



Active North Herts Strategy Report

North Herts Council

June 2023

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1. Active North Herts Strategy – Summary

1.1 Purpose of the new Strategy

1.1.1 North Herts Council is taking the opportunity to develop a new Active North Herts Strategy. This will set out a clear policy position on its role as a lead partner in enabling all residents to be more physically active.

1.1.2 Currently, the Council has no overarching strategy that clearly articulates its outcomes and objectives for the delivery of sport, leisure and physical activity services.

1.1.3 The Council has undertaken a wholesale review of its approach to delivering and supporting these services and a clear strategic direction has emerged.

1.1.4 The key aims of the Strategy include:

- Providing a clear policy position for the Council moving forwards
- Strengthening links with key internal and external strategic stakeholders in the district
- Identifying the client-side resources required to oversee the Strategy
- Providing a policy steer to support the focus of future investment decisions
- Providing clear strategic outcomes and objectives to support the new leisure management contract
- Providing a framework of actions for the Council and its partners to deliver over the next five years.

1.1.5 The new Strategy seeks to address existing health inequalities and target less active populations. It aims to create a supportive environment that inspires and enables individuals to move more and lead an active healthy lifestyle.

1.1.6 It will provide a 'clear line of sight' or 'golden thread' which connects the specific actions for sport and physical activity with the broader strategic priorities of the Council and its partners.

1.1.7 The development of the new Strategy sits alongside the procurement of a new leisure management contract which is currently underway. This provides a unique opportunity to rethink the design and delivery of the service. It will set out the role of the leisure operator partner in delivering a more outward facing service, in support of the overarching Strategy.

1.2 Strategic Framework

1.2.1 The Active North Herts Strategy has been developed within a framework that includes a series of agreed Strategic Outcomes, Objectives and Enabling Actions:

- **Strategic Outcomes** – These describe the intended results and demonstrate the impact and success of the Active North Herts Strategy.
- **Strategic Objectives** – These describe the things that the Council and its partners are working to achieve that will contribute to the Strategic Outcomes.
- **Enabling Actions** – These describe the headline actions which will support delivery of the Strategic Objectives and subsequently contribute to the Strategic Outcomes.

1.3 Summary Strategy on a page

1.3.1 The Active North Herts Strategy Summary can be seen in Table 1.



Table 1: Active North Herts Strategy Summary

Strategic Outcomes	Strategic Objectives
Strategic Theme: Active People	
1. More North Herts residents moving more.	Provide and support a connected and highly visible network of opportunities for residents to be physically active.
2. Physical activity making a greater contribution to the reduction of health inequalities.	Increase the number and frequency of people from identified target groups and localities taking part in regular physical activity.
Strategic Theme: Active Environments	
3. High quality green and urban/grey spaces that support formal and informal opportunities to be active.	Protect, maintain and enhance sustainable green and open spaces that provide opportunities for formal and informal outdoor sport, physical activity and wellbeing programmes.
4. Safe connecting routes that support active travel and 'everyday activity'.	Support the Council's wider strategic approach to sustainable active travel, through early intervention into the planning stages of new development.
Strategic Theme: Active Partnerships	
5. A collaborative, 'whole system' approach to supporting local health and wellbeing.	Strengthen the positive and preventative role of physical activity with system partners to deliver complementary, joined-up services.
6. Skilled and enabled staff and volunteers supporting communities to be more active.	Support the upskilling of the leisure operator's and other providers' workforce to ensure they are better able to meet the needs of people with more complex physical and mental health issues.
Strategic Theme: Active Places	
7. High quality, inclusive and sustainable sport, leisure and physical activity facilities.	Support the provision of sustainable indoor and outdoor facilities which are accessible to all and, meet evidenced need.
8. Activated community places supporting an accessible, local physical activity offer.	Increase locally based opportunities to be physically active through more community use of schools, community centres, village halls, sports club facilities, open spaces and informal space.

1.4 Guiding principles of the Strategy

1.4.1 There are a series of guiding principles and values which shall underpin the Council’s approach to delivery of the Strategy:

- **Collaboration** - The Strategy provides a framework to optimise future partnership working across the Council itself and with its partners and communities
- **Needs-led and evidence-based** – The Strategy shall be driven by the needs of communities and directed by clear insight and evidence on what support is required and where
- **Responsive** – The Strategy shall flex in accordance with changing priorities and be prepared to adopt a ‘test and learn’ approach through effective monitoring and evaluation

1.5 Partnership philosophy

1.5.1 Any place-based strategy needs to be owned and delivered by the organisations and communities in their localities. It is agreed that a **partnership philosophy** will be applied to the Strategy based upon the principles set out in Table 2.

Table 2: Active North Herts Strategy – Partnership Principles

Partnership principles	North Herts will benefit more from partners working together to achieve our shared aims and objectives.
Diversity	The great diversity in our skills, knowledge and experience needs to be respected and we must work together to improve community cohesion and reduce inequality.
Respect	Respect is needed for the differing responsibilities and pressures faced by each partner.
Contribution	Partners will play an important role in the planning and delivery of the Strategy. Clear roles and responsibilities shall be agreed for each partner, as well as for any other statutory sector, voluntary and community sector organisation identified.
Consultation	Local stakeholders shall be involved in decisions affecting the services they receive. Co-design and co-production will be required through a ‘bottom-up’ approach.
Commitment	The Partnership Philosophy needs to be committed to, effectively resourced, and reviewed to ensure continuing effectiveness and impact.

1.6 Strategic Partners

1.6.1 The following strategic partners will be required to play a key role in supporting the future delivery of the new Active North Herts Strategy. Some have been involved in helping to shape the new Strategy through consultation and engagement:

- Herts Sports Partnership - Active Partnership
- Leisure operator partner – Stevenage Leisure limited

- Hertfordshire County Council – Public Health / Adult Services / Children and Young People Services / Transport
- The Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care Board (ICB)
- Herts Disability Foundation
- National Governing Bodies of Sport
- Town and Parish Councils
- Community organisations
- Local sports clubs and physical activity providers
- Voluntary sector partners
- Local schools and colleges

1.7 Enabling actions

- 1.7.1 In Table 3 we set out the **enabling actions**. These are the headline actions which have been developed to support delivery of the Active North Herts Strategy.
- 1.7.2 These enabling actions will be developed further by the Council and its strategic partners over the next 12 months into a live, working action plan. The action plan will need to be agile and responsive, regularly reviewed and updated and be prepared to shift in direction as required.
- 1.7.3 Critical to this action plan will be a need to establish a clear understanding on the specific roles of the Council and its partners in leading or supporting each enabling action. Some indicative partners have been set out for the Council's consideration.

Table 3: Active North Herts Strategy: Enabling Actions

Strategic Outcomes	Enabling actions	Lead organisation / Partners
Strategic Theme: Active People		
<p>1. More North Herts residents moving more.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strengthen the work with partners and providers to develop, deliver and enable an innovative programme of formal and informal activities, supported by technology, that appeal to a wider audience. 2. Raise awareness of all residents of the opportunities to engage locally and the physical and mental health benefits of being more active. 	<p>North Herts Council working with system partners within North Herts</p>
<p>2. Physical activity making a greater contribution to the reduction of health inequalities.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop insight into localities and groups where people are less active, to ensure resource is targeted where it is most needed and will have the most impact. 2. Work with partners to develop a diverse and inclusive programme of targeted activities that are co-designed with local people and delivered in accessible settings. 3. Leverage external funding to support targeted interventions and enable informal and informal participation. 4. Establish effective, ongoing monitoring and evaluation of programmes, interventions and activity levels, to understand what works and to inform future design and delivery. 	<p>North Herts Council working with system partners within North Herts</p>

Strategic Outcomes	Enabling actions	Lead organisation / Partners
Strategic Theme: Active Environments		
<p>3. High quality green and urban/grey spaces that support formal and informal opportunities to be active.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Work with partners and providers to help ‘activate’ open spaces through development and co-production of a co-ordinated programme of outreach activities. 2. Enhance opportunities for active play through playgrounds and youth provision (such as skate parks/cycle parks) and by utilising digital tools. 3. Incorporate wider Council strategies and align with/feed into the Local Plan and updated Playing Pitch Strategy, due for publication in early 2024. 	<p>North Herts Council working with system partners within North Herts</p>
<p>4. Safe connecting routes that support active travel and ‘everyday activity’.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Raise awareness of active travel networks and a stronger understanding amongst residents of the benefits of ‘everyday’ activity. 2. Incorporate and promote the Local Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan currently in development in partnership with Herts County Council. 3. Work with North Herts’s leisure operator partner to establish Active Travel Plans for customers and staff at each of the facilities. 	<p>North Herts Council working with Hertfordshire CC, supported by its leisure operating partner</p>

Strategic Outcomes	Enabling actions	Lead organisation / Partners
Strategic Theme: Active Partnerships		
<p>5. A collaborative, 'whole system' approach to supporting local health and wellbeing.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish an Active North Herts Partnership Board to oversee the Strategy. 2. Build awareness amongst partners and providers, community workers and leaders, social prescribers and other community sign-posters of physical activity opportunities across North Herts – 'make every contact count'. 3. Support schools, sports clubs, town and parish councils, local businesses and community sector partners to deliver physical activity opportunities, particularly for people from less active groups. 4. Build capacity within neighbourhoods to support more active communities. 5. Develop a stronger role for the leisure operator partner, enabling the co-design of programmes and activities alongside communities and co-delivering these in local settings to build local capacity. 6. Establish stronger links with the local Integrated Care System. 	<p>North Herts Council working with system partners within North Herts including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care Board (ICB) • Active Herts - Active Partnership • Community organisations • The North Herts Voluntary Sector • Local schools and colleges
<p>6. A skilled and enabled staff and volunteers supporting communities to be more active.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support the development of apprenticeship programmes and work placements through stronger partnerships with local schools, colleges and training providers. 2. Support the voluntary sector to access grant funding, training and deployment opportunities. 	<p>North Herts Council working with system partners within North Herts including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local schools and colleges • Community organisations • The North Herts Voluntary Sector • Training Providers • Leisure operator partner

Strategic Outcomes	Enabling actions	Lead organisation / Partners
Strategic Theme: Active Places		
<p>7. High quality, inclusive and sustainable sport, leisure and physical activity facilities.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Maintain and enhance existing Council facilities through investment where there is evidenced need and a ‘business case’ for doing so. 2. Maximise the opportunities for developer contributions funding to support the facility infrastructure required, to meet the needs of a growing population. 3. Input into the Infrastructure Delivery Plan to ensure investment into facilities is proactively planned and align with other schemes. 4. Support the Council’s wider climate change strategy through effective environmental management of the Council’s leisure assets and by identifying ‘invest to save’ opportunities to reduce their carbon footprint. 5. Provide development pathways from beginners towards elite level performance. 6. Enable and support other facilities beyond the core leisure centres provided by partners wherever possible and where resources allow. 	<p>North Herts Council working with system partners within North Herts including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local sports clubs and NGBs • Local developer • Leisure operator partner.
<p>8. Activated community places supporting an accessible, local physical activity offer.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Map the existing network of partners and providers delivering activities in community settings. Identify gaps in provision, utilising the open space and facility audits completed by the Council’s Planning team. 2. Support these partners to develop and sustain community-based programmes at local facilities that are co-designed with local people. 	<p>North Herts Council working with system partners within North Herts including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local sports clubs and NGBs • Local developers • Leisure operator partner.

1.8 Monitoring and evaluation

1.8.1 In **Appendix 3** we set out some indicative Key Performance Indicators to measure progress of the Strategy. These will need to be reviewed and developed further by the Council in consultation with its strategic partners.

1.9 Our Approach

1.9.1 In order to inform the Active North Herts Strategy, SLC has completed a review of the current state of sport and physical activity within North Herts, which included the following:

- **Strategic document review** – to understand the wider strategic context in terms of the Council’s future priorities
- **Demographic & health inequalities review** – to provide an insight into the key challenges in the District to be addressed through the Strategy
- **Review of the role of the leisure centres** – current state analysis on the use, reach and impact of the services

1.9.2 See **Appendix 1** for detailed analysis of the above.

1.9.3 **External stakeholder engagement** was undertaken to ensure the emerging Strategy was informed by the views and priorities of the community, sports clubs and schools.

1.9.4 This was supported by input from internal stakeholders to develop a realistic and achievable set of strategic outcomes and strategic objectives – the primary scope of SLC’s work.

1.9.5 **Internal stakeholder engagement** consisted of two workshops with Council officers, elected Members and key strategic partners including Stevenage Leisure Limited and a representative from [Herts Sports Partnership](#).

1.9.6 **External stakeholder engagement** consisted of online surveys published and promoted to the following groups:

- Existing leisure centre users and the wider public – **535 completed responses**
- Sports clubs – **25 completed responses**
- Schools – **14 completed responses**

1.9.7 See **Appendix 2** for detailed analysis of internal and external engagement.

1.9.8 **This focused process has enabled the Council to review its provision of leisure, sport and physical activity services across North Herts, enabling it to revisit its priorities, to develop a new Active North Herts Strategy.**

1.10 Acknowledgements

1.10.1 SLC would like to thank elected Members and officers of North Herts Council and strategic partners, including Herts Sports Partnership and Stevenage Leisure Ltd, for their input to date in developing the Active North Herts Strategy.

2. Next Steps

Eight key next steps to bring the Strategy to life in North Herts

2.1 Introduction

- 2.1.1 SLC has worked with the Council and its partners to develop the strategic outcomes and objectives of the new Active North Herts Strategy and the enabling actions to support its delivery.
- 2.1.2 SLC has also set out some indicative key performance indicators to support the monitoring and evaluation of the strategy over the next five years. These can be seen in **Appendix 3**.
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2.2 Next steps

- 2.2.1 Following adoption of the new Strategy, the Council needs to take forward the following eight key next steps:
1. **Develop a public facing Vision for Active North Herts and high level ‘glossy’ strategy, working with colleagues in the Communications team.**
 2. **Establish an Active North Herts Partnership Forum, supporting terms of reference and governance structure(s) to support it and identifying members.**
 3. **Identify sufficient internal resource to support and service the Active North Herts Partnership Forum and monitoring and evaluation to support it.**
 4. **Embed the high-level strategic outcomes and objectives into procurement documentation to support the selection of a leisure operating partner.**
 5. **Map the existing network of partners and providers delivering activities in community settings.**
 6. **Following this, identify gaps in provision and priority localities, utilising insight from partners and the open space and facility audits completed by the Council’s Planning team.**
 7. **Develop the detailed action plan with partners, identifying key leads / owners and supporters / contributors linked to agreement on KPI’s monitoring and evaluation.**
 8. **Refinement and baselining of key performance indicators with strategic partners as appropriate.**

3. Active North Herts - An Overview

The general health of residents is above the national average.

Levels of active residents are higher than the national average. However, there are stubborn inequalities within North Herts.

Residents want inclusive, affordable, and sustainable opportunities for physical activity.

3.1 Where is North Herts now?

3.1.1 Leisure, sport and physical activity services have an important role in addressing stubborn inequalities that are important to North Herts including:

- overweight children
- activity levels amongst deprived areas
- those with a disability and long-term health condition.

3.1.2 Generally, North Herts has a higher proportion of active residents (those participating in 150 minutes or more of physical activity per week) than the national average.

3.1.3 **However, the more deprived a resident is, the less physically active they are.** Activity levels amongst the most deprived areas in North Herts (a third of residents) and those with a disability or long-term health condition, are significantly reduced.

3.1.4 The general health of residents is above the national average and levels of active residents are higher than the national average.

3.1.5 **However, there are deep set inequalities.** For example, childhood obesity is set to increase by c.10% from reception to Year 6.

3.1.6 **A better understanding is required of what is driving current physical activity levels and how any potential barriers could be lifted.**

3.1.7 Capturing localised data, especially around different socio-economic and ethnic groups will help inform a stronger understanding of specific community needs. This can support the design and delivery of the Council's future leisure and physical activity offer.

3.1.8 Full analysis, including a review of strategic documents, demographics and health inequalities and the role of leisure facilities can be found in Appendix 1.

3.2 What do North Herts residents think about physical activity?

3.2.1 Key themes that emerged from the community engagement revolve around a need to create **inclusive, affordable, and sustainable opportunities for physical activity.**

3.2.2 Key to this is building partnerships, leveraging existing resources, and addressing the specific needs of different communities and demographics.

- 3.2.3 There are key synergies across the groups consulted with: residents, sports clubs and schools. They include:
- **Lower cost activities** would support increased physical activity
 - The Council should prioritise support more **locally based activities** (e.g. in parks, community centres, village halls etc.)
 - Resources should be focused on **less active/inactive groups**
- 3.2.4 **87% of respondents surveyed want to be physically active.**
- 3.2.5 Residents would be more active in the future if there were:
- lower cost activities
 - more information on what's available
 - a wider, more diverse range of activities
 - better quality facilities
- 3.2.6 Sports Clubs identified the following support is required to help the needs of participants from less active groups:
- Increased funding opportunities to help meet the needs of less active groups
 - Increased awareness amongst less active groups of clubs and activities available
 - Additional training to provide more specialist coaches/instructors
- 3.2.7 Schools identified that the Council's priority for the provision of sport and physical activity facilities and services across North Herts should be:
- **To strengthen partnership working** with our leisure centres operator, sports clubs, schools, community and voluntary sector groups and other partners
 - **To support more opportunities for residents to be active in local places** such as parks, community centres and village halls
 - **To focus resources on encouraging inactive or less active residents to be more active**
- 3.2.8 Full details and results of the engagement with residents and stakeholders can be found in **Appendix 2.**

4. Appendix 1 – Active North Herts - Analysis

4.1 Strategic review summary

- 4.1.1 The Active North Herts Strategy will need to be framed within the wider strategic context.
- 4.1.2 The Strategy will need to complement and support the integrated framework of the Council's and partners' strategies, supporting improved health and wellbeing outcomes and increased community cohesion across North Herts.
- 4.1.3 SLC have reviewed a range of key strategic documents that will underpin the Active North Herts Strategy.
- 4.1.4 With no overarching strategy that clearly sets out the Council's strategic approach to its leisure, sport and physical activity services, it is important to consider where these services feature within the Council wider strategic priorities.
- 4.1.5 The Council's overarching strategy is the Council Plan 2022-2027, and although the promotion of physical activity is not explicitly mentioned, it does link into four key strategic themes which support the health and wellbeing of residents:
- **Our Environment** – recognising the importance of the natural environment and positive impact it has on the lives of local people
 - **Our Local Economy** – highlighting the role of the regeneration of town centres and addressing the issues faced by rural communities
 - **Our Places** – creating spaces and infrastructure that meet the current and future needs of residents
 - **Our Services** – helping residents to access services more easily
- 4.1.6 Leisure, sport and physical activity services have an important role in supporting all of these key themes.
- 4.1.7 The Local Plan 2011-2031 also recognises the importance of community and recreation facilities, alongside greenspace, in contributing to local people's physical and mental wellbeing. The plan identifies key strategic priorities, including Healthy Communities. This states the priority to provide and maintain healthy, inclusive communities for residents.
- 4.1.8 The role of greenspace in leisure, sport and physical activity services is also recognised within the Greenspace Management Strategy 2022-2027. Although the two are not explicitly linked, the role of providing a wide range of greenspaces which can be used for recreational purposes is identified as a key objective.
- 4.1.9 There are also a number of wider strategies to consider such as the countywide Health and Wellbeing Strategy, which we understand is currently being updated. The Herts Sports Partnership's new 5-year Strategy outlines a Vision of "more people, more active, more often". The Strategy identifies a number of strategic objectives:
- **Community sport & physical activity sector** – provide opportunities for the people of Hertfordshire to start, continue and thrive in their chosen sport or physical activity
 - **Covid recovery** - Support the community sport and physical activity sector and individuals to recover from the impact of the Covid pandemic, using sport and physical activity to improve health and wellbeing and community resilience.
 - **Physical activity for health and wellbeing** - Positioning movement, sport, and physical activity at the heart of how we think about people's health and wellbeing in Hertfordshire.

- **Sport for social change** - Use sport and physical activity to enhance the lives of Hertfordshire's residents by supporting community cohesion, social inclusion, economic prosperity, crime and anti-social behaviour reduction, educational attainment and employability
- **Stronger communities** - Taking a place-based approach to tackling inequalities and reducing inactivity, by concentrating limited resources and empowering local communities from target areas, for maximum impact.
- **Active environments** - The development of inclusive and sustainable places and spaces to encourage participation in sport and physical activity for all our residents.

4.1.10 It will be critical for the new Active North Herts Strategy to connect and align strongly with the broader existing strategic context.

4.1.11 In summary, whilst the provision of spaces and places for sport, leisure and physical activity is evident within the Council's wider strategies, a clearer definition of its strategic role in supporting the health and wellbeing of communities is required.

4.2 Strategic review

4.2.1 The following documents have been reviewed:

- North Herts District Council - Council Plan 2022 – 2027
- North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 – 2031
- Greenspace Management Strategy 2022-2027
- The Herts Sport Partnership Strategy 2022-2027 'All Together Now – Uniting the Movement in Hertfordshire'
- North Hertfordshire Indoor Sports Facilities Strategy & Action Plan (including May 2019 update)
- North Hertfordshire Indoor Sports Facilities Assessment Report
- North Hertfordshire Playing Pitch Strategy & Action Plan (including May 2019 update)
- North Hertfordshire Playing Pitch Strategy Assessment Report
- North Herts Council Equality Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2022-27

4.3 NHDC Council Plan 2022 – 2027

4.3.1 The Council Plan sets out three priorities:

- People first – valuing all residents, businesses, staff, contractors, Councillors and other partners and placing them at the heart of what the Council does
- Sustainability – committing to the delivery of services which are relevant and sustainable, with a focus on environmental responsibilities and sound financial planning
- A brighter future together – planning for the long term to ensure North Herts continues to thrive.

4.3.2 Whilst the promotion of health and physical activity is not explicitly mentioned within these priorities, they link into four subsequent themes which pick up on the health and wellbeing of residents:

- Our Environment
- Our Local Economy
- Our Places
- Our Services

- 4.3.3 Our Places contributes to this health and physical activity agenda through the ambition to create sustainable spaces and infrastructure based on need and ensuring walking and cycling are attractive modes of transport for residents. The developing Green Infrastructure Plan and Strategy will also support the health and wellbeing of residents.
- 4.3.4 The plan identifies key projects to deliver change that directly align to sport, physical activity and wellbeing:
- Installation of interactive playground equipment in all four towns
 - Implementation of the new Green Space Management Strategy
 - Undertake refurbishments at North Herts Leisure Centre, Hitchin Swimming Centre and Royston Leisure Centre
- 4.3.5 Although the strategy provides deliverable projects with associated timeframes for completion, there is a lack of proposed monitoring and accountability of these ambitions.

4.4 North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 – 2031

- 4.4.1 The Local Plan recognises the importance of community and recreation facilities, alongside greenspace in contributing to local people’s physical and mental wellbeing.
- 4.4.2 The Plan makes reference to the increasing population and predicted growth of nearly 9,000 residents over the next 10 years.
- 4.4.3 There is a recognition that infrastructure will need to accommodate this growth, including community buildings and sports facilities to cater for an increased demand.
- 4.4.4 The plan identifies key strategic priorities, including Healthy Communities. This states the priority to provide and maintain healthy, inclusive communities for residents.
- 4.4.5 Key priorities to achieve this include:
- Support the retention of existing community, cultural, leisure or recreation facilities;
 - Require appropriate levels of new community, cultural, leisure and built sport & recreation facilities to be provided in new development;
 - Work with the NHS Trust, the Clinical Commissioning Groups and other relevant providers to ensure appropriate coverage of healthcare facilities across the District;
 - Maintain the network of local retail centres identified in Policy SP4 and support the retention of locally-important shops;
 - Work with Hertfordshire County Council and education providers to ensure the planning system contributes to the provision of sufficient school places and facilitates the provision of new or expanded schools in appropriate and accessible locations.
 - Protect, enhance and create new physical and green infrastructure to foster healthy lifestyles
- 4.4.6 The National Planning Policy Framework addresses the importance that access to open space has for the health and wellbeing of a community. Physical infrastructure, for instance, walking and cycling routes, can have dual benefits of improving health through exercise, whilst sustainable modes of transport also lessen the impact on the natural environment. Green infrastructure assets can also be a driver for economic growth and investment.

4.5 Greenspace Management Strategy 2022-2027

- 4.5.1 The Greenspace Management Strategy sets out the Council’s vision, aims and strategic objectives for the management of greenspaces.

4.5.2 The strategy outlines the following vision: “to provide high quality, well managed green spaces to meet the needs of our communities and which contribute positively to our sustainability priority”.

4.5.3 The key objectives of the strategy are as follows:

- To manage our greenspace in an environmentally sustainable way, while also providing value for money for residents.
- To provide a wide range of greenspaces which can be used for many recreational purposes.
- To ensure greenspaces for future developments are developed with the needs of communities and sustainability in mind and deliver long term-benefits.

4.6 NHDC Indoor Sports Facilities Strategy & Action Plan (incl. Assessment Report)

4.6.1 The Indoor Sports Facilities Strategy & Action Plan was adopted by the Council in 2018, following the publication of the Assessment Report in 2016. This is important to consider when reviewing the key findings below as the strategy and action plans are somewhat out of date and require updating.

4.6.2 The overall vision for the strategy is ‘to create a network of high quality, accessible and sustainable sport and leisure facilities, which offer inclusive services for all; enabling the inactive to become active and more residents to fulfil their potential by participating in sport and physical activity, thus improving their long-term health and well-being.’

4.6.3 Supporting this vision, the strategy’s key objectives are based around the need to provide accessible and affordable facilities for all and contributing to tackling health inequalities across the region.

4.6.4 The additional need for facilities is considered in light of the housing and population growth identified in the Local Plan.

4.6.5 Key findings of the needs assessment undertaken as part of the strategy includes:

- There is a current and future under supply of sports halls and the current stock is in need of investment
- Clubs have identified demand for more sports hall space, suggesting there is a need for additional community provision
- There is generally a good supply of swimming pools, although the current stock is ageing
- Although the supply of swimming pools is good, clubs have identified a need for additional water space
- There is potential growth in demand for health and fitness facilities and consideration may be given to increasing the current provision
- Hitchin Swimming Centre and North Herts Leisure Centre are identified for investment

4.6.6 The updated Action Plan from May 2019 outlines key updates and outlines many refurbishments that have taken place, demonstrating the Council’s track record of investing into its leisure, sport and physical activities facilities.

4.7 NHDC Playing Pitch Strategy & Action Plan (incl. Assessment Report)

4.7.1 The NHDC Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) & Action Plan, adopted in 2015, is based on the Assessment Report published in 2015. These findings are therefore out of date and there is a need to refresh the assessment report and required actions.

4.7.2 The PPS identifies that:

- Overall, there is spare capacity for adult, youth and junior grass football across the district
- There is a future need for further 3G provision
- There is currently sufficient provision for cricket, rugby union, tennis, bowls, golf and there is not a need for the provision of an athletics track
- There is a need for increased AGP provision to satisfy hockey demand

4.7.3 The May 2019 updated Action Plan provides key updates to facility and club usage.

4.8 North Herts Council Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2022-2027

4.8.1 The Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy sets out the role it plays in advancing equality, fostering good relations between different groups within the community, and helping those who are disadvantaged to feel heard, represented and given practical help and support.

4.8.2 The Strategy includes the following objectives for key groups within the community, each of whom share a protected characteristic as defined by the Equality Act:

- Work with young people through youth engagement to make it easier for them to have their voices heard in local decision-making and democracy.
- Improve our engagement with marginalised, seldom heard, and new communities to make it easier for them to participate in local decision-making and democracy, and to have their views and experiences heard by the council.
These groups may include but are not limited to:
 - Black and minority ethnic groups;
 - refugees and asylum seekers;
 - disabled people.
- Improve our understanding of broader EDI issues and their impacts, such as neurodiversity and economic disadvantage; as well as the intersections between inequalities, using our Inclusion Group as a channel.
- Achieve consistency in measuring the likely equality impacts of our emerging policies and services.

4.8.3 Levels of physical activity can vary significantly amongst particular groups. Those with a disability or long-term health condition, those from black and ethnic minority groups and those on low income are all typically less active. Tackling these inequalities will therefore need to form a central theme that runs throughout all elements of the new Active North Herts Strategy.

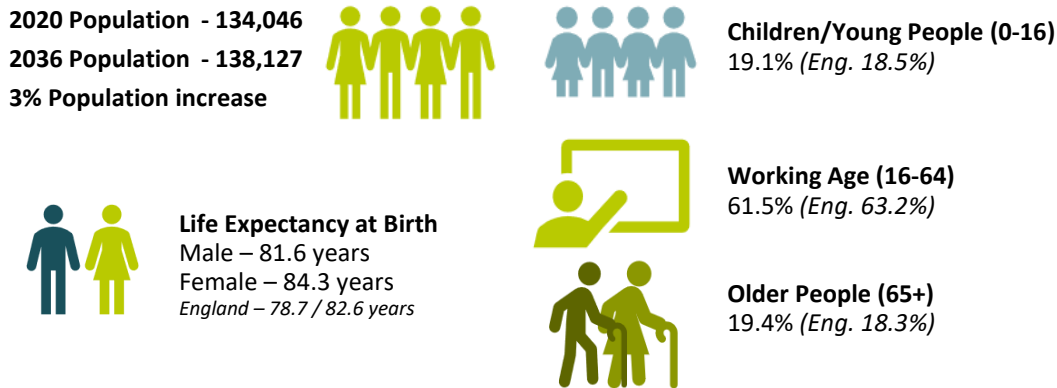
4.9 Demographic and health inequalities

4.9.1 A high-level review of the key demographics and health inequalities faced by North Herts residents has been completed. This provides an insight into the challenges in the District to be addressed through the new Strategy.

Key population and health statistics

4.9.2 Figure 1 provides an overview of the population, demographic, and life expectancy at birth across North Herts, and nationally.

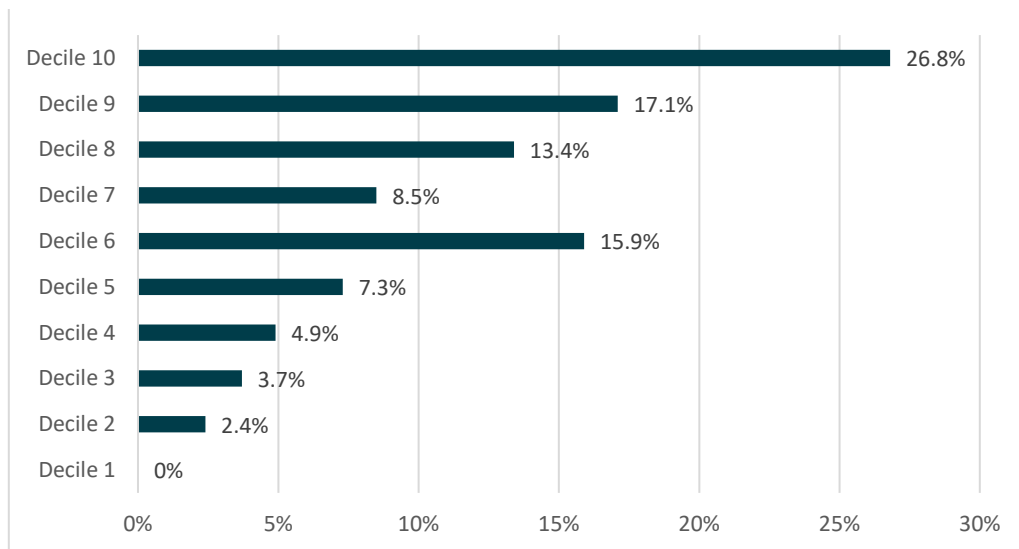
Figure 1: Population, life expectancy and demographics (Source: ONS)



4.9.3 North Herts is projected to increase by 3% by 2036 (Office for National Statistics (ONS) and life expectancy at birth is higher than the national average, both male and female. This population increase will be important to consider as built infrastructure will be required to meet a growing population.

4.9.4 Figure 2 shows the proportion of North Herts Lower-Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) National Deciles. IMD is the official measure of relative deprivation, taking into consideration elements that include Income Deprivation, Living Environment Deprivation, and Health Deprivation. Although North Herts is one of the 20% least deprived districts/unitary authorities in England, approximately 2,520 children live in low income families.

Figure 2: Proportion of North Herts LSOA in IMD National Deciles (1 - least deprived / 10 most deprived)



Population health

4.9.5 Overall, the health of people in North Herts is generally better than the national average. Figure 3 shows key health statistics for North Herts.

Figure 3: Overweight / Obese Children & Adults and Day-to-Day Activity Impairment due to Long Term Health/Disability (Public Health Outcomes Framework 2021/22)

Overweight or Obese Children
 Reception – 17.8%
 Year 6 – 28.36%
 England – 22.25% / 37.76%



Overweight or Obese

Adults

55.5% (April 2021)

England – 63.5



Long-term Health Problem or Disability

Day to Day Activities:

Limited a lot— 5.8%

Limited a little—10.1%

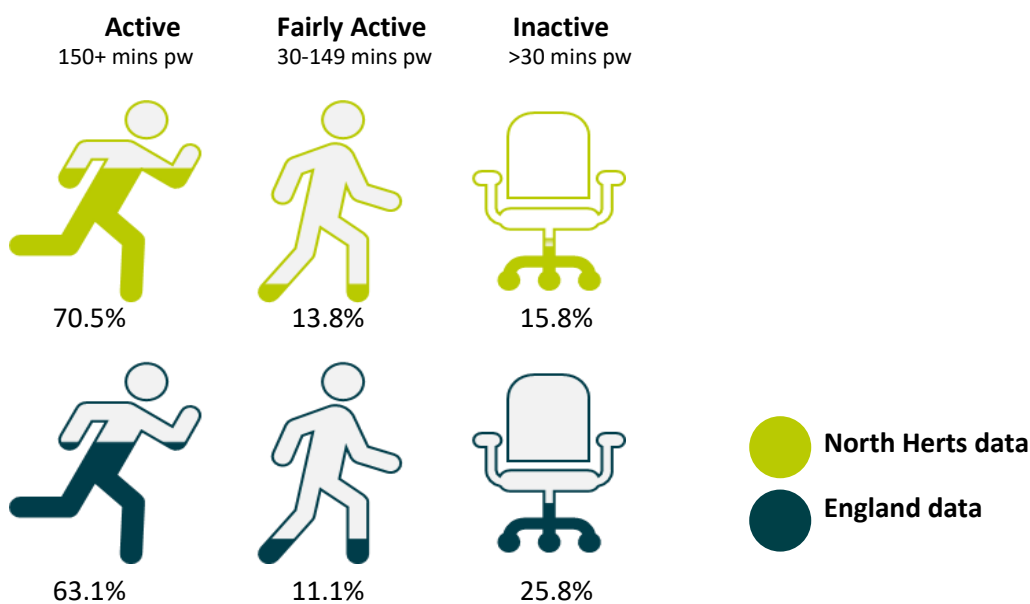
England – 7.5% / 10.2%

- 4.9.6 Obesity figures in North Herts across both adults and children are significantly lower than the national average. The Public Health Outcomes Framework 2019/20 states that 17.8% of reception age children in North Herts are overweight or obese, rising to 28% in Year 6. These are significantly lower than the England average, with reception figures c.9% lower than the national average. Similarly, adult obesity levels are c.8% lower than the national average.
- 4.9.7 Similarly, North Herts residents that were identified as being disabled and limited a lot and limited a little are both lower than the national average. 10.1% of North Herts residents were identified as being disabled and limited a little, this equates to just over 1 in 10 people.

Key participation statistics

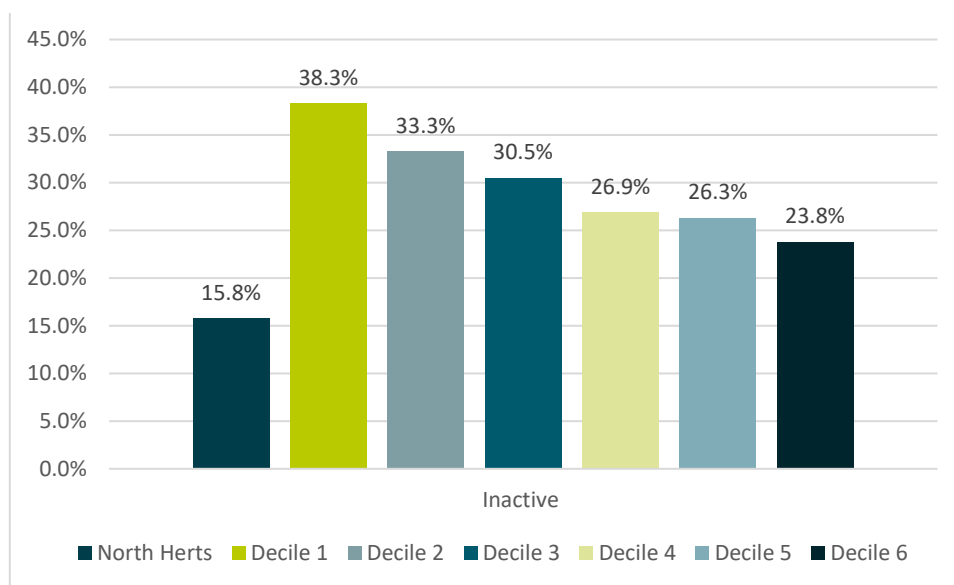
- 4.9.8 The Sport England Active Lives Survey November 2021/22 provides comparative activity data between North Herts and the national average. Generally, North Herts has a higher proportion of active (those participating in 150+ minutes per week of physical activity) residents than the national average (70.5% against 63.1% nationally).
- 4.9.9 At 15.8%, North Herts also has significantly lower levels of inactive (those participating in less than 30 minutes of physical activity per week) residents than the national average (25.8%).

Figure 4: North Herts and National Activity Levels



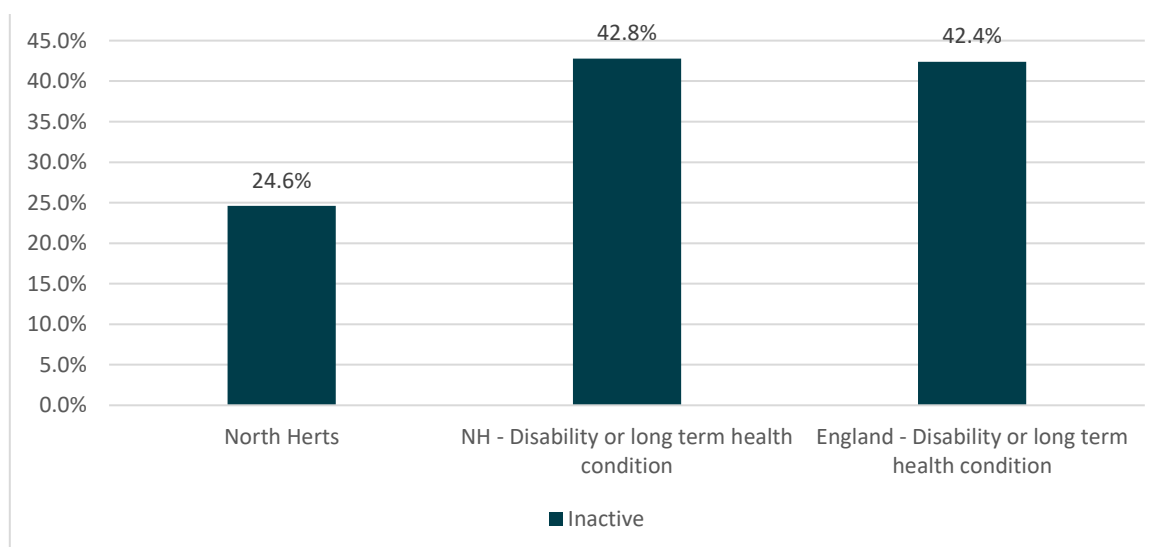
4.9.10 Figure 5 shows the inactivity levels of deprivation deciles (1-6), which are widely above the North Herts average. The first column represents the overall North Herts average inactivity levels, as demonstrated in Figure 4. The below graph shows the dramatic increase in inactivity in the most deprived areas of North Herts. **This identifies that the more deprived a resident is, the less physically active they are.** Significantly, Decile 6 inactivity levels are still higher than the average across North Herts. As shown in Figure 2, approximately a third of residents in North Herts current fall into deciles 1-6.

Figure 5: Inactivity by deprivation deciles



4.9.11 Figure 6 shows the inactivity levels of those with a disability or long-term health condition. This shows that inactivity increases significantly amongst those residents with a disability or long-term health condition when compared to the overall North Herts average. It also demonstrates that almost half of those with a disability or long-term health condition are physically active for less than 30 mins per week.

Figure 6: North Herts inactivity with a disability or long-term health condition



4.10 The role of the leisure facilities

- 4.10.1 The Council's leisure facilities play a crucial role in providing opportunities to be active and supporting the health and wellbeing of communities.
- 4.10.2 These facilities serve as publicly accessible and inclusive spaces where individuals of all ages and backgrounds can participate in a wide range of activities and programmes. They also play a vital role in providing learn-to-swim opportunities and supporting young people in developing essential water safety and swimming skills.
- 4.10.3 The facilities attract c. 1.4M visits each year and cater for a range of local sports clubs and community groups. As of January 2023, there were a total of 12,625 members across all facilities with c.1,330 on concessionary memberships, highlighting the Council's commitment to ensuring affordability and accessibility for residents. This high level of usage and membership reflects the significant reach and impact of the Council's leisure centres in supporting North Herts residents to be active.
- 4.10.4 The Council is in the process of procuring a new leisure contract to begin in April 2024. Within this, there are significant opportunities for the role of the leisure facilities service to expand its reach into communities and contribute even more to wider health and wellbeing outcomes. For example, the Council has a desire to establish a more outward facing service which provides more opportunities for people to be active in local settings.
- 4.10.5 The new contract will therefore act as a critical delivery mechanism for the new Active North Herts Strategy, providing more outreach programmes, with a focus on targeting less active communities. The preferred operator partner, selected through the procurement process, will therefore play a pivotal role in the future delivery of the Strategy.

5. Appendix 2 - What do North Herts residents and stakeholders think?

5.1 Public engagement

5.1.1 A public engagement exercise was undertaken via an online survey. The survey was live for three weeks in February 2023 and promoted through the Council's social media channels and website.

5.1.2 The survey was designed to understand more about the following:

- current activity levels of North Herts residents
- the barriers to being active and what would help to overcome these
- what activities people would like to take part in
- how often they use Council sports, leisure and physical activity facilities and what would encourage increased use of these in the future
- what the Council's future priorities should be.

5.1.3 Key findings from the public engagement were as follows:

- 535 responses were submitted
- **87% of respondents want to be more physically active**
- 14% of respondents are classified as 'inactive' (doing less than 30 minutes of physical activity per week)
- The three main barriers to being more physically active are: difficult to find the time (46%), it's too expensive (36%), and there is a lack of suitable activities (33%)
- The main things that would help participants become more physically active are lower cost activities (47%), improved walking and cycling routes (46%), more locally based facilities & activities (45%), and a broader range of activities (41%)
- Activities that people would like to participate in to increase levels of physical activity are walking (55%), swimming (47%), exercise classes (43%) and yoga/Pilates (40%)
- Respondents identified that the Council's priorities in supporting local people to become more active should be:
 - To support **more opportunities** for residents to be **active in local places** such as parks, community centres and village halls (48%)
 - To help **increase awareness** of what activities and facilities are available (42%)
 - To **focus resources** on encouraging **inactive or less active** residents to be more active (39%)
- The most popular responses when asked what would encourage people to use the Council's facilities more in the future were lower cost activities (49%), more information on what's available (40%), a wider range of activities (31%) and better quality facilities (24%).

5.2 Sports clubs engagement

5.2.1 A total of 25 sports clubs provided responses to the Council's online questionnaire. The key findings of the engagement are as follows:

- 44% reported that their club membership is slightly or significantly increasing. 37% reported that membership was remaining the same and 19% reported it was slightly decreasing
- 74% advised that they currently have some or a significant amount of additional capacity for new members, with the remaining 26% reporting that they have limited or no additional capacity for new members
- The main challenges highlighted by clubs in growing or sustaining membership levels are cost of facilities (48%), number of other volunteers to support club activities (48%), number of qualified coaches (40%) and access to facilities (36%)
- Clubs identified the following support is required to help the needs of participants from less active groups:
 - **Increased funding opportunities** to help meet the needs of less active groups (72%)
 - **Increased awareness amongst less active groups** of clubs and activities available (48%)
 - **Additional training** to provide more specialist coaches/instructors (32%)
- Sports clubs identified that the Council's priorities for the wider provision of sport and physical activity facilities and services across North Herts should be:
 - To help **increase awareness** of what activities and facilities are available (65%)
 - To **focus resources** on encouraging **inactive or less active** residents to be more active (61%)
 - To support the provision of **better-quality facilities** that are **more accessible** (57%)

Figure 7: Main challenges faced by clubs



5.3 Schools' engagement

5.3.1 14 schools provided responses to the online questionnaire. The key findings of the engagement are as follows:

- 60% of the schools who responded let out facilities for community use
- Key challenges identified for children and young people to be active in North Herts include:
 - Cost of activities (100%)
 - Access to facilities (77%)
 - Lack of information about what is available (54%)
 - Lack of time / motivation (38%)
- Schools identified that the Council's priorities for the provision of sport and physical activity facilities and services across North Herts should be:
 - To **strengthen partnership working** with our leisure centres operator, sports clubs, schools, community and voluntary sector groups and other partners (62%)
 - To **support more opportunities for residents to be active in local places** such as parks, community centres and village halls (54%)
 - To **focus resources on encouraging inactive or less active residents** to be more active (46%)

5.4 Internal and external stakeholders

5.4.1 SLC facilitated an Active North Herts Workshop with key Council officers, elected Members, Herts Sports Partnership and Stevenage Leisure Ltd on 3 March 2023. The virtual workshop with key stakeholders was to review the findings of the consultation and to explore:

- the current challenges faced by the Council's leisure, sport and physical activity facilities and services and;
- the future opportunities to support a more active place
- to identify the key emerging strategic themes for the new Strategy

5.4.2 The aim of the session was to identify the strengths within the current system and the opportunities for greater collaboration with partners. Alongside linking to the Council's internal capacity to provide leadership and coordination across the district.

5.4.3 The workshop secured strong engagement and genuine 'buy in' from elected Members and stakeholder partners. Attendees were consulted on what they considered to be the opportunities and priorities for the Council. The key themes that emerged were:

- Providing opportunities for physical activity that are affordable and inclusive
- Focusing on rural areas and addressing the needs of the needs of the community, and building 'everyday activity' into a healthy lifestyle
- Developing a much stronger community-based service, beyond the core facilities, through delivery of activities and programmes in community settings, parks and open spaces
- Coordinating and communicating available resources from partners, to establish a more placed-based approach
- Reducing levels of inactivity within communities, including removing the key barriers
- Strengthening collaboration with community and voluntary sector groups, to deliver programmes and activities within local settings that extend the offer and appeal to a broader audience
- Supporting the upskilling of the leisure workforce to ensure they are able to meet the needs of people with more complex physical and mental health challenges and cultural and socio-economic needs
- Developing an innovative and inclusive approach to workforce development through engagement with education partners. Providing a high-quality apprenticeship development programme and an innovative volunteering offer which recognises the value of the volunteering experience
- Developing a better understanding of the specific needs of communities and barriers to physical activity at a local level. A greater understanding of this will ensure services are designed effectively to meet these needs

5.4.4 **Overall, the key themes revolve around creating inclusive, affordable, and sustainable opportunities for physical activity. Key to this is building partnerships, leveraging existing resources, and addressing the specific needs of different communities and demographics.**

5.4.5 These key themes, alongside the key findings from the community engagement were used to establish the Strategic Outcomes and Objectives in consultation with Council officers.

6. Appendix 3 - Key Performance Indicators

Table 4: KPI's against Strategic Outcomes and Objectives

Strategic Outcomes	Strategic Objective	KPI (measure)	Baseline 2023	Target 2028
Strategic Theme: Active People				
1. More North Herts residents moving more.	Provide and support a connected and highly visible network of opportunities for residents to be physically active.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sport England Active Lives Survey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Active Lives Survey Nov 21 - 22: Active: 70.5% Inactive: 15.8% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase the number of Active residents by 5% Decrease those categorised as Inactive by 5%
2. Physical activity making a greater contribution to the reduction of health inequalities.	Increase the number and frequency of people from identified target groups and localities taking part in regular physical activity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sport England Active Lives Survey – specific groups (tbc) Level of external funding to support targeted interventions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Active Lives Survey Nov 21 - 22: Active: XX% (tbc depending on specific groups) Inactive: XX% (tbc depending on specific groups) Level of funding to be established in year 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase the number of Active residents from specific groups by 5% Decrease the number of Inactive residents from specific groups by 5% 10% increase in programmes supported by external funding

Strategic Outcomes	Strategic Objective	KPI (measure)	Baseline 2023	Target 2028
Strategic Theme: Active Environments				
3. High quality green and urban/grey spaces that support formal and informal opportunities to be active.	Protect, maintain and enhance sustainable green and open spaces that provide opportunities for formal and informal outdoor sport, physical activity and wellbeing programmes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residents' satisfaction on quality and accessibility of green and open space to support physical activity. Moving More – number of programmes /activities taking place in open spaces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To be established in year 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve satisfaction by 5% Increase in number of programmes registered on Moving More by 10%
4. Safe connecting routes that support active travel and 'everyday activity'.	Support the Council's wider strategic approach to sustainable active travel, through early intervention into the planning stages of new development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> % of planning applications where Active Design principles have been applied and resulted in a positive outcome. Resident awareness on access to active travel options. Delivery and monitoring of Active Travel Plan for leisure facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To be established in year 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase of planning applications by 10%. Increase resident awareness by 15% Active travel plan targets (tbc)

Strategic Outcomes	Strategic Objective	KPI (measure)	Baseline 2023	Target 2028
Strategic Theme: Active Partnerships				
<p>5. A collaborative, ‘whole system’ approach to supporting local health and wellbeing.</p>	<p>Strengthen the positive and preventative role of physical activity with system partners to deliver complementary, joined-up services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of programmes delivered through collaboration with system partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To be established in year 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase number of programmes by 25%
<p>6. A skilled and enabled staff and volunteers supporting communities to be more active.</p>	<p>Support the upskilling of the leisure operator’s and other providers’ workforce to ensure they are better able to meet the needs of people with more complex physical and mental health issues.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of endorsed training sessions on complex physical and mental health issues attended by the leisure operator’s workforce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To be established in year 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase number of training sessions by 25%

Strategic Outcomes	Strategic Objective	KPI (measure)	Baseline 2023	Target 2028
Strategic Theme: Active Places				
7. High quality, inclusive and sustainable sport, leisure and physical activity facilities.	Support the provision of sustainable indoor and outdoor facilities which are accessible to all and, meet evidenced need.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery of investment schemes at Royston LC • Delivery of NHC Capital Programme • Delivery of other investment schemes identified in partnership with operator • Energy consumption data. • Implementation of PV schemes. • Implementation of other invest to save schemes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2022/23 usage data • NHC Capital Programme • 2022/23 energy consumption data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10% increase in usage (2% per year) • Full delivery of Capital Programme • 10% reduction in consumption of energy from traditional sources
8. Activated community places supporting an accessible, local physical activity offer.	Increase locally based opportunities to be physically active through more community use of schools, community centres, village halls, sports club facilities, open spaces and informal spaces.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No. of activities delivered in community settings that are registered on Moving More 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be established in year 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25% increase in the no. of activities delivered in community settings



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SLC was established in 2009.
Working alongside core cities, metropolitan councils, borough and district councils, we support active communities.

