

OXFORD CITY COUNCIL

Indoor Facilities Assessment

An

Executive Summary

By

STRATEGIC LEISURE LIMITED

October 2004

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Introduction

Strategic Leisure Limited (SLL) were appointed in September 2003 to begin developing an Indoor Facilities Strategy for Oxford City Council (OCC). This strategy is to be developed from an initial starting point of a baseline assessment of provision based on identified good practice methodologies within the leisure industry. This assessment would be one of a series of assessments covering Playing Pitches, Community Centres and Green Spaces. These in turn will lead to the development of additional strategies for provision across these areas of provision.

The Indoor Facilities Strategy needs to include leisure provision, in the public, commercial, and where possible voluntary sectors. The strategy aims to identify:

- The need for facility provision – current and future
- The type of facility provision required
- The local standards for provision (qualitative and quantitative)
- The location (s) for new and refurbished provision
- The community area served by the facilities
- The potential for integrated sport and community facilities, to make most effective use of available resources.

The scope of the Indoor Facilities Assessment undertaken as the first step in developing this strategy includes the main type of facilities provided by the City Council as well as others and covers:

- Indoor swimming pools
- Indoor sports facilities
- Health and Fitness facilities

Local Strategic Context

OCC is a one of five districts in Oxfordshire. Oxford City is 4560 hectares in size. It is located centrally in the county, about 50 miles north west of London. Oxford is the main urban centre of Oxfordshire; a historic city with a modern service economy as well as a major manufacturing and academic centre. Over 5 million people come to the City per year, primarily to visit the University and bring in the region of £250m to the city's economy. The City has experienced rapid change over the past 30 years, moving from a university and manufacturing town to a new role as one of the largest employment centres in the South East.

A review of the key local strategic context is provided below, with a focus on OCC corporate priorities and objectives. It is important to ensure that local priorities of the Council and other key stakeholders are considered in assessing the adequacy of current provision and in making recommendations for the future.

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Our Vision for Oxford: Building Pride in our City (Best Value Performance Plan 2003).

Improving the Council's performance

OCC aims to provide services that the people of Oxford can rely on, services that get things right the first time. OCC aims to be a Council that our people can be proud of. OCC believes that good services can only be delivered by staff who are motivated and appreciated. The Council will:

- restore and maintain financial stability
- bring all core services up to the standards of those provided by the best Councils over the next three years.

Working with others to develop and deliver shared goals

The Council, as the democratically elected body for Oxford, should play a more focused and creative role in the life of the city. The Council aims to do this by working more closely with the communities in our city and learning from them. They will:

- Improve the environments where we live and work
- Make Oxford a safer city
- Provide more affordable housing
- Create local prosperity and sustain full employment
- Improve transport and mobility
- Improve dialogue and consultation
- Provide more and improved affordable leisure activities.

Provide more and improved affordable leisure activities

Oxford offers a rich range of leisure activities, which can contribute to the health, and well-being of the city. The Council wants to increase this range and make them accessible to all of the people in Oxford at a reasonable price.

Over the last few years the Council has:

- Invested almost £0.5m in the Parks infrastructure and introduced new outdoor leisure facilities in parks across the city. More will be invested in the forthcoming year
- Made plans to invest in new facilities to bring their leisure centres up to the highest standards, including £3.5 million in the Ferry centre. This work is in progress.

OCC's challenges in the future are to:

- Continue working with others to bring new leisure facilities to the City
- Encourage diversity of contemporary culture by supporting other organisations to provide the widest possible range of facilities, particularly for young people.

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Local Planning Policy

The Second Draft Oxford Local Plan (SDOLP) 2001-2016, deposited February 2003 sets out relevant planning policies in respect of indoor sports facilities.

The City Council's planning policy towards recreation is based on three principles: -

- Seeking to protect existing facilities, as very little land is available for replacement facilities
- Wherever possible seeking to provide, or encourage others to create, new recreational facilities
- Improving access to such facilities, in terms of geography, and in terms of social inclusion, disability and income.

The City Council accepts that it is important to provide new facilities where there are gaps in existing provision, and to seek to enhance existing facilities where there is the opportunity to do so. Proposals for new sports facilities will be supported providing they are consistent with other environmental policies contained in the plan.

Section 14.0 Development Sites, contained within the SDOLP, gives details of three sites proposed for new sporting facilities in Oxford. These are:

- Bayswater School, Barton – an indoor swimming pool; planning consent has been granted and development is imminent
- Oxford University Sports Centre, Iffley Road – a new indoor sports facility was granted planning consent, and this facility is now open, with some limited community use;
- Oxford Road, Horspath – a Centre of Excellence for cricket and rugby – planning consent has been approved in principle.

Under Policy SR.3 the City Council will seek to ensure that measures are implemented to ensure that new sports facilities are realistically accessible by walking, cycling or public transport.

The City Council will seek public access to private and institutional facilities through sharing schemes and joint user agreements, in accordance with Policy SR.3.

Most developments in Oxford are on reasonably small sites on which it is not normally realistic to expect the provision of sports facilities. However, the demand on existing facilities is likely to increase as a result of the development, and in such circumstances contributions will be sought, through S106 agreements towards improving local facilities, in accordance with Policy HS.29.

Housing Development Guidelines

On new residential developments involving 20 or more dwellings, and/or occupying more than 0.4 ha, the City Council will require a minimum of 10% of the site area to be used to provide public open space, unless it is considered that the recreational needs of the development would be better served by taking a contribution towards improving existing local facilities. Such contributions will also be required on smaller sites.

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The City Council will also seek contributions from developers towards the improvement of local sports facilities when the need arising from the development justifies it. When necessary, these will be secured by a planning obligation.

Current Leisure Facility Provision

OCC currently operates 7 leisure and sports facilities, one of which is the outdoor pool at Hinksey. These facilities, constructed in the 70s and mid 80s, have a value in excess of £27m, despite the fact that the maintenance programme has been inconsistent, refurbishment of a minor nature and has been undertaken only when financial resources became available.

The seven main facilities currently operated by OCC are:

- Ferry Sports Centre
- Temple Cowley Pool
- Blackbird Leys Pool
- Blackbird Leys Leisure Centre
- Oxford Ice Rink
- Peers Sports Centre
- Hinksey Pool (outdoor)

The current geographical distribution of the OCC indoor sports facilities in the City is as follows:

FACILITY NAME	WARD	COMMUNITY AREA
Blackbird Leys Pool	Blackbird Leys	South East
Blackbird Leys Leisure Centre	Blackbird Leys	South East
Ferry Sports Centre	St Margarets	North
Hinksey Pool	Hinksey Park	Central, South & West
Oxford Ice Rink	Carfax	Central, South & West
Peers Sports Centre	Littlemore	South East
Temple Cowley Pool	Cowley Marsh	South

Existing usage data for these facilities is summarised below:

FACILITY NAME	ANNUAL USAGE – 2003 /04
Blackbird Leys Pool	
Blackbird Leys Leisure Centre	
Ferry Sports Centre	
Hinksey Pool	
Oxford Ice Rink	
Peers Sports Centre	
Temple Cowley Pool	

From the above table, which looks at 2003/04 usage, it can be seen that the most used facility is Ferry Sports Centre followed by Temple Cowley Pool. The least used facilities are Hinksey Pool (only open on a seasonal basis), and Blackbird Leys Pool. Oxford ice Rink brings in the most income followed by Temple Cowley Pool and Ferry Sports Centre. The facilities generating least income are Blackbird Leys Pool and Hinksey Pool.

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Net spend per User

Blackbird Leys Pool	£ 0.80
Blackbird Leys Leisure Centre	£ 1.29
Ferry Sports Centre	£ 1.75
Hinksey Pool	£ 2.32
Oxford Ice Rink	£ 2.98
Peers Sports Centre	£ 1.57
Temple Cowley Pool	£ 1.99

The quality of the existing facilities is a critical factor in their ability to attract users, and operate cost effectively. All the seven facilities currently operated by OCC are now in need of significant investment, to improve the quality and range of facilities available for community use.

The Council currently has plans to invest in:

- A new pool at Barton
- Ferry Sports Centre (work underway)
- Improvements at all facilities to meet the requirements of the disability Discrimination Act (DDA)

There is generally a reasonable spread of overall indoor facility provision across the City, with the exception of the central northwest area. However, in relation to public sector indoor sports provision, there would appear to be a deficiency in the west/north west area, and the east of the City. There would appear to be over provision, in comparison, in the south of the City.

The situation in the east will be addressed by the development of the new pool at Barton . Residents in the west of the City will have good access to the new indoor facility being developed at Matthew Arnold School, Vale of White Horse DC), but currently there appears to be a gap in provision. The issue is that overall, the City is over-provided with water space (even with the private provision excluded), has only a tiny deficit of sportshall provision, and will have sufficient health and fitness facilities with the addition of the David Lloyd Club and the Ferry Centre re-development.

Commercial Provision – Indoor Facilities

The level of provision of Private Health and Fitness facilities is near to saturation point when supply is compared to propensity to participate and participation rates for this kind of facility in Oxford.

Voluntary Sector Provision – Indoor Facilities

There appears to be one main voluntary indoor sports facility OXRAD in Marsh Lane providing indoor sports facilities for people with disabilities. In addition to this facility, there are a number of large sports clubs, which provide for outdoor sport in the City. These are examined in detail in the City's Playing Pitch Study.

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Education Sector – Indoor Facility Provision

The education sector has a number of quality sports and leisure facilities. The Universities, Oxford Brookes and Oxford University, provide Indoor Sports and Swimming facilities for Oxford City residents as well as the University students.

The level of schools' provision of indoor sports and swimming pool provision is less clear. It appears that the Oxford Community School has a 4-court sports hall facility available for community use. In addition there are a number of other schools that allow community use of their sports facilities through adult education community learning e.g. Headington Independent School 25m indoor swimming pool,

Key Stakeholder Consultation

A number of key stakeholders were consulted on the current indoor facility provision in the City, and their views as to the needs and priorities for the future. A list of the key stakeholders is included at Appendix 4. These views are summarised below.

- There is a need to prioritise the provision of facilities in the City in the future, by both geographic area, and by facility type
- There is a need to improve the quality of facility provision in the City, to encourage greater participation, and meet the expectations of the community
- There is a need, and an opportunity to look at the consolidation of facility provision, given the potential for partnership with the public (education) and voluntary sectors in the City
- Given the level of existing, and planned, commercial health and fitness facilities in the City, the role of the Council should be to ensure that there is access to this type of provision for all, but that public provision should target those areas of the City where commercial provision is unaffordable
- There is a need to formalise the role of the Universities, and the Colleges in relation to community access to sport and leisure facilities
- There is a need to develop a strategic framework for indoor sports facility provision in the City, based on the principle ensuring reasonable access to a range of facilities
- There is potential to consider an alternative approach to facility provision in the south of the City
- There is a need to retain the Ice Rink, and potentially additional commercial leisure in the city centre, which would provide at Regional level
- There is a need to be realistic about the indoor facility provision just outside the City boundaries e.g. Vale of White Horse, to which Oxford residents have easy access, and may choose to use
- The Council is not the only facility provider in the City, and needs to work in partnership with other providers
- There is a need to review the existing dual-use agreements, and implement new partnerships, or in some cases e.g. Peers Sports Centre, consider the long term value of OCC's continuing involvement
- OCC's indoor facility provision needs to be affordable, in both capital and revenue terms, to ensure ongoing investment to maintain quality

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Future Need for Indoor Sports Facility Provision in the City

In order to plan future investment in other facilities around the City, any Indoor Facilities Strategy should aim to identify the current and future need for facility provision, where it should be located, and what level of facilities should be provided across the City, to ensure reasonable access to a range of high quality community indoor sports facilities.

Before taking the step of providing funding for the refurbishment/ development of the existing facilities, demand assessment modelling needs to be undertaken to identify the demand for provision, given the range of extensive commercial facilities in the City. It is also important to model the type and level of demand, to ensure that future facilities are provided in the right place, given that communities grow, and relocate their focus as a consequence of new residential development, or a new transport route opening.

Demand Models - Swimming Pools, Sports Halls and Health and Fitness Facilities

Swimming Pools:

The current demand for water space in Oxford City Council has been assessed by utilising 2001 Census population Data and Sport England Participation Ratios. The current supply of indoor swimming water space equates to 1514m². This does not include the two university swimming pools, which will and do offer some public swimming time.

The demand analysis utilising the Sport England Participation rates (1998) shows that there is a need for only 483m² of water space. Utilising the British Market Research Bureau Participation profile for sports and leisure (2003) – Swimming: the number of adults that take part in swimming is 10.8% of the population in Oxford compared to 10.9% nationally. Applying these figures to the demand model equates for a need of 791m² of water space.

It should be noted that Oxford is on the River Thames and should potentially have a policy to ensure that its residents can learn to swim for safety reasons; this is a good reason to have an over supply of water space.

There is currently almost double the level of water space in the City available for community access, than is actually required. This level of supply does not include the limited availability of the University pools, existing or planned commercial provision, or the new facility planned for Barton. There is therefore some potential to consider a reduction in the provision of water space provided by OCC, without compromising the expressed demand for this type of facility in the City. The closure of smaller pool facilities, in a poor condition, would not affect the accessibility of public provision, given the facility development proposal at Barton.

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Sportshalls

Using Sport England demand modelling techniques the current provision equates to 34 courts across the City, while demand indicates the need for 36. There is therefore a need to provide additional sportshall access for community use in the City, but given that the demand identified equates to 2 courts, or half a 4 badminton court sportshall, the optimum means of addressing this need is to develop a new partnership arrangement over a school-based facility. Any additional facility provision developed in the City, or any consolidation of existing sportshall provision, must be considered in the context of the need to maintain the supply/demand balance, whilst recognising that no commercial facilities are included in the above calculations. The supply/demand model does, however, reflect the fact that there is limited community access to University sportshalls in the City. Oxfordshire County Council has recently published their intention to support schools in the City to open up sports facilities for community use.

Health and Fitness

The demand model utilising the British Market Research Bureau data (2003) and the 2001 census population data identified a demand in Oxford City for 662 fitness stations. The supply identified at the time of the assessment showed a supply of 625 fitness stations. There was therefore a deficiency in provision of 37 stations. This 'gap' in provision has been addressed by the extension to health and fitness facilities at the Ferry Sports Centre and the provision for fitness at the David Lloyd facility opened in February 2004. The proposed investment in health and fitness at some OCC facilities therefore needs further consideration; The key focus for OCC, is that its investment in health and fitness should be targeted at those areas of the City whose residents may be unable to afford commercial provision. This is key to ensure that OCC investment reflects the Government targets for increasing physical activity, and improving health.

Indoor Sports Facilities – Key Issues

There are a number of key issues with the current stock of indoor sports and leisure facilities (public sector) within Oxford. These include:

Strategic Planning

- Establishing the need for community sports facility provision in the City is likely to suggest that some facilities are no longer the right ones in the right place. Given the pressures on capital and revenue funding, the Council will need to determine its priorities, and decide whether it is better to have fewer, better quality, affordable facilities, rather than try to maintain out of date buildings which require significant subsidy
- Future community sports facility provision also needs to respond to the demographic changes and trends in the City, to ensure it is both appropriate and sustainable
- There is currently no hierarchy or framework for strategic provision in the City, and therefore it is difficult to see how the various types and levels of provision reflect local need

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- There is a need for a strategic approach to the planning, location and operation of indoor sports facilities; this is needed so that decisions regarding future planning for provision can be made on a rational basis
- There is potential to develop a strategic framework for indoor sports provision, based on a geographical spread of core facilities across the City; these will be supplemented by those provided by the commercial and university sectors
- There is a need to develop local standards of community sports facility provision, based on a hierarchy, which establishes the need for provision on the basis of 'reasonable access'
- The strategic framework for future indoor sports provision in the City needs to be based on both a citywide and a community area approach
- The future framework for facility provision needs to link to, and reflect the national agenda for health improvement, through increased participation; this is only likely to be achieved through a planned approach to local facility provision, based on geographical locations of communities
- The regional role of the existing Ice Rink cannot be disregarded in planning for the future
- The Indoor Facilities Strategy needs to link to the recommendations for the Playing Pitch Assessment and Strategy, to make most effective use of resources, by single site location, where appropriate

Capital Investment

- It has been recognised that the existing facilities are in need of significant investment; whilst a significant amount of capital is available from OCC, this has been prioritised for the new pool at Barton, and the refurbishment at Ferry Sports Centre. Based on the assumption that the existing stock of indoor sports facilities remains unchanged, there may therefore be the need to identify additional capital resources to support the required investment in facilities, if the capital costs are higher than anticipated, or if additional works are required.
- There is a need to invest capital in the ice rink; there is potential to develop the adjacent site for additional commercial leisure provision. This potential needs to link into the West End Development Plan, which identifies the role of leisure in extending and complementing the range of facilities in central Oxford. As a major City, Oxford currently lacks any innovative commercial leisure provision, and there is potential for such a facility e.g. indoor snow, to act as a catalyst for regeneration/external investment in the Ice Rink site

Partnership Opportunities

- Existing dual-use agreements are out-dated, and provide for an operational delivery of provision, rather than a partnership approach

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- There is potential to increase the amount of community access to school sports facilities in the City, to address local issues of accessibility and affordability, but this needs to be tackled through robust partnership agreements; a commitment to greater community use of school sports facilities has recently been announced by Oxfordshire County Council (Jan 2004)
- There are a significant number of private education sports facilities in the City which are unavailable for community use
- There is a need for greater clarity over the role of the University and College sports facilities in the City; they do not 'fit' into a strategic context within the City, yet provide for significant community use e.g. Oxford Brookes fitness suite has 600 community members
- The key requirement for Oxfordshire County Council is access to water space in the City for school swimming
- The potential for the Universities and Colleges to provide for community pay and play usage, as part of the overall strategic framework for provision in the City, through appropriate community use agreements, should be further investigated. E.g. the new University pool has been privately funded and developed, and provides only limited community use, yet this could have a more strategic role as a City Centre facility
- There is potential to consolidate some of the existing City-based facility provision, as it is out of date, and unable to meet the expectations and requirements of the modern day user

Sports Development

- There is a lack of sports development resources in the City, especially in relation to the development initiatives and programmes which have been implemented at local level
- This lack of sports development support has resulted in a lack of club development across the City; particularly in respect of junior development. The exception is in cricket and rugby, which do have dedicated development resources.
- There is potential to broaden the scope of sports development and to make more effective use of available personnel resources, and develop the crucial local links between clubs and schools

It is our recommendation that these Key Issues should form the basis for an options analysis and strategic recommendations for the Indoor Facilities Strategy on the basis of:

- Location
- Strategic need
- Facility mix and scale

at both Citywide and local levels.

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Summary of findings from assessment of current Indoor Facility provision

The need for investment in the existing stock of indoor sports facilities in the City had been recognised as a priority by the previous Administration, and capital monies have been allocated accordingly including over the future period April 2005 – March 2007. The investment commitments have been made against the existing facility stock on the basis of both the condition and potential for enhancement of facility provision, which were originally identified in the Best Value Review of Community Buildings.

The commitment to provide more and better community sports facilities, which has driven the above capital investment commitment, does however ignore the potential for some level of consolidation within the City in relation to indoor sports facility provision. This understanding is based on:

- New facility provision in the commercial and education sectors, which has come about since the investment commitments in 2002
- New opportunities for partnership working e.g. education
- The role of the Universities and Colleges in providing indoor facilities in the City
- Ongoing public consultation and feedback, which must be reflected in the level, type and location of indoor sports provision
- Changing demographic trends
- The external funding support (Sport England) for provision of the new facility at Barton
- Changing relationships with the County Council over e.g. dual-use arrangements for indoor sports facility provision

Recommendations

From the research, review and consultation undertaken, which have identified the key issues, the priority considerations in assessing leisure facility provision needs in the City are:

- Additional indoor community sports facilities in the East of the City
- Consolidation of existing indoor facility provision in the South of the City
- Consideration of the potential to deliver sport and leisure provision in different ways in the South of the City
- Development of additional commercial sport/leisure provision in the town centre, with the aim of improving/replacing the existing Ice Rink facility
- Improved quality of existing facilities, where they 'fit' into the proposed strategic framework for provision in the City
- New/re-negotiated partnership agreements for community access to sportshall facilities on education sites e.g. the key development sites for education in the City
- Additional access to water space for Oxfordshire County Council schools
- The development of a local standard for indoor facility provision, based on reasonable access to a range of quality facilities
- Increased sports development resources at local level in the City, to encourage, facilitate and support increased participation in sport and physical activity
- Review of current facility operations to provide a range of appropriate activities to increase participation levels at local and City wide levels based on equity of accessibility

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