

UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

**LEISURE FACILITIES EVIDENCE BASE
INDOOR AND BUILT FACILITY - INTERIM FINDINGS**

SEPTEMBER 2023

Integrity, Innovation, Inspiration

UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

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PART 1: INTRODUCTION

This is the interim summary report for indoor and built sports facilities in Uttlesford. It was prepared by Knight Kavanagh & Page (KKP) for Uttlesford District Council (UDC) and provides detail regarding facility provision in the area, its condition, distribution and overall quality. It uses the Authority's 2018 sports facilities & recreation strategy report as a basis and has updated it to reflect known changes in provision and population and to set a new and contemporary supply and demand summary for each facility type. One main demographic factor of note is the over 65 age group represented 19.5% of Uttlesford's population in 2018 and is projected to be 26.3% of the total by 2041.

Indoor and built sports facilities - Uttlesford

The following information is the most up to date position available at the time of writing. Non-technical site audits and consultation with stakeholders, facility owners / managers are still being undertaken. Where consultation with site operators/clubs have not yet taken place, Sport England's Active Places database information has been used in the interim.

Sports halls supply and demand summary

- ◀ There are 14 sports halls (43 courts). Of which, 10 are 3+ court sports halls located at 8 sites (38 badminton courts).
- ◀ 95% of UDC's population live within 20 minutes' drive of a sports hall.
- ◀ 31.8% lives within 20 minutes' walk of a community available sports hall.
- ◀ Population growth (+18,328) estimates may create additional demand for an additional 5.15 courts (1.29 halls) by 2043. This is prior to factoring in any growth linked to planned housing developments.
- ◀ There is some available capacity at existing facilities, but they are busy and are at/near capacity.
- ◀ In general, sports hall stock is well maintained. All sports halls have received some level of refurbishment within the last 20 years. Dame Bradbury School is below average quality (unless it has received investment since 2018 - yet to be verified).
- ◀ There is a need to continue to maintain the quality of the sites as they age.
- ◀ Maintenance at Lord Butler, Mountfichet Romeera and Great Dunmow leisure centres is overseen by the leisure operator Parkwood. This is subject to the conditions of the PFI contract up until 2032.
- ◀ One site (Carver Barracks – an MoD site) is private use only. It cannot offer community use due to security and military reasons.
- ◀ Facilities consulted with to date are operating at or very close to the Sport England Benchmark of being comfortably full and there is limited spare capacity.
- ◀ Netball reports having to travel out of area to access provision (indoor and outdoor). Herts & Essex Sports Centre is a key netball facility to which some Uttlesford residents travel.
- ◀ Continued good relationships between schools and clubs are required to maintain/increase sports hall access and use.
- ◀ Daytime use of sports halls will be of key importance given the projected increase in the number and proportion of older population in the Authority. This applies particularly to the public site (Lord Butler Leisure Centre).
- ◀ Each facility is important to the communities served. They need to be protected in accordance with para 98 of the NPPF.
- ◀ A good range of sports is available including gymnastics, badminton, netball, football, trampolining, pickleball, futsal, martial arts, indoor cricket, indoor hockey and indoor tennis.

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Swimming pools supply and demand summary

- There are eight pools at seven sites; three main pools, three lidos and two teaching/learner pools. Of these, three are 20m+ in length and are of community main pool size).
- Over 83% of the population lives within 20 minutes' drive of a swimming pool. 30% reside within a 20-minute walk.
- Pay and play access is available to 18% of residents within one mile walk.
- Pool stock is generally in above average condition.
- Two main pools are located at public leisure centres, one is part of a boarding school.
- There is a need to maintain the current stock of swimming pools with ongoing investment. This is covered for the public leisure sites until 2032 by the PFI contract.
- The Felsted School pool closed to the public during the Pandemic and consultation to date indicates it has not re-opened to the community since.
- Swim England consultation indicates insufficient water space in the area. It notes a current deficit of -152m² which is almost equivalent to a 4-lane 20m pool. Existing stock will not be able to accommodate increased demand derived from projected population growth and housing development and additional provision may be required. (Yet to be determined). Consultation with facility operators and clubs confirms this.
- Consideration should be given to the viability of adding a learner/teaching pool to the Great Dunmow Leisure Centre to reduce programming pressures, expand its learn to swim programme and accommodate aquatic classes.

Health & fitness gyms supply and demand summary

- ◀ Health and fitness facilities along with dance studio space offer potential to increase physical activity in the wider population. In Uttlesford, 14 gyms provide 670 stations. Of these, 11 have 20+ stations. When considering community available sites, this reduces to nine sites - 579 stations. There are 10 studios.
- ◀ Almost one third (32.7%) of the population lives within one mile of a gym and almost all (98%) residents live within 20 minutes' drive of a gym and/or studio.
- ◀ Spatially there is a good spread throughout the more densely populated areas of UDC.
- ◀ PureGym is the largest fitness provider in the area, it provides 37% of the total community available supply.
- ◀ There is a calculated positive supply over demand balance of health/fitness provision at present. Projecting forward in the future (to 2041), there is a projected under supply of 91 stations.
- ◀ Three gyms are rated as good quality and above average. One is rated below average (Saffron Walden County High School).
- ◀ There is a need to maintain quality and where possible improve the condition of the below average-rated gyms and studios.
- ◀ Of the seven publicly accessible pay and play health and fitness gyms with 20+ stations in Uttlesford, four require a membership to access, and three are for private use only. One is on an MoD site; one is in a hotel; and one is at a school.
- ◀ The key need is to ensure that gyms cater fully for the full range of market segments in the Uttlesford community and that residents who face barriers to participation can access them.
- ◀ Ongoing monitoring of the market is required to ascertain whether there is a need for increased health and fitness provision in the area.
- ◀ Parkwood identifies a need for additional studios at both Lord Butler and Great Dunmow leisure centres to meet the demand for group fitness classes.
- ◀ Should the opportunity arise, consider upgrading health and fitness provision (both gyms and studios) at Lord Butler and Great Dunmow leisure centres – to meet future demand.

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Squash supply and demand summary

- ◀ There are nine squash courts at four sites. Five are glass backed the others are traditional.
- ◀ Three courts at Lord Butler Fitness & Leisure Centre are currently closed due to RAAC concrete. (since March 2023). It is not known when the necessary remedial work will take place.
- ◀ Five of the nine courts are available for community use, two are located at the MoD site and two are at a private boarding school. As noted above, only two are currently accessible due to the RAAC concrete issue.
- ◀ All courts are reported to be good and above average quality. The public leisure courts receive regular maintenance as per the PFI contract.
- ◀ The one club operating in the area has 70 members. It runs at the Lord Butler Fitness Leisure Centre and has reduced its programme temporarily until the work is completed as it reports that increased travel to the Great Dunmow Leisure Centre is not feasible for certain members. It operates five nights per week and utilises all three courts for its programme which includes training matches, box leagues, inter leagues and coaching.
- ◀ Currently overall squash court provision in the area meets the blanket national requirement (one per 10,000 people). However, two are based at a MoD site with restricted access and two are at a private boarding school. Future population increase (and increase in housing development) may create a need for additional courts. This is yet to be determined.
- ◀ There is a need to protect existing squash facilities.

Gymnastics and trampolining supply and demand summary

- ◀ There is one gymnastics club and one trampoline club in the authority. Both operate from non-dedicated leisure centre sites, and neither is affiliated to British Gymnastics.
- ◀ Both clubs have yet to respond to consultation requests.

Indoor bowls supply and demand summary

- ◀ The one dedicated indoor bowls centre in the Authority (Turpins Indoor Bowls Club) is of above average quality.
- ◀ 78% of the population lives within a 30-minute drive of an indoor bowls facility and there are no other indoor bowls facilities within the 30-minute drive catchment of the authority.
- ◀ There is a need to replace the carpet within the next five years and a sinking fund is in place.
- ◀ There is a need to continue to maintain and invest in the facility.
- ◀ EIBA suggests there that the existing centre can cater for future anticipated demand.

Village halls/ community halls

- ◀ There are 36 village/community halls in Uttlesford in which some form of physical activity, fitness or sport is delivered.
- ◀ Approximately 15% of residents live within an 800m (10-minute walk) of a community/village hall
- ◀ Activities tend to reflect the needs of the local community and halls open at time to suit demand.
- ◀ In recent years (since the last audit) there has been an increase in the volume of fitness and physical activity taking place and fewer dance options.
- ◀ In addition to sport and physical activity, other services are delivered (e.g., warm hubs, Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) programme). This reflects the economic and financial constraints being experienced in the communities that many serve.
- ◀ No specific deficiencies or surpluses are identified.
- ◀ The opportunity to increase physical activity and work with service delivery partners (e.g., NHS) to ensure that all residents, particularly those in rural areas have access to sport/physical activity opportunity should be a key strategy feature moving forwards.

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Uttlesford IBF strategic recommendations

The principal opportunity/challenge for Uttlesford is to ensure that there is continuous investment in indoor and built facilities and that they are, consequently, fit for the future. There is a need to balance the needs of the core market of sports consumers already participating in local clubs whilst ensuring the growth of existing or new activities which meet the needs of new participants and the authority's growing population of older residents.

The following key strategic recommendations will be developed further in the strategic document which follows this but are likely to encompass the need to:

- ◀ Work with Dame Bradbury School to improve the standard of its below average sports hall subject to it opening for community use (should sufficient demand be identified).
- ◀ Address the identified deficiency in water space in the area. Options include obtaining access to Felsted School for club use and the installation of a learner/teaching pool at Great Dunmow Leisure Centre.
- ◀ Maintain the quality of facilities - across all sports - which are currently in above average and good condition.
- ◀ Where no formal agreements are in place work with educational sites to secure community use agreements (CUAs). Felsted School swimming pool is a high priority for such an arrangement.
- ◀ In the medium to longer term, increase health and fitness (and studio) provision in the area, ideally at the public leisure centre sites. This will enable them to upscale a more viable fitness offer and cross subsidise other health and wellbeing activities.
- ◀ Complete the remedial RAAC concrete works on the squash courts at Lord Butler Leisure Centre.
- ◀ Undertake a programme review of sports halls, linked to the findings of the Borough's Playing Pitch Strategy. Ascertain whether there is a need for more 3G/netball court investment to enable outdoor sports to play outside creating additional capacity for indoor sports.
- ◀ Ensure that memberships and specific activities are available to people living in the Authority's more deprived communities via enabling increased use of community facilities (e.g., activity halls and community centres).
- ◀ Maintain a watching brief in respect of the scale of health and fitness provision within Uttlesford (and provision made outside the Authority).
- ◀ Ensure that people who face specific barriers to participation can access health and wellbeing provision, especially those in rural areas.
- ◀ Support other developments (via planning, developer contributions and officer expertise) which may assist in increasing sport and physical activity within the wider community.
- ◀ Work with local sports clubs (with and via the leisure operator) to ensure that facilities and workforce development programmes enable facilities to best meet the needs of all clubs and residents.
- ◀ Develop a system to, as early as possible, identify and tackle ongoing investment, maintenance, and refurbishment requirements to protect and improve existing sports facilities.

Next steps

It is expected that:

The full draft needs assessment report will be completed by KKP by the end of October 2023.

The draft strategy and action plan report will be completed for the end of November (subject to the prompt receipt of any comments and amendments).

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Final reports will be produced at the end of December 2023.