres
 - the profile of sport and recreation in St Albans needs to be highlighted as a contribution to wider corporate objectives
 - there is a largely affluent population in the City and District with a high propensity to take part in sport and recreation, and certain sports such as health and fitness, 5-a-side football and swimming are growing in popularity.

Demographic analysis

- xii) In analysing the need and demand for any new playing pitches it is important to assess the size and composition of the local leisure markets and the impact they will have upon facility usage.
- xiii) Analysis of headline 2001 census data reveals a total population of approximately 129,000, with a relatively slow rate of growth but a high population density relative to the national average. There is a lower than average proportion of ethnic minority groups, with 93.1% of the population being white. Deprivation indices indicate that St Albans is a relatively wealthy district, with no wards in the 50% most deprived in England.

Facility appraisal – Current Position

- xiv) A review of existing provision was undertaken looking at provision in the public, private, voluntary, parish and town Councils. A programme of site visits and a performance review was completed for the main public facilities. The key findings are:
- the five main public facilities are becoming dated and unattractive to a largely affluent and active population
 - staff and energy costs are high, due to older, inefficient facilities with poor design
 - despite this, performance and income generation, particularly at Harpenden Leisure Centre and Westminster Lodge Leisure Centre, is good, indicating high potential for increased income and participation if the condition of the facilities can be addressed
 - the geographic spread is good, although Bricket Wood Sports Centre is inaccessible, particularly for those without access to a car - due to its location away from the population base

- the Council facilities are complemented well by other facilities such as Redbourn Recreation Centre and schools
- the range of facilities is good, with a mix of indoor wet and dry provision, athletics, synthetic turf pitches and specialist facilities
- pools in particular are in need of updating or replacement to accommodate the needs of families and competitive swimming.

Indoor Facilities

- xv) A detailed review of indoor sports facilities was undertaken, looking at the current and required future provision for swimming pools, sports halls, health and fitness, indoor bowls, indoor tennis and community centres.
- xvi) Detailed information concerning the local standards for quality, quantity and accessibility, demand modelling and consultation is set out within section four of this report. Local accessibility standards are summarised in Table E2 below.

Table E2 – Local Accessibility Standards

Facility Type	LOCAL ACCESSIBILITY STANDARD
Swimming Pools	15 minute drive time
Sports Halls	15 minute drive time
Health and Fitness	10 minute drivetime
Indoor Bowls	20 minute drivetime
Indoor Tennis	20 minute drivetime
Community Centres/ Village Halls	15 minute walk time

- xvii) Quantity standards per 1000 of the population were also set for sports halls (51.23m² per 1000 population), swimming pools (10.51m² per 1000 population), health and fitness (20.84 m² per 1000 population).
- xviii) Application of the standards and demand models revealed there is a need for the following key facilities within St Albans City and District:
- a range of sports facilities catering for all age groups and which help to encourage continuing participation in leisure and recreational activities and meet recommended accessibility parameters
 - a good geographical spread of wet and dry sports provision offering specialist facilities as well as enhanced provision of community-based recreation/ meeting space

- additional sports hall facilities spread evenly across the City and District residential areas to improve school and community access (casual and club) to provision
 - enhanced indoor netball provision potentially at school sites in St Albans City and District
 - a competitive swimming venue in the district (25m by 8-lane pool with spectator provision)
 - swimming pool facilities for canoeing and canoe polo
 - replacement provision at Westminster Lodge Leisure Centre, to include a sports hall and competitive swimming venue, either on the same or a nearby site
 - further indoor tennis provision.
- xix) In addition to accessibility and quantity standards, quality standards, looking at the standard of existing provision were set. All facilities, both existing and current should strive towards meeting the quality standards set, which are briefly detailed below, and discussed in more detail in section 6 of the report.

QS1: Quality Standard (Design and Technical) for St Albans City and District

QS1: All new build and refurbishment schemes to be designed in accordance with Sport England Guidance Notes, which provide detailed technical advice and standards for the design and development of sports facilities.

QS2: Quality Standard (Facility Operation and Management) for St Albans City and District

QS2: All leisure providers to follow industry best practice principles in relation to a) Facilities Operation, b) Customer Relations, c) Staffing and d) Service Development and Review. The detail of the internal systems, policies and practices underpinning implementation of these principles will correlate directly to the scale of facility, varying according to the position of the facility within the levels of the established hierarchy.

Outdoor sports facilities

- xx) In addition to considering the current and future provision of indoor sport and recreation facilities, this strategy also looks at the provision of outdoor facilities. There are clear links and overlaps between this Sport and Recreation Facilities Strategy (SRFS), the Green Space Strategy (GSS) and the Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS). Whilst the GSS provides an overview of outdoor sport in the City and District, this strategy provides a more detailed assessment of this type of provision.
- xxi) The demand modelling and consultation undertaken for the sport and recreation facilities strategy revealed that there is a current need for the following outdoor facilities in the City and District:

- a range of sports facilities catering for all age groups and which help to encourage continuing participation in leisure and recreational activities
 - two new Synthetic Turf Pitches, one in the Harpenden area
 - a four-court outdoor netball facility in St Albans to meet the minimum specification for both adult and junior leagues, ideally linked to an indoor facility
 - increased provision of outdoor floodlit courts for both tennis and netball throughout the district on existing sites
 - emphasis on improving existing golf provision, particularly with respect to issues of accessibility to support junior development
 - enhancement of the quality of athletics tracks and ancillary provision.
- xxii) This complements the key findings of the playing pitch strategy. Due to the wide ranging nature of the outdoor sports facilities category, a quantity standard of 2.71 ha per 1000 population was set for broad planning need only. The playing pitch strategy sets a quantity standard of 1.35 ha per 1000 population specifically for football, cricket, rugby and hockey provision.

Water Sports

- xxiii) There are no purpose built watersports centres within St Albans City and District. The nearest facilities are:
- Fairlands Valley Park in Stevenage
 - Willen Lake in Milton Keynes
 - Stanborough Watersports Centre in Welwyn Garden City.
- xxiv) This strategy gives consideration to current and future provision for canoeing, rowing, water skiing and sailing within the city and district, taking into account consultation and current National Governing Body initiatives. Key priorities identified are highlighted below :

Canoeing:

- ensure the availability of indoor training facilities to enable the development of an outdoor activities club, there is believed to be potential for establishment/ hosting of a club at the Westminster Lodge site
- work to raise awareness and increase levels of participation
- emphasis on the establishment of new school-club links to develop increased interest and participation

Rowing

- ensure the availability of indoor training facilities to enable the development of an outdoor activities club

- develop a strategy for supporting volunteers in Hertfordshire Dry Start forms a key element in the ARA NJRP and associated instructors awards are organised to ensure that those running courses have the base of knowledge and skills to run sessions which engage young people and generate enthusiasm for continued participation in the sport
- work to raise awareness of rowing - the launch of the new Sport England funded programme, 'Road to Health', was identified as a means by which to promote indoor rowing since this initiative will fund the establishment of equipment hubs (treadmills, ergometers, bikes) within facilities to support health related activities

Waterskiing

- It was stated that there is a clear deficiency of water ski facilities in the county. British Water Ski consider there to be a case for the development of two cable tow facilities in Hertfordshire and it is recommended that the Council engage with private sector operators to explore potential for facility development within or in close proximity to the City and District, but in the first instance to raise awareness of opportunities and facilitate access to existing nearby facilities

Sailing

- Onboard is a nation-wide programme that is making it easier for young people to go sailing and get involved in local sailing activities by raising awareness, developing local opportunities; encouraging young people and developing more regular club activities. It is suggested that the Council in conjunction with neighbouring authorities explores opportunities to deliver benefits to the local community through involvement in the Onboard scheme.

Neighbourhood Play Areas and Wheeled Sports Provision

- xxv) An assessment of neighbourhood play areas and wheeled sports provision in St Albans City and District indicates that the network of provision for children and young people caters for a range of target age groups and varies greatly in terms of size and type of equipment. The Council is the major provider of these facilities but there is a network of supporting provision under Parish Council ownership and management. This is highlighted further within the greenspaces strategy.
- xxvi) Accessibility and quantity standards set for the provision of play areas (including wheeled sports provision, defined as a Neighbourhood play area) are highlighted in table E3.

Table E3 – Local Provision Standards

Play Area Type	Accessibility Catchment	Quantity Catchment
Neighbourhood Play Area	10 minute walk (0.8)	0.11
Large Local Play Area	10 minute walk (0.8)	0.20
Small Local Play Area	5 minute walk (0.4)	0.01

- xxvii) Application of locally derived standards sought to highlight those priority areas with quantitative deficiencies across different levels of the established hierarchy, with particular emphasis on areas falling outside of the reasonable walk time catchment for these facilities.
- xxviii) There are clear deficiencies in the Hatching end area together with small pockets in the central and southern parts of the district which do not fall within either a 10 minute walk or five minute walk time catchment of any play provision.
- xxix) It was concluded that new provision of wheeled sports provision for teenagers should be developed in close consultation with prospective user groups of this age in local communities and designed in accordance with RoSPA good practice guidance.

Planning policy context

National planning context

- xxx) Planning obligations are typically agreements negotiated between local authorities and developers in the context of granting planning consent. They provide a means to ensure that a proposed development contributes to the creation of sustainable communities, by securing contributions towards the provision of necessary infrastructure and facilities (including sport and leisure facilities) required by local and national planning policies.
- xxxi) The framework for the current system of planning obligations in England is set out in Section 106 (s106) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as substituted by the 1991 Act) and in Department of Environment Circular 1/97: Planning Obligations.
- xxxii) Section 106 provides that anyone with an interest in land may enter into a planning obligation enforceable by the local planning authority. Such an obligation may be created by agreement or by the person with the interest making an undertaking. Such obligations may restrict development or use of the land; require operations or activities to be carried out in, on, under or over the land; require the land to be used in any specified way; or require payments to be made to the authority either in a single sum or periodically.
- xxxiii) Under the new planning system, the legislative framework is provided by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill, 2004 (Sections 46 and 47). This introduces the use of standard charges in addition to the negotiation of planning contributions. There are a number of documents emerging to interpret and provide guidance on the implementation of planning contributions under the new planning system, including the Draft Revised Circular on Planning Obligations (2004).
- xxxiv) Contributions to the provision of leisure facilities is both appropriate and encouraged where the demand from new housing puts an increased pressure on facilities. Although this requirement has statutory support, there is no detailed guidance in terms of calculating the amount that developers should contribute. It is therefore essential that the tests of Circular 1/97 are adhered to and a robust methodology is used.
- xxxv) There are many factors to consider when devising a robust formula. A well-used method of determining developer contributions is through negotiation between the planning authority and developer. Through the nature of negotiation, methodologies for developer contributions can come under scrutiny and gaps and inconsistencies can often be found.

- xxxvi) In the absence of any established methodology that is widely used, PMP propose a developer contribution based on the actual increase in demand from the proposed development and cost of providing a facility to meet that demand. This methodology follows an example from Milton Keynes who have produced a draft Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG). This methodology is also supported by Sport England.
- xxxvii) The methodology uses the Sport England Facility calculator to ascertain the demand for facilities by applying standard demand parameters and measuring this against the population profile. Using this methodology, it was concluded that demand in St Albans City and District is equivalent to:
- 10.51m² of swimming pool provision per 1,000 population
 - 51.23m² of sports hall provision per 1,000 population
 - 20.84m² of health and fitness provision per 1,000 population
- xxxviii) The methodology then multiplies the cost per square metre by the area requirement per 1,000 population and divides this by 1,000 to provide a figure per person, which can be used as a basis for determining developer contributions. A worked example is provided in section 9.
- xxxix) It is considered that this Milton Keynes example provides a robust and up-to-date methodology, ensuring the Council has a sound basis on which to negotiate developer contributions for new development.
- xl) By setting out this methodology in a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), this approach could be applied in all future negotiations. However, it is essential that there is a regular review cycle to allow participation rates and cost information to be updated.
- xli) Several areas requiring further consideration have been highlighted:
- use of calculations based on an adjusted population profile across the 0 to 69 year age brackets (even re-distribution of population above 70 years) to ensure calculated requirements relate directly to each specific development
 - currency of participation data and use of locally derived participation parameters.

Vision and Strategy Framework

- xlii) The vision, aims, objectives and key recommendations for the future provision of sport and recreation facilities in St Albans City and District define the type and range of facilities that should be available to residents, visitors and community groups.
- xliii) To give common purpose and drive future development a vision has been established that is challenging but also achievable:

Our vision

“To enhance the health and wellbeing of everyone by providing quality sport and recreation opportunities at facilities that are inclusive and responsive to the needs of our community.”

xliv) To achieve this vision the strategy identifies a number of key aims and objectives:

Aim 1: To maximise the contribution sport and recreation facilities make to the health and wellbeing of residents and visitors

This will be achieved by:

- a) Developing facility initiatives which increase community participation in sport and active recreation
- b) Creating facility initiatives that help reduce crime, foster a sense of local pride and develop community identity

Aim 2: To enable all residents and visitors to have access to a range of sport and recreation facilities

This will be achieved by:

- a) Providing appropriate quality sport and recreation facilities to meet identified community needs and assist individuals to succeed in sport
- b) Providing new and improved sport and recreation facilities that remove barriers and improve access for:
 - Minority ethnic communities
 - People on low incomes
 - People over the age of sixty five
 - People with disabilities
 - Young people
- c) Improving awareness of sport and recreation facilities through improved marketing and communication campaigns

Aim 3: To develop customer focussed sport and recreation facilities that are capable of delivering the standards our community expects

This will be achieved by:

- a) Improving the quality of the facilities by fostering a culture of excellence and continuous improvement
- b) Providing sport and recreation facilities that are safe for the community
- c) Involving the community in developing and improving sport and recreation facilities

Aim 4: Ensure the delivery of sport and recreation facilities is undertaken in an environmentally sensitive manner

This will be achieved by:

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- a) Ensuring that where appropriate all sport and recreation facilities meet the requirements of Local Agenda 21 and environmental best practice whilst respecting the built and natural environment
- b) Encouraging and promoting innovative, high quality and environmentally sensitive design in all new sport and recreation facility developments

Aim 5: To develop sustainable sport and recreation facilities that contribute to the prosperity of the district

This will be achieved by:

- a) Attracting inward investment into the district through the development of sport and recreation facilities
 - b) Developing sport and recreation events that contribute to the local economy
- xlv) Through the vision, aims and objectives the strategy sets out a clear direction for the development of sport and recreation facilities in the district. However, it suggests that turning these aspirations into reality will not be easy and can only happen through partnership working.

The strategy highlights that every sport and recreation organisation from the public, private and voluntary sector has a role to play and what is important is that all providers work towards the same objectives and the combined contributions maximise the impact of sport and recreation facilities on individuals, communities and the district as a whole.

The strategy uses the vision, aims and objectives to inform the development of specific recommendations for organisations involved in sport and recreation provision across the district. These recommendations are outlined in the table below:

Strategy Recommendations	
R.1	That the Council embraces the role of an advisor and enabler, assisting and supporting other organisations within the City and District and neighbouring areas to provide facilities and sports development programmes aimed at increasing levels of participation.
R.2	Work with agencies including Hertfordshire County Council (Children Schools and Families) to develop a 'community-use' policy to maximise opportunities for use of existing schools, youth centres and privately owned sports and leisure facilities.
R.3	That the Council and local schools should work together with Hertfordshire County Council (Children Schools and Families) to ensure that interested schools achieve Specialist Sports College Status.
R.4	Introduce a policy of rationalisation of provision in areas of surplus or where existing facilities cannot meet local needs and re-investment/ re-provision in areas of current deficiency.
R.5	Agree a framework of provision, which represents a hierarchy of facilities (flagship → specialist → community sports centre → outdoor recreation → local indoor facilities → mobile/outreach). Further community facilities should be provided through additional school facilities – including sports hall facility provision.
R.6	Improve marketing and promotion of leisure facilities and activities.
R.7	Seek to provide a flagship centre in St Albans, on the existing Westminster Lodge site or at a nearby alternative location easily accessible on foot or by public transport from St

Strategy Recommendations

Albans. Undertake a full site options appraisal to identify and assess suitable sites. The flagship centre should include, as a minimum:

- a) 25m eight lane competitive swimming pool with spectator seating
- b) provision for learn to swim and diving, potentially in the same pool with a moveable floor (separate from main pool)
- c) provision for wider pool-based sports (water polo, canoe polo, canoe training, octopush)
- d) six/eight court sports hall (subject to funding/design considerations) with temporary seating for events
- e) multi-use room for aerobics, dance, martial arts and other activities
- f) changing, crèche, bar, function room, catering.

R.8 Explore the partnership funding options to replace Westminster Lodge Leisure Centre. Particular consideration to be given to investment by the private sector under a long term (circa 10 years) management agreement or a longer term (circa 25 years) Public Private Partnership arrangement. Specialist sports centres to be provided in key outlying areas/towns.

R.9 Explore opportunities to work in partnership with neighbouring authorities to provide high quality, accessible facilities for local residents situated at the periphery of the City and District.

R.10 Continue to explore the partnership funding options and partnerships with schools to address the lack of STPs for use by hockey in the Harpenden area.

R.11 Community recreation centres/halls (three/four-court size) to be provided in local areas (within secondary school catchment areas). The Council should support provision of further community facilities through additional school facilities – including sports hall provision – and identify partnership finance in support of funding bids in areas of deficiency.

R.12 Continue to work with other sports providers and county/regional sports governing bodies to attract specialist sports facilities to the district, further raising the profile of the district and facilitating the development of more talented local young sports people to their full performance potential. The Council should explore opportunities to encourage private investment to develop specialist centres. The sports facilities requiring special focus include:

- a) tennis, with the continued development of Batchwood Golf and Tennis Centre as a regional centre of excellence
- b) netball, with a need to identify a suitable site for specialist County/Regional facilities
- c) swimming, with the development of a 25 metre eight-lane pool at Westminster Lodge Leisure Centre for use by competitive clubs and performance swimmers
- d) golf, with further development of Abbey View Golf Club as a Golf Foundation Starter Centre
- e) watersports, with cable tow provision for wakeboarding and introduction to water-

Strategy Recommendations

skiing, sailing and canoeing.

- R.13 That an appraisal is conducted into the future of Bricket Wood Sports Centre, with a view to ending the current arrangement with HSBC and providing alternative community facilities and programmes in the south of the district, centred on areas of population and focused on programmes aimed at current non users and groups traditionally under-represented in sport and recreation.
- R.14 Disseminate information on the Council's newly established 'Quality Standard'.
- R.15 Create an efficient management system for the district's sports centres and pools, which is responsive to the needs of all users.
- R.16 Develop a management information system for leisure centres and sports development, which identifies the social profile of users, enables user and non-user surveys.
- R.17 Consult regularly and frequently with a range of providers and the public, including National Governing Bodies (NGBs), local clubs, user groups, community groups, and specific groups within the community (e.g. low income groups, older people, young people, schools).
- R.18 Identify appropriate sites for the provision of new facilities. Planners to develop policy options for the provision of new facilities, in consultation with the local community, for inclusion in the Council's Development Plan Documents.
- R.19 Extend the sports development service to incorporate specific sports development, assistance and support to NGBs and clubs, coach and volunteer development programmes, and a range of directly provided events and programmes. This could include initiatives such as improved publicity for sports clubs, a sports club website, recruitment programmes for potential coaches, multi-skills sessions/clubs, taster sessions, holiday programmes, events etc.
- R.20 Ensure that sports development in the district places an increased focus on schemes to encourage non-users, for example outreach schemes, sports development initiatives, 'every day' physical activity (cycling, walking, gardening) and school-club link schemes to raise participation amongst traditionally non-active groups.
- R.21 All organisations should commit to working in partnership, through firstly signing up to the vision and objectives in this strategy.
- R.22 In particular there is a need for new forms of partnership between leisure centres, schools and sports development.
- R.23 All agencies to work in partnership to maximise the use of existing sports facilities, including those managed by schools, other educational institutions, the private sector and voluntary clubs and community groups.
- R.24 Opportunities for cross-sector working to address the wider social agenda to be maximised through joint initiatives with PCTs, Connexions, Community Safety Partnership, etc.

Action Plan

- xlvi) Whilst the sport and recreation facilities strategy contains a vision, aims, objectives and recommendations which are applicable to partner agencies and wider stakeholders, the document concludes with an action plan that outlines projects

specifically for St Albans City and District Council to implement over the life of the strategy.

SECTION 1
INTRODUCTION

Background

- 1.1 St Albans City and District Council (referred to in this document as 'the Council') commissioned PMP to produce three inter-linked strategies covering green spaces, playing pitches and sports and recreational facilities. Together, these strategies will guide future provision and management of existing resources in the St Albans area in the context of national policy and local development criteria.
- 1.2 This is the Sport and Recreation Facilities Strategy which:
- analyses the current level of public, private, dual and voluntary sport and recreational provision (quality, quantity and accessibility) within the City and District
 - identifies and evaluates strategic options for enhancing provision
 - provides information to inform decisions and help determine future development proposals in the area and feed into the Development Plan Documents (which are currently being prepared)
 - makes clear recommendations which will then be used to inform the Council's five year action plan.

Strategy objectives and benefits

Scope

- 1.3 The Sport and Recreation Facilities Strategy includes an assessment of the following:
- athletics
 - bowling greens and indoor centres
 - community centres/village halls
 - golf courses
 - health and fitness gyms
 - leisure centres
 - netball courts
 - outdoor water space
 - racquet sports courts
 - sports halls
 - swimming pools
 - wheeled sports parks.
- NB** Playing pitch provision is assessed separately within the Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) and children's play is included within the Green Spaces Strategy (GSS).
- 1.4 For each of the above facility types, the strategy provides answers to the following questions:
- what does the Council provide?
 - what do others provide?
 - what is the quality of the provision?
 - where are the gaps in provision?
 - what needs to be done and what are the priorities?
 - where should resources be targeted?

Why have a strategy?

- 1.5 The strategy is applicable to all providers of sport and recreation, including the district council, educational establishments, the voluntary sector, the private sector, local clubs and community organisations.
- 1.6 The strategy has the potential to help deliver the following **benefits** to the community, the Council and its partners:

For the general public:

- improves access to leisure activities, programmes and a range of facilities, providing a wider and higher quality service
- provides information about the work of the Council and other agencies
- helps to create a sense of pride and belonging through improving leisure services and quality of life in the district
- focuses on the sport and recreational needs of the community and seeks to improve services throughout the district
- enables local people and community groups to contribute to policies for leisure services
- promotes volunteering in cultural activities, benefiting the volunteers and the area
- allows people to progress and improve their skills in particular areas, and encourages lifelong learning
- encourages partnership working to improve services
- helps to ensure the provision of the right facilities in the right place, resulting in quality and accessibility for all.

For voluntary clubs and community organisations:

- provides guidance to groups on “where the local authority is going” thereby helping to focus community views, concerns and support, hopefully leading to more partnerships
- helps to protect facilities and resources used by clubs and voluntary sector leisure organisations
- helps communication between the local authority and voluntary sector
- identifies the important role of the voluntary sector in providing facilities and opportunities to take part in a variety of different activities
- illustrates gaps in current provision and how the voluntary sector could improve quality and quantity of service
- helps to ensure the provision of the right facilities in the right place, resulting in quality and accessibility for all clubs and community organisations.

For the education sector:

- encourages enhanced partnership working between the Council and schools/colleges as well as Hertfordshire County Council
- raises the profile of schools/colleges in the community as a valuable resource, helping to attract more students
- highlights opportunities to increase community use of sports facilities on school/college sites
- provides a documented strategic policy to guide future facility developments and to help improve the transparency of the Council's decision-making processes
- helps to protect facilities and resources used by educational establishments and the wider community
- highlights gaps and identifies how the education sector can improve the quality and quantity of provision by forming an integral part of a local network of leisure facilities
- identifies how the education sector can obtain technical support and information, lottery partnerships, grant aid, etc.

For statutory agencies such as the police, Health Authority, Sport England and the Countryside Agency:

- outlines direction and priorities
- defines and clarifies the roles of the various agencies in providing opportunities in the area
- encourages partnership solutions to issues which affect each agency
- encourages communication, co-operation and a common sense of direction
- allows time saving exchange of information, data and views.

For the Council:

- offers clear guidance on the preparation of leisure and sport policies for inclusion in the new development plan documents for the district
- improves the profile of leisure services and demonstrates how they contribute to economic, social and environmental issues in the community
- acts as a framework for performance review
- improves the working links between traditional leisure services and other services such as education, social services, housing, transport and health
- acts as a basis for gaining funding from organisations such as: Lottery Funding, European Union funding, Private Sponsorship, Regional funding: and creates a clear vision shared by these funding agencies
- links with Department for Culture Media and Sport, Department for Education and Skills and Office of the Deputy Prime Minister agendas.

Methodology

- 1.7 This strategy has been prepared through consultation with a range of agencies and it is important that all stakeholders continue to be involved in the ongoing implementation of this strategy.
- 1.8 The table below describes the various tools used during the preparation of this strategy and how they have helped the process.

Methodology used to assess facility supply and demand

Method	Supply analysis	Demand analysis
(a) Desk research	Information relating to provision/quality of existing facility provision.	Council, clubs, governing bodies, etc. Information relating to demand/need for existing/additional facilities.
(b) Consultation (internal and external)	Confirmation of the range and quality of facilities provided.	Feedback on facility needs/demands based on work with local clubs/providers/other stakeholder groups.
(c) Household survey	Assesses current usage of sport and recreation facilities and provides feedback on the quantity, quality and accessibility of existing provision.	Identifies priorities for new or improved provision to satisfy local needs.
(d) Club survey (including postal survey and follow-up telephone survey)	Identifies facilities currently used and quality of provision.	Feedback on priorities for improvements to existing facilities and additional facility needs which exist.
(e) School survey	Identifies facilities currently provided/used and feedback on quality of provision.	Feedback on priorities for improvements to existing facilities, additional facility needs which exist and current demand for the facilities from clubs.
(f) Facility audit/research (including site visits, telephone consultations and PI analysis)	Detail of level and quality of existing facility provision. Analysis of the current performance of the centres.	Priorities for improvement/redevelopment.
(g) Demand modelling	Provides context for facility audit.	Indicates shortfalls/surpluses of major sports facilities.
(h) Demographic analysis	Provides baseline data against which the adequateness of supply can be assessed.	Defines the potential leisure market.

(a) Desk research

1.9 The desk research undertaken incorporated a review of background documentation and data sources including relevant Council strategies/reports/plans (as outlined in Section Two of this strategy), governing body facility strategies/development plans, league handbooks/development information, local club development plans, Community Leisure Databases, *Mapping the Future™* facility databases, and associated County Development Plans.

(b) Consultation

1.10 A comprehensive consultation exercise has been undertaken with the following internal and external consultees. A full list is shown at Appendix A.

Internal (St Albans City and District Council)	External
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leisure department • Sports development section, (Community Leisure) • Planning department • Leisure Connection Ltd • Members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • County Council officers • National Governing Bodies (NGBs) • Facility managers • Parish and Town Councils • Local clubs and leagues • Local schools.

1.11 A Key Issues Paper was produced for discussion at a group workshop attended by primary stakeholders. A copy of this paper is included at Appendix B.

(c) Household survey

1.12 5000 self-completion postal questionnaires were sent out across the City and District. Each household was selected at random and the person in the household with the next birthday (but over the age of 10) was asked to complete the questionnaire. 1035 questionnaires were returned yielding a response rate of 21%. This response rate gives a statistically significant 95% confidence level. A copy of the household questionnaire can be found in Appendix C.

1.13 The returned household questionnaires have been analysed following entry on to an Access database.

(d) Club survey

1.14 In total, a postal questionnaire was sent to 127 sports clubs across 17 separate sports (see Appendix D for respondents) which included:

- all clubs in the St Albans Sports Directory (provided by Community Leisure)
- additional club contacts provided by the Council.

SECTION ONE - INTRODUCTION

- 1.15 Additional clubs were identified through a review of websites, league handbooks, County Association handbooks, booking records, the local press, telephone directories, consultation with governing bodies/league secretaries, etc.
- 1.16 All non-responding clubs were sent reminder notices and responses were received from the following 23 clubs:
- 6 bowls clubs
 - 5 tennis clubs
 - 3 netball clubs
 - 1 athletics club
 - 1 badminton club
 - 1 basketball club
 - 1 cycling club
 - 1 darts club
 - 1 diving club
 - 1 swimming club
 - 1 squash club
 - 1 table tennis club.
- 1.17 This represents an overall response rate of 18%, which is relatively poor compared to the average response rate for postal surveys of 25%. A further four clubs returned an incomplete questionnaire stating that, due to the facilities used, the survey was of no relevance to the club.
- 1.18 A broad mix of consultation methods has been used to build up a profile of the needs on a sport-by-sport basis. Any data provided through the club survey is therefore assimilated with information from wider telephone consultations with NGBs, local leagues and sports clubs as well as surveys conducted in support of the Playing Pitch Strategy, to ensure that a robust evidence base substantiates strategy recommendations.

(e) Schools survey

- 1.19 Surveys were sent to 73 schools within the district. 12 postal surveys were returned, a poor response rate of 16%. All non-responding schools were sent a reminder. The remaining 84% of schools were contacted by telephone for the PPS, and information on sports facilities was gathered.

(f) Facility audit

- 1.20 Existing and planned sport and recreational facilities within the City and District and a five kilometre 'buffer zone' were identified using the following data sources:
- PMP internal databases
 - Active Places register
 - existing Council audit information
 - consultation with neighbouring local authorities
 - commercial operator websites
 - information provided by national governing bodies
 - www.upmystreet.com
 - www.yell.com
 - www.swimmersguide.com
 - www.runtrack.dir
 - www.health-club.net
 - www.thefitmap.co.uk
 - www.gymuser.co.uk

Quantitative Assessment

- 1.21 The existing facility mix was verified via a series of telephone consultations. Data collected included:
- name
 - address and postcode
 - telephone number
 - type of facilities
 - size of facilities
 - pricing structure.
- 1.22 The 'useful area' of indoor recreation facilities (e.g. number of badminton courts, area of water space, number of indoor tennis courts) was audited and the *Mapping the Future*TM software package was used to plot indoor facilities as point data and present a visual illustration of the geographical distribution of provision.
- 1.23 This data was used to inform demand modelling calculations - see sub-section (g) Demand Modelling below.

Qualitative assessment

- 1.24 A number of site visits were undertaken to further supplement consultation feedback relating to the quality of existing facility provision. Sites assessed included:
- Batchwood Golf & Tennis Centre
 - Bricket Wood Sports Centre
 - Harpenden Sports Centre and Swimming Pool
 - London Colney Adventure World
 - Redbourn Recreation Centre
 - Westminster Lodge Leisure Centre
 - Francis Bacon School.

(g) Demand modelling

- 1.25 Our in-house demand model has been developed in accordance with the principles underpinning Sport England's Sports Facility Calculator. The model uses published participation rates to calculate the level of peak time demand for sports halls (as badminton courts), swimming pools (as water area), health and fitness (as fitness stations) and indoor bowls (as rinks).
- 1.26 Drawing on the quantitative data collected during the audit stage, surpluses or deficiencies in current levels of provision have been calculated. The demand modelling calculations use 2001 Census data and are based on population projections for 2005 and 2010.
- 1.27 This supply and demand assessment provides one source of evidence on which to set local standards for provision. When leading to the development of recommendations for the retention, enhancement and/or rationalisation of indoor facility provision, it is critical that these findings are not viewed in isolation but are considered within the wider context of conclusions drawn in relation to accessibility, quality and usage.
- 1.28 The Playing Pitch Strategy constitutes a district-wide playing pitch assessment, taking into account sports pitches across both rural and urban areas of the district. The supply and demand assessment is based on Sport England's Playing Pitch Methodology (PPM), which calculates levels of under/over supply.

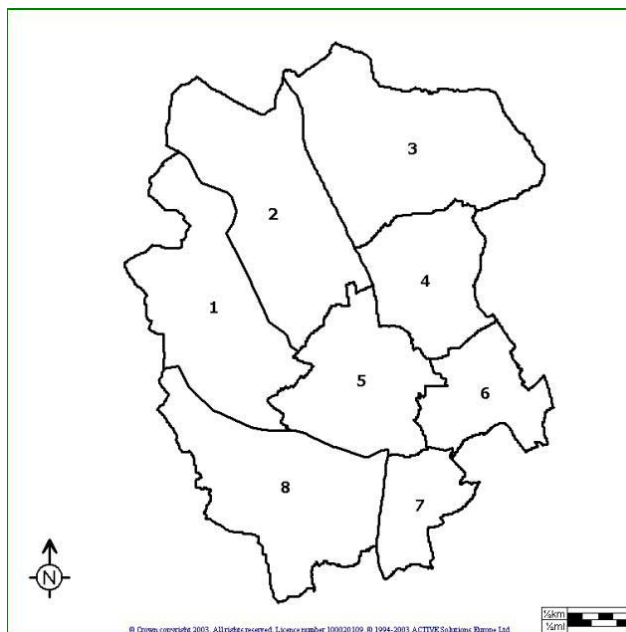
SECTION ONE - INTRODUCTION

- 1.29 There are no nationally recognised demand models for other sports such as tennis and golf, but a combination of modelling, mapping, analysis of participation trends and results of consultation have been used to identify supply and demand and highlight shortfalls or surpluses of provision for all other sports covered in this strategy.

Analysis areas

- 1.30 Indoor sport and recreation provision has been assessed on a district-wide basis with consideration also given to facilities in neighbouring areas. The provision of playing pitches and children's play has been analysed on both a district-wide basis, and at a lower level, using eight specifically defined analysis or sub areas.
- 1.31 These sub areas take into account both parish boundaries, and physical boundaries within the district including the main railway line, motorways and primary roads etc. They are illustrated in Figure 1.1 below.

Figure 1.1 Analysis Areas in St Albans City and District



Sub Area	Name
1	Redbourn and surrounds
2	West Harpenden and surrounds
3	East Harpenden and Wheathampstead
4	Sandridge
5	Central
6	Colney Heath
7	London Colney
8	Park Street and St Stephens

- 1.32 The central urban area of St Albans is analysed as one area. This area includes the wards of St Peters, Clarence, Ashley, Batchwood, Verulam, Sopwell and Cunningham. The north of the district is split into three, (Analysis Areas 1, 2 and 3) using the barriers of the main railway line and the A5183.
- 1.33 The south of the district has been split using the boundaries of the M10 and the main railway line. The parishes of London Colney and Colney Heath, which in many respects act as settlements that are separate from the rest of the district, are treated as two distinct analysis areas. London Colney is separated from the central and St Stephens analysis areas by the main railway line. The Sandridge area is separated from the others using the central ward boundaries, the parish boundaries and the main railway line.

(h) Demographic analysis

- 1.34 In analysing the need and demand for any new sport and recreation facilities it is important to assess the size and composition of the local leisure markets and the impact they will have upon facility usage. An analysis of the overall 2001 Census data is contained in Section Two.

Report structure

- 1.35 This strategy is set out in eleven parts:
- **Executive Summary** provides a synopsis of the strategy for broad circulation, highlighting key findings, conclusions and recommendations
 - **Section One** sets out the methodology for the project.
 - **Section Two** provides the context for the strategy. It examines national, regional and local strategies and what they mean for this document, and analyses the demographic and local trends.
 - **Section Three** describes the current situation in the District regarding sport and recreation. It describes the range of organisations that currently provide sport and recreation facilities, and comments on facilities currently available.
 - **Section Four** focuses on indoor sport and recreation facilities and analyses the needs of the district, based on the consultation undertaken as part of the strategy preparation and the supply and demand analysis.
 - **Section Five** sets out a quality standard for indoor sport and recreation facilities in the City and District which has been set using national benchmarks, Sport England Technical Design Guidance Notes and Quest Best Practice Standards.
 - **Section Six** focuses on outdoor sport and recreation facilities and analyses the needs of the district, based on the consultation undertaken as part of the strategy preparation and the supply and demand analysis.
 - **Section Seven** examines potential to increase participation in water sports activities across the City and District and opportunities for facility development.
 - **Section Eight** focuses on neighbourhood play and wheeled sport provision, examining the needs of the district, based on a comprehensive audit of provision and consultation with local residents and other stakeholders.
 - **Section Nine** assesses the planning policy context and uses good practice principles to inform derivation of a formula driving the calculation of developer contributions in the City and District
 - **Section Ten** sets out a vision, key objectives and recommendations for the future provision of sport and recreation facilities in St Albans City and District. It defines the type and range of facilities that should be available to residents, visitors and community groups.
 - **Section Eleven** outlines an action plan showing how the Council intends to help deliver key elements of the strategy.

SECTION 2

CONTEXT

St Albans now: context

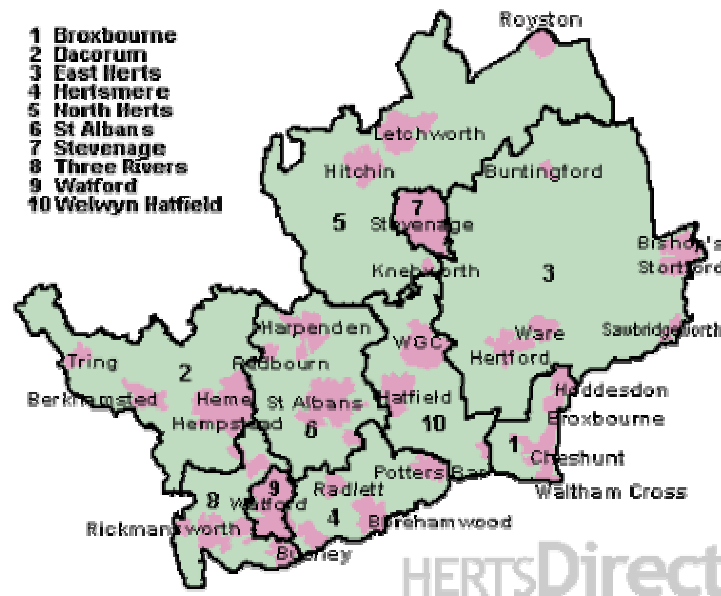
2.1 This Section sets the background context for the Sport and Recreation Facilities Strategy. It contains the following information:

- key facts about St Albans City and District
- a review of national strategies relevant to sport and recreation in the City and District
- a review of local strategies that will impact upon this strategy
- an analysis of demographic and participation trends, comparing the City and District with the national picture.

Location and economy

2.2 St Albans City and District is one of 10 districts in Hertfordshire, and is bordered by Bedfordshire (Luton) to the North, North Herts to the North East, Welwyn Hatfield to the East, Watford and Hertsmere to the South, Three Rivers to the South West, and Dacorum to the West.

Figure 2.1 Map of Hertfordshire



2.3 St Albans is ideally located for easy access to London and the Midlands, with excellent road, rail and bus services. It is:

- 14 miles north of London
- easily accessible from the M1, A1, M25
- located on a mainline railway into London with access to Thameslink services
- served by comprehensive bus and national coach network links.

- 2.4 The City and District has a reputation as being an affluent and prosperous area, with highly qualified residents. At the close of 1999, unemployment was 0.9%, the lowest in Hertfordshire, much lower than the London rate of 7.0% and the national figure of 5.9%. By 2003, unemployment had risen to 1%, (the London Colney area experiencing the largest increase) in comparison to 1.4% in Hertfordshire, and 2.4% nationally. House prices are among the highest in the UK, and the levels of attainment in education are also high compared to national averages: GCSE results for City and District schools show 63% of pupils achieving 5 A* - C grades, compared with a national average of around 46%. In the working population, 33% are employed in professional and managerial occupations.
- 2.5 The close proximity to London, and in particular the excellent rail and road communications, has a significant effect on economic activity. The City and District has a highly skilled workforce and ranks highest in the county. Although a large proportion of the population (around 51%) travel out of the City and District to work, there is a distinct and thriving local business community, which provides over 46,000 jobs, approximately 42% of which are filled by inward commuters.
- 2.6 The key characteristics of the local economy have changed markedly in recent years. The recession of the early 1990s left its mark on the City and District. The closure of large manufacturing operations, such as Marconi, Murphy and Brooke Bond has, over recent years, resulted in a significant shift away from manufacturing industry and employment concentrated in large operations. There has been a compensatory increase in retail and office accommodation, but there still appears to be a shortage of office space.

National strategic review

- 2.7 Despite the explosion of local authority provision during the 1970's and the recent private health and fitness boom, participation in sport and recreation has remained static at about 33% of the adult population. Generally, there has been increased pressure on local authority budgets and there is an ageing stock of expensive facilities that are not suited to meet the needs of new activities and participants.

Game Plan: a strategy for delivering Government's sport and physical activity objectives (DCMS/Strategy Unit, December 2002)

- 2.8 Game Plan is the key national document that sets out the strategy for addressing these issues. It is the Government's long-term vision for increasing participation and high performance in sport. It:
- provides facts about sport and physical activity in the UK and where problems lie
 - provides evidence of the benefits of sport and physical activity
 - explores a vision of sport and physical activity in 2020
 - gives recommendations and sets targets for participation, high performance sport and mega sporting events.
- 2.9 ***Game Plan's*** remit is wider than sport alone and recognises the link between physical activity and improving health and the importance of focussing on young people. Major investment has and will continue to be directed into schools through the PE, School Sport and Club Links Strategy (PESSCL) to drive forward achievement of Game Plan's objectives.

SECTION TWO - CONTEXT

- 2.10 The report also highlights the need to target resources in particular towards those who live in economically disadvantaged areas in order to encourage participation. The report calls for greater emphasis to be placed on partnership working for the funding of and delivery of sport and physical activity at a local and regional level.
- 2.11 The long term vision of **Game Plan** is:
- “by 2020 to increase significantly levels of sport and physical activity, particularly among disadvantaged groups, and to achieve sustained levels of success in international competition”***
- 2.12 The plan gives details of how over £2 billion Government and Lottery money will be going into sport in the next three years. The aims of the document are to:
- encourage mass participation culture, with a target of achieving 70% of the population active (currently 30%)
 - enhance international success.

What does this mean for St Albans City and District?

The impact of Game Plan on this strategy is that it should:

- provide new and innovative solutions
- acknowledge the wider benefits of sport and recreation
- set targets to achieve wider health benefits from sport and recreation
- target resources on priority groups - children and young people, women, older people, and economically deprived neighbourhoods
- seek to provide innovative refurbishment solutions required through wider partnerships
- provide for inter-dependent networks of facilities that work locally
- consider multi sport facilities (e.g. 5-a-side, indoor tennis, skate boarding, swimming pool, crèche, internet café, local resource centre)
- seek to extend connections with health, education, community development and youth
- have a robust monitoring and evaluation process, with success evaluated against:
 - the impact on participation
 - a cost/benefit analysis
 - the “fit” with objectives such as reduced crime, social cohesion, etc.

Learning through PE and Sport: A guide to the Physical Education, School Sport and Club Links Strategy (March 2003)

- 2.13 The Prime Minister launched the PESSCL strategy in October 2002, which is being delivered by the DfES and the DCMS through eight programmes. This guide emphasises the importance of PE and sport in schools (curricular and extracurricular) and set out three-year aims for achievement of the strategy through joint working with children, parents, schools, local authorities, NGBs and sports clubs.
- 2.14 Key themes of the guide include:
- schools as a community resource
 - 'lifelong learning'
 - extended schools programme.

What does this mean for St Albans City and District?

In the light of this document, the strategy for the district should consider:

- opening up of school sports facilities for community use
- joint working between the Council, Hertfordshire County Council Children, Schools and Families and other local partners with clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

Sport England – Making England an Active and Successful Sporting Nation (2004)

- 2.15 This document highlights the lack of increased participation since the 1970s and the fact that budgetary pressures have made it difficult for the public sector to update the ageing stock of facilities. Facilities are expensive to maintain while not suited to meet the needs of new activities and participants.
- 2.16 Following the publication of ***Game Plan***, Sport England has undergone organisational changes and a new vision has evolved. This vision is underpinned by three key objectives:
- opportunities to play in sport
 - opportunities to stay in sport
 - opportunities to achieve success in sport.

What does this mean for St Albans City and District?

- more emphasis needs to be placed on sport and physical activity within schools and development of school-club links
- new and innovative solutions are required such as multi sport facilities (e.g. 5-a-side, skate boarding, swimming pool, crèche, internet café, local resource centre)
- facilities are needed in connection with health, education, community development and youth.

Choosing Health: Making healthy choices easier (2004)

2.17 The Choosing Health White Paper emphasises that the 21st century citizen should actively look towards a healthier approach to life. By listening to people's views and taking into account the realities of lifestyles, three core principles towards making healthy choices easier have emerged:

1. Informed Choice – people able to make their own decisions
2. Personalisation – support for individuals
3. Working together – effective partnerships.

2.18 The consultation process also identified the following overarching priorities:

- reducing the number of people who smoke
- reducing obesity and improving diet and nutrition
- increasing exercise
- encouraging and supporting sensible drinking
- improving sexual health
- improving mental health.

2.19 As consumers the choices we make can affect our health; the Government White Paper aims to set out a modern strategy encompassing access to and quality of information. Key messages from this document include:

- supporting children at a young age, by providing accessible health and social care, puts them on the right path for the future.
- health should be seen as a way of life – providing people with the tools to make informed lifestyle choices.

Choosing Activity: A physical activity action plan (2005)

2.20 The Government plans to encourage and co-ordinate the action of a range of departments and organisations to promote increased participation in physical activity across England.

SECTION TWO - CONTEXT

2.21 The aim of the plan is to promote activity for all, in line with the Chief Medical Officers recommendations – at least five times a week.

2.22 The key outcomes of the action plan can be summarised as:

- improve information and raise awareness of the benefits of activity
- support activity in the community by addressing barriers such as safety, cost and locality
- support activity in early years and schools and improve community access to school facilities
- support and encourage everyday activities like walking and cycling.

Walking & Cycling: An Action Plan (June 2004)

2.23 The Department for Transport action plan establishes a long-term plan to counter-act the modern preference for other forms of transport. The plan sets out a framework through which sustainable travel should be encouraged on the basis of the benefits that walking and cycling can bring to people's health and the transport system.

2.24 The action plan comprises the following four objectives:

- improving the walking and cycling environment
- better facilities for walking and cycling
- influencing travel behaviour
- inspiring people to take action.

2.25 The key outcomes are:

- new and improved quality of cycle routes and pedestrianised areas
- an increase in the spend on cycling and walking per hour, or in personnel devoted to manage them.

What does this mean for St Albans City and District?

The Government White Paper and the two outlined action plans should encourage the Council to:

- promote the benefits of healthy lifestyles
- encourage local residents to incorporate physical activity into their everyday routines
- improve provision of walking and cycling paths and ensure that routes are safe and secure.

Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (Planning for Open Space Sport and Recreation, July 2002) and its Companion Guide (September 2002)

- 2.26 Planning Policy Guidance Notes set out the Government's national policies on different aspects of planning.
- 2.27 PPG17 states that *"the government expects all local authorities to carry out assessments of needs and audits of open space and sports and recreational facilities"*.
- 2.28 Well designed and implemented planning policies for open space, sport and recreation are fundamental to delivering broader Government objectives, which include:
- supporting an urban renaissance
 - supporting a rural renewal
 - promotion of social inclusion and community cohesion
 - health and well being
 - promoting more sustainable development.
- 2.29 The policy guidance highlights the requirement for local authority decisions regarding open space, sport and recreation to be informed by local needs assessments and an audit of existing provision. Such audits should incorporate qualitative, quantitative and accessibility considerations as well as the overall non-monetary value of the land including the level of use. National standards are no longer considered to meet local needs, although they may be used as benchmarks.
- 2.30 Other changes in this planning policy document compared to previous policies are:
- the definition of open space should be taken to mean all open space of public value, including not just land, but also areas of water such as rivers, canals and lakes, which offer important opportunities for sport and recreation
 - a greater emphasis is placed on qualitative considerations – this is particularly important as it will allow local authorities to identify potential for increased use through better design, management and/or maintenance of open space, sport and recreation
 - it advocates the setting of local standards appropriate to the local area rather than assessment by national standards although these can be used as benchmarks. The Government believes that national standards are inappropriate, as they do not take into account the demographics of an area, the specific needs of residents and the extent of built development
 - it provides further guidance on the constituent elements of open space typologies
 - it clearly acknowledges the multiple functions that open spaces can perform.

SECTION TWO - CONTEXT

- 2.31 The policy guidance sets out priorities for local authorities in terms of:
- assessing needs and opportunities – undertaking audits of open space, sport and recreational facilities
 - setting local standards
 - maintaining an adequate supply of open space
 - planning for new open space.
- 2.32 The Companion Guide sets out the process for undertaking local assessments of needs and audits of provision. It also:
- indicates how councils can establish the needs of local communities and apply provision standards
 - promotes a consistent approach across varying types of open space, sport and recreation facilities.
- 2.33 Sport and recreation is not formally defined for the purposes of PPG17 although the guidance states that assessments of need and audits should be undertaken and should include assessments of swimming pools, sports halls and leisure centres, bowls facilities, indoor tennis centres, community centres and village halls.

What does this mean for St Albans City and District?

PPG17 supports the approach taken within this strategy to:

- undertake a local needs assessment
- consider community need and current provision of a range of sport and recreation facilities
- set local standards for the future provision of sport and recreation facilities.

Local strategic review

St Albans City and District Council Corporate Plan 2005-06

- 2.34 The Council's vision, set out in the 2005/06 Corporate Plan, is:

“To preserve and enhance the distinctive character of St Albans City and District, making it an outstanding place to live, work and to visit, where everyone enjoys a range of quality and efficient services in a progressive, caring and environmentally concerned community.”

2.35 There are five corporate aims underpinning this vision:

Aim 1: To build a community that is open, fair and inclusive

Aim 2: To work in partnership for the health and well being of the community

Aim 3: To cherish and promote our heritage, arts and culture

Aim 4: To safeguard the environment

Aim 5: To ensure the District is a desirable place in which to live and work

2.36 The Council recognises the need to work in partnership to meet community need, and outlines its commitment to work in partnership with the County Council, the police, NHS, voluntary and community groups.

2.37 A number of priority actions have been identified which relate to the improvement, management and use of open space, specifically protecting and enhancing the environment, improving local provision and encouraging healthy lifestyles:

- working with partners to improve community safety and reduce anti-social behaviour - producing a Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy for 2005/08
- developing and delivering healthy living projects - initiating a healthy walks programme and appointing a health and physical well-being outreach officer
- developing activities for children and young people - creating an innovative toddlers' splash park in Verulamium Park
- improving the River Ver and Verulamium Park - publishing results of the preliminary application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for financial support to improve Verulamium Park, the River Ver and the lakes
- increasing the provision of dedicated cycling routes - by exploring and publishing results of a feasibility study for a north/south and east/west cycle route across Verulamium Park
- preserving parks and green spaces - by undertaking improvements to Clarence Park pavilion and enhancing and maintaining the Alban Way, Nicky Line and Lea Valley Walk green access routes
- improving children's playing facilities - by developing a new play area at Sandringham Crescent, St Albans.

City and District of St Albans: District Local Plan, adopted 1994

2.38 The early stages of preparation of new style Development Plan Documents (DPDs) are currently underway and will lead to the replacement of the adopted Local Plan. The Sport and Recreation Facilities Strategy, Playing Pitch Strategy and the Green Spaces Strategy will provide essential background information which will inform strategic policy formulation and development control decisions.

2.39 District Plan Policy 91 provides overall guidance on the location of leisure facilities, and indicates that:

“New leisure proposals and extensions to existing facilities will not normally be permitted unless they are acceptable in terms of location, access, car parking, environmental impact and safety.”

- 2.40 The plan states the Council’s intention to increase and improve the provision of indoor facilities in areas not served by existing sports provision, both through its own projects and encouraging new provision.
- 2.41 In addition, it was the intention of the Council to continue to investigate and promote joint provision and dual use of educational and other leisure facilities to promote the development of multi-purpose buildings for leisure use.
- 2.42 In terms of guidance regarding the location and development of playing pitches, the Council accepted that playing space should be provided to meet the NPFA target of 2.4 hectares per 1,000 population and that this space should be distributed within the open space hierarchy to meet the needs of all age groups. Further development of this policy is contained in the Playing Pitch Strategy.
- 2.43 Although at the time of production total acreage of existing playing space within the district met the NPFA target, there were areas with shortages of certain types of sports provision. New pitches to help overcome perceived shortages and meet future needs were therefore proposed, including Crabtree Fields, Harpenden.
- 2.44 The plan states that existing recreational open space should normally be retained. It also sets provision standards for the district. These include:

Type of Open Space	Size Range	Catchment (Maximum distance from homes)
District Park	Over 20ha	2 miles
Local Park	2-20ha	0.75 miles
Small Local Park	0.8-2ha	0.25 miles
Children’s Play Area	0.4-0.8ha	0.25 miles
Toddlers’ Play Space	20m ² – 100m ²	Less than 200m

- 2.45 The plan identifies potential areas of new open space in areas where there are deficiencies, or where provision is needed for new housing.

Community Strategy, produced by the Local Strategic Partnership for St Albans and District, 2003

2.46 The Community Strategy has been produced with the aim (among others) of:

“Developing a district where everyone can enjoy and have access to learning, leisure and the arts regardless of their age, ability or ethnic background.”

2.47 A number of priorities have been identified. The priorities which are particularly relevant to leisure include:

- improving health and well-being by increasing participation for all groups in sport and leisure activities
- developing sports and leisure facilities in partnership across the district
- encouraging schools and communities to work together more closely.

Life and Soul – St Albans City and District Cultural Strategy (2005)

2.48 The St Albans City and District Cultural Strategy has been influenced and integrated with a number of other strategies. It sets out a framework for the provision of culture in the district that seeks to:

- promote a sense of cultural well-being
- advocate the benefits of cultural activities
- focus on the needs and aspirations of residents and visitors
- ensure equity and access to cultural activities for everyone
- identify key priorities for action and improvement
- develop links to other strategies to promote partnership working and facilitate change
- act as a lever and rationale for gaining funding from external agencies.

2.49 The strategy highlights the important characteristics of the district and establishes a clear vision for the future development of culture. It sets out a series of strategic objectives, which are to be achieved through close partnership working.

2.50 Sport and recreation facilities are key vehicles for achieving these objectives which include:

- enabling all residents and visitors to have access to range of cultural opportunities
- maximising the contribution culture makes to the health, wellbeing and safety of everyone
- protecting and enhancing the environment and heritage
- developing a sustainable cultural economy.

Working Toward Tomorrow – Local Agenda 21 Strategy

- 2.51 The Local Agenda 21 Strategy sets benchmarks for existing and future environmental policies, providing a framework for the Council to express its objectives, programmes and priorities for sustainable actions and development. The strategy provides a context for decision making on environmental and social issues.
- 2.52 Vision statements and targets for environmental improvement and partnership working are set for seven key areas:
- awareness raising and education
 - lifestyle
 - energy, water and air quality
 - nature conservation
 - economic development
 - transport
 - waste.
- 2.53 The focus on sustainability and environmental improvement should be a key theme in the development and management of sport and leisure facilities.

St Albans City and District Community Safety Strategy 2005 - 2008

- 2.54 The strategy sets out the strategic priorities for the St Albans City and District Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership addressing both national priorities and areas of local concern. It considers both reactive and preventative measures that will be undertaken by the partnership over the next three years.
- 2.55 The four overriding strategic priorities are:
- reduce crime
 - reduce anti social behaviour
 - reduce harm caused to communities by drugs
 - build community confidence.
- 2.56 These are supported by four cross cutting areas of work all of which contribute to the achievement of these strategic priorities. Sport and recreation facilities can play an important role in the achievement of these objectives.

Herts Sports Partnership

- 2.57 Herts Sports Partnership (HSP) is one of 45 county sport partnerships in the UK. HSP has an open membership which includes individuals, clubs, county governing bodies of sport, local authorities, Hertfordshire County Council, University of Hertfordshire, English Federation for Disability Sport, Youth Sports Trust, Sport England, and many others. HSP was formed in January 2004 following a merger of Herts Active Sports and the Herts Sports Forum.

2.58 The key aim is to increase participation in sport and physical recreation throughout Hertfordshire, through development of clubs, coaches, officials and volunteers, and by providing a single voice for sport in Hertfordshire. The Partnership has a small core team of professionals whose key role is to deliver the Herts Active Sports programme.

Previous strategies produced for the Council

2.59 The two main documents relevant to this strategy are:

- The Leisure Strategy (1995)
- A Leisure Needs Survey of 11-18 year olds (1999)

2.60 The key recommendations made by these documents were for the Council to:

- take on an active enabling role
- build links with other agencies
- make provision for young people a priority
- use Section 106 agreements
- provide a sports hall at Westminster Lodge Leisure Centre
- create websites and information for young people
- use leisure boards in schools
- make outreach presentations
- introduce taster courses
- provide a summer circular bus route
- create a Youth Forum
- employ a Young People Development Officer.

Population and participation trends

Demographic analysis

2.61 In analysing the need and demand for any new sport and recreation facilities it is important to assess the size and composition of the local leisure markets and the impact they will have upon facility usage.

2.62 We have analysed the 2001 Census data and also produced a Sport and Leisure Potential report, examining the local population's propensity to take part in a variety of different sports.

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- 2.63 The propensity to participate is identified using a representative sample derived from Continental Research's Million Plus Panel. This panel comprises a pool of over two million UK residents and holds over 3,000 lifestyle, demographic and purchasing details. This panel is a representative sample of the Experian Ltd (ICD) Lifestyle database, which has in excess of 12 million records. Those respondents who indicated that they are likely to participate in a particular activity represent those with the propensity to participate, rather than actual participation figures. The study asks what activities people would like to do, rather than what activities they currently do.
- 2.64 The full Sport and Leisure Potential Report is in Appendix E. A summary of the results of the analysis of Census figures and the Sport and Leisure Potential Report is in Table 2.1 and Table 2.2 below.

Table 2.1 Demographic analysis

Demographic Indicator	Impact on facility usage
The total district population is 129,005. This population has grown by 2.2% since the 1991 Census.	There is a large potential user base for leisure facilities within the district.
The proportion of people aged below 25 is below the national average, however there is a larger proportion of middle-aged people.	Young people have a high propensity to participate in sport and leisure activities. There is a need to cater for the needs of middle-aged residents.
Unemployment is below the national average at around 1% compared to 3.4% nationally.	People with large amounts of disposable income have the propensity to participate in sport and leisure.
Only 14.8% of households do not have a car compared to 26.8% nationally and 42.8% of households have access to two or more cars.	Although mobility is good within the district, there are a number of households who do not have access to a car and therefore good public transport links need to be maintained.
Only 30.7% of the population have no interest in sport compared to 35.4% nationally (see Appendix E).	The population of the district has a high propensity to participate, and it will therefore be important to ensure that facilities are able to cater for this high demand.
Deprivation Indices produced by the Government (Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000) support earlier conclusions that St Albans City and District is a relatively wealthy area. There are no wards that fall within the highest 25% of deprived wards in the country. The most deprived ward in the district is Sopwell, although 50% of wards in the country are more deprived than Sopwell.	People with large amounts of disposable income have a high propensity to participate in sport and leisure.

Participation trends –national and local

2.65 Trends in some of the key sports covered by this strategy are outlined below:

Table 2.2 Key sport participation trends and local impact

	Key facts and trends – national	Comparison of St Albans to national picture	Implication for facility provision
Swimming	<p>Research by RSL and the National Survey of Young People and Sport revealed that swimming remains the most popular participation sport amongst adults and children. Over 15% of adults and 50% of young people take part on a regular basis.</p> <p>‘Provision for swimming’, Sport England’s swimming strategy, identifies several growth factors which include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the requirement of the National Curriculum is likely to boost the proportion of children who can swim by the age of 11 by a third – it is therefore reasonable to expect that existing participation rates will rise by the same proportion the increased promotion of sport is likely to generate increased interest in swimming, as the UK’s most popular sport there is successful promotion of the swimming habit amongst adults. 	<p>Propensity to participate in swimming in the district is higher than the national average, with 24.3% of the population expressing an interest, compared to 23% nationally.</p> <p>However, at present St Albans has a low number of swims per 1,000 population.</p>	<p>There is steady demand for swimming facilities and it is important to ensure that there are sufficient quality facilities to enable this level of interest and popularity of the sport to continue.</p> <p>This research points to a high likelihood of increasing demand for swimming facilities in the district.</p> <p>The current low number of swims can be partly explained by inadequate measuring systems but also points to a lack of quality swimming facilities, which must be addressed in future provision.</p>
Health and Fitness	<p>Consultation and research has indicated that the main complaint against the industry is the cost of membership. Research conducted for the FIA found that in most clubs, monthly membership fees had not increased since last surveyed in 2001.</p>	<p>The local population has a high propensity to attend gyms.</p> <p>The affluence of the district and a healthy proportion of public facilities in St Albans (almost 50%) indicate that cost of membership will not be an issue locally.</p>	<p>Public provision is usually lower priced, and therefore it is important that both public and private provision is available within the area. Research by the FIA (2002) highlights the variations between public and private health and fitness providers.</p>

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	Key facts and trends – national	Comparison of St Albans to national picture	Implication for facility provision
	<p>There was a 25% increase in the total number of health and fitness clubs in the UK between 1996 and 2001, and Online Leisure (2000) has estimated that the number of members will now have reached 3.5m. Overall, the rise in profile of the health agenda and awareness of problems with obesity has increased the interest in health and fitness participation.</p> <p>While there are more gyms open than ever before, the industry has run itself into a circle over the last 18 months. Two years ago, gym chains were growing and operators were fighting for sites, but saturation, together with the weakening economy made some members re-assess their monthly outgoings and cut back spending on non necessities such as gym memberships.</p>	<p>Fitness First has recently opened in St Albans, highlighting continued interest in the health and fitness industry.</p> <p>The level of saturation in St Albans now mirrors the national picture. This saturation follows a period of significant growth in line with national trends.</p>	<p>The rising importance of a healthy and active lifestyle will ensure continuing demand for health and fitness over the next few years.</p> <p>Although it is likely that there will be continuing interest in the health and fitness market, growth has slowed and the market has matured and become more saturated.</p>
Tennis	<p>Between 1994 and 1998 tennis participation rates fell significantly from 11.2% to 5.1%. Participation has continued to fall but the rate of decline is slowing.</p> <p>Only 33% of play currently takes place on indoor courts, although research indicates (LTA) that use of such courts is inhibited by a lack of awareness and availability rather than a lack of demand.</p>	<p>The local population has a high propensity to take part in tennis compared to the national average (10.1% compared to 5.1% nationally)</p>	<p>Although participation in tennis is currently declining marginally, it is important to ensure that tennis facilities meet the needs of all players and are able to cater for the needs of the community in future years.</p> <p>Future years are likely to see an increase in the demand for indoor tennis facilities.</p>
Hall sports	<p>Participation in badminton decreased from 1987 to 1996 for both men and women. Research has shown that participation decreases with age. Overall, it appears that demand is continuing to decrease marginally.</p>	<p>No clubs are currently involved in leagues within the City of St Albans. There are three established clubs participating in Harpenden comprising a total of 12 teams. In addition, there are five more informal clubs based at locations across the district.</p>	<p>Overall demand for sports halls from badminton users is likely to decrease marginally.</p>

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	Key facts and trends – national	Comparison of St Albans to national picture	Implication for facility provision
	There has been a 300-400% growth in informal five-a-side football over the last five years at the expense of the traditional 11-a-side game.	The local population has a high propensity to take part in football, 22.1% compared to the national average of 11.7%.	There will be increased demand for indoor sports provision in the district to accommodate the increasing numbers wishing to play 5-a-side football.
Hockey	Hockey is one of the top five most popular games in school. Participation figures for young people grew by 8,500 from 1996 to 2000. However, adult participation declined from 20% in 1994, to 17% in 1999 and the number of children citing it as enjoyable dropped from 13% to 10% over the same period.	Analysis carried out in support of the Playing Pitch Strategy, showed that the district has a lower than average Team Generation Rate, indicating high unmet demand and a potential for greater participation in this sport.	Continuing requirement for STPs and improved clubhouse facilities to meet league requirements and to encourage club/team formation. Localised demand for pitches.
Golf	<p>Market competition has resulted in improved accessibility to golf facilities. Over recent years a growing number of public golf courses have been developed, which offer facilities for all abilities at affordable prices.</p> <p>Since the early 1990s, the number of golfers in Europe has grown by an average of 7% while the number of golf courses has risen by an average of 5% per year</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UK and Ireland have 51% of all European golf courses and 43% of all registered European golfers, yet only 15% of the European population • the number of non-registered 'independent' golfers is also extremely high in the UK, where there are an estimated 1.25 to 1.75 million players. <p>Research indicates that the British market is highly saturated with the development of new golf courses and the growing number of new golfers shifting increasingly to the continent.</p> <p>It is predicted that between 2000 and 2010, the number of golfers and golf courses within GB and Ireland will rise by 16.5% and 20.5% respectively.</p>	The Sport and Leisure Potential Profile data highlights that 16% of the local catchment population have a propensity to participate in golf. This level of interest is high in comparison to the national average of 12%.	The need to ensure a good spread of pay and play courses (both 9-hole and 18-hole) with affordable pricing structures to encourage mass participation.

Summary

- 2.66 This Section has identified the context for the Sport and Recreation Facilities Strategy. The main findings are that:
- the strategy should take into account national priorities of increasing participation in sport and physical activity, particularly amongst groups which do not traditionally take part
 - the strategy should consider innovative new solutions to facility development, combining a range of activities, rather than traditional sports centres
 - the profile of sport and recreation in St Albans needs to be highlighted as a contribution to wider corporate objectives
 - there is a largely affluent population in the City and District with a high propensity to take part in sport and recreation, and certain sports such as health and fitness, 5-a-side football and swimming are growing in popularity.
- 2.67 Section Three of this strategy examines the current supply of facilities in the City and District, analysing the current condition and performance of centres and roles of different providers.

SECTION 3

PROFILE OF CURRENT PROVISION

Introduction

- 3.1 This Section examines the current situation in St Albans City and District with regard to existing sport and recreation facilities and the range of organisations that provide them. It explores the roles and responsibilities of current providers across the district, and contains a full appraisal of the major existing public facilities, based on site visits and a comparison of performance indicators.

Current providers: roles and responsibilities

- 3.2 The market for sport and leisure can be matched to typical products and services as follows:

Table 3.1 Roles of providers

Segment	Product/Service
Upper end of the market	Premium priced health clubs often with indoor tennis and swimming, typical fee £55+ per month. Examples: David Lloyd Leisure, Holmes Place, Virgin Active and Cannons.
Mid/upper market	Private health and fitness clubs, excluding swimming and tennis, typical fee £35-£45 per month. Examples: Fitness First, Esporta. Local authority leisure centres with gyms (typical fee £30-£40 per month), swimming, sports halls, etc (pay and play access). Voluntary clubs owning and leasing facilities.
Mass/community market	Local authority leisure centres with gyms (pay and play access is particularly important), swimming, sports halls, etc (pay and play access). Town/Parish Council play and recreational facilities. Schools with community or club use of facilities.
Under-represented groups	Discounted pay and play access via local authority leisure pass or similar. Schools with community use of facilities. Voluntary and community sector provision.

Local authority

- 3.3 The Council operates leisure and sports facilities across the district, managed by Leisure Connection Ltd on behalf of the authority. The programming and pricing policy for these facilities support the mass/community market and under-represented groups and is consistent with the Council's corporate aim of *working in partnership for the health and well being of the community*.
- 3.4 It is important that the Council promotes and encourages active lifestyles by providing a range of accessible facilities that appeal to a broad cross-section of age groups.
- 3.5 Leisure Connection encourages participation from all sectors of the community and offers customers a concessionary scheme. This provides discounts to senior citizens,

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low waged or unwaged, and people with disabilities. Discounts are also available for students and young people on youth training schemes.

- 3.6 The Council may decide in the future that it needs to provide more for the mid/upper market segment. This would have the benefit of raising important health and fitness income that could be used for reducing subsidies to leisure centres.

Town and Parish Councils

- 3.7 Town and Parish Councils have the enabling power to manage and maintain locally based recreational provision for residents. They also play an important role in identifying priority areas for improvement and in supporting such developments through the contribution of funding, lobbying and facilitating partnership working.

- 3.8 Harpenden Town Council is the largest of 9 Parish Councils situated in the St Albans District. In terms of sporting facilities, Harpenden Town Council is responsible for the provision of a cricket pitch, two football pitches and a golf course. The Council is also responsible for the management and maintenance of Park Hall Community Building. Other services provided include fundraising for community projects such as the introduction of a skate facility in Rothamsted Park.

- 3.9 The objectives of Harpenden Town Council include:

- actively seeking a re-vamped Youth Club in the Town and working in partnership with the County Council and voluntary groups to deliver improved youth facilities
- working with the Council to seek the modernisation and improvement to the Public Halls to meet the needs and demands of Harpenden residents
- working with local sports groups, clubs and residents groups to seek the mix and quality of facilities wanted by local residents.

- 3.10 St Stephens Parish Council manage and maintain Greenwood Park, a multi facility site located in the Chiswell Green area of the City and District containing outdoor tennis courts, a small sports hall and meeting room, 2 adult, 1 junior and 1 mini football pitch and a cricket pitch. There is also a play area on site and a further mini football pitch at St Stephens Parish Centre. The Parish Council manage and maintain a variety of open spaces within the Parish.

- 3.11 Additionally, Wheathampstead Parish Council, Colney Heath Parish Council and London Colney Parish Council own and manage recreation grounds in the city and district, all of which contain both outdoor sports facilities and tennis courts.

Private sector

- 3.12 Private operators meet some of the demand for health and fitness although this is typically limited to the mid and upper end of the market and the sector will not normally provide sports hall activities, sports development or activities targeted at under-represented groups.

- 3.13 The private sector also provides exclusive access to certain facilities by operating sports clubs on a private membership basis (e.g. tennis, golf and squash).

Voluntary sector

- 3.14 The voluntary sector fulfils an important role as a provider of community sports provision.

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3.15 A selection of voluntary facilities at the core of community provision include:

- Redbourn Playing Fields Trust provides Redbourn Recreation Centre, a valuable community leisure centre
- Old Albanians Rugby Club has established a charity, Old Albanians Sports Association, to manage club facilities at the Woolhams Playing Fields site; a location well used by other local sports clubs
- Sandridge Youth and Sports Community Association (SYSCA) manages Spencer Playing Fields, a site used by both Sandridge Rovers Football Club and Sandridge Cricket Club
- Harvesters Football Club has recently developed a new artificial turf pitch with the support of the Council
- An enclosed play area comprising equipment for under-nines and basketball hoops and five-a-side football for older children and teenagers was opened in Harpenden in summer 2003. This initiative was developed by Westfield Community Action Plan (West CAP), which through fundraising activity contributed £1,800 to the scheme. Harpenden Trust and the Council awarded grants of £25,000 and £50,000 respectively. Since opening, the facility has been heavily used by the local community – by entire families as well as groups of young people. This has helped to generate revived community spirit in this part of Harpenden.

Education

3.16 Schools and colleges have the potential to play an integral role in sport and leisure provision in any area. A number of local sports clubs and community groups in the district benefit from the use of school facilities. In addition, a range of sports development programmes and initiatives are delivered using school facilities.

3.17 Use of this network of facilities is not currently being maximised. There is scope to improve this situation through supporting proposed facility developments, the attainment of Specialist Sports College status by local secondary schools and the establishment of formal community use agreements.

Major public facilities

Current facility mix

3.18 The range of indoor and outdoor facilities provided at the five main public facilities operated by Leisure Connection on behalf of the Council are detailed in the Table overleaf.

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Table 3.2 Public leisure facilities

Site name	Facilities available
Westminster Lodge Leisure Centre	Wet and dry centre. Eight football pitches (one floodlit); one athletics track (six lane/eight lane straight); 33.3m swimming pool (with diving and flumes and spectator seating); learner pool; multi-activity room; crèche; sunbed; sauna; Jacuzzi; 30 station health and fitness suite; nine hole, par three golf course, 3 outdoor hard tennis courts (used for netball during the winter) and 6 grass tennis courts used in the summer months. There is also a toddler splash park located away from the main centre. Changing rooms; ample parking with short walk to centre entrance.
Harpenden Leisure Centre	Split site, two buildings: Sports Centre. Five-court sports hall; multi use games area; three tennis courts; two squash courts; health and fitness suite (Harpers) with 40 stations; dance studio; pitch and putt (not used). Changing rooms; ample parking with short walk to centre entrance. Swimming Pool: new 25m x 6 lane pool; old outdoor paddling pool; health area (Jacuzzi; steam room; sauna; sunbeds). Changing rooms; portaloos for paddling pool users; ample parking.
Batchwood Golf and Tennis Centre	Four indoor tennis courts built in 1988 under the Lawn Tennis Association's Indoor Tennis Initiative (ITI); changing rooms, health and fitness suite; dance studio and two squash courts. Air hall enclosing three courts for winter use; four floodlit outdoor courts. 18 hole (6161 yards) golf course. Separate entrance to golf club, social and bar area. Car parking (recently resurfaced) with CCTV.
Bricket Wood Sports Centre	Wet and dry centre. 23m x 6 lane swimming pool; one grass football pitch; three multi use games areas; one cinder athletics track (overgrown); eight-court sports hall, multi-marked (including roller-skating) with 1,000 spectator seats; health and fitness suite (Cascades) with 15 stations; saunas in changing rooms; one sunbed; crèche (for 24 children).
London Colney Adventure World	Community Centre with soft-play area; day-care centre; function room (used for aerobics etc and football (for young children)); outdoor play area; health and fitness (25 stations and free weights); two tennis courts/multi use games area; one basketball court.

3.19 We have assessed the main public leisure facilities in the City and District using the following methods:

- site visits (including overall assessment of the geographic spread and relevance to core markets)
- a review of performance using national performance indicators and benchmarks
- review of recent conditions surveys.

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Site visits

3.20 Site visits were made to all sites listed in Table 3.2. Site visits were also made to Redbourn Recreation Centre and Francis Bacon School. The main observations and conclusions are given below:

Table 3.3 Site visit observations

Site	Site visit observations
Westminster Lodge Leisure Centre	<p>Although the centre has a well-used pool with excellent programming and well-respected fitness classes, there are many issues with the current facilities, which are tired and in poor state of repair:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • poor maintenance and décor • toddler splash park/athletic track located away from main centre, creating management issues particularly for the paddling pool.
Harpenden Leisure Centre	<p>This split site would ideally be provided under one roof, but this would be a major undertaking and the local users are now accustomed to the layout of the two sites.</p> <p>The swimming pool and health and fitness facilities at Harpenden are regarded as the best public provision in the district.</p> <p>In addition, although the sports hall facility is tired, it is well used throughout the day.</p> <p>Facility issues to address include the future of the paddling pool, which is expensive to maintain, and the need for investment in the tennis courts to improve drainage.</p> <p>Multi use games area/5-a-side courts are well used but suffer from vandalism.</p> <p>Although not part of the leisure centre site, a new skatepark facility has recently been provided in the park adjacent to the centre (summer 2003). This provides an additional attraction and, although it is too early to assess the effects, could provide some additional users for the centre.</p>
Batchwood Golf and Tennis Centre	<p>The site is perceived by the Lawn Tennis Association as one of the top three centres in England for development work. A variety of courses are held providing for the full participation spectrum (from 2½ year olds to elite level performers).</p> <p>The recent airhall development, enclosing three of the outdoor courts, will help the centre maintain its status as a regional centre for excellence. Any further development of the site is unlikely due to its sensitive location in the metropolitan green belt.</p> <p>Batchwood Golf Club is based at the centre and is well-used, although there are some issues regarding the maintenance of the course.</p> <p>Redesigning the entrance area and relocating the bar could improve the site.</p>

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Site	Site visit observations
Bricket Wood Sports Centre	<p>Bricket Wood Sports Centre is located in the south of the district, halfway between St Albans and Watford. It has a small base of regular customers, many of whom come from Watford rather than St Albans.</p> <p>All signage has the HSBC branding with no Council or Leisure Connection identity. The entrance to the site is unclear and is easily confused with the HSBC facilities.</p> <p>The centre is also in poor state of repair. Particular issues include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • changing rooms used for wet and dry activities • pool is incorrect dimensions for competitive swimming (23 metres) • fitness gym is small and stocked with old equipment • overgrown and unusable cinder athletics track • lack of catering facilities. <p>The site's largest asset is the eight court sports hall with 1,000 spectator seats which can host elite regional and national competitions (e.g. Basketball; Netball; Tae Kwon Do).</p>
London Colney Adventure World	<p>The Adventure World has an unusual mix of facilities, largely junior focused (soft play area).</p> <p>Small health and fitness suite and a hall used for classes (although not 'fit for purpose') but not racquet sports. The facility is tired and in a poor state of repair.</p> <p>The outdoor courts (for netball and tennis) are relatively new but are not used to full potential. Development of the courts is restricted by a lack of floodlights.</p> <p>The outdoor basketball court requires investment to rectify problems caused by tree roots.</p>
Redbourn Recreation Centre	<p>Redbourn Recreation Centre is operated by a management company on behalf of a Trust. In 2002, a grant was obtained from the Sport England Lottery Fund to provide an additional six changing rooms, referees changing facilities and increased storage. There are further plans to provide an all-weather bowls green, however it is likely that there will be a requirement for partnership funding contributions from the Trust and Parish Council.</p> <p>Although the recreation centre contains a four-court sports hall, it does not meet the recommended minimum size for this type of hall. The dimensions of the hall do not allow for an adequate run-off area around the court. It is therefore unsuitable for use as a competition venue.</p> <p>The development of a number of private health and fitness facilities within the area has had an adverse affect on the small gym within Redbourn Recreation Centre and membership numbers are declining.</p> <p>The condition of the facility is considered to be good overall.</p>

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Site	Site visit observations
Francis Bacon School	<p>Francis Bacon Leisure Centre is located in the centre of the district, in the Cunningham area of St Albans. The site is poorly lit and is considered to be intimidating at night by the local community. The majority of users of the site are members of clubs who block book the facilities. No marketing has been undertaken for the past few years to attract new users.</p> <p>Although internal signage within the centre is good, external signage was less easy to follow. In addition, car-parking capacity is insufficient with cars currently expected to park on existing school netball courts.</p> <p>Although maintenance equipment was evident, the centre was relatively dirty and in a poor condition, with tiles missing in the changing rooms and a large pane of glass missing in the sports hall door.</p>

Performance review

- 3.21 The performance of the five Council centres was compared against other centres using Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs), Local Performance Indicators and Audit Commission Performance Indicators (ACPIs). Sport England 25%, 50% and 75% benchmarks were also used as a basis for comparison.

Best value performance indicators

- 3.22 These indicators have been set by the Government and are designed to enable comparisons to be made between the performance of different authorities, including different types of authorities, and within an authority over time. To ensure BVPIs give a balanced view of performance the Government has adopted five dimensions of performance. These are:

- strategic objectives – why the service exists and what it seeks to achieve
- cost/efficiency – the resources committed to a service and the efficiency with which they are turned into outputs
- service delivery outcomes – how well the service is being operated in order to achieve the strategic objectives
- quality – the quality of the services delivered, explicitly reflecting users' experience of services
- fair access – ease and quality of access to services.

Audit Commission performance indicators

- 3.23 The Audit Commission retains its duty, under the Audit Commission Act 1998, to specify performance indicators to enable a comparison of performance both between different authorities and within an authority over time. The Audit Commission's aim in specifying ACPIs has been to facilitate a rounded view of the authority's performance. They complement the BVPIs and are regularly reviewed.

Sport England benchmarks

3.24 Sport England benchmarks are used as part of various quality schemes and are helpful when directly comparing performance of individual leisure centres rather than whole Council performance. They have been compiled using data from a large number of centres nationwide and comprise an analysis of:

- visits and attendances
- subsidy
- income
- secondary income
- staff costs
- energy costs
- marketing costs.

3.25 All Performance Indicators are shown in tabular form in Appendix F.

Results and conclusions of performance review

3.26 The main results of the comparisons, showing where facilities in the district perform well and not so well compared to other authorities, are shown in Table 3.4 below.

Table 3.4 Performance Indicators

PI	Key findings
ACPIs (2000/01)	<p>We have compared St Albans against both neighbouring Hertfordshire authorities and district authorities as a whole. St Albans compares poorly with 2,821 being by far the lowest number of swims per 1,000 population in a range of 2,821 to 11,178 (this is especially pertinent given that the population has a high propensity to take part in swimming). The district authority average is 6,228 placing St Albans in the lowest 25% of authorities.</p> <p>St Albans also compares poorly in net cost per swim, £3.24 by far the highest in our sample (range: £0.70 to £3.24). The district authority average is £1.20 placing St Albans in the 25% of authorities with the highest cost per swim.</p> <p>It should be noted that interpretation of the above information may have been skewed by the absence of robust systems to accurately measure usage data.</p>
BVPs (2003/04)	<p>When last surveyed in 2003/04, satisfaction levels amongst users and non-users of sport and leisure facilities had dropped significantly compared with the 2000/01 results (64% and 47% respectively). The percentage of all respondents 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied with facilities places St Albans the second lowest authority in Hertfordshire and well below the national district council average.</p>

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PI	Key findings
<p>Sport England benchmarks</p>	<p>These are the most crucial indicators to help assess performance of individual centres. The remainder of this table indicates the findings from the comparison of Sport England benchmarks.</p>
<p>Harpenden Leisure Centre</p>	<p>Harpenden Leisure Centre is performing well. Income generation is particularly good and positions the facility well within the top quartile for such facilities. Swim income per square metre of water space is high and health and fitness revenue per station is excellent.</p> <p>Percentage cost recovery is very good. The facility generates an operational surplus and this naturally results in a negative subsidy per visit and/or per square metre. Although secondary income per visit is poor, this was anticipated since vending facilities are the only on-site catering provision.</p> <p>Energy costs per square metre are high. This is unusual considering that the swimming pool is a relatively new facility. This may be attributable to inaccuracies in the building area with the possibility that stores, plant area, etc may have been excluded from calculations. Staff costs are also relatively high which is surprising for a high income generating facility. This may be due to the additional costs associated with the operation of split sites as well as an outdoor paddling pool.</p>
<p>Westminster Lodge Leisure Centre</p>	<p>Westminster Lodge Leisure Centre is generally performing well. Health and fitness as well as swim income are above average. Total income per visit and per square metre are high, placing the facility well within the top performing quartile for these PIs.</p> <p>Secondary income per visit is however average. Expenditure is reasonable overall. Percentage cost recovery and subsidy per visit are average. Subsidy per square metre is relatively high. Energy costs per square metre are very high suggesting potential building inefficiencies. This is not considered unusual given the age and quality of this facility.</p> <p>It is important to note that estimated number of annual visits have been used as the basis for some of the calculations.</p>

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PI	Key findings
Bricket Wood Sports Centre	<p>Bricket Wood Sports Centre is a facility with mixed performance. The number of annual visits is low, although it is anticipated that this may have been underestimated.</p> <p>Subsidy per square metre and per visit is currently below average although this would rise to an average level should annual visit figures increase. Despite health and fitness and swim income being below average, income per visit and/or per square metre is within top quartile levels. This indicates that other areas such as the sports hall are generating considerable income.</p> <p>Although secondary income per visit is poor, this was anticipated since vending facilities are the only on-site catering provision. Operational expenditure is above average including staff costs and energy costs per square metre. This leads to a relatively low percentage cost recovery.</p>
Batchwood Golf and Tennis Centre/London Colney Adventure World	<p>Batchwood Golf and Tennis Centre and London Colney Adventure World have been excluded from this analysis since the facility mix at each of these facilities is not comparable with models on which Sport England benchmarks have been based.</p>

Conditions surveys

- 3.27 The Council has recently completed a full condition survey on each of its five leisure facilities. The surveys identified problems with maintenance at all the centres but highlighted significant issues with Bricket Wood Sports Centre, London Colney Recreation Centre and Westminster Lodge Leisure Centre. The total cost of the works to maintain the three facilities in their present state, with no certainty that further costs will not be discovered, is as follows:

	1-5 years	6-10 years	Total
Westminster Lodge Complex	£1,878,810	£2,805,400	£4,684,210
Golf Centre and Running Track	£584,200	£97,600	£681,800
Bricket Wood Sports Centre	£1,012,650	£474,000	£1,486,650
London Colney Recreation Centre	£134,000	£56,500	£190,500
Total	£3,609,660	£3,433,500	£7,043,160

Facility appraisal: conclusions

3.28 The following conclusions can be drawn from the site visits and performance review:

Site	Conclusions
Westminster Lodge Leisure Centre	Dated and inefficient but still performing well with high level of income. Major defects requiring significant investment.
Harpenden Leisure Centre	Performing well but high staff costs and energy costs. Sports hall 'tired' but well used. Tennis and multi use games area/5-a-side courts in need of re-surfacing.
Batchwood Golf and Tennis Centre	Design of centre inefficient, although regionally recognised.
Bricket Wood Sports Centre	Dated facility, performing poorly. Inaccessible to district residents. Structural defects requiring investment.
London Colney Adventure World	Strong emphasis on soft play. Indoor facilities in a poor state of repair. Hall not 'fit for purpose'. Outdoor courts not used to full potential.
Redbourn Recreation Centre	Good condition overall. Small gym unable to compete with increasing number of new private health and fitness facilities.
Francis Bacon School	Poor cleanliness and maintenance. Inadequate external signage and lighting. Insufficient car parking.

Summary

3.29 The profile of major sports facilities in the City and District can be summarised below:

- the five main public facilities are becoming dated and unattractive to a largely affluent and active population
- staff and energy costs are high, due to older, inefficient facilities with poor design
- despite this, performance and income generation, particularly at Harpenden Leisure Centre and Westminster Lodge Leisure Centre, are good, indicating high potential for increased income and participation if the condition of the facilities can be addressed
- the geographic spread is good, although Bricket Wood Sports Centre is inaccessible, particularly for those without access to a car - due to its location away from the population base
- the Council facilities are complemented well by other facilities such as Redbourn Recreation Centre and schools
- the range of facilities is good, with a mix of indoor wet and dry provision, athletics, synthetic turf pitches and specialist facilities
- pools in particular are in need of updating or replacement to accommodate the needs of families and competitive swimming.

3.30 In the next five Sections of this strategy, the demand for indoor and outdoor facilities is assessed with conclusions regarding gaps in provision and future development options.