

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Maidstone is situated in the heart of Kent, strategically located between the Channel Tunnel and London, with direct connections via the M20 and M2 motorways. Approximately 70% of its 171,800 population¹ lives in the urban area to the northwest of the borough, with Maidstone providing a strong commercial centre and one of the largest retail centres in the south-east.
- 1.2 According to the Government’s 2019 Indices of Multiple Deprivation, Maidstone is a comparatively affluent area. However, there are pockets of high deprivation. The urban area includes the neighbourhoods of Park Wood, High Street, Shepway North and Shepway South. All these areas are in need of regeneration and fall within the 20% most deprived in the Country.
- 1.3 The Borough has an aging demographic, high levels of child and adult obesity, and low participation rates, particularly in areas of high deprivation.
- 1.4 Maidstone Leisure Centre is currently the main leisure centre for the borough and is located within close proximity of the above areas of deprivation. The leisure centre is also located adjacent to Mote Park, “the Jewel in Maidstone’s Crown”. This is a Grade II listed 450 acre park which receives over 1 million visitors each year and is one of the UK’s 10 favourite parks (People’s Choice Awards). The park provides 4 play areas, 6 miles of footpaths, 5 football and rugby pitches, a 5k walking/running route, dementia walk, BMX track, model railway, café, lake offering watersports, picnic area, arboretum and 3 car parks.
- 1.5 Mote Park Cricket Ground is also located adjacent to the park and leisure centre. The land is owned by The Mote Cricket Club and the pavilion is shared with Maidstone Rugby Club. Maidstone Squash Club (private members club) is also situated within the grounds of the Cricket Club.
- 1.6 The revised Local Development Plan is currently under development. As part of the Infrastructure Development Plan the need for new leisure facilities in and around Maidstone is identified:

Table 1.1: Infrastructure Development Plan – leisure requirements

Sports and leisure facilities	
Lead organisation(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maidstone Borough Council • Private health and fitness providers
Main sources of information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maidstone Economic Development Needs Study 2020 • Maidstone Playing Pitch Strategy 2020 • Maidstone Sports facility Strategy 2020

¹ Source: ONS mid-year estimates 2019

Sports and leisure facilities	
Existing provision	Mote Park Leisure Centre is the local authority leisure centre and it contains swimming facilities; sports halls; gymnasium; and a large soft play area. According to Sport England/Active Places data, there are 16 registered health and fitness suites in Maidstone, with 1,144 fitness stations in total. Four of these facilities are for private use only, one facility is 'pay and play' and the remaining 11 are open for the public to register as members.
Future requirements	An MBC study suggests that a new leisure centre is required in the borough to accommodate the needs of a growing population. This will need to be supported by a smaller satellite facility. Local Plan Review evidence suggests there is scope for 4 medium sized gyms (up to 50 stations) across the borough by 2042, based on population growth.
Funding sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MBC Capital programme; • Developer contributions (CIL) • Potential bid to Sport England • Potential bid to NGB capital funds, depending on facility mix
Key issues (incl. DtC)	The current contract for the operators of Mote Park Leisure Centre comes to an end in 2024. Land needs to be identified for the smaller satellite leisure centre to supplement a regenerated Mote Park.

- 1.7 In the adopted Local Plan 2011-2031, the Borough's objectively assessed housing need was based on 883 dwellings per annum (dpa) or 17,660 dwellings over the plan period (2011-31). The Local Plan Review extends the Plan Period to 2037 and covers the period 2022-2037. The corresponding housing need figure for the Borough is 1,157 dwellings per annum, which equates to approximately 17,355 dwellings over the plan period (to 2037).²
- 1.8 To meet the housing and other needs identified the Council has decided to pursue a spatial strategy that includes the provision of Garden Communities. These are either garden villages (developments of 1,500 to 10,000 residential units) or garden towns (developments of 10,000 residential units plus).³ In 2019 the Council invited proposals for garden communities within the Borough. In response it received 7 proposals across the Borough. These were then assessed and two have been chosen for inclusion in the spatial strategy. These are Lidsing and Heathlands Garden Communities.
- 1.9 Lidsing Garden Community is a mixed community of 2,000 residential units and 2,000 jobs promoted by 1 major landowner. It is situated in the north of the Borough adjacent to the boundary with Medway Council. Access to the site can be gained from the strategic road network via the M2 junction 4.

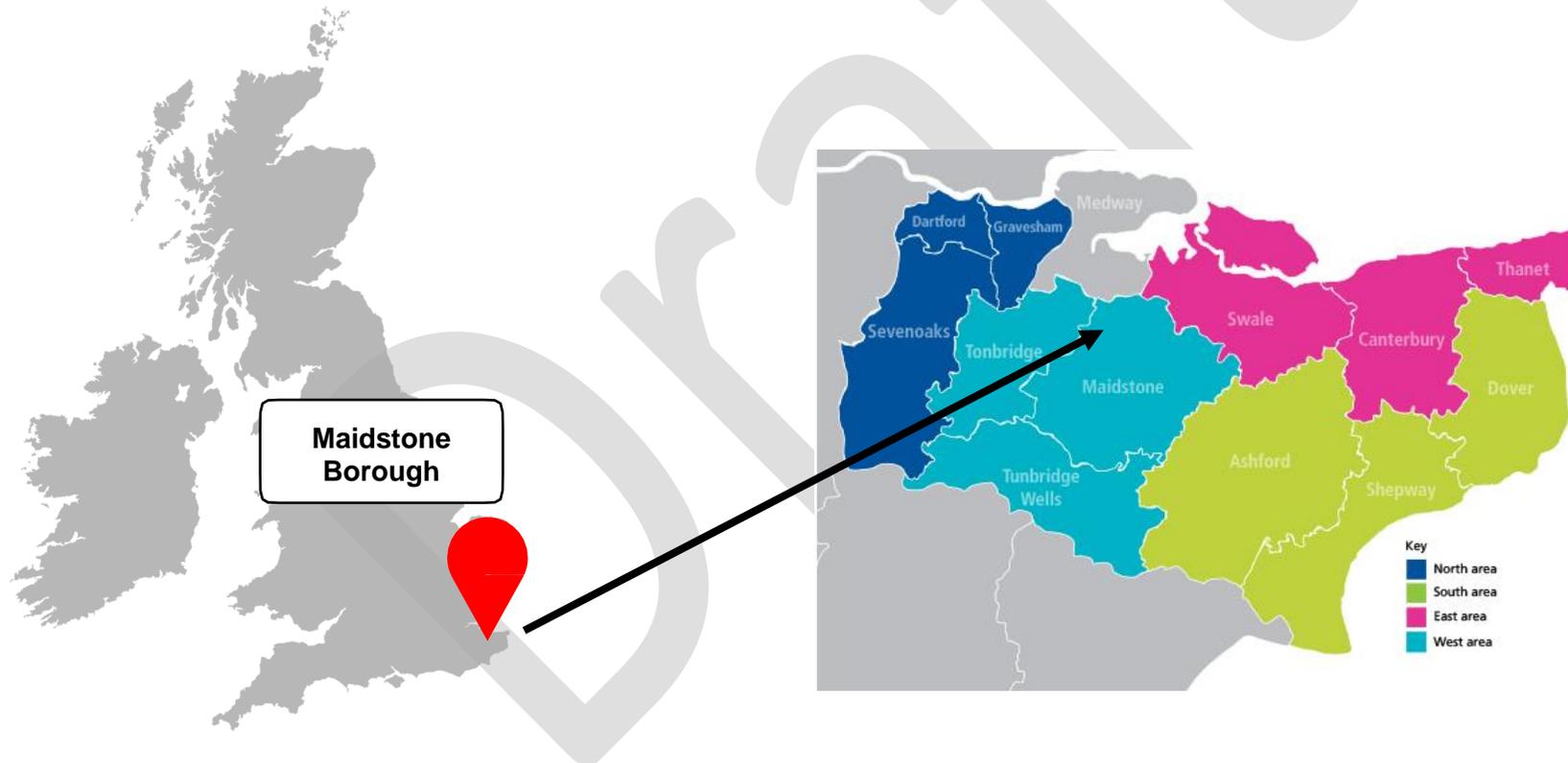
² Source: Strategic Housing Market Assessment

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- 1.10 The site is to be delivered over a 15 year period starting in 2027. This community will look towards Maidstone or even Gillingham for its community facilities and services.
- 1.11 Heathlands Garden Community is a mixed community of 5,000 residential units and 5,000 jobs promoted jointly by Homes England and Maidstone Borough Council. The site is between the villages of Lenham in Maidstone Borough and Charing in Ashford Borough, but the site is within Maidstone borough's administrative boundary. The site has vehicular access to the A20 corridor and potential for a new rail station on the South-eastern Maidstone Line between Ashford and Maidstone. The site is to be delivered over a 25year period starting in 2030. The need for investment in leisure facilities is included in the Infrastructure Development Plan (IDP) so will be reflected in the Local Plan.

Location



The Current Picture

- 1.12 Maidstone Leisure Centre is owned by MBC and leased to Maidstone Leisure Trust (MLT) along with a management contract and specification. MLT employs Serco Leisure Ltd (Serco) as its managing agent. The 15 year contract is due to expire in August 2024. In 2017, a deed of variation was signed to include the operation of Outdoor Adventure, an outdoor leisure facility in the neighbouring Mote Park, located approximately 200m from the leisure centre. This contract is co-terminus with the leisure centre contract.
- 1.13 The leisure centre contract includes a subsidy of £200,000 per annum paid by Serco to MBC on a monthly basis. MBC makes monthly payments totalling £624,000 per annum into a lifecycle budget which Serco uses for the ongoing repair and maintenance of the leisure centre building. The sum is fixed over the life of the contract and was arranged through Serco PAISA and operates on a similar basis to a financial loan. The £624,000 are the annual loan repayments which total approximately £9m over the life of the contract including inflation. The maintenance fund available over that period is around £7.2m. In addition, a utilities cost adjustment arrangement is built into the contract which requires the Council to pay any increase in utilities over and above the baseline Utility Tariff as agreed in June 2008. The annual net cost to MBC for Maidstone Leisure Centre is approximately £450,000 per annum.
- 1.14 Maidstone Leisure Centre is a very popular and well used facility. The original pool was built in the 1960's and has been refurbished and extended over the years with the sports hall, gym and leisure water incorporated into the overall design during the 1990's. The facility is beginning to look tired and is showing its age. No work has been carried out to the roof for at least 5 years and its replacement would be a significant cost within any future refurbishment scheme.
- 1.15 The leisure centre is also inefficiently designed, having been added to on a piecemeal basis over the years. There are lots of corridors and the orientation of the building is such that it does not take advantage of the views of the adjacent parkland, nor the opportunity of accessing the leisure centre facilities from Mote Park itself. The leisure centre entrance faces away from the Park.
- 1.16 There is a strong swim club and lesson programme (2,000 members pre-Covid) at Maidstone Leisure Centre but lack of changing space for swimmers. There is also a diving section to the swim club which is popular. The diving tank is used during club hours and used by the general public during weekends and holidays. Scuba diving also takes place in the diving tank.
- 1.17 There is a busy gym and group exercise programme but this has been impacted by competition from budget gyms setting up locally. Most are located in the town centre. The existing gyms lacks any views out over the adjoining parkland.
- 1.18 The 6 court sports hall has been converted into a concert venue with retractable seating. The arrangement satisfies nobody as its dual purpose restricts the number of regular events that can be held on site to make it financially viable as a concert venue. It also restricts use of the sports hall by local sports clubs at weekends.
- 1.19 The café is poorly located within the main leisure pool hall, providing uncomfortable environmental conditions for customers.

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- 1.20 Usage of the soft play area has tailed off in recent years due to the age and condition of the equipment. The soft play is also located within the main leisure pool hall and therefore there are uncomfortable environmental conditions for those using the equipment.
- 1.21 There is a lack of cohesion/integration between Maidstone Leisure Centre, and the neighbouring Mote Park, Mote Cricket, Rugby and Squash Clubs and Maidstone Indoor Bowls Club. The leisure centre's existing design does not blend in with its surrounding natural environment and the entrance faces away from the park.
- 1.22 The Mote Cricket Club is currently seeking to sell part of its site to fund the provision of a new pavilion.
- 1.23 Maidstone Leisure Centre therefore sits in a very strategic position, as an integral part of an existing hub of indoor and outdoor leisure provision in the Borough, located geographically close to the Borough's areas of highest deprivation and inactivity.
- 1.24 MBC is also reviewing its Local Plan which was adopted in 2018. Up to 1,200 new homes will be provided leading to significant population growth through to 2037. This housing development will be predominantly in the south of the borough. In Tunbridge Wells, to the southwest of Maidstone, new housing development and leisure facilities in Paddock Wood are being proposed. It is anticipated that residents living in the south of Maidstone borough will be served by these new leisure facilities.
- 1.25 MBC's strategies and policies clearly demonstrate a commitment to improving physical health and wellbeing of its residents, including access to high quality parks and open spaces, improving active travel and addressing and reducing health inequalities. As a minimum, the Council wishes to see accessible community sport and leisure facilities, places and spaces for swimming, fitness, sports hall and sports activities available to all residents. This includes both formal and informal spaces, for example community halls, in which to play sport and be physically active, as well as improved access to green spaces.
- 1.26 Sport England data has highlighted the negative impact that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on both the physical and mental wellbeing of the nation and MBC recognises the important role that community sport and leisure facilities, spaces and places will play in addressing the needs of its residents now and in the future.

1.27 Set within this context, and given the need to provide for new communities on the basis of MBC's shared outcomes for physical activity, the following options are to be considered as part of this report:

1 Refurbishment of the existing Maidstone Leisure Centre

2 Investment in a new leisure centre and physical Activity Hub with co-located community services e.g. GP surgery, CAB etc in Mote Park to replace the existing leisure centre

3 Adopt a Hub and Spoke approach i.e. new leisure and Physical Activity Hub with co-located community services in Mote Park supported by outreach service/provision in rural villages

4 Invest in a new Leisure and Physical Activity hub with co-located community services e.g. GP surgery, CAB etc in Mote Park to replace the existing MLC and develop a new leisure centre to serve the new communities which will live in the new housing to the south of the Borough

Our Vision for Change

1.28 MBC's Vision for Change and the objectives for the creation of a new leisure and physical activity hub in Mote Park supported by outreach service/provision in rural areas:



2. Our Vision and Shared Local Strategic Outcomes

2.1. Our overall Vision and Priority Outcome:

Maidstone will be a district where healthier, active lifestyles are encouraged, supported and facilitated for everyone

2.2. Four core principles underpin the delivery of this Vision:



Support for the creation of a high quality and sustainable indoor leisure facility mix, which provides accessible and inclusive activities for all Maidstone residents leading to increased participation and active lifestyles, thereby meeting community need;



Recognising the importance of leisure facilities as relevant community spaces, accessible to all and offering opportunities for the delivery of a wide range of activities, services, support and entertainment to local communities and people;



Recognise the importance of accessible informal indoor and outdoor community spaces and activities in addressing both the physical and mental health and wellbeing of local residents; and



Recognise the importance of active travel in contributing towards the physical and mental health and wellbeing of local residents.

Our Outcomes Framework

Table 1.1 Planned Outcomes

Planned Outcomes	How will we know that outcomes are being achieved?	How the new leisure and physical activity hub in Mote Park will contribute to these outcomes?
Increase levels of physical activity across the Borough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More young people and older people from harder to reach groups taking part in physical activity. 	A new leisure and physical activity hub in Mote Park will:

Planned Outcomes	How will we know that outcomes are being achieved?	How the new leisure and physical activity hub in Mote Park will contribute to these outcomes?
Achieve sustainable, positive health outcomes for young and older people living in Maidstone through targeted activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain and look for opportunities to improve participation in physical activity amongst this target audience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase ability to incorporate physical activity into everyday life
Reduce social isolation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased number of people walking and cycling as part of everyday life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase access to daytime physical activity
Improve quality of life and social outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A locality based social prescribing offer driven by and for local people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide opportunities to socialise and integrate through physical activity
Address priority health issues e.g., obesity, circulatory diseases, cancers, respiratory diseases, hypertension, dementia and mental health issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved individual engagement with the exercise referral scheme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide formal/conventional water space which will better cater for lane swimming which is better for exercise and overall health and wellbeing, and swim lessons, encouraging children and young people to learn a life skill and enjoy an active lifestyle from a young age.
Through sport and physical activity, help children and young people obtain a broad range of skills and capabilities to achieve and succeed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in physical and mental health inequalities in the borough • Contribution to an increased healthy life expectancy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved disabled access will encourage greater participation
Provide opportunities to participate, progress and achieve in sport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued reduction in levels of childhood and adult obesity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A hub design concept will facilitate joined up working between leisure and health providers and ease of use for residents
Utilise technology to engage with communities e.g. MBC website, 'Making Maidstone More Active', social media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-location of a range of physical activities and wider community focussed health services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new design which will create an integrated indoor and outdoor active environment, linking with the Mote Park and adjacent sports clubs
Support local community groups to grow and sustain their sport and physical activity provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased engagement with old people and young people • Contribution to climate change through reduction in carbon emissions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased employment opportunities and apprenticeships
Support positive activity programmes with local sports clubs, voluntary organisations and local housing associations to address changing health needs across the District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better co-ordination and utilisation of existing providers to deliver outreach health and physical activity • Activity programmes delivered that connect urban and rural areas into physical activity using existing infrastructure and the great outdoors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased skills through sports coaching/lesson programmes provided by leisure operator, local clubs and NGBs • Sustainable facility provision (operational and financial) • The existing centre has a very large carbon footprint. Typically, a leisure centre contributes between 10% and 40% of an authority's overall emissions, depending on the age of the portfolio stock. A new facility will significantly reduce this and the hub concept will improve efficiency through shared plant, and passive design principles etc.

Planned Outcomes	How will we know that outcomes are being achieved?	How the new leisure and physical activity hub in Mote Park will contribute to these outcomes?
Work with local providers and partners to deliver a coordinated approach to sport and physical activities in rural areas e.g. Active Kent, MLT, Leisure Operators, Voluntary Sports and Social Clubs/organisations etc		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-ordinated delivery of outreach programme of activities in rural areas as part of a future leisure facility contract to complement existing provision • Improvements to the mental health of residents • Increased opportunities for active travel (walking and cycling) due to central location and by linking to/extending existing cycle/walking routes • Development of separate concert venue at alternative location to increase availability of community accessible sports hall space for sports club and casual use at weekends
Investment in modern GP surgeries and local health hubs in Maidstone		
Provision of additional community accessible 'pay and play' swimming pool space and sports hall space to address future demand		
Investment in walking and cycling infrastructure to support an active lifestyle		

Our Wider Strategic Outcomes

- 2.3. There are a number of wider strategic outcomes to which physical activity can contribute to the Borough; these are summarised below in relation to the policy/strategy in which they are identified.

Maidstone Borough Council Strategic Plan (2019 – 2045)

Vision: Maidstone: a vibrant, prosperous, urban and rural community at the heart of Kent where everyone can realise their potential.

2.4. MBC's Strategic Plan (2021 Refresh) identifies the following key priorities in helping achieve the above vision:



2.5. Addressing and reducing health inequalities is seen as a cross-cutting objective across all 4 key priorities.

2.6. The Strategy seeks to deliver the following key shared outcomes by 2045 in relation to sport and physical activity:

Ensuring that sufficient infrastructure is planned to meet the demands of growth

An environmentally attractive and sustainable borough

Everyone has access to high quality parks and open spaces

A diverse range of community activities is encouraged

Community facilities and services are in the right place at the right time to support communities

A vibrant leisure and cultural offer, enjoyed by residents and attractive to visitors

Our towns and villages are fit for the future

Maidstone Borough Council Local Plan 2011 – 2031 (adopted 2017)

- 2.7. MBC's Local Plan policy DM (Community Facilities) ensures that any new residential development which generates the need for or for which spare capacity in such facilities does not exist, will not be permitted unless the provision of new, extended or improved facilities (or a contribution towards such provision) is secured as appropriate by planning conditions, through legal agreements, or through the Community Infrastructure Levy. Proposals which would lead to a loss of community facilities will not be permitted unless demand within the locality no longer exists or a replacement facility acceptable to the council is provided. The same policy seeks to ensure, where appropriate, that providers of education facilities make provision for dual use of facilities in the design of new schools and will encourage the dual use of education facilities (new and existing) for recreation and other purposes.

MBC Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy 2016

- 2.8. The Strategy identifies and prioritises where green and blue infrastructure interventions will have the most impact on achieving objectives which include mitigating and adapting to climate change, integrating sustainable movement and access for all, and providing opportunities for sport, recreation, quiet enjoyment and health.
- 2.9. Maidstone urban area is seen as a priority area for improvement due to the high population levels, levels of multiple deprivation and need to mitigate the effects of air pollution through tree planting and encouraging active and sustainable travel.

Maidstone Sports Facility Strategy 2019

- 2.10. MBC's Sports Facility Strategy 2019 highlights that participation rates in Maidstone have fallen recently to lower than the wider geographical averages. There are significant differences in sports participation between the urban (where rates are lower) and rural (where rates are higher) parts of the borough, which will impact upon demand patterns. It is worth noting that this finding contradicts the findings from the MBC 'Making Maidstone More Active' survey 2019 which found that in Urban Wards there was a greater percentage of people achieving the recommended minimum amount of physical activity or more, compared to those living in Rural Wards.
- 2.11. The following key issues and recommendations were identified in the Strategy:

- **Facility Needs Identified**

- In terms of sports hall provision, there are nine community-accessible sports halls in Maidstone, plus one other facility without public access. There is no current spare peak time sports hall capacity. Additional demand by 2031 will require the equivalent of 1.6 four-badminton court sized sports halls with full community access. All the main populated areas of the borough are within 15-minutes driving time of a community-accessible sports hall with 'pay-and-play' access. Seven of the nine sports halls in the borough are on school sites, with limited midweek daytime access and only four halls offer regular weekend availability. None of the school facilities has secured community use.

- There are nine swimming pools at five sites with community use in Maidstone. Additional demand by 2031 will amount to the equivalent of one 25m x 4-lane pool with full community access. Only the Maidstone Leisure Centre pools (3 plus some leisure water) offer 'pay-and-play' public access in the borough, with the remaining facilities accessible on a membership only basis.
- There are 15 publicly accessible health and fitness facilities in Maidstone. Additional demand by 2031 will amount to the equivalent of an extra 187 equipment stations.

- **Recommendations**

- It is recommended that existing planning policies continue to support the retention of all sites
- Efforts are made to secure formal Community Use Agreements at existing education sports facilities
- Some of the current and future demand for sports facilities in Maidstone can be accommodated through enhancements to existing facilities.
- Maidstone Leisure Centre is the major community sports facility in the borough, of key strategic significance for swimming, but also 'pay-and-play' health and fitness provision. By 2031, the Centre will have reached the end of its planned lifespan. The current management contract with the Maidstone Leisure Trust expires in 2024, which will give the Council an important opportunity to review the scale and location of the facilities mix provided, to determine whether the current configuration is the most appropriate to deliver community leisure needs over the next few decades. The review should examine whether:
 - (a) The current scale and configuration of swimming facilities is appropriate to current and future needs and if not, what alternatives should be provided.
 - (b) Other facilities should be considered for inclusion in a new or refurbished leisure centre.
 - (c) Provision of community sports facilities at the current site in the centre of the borough is the most appropriate way to meet current and future needs, compared with a more dispersed model of provision.
 - (d) The Council is the most appropriate provider of the facilities or whether other providers such as the education and/or commercial sectors could meet all identified needs.

- 2.12. A draft update of the above strategy was prepared in 2020 to reflect increased housing needs and the rolling forward of the end date of the Local Plan review to 2037. The recommendations have yet to receive Member approval, however the following key changes in terms of leisure facility provision needs are identified:



The equivalent of two 4-badminton court-sized sports halls with full community access



The equivalent of one 25m x 6-lane pool with full community access



230 health and fitness equipment stations



Additional specialist gymnastics facilities

Maidstone Collaborative Working Agreements

- 2.13. The Maidstone Collaborative Working Agreements are good examples of formalised joint working agreements between the Council's Public Health Team and Leisure, Parks and Open Spaces, and Strategic Planning to seek ways of working together to address Public Health priorities and key health inequalities across the Borough. The Council's Strategic Plan acknowledges that health inequalities is a cross cutting objective and the responsibility of all departments of the Council.

2.14. With regards to the Leisure Team, key actions include:

The inclusion of Public Health KPI's in future leisure contracts

Leisure services are delivered in a way that enables and encourages positive behavioural change

Ensure that the charging policy is attractive to key target groups

Market, target and engage with people who attend One You Kent programmes, individuals referred with a health condition by their GP/health professional, individuals on benefits, people with a disability including long term conditions, carers - families and children

Offer package of lifestyle support and advice for clients (Mytime Active and MLC) with a focus on behaviour change

Offer Healthier Catering options including vending machines

Mytime Active and MLC to develop working partnerships with the NHS including GPs, Maidstone Hospital and the West Kent Clinical Commissioning Group focusing on priorities with the prevention workstream of the Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships. Offer a suite of services for individuals with health conditions working alongside the NHS to develop appropriate referral pathways.



2.15. Mytime Active is the golf contractor at Cobtree Manor Park golf course in Maidstone. This 20 year management contract commenced in 2017.

2.16. Key actions relating to the Parks and Open Spaces Team include:

Design, maintenance and activities within the Parks and Green Spaces of Maidstone should encourage physical activity appropriate for all sections of the population. They should also create restorative spaces and activities that promote positive mental wellbeing. The focus will be on inactive people, those living in areas of deprivation (particularly Shepway South, Park Wood and High Street), those with a disability including long term conditions etc

Explore investment not just in the physical infrastructure and maintenance of Parks and Greens spaces but also in activities that animate, activate green spaces and encourage people to use them

Develop links with the NHS and in particular Social Prescribing (Involve Kent). Actively promote 'Green Prescription' and the activities encouraging positive physical and mental wellbeing which take place in MBC Green Spaces including development and support of volunteering and Friends of Groups.

Create an Activity Hub in Senacre. Improve access to site and include sophisticated outdoor gym equipment and 1km track.

Develop Maidstone Leisure Centre as a hub in Mote Park for physical activity and exercise. Introduce a more joined up approach to leisure provision in Mote Park including MLC, the Water sports Centre and Outdoor Adventure this may include memberships for target groups.

Mark out areas for games in parks over the summer months to encourage outdoor play

Consider installing table tennis/games equipment in Parks

Cycling and Walking

2.17. The borough has an existing network of walking and cycling routes as well as the National Trails of the North Downs Way and the Greensand Way, which pass through the Borough, and various promoted routes e.g. Medway Valley, Medway Towpath. However, the cycle routes linking schools, colleges, employment and retail areas are limited and disjointed with few off road options and a lack of secure parking at key destinations.

- 2.18. Participation levels in walking and cycling within the borough is lower than the national and regional averages.⁴ However, participation in walking and cycling has increased over recent years.
- 2.19. The borough's existing cycle network links the town centre to most suburban areas and community facilities, including several schools, Maidstone East Railway Station and Mote Park. National Cycle Network route 17 provides an 11 mile leisure/commuter link between Maidstone and Rochester. Via Mote Park, Weaving Street and Hockers Lane, route 17 connects to the Pilgrims Cycle Trial at Detling in the North Downs.
- 2.20. In October 2020, Maidstone Borough Council declared a biodiversity and climate emergency. It agreed the following key actions in relation to walking and cycling for residents:



Ensure policies encourage and enable development proposals which give priority first to pedestrian and cycle movements, both within the scheme and with its surrounding areas; and second to facilitating high quality public transport connectivity.



Work with KCC to develop Maidstone Integrated Transport Strategy, and Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, as part of the Local Plan review to promote and support a modal shift to walking, cycling, public transport, and electric vehicles.



Produce a business case for the introduction of a workplace parking levy to fund active travel or public transport.

MBC Local Infrastructure Delivery Plan 2020

- 2.21. There is a commitment in the Council's Strategic Plan to improving active travel within the Borough and this is reflected in the Local Plan and the Council's Local Infrastructure Delivery Plan 2020. For example, in Maidstone Town Centre it identifies cycle parking improvements, improved pedestrian linkages and accessibility and legibility, new sections and improvement of existing towpath, and a new footbridge provision to reduce traffic congestion within the town centre and introduce health benefits in terms of improved air quality and increased physical activity.
- 2.22. The Local Infrastructure Delivery Plan is in the process of being updated to focus on the strategic infrastructure required to support delivery of the development in the Maidstone Local Plan Review

⁴ Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/walking-and-cycling-statistics-cw>

Maidstone Walking and Cycling Strategy 2011 – 2031

- 2.23. The Maidstone Walking and Cycling Strategy identifies the improvements required to deliver a comprehensive and well-connected cycle network (rather than focusing in detail on pedestrian-only facilities), which will help to make both cycling and walking more attractive alternatives for journeys within the borough. The Strategy is aligned with the Maidstone Borough Local Plan and the Integrated Transport Strategy and is supported by the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy which promotes the use of urban green space and Public Rights of Way for active travel.

Vision: Walking and cycling become the natural choices for shorter journeys in Maidstone Borough – or as part of a longer journey – regardless of age, gender, fitness level or income.

- 2.24. The Strategy's focus is on the Maidstone Urban area. This is where most people live, where significant new development will take place in the coming years and where the infilling of gaps in cycle facilities will make the greatest contribution towards achieving the modal shift from private car journeys. However, there is also merit in developing longer distance cycle routes to encourage inter-urban travel and cycle tourism and so the identification of opportunities for improving cycle linkages into neighbouring authorities has been another focus of this Strategy. It is intended to complement the measures and interventions identified in the cycle strategies prepared by neighbouring authorities in conjunction with Kent County Council (KCC).
- 2.25. In terms of creating new cycle links, the Strategy refers to:

“Filling in of the gaps” to create a fully integrated urban cycle network, with radial routes joined across the town centre. Key destinations (e.g. schools, colleges, hospitals, shopping centres, visitor attractions) and new housing and employment sites will be integrated into the cycle network.

The creation of an orbital walking and cycling route around the Maidstone urban area, linking to the town centre via radial routes. This would be delivered through the designation of cycle routes along quiet lanes as well as the upgrading of existing footways alongside distributor roads and, where possible, footpath networks to provide cycle linkages.

The creation of cycle routes from rural service centres and smaller settlements to transport hubs (where new/improved cycle parking will be provided), along a mixture of quiet lanes and segregated shared use footways.

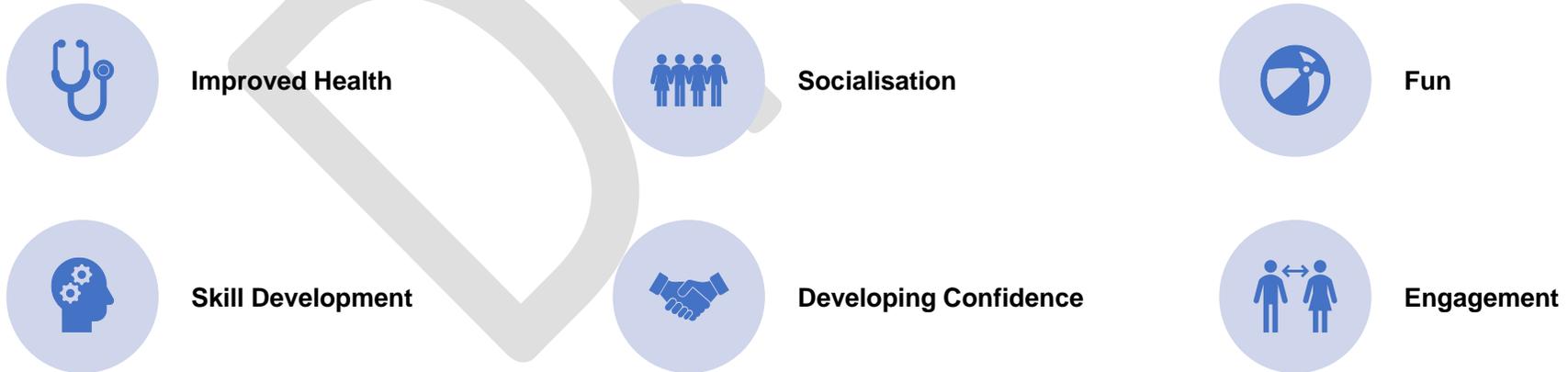
The creation of a rural circular cycle route (which could potentially be branded as a “Maidstone Ring” or similar) to encourage leisure cycling and exploration of the Borough's rural attractions. This would complement the existing NCR17/Pilgrims Cycle Trail and improve connectivity between rural service centres by cycle.

Summary

- 2.26. There are a number of clear priorities and strategic outcomes for improving community health and wellbeing in Maidstone as detailed in Table 1.1; the leisure facilities and services will contribute significantly towards the delivery of these outcomes and the attainment of the Vision for change in which **'Maidstone will be a district where healthier, active lifestyles are encouraged, supported and facilitated for everyone'**. Increasing access to good quality and accessible physical activity is at the heart of these shared outcomes and Vision for Change.
- 2.27. It is important to highlight that the majority of the SOPG research has been undertaken during the Covid pandemic. The data concerning Covid and its aftermath is telling us (Sports England Active Lives Report April 2021) that where inequalities previously existed, these have been exacerbated by the pandemic and investment to reduce health inequalities is needed more than ever. Whilst the majority of physically active adults in England managed to maintain their levels of physical activity, there was a marked increase in those who were inactive (less than 30 minutes exercise per week). This was particularly noticeable amongst women, young people aged 16 – 24, over 75's, disabled, and those from Black, Asian and other minority ethnic backgrounds.
- 2.28. Participation in gym/fitness and swimming has begun to increase as leisure facilities have re-opened, and home based activity has decreased. Sport England will continue to monitor as the sector restrictions continue to ease using Active Lives survey data and Moving Communities Data supplied by leisure facility operators.

The Contribution of Sport and Physical Activity

- 2.29. Sport and physical activity can contribute towards:



2.30. In Maidstone, we want to:

Break down	Break down barriers
Facilitate	Facilitate change
Support	Support individuals and families
Improve	Improve mental and physical wellbeing
Develop	Develop identity
Connect	Connect people and places

Partnerships Behind our Shared Outcomes

Maidstone Borough Council
Sport England
Kent County Council
Maidstone Leisure Trust
Serco Leisure
Kent and Medway Clinical Commissioning Group
Involve Kent
Kent Sport
County ASA

Draft

3. Our Place Insight

Borough Demographics

3.1 The following summary of Maidstone's key demographic profile provides useful insight as to factors influencing physical activity across the Borough:



Table 3.1:

Demographic Statistics	Maidstone	Kent	England
Population⁵			
Population 2021	176,013	1,609,182	56,989,570
Population projection between 2021 and 2031	190,772	1,715,674	59,389,102
Population projection between 2021 and 2031 for those aged 65+	14,519 up to 17,866 (18%) increase	21% increase	18% increase
Gender		791,284 male 817,899 female	28,203,353 male 28,786,217 female
Ethnicity	white (84.8%)	White (90.7%)	White (85.4%)
Population density	Area (hectares) 39,333 Density (persons per hectare) 4.4	Area (hectares) 354,295 Density (persons per hectare) 4.5	
Population by age group 2021	0 – 15 yrs 19% 16 – 64 yrs 62% 65+ 19%	0 – 15 yrs 18% 16 – 64 yrs 61% 65+ 21%	0 – 15 yrs 18% 16 – 64 yrs 63% 65+ 19%
Health & Wellbeing⁶			
Life expectancy	Male 80.5 yrs Female 83.7 yrs	Male 80.7 yrs Female 84.1 yrs	Male 79.6 yrs Female 83.2 yrs
Smokers	12.3%	12.9%	14.4%
Percentage of children in low income families	14.2%	12.9%	17%
Obesity			
Percentage of Adults classified as overweight or obese	61.4%	60.3%	62%
Prevalence of obesity in Yr 6 children	16.9%	16.8%	20.2%

⁵ Source: ONS 2019 Mid-year population estimates

⁶ Source: Public Health Profile Maidstone 2019

Maidstone Borough Council

SOPG

Demographic Statistics	Maidstone		Kent		England
Prevalence of excess weight in children ⁷	<u>Reception</u> 24% excess weight 14% overweight 10.7% obese 2.7% severe obesity	<u>Yr 6</u> 32.5% excess weight 17.5% overweight 15% obese 3.5% severe obesity	<u>Reception</u> 25.2% excess weight 14.8% overweight 10.4% obese 2.5% severe obesity	<u>Yr 6</u> 34.6% excess weight 14.6% overweight 20% obese 4.2% severe obesity	
Educational Attainment					
Average GCSE attainment (score 8)	49.6		47.9		46.9
Those achieving NVQ Level 4 and above	5.6%		44.9%		43.1%
Deprivation					
The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD2019): Headline findings for Kent	Maidstone has 95 LSOA's, 2 of which are in the 10% most deprived in England. These LSOA's include the wards of Park Wood, Shepway South and High Street		There are 51 LSOA's in Kent within the 10% most deprived LSOA's in England, The majority are in Thanet and Swale.		
Physical Activity⁸					
Do fewer than 30 minutes activity a week - adults	28.9%		26.6%		27.1%
	55% of these adults do no activity at all.				
Fairly Active - adults	9.7%		10.7%		11.5%
Active (at least 150 mins per week) - adults	61.4%		62.7%		61.4%
Do fewer than 30 minutes activity per day – young people	25.6%		28.4%		31.3%
Fairly Active – young people	19.1%		25%		23.8%

⁷ Source: National Child Measurement Report 2019/20 - Kent Public Health Laboratory

⁸ Source: Sport England Active Lives Data 2019/2020

Demographic Statistics	Maidstone	Kent	England
Active (average of 60+ mins per day) – young people	55.2%	46.6%	44.9%

Maidstone Facility Planning Model National Runs (2020) – Swimming Pools and Sports Halls

3.2 Appendix 1 to this report presents a summary of the latest Sport England Facility Planning Model (FPM) National Runs for swimming pools and sports halls for Maidstone (2020). An FPM is a supply/demand gravity model to assess the strategic provision of community sports facilities in an area. The reports includes public, private/commercial and school swimming pools and sports halls available for community use. The reports highlight the following:

Swimming Pools

- Supply of water space per 1,000 population is just below national and regional levels.
- The Model suggests that there is just enough water space to meet demand; however the majority of this provision is ageing.
- Approximately 89% of demand is satisfied and the Model suggests that 15.5% of this demand is being exported into neighbouring areas in order to be met.
- Unmet demand is slightly above national, regional and neighbouring authority levels and nearly all of this is due to people living outside the catchment of a pool.
- The Model suggests that pools may have the capacity for higher levels of usage.
- 20% of the used capacity modelled is shown to be imported into the borough.
- Aggregated unmet demand is high to the south of Maidstone town centre as reflected in the FPM map for swimming pools

Sports Halls

- Courts per 10,000 population is below national and regional figures and is lower than all neighbouring authorities too.
- The supply and demand balance identified a shortfall of 9 courts of space at peak periods in Maidstone; this is the largest shortfall figure when compared to neighbouring authorities.
- Mote Hall's dual use approach as a concert venue exacerbates this problem
- Satisfied demand is similar to national and regional figures but approximately 26% of this demand is having to be exported out of the borough into facilities in neighbouring areas, which reflects the shortfall in supply potentially.
- The significant majority of unmet demand identified is modelled as being caused by people living outside of a catchment of a facility.
- Some of the existing halls may have some capacity and these are mainly on school sites.

3.3 The above FPM analysis suggests that there is a current under supply of sports halls and water space in the Borough and that unmet demand for swimming is high in the south of the borough. This supports the findings from the MBC Sports Facility Strategy Review 2020 which identifies a shortfall of pool space by 2037 based on future population growth, equivalent to one 25m x 6 lane pool, and 2.05 four-badminton court sized sports halls with full community access. The Sports Facility Strategy does not identify where in the borough this future provision should be delivered.

Local Community and Stakeholder Insight

'Making Maidstone More Active' Review

3.4 In September 2019 (pre-Covid), MBC launched a boroughwide residents' survey to capture information on current behaviours, attitudes towards physical activity and opinions on local services, under the banner of 'Making Maidstone More Active'. The aim of the process was to help the Council design a leisure service that would enable, encourage and empower residents to be more active.

3.5 A total of 2,045 responses were received. The key findings are set out below:

- **The majority of respondents thought that regular exercise was important but just under half said that they felt that they undertook enough exercise**
- **49.6% said that they undertake moderate physical activity at least 3 times per week**
- **Almost 7 in 10 respondents have a positive attitude towards becoming fit and healthy**
- **Barriers to becoming more physically active – the top 3 responses were lack of motivation, lack of suitable activities, and childcare/other carer commitments. Female respondents were more likely to list 'lack of confidence' as one of their main reasons.**
- **When asked what factors would encourage more activity, the top 3 answers were cost and fees, quality of facilities, and range of suitable activities**
- **The survey also asked respondents to pick from a list the top 2 things they thought would help make them more physically active. The top 3 responses were lower cost activities, improved walking and cycling networks, and more locally based facilities**
- **Respondents were asked what sports or physical activity they undertook on a regular basis. The top 6 responses were walking/hiking/rambling, gym/fitness club, swimming, fitness classes, running, cycling**

- When asked what activity they would like to do more often the most popular responses were swimming, cycling, walking and running
- More than half the respondents had been part of a club or group in the past 4 weeks.
- When asked to rate their level of satisfaction with sport and exercise provision in Maidstone, the most common response was neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. A significantly higher proportion of economically active respondents answered this question negatively compared to economically inactive who tended to respond neutrally.
- 76.4% respondents thought that it was very important that Maidstone Borough Council provides opportunities for sporting and leisure activities
- The majority of respondents find out about local sport and leisure activities in the area via social media. However, a higher proportion of economically inactive respondents also referred to village newsletters and newspapers.

3.6 It should be noted that this survey was undertaken pre-Covid and further consultation may be required to explore any changes in attitudes and behaviours to physical activity resulting from the pandemic. However, the survey did highlight some useful points for future consideration:



There is clearly an interest in informal outdoor leisure activities, particularly walking, cycling and running



A large proportion of respondents emphasised the importance of the quality of facilities in encouraging participation in physical activity



The majority of respondents were also neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with current sport and physical activity provision in Maidstone which suggests that perhaps the age and condition of the existing Maidstone Leisure Centre may be influencing their decision to use the facility

3.7 MBC will be arranging forums targeted at different user groups, demographics, and geographical areas of Maidstone to obtain a deeper understanding of the themes identified in the survey, obtain insight into the impact of the Covid pandemic on residents' leisure behaviours, and consult on proposals resulting from this report. These forums are anticipated to begin in early 2022.

Sport Club Covid-19 Survey – Maidstone Leisure Trust (March 2021)

- 3.8 A survey was undertaken by Maidstone Leisure Trust (MLT) during the Covid-19 pandemic to identify how sports clubs in Maidstone had been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and if there was anything that could be done to support them during this time. 59 clubs were contacted but only 18 responses were received (a 31% response rate). This may be because a number of the clubs were not operating due to Covid restrictions or had disbanded.
- 3.9 Of the clubs who responded, the majority had seen their membership base decrease as a result of the pandemic but most believed that this would reverse once restrictions were removed. Most believed that this would happen at the latter end of 2021 or into 2022.
- 3.10 Only Village Golf had seen membership increase and this is possibly because golf was, for a short period, one of the few outdoor sports that was allowed to go ahead.
- 3.11 Many of the clubs provided incentives, or online mechanisms, to encourage members to continue with club activities, but in most cases, this was not successful.
- 3.12 The majority of respondents reported a loss of income and little or no funding from Central or Local Government. One organisation received Rates Relief, presumably because they operated out of registered premises. One club had received financial support from their local Parish Council.
- 3.13 Some reported support from their National Governing Body. This support varied but included a Sports Council grant, general funding to support Covid precautions and administrative support for risk assessments.

Serco Leisure Mosaic Profiling – Maidstone Leisure Centre

3.14 Serco’s latest Mosaic profiling undertaken for Maidstone Leisure Centre highlights that the borough is very affluent with mainly above average incomes and the most prominent Mosaic profiles are as follows:

Table 3.2:

(B) Prestigious positions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 56-65 • Established families in large, detached homes living up market lifestyles. • Supporting older children or students
(G) Domestic success – thriving independence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 36-45 • Well qualified singles with good income.
(G) Domestic success – mid career conventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional married couples bringing up young families. • Comfortable living standards
(E) Senior Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most elderly group with average age of 75. • They have sufficient income to buy their properties with mortgage paid off
(F) Suburban Stability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aged 55 – 65 • Single mature owners working in intermediate occupations • Supporting adult children who may be studying, looking for work or enjoying parents help • Respectable income and comfortable living •
(H) Aspiring Homemakers – primary ambitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aged 26-45 • Couples with children who attend local nursery and primary schools • Good household incomes • Affordable homes in better neighbourhoods • Although cheaper properties in the neighbourhood bought as first time buyers and close to schools. May now be considering homes with more space.

- 3.15 The most prominent profiles are (B) Prestigious Positions and (G) Domestic Success.
- 3.16 The age distribution of health and fitness members at Maidstone Leisure Centre is such that the 35 – 44 year age group constitutes the largest proportion of members. The proportion of members aged 25 to 34 years and 55 – 64 years is relatively low compared to other Serco contract sites.
- 3.17 Figure 3.1 opposite shows the geographical distribution of Maidstone Leisure Centre members. The map shows the distribution of members within a 10, 20 and 30 minute drive time of Maidstone Leisure Centre. The map shows that a high proportion of members live in Maidstone Town Centre itself and within close proximity to the main arterial roads leading out of the town centre (i.e. A229, A274, A20, A249).
- 3.18 Figure 3.2 below provides a breakdown of health and fitness and swimming members by ward. The breakdown shows that approximately 34% of these members come from Maidstone's wards of highest deprivation i.e. Shepway North, High Street, Park Wood and Shepway South.

Figure 2.1 Geographical distribution of Maidstone Leisure Centre Members 2019

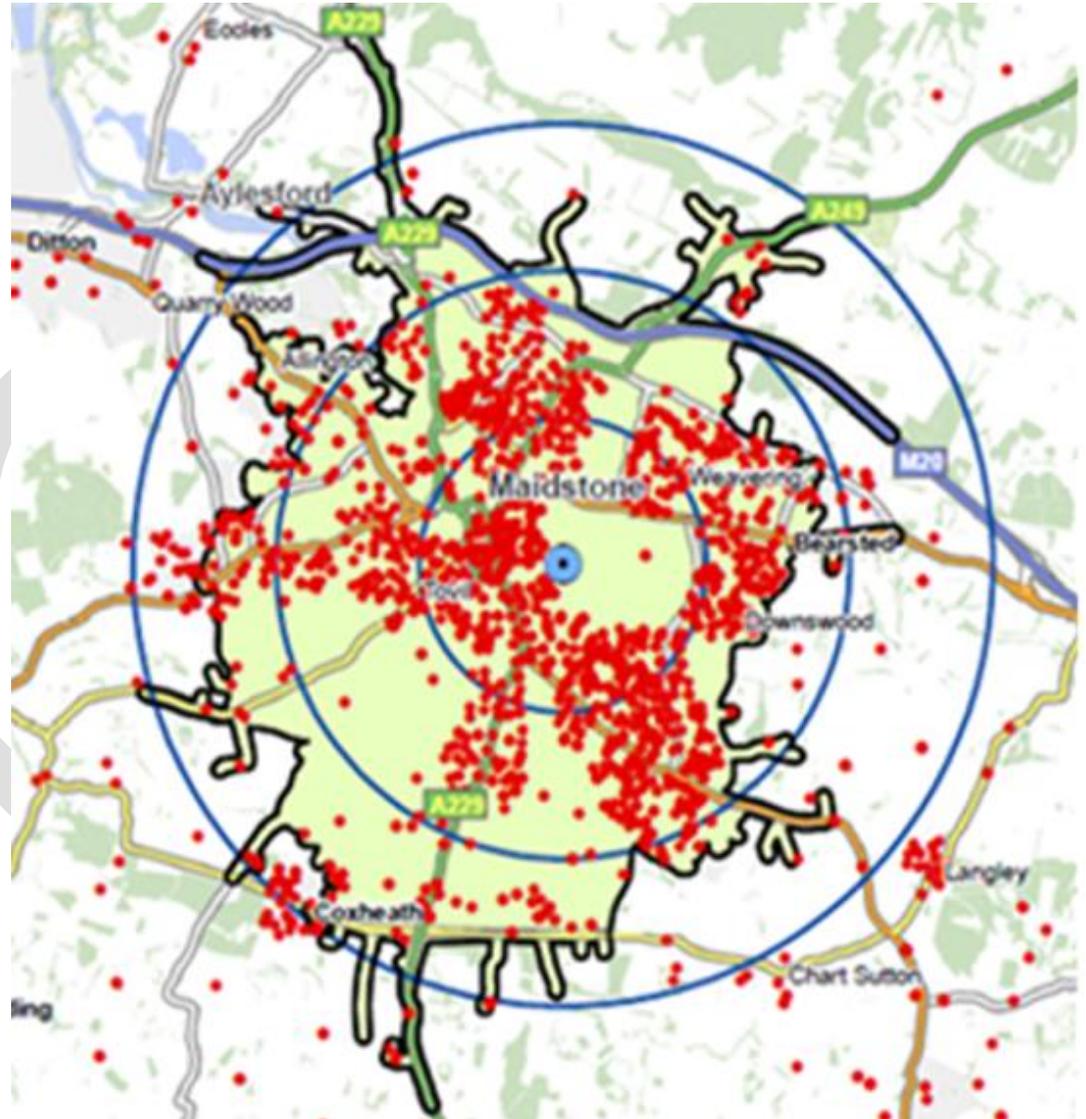
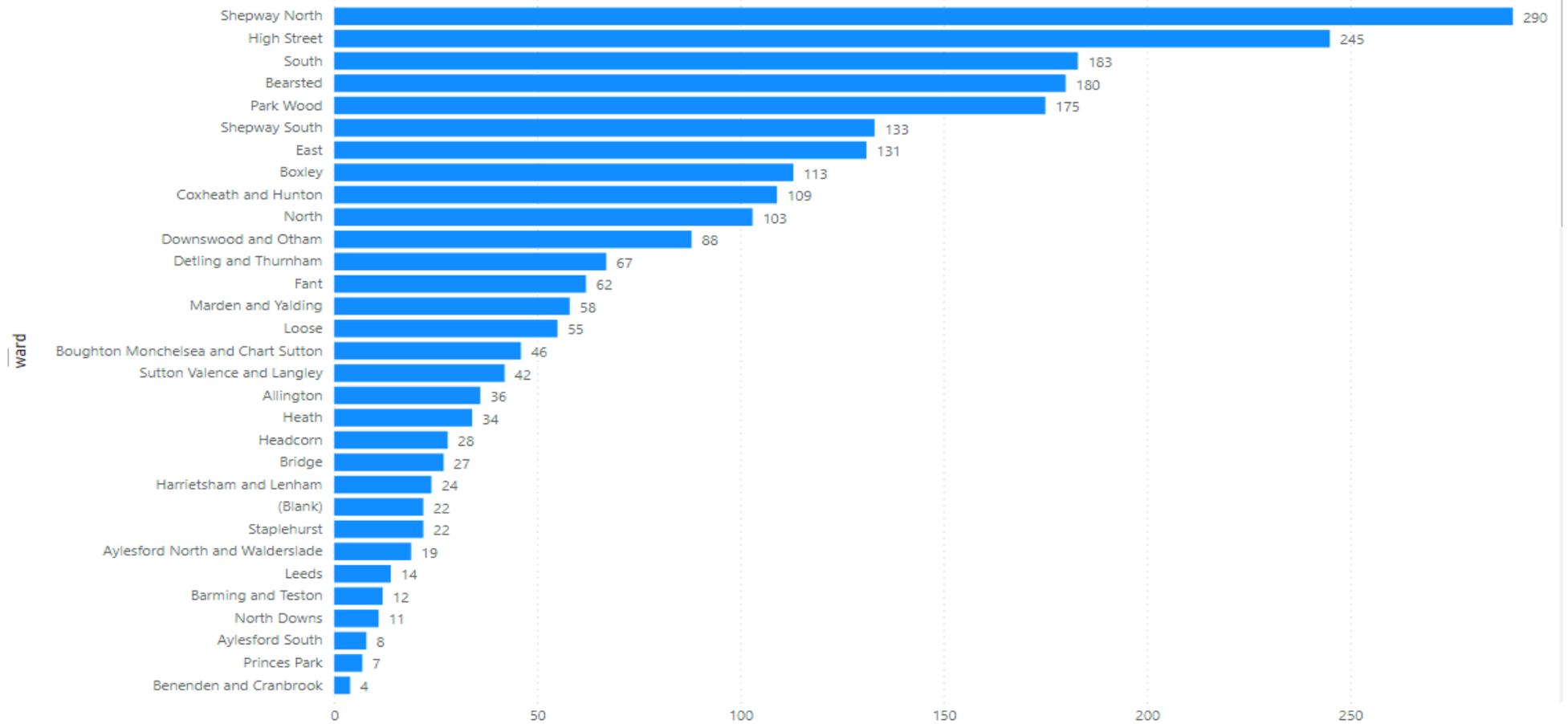


Figure 3.2 Number of Health and Fitness and Swimming Members by ward



- 3.19 Table 3.3 provides a further breakdown showing how the proportion of members who live in wards of highest deprivation compare to the proportion of the Maidstone population who live in these wards:

Table 3.3: Proportion of MLC members living in wards of high deprivation

Maidstone Ward of high Deprivation	Proportion of population who live in ward as a % of overall Maidstone Population 171,800 (2019) ⁹	Proportion of population who live in ward as a % of Maidstone Urban Area Population 128,110 (2019)	% of MLC H & F/Swim Members living in ward	% of MLC swim lesson and dry course members living in ward
Shepway North	5	7	12	8
High Street	4	5	10	10
Park Wood	5	7	7	9
Shepway South	7	9	5	5

- 3.20 Table 3.3 shows that uptake of health and fitness/swim memberships is disproportionately high in Shepway North and High Street wards when compared to the population of those wards. This may be due to the immediate proximity of these wards to Maidstone Leisure Centre. A similar pattern is exhibited for swim lesson and dry course memberships but with Park Wood ward also showing disproportionately high numbers. Of those members who live in a postcode with an Index of Multiple Deprivation of 1 – 10 (10 being the least deprived), approximately 62 – 65% live in a postcode with an Index of Multiple Deprivation of 1 – 5. This is positive in that it shows that the leisure centre is attracting membership from areas of high deprivation, however, further work could be undertaken to target membership in Shepway South ward.
- 3.21 There is greater health and fitness competition from the premium providers in the area with a similar offering i.e. David Lloyd, The Village, Freedom Leisure, Top Notch/Welcome Gym. The nearest competition is Pure Gym which is located 1.2 miles from Maidstone Leisure Centre and offers a 220 station gym.

⁹ Source: ONS MYPE for wards released 2020

3.22 Taking the above into consideration, Serco has identified the following key priorities for retaining and building on membership at Maidstone Leisure Centre going forward:

- **Add value to attract and retain the 55+ market:**
 - Maidstone has an affluent 55+ demographic present.
 - As people get older swimming becomes more popular which is a USP against the low cost centre. Ensure good provision of swimming at relevant times for this audience.
 - The proposition of adding Shapemaster appears aligned to the demographic.
 - Review our offer to consider what else we can do to **add value** to this audience and ensure communication of relevant benefits e.g. classes tailored to this age group, community activity, swimming, Shapemaster.
- **Add value to attract and retain the family market with school children or younger**
 - Parents likely to be attracted by the mix of classes, gym and pool and so a key target.
 - Swimming lessons are a key attraction.
 - Similar to the 55+ market consider how we can **add value** and market to this userbase e.g. class provision, family events, taster lessons.
- **Consider older Children living away or being supported by parents as a lower priority.**
 - Potentially more likely to be attracted to low cost providers and consider a lower priority.
 - Could consider offering 'free' passes for when older children are home from studying?

Maidstone Leisure Centre – School and Sports Club Surveys

3.23 A survey was sent out to all sport clubs and schools in Maidstone to obtain feedback on the existing Maidstone Leisure Centre and Mote Park and identify current and future facility needs. An analysis of both surveys is attached as Appendix 2. The surveys took place over a 4 week period in September/October 2021. A survey was sent out to 67 schools and a total of 11 responses were received representing a 16% response rate. This is slightly disappointing, considering that all schools were contacted more than once during the consultation period. A summary of the key findings from the schools' survey are as follows:

- 35% of schools that responded (4 schools) use MLC and for the purpose of their school swim lesson programme.
- When asked to rate the facilities/services used at MLC, 20% regarded the pool changing facilities as poor; the main reasons for this included a poor state of cleanliness or the need for updating/refurbishment.
- Only 4 schools responded to the question regarding how they travel to MLC. All 4 schools used a bus to travel and 2 of these schools took 0 -15 minutes to travel to MLC and the remaining schools took 15 – 30 minutes.
- The main reason for not using MLC more often is the location/lack of time to travel (32%) followed by the lack of school transport (26%) and quality of the facilities/services (21%).

- When asked what indoor sports facilities/services their school would need in the future, 7 schools did not respond to the question and the remaining schools suggested a 3G pitch or assistance with the cost of transport/facility hire (school located in area of deprivation).
- Only 1 school confirmed that it used outdoor sport and leisure facilities in Mote Park. The school used the public park area rather than specific outdoor sports facilities.
- The main reasons for not using Mote Park were lack of school transport (78%) and location/time taken to travel (55%).
- When asked to suggest ways that the two venues could work together to provide a more integrated offer for schools, one suggestion was to provide a dedicated outdoor area for schools separate to the public to avoid any safeguarding issues.
- Other comments about MLC included lack of/poor communication by the leisure operator when dealing with swim lesson bookings.

3.24 A survey was sent out to 65 sports clubs and a total of 17 responses were received which represents a 26% response rate. A summary of the key findings from the sports club survey are as follows:

- Responses were received from a wide range of clubs in the borough including Triathlon, Running, Roller Skating (artistic), Golf and Cheerleading.
- 69% of clubs that responded cater for people with disabilities; no details were provided regarding specialist coaches/equipment provided.
- 25% of clubs currently have over 80 active playing members; prior to Covid, approximately 70% of clubs had over 80 active members.
- The majority of clubs had seen an increase in membership in the 5 years prior to Covid.
- Approximately 70% of clubs expect to see an increase in membership over the next 5 years.
- 69% of clubs that responded have more than 11 volunteers.
- When asked for the location of the club's most used venue, all venues given are located within the Maidstone borough boundary.
- Other venues used included venues in Haywards Heath, Gillingham and Tunbridge Wells.
- Only 13% of clubs that responded use MLC; those clubs rated the facilities as 'standard'.
- There was uncertainty as to how their members travel to MLC. 67% said that their members travelled by car, but an equivalent percentage said that they didn't know.
- When asked what would encourage their members to walk or cycle to MLC, 35% suggested secure covered cycle parking, followed by better connected/signposted walking and cycling network (20%) and reward incentives (20%).
- 46% of clubs said that lack of suitable facilities or cost of hire prevented them from using MLC more often; however, lack of availability was highlighted (38%) and lack of engagement from MLC.
- Lack of storage (60%) and need for better equipment (39%) were also highlighted as reasons for not using MLC more often. Some clubs (43%) also said that MLC could not cater for the specialist facilities required for their sport.
- None of the clubs that responded used any outdoor sport and leisure facilities in Mote Park.
- When asked to think of ways in which the two venues could work together and provide a more integrated offer, Maidstone Harriers suggest the provision of an athletics track on site. There is also the suggestion of providing a cross country route in the park.
- Other comments include the high cost of hiring the facilities, lack of sports hall court availability and pool hire availability, more space needed for land training, and a sports hall that cannot cater for professional and competitive basketball. There were comments from Maidstone Harriers

about working with MBC for provision of better training options for the club including swimming, cycling/spin and core strength. As with the schools' survey, there was criticism about lack of/poor communication from the leisure operator. The cycling club suggests that there may be an opportunity for the club to make MLC its base for indoor and outdoor training/competition.

- 3.25 Individual face to face consultation with Maidstone Leisure Centre key sports clubs highlighted the need for more hall space in the borough with a number of the clubs wanting their own dedicated space. Clubs thought that Maidstone Leisure Centre is too expensive and does not offer them sufficient time. The latter has been exacerbated by the Covid pandemic.

MLT/Serco Leisure Insight – Maidstone Leisure Centre

- 3.26 MLT and Serco Leisure highlight the following key issues when consulted regarding the current Maidstone Leisure Centre and future leisure needs for the borough:

- MBC is keen for a new Maidstone Leisure Centre to be a regional facility with rural areas supported by outreach leisure provision, utilising existing indoor and outdoor community facilities. Sport England has a blueprint for an efficient, affordable leisure centre design that it recommends local authorities use, but this may not necessarily fit with local political desire.
- MLT queried whether it would be better to create smaller sports hubs across the borough, supporting existing sports clubs, rather than having one central leisure centre. MLT highlight that some sports clubs have their own facilities. However, this would not address the key priority of encouraging more of the general population to take part in physical activity, bringing as many activities together centrally to optimise the opportunity to participate. Essential life skill activities such as swimming could be subsidised by more commercial type activities e.g. health and fitness. MLT's view was that the majority of sports clubs in Maidstone tend not to use Maidstone Leisure Centre but use community halls instead. The Sports Club Survey undertaken for this project supports this view.
- **Swimming Pool** – Maidstone Leisure Centre pools attracts visitors from all over Kent. Day visits are common. For this to continue, it is important to have the volume of activities and for this to include pool fun/leisure features. Serco supports the suggestion of having an 8 lane 25m main pool and 4 lane 25m training pool with moveable floor. The ASA has said that there is a need for an 8 lane 25m competition pool and Maidstone Leisure Centre would provide an ideal centrally located venue in Kent for swim competition. At present, swimming clubs are having to travel to Medway Park for galas This is an aging facility and not particularly suitable. MLT agreed that there are currently poor facilities locally for competitive swimming. There are currently poor viewing facilities for parents wanting to watch their child take part in swim lessons.
- **Leisure Pool** – Serco suggest extending the water play offer by providing wet play facilities external to the building to capitalise on the core family market. This could be included in both a refurbishment or new build.

- **Diving Pit** - From a commercial perspective, Serco would not include a diving pit in a new/refurbished leisure centre.
 - **Changing Rooms** – There are an insufficient number of changing rooms at peak times at Maidstone Leisure Centre. The layout should also be reviewed; needs to be more open with fewer corridors. Maidstone Leisure Centre is informally referred to as the ‘aquatics disability centre’ for Kent and is used by Kent disability Club, Maidstone Disabled Swim Club, and Bubbles Swim School (part of the Learn to Swim Scheme). Serco invested in improvement to changing facilities for people with disabilities. Provision for people with disabilities needs incorporating into the design of new changing rooms. Also need to consider access into the pools so that people with disabilities can enter the water in a dignified manner, ideally without the need for assistance from staff.
 - **Sports Hall/Events** – The existing 6 court sports hall is a versatile multi-purpose space offering an empty hall for sporting competition, to a full theatre set up with a large stage and a seating capacity to accommodate an audience of 1200, for bands, comedians such as Jimmy Carr, and regular events throughout the year such as Maidstone Symphony Orchestra, Boxing, Robot Wars, Wrestling shows and dance competitions. Our hirers are not all local to Kent; some come as far as Manchester. The venue is also popular with the community for cultural events and wedding receptions. The hall can comfortably hold 500 guests seated.
- 3.27 To host these big events, Serco has to hire in tables and chairs as there is not adequate storage on site to hold additional furniture. On occasion, Serco also needs to hire in additional function bars to accommodate the large numbers attending.
- 3.28 In 2018, the leisure centre took £20,150 over the bar and £74,070 in event hire. In 2019, the leisure centre took £25,871 over the bar and £71,101 in events hire. The cost of hire for a full set up with stage and seating is approximately £2,100. The cost of hire of an empty hall with no equipment is approximately £600 depending on the length of hire.
- 3.29 Depending on the season, the sports hall is used for events 3 weekends out of 4. This essentially means that sports clubs and casual hirers are unable to use the sports hall on those weekends. The sports hall facility needs and issues outlined in the Maidstone Sport Facility Strategy 2019 are compounded by the current arrangements at Maidstone Leisure Centre.
- 3.30 Serco said that it is also becoming more difficult to attract commercial acts/shows to leisure centres, essentially because the venue does not lend itself aesthetically to these types of activities, particularly as customer expectations increase.
- 3.31 Serco would retain a 6 court sports hall in a new/refurbished Maidstone Leisure Centre to cater for the demand from sports clubs.
- 3.32 MLT would recommend that MBC provide a separate new large concert/events venue for the borough to cater for the arts and cultural needs of the borough.

- **Soft Play** – Serco would suggest having soft play area adjacent to the café and separate to pool environment. Consideration should be given to Tag Active or similar activities targeting the family or pre-teen market. If refurbishment, consider re-configuring the existing ice hills and adventure zone area.
- **Café** – to be accessible from the outside/park so that public do not have to pay for entry into the leisure centre to use the café. Ideally located so that parents can watch the family taking part in swim lessons, soft play, and/or leisure pool activities.
- **Health and Fitness Suite** – Maidstone Leisure Centre currently has approximately 100 stations, 21/22 members per station. The gym is split across 3 floors which is not ideal. Serco would ideally like to see a health studio/Shapemaster suite, consulting rooms and medium size multi-purpose space. The Shapemaster suite would be separate to the main gym, providing power assisted exercise and rehabilitation, catering for the 55+ market, disabled, those suffering with poor mobility, and those living with long term health conditions. There is a lack of provision locally and a demand for 11,000 users. Serco would like to develop integrated solution with local health providers, but also create some suitable space for rental by third parties supplying dental and optometry to deliver complimentary services.
- **Studios** – Serco would like to see a purpose built cycle/spin studio and 2 separate studios catering for different exercise classes. They would cater for virtual classes, but the usage of these classes is relatively low. There has been a shift towards home workouts delivered by your favourite leisure centre instructor and Serco would continue to offer this.

Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust

- 3.33 There is a new programme called **Community Health Transformation Programme** which is due to roll out from 2023/4, in which the NHS will be seeking to make mental health services more integrated and accessible to the general public, working with other providers such as Live Well Kent, and commissioned through Kent County Council.
- 3.34 The Trust has expressed interest in the Maidstone Leisure Centre project and specifically the opportunity to co-locate adult mental health services and potentially Live Well Kent services on the same site as part of a community hub concept. There would be far less stigma attached to providing these types of services in an informal setting rather than in a hospital environment. Only a relatively small, allocated space would be required.
- 3.35 Maidstone is a high priority area for the Trust with poor levels of mental health, both in the town centre but also the more isolated rural communities.
- 3.36 The Trust is also currently looking at the introduction of **Community Diagnostic Hubs**: one stop shops for the community to receive lifesaving health checks close to home. The Trust is looking to set these up in free space on the high street and retail parks. The space would provide x ray, CT scanning, blood test and screening services. This may also be an option for the Maidstone Leisure Centre project.

Kent County Council Youth Service

- 3.37 The Youth Service has expressed interest in offering youth services from a new community hub facility in Mote Park. They already do outreach work from the park and would be able to offer more services, particularly if a better outdoor skatepark facility was available as part of the development to encourage greater participation and interaction with young people.
- 3.38 Their role is changing and they now help support and educate young people e.g. on sexual health, drugs etc. They provide this support through workshops and groups. They could ideally provide sexual health support including provision of sexual health protection/information from a new community hub in Mote Park if space was made available. This would provide a less judgemental environment compared to a medical practice, as no one would know why they were visiting the community hub.

Maidstone Volleyball Club

- 3.39 Membership of Maidstone Volleyball Club has grown significantly in the last three years, particularly within the 11 – 18 year age group. The Club is keen to be able to support this growth (the Club currently has 200 members, 100 of which are active) and interest in playing volleyball and needs more hall space on a regular basis for training and competition.
- 3.40 Consultation with the Club highlighted their interest in developing outdoor volleyball courts in Mote Park. They know that these would be used by local schools and the Club would be willing to provide courses, instructors etc.
- 3.41 The Chairman of the Club is also the Chairman of Kent Volleyball. At a County and local level there is a desire to develop the game and there is an aspiration to develop a regular competition venue where not just club matches could be hosted but National League and Junior Grand Prix league sessions, where 8 – 10 clubs would play at one time.
- 3.42 Volleyball has significant potential to grow further in the Maidstone area given the interest from eastern European students and communities; it provides an opportunity to be active in a sociable environment and can benefit both physical and mental health.

Consultation with Neighbouring Local Authorities

- 3.43 Consultation has been undertaken with neighbouring local authorities to identify their plans/proposals for investment in the Active Environment so that provision in Maidstone can take this into account.

Table 3.4 Consultation with Neighbouring Local Authorities

Maidstone Borough Council
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Local Authority	Consultation Feedback
Tonbridge and Malling (TMBC)	<p>TMBC provides three leisure facilities, all managed by TM Active, a local trust. There has been extensive investment in facilities in recent years.</p> <p>The Council is considering the future options for the Angel Centre (dryside) given proposals for the Tonbridge town centre re-development. There is also Tonbridge Swimming Pool in the town.</p> <p>Larkfield Leisure Centre, Aylesford is the largest facility, including a significant leisure water offer. This facility draws users for a wide catchment including that side of Maidstone.</p> <p>It is not considered that investment in the Maidstone leisure offer would impact adversely on the Larkfield facility.</p>
Medway Council (MC)	<p>MC facilities are operated in-house.</p> <p>MC is investing in a comparable replacement for the Splashes Sports Centre, Rainham, Gillingham; this will include a replacement leisure pool and fitness suite. The new centre, on the same site will be open from July 2024. There is a proposal to develop a new garden village adjacent to Gillingham as part of Medway's provision for new homes.</p> <p>There is significant housing development planned for the Hoo Peninsula; this will take place up to 2030. As part of this investment in new leisure provision is anticipated, predominantly funded through S106 contributions. It is not yet clear how this would impact the existing Hoo Sports Centre.</p> <p>There are currently no definitive plans to replace Medway Park Leisure Centre, Gillingham which is the venue currently used for competitive swimming, and by the Kent ASA.</p> <p>At Strood Leisure Centre there is a water polo club; this pool can only be used for water polo training not competition.</p>
Swale District Council (SDC)	<p>SDC also has Serco as leisure operator.</p> <p>Approx. 3 years ago, the Council decided to undertake a review of leisure. On the back of this, the leisure contract was extended by 5 years (now due to end 2025) to allow the Council more time to determine the future direction of its leisure facilities and services. However, a re-structure subsequently took place and the opportunity to review leisure was lost. Covid then happened.</p> <p>SDC intend to look at a leisure strategy from Sept/Oct 2021 and link this to the new local plan. There will be an options paper first, considering how many facilities they need and what they provide etc. It is unlikely that they will do anything with the Swallows LC because of the recent roof repairs, which cost the Council a significant amount of money.</p> <p>SDC is of the view that there are a small percentage of Swale residents who use the existing Maidstone LC, mainly families, due to the offer available there. Does not feel that many Maidstone residents travel to use Swale facilities. Would be easy for Serco to undertake a member catchment area analysis across the 2 districts.</p> <p>Swale is approximately 12 miles from Maidstone. The main access route is the A249.</p>

Summary

3.44 The above insight together with feedback from key stakeholders (Appendix 3) identifies a number of health and physical activity inequalities affecting Maidstone residents and creating barriers to taking part in physical activity. These can be summarised as follows:

- **High levels of physical inactivity in both children and adults. The Covid 19 pandemic has only exacerbated this issue.**
- **Participation rates are higher in the more affluent rural parts of the borough compared to urban areas where participation is lower. The lowest levels are in the south-east of Maidstone town, within close proximity to Maidstone Leisure Centre.**
- **There is a correlation between low levels of physical activity in Maidstone and areas of high deprivation (Park Wood, High Street, Shepway North and South wards)**
- **The existing Maidstone Leisure Centre does attract membership from areas of high deprivation within close proximity of the facility, particularly Shepway North and High Street wards**
- **Levels of childhood obesity are increasing in Maidstone**
- **An ageing population is leading to pressure on social services**
- **Increasingly mental health issues are affecting individuals and families**
- **There is poor physical accessibility for people with disabilities using Maidstone Leisure Centre e.g. lack of disabled parking close to the centre, the steep slope down to the main reception is difficult to navigate for people in wheelchairs, the size of the building and length of internal corridors make it tiring to navigate as a disabled user.**
- **The top 3 reasons for residents not becoming more physically active are (1) lack of motivation (2) lack of suitable activities and (3) childcare/other care commitments**
- **The top 3 things that would encourage residents to become more active are (1) lower cost activities (2) improved walking and cycling network and (3) more locally based activities (this was the top answer for the 65+ age group)**
- **The top 3 factors that would encourage more physical activity are (1) cost and fees (2) the quality of facilities and (3) the range of suitable activities**

- The popularity of informal activities such as walking and cycling within Maidstone may reflect the age profile of the borough.

Opportunities for Change

3.45 There are a number of potential opportunities for addressing the above:

- A new Maidstone Leisure Centre, providing high quality accessible sport and leisure facilities.
- Better integration of the leisure centre with the adjacent Mote Park to create a destination venue, developing the Active Environment and connectivity through the provision of accessible walking and cycling routes and linking indoor facilities with outdoor activities and facilities in the park.
- Opportunities to link the leisure centre and the park through shared provision such as outdoor changing, café, outdoor leisure pool.
- Opportunity to better link the leisure centre with the neighbouring Mote Cricket, Rugby and Squash and Indoor Bowls clubs.
- Co-location opportunities to attract more people to Maidstone Leisure Centre for physical activity and wider health benefits e.g. Adult and Young Persons Mental Health services, Youth Service (sexual/drug support services), GP Referral, cardiac rehabilitation, long term health condition activities etc.
- Opportunity to provide complementary outdoor sport and leisure facilities (e.g. volleyball courts, skatepark, MUGA, Pumptrack, Splashpad) which link/integrate the leisure centre with the adjacent Mote Park and Active Environment, encouraging particularly young people to engage in physical activity.
- Opportunity to provide separate concert/events venue for the borough to free up space in the sports hall at Maidstone Leisure Centre and help address demand for community accessible sports hall provision for casual use and sports clubs at weekends.
- Investment in new swimming facilities to increase capacity, optimise learn to swim programme, provide flexible programming and provide a regional competition pool for swimming etc.
- MBC to deliver co-ordinating role in future for outreach health and physical activity provision in rural areas, working with third sector organisations to deliver key outcomes.

- **Future leisure management contract to incorporate direct delivery of an extended range of outreach provision in rural areas and areas of high deprivation with KPI's directly relating to MBC key outcomes for health and physical activity.**
- **Making better use of outreach community facilities for delivery of health and physical activity to rural areas.**
- **Address the scope and range of Maidstone Leisure Centre facilities to increase capacity, raise levels of participation, provide for those with a disability, those aged 55+, those on low incomes and enable increased revenue generation.**
- **Opportunities to develop working partnerships with the NHS including GPs, social prescribing (Involve Kent), One You Kent programmes, Maidstone Hospital and the West Kent and Medway Clinical Commissioning Group focussing on provision of a suite of services for individuals with health conditions.**
- **Opportunities to provide a combined GP referral scheme and Green Prescription Scheme which incorporates both indoor and outdoor physical activities in the leisure centre and parks, encouraging positive physical and mental wellbeing.**
- **Opportunity to introduce a means tested leisure card for the borough to provide discounted activities for those who would benefit the most and encourage participation in indoor and outdoor sport and physical activity. This scheme could be introduced as part of the re-procurement of the leisure contract as a contractor requirement.**

4. Interventions

Our Response

Where are we going to deliver our interventions?

- 4.1. MBC's Strategic Outcomes Planning Guidance Diagnostic (February 2021) recommended that further feasibility work be carried out on the following 4 options for addressing MBC's shared outcomes for physical activity. All options involved the retention of a leisure centre on the site of the existing Maidstone Leisure Centre:

Table 4.1: Feasibility Options - advantages and disadvantages

Option	Advantages	Disadvantages
1. Refurbish Existing Maidstone LC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central location adjacent to Mote Park • Close to town centre and areas of high deprivation • Retaining existing customer base • Good free car parking provision • Opportunity to improve links to active environment/park • Central Concert venue remains available • Greater connection via cycling/walking/running with the leisure centre • Refurbishment scheme and operator proposals could be incorporated into new leisure management procurement process in advance of 2024. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant capital needs to be spent on back of house i.e. plant and equipment, roof replacement; whilst this investment is a priority, it will not add to the customer experience of using the facility • Poor access by road and cycle, with no linked cycle routes, busy town centre one way system • Limited scope to change configuration of building and layout. • No direct link to adjacent park and clubs • Distance from new areas of population growth • Limited scope to alter facility mix to meet changing leisure needs of population • Previous refurbishments resulted in short term rather than long term increase in usage • Perception of 'no change' from residents • No proper assessment of business case for retaining concert venue on current site • Management Contract is likely to be less attractive to leisure operators and they will cost for risk in managing an ageing building • Continued high carbon emissions due to age and inefficient design of building

Option	Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>2. Invest in a new Leisure and Physical Activity hub with co-located community services e.g. GP surgery, CAB etc in Mote Park to replace the existing MLC</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to take full advantage of location and re-orientate building to integrate with park and neighbouring facilities e.g. direct link to Outdoor Adventure, access to café in entrance without entering facility, view out to park etc • Provision of complimentary co-located community facilities providing integrated health and physical activity offer • Greater connection with the leisure centre via cycling/walking/running routes • Efficient design of facility with facility mix that meets the current and future needs of the Borough • Opportunity to review target market – regional or local facility? (planning aim is for Maidstone to become a regional destination once again) • Opportunity to target hard to reach groups through hub approach to delivery. • Opportunity for assessment of business case for retaining Concert Venue on same site. • Retention of good parking • More cost effective long term than adding to old facility structure • Option to develop borough discount card/membership for indoor/outdoor leisure provision • A new leisure facility is likely to be very attractive to leisure facility operators and proposals could be incorporated into new leisure contract procurement process, ensuring better financial return to the Council • Opportunity to incorporate new key health and physical activity KPI's into new leisure management contract reflecting priorities of the Council • Capital cost less likely to be prohibitive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor access by road and cycle, with no linked cycle routes, busy town centre one way system • Only one facility serving the whole population of the Borough – what about meeting the needs of new population growth in rural fringes. • Hub will only work if joined up working/commitment of key partners • Rural provision would need to operate as complimentary to the main physical activity hub. Smaller, informal provision in the rural areas may not be attractive to an external operator

Option	Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>3. Adopt a Hub and spoke approach i.e. new Leisure and Physical Activity hub with co-located community services e.g. GP surgery, CAB etc in Mote Park supported by outreach service/provision in rural villages</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As per Option 2, plus: • Option to reduce/vary the facility mix with some facilities located on the outer fringes of the Borough as part of smaller community outreach facility(ies). Cost benefit analysis will be needed. Need to determine whether MLC is to be a regional or borough facility. • This could alleviate some car access issues and be strategically located closer to new housing development. • Outreach provision could also include support given by the Council to existing community facilities/organisations to help them be sustainable long term • Opportunity to review management options for sites for inclusion in new leisure management contract post 2024. • Opportunity to include outreach element of service provision within new leisure management contract, giving greater responsibility to operator to deliver key services/activities in parks and community/village halls etc • Alternatively, smaller facilities would have the potential to be managed by local organisations under asset transfer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changed/reduced facility mix at current MLC site may meet with public opposition • Loss of 'flagship' status of MLC site • Negative impact (e.g. reduced levels of activity) of moving some leisure provision away from areas of high deprivation in the urban centre • Hub will only work if there is joined up working/commitment of key partners • Capital cost of investing in multiple locations could be prohibitive
<p>4. Invest in a new Leisure and Physical Activity hub with co-located community services e.g. GP surgery, CAB etc in Mote Park to replace the existing MLC and develop a new leisure centre to serve the new communities which will live in the new housing to the south of the Borough</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As per Option 2, plus: • Another new facility could act as a satellite site to the main physical activity hub in Mote Park • It may be perceived that a smaller facility serving the rural areas (likely to comprise of a small pool, multi-purpose space and fitness facilities and possibly a sports hall) would balance the provision in the north, more urban areas of the Borough • Providing two facilities may better address identified facility needs set out in the Sports Facility Strategy • Two new facilities would constitute an attractive offer for an outsourced contract and would be likely to generate a return to MBC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changed/reduced facility mix at current MLC site may meet with public opposition • Loss of 'flagship' status of MLC site • Negative impact (e.g. reduced levels of activity) of moving some leisure provision away from areas of high deprivation in the urban centre • Hub will only work if there is joined up working/commitment of key partners • Capital cost of investing in multiple locations could be prohibitive • May not provide as great opportunity to develop a range of provision • Potential to reduce usage of a hub facility in Mote Park?

Feasibility Option 1 – Refurbishment of Maidstone Leisure Centre

- 4.2. A further assessment has been undertaken of Feasibility Option 1 by Saunders Boston Architects concerning the viability of a refurbishment scheme for the existing Maidstone Leisure Centre.

Changing Leisure Trends

- 4.3. Refurbishment of leisure centres can be extremely challenging. Many of the leisure centres built in the 1960's, 1970's and 1980's are now approaching or passed the end of their working lives. Sport and leisure trends have moved on and the demand for some of those facilities have changed dramatically.
- 4.4. For example, many facilities developed in the 1970's and 1980's included 'leisure water' at the heart of their offering with a combination of flumes, play features and sometimes wave machines. In contrast, today most swimming pools are developed around the demands for learn to swim and lane swimming programmes.
- 4.5. Similarly, a gym would have previously comprised of a small underutilised and unattractive space in a facility, today the state of the art fitness suite is now front and centre of a leisure centre and seen as the primary source of revenue.
- 4.6. Over the years, leisure centres have tried (some more successfully than others) to adapt to changing trends and customer demands through extensions and alterations but on many occasions, a building can reach a point where alterations or extensions no longer offer best value. In the case of Maidstone Leisure Centre, this building is very much at this threshold for the following reasons:

Access

- 4.7. In 1995 a landmark piece of Legislation called the Disabled Discrimination Act (DDA) was introduced. This resulted in a fundamental change in how we all interact with the Public realm. Superseded in 2010 by the Equality Act many public buildings have been left struggling to be adapted and comply.
- 4.8. Maidstone Leisure Centre users encounter various changes in level which have been mitigated through lifts and platform lifts. It leads to an uncomfortable customer journey that starts at the car park, down the steps/steep slope into the building, through the build all the way to poolside where a crane/sling unit is mounted poolside to lift disabled people into the pool tank.

Building Fabric

- 4.9. The building fabric has had regular maintenance and some replacement over the years. Broadly speaking it is in good order and fit for purpose in the short/medium term. The thermal and airtightness performance however of the existing envelope falls significantly short of current standards. This results in higher running costs as warm air is lost through the building envelope (particularly glazed areas and material/building junctions e.g. wall meets roof).

- 4.10. To offer any significant extension (say 20 years plus) to the life span of the building substantial improvements are required. This type of regeneration would require a new highly insulated external façade and roof with higher performing air-tightness construction. Alongside new min double glazing with thermally broken frames and solar glass.

Swimming Pool Design

- 4.11. Since the swimming pools at Maidstone Leisure Centre were built, there has been a fundamental shift in swimming pool design. To improve user experience, safety and water standards (filtration) deck level pools are now typical. As swimmers enter the pool, water is displaced over the edge of the edge of the pool into a 'transfer' channel (trough) and encouraged through the filtration system rather than back into the main body of water therefore improving water hygiene. This reduces the wave's bouncing back from the pool edge. It brings the water to a higher level reducing the impact should someone fall into the water as well as improving visibility for spectators and crucially lifeguarding, as hidden corners are eliminated. Retrofitting such improvements to an existing pool can be complex and costly given the need for a waterproof construction.
- 4.12. Today swimming pools, including 25m community and regional short course pools, need to apply strict tolerances around the pool lengths to ensure timed swimming events are comparable. These tolerance are measured by an independent surveyor.
- 4.13. Pool surround standards have also developed. The size of pools surrounds has developed significantly with the HSE and governing bodies such as Swim England and Sport England to ensure users have sufficient space to transition safely around the pool edge.

Circulation

- 4.14. The existing centre has developed over many years. In order to facilitate the additional new facilities, more and more circulation has been added. This circulation adds to the overall size of the building and becomes very inefficient. As a result some corridors become uninviting, are poorly decorated and badly lit. If refurbished, this will result in an ongoing need to continually refresh (paint and re-carpet) multiple circulation areas and multiple stair cores.

Adjacencies

- 4.15. Adjacencies are the ways in which one space interacts with another. For example it is fundamental that the changing room is adjacent to the swimming pool. As Maidstone LC has been extended and refurbished over time, some issues with adjacencies have been addressed.

- 4.16. From a customer perspective there are a number of adjacencies that are expected in a modern leisure centre. At Maidstone Leisure Centre the relationship of the spectator seating to the viewing area and the café are compromised and this effects the user experience between parents and children. At present the Fitness suite is split between levels and shares no relationship to the studio/multi-purposes spaces, this is difficult for the operator to manage and is uninviting for users. Any future refurbishment options would struggle to address many of the adjacency issues including;



The Pool Environment

- 4.17. The most complex part of any leisure centre to service is the Pool hall. At Maidstone the Leisure Pool is located in an open environment with no physical separation between the pool area, café, activity area and the entrance. Air temperature is therefore a critical issue. Typically a leisure pool should be 29/30 degrees with the air temperature 1 degree higher. This means if the pool is heated to the correct temperature the adjacent areas are extremely high for an individual who is fully clothed sitting in a café. Alternatively if the pool is too cold it will be undesirable for swimmers.

Plant and Mechanical and Electrical Services

- 4.18. Under the existing Maidstone Leisure Centre contract with MLT/Serco, the Council pays Serco £624,000 per annum for maintenance. This sum is fixed over the life of the contract and was arranged through Serco PAISA Ltd, a financial leasing company. The £624,000 per annum is the Council's loan repayment which totals approximately £9 million over the life of the contract. The original lifecycle maintenance programme was drawn up in 2008. An updated condition survey was commissioned in January 2020 prior to Covid to help prioritise the remaining PAISA fund through to the end of the contract period.

- 4.19. The building services associated to a leisure centre are large, complex to maintain and expensive to replace. To fully understand the life spans of current plant and machinery a full condition survey will be required. It is likely that despite regular routine care and maintenance much of the primary plant and infrastructure will be approaching the end of its working life and due for replacement. Running old plant for longer can often become a false economy and never run efficiently. It is therefore likely that a significant proportion of any finance allocated to a refurbishment scheme will need to be spent on back of house plant and infrastructure, so the public may not necessarily see many visible front of house improvements as a result of the Council's investment.

External Appearance

- 4.20. The external appearance of a building can often be undervalued. In the Leisure Sector the customer experience is paramount. People need to want to visit the centre and it must therefore appeal to its customers. If it does not people will vote with their feet, perhaps visit less frequently or use a private alternative. The current external appearance of Maidstone LC is non-descript; it could be any building in almost any location. It does not help inspire good health.
- 4.21. The existing building also fails to exploit its location adjacent to Mote Park, with key areas of the building (e.g. café, fitness suite, studios) failing to take advantage of the views out onto the park and the potential connectivity with the outdoors and the Active Environment. There would be minimal scope for a refurbishment scheme to address these factors.

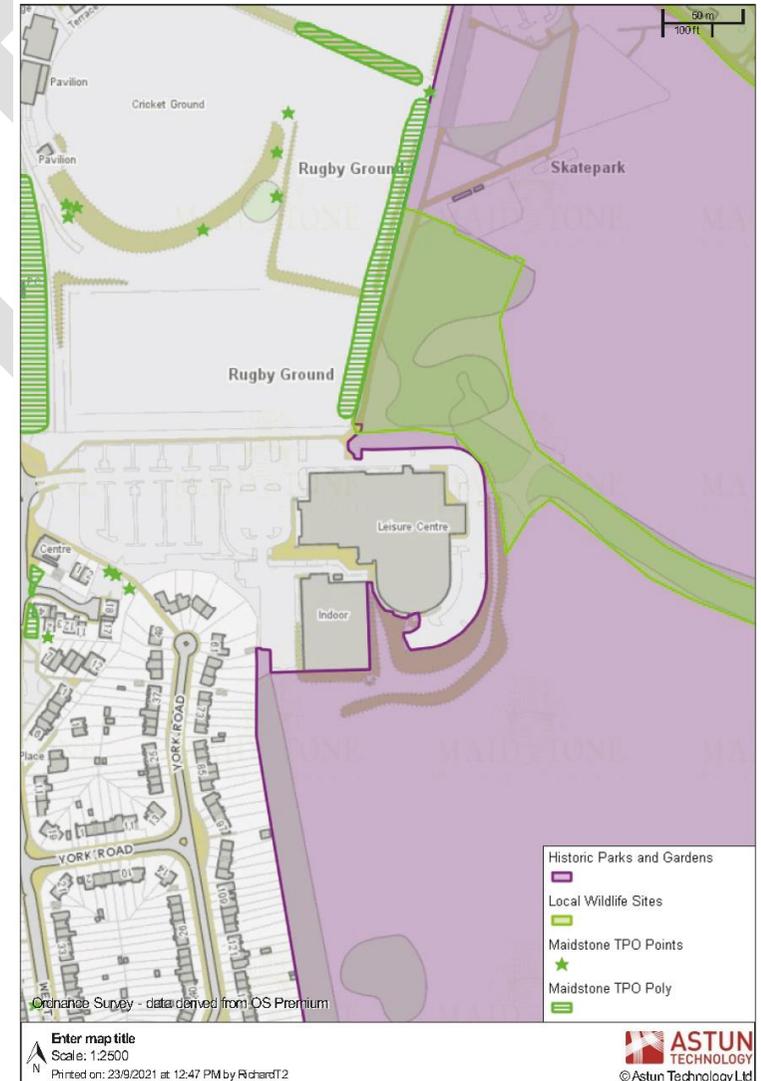
Summary

- 4.22. Taking into consideration the above factors and risks outlined above, it is recommended that Feasibility Option 1 does not represent best value to MBC and is not progressed.

A New Leisure and Physical Activity Hub with Co-located Community services (Feasibility Option 2)

Map 4.1: Historic Park Map

- 4.23. A new Maidstone Leisure and Physical Activity Hub with Co-located Community Services is proposed for the borough on land adjacent to Mote Park. Feasibility options 2, 3, and 4 in Table 4.1 above all include a new leisure facility with co-located services as a minimum but with different variables. These alternative options are considered later in this report.
- 4.24. There are a number of planning constraints affecting the existing leisure centre location which are shown on Map 4.1 below. Most importantly, Mote Park is a registered Historic Park and Gardens (area coloured purple on plan) and there is also a designated Local Wildlife Site to the north and east of the site (area coloured green on plan) and a row of protected trees to the north along the boundary between Mote Park and the Rugby Ground (area hatched green on plan). Consideration therefore needs to be given to any loss of public open space, wildlife and tree habitats, and but also environmental impacts such as lighting, noise and views out to the North Downs.
- 4.25. A number of indicative site options are being considered for a new Leisure and Physical Activity Hub adjacent to Mote Park as detailed below. Pre-Application Advice has been sought from Maidstone Planning and Development Team and their comments have been included for each option.

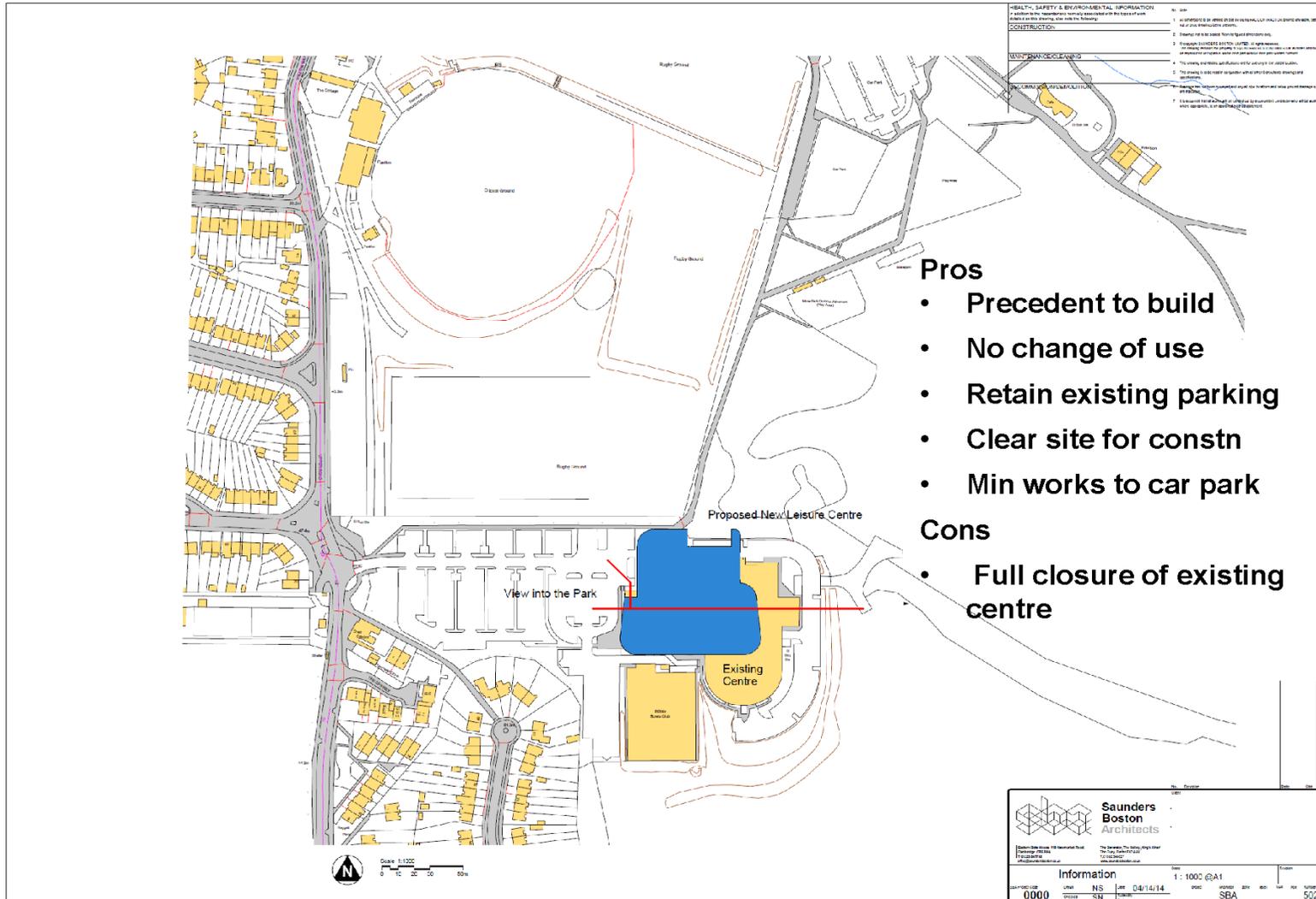


Map 4.2: showing all 4 site options



Site Option 1 (Existing Site)

Map 4.3: showing Option 1 (Existing Site)



- 4.26. This site option is positioned where the existing leisure centre is currently located. The advantages to this option are that there is an existing precedent to build in this location, and no change of use from a planning perspective. The existing car park can be retained with minimal works required and there is a clear site for construction.
- 4.27. The key disadvantage of this option is that the existing leisure centre will be closed and demolished with no alternative provision for the public throughout the build period, which could be up to 2 years. This will have a significant negative impact on school and public swimming lessons, club use, and the overall health and wellbeing of residents who rely on the facility for their sport and physical activity. As Maidstone Leisure Centre is the only public leisure centre within the Borough, it will be difficult, and in some cases impossible to relocate all users and hirers to other sites locally. There will also be the difficulty of regaining their custom once the new leisure centre opens, and this may take a number of months, which will impact on the new leisure centre's business plan and income generation.
- 4.28. This location also creates a barrier between the car park and Mote Park, therefore preventing the opportunity to draw people towards 'the Jewel in Maidstone's Crown' and the beautiful landscapes and activities that it offers.

Pre-Application Advice from MBC Planning Team

- 4.29. This option would have a low impact being largely on the existing footprint. There would be a very small incursion into the boundaries of the Historic Park which must be avoided if this option is pursued.
- 4.30. There would be a small loss of land in Mote Park and so loss of recreation public open space (POS). National and local policy (DM19) requires that there is no net loss of POS and so this would need to be replaced or avoided.
- 4.31. The impact upon the setting of the Historic Park would be limited as it would be on a similar footprint and if the design quality was high there could potentially be a positive impact. It is likely some trees would be lost which should be replaced.
- 4.32. This option would mean there would be no leisure centre for a number of years, which is clearly a negative factor but this would not be a reason to refuse planning permission.

Site Option 2 (Car Park)

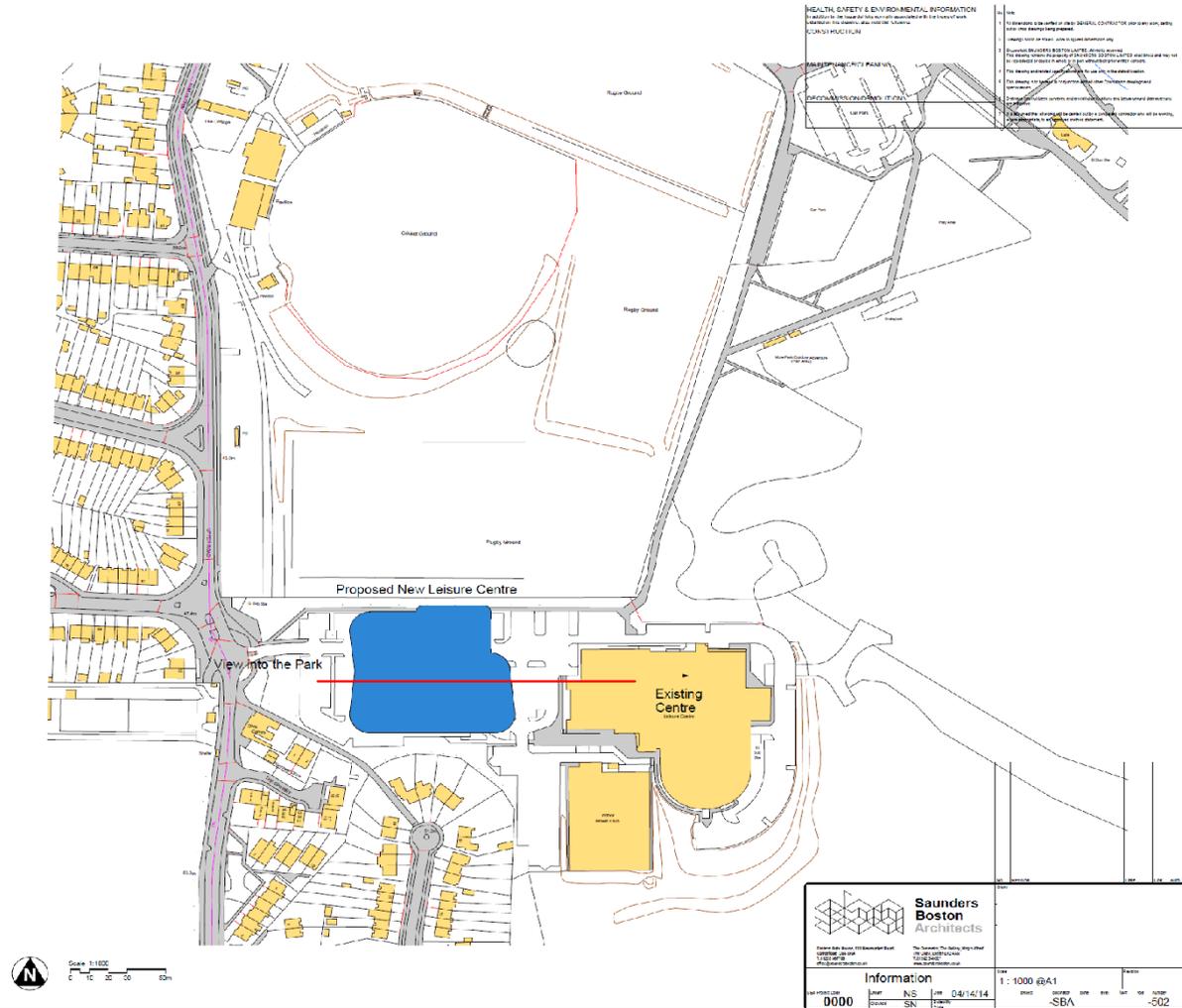
Map 4.4: showing Option 2 (Car Park)

Pros

- Retain existing centre during build
- No loss of service?
- No change of use
- No impact on green space

Cons

- Loss of parking during build
- Parking will be behind the new centre
- Longer and more expensive



- 4.33. The main advantage of this option is that the existing leisure centre can remain open whilst the new leisure centre is being built. However, there would be no public car parking available during the build, and since a high proportion of centre users travel by car to the site from across the Borough, this would severely restrict usage and impact on income. Once the new leisure was built, additional time would be required to demolish the old leisure centre and build a car park on the same site, leading to longer and more expensive overall construction period.
- 4.34. However, this option would involve no change of use and no impact on existing green space. The layout/design would be more elongated to ensure that it could be accommodated within the existing car park parameters.
- 4.35. As per site option 1, this location would create a barrier between the new facility and the park. A new access road would also need to be built for cars to drive round to the new car park located to the rear of the leisure centre. The leisure centre would have immediate views out to the new car park as opposed to Mote Park and there would be a loss of immediate integration/connection between the outdoor Active Environment and indoor facilities.

Pre-Application Advice from MBC Planning Team

- 4.36. This option would have a low impact being within the existing car park and set well back from the Park. The impact upon the setting of the Historic Park is likely to be positive through the removal of the existing centre, provided the new car park to the east is well screened.
- 4.37. Trees would be lost in the car park and probably along its north boundary which should be replaced.
- 4.38. The new building would be relatively close to houses to the south (under 30m). It is a large building in terms of its span and height and I have concerns over the impact upon outlook and privacy and so this would need careful consideration.

- 4.39. This option utilises land currently owned by Mote Cricket Club and used by Mote Rugby Club for training. This option would therefore involve a potential change of land use and also encroach into the Historic Park and onto land designated as a Local Wildlife Site and with protected trees.
- 4.40. However, the main advantage of this site is that it would be possible to retain the existing leisure centre and car park during the build, so there would be no loss of service. There is also a better interaction between the leisure facility and the park, with the leisure facility not blocking the views of the park but drawing you towards the landscape and amenities. Minimal work to the existing car park would be required.
- 4.41. Further negotiation would be required between Mote Cricket Club and Mote Rugby Club on this option. There may be scope to link this project with the Club's aspirations to build a new pavilion on their site, to ensure that the two facilities complimented each other in terms of the facilities and activities on offer.

Pre-Application Advice from MBC Planning Team

- 4.42. This option would be to the north of the existing centre and extend into the Mote CC. It would protrude into the Historic Park, be within the LWS, result in the loss of protected and unprotected mature trees, and result in the loss of POS in the Park. It was confirmed that no loss of sports pitches would occur in Mote CC.
- 4.43. It is considered that there would be some harm to the Historic Park through having a large building within its boundaries. Paragraph 200 of the NPPF states that any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (such as the Historic Park) will require clear and convincing justification. Paragraph 201 states that where 'substantial' harm is caused by a development it should be refused unless this harm is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss. Paragraph 202 states that where 'less than substantial' harm is caused it should be weighed against the public benefits of the development. Public benefits can be anything that delivers economic, social or environmental objectives as described in the National Planning Policy Framework. The benefits of providing a replacement facility in a location whereby the existing leisure centre can remain open could be given some limited weight.
- 4.44. At this stage it is difficult to advise whether there would be 'substantial' or 'less than substantial' harm to the Historic Park in the absence of a Heritage Statement to assess the 'significance' of the Historic Park and a Heritage Impact Assessment to assess the impact the proposal would have. Whilst it would be on the edge of the Park and grouped near to other development it would develop over the historic boundary and result in the loss of mature trees which contribute to the character of the Park. The impact upon the setting of the Grade II listed Tabernacle to the west would also need to be considered. It is recommended that you engage a heritage consultant to advise on these matters.
- 4.45. In terms of the LWS, policy DM3 of the Local Plan states that "For local designated sites, development likely to have an adverse effect will be permitted only where the damage can be avoided or adequately mitigated or when its need outweighs the biodiversity interest of the site. Compensation will be sought for loss or damage to locally designated sites." This is part of the Mote Park and River Len LWS and it covers the whole of the Park apart from the areas with sports pitches and recreational land. It is suggested that the biodiversity value north of the existing centre is from the mature tree cover. The development will have an adverse impact on the LWS so if it cannot be avoided, compensation would be needed through providing at least an

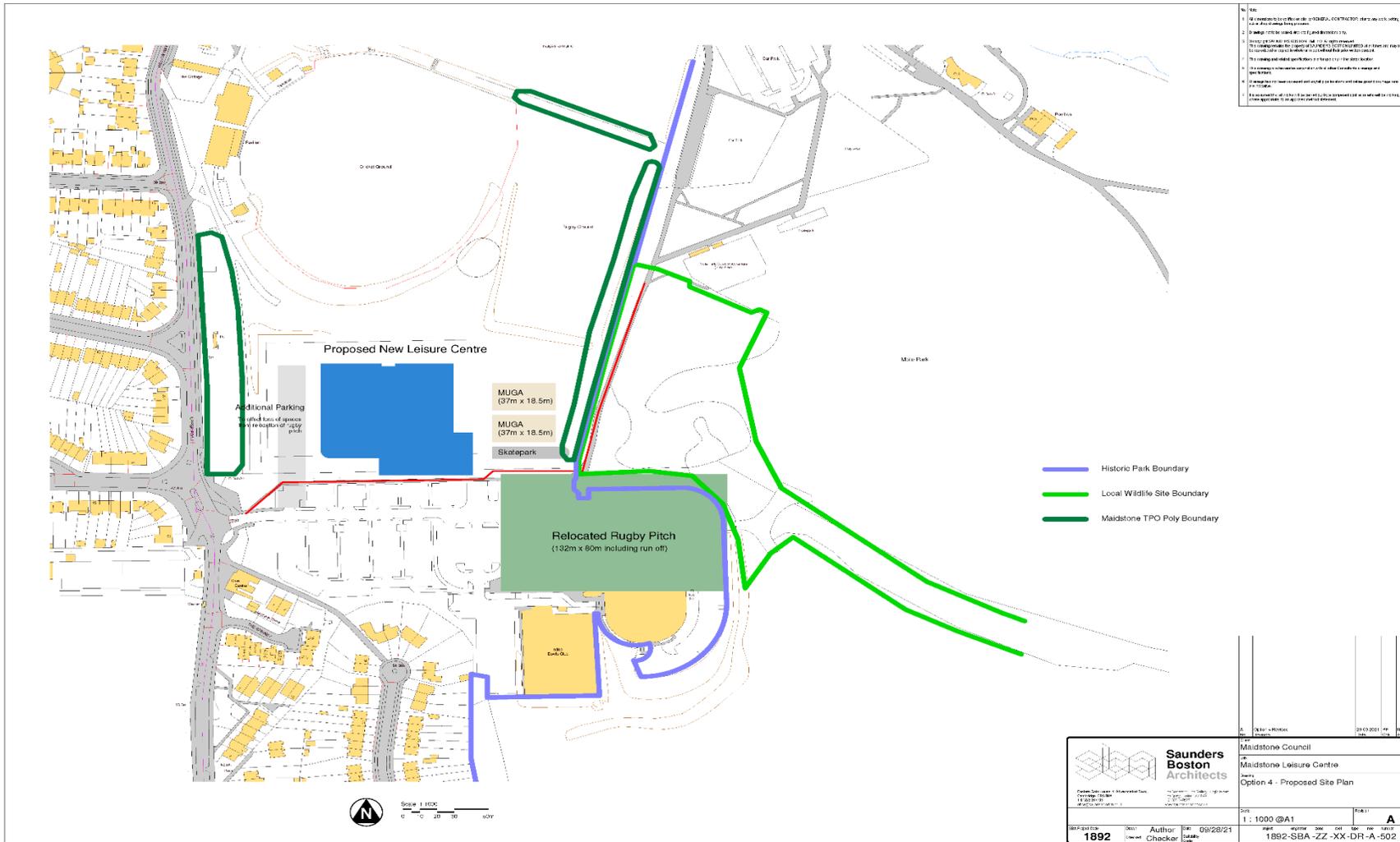
equivalent area elsewhere in the Park. Clearly, mature trees can only be replaced over the long term and so there is likely to be a negative impact upon biodiversity in the short to medium term. It is recommended that you engage an ecologist to advise on this matter.

4.46. The POS lost in the Park would need to be replaced and this could potentially be provided on the footprint of the existing centre.

Draft

Site Option 4 (Rugby Field)

Map 4.6: Site Option 4 (Rugby Field)



4.47. This option also utilises land currently owned by Mote Cricket Club but occupies the First Team Rugby Pitch. There would therefore be a requirement from Sport England and the RFU to re-provide this pitch elsewhere and ideally within close proximity to the existing site.

- 4.48. The key advantage of this option is that the new leisure centre would not encroach on the Historic Park, designated Local Wildlife Site or any protected trees. However, if the rugby pitch was to be relocated onto land currently occupied by the existing leisure centre, then there would be a slight encroachment of the pitch into the Historic Park and designated Local Wildlife Site.
- 4.49. This option retains the same other advantages as Option 3 above.
- 4.50. Map 4.6 also presents a couple of examples as to how the outdoor space adjacent to the new leisure centre could be utilised. A new skatepark for example, has been raised by Kent Youth Service as a facility that would be really beneficial for young people in the area.
- 4.51. Further negotiation would be required between Mote Cricket Club and Mote Rugby Club as this would impact on their own aspirations to have a dual aspect pavilion serving both the first team rugby pitch and cricket ground.

Pre-Application Advice from MBC Planning Team

- 4.52. This option would be to the north of the existing centre entirely within the Mote CC grounds. It would result in the loss of unprotected trees and would potentially have an impact upon the protected trees along the east boundary of Mote CC. It would result in the loss of the rugby pitch.
- 4.53. The impact upon the setting of the Historic Park is likely to be positive through the removal of the existing centre. The impact upon the setting of the Grade II listed Tabernacle to the west would need to be considered.
- 4.54. The loss of sports pitches would need to be replaced and you advised that this could be through a new pitch (possibly all-weather) on part of the footprint of the existing centre. This would have the potential to overcome policy DM19 but it would be important to provide robust landscaping to screen/soften its impact upon the Historic Park. Flood lighting would not be appropriate. You also suggested that in the short term whilst the development was taking place, a pitch could be provided for temporary use for rugby in the Park. This would not provide a replacement but would be a positive approach.

Summary of Location Options

4.55. It is clear that the above analysis, that there are a number of advantages and disadvantages to each location option available to MBC from both a planning, operational and design perspective. These can be summarised in the table below:

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Option 1 – Existing Site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Built on existing footprint – low impact No change of use Existing Car Park retained – minimal works Low impact on setting adjacent to Park 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No leisure centre during build (up to 2 years) – loss of custom Small incursion onto Historic Park Small loss of land in Mote Park Loss of recreation Public Open Space Facility creates barrier between car park and Mote Park
Option 2 – Car Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing facility remains open during build Building on car park – low impact/no change of use Positive impact upon setting of Historic Park if new car park screened 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing car park closed during build – impact on usage/income Longer/more expensive construction period due to car park build Tree loss in car park and northern boundary Closeness of new facility to existing housing New facility creates barrier between new facility and Park New access road required Views from new facility out across new car park rather than Mote Park
Option 3 – Adjacent Site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retain existing leisure centre and car park during build Better interaction between new facility and Park Minimal work required on existing car park 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential change of land use Dependency on negotiation with Mote Park Cricket/Mote Rugby Club Protrudes into Historic Park – harm to/loss of designated historic asset Located within the Local Wildlife Site – to be compensated for elsewhere Loss of Public Open Space Potential impact upon setting of Grade II listed Tabernacle

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Option 4 – Rugby Pitch	<p>No encroachment of new Leisure Centre on Historic Park, or Local Wildlife Site</p> <p>Positive impact upon setting of Historic Park through removal of existing leisure centre</p> <p>Retain existing leisure centre and car park during build</p> <p>Better interaction between new facility and Park</p> <p>Minimal work required on existing car park</p>	<p>Loss of unprotected trees.</p> <p>Dependency on negotiation with Mote Park Cricket/Mote Rugby Club</p> <p>Potential loss of protected trees on eastern boundary</p> <p>Re-provision of rugby pitch on footprint of existing leisure centre would create slight encroachment into Historic Park and Local Wildlife Site.</p> <p>No floodlighting allowed for re-provided rugby pitch in proposed location</p> <p>Potential impact upon setting of Grade II listed Tabernacle</p>

4.56. Following an assessment of the above, it is recommended that further feasibility work is undertaken in respect of Site Option 4 as the preferred option, and that officers engage with Mote Park Cricket Club and Rugby Club at the earliest opportunity.

4.57. A new Leisure and Physical Activity Hub with Co-located Community Services adjacent to Mote Park will:

- **Contribute towards addressing the current and future leisure and physical activity needs of the growing population of Maidstone, and reducing health inequalities**
- **Provide high quality, sustainable and cost effective sport and leisure facilities**
- **Provide better cohesion/integration between the leisure centre, the adjacent park and sports clubs, blending in with its surrounding natural environment.**
- **Contribute towards the Council’s carbon reduction agenda through the provision of an energy efficient building and provision of Active Travel (walking and Cycling)**
- **Provide accessible sport and physical activity provision close to wards of highest deprivation in the Borough**

- **A holistic approach to community health and wellbeing by offering co-located services on the same site (e.g. Adult Mental Health, Youth Service support services), providing opportunities for greater partnership working between organisations**
- **Put physical activity at the heart of our thinking (social prescribing and GP referrals)**
- **Provide for both formal and informal sport and physical activity**
- **Address the needs of key priority groups i.e. young people, older people, families**
- **Develop partnerships with Kent County Council, NHS, the Third Sector and National Governing Bodies of Sport**
- **Based on insight and community engagement, change behaviours at a local level by improving relevance and quality, taking away barriers, increasing access, creating opportunities and raising expectations.**

4.58. Based on the above insight, consultation and identified facility provision in the borough, the following recommendations are made for the future provision of a Leisure and Physical Activity Hub in Maidstone

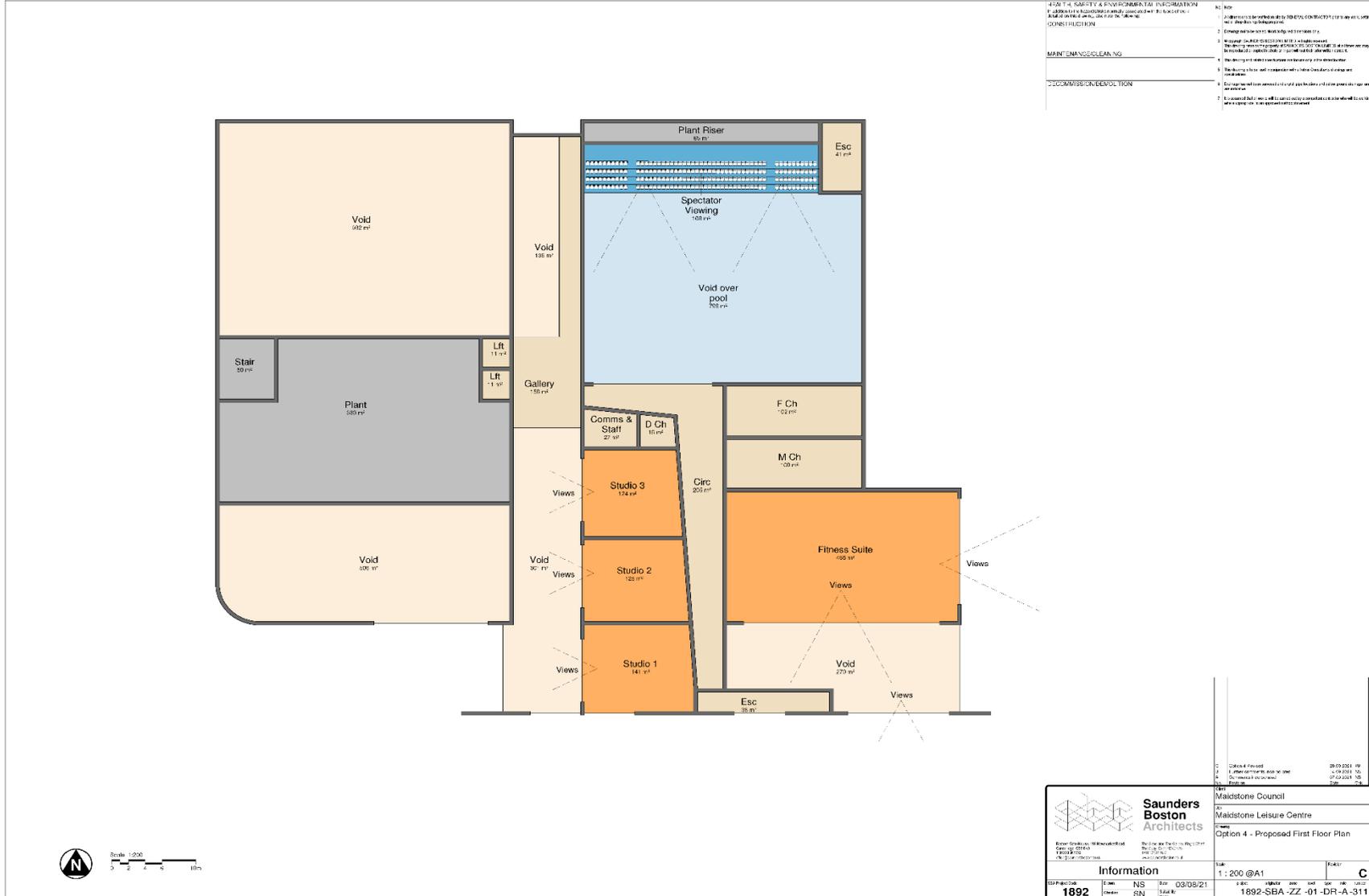
Existing Maidstone Leisure Centre	New Leisure and Physical Activity Hub
25m x 6 lane main pool with no spectator seating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25m x 8 lane competition pool. • There is currently no competition size facility in Kent and the new Hub would be centrally located to serve the County, providing more than 4 regional competitions per annum. • Maidstone's Sports Facility Strategy Review (Nov 2020) identifies a shortfall in future pool provision (equivalent of 25m x 6 lanes) to meet population growth. These additional 2 lanes will contribute towards meeting this shortfall. • The size meets competition requirements but the main benefit is the ability to subdivide it into lanes or widths suitable to maximising activity programming. For example, early morning club training and customer lane swimming or daytime school lessons and casual bathing or after school fun sessions and swimming lessons. • Spectator provision (200 spaces) – permanent provision should be limited as it is a non-income generating space, but sufficient to cater for swim competitions/galas. Most modern pools provide some limited seating adjacent to the learner pool/or seating in a café area over-looking the pool, and there is the ability to bring in seating for a gala.
2 x learner/training pools (9m x 9m)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25m x 4 lane Training Pool with moveable floor. • Swimming lessons are second in the hierarchy of income generation so all operators are keen to maximise lesson space. The floor can be set at any depth between zero

Existing Maidstone Leisure Centre	New Leisure and Physical Activity Hub
	<p>(overnight energy saving pool cover) and 1.6m. Sensible programming makes this pool suitable for non-swimming babies and toddlers, junior learn to swim lessons, improvers lessons, diving, artistic swimming, adult aquacise classes, casual or lane swimming etc</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The competition pool and training pool allows for the continued expansion of the swim lesson programme which was already very successful pre-covid (2,000 members) • The new Hub would provide better spectator viewing for the Training Pool to allow parents to watch their children during lessons. • The size of the pool allows continued use for different activities, even when the competition pool is being used for galas
Diving Pool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No stand-alone diving pool to be provided. • The existing pool is used for diving by the swimming club in the evenings and by the public at the weekends, however, the facility remains relatively unused the rest of the time. • Swim England considers learn to swim, competition and swimming for health to be the priority (easily accessible for all age groups) and that a diving pool is not needed all the time. There is the opportunity to have a training pool with moveable floor to address diving and artistic swimming requirements.
Indoor Leisure Pool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indoor and outdoor Splash Pads • Offers smaller leisure water provision targeting young families, offering range of fun features but with lower operating costs • This follows recent trends which prioritise swim lesson and lane swimming/swim exercise programmes. • Indoor and outdoor splash pad opens out the facility to its neighbouring park environment. Its adjacency to the café encourages longer day visits, particularly in the summer months.
Café located within the main pool hall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Café with 60+ covers located overlooking the park, and accessible to park users and visitors to the Hub. • The location and size are the most important aspects of this service. • The café is located close to the Soft Play/Tag Active space as well as the Community Room. Both areas could be hired out for parties, therefore catering for the family market.
Mixed village style wet changing facilities including family and group changing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Larger village style change plus group change, conforming to safeguarding guidance. Fully inclusive to meet the needs of disability groups. Inclusion of Changing Places room ideally accessible for both wet side and dry side.

Maidstone Borough Council
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Existing Maidstone Leisure Centre	New Leisure and Physical Activity Hub
6 court sports hall/concert venue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retain 6 court sports hall as a minimum and relocate concert venue to allow increased casual and sports club use at weekends. Maidstone's Sports Facility Strategy Review (Nov 2020) identifies a shortfall in community accessible sports hall provision in the Borough, which is exacerbated by the use of the space as a concert venue.
3 studios	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retain 3 studios but have these all located on the same floor and close to the Health and Fitness Suite so that there is shared relationship between the spaces. One of these studios to be a dedicated spin studio. Option to make one of the studios into a Shapemasters studio offering power assisted gentle exercise equipment in a quieter environment to the main gym, targeting the older age group and those with specific health conditions. Opportunity for one of the studios to look out onto the park, therefore providing a relaxing and inviting environment for exercise e.g. yoga.
100 station fitness suite located over 3 floors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retain a similar size fitness suite but in one location on the first floor. Fitness suite offering attractive views overlooking the park, linking the outdoor active environment with the indoor environment.
Creche/Soft Play within Pool Hall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New soft play targeting families with children under 5. Also include Tag Active facility offering fun activities for the teenage market. Both facilities located close to entrance to the Hub to draw people into the facility. No longer located within the humid pool hall environment, but close to the cafe
<p>Other design features</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of linkage/connection with the adjacent Mote Park Poor internal/external disability access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The open internal 'street' design provides a route through the building for people using the park. The orientation of the facility takes advantage of the views, encouraging people to make the most of both the indoor and outdoor active environment. Greater opportunities to connect to adjacent sports clubs and Mote Park Outdoor Adventure Use of building materials that blend in with the neighbouring park e.g. imitation wooden cladding, green 'Living Wall' etc. A more compact building design which occupies a smaller overall space. Disabled parking bays close to the Hub and easy access to the reception and around the building. Building to be DDA and Equality Act compliant. Use of Changing Places Room, IFI compliant equipment in gym etc.

Existing Maidstone Leisure Centre	New Leisure and Physical Activity Hub
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No shared space creating partnership opportunities and encouraging use by hard to reach groups• Ageing, inefficiently designed building with large carbon footprint	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Hub is intended to encouraging people to visit that would normally not consider going into a leisure facility environment. The inclusion of a community space allows an opportunity for organisations that work with hard to reach groups to base themselves in a less formal setting. Kent and Medway Adult Mental Health Services and Kent youth Service have already expressed interest in the Hub scheme.• A building design which makes economical use of space and modern energy efficient plant and equipment to reduce both the Council's carbon footprint and operational costs.



New Leisure and Physical Activity Hub supported by Outreach Service/Provision in Rural Villages (Feasibility Option 3)

- 4.59. MBC has clearly demonstrated a commitment to improving the health and wellbeing of its residents. As a minimum, the Council wishes to see accessible community sport and leisure facilities, places and spaces. This should include both formal and informal spaces (e.g. community halls) in which to play sport and be physically active, as well as improved access to green spaces.
- 4.60. Although approximately 70% of the current Maidstone population live in the urban centre, the borough is largely rural and consultation suggests that people living outside the town do not necessarily identify with the town. Rural areas often suffer from poor public transport, and with limited access to local services, this can have a negative impact on an individual's health and wellbeing, often leading to other issues such as loneliness and social isolation. This can affect both young people and the elderly living in rural areas.
- 4.61. There is a great deal of formal and informal sport and physical activity currently being delivered at a local level by third sector and voluntary organisations (e.g. Active Kent), charities (e.g. MLT), parish councils and local sports clubs, and volunteer networks (e.g. Medway Valley Countryside Network volunteering). Often, the difficulty is in raising community awareness of these activities and services to help encourage participation. There are also existing community spaces in rural areas available to deliver a range of health and physical activities and services where gaps in provision exist.
- 4.62. In addition to providing a new Leisure and Physical Activity Hub in Maidstone, there is an opportunity for the Council to help further support the provision of accessible health and physical activities and services in rural areas by:
- Building on existing outreach work through improved co-ordination and collaboration against shared outcomes
 - Launch 'Healthy Maidstone' webpage or similar, giving prominence on Council website. Webpage/site to provide info on exploring the outdoors, getting active, healthy living info, events etc. Links to key services/activities in local/rural areas and organisations such as Involve Kent, Active Kent, MLT, Volunteering networks etc. Links to other Council webpages on hiring community centres, hiring football pitches etc.
 - Map existing provision to identify gaps in health and physical activity in rural areas and availability of indoor/outdoor community space to deliver a programme e.g. schools, community centres, care homes etc.
 - As part of re-procurement of the Council's Leisure Management Contract, include the delivery of an outreach programme in rural areas as part of a co-ordinated approach to increasing physical activity using existing built infrastructure and the great outdoors. This programme to be based on the gap analysis and agreed shared outcomes. The programme need not be too prescriptive but allow the contractor to interpret the brief and come up with creative solutions to achieving the shared outcomes. Key performance indicators (KPI's) for outreach delivery to be included in the contract against which the contractor will be monitored.
 - MBC to continue to support existing providers of outreach sport and physical activity provision through small grants schemes, collaboration on key projects, raising of awareness of what services/facilities are available in local communities etc.

New Leisure and Physical Activity Hub and a separate New Leisure Centre (Feasibility Option 4)

- 4.63. At the time of writing MBC's Strategic Outcomes Planning Guidance (SOPG) Diagnostic (February 2021), new housing development identified in the Council's Local Plan Review (up to three garden villages of approximately 5,000 homes), was predominantly planned for the south of the borough, approximately 10 – 15 miles away from Maidstone Leisure Centre. The SOPG Diagnostic therefore recommended that further feasibility work be carried out on the option of providing a separate new leisure centre to serve the new communities in the south of the borough.
- 4.64. However, in 2019 the Council invited proposals for garden communities within the Borough. In response it received 7 proposals across the borough. These were then assessed and two have been chosen for inclusion in the spatial strategy. These are Lidsing and Heathlands Garden Communities.
- 4.65. Lidsing Garden Community is situated in the north of the Borough adjacent to the boundary with Medway Council. Access to the site can be gained from the strategic road network via the M2 junction 4. The site is to be delivered over a 15 year period starting in 2027. It is anticipated that Maidstone Leisure Centre or leisure centres in Gillingham will serve this community.
- 4.66. Heathlands Garden Community is a mixed community of 5,000 residential units and 5,000 jobs promoted jointly by Homes England and Maidstone Borough Council. The site is between the villages of Lenham in Maidstone Borough and Charing in Ashford Borough, but the site is within Maidstone borough's administrative boundary. The site has vehicular access to the A20 corridor and potential for a new rail station on the South-eastern Maidstone Line between Ashford and Maidstone. The site is to be delivered over a 25year period starting in 2030. The need for investment in leisure facilities is included in the Infrastructure Development Plan (IDP) so will be reflected in the Local Plan. This will include spaces for sport, leisure and recreation, a community hub and focus on Active Travel (walking and cycling).
- 4.67. Regardless of the above proposed housing developments proposed in the north and east of the borough, there is the perception from residents who live in the south of the borough that there is very little leisure provision currently available where they live.
- 4.68. Although the Maidstone FPM National Runs for swimming and sports halls (2020) does suggest a current shortfall in provision, only the swimming data shows that there is unmet demand for swimming in the south of the district. The MBC Sports Facility Strategy review 2020 also identifies the future need for the equivalent of a 25m x 6 lane swimming pool and 2.05 four-badminton court sports halls but does not identify where in the borough these should be located.
- 4.69. Consideration should also be given to plans for new leisure facility provision in neighbouring authorities, as residents will chose to use their nearest leisure centre regardless of local authority boundaries.
- 4.70. An SOPG Diagnostic report has recently been completed for Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. The report identifies:

- ***The need for a replacement for Putlands Sports Centre to better address the needs and new communities in the north of the borough. Putlands Leisure Centre does not provide a pool, is an ageing facility and is in the wrong location in terms of access to new housing developments.***
- ***Replacing the existing facility creates the opportunity to consider opportunities for co-location with other indoor/outdoor physical activities as well as a range of community services. There is also potential to consider how a replacement facility can better contribute to the overall priorities for health and wellbeing in the borough, and to the development of an active environment.***
- ***In order to ensure enhanced accessibility for the Paddock Wood catchment area, which will see new homes developed in two strategic sites- Paddock Wood and east Capel (c. 3,490-3,590 homes up to 2038) and Tudeley Village (2,100 homes up to 2038, 2,800 in total), a replacement facility will need to be relocated. The optimum site for a new community physical activity facility is in east Capel.***
- ***The facility mix for a new facility has yet to be confirmed. However, the report identifies the need for a 50m pool to serve the new communities in Tunbridge Wells.***

4.71. There is therefore an opportunity to work together with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, with the intention that a new physical activity facility in Paddock Wood and east Capel, serve both the new homes in the north of Tunbridge Wells and residents living in the south of Maidstone. On this basis, MBC could provide developer contributions towards the provision of a new physical activity facility in Paddock Wood and east Chapel and a similar arrangement with Medway Council, where the replacement Splashes Leisure Centre would serve Maidstone's new Lidsing Garden Community.

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