



## **ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 14TH SEPTEMBER 2021**

**SUBJECT:           SPORT AND ACTIVE RECREATION STRATEGY –  
                          PROGRESS UPDATE**

**REPORT BY:       CORPORATE DIRECTOR, ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT**

### **1.       PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.1     To provide members of the scrutiny committee with an update of the progress made in delivering the Council's Sport & Active Recreation Strategy 2019 - 2029.

### **2.       SUMMARY**

2.1     Following a period of extensive customer and stakeholder consultations across a period of 10 weeks, on the 8<sup>th</sup> November 2018 the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny committee recommended to Cabinet that the Sport and Active Recreation Strategy (SARS) be approved. Cabinet endorsed the Sport & Active Recreation Strategy 2019 - 2029 on the 14<sup>th</sup> November 2018. The SARS was implemented on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2019.

2.2     The SARS sets out an ambitious and holistic vision for the delivery of sport and active recreation across the county borough aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of our communities.

2.3     Despite the Covid-19 global pandemic presenting substantial and unprecedented challenges, significant progress has been made in delivering against the ambitions set out in the SARS and improving the opportunities that exist for residents across all parts of the county borough.

2.4     A number of collaborative arrangements have been developed which in turn have led to substantial sums of external funding being leveraged to support improvements and enhancements to the current infrastructure across the county borough. This approach has resulted in significant increases in the scope, level and experience of the opportunities made available to residents.

2.5     A range of future projects, developments and prospects have been identified and established that will continue to increase opportunities for residents to engage in sport and active recreation across a range of environments and formats.

### **3. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 The Scrutiny Committee are asked to consider and acknowledge the progress made to date in delivering the Sport & Active Recreation Strategy.
- 3.2 Officers to prepare suitable update report(s) to the Scrutiny Committee in accordance with its Forward Work Programme.

### **4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 To provide the Scrutiny committee with an update on progress with implementation of the strategy and to outline the response to the challenges brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **5. THE REPORT**

- 5.1 Following a period of extensive and exhaustive customer and stakeholder consultations across a period of 10 weeks, on the 8<sup>th</sup> November 2018 the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny committee recommended to Cabinet that the Sport & Active Recreation Strategy be approved. Cabinet endorsed the Sport & Active Recreation Strategy (SARS) 2019 -2029 on the 14<sup>th</sup> November 2018 and it was formally implemented on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2019.
- 5.2 The SARS sets out an ambitious and holistic vision and future purpose for the delivery of sport and active recreation across the county borough, establishing key principles which inform future direction and action.
- 5.3 The adoption of the SARS has provided officers and staff with a clear roadmap to support the establishment of appropriate policy development, collaborative arrangements and exploration of funding sources to support both facility and programme expansion.
- 5.4 The SARS also articulated the following strategy purpose, principles and priorities to further inform this approach, namely:
  - to encourage healthy lifestyles and support our residents to be 'more active more often'
  - by encouraging a collective responsibility and approach to provide and promote appropriate opportunities across a range of organisations
  - to promote positive messages about health and physical activity
  - to improve standards of performance and celebrate local success in sport
- 5.5 Despite the impact and unprecedented challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, significant progress has been made in delivering against the ambitions set out in the SARS. These are set out in more detail below.
- 5.6 A central tenet of the SARS is that the Council through Sport & Leisure Services will adopt a supportive / enabling role in the delivery and development of sport and active recreation opportunities and will not, in all cases, be the primary provider.
- 5.7 This approach has led to a range of collaborative initiatives being developed and established, resulting in a number of exciting developments that have significantly improved the opportunity and landscape for residents of the county borough. Examples include:

- the development of the 100% Welsh Government funded Athletics Track in Oakdale that will support Education, community use and future club development which opened in July 2021
- the enhancement of 2 x multi use 3G pitches at Lewis School Pengam and Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymini, Fleur de Lys.
- accessing funding from a Sport Wales managed collaborative funding avenue that includes Football Association of Wales (FAW), Welsh Rugby Union (WRU) and Hockey Wales (HW) to support the development of an enhanced outdoor facility at St Cenydd Campus from an aged and poorly maintained Astro Turf Pitch (ATP) to a new multi-use 3G facility that will significantly improve the experiences both in terms of curriculum delivery and community use.
- working collaboratively with Play Wales and Welsh Government (WG) to access funding that supports and increases opportunity for play development through the medium of sport and physical activity and enhanced play activity in our leisure centres, parks and tourism venues.
- partnership working with colleagues in Education and the 21st Century Schools programme which has delivered a number of key projects which have benefited both our learners and the wider community
- maximising the realignment of the Welsh Government Free Swim Initiative (FSI) capital funding allocation to improve the provision and opportunity of aquatics across our portfolio of leisure centres. An example includes the provision of aquatic based spin bikes at Heolddu LC (The first in south - east Wales) building upon the significant growth in (group) cycling across the UK.

5.8 A further key principle of the SARS is that the council will directly provide where the need is clearly identified and when others do not have the expertise or capacity to do so. It is also clear that the Sport & Leisure Services brand is widely established and trusted across a broad range of stakeholders providing high quality, innovative and safe facilities and activities. Evidence is gathered in this regard through an industry recognised and accepted system called the Net Promotor Score, whereby written and verbal feedback is collected through a range of media.

5.9 Establishing and delivering this principle across the core elements of Sport & Leisure Services, i.e. Leisure Lifestyle, Sport Caerphilly, Caerphilly Adventurers and National Exercise Referral Scheme (NERS), has resulted in an array of exciting, creative and innovative opportunities and developments to residents to engage in sport and active recreation, some examples include;

- A significant investment into the enhancement of the fitness suite provision at Newbridge Leisure Centre – scheduled to open later this year
- A broad and varied range of taster and competition activities delivered in partnership with primary and secondary schools across the county borough engaging thousands of young people in active recreation
- Supporting engagement with the 'Daily Mile' aimed at encouraging primary school aged children to become more active on a more regular basis

- The continued delivery of the well-established and much respected 'Disability Six Nations'
- The Bryn Meadows Caerphilly 10k and 2k delivered in partnership with CCBC Tourism and Welsh Athletics – now a well-established and key date in the Welsh Athletics competition calendar
- A range of intergenerational 'return to' activities that have seen people aged 18-75 re-engage with active recreation, e.g.: Walking Netball, Walking Football and Walking Rugby.
- The Positive Futures programme, working in collaboration with a range of stakeholders, including Gwent Police, to provide a range of positive experiences and opportunities to our young and most vulnerable people through the powerful medium of sport and active recreation, aimed at ensuring a brighter future for its participants while hopefully steering young people away from the attraction of antisocial behaviour and other associated crime.
- Over 30 young people engaged and trained as part of the 'Coach of the Future' programme
- Supporting the Caerphilly Challenge Series and over 3000 pupil visits to various outdoor venues
- Continued and ongoing support for all local clubs and organisations in areas such as talent identification, club growth, access to various funding streams and exploring, where appropriate, Community Asset Transfer (CAT) opportunities
- In excess of 1400 clients engaging in the National Exercise Referral Scheme (NERS) in programmes such as Cardiac Rehabilitation, Pulmonary Rehabilitation, Diabetes and Obesity. Further programmes such as the prevention of cardiovascular and cardiopulmonary disorders outline how the growing and broad scope of the NERS

5.10 The SARS further acknowledges that the county borough benefits from an exciting and mature network of outdoor provision that supports opportunity for engagement in sport and active recreation.

5.11 On the 25<sup>th</sup> November 2020, Cabinet formally adopted the Caerphilly Green Infrastructure Strategy, which had previously been considered and unanimously supported by the Environment & Sustainability Scrutiny Committee on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2020. The vision of the Strategy is ***“Caerphilly will be a green and healthy place to live with an established, multi-functional green infrastructure of high - quality spaces interlinked by a network of corridors that benefit both people and nature”***.

5.12 The Green Infrastructure Strategy maps facilities such as parks, public open space, green corridors etc. which are scored against a set of criteria. This data can then be used as the planning basis for both policy and strategy formulation and initiatives, allowing for specific prioritisation. Our parks are used to support a vast range of clubs and organisations covering a collection of sports including football, rugby, cricket, tennis and bowls, engaging thousands of residents per annum in active recreation.

5.13 In support of the Green Infrastructure Strategy, a number of key developments and improvements have also taken place to help shape the outdoor environment and improve the scope and access for residents to participate in active recreation, some examples include:

- the improvement of land drainage on a number of sports pitches, such as the 'The Ynys' football pitch, Pengam, to bring them back into beneficial use and to increase active participation.
- the installation of a number of new skate parks / outdoor gyms in collaboration with Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) and /or local community groups [including exclusive play equipment]; Examples include new Skate Parks in Bargoed and the Penllwyn and Outdoor Gyms in Penyrheol and Fochriw
- various infrastructure improvements in parks to improve usage (e.g. the planned completion of the jogger's path at The Showfield, Blackwood; and completion of a cycle link path in Caetwmpyn Park, Newbridge to connect town centre provision with active recreation opportunities)
- working in collaboration with Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations (GAVO) and Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB) to develop the 'green prescription' initiative and increase use of green space. This is a pilot project, currently targeting the north of the county borough with focused improvements at Rhymney Park
- Actively maintaining 800km of Public Rights of Way (PROW) throughout the county borough

5.14 The work of the Caerphilly Adventures Team is also essential in creating opportunities, particularly for young people, to engage in active recreation in an outdoor setting across our county parks. Examples include the development of Paddle Boarding at Pen y Fan and various cycling initiatives at Cwmcarn Fforest Drive.

5.15 It should also be noted that the Caerphilly Adventures Team, working closely and collaboratively with the Council's Education Service, also directly supported 1,700 Education other than at school (EOTAS) visits, 1,700 Specialist Resource Based Visits and 300 Family Sessions – all of which included active recreation as the key and central tenet.

5.16 As stated earlier in this report, the impact of COVID 19 from February 2020 presented a range of unprecedented challenges for Sport & Leisure Services and the residents of Caerphilly County Borough. The cessation of the sport and leisure provision resulted in the service staff being initially redeployed to support the continued delivery of key and essential services. This included the provision and delivery of free school meals, supporting the implementation and delivery of the Test, Trace & Protect service, supporting the reopening of Household Waste Recycling Centres, assisting with community support programme for vulnerable residents, and more latterly, organising throughout of arrivals at the Mass Vaccination Centre at Newbridge Leisure Centre.

5.17 Sport & Leisure Services however quickly flexed and adapted services through efficient and targeted communications to ensure that residents were able to continue to engage with and participate in sport and active recreation. Examples included:

- the development of a dedicated free to access You Tube channel providing a range of Group Exercise classes that would traditionally be available in leisure centres
- enhanced developments to the Leisure Lifestyle 'app' to support digital access and engagement – resulting in close to 15,000 downloads
- targeted provision of bespoke activity for customers registered on the National Exercise Referral programme. This included virtual and hard copy resources
- school holiday programmes delivered virtually in collaboration with a range of local clubs and organisations
- ongoing and regular communication with key user groups and National Governing Bodies

- a collaboration with other local authorities in Gwent to provide an 'open membership' for residents to visit their nearest facility (when appropriate) to reduce travel requirements and comply with Welsh Government guidance
- 5.18 Further to the above, the service will continue to work closely with a broad range of stakeholders to ensure that services are re-shaped and appropriate to meet the requirements and expectations of residents in a post pandemic environment. At present it is not clear what shape that would take, however initial indications suggest that there is an appetite for a return to physical buildings but that access to and participation in outdoor based activity has become more ingrained.
- 5.19 The information presented above provides a detailed overview of the work that has been undertaken since the SARS was formally implemented on January 1<sup>st</sup> 2019. Members however should note that a range of programmes, developments and investments are also scheduled for either commencement or completion across the next 6 – 12 months. These include but are not limited to:
- the development of a Hockey Hub at Sue Noake Leisure Centre, Ystrad Mynach through the replacement of the existing facility, funded by the Welsh Government (administered by Sport Wales in collaboration with FAW, WRU, HW)
  - the replacement of the existing ATP at Idris Davies High School with a new, multi-use 3G pitch aimed at improving opportunities and experiences for young people and local clubs / organisations
  - further partnership with school hubs to ensure appropriate agreements are in place to support community access to and use of sport and active recreation spaces
  - playing a key and integrated role to assist in shaping the future development opportunities that exist at Cwmcarn Fforest Drive from an active recreation perspective
  - working closely with the Royal British Legion and other employment-based organisations to provide and create opportunities for training and potential future employment
  - continued support for clubs and organisations that wish to explore Community Asset Transfer opportunities as a mechanism to ensure long term sustainability and provide mechanisms for growth
  - further development of the digital infrastructure and communication platforms to create access and opportunities for hard to reach groups and other organisations that may wish to explore active recreation and wellbeing as part of workforce development strategies and practice
  - continued exploration of options for a new, contemporary wellbeing / leisure centre to support the population growth in the Caerphilly Basin area

## **Conclusion**

- 5.20 Sport & Leisure Services have worked extremely hard to ensure that the principles, vision and ambitions set out in the SARS are the focus for day to day operation and longer term policy and development planning, fully embracing the scope, opportunities and challenges this represents.
- 5.21 The response to the Covid-19 pandemic by staff across the sport and leisure service has been exemplary and has been well recognised by customers and other stakeholders.
- 5.22 It is clear that significant progress has been made, however the service is absolutely clear that there is much more work to complete and that the environment, post Covid-19, is likely to present a number of major and in some cases, more nuanced challenges.

- 5.23 Throughout the pandemic evidence has been gathered across a range of environments of the importance leading a healthy lifestyle can have on supporting nations and its citizens to be able to actively combat any future pandemics, but also ease pressure on health provision.
- 5.24 On a more positive note, there is a wide evidence base of the positive impacts of engaging with and leading a healthy lifestyle in areas such as personal health, educational attainment, mental health, regeneration and social wellbeing. The adoption and implementation of the SARS has provided a robust policy platform upon which further efforts in support of these aims can be achieved.
- 5.25 Positive progress has been made in a relatively short period and against the backdrop of a global pandemic. Many more challenges lay ahead however it is clear that the approach being adopted by the service and with its various partners and stakeholders is resulting in tangible improvements for the residents of the county borough.

## **6. ASSUMPTIONS**

- 6.1 The report has assumed that the council will continue its delivery of the SARS and meet the ambitions outlined within the Strategy in a post Covid-19 environment.

## **7. SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 7.1 The purpose of the report is to provide the Scrutiny committee with a progress update and as such an Integrated Impact Assessment is not required at this time

## **8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 There are no direct financial implications associated with this report at this time
- 8.2 Individual projects associated with the delivery of the Sport and Active Recreation Strategy will be subject to robust business cases and financial planning and specific decisions by either cabinet or council.

## **9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 There are no personnel implications associated with this report.

## **10. CONSULTATIONS**

- 10.1 This report has been sent to the Consultees listed below and all comments received are reflected in this report.

## **11. STATUTORY POWER**

- 11.1 Local Government Act 1972.

Authors: Jeff Reynolds, Sport & Leisure Facilities Manager

Consultees: Councillor Ross Whiting, Cabinet Member for Learning and Leisure

Councillor Nigel George, Cabinet Member for Waste, Public Protection and Streetscene  
Councillor Tudor Davies, Chair of Environment & Sustainability Scrutiny  
Councillor Adrian Hussey, Vice Chair of Environment & Sustainability Scrutiny  
Mark S Williams, Corporate Director – For Economy & Environment  
Rob Hartshorn, Head of Public Protection, Community & Leisure Services  
Jared Lougher, Sport & Leisure Development Manager  
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Craig James, National Exercise Referral Team Leader  
Kevin Lodge, Community Centre Services Manager  
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Background Papers:

Report to Regeneration & Environment Scrutiny Committee – 8<sup>th</sup> November 2018, Draft Sport & Active Recreation Strategy 2019 – 2029

Report to Cabinet – 14<sup>th</sup> November 2018, Draft Sport & Active Recreation Strategy 2019 – 2029

Sport & Active Recreation Strategy 2019 – 2029

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Infographic displaying SARS delivery progress to date