

EAB Discussion Paper Proposed Leisure Strategy

Purpose

The Corporate Plan highlights an objective to prepare a Leisure Strategy with a target date of May 2017.

Background

Leisure is a very broad term and can cover an array of activities and a broad direction is required to ensure that any strategy adds value and meets the desired need. The Corporate Plan sets an overview statement but is a blank canvas in respect of the prime objective to be achieved by the preparation of this new strategy.

Nationally, Leisure Strategies come in different forms with a variable nature of content. Broadly, they tend to cover one, some or all of the five main themes listed below:

1. Active people / health and well-being strategy
2. Sport development
3. Facilities planning (mostly for major changes in the property portfolio or operation)
4. Pitch strategies
5. Cultural strategies (including museums, theatres etc.)

In the initial research, officers did not find a strategy that also incorporated Play or Art Development; however, it is likely that these specific strategies exist in at least some of the authorities in question. We already have a Play Strategy that is split into two parts of Play Development and Play Equipment. We are currently in the process of renewing our Art Development and Public Art strategies.

Existing strategies & related documents

Guildford already has some strategies on a standalone basis that would cover some of the above themes. This includes the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Sports Development Strategy. The Sports Development Strategy has a facility section contained within it and has some excellent and interesting research on activity levels locally within the borough.

Other documents do set out some key leisure policy, perhaps the most significant document for this is the Leisure Partnership Agreement (LPA). The three main Council sport venues are Guildford Spectrum Leisure Complex, Guildford Lido and Ash Manor Sports Centre. The operation of these three sites was outsourced to GLL/Freedom Leisure in November 2011 via the Leisure Partnership Agreement. The decision to outsource the operation of these sites is a significant leisure strategy decision in itself and that contract has a further five years to run to 31 October 2021.

Within the LPA are summary objectives for the operation of the leisure venues to fulfil:

- To improve the health and wellbeing of their communities through increased participation
- To use sport and leisure to bring communities together
- To enable access to services by specific groups with identified needs
- To encourage and provide affordable and sustainable local facilities and services
- To explore partnerships with other organisations where these will benefit the community
- To work with clubs and voluntary organisations in the borough to develop their activities and skill levels
- To encourage investment in the facilities to maintain and enhance the quality of service

- To bear in mind the rights, needs and aspirations of facility users and staff
- To demonstrate value for money and continuous improvement
- To recognise and maximise commercial opportunities in the facilities
- To improve the financial 'bottom line' of the Council

These summary objectives form the backbone of the current Council policy surrounding leisure and are reviewed annually as part of the leisure contract report to ensure they are still appropriate.

Guildford has some unique sites within its portfolio:

Guildford Spectrum is the largest leisure complex of its type in the UK. It contains:

- An International standard ice rink spectator capacity 2000
- 4 swimming pools including a multi flume leisure pool, 25m competition pool, a dive pool with 1m, 3m and 5m boards and a teaching pool
- 32 lane ten pin bowling centre
- 10 badminton court sports hall
- A dedicated group exercise studio
- 72 station fully equipped health and fitness suite
- a 400m athletics stadium with a floodlit football pitch
- a crèche
- a children's soft play
- a number of other smaller facilities including a spinning studio, 2 squash courts and dry sport facilities
- a number of catering and sports retail outlets
- a 1000 space car park.

Guildford Lido was built in the 1930s by the Council and features:

- An outdoor 50m swimming pool, paddling pool and 4 acres of surrounding gardens
- 3 water slides
- specialised heavy weights gym
- a catering outlet and a snack shack

Ash Manor Sports Centre is a dual use sports centre at Ash Manor School and includes:

- 42 Station gym
- 2 multiuse sports halls
- 3G all weather pitch
- A studio

The responsibility for asset management at these three sites is split between the Council and the operator under the LPA. In broad terms, the Council is responsible for the external fabric of the building and the operator is responsible for everything else including the maintenance and replacement of plant and equipment.

Parks facilities

There is currently no pitch strategy for the borough. There are a number of pitch locations of various types and sizes. These pitches are well maintained and well used. Some of the pavilion buildings could use some further investment and a revised scheme of maintenance to ensure a better quality of experience for the users.

Community centres

There are a number of community centres within the Council's portfolio. These buildings have a mix of tenants but broadly similar uses. Some of these assets are similar to the pavilion buildings in that a coordinated plan of investment and a scheme of maintenance would be beneficial for the services offered. These facilities are managed by different directorates according to their origins and a review of these arrangements could be included within a project.

Cultural Strategy

Guildford has not had a cultural strategy for a number of years. The last incarnation of this strategy fell into disrepute and was not renewed when it expired some years ago.

The facilities that may be included in such a document are undergoing a transformation process at present and it is unlikely that their inclusion within a strategy at this stage, when so much is uncertain, will deliver tangible benefits.

Current situation

Two other Corporate Plan objectives are likely to have considerable bearing on a Leisure Strategy if it were to include facilities management planning:

1. The feasibility of a new sports and entertainment venue
2. complete the refurbishment of Guildford Spectrum, including the roof, pool air handling system and other improvements.

These two objectives were part of a separate paper discussed by the Borough EAB on 31 October 2016.

The paper suggests an outline for the process of developing the facilities mix for a replacement venue for Guildford Spectrum if appropriate. The process includes significant public consultation, the data from which would be essential for making informed decisions within a facilities led Leisure Strategy.

Within the LPA, there is a requirement for a regular non user survey. Freedom Leisure is currently commissioning this. This data will again be extremely useful in reviewing the existing leisure policy and therefore any subsequent Leisure Strategy.

Each year the client team consider a programme of maintenance work for the three sites to ensure the Council fulfils its obligations under the LPA. It is questionable whether a Leisure Strategy would change or drive this process as it is about planning maintenance obligations under the LPA not developing new leisure ideas, which should primarily come from the operator.

Conclusion

The most beneficial gap in the existing strategies may be on facilities management planning. The data that will be collected as part of the public consultation process for the new sports and entertainment venue is an essential source of information that will have a real impact on the Council's leisure provision going forward.

This approach will delay the production of a Leisure Strategy but ensure it is more consistent with the needs identified within the public consultation process.

This issue was discussed at the Executive/Management Team Liaison Group meeting and the consensus was that a facilities led strategy would offer the best opportunity for improvement if the data collected in the new venue public consultation exercise can be factored in.

The EAB is asked to comment on:

- Whether it believes a facilities led Leisure Strategy will add value
- What scope of facilities should be included within the Leisure Strategy process e.g. include the pavilions and community centres
- identify any particular areas where facilities are lacking provision
- identify particular demographics where facilities are lacking
- highlight any restrictions pertinent to the process