

# South Somerset Leisure Facilities Strategy

## Our Vision for South Somerset:

A place where businesses flourish, communities are safe, vibrant and healthy; where residents enjoy good housing and cultural, leisure and sporting activities.

# Feb 2019

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# Part 1: Introduction

This is the South Somerset Leisure Facilities Strategy for the period 2018 - 2036.

Recommendations are drawn from the Indoor Built Facilities Assessment Needs Assessment, researched and prepared between September 2018 and November 2018 by specialist sport and leisure consultancy, Knight Kavanagh and Page Ltd (KKP). Both the Assessment Report and this Strategy have been prepared in accordance with Sport England's ANOG (Assessing Needs and Opportunities for Indoor and Outdoor Sports Facilities) Guidance and in consultation with South Somerset District Council (SSDC), Sport England, national governing bodies of sport (NGBs), local sports clubs and key stakeholders.



As illustrated, Sport England regards an assessment of need as core to the planning for sporting provision. This report reviews leisure sporting facility need in South Somerset and provides a basis for future strategic planning.

SSDC's vision is a place where businesses flourish, communities are safe, vibrant and healthy; where residents enjoy good housing and cultural, leisure and sporting activities

Healthy self-reliant communities is a particular focus area within SSDC's Council Plan. In particular, the Council wishes to "Help people to live well by enabling quality cultural, leisure, play, sport and healthy lifestyle facilities & activities". Its specific health and community objectives are to:

- Support communities so that they can identify their needs and develop local solutions.
- Target support to areas of need.
- Help people to live well by enabling quality cultural, leisure, play, sport and healthy lifestyle facilities and activities.
- Work with partners to tackle health issues such as diabetes and hypertension, and mental health.
- Work with partners to keep communities safe.

The focus and purpose of this Strategy is to shape our delivery, give clarity to residents and support our partners so that together we can plan and develop the more modern, efficient and sustainable range of community-based sport and leisure facilities that South Somerset requires. This will ensure that residents have the opportunity to be physically active and healthier and, where appropriate, take forward their sporting ambitions within their local community.

South Somerset district covers 370 square miles (958 km<sup>2</sup>). It has a population of 167,216 (2017 MYE). The primary administrative centre is Yeovil and other main settlements include Bruton, Castle Cary, Chard, Crewkerne, Ilminster, Langport, Milborne Port, Somerton and Wincanton. It has a dispersed population (at least 50% lives in settlements with a population of fewer than 10,000 residents). It borders the local authorities of Sedgemoor, Mendip and Taunton Deane (all in Somerset), East Devon, West and North Dorset councils and Wiltshire.

SSDC is committed to improving the health and wellbeing of its residents and understands the relationship between physical activity and health and wellbeing. This commitment is underpinned in and by its corporate and local plans.

## South Somerset



Figure 2.1: South Somerset with main roads and main settlements/ towns

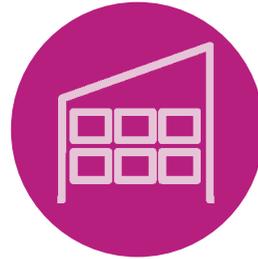
The rural nature of the area means that residents need to travel to access services; this includes sport and leisure facilities. Levels of activity and inactivity are commensurate with regional and national findings. The most popular sports are cycling and swimming. Along with many other areas of the country, child obesity rates increase substantially between the ages of 4 and 11 years.

Consultation with a range of health and community groups, many run by volunteers; plus wider interrogation of local issues confirms that community halls and village halls play a key role in the provision of programmes and activities which get people more active. The range of provision made in these settings is substantial. It is also important to note that getting the inactive active takes significantly more resource than increasing the activity frequency of existing participants.



## Aquatic sports

Swimming facilities and access to aquatic sports is a key and current issue particularly as a result of the closure of the swimming pool at Cresta Leisure Centre (July 2018); this leaves residents in Chard without immediate access to a pool. The Chard Regeneration vision identifies the importance of developing swimming pool and associated fitness facilities as a key development in the town. This will support wider economic development as a market town, as well as helping to drive increases in physical activity and sport. The refurbishment of Huish Episcopi (via the installation of a roof over its swimming pool) in Area North has increased accessibility to swimming and other aquatic sports in this area.



## Partnerships

There is a recognition of the importance of working in partnership with other agencies to deliver opportunities given the geographical and access issues encountered within the District. The Chard Regeneration Plan identifies the importance of reinvigorating Chard town centre and the vision to create a leisure, culture and health focus that can be serviced by new swimming pool and fitness provision.



## Population

The population in South Somerset is projected to grow given the house building policy identified in the Local Plan; this indicates that SSDC needs to make provision for at least 15,950 dwellings in the plan period 2006 - 2028. A new Local Plan is being developed for 2020 to look ahead until 2036 and this strategy aligns with this plan period. At least 7,441 (47% of growth) will be in Yeovil with other market towns providing 5,134 (32%) dwellings. It is also projected that the proportion of the population represented by the over 65 age group will increase from one quarter to just under one third by 2036. This needs to be taken account of within any new facilities or when considering the programming and pricing of current facilities .

The key challenge is not to think of sport and leisure facilities as venues for 'sporty types' but as community assets that are relevant, and which make a contribution, to the wellbeing of all District residents alongside other community assets such as village halls and community centres.

# Part 3: What do we know about current facilities and activities?

South Somerset's Leisure Facilities Needs Assessment 2018 identifies the key sports and leisure facilities within the District, regardless of whether they are local authority, education or commercially owned and operated. (SSDC owned facilities are managed by LED Leisure). The key findings are:



## Village Halls

There are 104 identified village halls and community centres in South Somerset, many of which offer opportunity for people to take part in physical and sporting activity in a local facility. In addition, there are a number of sports pavilions which also offer significant community space, which in some instances is the only community space for the local population e.g. Forton Pavilion. Facility condition does not necessarily lead to reduced programmes of activity, but they all to a greater or lesser degree rely on the goodwill of volunteers to operate. These sites can play an important role in ensuring older people and/or all people in more rural areas have access to facilities/programmes of activity and can contribute to getting the inactive active or retaining those already involved.



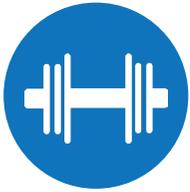
## Sports Halls

There are 19 sports halls with 3+ courts across 18 sites. Most are located on education sites which inevitably limits daytime availability; this means that just two sports hall venues (at Wincanton and Westland) are accessible during the day. Westland Sports and Fitness has full availability whilst Wincanton Sports centre, because it too is based on a school site offers more limited access.

There is a level of uncertainty with regard to the future use of sports halls on education sites because the contract held by Somerset County Council with 1610 is due to end on 31 March 2019). At this time the management of the sports halls affected will revert to the individual schools/academies. The six institutions affected by this are in the process of exploring the business cases associated with, and financial viability of, continuing to let facilities to the community. There could however be a significant reduction in community access to dual use facilities in South Somerset and this is an area of particular concern.

A good range of activity/sport is on offer in the district. This includes, for example, badminton, basketball, netball, walking football, inline roller hockey and volleyball. Netball is particularly strong in the locality and its further development is currently constrained by lack of access to quality indoor courts.

It is generally accepted that older people prefer to use facilities during the day so the increase in number of the ageing population needs to be catered for via a variety of means including use of village halls and innovative programming.



## Health and Fitness Facilities

There are 27 health and fitness gyms in South Somerset; the majority in Area South (Yeovil). Generally, such facilities tend to be located in more densely populated areas. The popularity of health and fitness facilities and demand for dance studios for class-based programmes is continuing to rise. There will be a requirement for additional health and fitness provision to accommodate increased population growth. There will also be a need to maintain quality and where possible improve the condition of the District's average/below average rated gyms.

Health and fitness facilities and associated class-based programmes have the potential to impact positively on all residents in South Somerset. There is a need to ensure that harder to reach groups and people with specific health needs, as well as the general public, can access facilities and relevant programmes of activity.

Whilst there is no current under-supply of health and fitness facilities, it is important to note the financial contribution they make to the viability of (and to enable) other publicly accessible facilities, such as swimming pools, to be financially sustainable. This need to be considered when, for example assessing the feasibility of developing new swimming facilities in Chard.



## Swimming pools

Up until July 2018, four sites (Cresta Leisure Centre, Crewkerne Aqua Centre, Goldenstones Leisure Centre and Wincanton Sports and Fitness Centre) offered pay and play swimming opportunity to the community. Since that time the swimming pool at Cresta has been closed. Huish Episcopi has covered what was formerly an outdoor pool and now offers pay and play access, swimming lessons and club activities. Thus, although the volume of indoor water space remains similar within the District, accessibility has changed significantly with residents of Chard (c.13,000) and surrounding hinterland particularly affected by the closure.

The swimming pool at Chard is reported to have accommodated more than 100,000 swims per annum. Its closure could negatively impact on the amount of physical activity undertaken by local residents and, even if they choose to travel, the other pools are full and have little capacity to accommodate increased demand resulting from population growth, increased swimming participation or demand displaced from elsewhere. In addition, Sport England market segmentation would suggest that there is substantial latent demand for swimming.



## Tennis

With nearly 140 tennis courts across 47 sites (and 116 courts available for community use at 42 sites), tennis provision is relatively good in the South Somerset. The District is serviced by 13 tennis clubs (all but one of indicates having capacity for more players).

There are currently no purpose-built indoor tennis courts servicing the district, however, the LTA has expressed interest in addressing the demand for indoor courts and in testing the feasibility of establishing indoor provision within Yeovil (Area South). Consultation did not unearth specific club demand for, or aspirations to, create local indoor provision.

The LTA's view is that community courts need protection (and in some cases improvement) and are a priority in order to increase levels of tennis participation in South Somerset. Several sites would benefit from the installation of floodlights to extend the hours available to play. The LTA's view is that the clubs and courts already in existence can cope with current and future demand.



## Squash

Squash is now on a new strategic path, implementing a rebrand and undergoing a major restructure. Provision is well distributed in South Somerset with courts found in the more densely populated areas and each administrative area. There is no requirement to build additional courts but there is a need to maintain/improve the condition of existing courts



## Indoor bowls

South Somerset's three indoor bowls venues have 12 rinks. Two (Donyatt Indoor Bowls Club and Ilminster Bowling & Tennis Centre) are in Area West. Yeovil Bowls & Squash Club is in Area South. All three run on a membership basis. All are available during the day and in the evening.

The indoor bowls clubs are experiencing declining numbers in South Somerset. Consultation did not highlight any additional demand for indoor bowls and, based upon current membership figures, EIBA's view is that the three existing clubs will be able to accommodate current and future demand. Donyatt IBC requires investment to resolve ongoing structural issues and improve quality but there is also some doubt about the future security of this venue for bowls should it be redeveloped for business use. If not retained as a bowls facility this will reduce the supply of indoor bowling facilities significantly impacting in the region of 500 active bowlers who use the facility on either a regular or ad hoc basis.



## Athletics

The Bill Whistlecroft Athletics Arena was built in 1972 and refurbished in 2013. Home to Yeovil Olympiads Athletics Club (YOAC), it is the only 'Grade A' Athletics Arena in Somerset. The Arena track is owned and maintained by SSDC while the clubhouse is owned by the Athletic Club. The clubhouse was, at the time of preparation of this report, undergoing refurbishment. The track will need to be re-surfaced within the next five years. It is a key facility for SSDC and neighbouring authorities. Current investment will improve DDA access and should lead to increases in participation. There is a need to protect this facility for local and wider sub-regional use.



## Cycling

Swimming and cycling are identified as popular activities in South Somerset. Cycling is increasing in popularity with new initiatives to increase the number of people who can cycle and the number of cycle groups. Local cycle routes and roads are used to accommodate cyclists. SSDC's Locality Team, in partnership with Yeovil Wellbeing Alliance and SPARK, delivers Breeze Cycle Leader training to enable cycle groups to start in towns and villages across the District.

There is no dedicated built cycling facility in South Somerset or the surrounding areas. Local clubs are interested in development of a closed circuit/off-road facility in the area but do not have funds available to contribute. Use should be made of MoD land and facilities if the opportunity arises.



## Gymnastics

Participation in gymnastics across the Country is reportedly increasing rapidly. There are five gymnastics clubs in South Somerset, four in the Yeovil area and one in Chard. Gymnastics operates from either dedicated or non-permanent facilities; South Somerset has two dedicated gymnastics venues both in Yeovil. Spirit Gymnastics Club has only recently (2018) moved to its new home (a site formerly occupied by Yeovil College).

Current facilities are full and clubs reportedly have substantial waiting lists. There is a supplementary need to support workforce development to underpin existing provision and enable future growth. In addition, SSDC should consider whether and how to encourage development of additional recreational gymnastics provision in Area West (in particular).



## Bowls

There are 12 bowling greens in South Somerset on 12 sites. All are flat greens and considered to be available for community use. Supply is considered sufficient to accommodate current and future demand. However, the greens in Area South are currently overplayed and their condition needs to be monitored. There is no requirement for additional bowling greens.

The vision below outlines what we want to achieve.

**To create accessible, high quality and sustainable sport and leisure facilities, which offer inclusive services for all; enabling the inactive to become active, increase participation in targeted groups in particular and help improve the health and well-being of all of our residents.**

Strategic Priority	Recommendation	Action	Timescale Importance	Responsibility	Measure	Review Date
Sports halls: community use of education facilities <b>Enhance</b>	Maintain and look to increase community use of education facilities for sport and physical activity (especially by harder to reach groups)	Continue to support schools to manage their facilities with a view to ensuring continued community use following the end of the County Council contract with 1610 in March 2019.  Retain a watching brief in respect of ensuring that sufficient daytime access is available to indoor sports and other facilities across the district.	Short (high)  Ongoing (high)	Schools, Somerset County Council, SSDC NGBs	More schools opening for more community hours. Increase participation among targeted groups in particular Increased daytime hours available to the community	
Dedicated specialist sports facilities <b>Enhance</b>	Address the latent demand for gymnastics	<b>Support</b> improved gymnastics provision across the District.	Short (medium)	SSDC SE BG LED Leisure, Gymnastics clubs	Gymnastics development group in place with planned development programme, with targeted work to begin in Area West	
Athletics <b>Protect</b>	Maintain the collaborative work between SSDC and the Club.	Maintain and invest in the athletics track to ensure its ongoing regional profile and its use for training, competition and recreation. <b>Deliver</b>  This will mean resurfacing the track within the next five years (monies yet to be identified to support this action. <b>Deliver</b>	Ongoing (low)  Ongoing (high)	SSDC Athletics Club  SSDC	Continued/improved quality of the site.  Track resurfaced. Increased athletics participation Increased number of events attracted.	

Strategic Priority	Recommendation	Action	Timescale Importance	Responsibility	Measure	Review Date
Swimming pools <b>Provide and Enhance</b>	Ensure sufficient water space is available to current and future residents. Strategically programme water time for all residents.	<b>Deliver</b> a new swimming pool for Chard, including wider provision for health and fitness.  Over the period of the Local Plan, deliver plant replacement and improvement at Goldenstones Leisure Centre, Whilst considering how to replace the facility in Yeovil in the longer term (due to its age).  Following the work at Goldenstones deliver plant improvement at Wincanton and a longer term plan for replacement.	Short (high)  Short (high)  Short (medium)  Short (high)	SSDC	Chard swimming pool built. Improved quality of facilities at both Goldenstones and Wincanton leisure centres leading to increased participation in swimming from different market segments.	
Health and fitness <b>Protect and Enhance</b>	Continue to monitor quantity and quality of health and fitness offer across the District. Ensure that the provision of health and fitness facilities is appropriate to an ageing population in the District.	Monitor the usage of health and fitness facilities by age, gender, location etc in order to drive increases in specific market segments (impacting positively on health and well-being of residents).  <b>Deliver</b> increase the quantity of health and fitness provision in Chard to meet the mild shortfall caused by its increased popularity and the predicted population increase (see above).	Medium (medium)	SSDC	Increased participation in general; also by older age groups using health and fitness facilities across the District, especially in Chard.	
Cycling <b>Enhance</b>	Where possible invest in infrastructure to enable the community to undertake active travel and increase cycling participation.	<b>Enable</b> a revision of planning policy for improving the provision of cycle links in the District.  Should the opportunity arise, support a dedicated closed road circuit in the district possibly, in the fullness of time, on the MoD Yeovilton site.	Medium (high)	SSDC, MOD, cycle clubs, Sustrans	More cycle networks joined up. Initial communication with MOD regarding opportunities documented.	

Strategic Priority	Recommendation	Action	Timescale Importance	Responsibility	Measure	Review Date
Tennis development <b>Protect and Enhance</b>	Work with the LTA and partners in a coordinated manner to address the relatively high latent demand and increase participation tennis across SSDC.	<p><b>Support</b> installation of floodlights at key sites to increase the capacity of the District's publicly accessible court stock and address overplay in specific areas. Check whether s106 monies can be made available to outdoor tennis improvements given the move away from the indoor tennis requirement.</p> <p><b>Support</b> improvement of ancillary provision at Lightgate Recreation Ground (South Petherton TC) and Martock Recreation Ground (Martock TC).</p> <p>Support provision of an additional outdoor court at Somerton TC.</p> <p><b>Deliver</b> improvements community court provision at Yeovil Recreation Centre</p>	Medium (high)  Short (high)  Medium (high)  Long (low)  Medium (medium)	SSDC Tennis Development Group Local tennis clubs LTA      SSDC	Agreed programme of improvement (finances agreed). Increased participation.	
Planning <b>Protect, enhance and provide</b>	To recognise the importance of this Strategy and ensure that recommendations are acted upon.	To adopt Strategy recommendations and ensure that they are encapsulated in planning policy documents (the Local Plan) and other relevant SSDC strategies as appropriate. Develop priorities to assist SSDC to identify developments that could be funded via developer contributions, CIL and other funding sources; informing the regulation 123 List and identification of infrastructure requirements.	Medium (high)	SSDC	Report adopted by Council Action plan recommendations incorporated in relevant SSDC policy documents.	

Strategic Priority	Recommendation	Action	Timescale Importance	Responsibility	Measure	Review Date
Include village halls and community centres in the broader activity portfolio <b>Protect</b>	Continue to work with village halls and parish councils to help them offer as wide a programme of activities which supports the physical activity offer.	Investigate feasibility of low-interest loan facility for communities to improve village halls/community centres etc ( <b>enable</b> ). This will allow a 'minor works' investment plan to address key issues appertaining to the condition and presentation of some of the more significant community/village hall facilities. <b>Enable</b> the delivery of new community hall facilities on key site residential developments in order to help develop sustainable self-reliant communities. Concurrently support village hall and parish council committees to continue to offer, coordinate and publicise community spaces which contribute positively to the physical activity and health and wellbeing agenda.	Medium (medium)	Parish councils, Community groups Private facilities.	Programme of minor works agreed and funded. Regular liaison with village halls to understand sport and physical activity offer (documented).	
Monitor and review	Keep the Facilities Strategy relevant and up to date.	Complete an annual light touch review. Undertake a complete review within 5 years of adoption.	Medium (high)	SSDC	Light touch reviews completed. Document updated.	

## What can other organisations do/take responsibility for?

Strategic Priority	Recommendation	Action	Timescale Importance	Responsibility	Measure
District wide development <b>Enhance</b>	Establish a workforce development plan which aims to build capacity in sports clubs across the District.	Establish a working group which looks to develop coaches and volunteers in the District in a range of sports. Consider how to deploy the volunteers/coaches to best effect linking to increased sporting opportunities at school sites (which are currently underutilised) leading to a stronger and more sustainable club structure in the District.	Short (high)	Clubs LED Leisure, NGBs, Active Somerset and schools.	Plan in place and actively being worked towards, More active coaches in the District
Indoor bowls <b>Protect and enhance</b>	Improve facilities at Donyatt Indoor Bowls Club.	Use available investment funding to improve the quality of the Donyatt Indoor Bowls Club.	Ongoing (low)	Donyatt Bowls Club EIBA	Improved quality of facilities. Increased membership/participation.
Squash Courts <b>Protect</b>	Retain current squash facilities to ensure the sport can continue in the area.	Maintain court quality via appropriate maintenance regimes. Actively promote squash in the area (link to workforce development plan identified above). Ensure that the use of squash courts for their primary purpose is continuously justified; on an ongoing basis.	Long (low)	SSDC, LED Leisure, England Squash & Racketball	Number of hours of squash activity maintained. Number of coaches increased.

The Leisure Facilities Strategy identifies the investment and actions required to deliver and maintain a high-quality built facilities infrastructure for South Somerset for the period up until 2036. A measurement mechanism is identified for each strategic priority. It is important that the Strategy is (and is treated as) a live document and used in a practical manner to prioritise investment, develop key work programmes and partnerships, guide planning gain investment and ensure that built sports facilities are a vital component contributing to the quality of life of South Somerset residents.

Strategy production is just the start of the strategic planning process. There is a requirement for all partners to engage in ongoing dialogue and review in order to ensure that a strategic perspective and approach is maintained throughout the life of the Strategy.

It is also important for the Council and its partners to develop a 3-5 year action plan based around the Strategy and for this to be monitored and reviewed annually. This should not only assess progress against the action plan but should also identify actual/potential changes in supply and demand across the authority. This is on the basis that the Strategy is as much about how facilities are used as ensuring that the infrastructure is of a good quality.

The outcome of the five-year review will be to develop a new annual and medium-term action plan for leisure facilities across the District.

**Produced by Strategy and Commissioning, South Somerset District Council**



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## In particular, the annual review process should include:

- A review of annual progress on the recommendations made and the 3-5 year action plan; taking account of any changes required in relation to the priority attached to each action (e.g. the priority of some may increase following implementation of others).
- Lessons learnt throughout the period.
- New facilities that may need to be taken into account.
- Any specific changes in the use of key District sites (e.g. sport specific specialisms of sites (such as the proposed indoor netball centre), changes in availability, etc.).
- Any specific changes in demand at particular facilities and/or clubs in the area (e.g. reduction or increase in club numbers, new housing growth).
- New formats of traditional sports that may need to be considered.
- Any new or emerging issues and opportunities.