

**STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL  
INDOOR SPORTS FACILITIES STRATEGY**

**NEEDS ASSESSMENT: FINAL REPORT**

**MARCH 2026**

QUALITY, INTEGRITY, PROFESSIONALISM

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# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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## SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

Knight, Kavanagh & Page Ltd (KKP) was appointed to produce a Sport and Recreation Strategy for Stevenage Borough Council (SBC). This work will provide key evidence to support the development of indoor and outdoor leisure facilities in Stevenage. With regard to the Indoor Sports Assessment and Strategy work, the Council's stated objectives are to:

- ◀ Undertake a local authority wide assessment of indoor sport and recreation facilities, building upon existing information, to establish the quantity and quality of existing provision and any additional provision required to meet future needs to 2031.
- ◀ Develop a strategy and realistic action plan for indoor sports provision. This will need to be prioritised and realistic in recognition of diminishing public resources and limited budgets.
- ◀ Follow best practice advice including Sport England's Assessing Needs and Opportunities Guidance (ANOG) and its Playing Pitch Strategy Guidance.
- ◀ Provide a robust evidence base to ensure the timely and sound preparation of the Stevenage Local Plan dates and other planning policy documents and to provide parameters for developing a toolkit for the council / developers.
- ◀ Provide a clear direction on where future investment from the Council or external sources should go in Stevenage.
- ◀ Provide clear and justified conclusions.
- ◀ Provide advice and guidance on how to maintain an up-to-date record of existing provision in terms of condition, demand, aspirations of clubs etc.

The scope of the indoor Sports Strategy includes all sports halls larger than three badminton courts in scale, swimming pools, health and fitness suites and other specialist sports provision.

Evidence about provision and overall need detail:

- ◀ A clear picture of the quantity, quality, accessibility and availability of facilities serving the area within the local authority and adjacent authorities.
- ◀ A clear understanding of existing and future demand for facilities considering local population data, local and national participation rates, unmet, latent, dispersed and future demand, local activity priorities and sports specific priorities.
- ◀ The resultant required level of provision in quantity, quality, accessibility and availability terms and develop key findings and facility implications that could be used by the Authority with reference to a Toolkit for provision.

Intelligence and needs assessment detail:

- ◀ A documented assessment of current use and future need for sports/amenity facilities within the Authority; focusing on the quantity and quality issues in relation to supply and demand until 2031.
- ◀ Identification of all sites to ensure they can be protected and improved for the long-term benefit of sport.
- ◀ Identification of education facilities which could be utilised to address identified deficits in provision.
- ◀ Detail with regard to need to inform development and implementation of planning policy.
- ◀ Detail with regard to need to inform the assessment of planning applications – linked to a toolkit via which contributions can be best directed to enhance existing provision.

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Development priorities:

- ◀ A priority list of realistic and deliverable projects which will help to meet any current deficiencies, provide for future demands and feed into wider infrastructure planning work.
- ◀ Proposed potential changes to the supply of provision due to capital programmes e.g., for educational sites.

Financial budgeting:

- ◀ Advice in respect of achieving the most efficient management and maintenance of playing pitch and sports facility provision.
- ◀ Prioritisation of internal capital and revenue investment.
- ◀ Evidence to help secure internal and external funding including S106 / CIL funding linking to potential developments coming forward.

The audit

The audit was conducted between August- December 2024. Where access was not available KKP carried out non-technical quality assessments via desk research. Where possible the quality of this was supplemented utilising virtual 'walk arounds' of the health and fitness suites or videos and photos present on operators' websites or in discussion with operators.

## 1.2: Scope of the project

This report provides detail as to what exists in Stevenage, its condition, location, availability and overall quality. It considers demand for facilities based on population distribution, planned growth, and takes into consideration health and economic deprivation. The facilities/sports covered include sports halls (and associated indoor sports), swimming pools, health and fitness, dance/aerobic studios, squash, indoor tennis, indoor bowls and gymnastics. In delivering this report KKP has:

- ◀ Individually audited identified sports halls (conventional i.e., 3+ court halls) swimming pools (minimum size 160m<sup>2</sup>), health and fitness facilities (including, within reason, dance studios), squash courts, gymnastics facilities, indoor tennis courts, indoor bowls facilities, ice sports and combat sports facilities.
- ◀ Analysed supply and demand to identify gaps and opportunities to improve provision.
- ◀ Sought to identify the extent to which delivery of leisure facilities is undertaken with full reference to the corporate strategies of the Council and other relevant strategic influences.
- ◀ Identified areas of good practice and opportunities for improved service in order to drive up participation levels.

This evidence-based report thus provides a quantitative and qualitative audit-based assessment of the facilities identified above. It is a robust, up-to-date assessment of need and identifies opportunities for new, enhanced, and rationalised provision. Specific deficiencies and surpluses are identified to inform the provision required. The specific objectives are to:

- ◀ Review relevant Council strategies, plans, reports, corporate objectives.
- ◀ Review the local, regional, and national strategic context.
- ◀ Deliver a demographic analysis of the local population at present and in the future (up to 2031).
- ◀ Audit indoor facilities provided by public, private, voluntary and education sectors.
- ◀ Consider potential participation rates and model likely demand.
- ◀ Analyse the balance between supply of, and demand for, sports facilities plus identification of potential under and over-provision – now and in the future.
- ◀ Identify key issues to address in the future provision of indoor sports facilities.

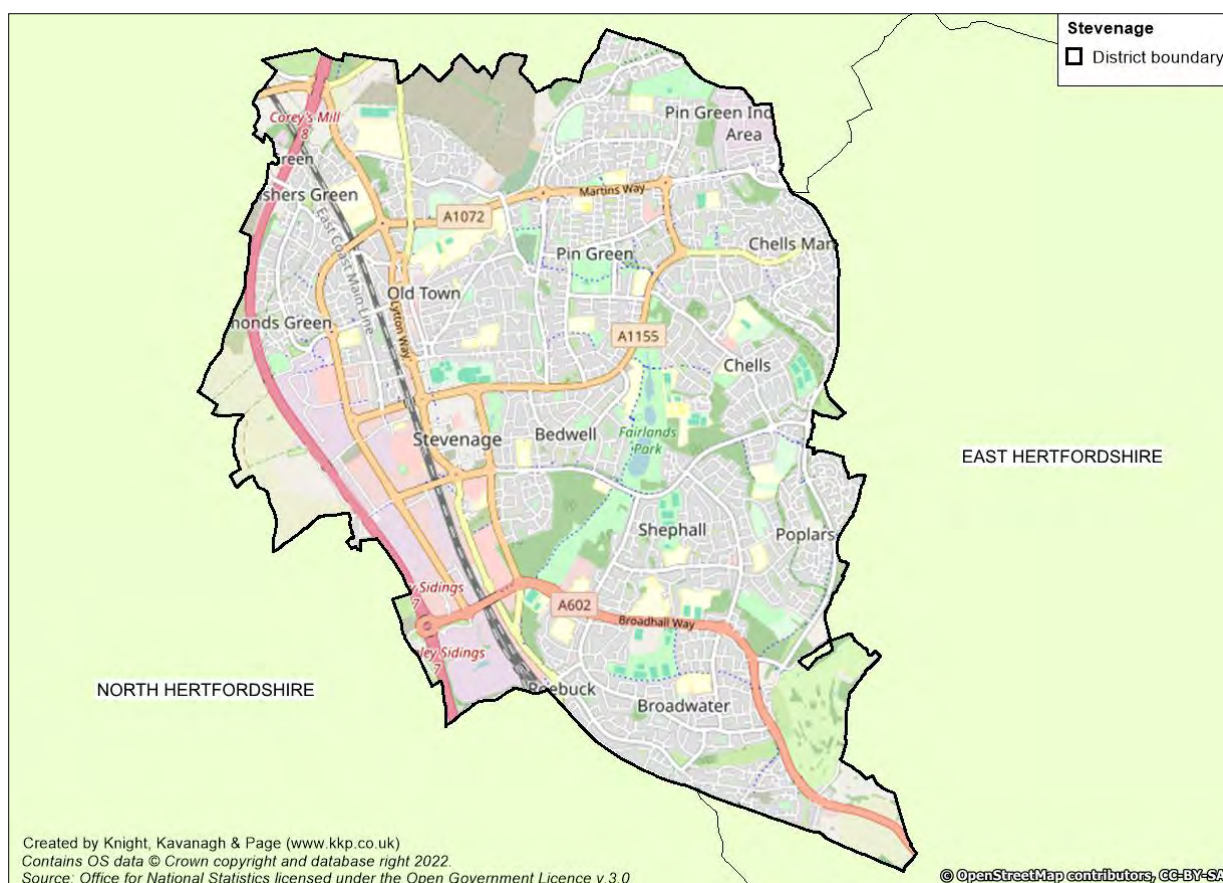
# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

This process follows the Assessment Needs and Opportunities Guidance (ANOG) methodology for assessing indoor sports need, developed by Sport England. It also accords with relevant paragraphs of the most up-to-date version of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Planning Practice Guidance (PPG).

## 1.3: Background

Stevenage was England's first designated new town (in 1946) prior to major residential development throughout the next two decades. It is a predominantly urban borough, 25.96km<sup>2</sup> in size. It is surrounded by the districts of East Hertfordshire and North Hertfordshire.

Figure 1.1: Stevenage with main roads and neighbouring authorities



The A1(M) runs through the west of the Authority providing good transport links to London and the north of England. On a more local level, the A602 connects Stevenage with Ware and Hertford in East Hertfordshire to the east, and Hitchin in North Hertfordshire to the west. Beyond the edge of the Authority boundary is open countryside and villages such as Aston, Knebworth and Walkern.

Stevenage town centre is relatively central to the Authority. It offers a traditional high street shopping experience with good public transport accessibility via the train and bus station.

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## 1.4: Report structure

The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) in a report entitled 'Strategic Planning: Effective Co-operation for Planning Across Boundaries (2015)' puts the case for strategic planning based on six general principles:

- ◀ Have focus.
- ◀ Be genuinely strategic.
- ◀ Be spatial.
- ◀ Be collaborative.
- ◀ Have strong leadership and
- ◀ Be accountable to local electorates.

KKP has paid due regard to these strategic principles and this needs assessment report is, thus, structured as follows:

- ◀ Section 2 - review of background policy documentation (national/regional/local) and a profile of the population and socio-demographic characteristics of the Authority.
- ◀ Section 3 - description of methodology employed to assess provision.
- ◀ Section 4 - assessment of sport halls provision.
- ◀ Section 5 - assessment of swimming pool provision.
- ◀ Section 6 - assessment of health and fitness provision.
- ◀ Section 7 - assessment of squash.
- ◀ Section 8 - assessment of indoor bowls.
- ◀ Section 9 – assessment of indoor tennis.
- ◀ Section 10 – assessment of gymnastics and trampolining.
- ◀ Section 11 – strategic recommendations.

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

## SECTION 2: BACKGROUND

### 2.1: National context

It is important to note that a change of UK Government took place in July 2024. The majority of strategies and policies to which reference is made below were set in place prior to June 2024 and it is, thus, likely that over the period of time to which this strategy applies, some changes will be made.

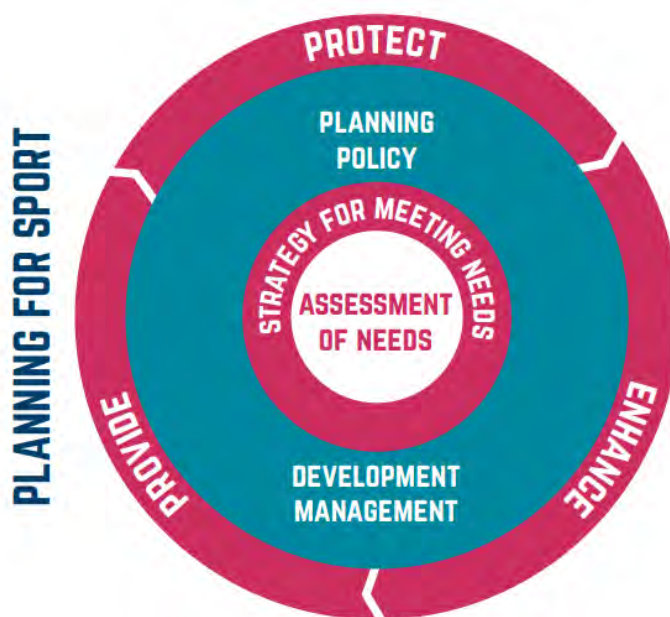
The Government [Get Active: A strategy for the future of sport and physical activity](#) has the focus on increasing physical activity, making sport more welcoming and inclusive, and ensuring the long-term financial and environmental sustainability of the sector. In addition, the recently launched cross-departmental National Physical Activity Taskforce has a focus on environmental sustainability in the sector, clear targets for increasing physical activity rates and a new vision for leisure facilities in 2023.

Get Active sets out how the government will work with the sector to achieve these aims by ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to get active. Central to this is a focus on ensuring that children establish a lifetime of engagement with sport and physical activity. This is accompanied by the introduction of national targets for participation to help hold Government and the sector to account for delivering the change that is needed.

### Sport England

Sport England aims to ensure positive planning for sport, enabling the right facilities to be provided in the right places, based on up-to-date assessment of needs for all levels of sport and all sectors of the community. This assessment report has been produced for BDC applying the principles and tools identified in ANOG.

Figure 2.1: The Sport England Planning for Sport Model



Assessment of need is core to planning for sporting provision. It is underpinned by 12 planning-for-sport principles which help the planning system to contribute to sustainable development by fulfilling the key role of the NPPF in creating strong, vibrant and healthy communities.

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Applying them ensures that the planning system positively enables and supports healthy lifestyles, delivers community and cultural facilities and services to meet local needs, and provides opportunity for all to experience the benefits that taking part in sport and physical activity brings. They apply to all areas of planning at authority and neighbourhood levels. As such they relevant to all involved in, or looking to engage with, the planning system.

Figure 2.2: Sport England’s 12 planning principles



## Sport England: Uniting the Movement 2021

Sport and physical activity have a major role to play in improving the physical and mental health of the nation, supporting the economy, reconnecting communities, and rebuilding a stronger society for all following the global pandemic. Reflecting this, Sport England’s Uniting the Movement strategy sets out its 10-year vision to transform lives and communities through sport and physical activity.

It seeks to tackle the inequalities that it states are long seen in sport and physical activity noting that ‘providing opportunities to people and communities that have traditionally been left behind, and helping to remove the barriers to activity, has never been more important’. The three key Strategy objectives are:

1. Advocating for movement, sport and physical activity.
2. Joining forces on five big issues.
3. Creating the catalysts for change.

As well as being an advocate for sport and physical activity, through the building of evidence and partnership development, the Strategy identifies five big issues that communities and people need to address by working together. They are described as the major challenges to England being an active nation over the next decade as well as being the main opportunities to make a lasting difference. They are designated as a building block that individually would make a difference but tackled collectively could change things profoundly.

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The issues are:

- ◀ Recover and reinvent: Recovering from the biggest crisis in a generation and reinventing as a vibrant, relevant, and sustainable network of organisations providing sport and physical activity opportunities that meet the needs of different people.
- ◀ Connecting communities: Focusing on sport and physical activity's ability to make better places to live and bring people together.
- ◀ Positive experiences for children and young people: Unrelenting focus on positive experiences for all young people as the foundations for a long and healthy life.
- ◀ Connecting with health and wellbeing: Strengthening the connections between sport, physical activity, health, and wellbeing, so more people can feel the benefits of, and advocate for, an active life.
- ◀ Active environments: Creating and protecting the places and spaces that make it easier for people to be active.

To address these five big issues, the right conditions for change need to be created: across people, organisations, and partnerships to help convert plans and ideas. This will include a range of actions, including development of effective investment models and applying innovation and digital technology to ensure sport and physical activity are more accessible.

The specific impact of the Strategy will be captured via funded programmes, interventions made, and partnerships forged. For each specific area of action, key performance indicators will be developed to help evidence the overall progress being made by all those involved in supporting sport and physical activity.

### **Sport England: Understanding the impact of Covid-19 January 2021<sup>1</sup>**

Activity levels for adults had been increasing until coronavirus restrictions were introduced in March 2020. This led to unprecedented drops in activity during the first few weeks of full lockdown between mid-March and mid-May 2020. The proportion of the population classed as active dropped by 7.1% (meaning that there were just over 3 million fewer active adults). Some audiences found it harder to be active before Covid-19 and are finding it hard now. Inequalities between different groups have persisted since lockdown restrictions began in March. Those who have found it hardest to stay active include:

- ◀ People with long-term health conditions/disabilities.
- ◀ People from lower socio-economic groups.
- ◀ Women aged 16–34-year-olds and 55 years and above.
- ◀ Black adults, Asian adults, and adults from other minority ethnic groups

The proportion of children and young people reportedly active mid-May to late July 2021 fell by 2.3%, with just over 100,000 fewer meeting the recommended level of activity compared to the same period 12 months earlier. The impact was greater for some groups than others. Whilst all were impacted in terms of activity levels, girls fared better than boys, whilst those from black and mixed backgrounds saw more pronounced drops in activity levels.

Sporting activities saw large decreases with over a million fewer children and young people (16.3%) reporting having taken part in swimming and team sports in the last week\* compared to the same period 12 months earlier. Walking, cycling and fitness all saw substantial increases in numbers reporting having taken part in the last week compared to the same period 12 months earlier. 1.6 million more children and young people went for a walk (22.0%) or did fitness activities (22.1%), whilst 1.4 million more cycled for fun or fitness (+18.4%).

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<sup>1</sup> Link to Sport England - Understanding the impact of Covid-19 January 2021

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In addition, lack of disposable income may lead to a reduction in sports sector spend and can have an impact upon the take-up of activities which cater for children and young people as well as adults. Uncertain employment and financial circumstances mean that greater numbers of people will be looking for affordable and flexible opportunities to stay active. Fewer people will be in a position to make an ongoing financial commitment to participate.

### **Social and economic value of community sport and physical activity in England 2020<sup>2</sup>**

Sport England has brought together evidence on the contribution of community sport and physical activity to the five outcomes identified in the Government's strategy Sporting Future. These are physical wellbeing, mental wellbeing, individual development, social and community development, and economic development.

Its aim was to assess the evidence base with a view to demonstrating the contribution of community sport and physical activity to the outcomes. Building on this foundation and other previous work, Sport England quantified its social and economic impact. There are two complementary parts to the research. The first measures social impact (including physical and mental health) of sport and physical activity, the second assesses the economic importance.

Findings reveal that community sport and physical activity makes an annual contribution of £85.5 billion to the country (in 2018 prices) in social and economic benefits. Its social value – including physical and mental health, wellbeing, individual and community development – is more than £72 billion (healthier population, consumer expenditure, greater work productivity, improved education attainment, reduced crime, and stronger communities). It also generates more than £13bn in economic value. The economic value includes more than 285,000 jobs that employ people within the community sport and physical activity sector.

Together, these enable Sport England to demonstrate the contribution of sport and physical activity to the five government outcomes. The combined social and economic value of taking part (participating and volunteering) in community sport and physical activity in England in 2017/18 was estimated to be £85.5bn. When measured against the £21.85 billion costs of engagement and providing sport and physical activity opportunities, for every £1 spent on community sport and physical activity, a return on investment (ROI) of £3.91 was created for individuals and society.

### **Sport England: The Future of Public Sector Leisure**

Engagement by Sport England with the public leisure sector has highlighted that the pandemic has accelerated the appetite for local authorities to look at leisure services and re-examine the purpose of their provision, delivery against local community outcomes and consider their alignment with broader strategic outcomes, particularly health.

Key insight from the report ([Sport England: The Future of Public Sector Leisure](#)) includes:

- ◀ 68% of sports halls and swimming pools were built 20+ years ago. Although more than £150m was invested in the opening of new public leisure and swimming facilities in 2018/19<sup>3</sup>, with another £200m worth of assets in construction or planning there remains significant levels of ageing public leisure stock.
- ◀ 72% of all school swimming lessons take place in a public leisure facility, which included both the statutory learn to swim programme and the water safety curriculum across primary schools. Swimming club usage is also based primarily at public leisure facilities.

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<sup>2</sup> Link to Social and economic value of community sport and physical activity in England 2020

<sup>3</sup> 2 Mintel Report on Leisure Centres and Swimming Pools (September 2019)

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The leisure sector emerged from the pandemic in a fragile state. Emergency funding<sup>4</sup> helped to avert financial catastrophe and enabled the additional costs of maintaining public assets and reopening services to be met. This funding is, however, finite and is largely exhausted. At best, financial pressures risk limiting the ability of stakeholders to deliver against their commitments; at worst they may result in the permanent closure of some services or facilities.

In respect of the recovery of the sector to pre-Pandemic participation levels, data generated via the [Moving Communities](#) platform suggests that in October 2021, throughput levels (13.2 million) were still lower than the monthly average in 2019 (17.8 million). Recovery of participation levels across different activities has been imbalanced and has leaned towards those activities which deliver a faster return to pre-pandemic revenue levels.

Sites refurbished in the last 10 years are seeing a throughput recovery of 68% compared with a recovery of 62% for those last refurbished 20+ years ago, suggesting that investment in newer facilities creates spaces that have greater appeal, increase user confidence levels and provide a more relevant offer to meet current customer demands.

To address these significant challenges, a repositioning of the traditional offer of public leisure into one akin to an **active wellbeing service** is advocated focusing on added value and supporting delivery of key local priorities, alongside wider government policy around Levelling Up, net zero and health inequalities.

### Chief Medical Officer Physical Activity Guidelines 2019

This updated the 2011 physical activity guidelines issued by the four chief medical officers (CMOs) of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. They drew upon global evidence to present guidelines for different age groups, covering the volume, duration, frequency and type of physical activity required across the life course to achieve health benefits.

Since 2011, evidence of the health benefits of regular physical activity for all groups has become more compelling. In children and young people, regular physical activity is associated with improved learning and attainment, better mental health and cardiovascular fitness, also contributing to healthy weight status. In adults, there is strong evidence to demonstrate the protective effect on physical activity on a range of many chronic conditions including coronary heart disease, obesity and type 2 diabetes, mental health problems and social isolation.

Regular physical activity can deliver cost savings for the health and care system and has wider social benefits for individuals and communities. Key factors for each age group are as follows:

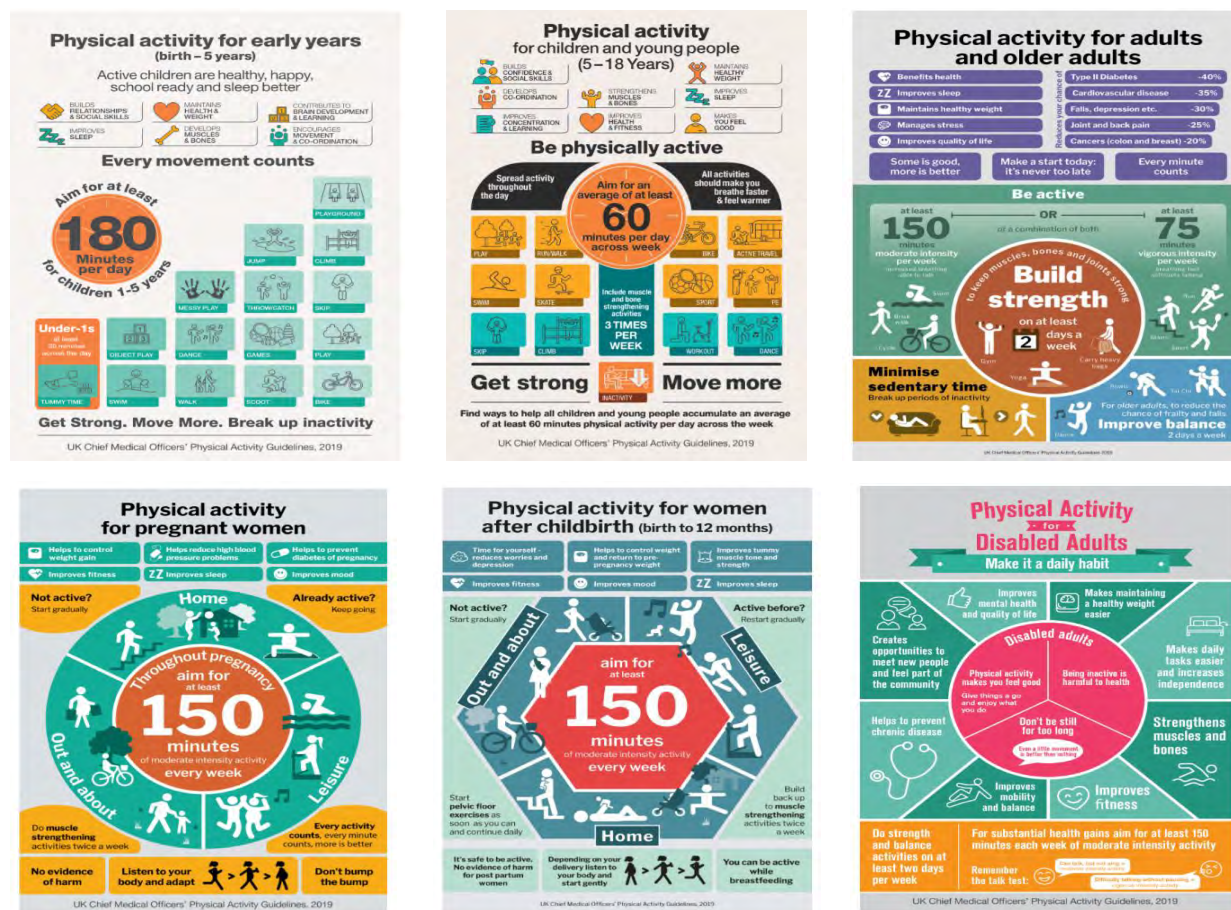
- ◀ Under-5s (infants, toddlers and pre-schoolers): should spend at least 180 minutes (3 hours) per day in a variety of different exercises, whereas infants should be physically active several times every day in a variety of ways, including interactive floor-based activities.
- ◀ Children and young people (5-18 years): should engage in moderate-to-vigorous intensity physical activity for an average of at least 60 minutes per day across the week.
- ◀ Adults (19-64 years): for good physical and mental health, adults should aim to be physically active every day. This could be 150 minutes of moderate exercise, 75 minutes of vigorous exercise or even shorter durations of very vigorous intensity activity, or a combination of moderate, vigorous and very vigorous intensity activity.
- ◀ Older adults (65+): should participate in daily physical activity to gain health benefits, including maintenance of good physical and mental health, wellbeing, and social functioning. Each week older adults should aim to accumulate 150 minutes (two and a half hours) of moderate intensity aerobic activity.

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<sup>4</sup> Local authorities invested £160 million, the National Leisure Recovery Fund £100m, Leisure operators drew on £171 million of reserves alongside further relief measures such as the furlough scheme

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Figure 2.3: Physical activity guidelines



The report also recognises an emerging evidence base for the health benefits of performing very vigorous intensity activity performed in short bouts interspersed with periods of rest or recovery (high intensity interval exercise, HIIT). Available evidence demonstrates that high intensity interval exercise has clinically meaningful effects on fitness, body weight and insulin resistance. This option has therefore been incorporated into the recommendation for adults.

It, thus, emphasises the importance of regular activity for people of all ages. It presents additional guidance on being active during pregnancy, after giving birth, and for disabled adults. The new guidelines are consistent with previous ones, introducing some new elements and allowing flexibility in achieving recommended physical activity levels for each age group.

## Joseph Rowntree Foundation UK Poverty 2024 report

This report notes that poverty in the UK has now increased to just below pre-pandemic levels. Available data provides evidence that more than one in five people now live in poverty (including 4.2 million children. Of these, 40% are described as being in 'deep poverty', with an income considerably below the standard poverty line. Certain groups of people face particularly high levels of poverty. They include (figures relate to 2021/22 unless otherwise stated):

- ◀ Larger families – where 43% of children in families with 3 or more children were in poverty.
- ◀ Families whose childcare responsibilities limit their ability to work – 44% of children in lone-parent families were in poverty.
- ◀ Many minority ethnic groups – many households have higher rates of child, very deep and persistent poverty.

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- ◀ 31% of disabled people are in poverty. This rate is higher (at 38%) for people with a long-term, limiting mental health condition.
- ◀ 28% of informal carers (those with caring responsibilities). They have limited ability to work and unpaid social-care givers experience an average pay penalty of nearly £5,000/annum.
- ◀ Families not in work – more than half of working-age adults (56%) in workless households are in poverty - compared with 15% in working households. Around two-thirds of working-age adults in poverty actually live in a household where someone is in work.
- ◀ Part-time workers and the self-employed - the poverty rate for part-time workers was double that for full-time workers (20% compared with 10%). Self-employed workers are more than twice as likely to be in poverty as employees (23% compared with 10%).
- ◀ 43% of people living in rented accommodation and 35% of private renters are in poverty after housing costs.
- ◀ Families claiming income-related benefits.

### Environmental sustainability

The UK Government net zero strategy 'Build Back Greener' was published in October 2021. This sets out how it intends the UK to meet its target for decarbonisation by 2050. It focuses on interventions such as:

- ◀ A fully decarbonised power system by 2035 with all electricity coming from 'low carbon sources'.
- ◀ Improved efficiency of heating for homes and buildings, aiming for all new appliances to be based on low carbon technologies, such as electric heat pumps or hydrogen boilers.
- ◀ Low carbon fuel supply – by scaling up the production of low carbon alternatives including hydrogen and biofuels.

[Sport England](#) reports that <sup>5</sup>climate change and the increased occurrence of extreme weather that it brings are already affecting sports facilities, meaning that the sector needs to build greater resilience to counter this very real threat.

It proposes that a wide range of issues should be considered when approaching project development to, and the resultant environmental impact of, say, new swimming pool development. This applies to determining whether to refurbish an existing building with its carbon already embedded or to build anew<sup>6</sup>. In establishing a sustainability strategy early on Sport England suggests some key principles as part of a 'pathway to sustainability' and net zero carbon in respect of building design and operation.

- ◀ Reduce energy consumption as a first measure to reduce carbon emissions/energy costs.
- ◀ Change behaviour, eliminate energy waste and operate energy control systems more effectively at no extra cost.
- ◀ Passive design - Building orientation and placement on site is critical to achieving net zero targets Harness a site's natural resources to benefit cross ventilation, natural lighting, solar gain, shelter or shading.
- ◀ Fabric efficiency Maximise the building fabric and glazing performance.
- ◀ Minimise initial energy demand to reduce demand on plant and technologies incorporated.
- ◀ Efficient systems Invest in appropriate energy-efficient products including heating, ventilation, fittings, controls, sensors, heat pumps and recovery systems.
- ◀ On-site renewables; using low/zero carbon (LZC) technologies to produce energy on site.
- ◀ Off-site renewables - only use energy providers who use renewable energy.

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<sup>5</sup>[Sport England Environmental Sustainability policy](#)

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## Investment in school sport

The School Sport and Activity Action Plan (July 2019) set out the (then) Government's commitment to ensuring that children and young people have access to at least 60 minutes of sport and physical activity per day, with a recommendation of 30 minutes of this delivered during the school day (in line with the CMO guidelines which recommend an average of at least 60 minutes per day across the week). The action plan has three overarching ambitions - that:

- ◀ All children/young people take part in at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day.
- ◀ Children/young people have the opportunity to realise developmental, character-building experiences through sport, competition and active pursuits.
- ◀ All sport and physical activity provision for children/young people is designed around the principles of physical literacy, focuses on fun and enjoyment and aims to reach the least active.

The PE and sport premium is intended to help primary schools to achieve this aim, providing them with £320m of government funding to make additional and sustainable improvements to the quality of PE, physical activity and sport offered via core budgets. It is allocated directly to schools which have the flexibility to use it in the way that they consider works best for their pupils.

In 2021 the Department for Education announced a £10.1 million funding package to help more schools open their facilities to the public once the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic is over. The funding, which will be administered by Sport England and distributed via the Active Partnership Network will help schools deliver extra-curricular activities and open their facilities outside of the school day during evenings, weekends and school holidays.

## The Physical Literacy Consensus Statement for England – Sport England (2023)

This has been developed to facilitate a shared understanding of physical literacy for those working in the sport, education, physical activity, recreation, play, health and youth sectors. It offers a broad overview of physical literacy, why it matters and how it can be developed and supported.

Developing a consensus on the term physical literacy has been a priority, as understanding what impacts people's relationship with movement and physical activity throughout life will enable those working in the sector to ensure their offer is as appealing as possible.

In essence, physical literacy represents the extent to which individuals have a positive relationship with movement and physical activity. The Youth Sport Trust has published findings evidencing that a total of 4,000 hours of physical education (PE) have been lost from the curriculum of state-funded secondary schools. PE hours have fallen victim to more time spent online, poor school attendance and declining health and wellbeing levels in young people. Since 2012, the amount of PE in England has fallen by more than 12%.

Evidence also shows that children with high levels of physical literacy are twice as likely to engage in sport and physical activity. In later life, adults who feel they have the opportunity, ability and enjoy being physically active are more likely to be so. To increase physical activity in both children and adults, it is important to consider the cultural and environmental factors which affect physical activity levels alongside the influence of previous experiences.

Ensuring good quality and regular PE in schools is considered to be essential to improving the mental and physical wellbeing of young people and will enable young people to develop new skills, achieve greater academic success and live longer, happier, healthier lives.

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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## **Sport England Swimming Pool Support Fund**

In 2023, a funding pot of £63 million was announced to ease the pressure on leisure centres with managing the cost of operating, maintaining and heating swimming pools. This is being managed by Sport England and is available to all pools run by councils and charities and all those run on behalf of councils. Stevenage Council received £37,242 from the Sport England Swimming Pool Support Fund to carry out improvement work at Stevenage Swimming Centre.

## **Revised National Planning Policy Framework 2023**

The NPPF sets out planning policies for England. It details how these changes are expected to be applied to the planning system. It also provides a framework for local people and their councils to produce distinct local and neighbourhood plans, reflecting the needs and priorities of local communities. It states that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. It identifies the need to focus on three themes of economic, social, environmentally sustainable development:

A presumption in favour of sustainable development is a key aspect for any plan-making and decision-taking processes. In relation to plan-making, the NPPF states that local plans should meet objectively assessed needs. It is clear about sport's role delivering sustainable communities through promoting health and well-being. Sport England, working within the provisions of the NPPF, wishes to see local planning policy protect, enhance and provide for sports facilities based on robust and up-to-date assessments of need, as well as helping to realise the wider benefits that participation in sport can bring.

The promoting healthy communities theme identifies that planning policies should be based on robust, up-to-date assessment of need for open space, sports and recreation facilities and opportunities for new provision. Specific needs, quantitative/qualitative deficiencies and surpluses should be identified and used to inform provision requirements in an area.

(It should be noted that, in order to increase the pace with which new housing is being developed, the incoming Labour administration has plans to amend current planning regulations).

## **Summary of national context**

In the context both of emergence from the global pandemic and the highly challenging economic environment, there is a need to reconnect communities, reduce inequality and create stronger societies. The aim is to create a catalyst for change, with sport and physical activity a key driver and people in all age groups either getting or remaining active. Ensuring an adequate supply of suitable facilities to support this aim is a key requirement of the planning system in line with national policy recommendations.

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## 2.2: Local context

### Stevenage Borough Local Plan (2011-2031)

This was adopted in May 2019. It sets out how Stevenage will develop over the 20 years it covers. It outlines plans for the future development of Stevenage including its aim to deliver approximately 7,600 new homes along with new jobs and community facilities. It forms the foundation for revitalising the town centre, which will feature new homes, shops, offices, coffee bars, and restaurants, with the goal to create a vibrant and pride-worthy centre. The plan also emphasizes the protection of green spaces infrastructure and historic assets to maintain a high quality of life for residents.

The Local Plan acknowledges the importance of three key elements which need specific attention to improve the lives of local people:

- ◀ Regeneration – Stevenage is the most deprived local authority in Hertfordshire.
- ◀ Housing provision – there is a lack of affordable housing and more expensive houses to attract higher earners.
- ◀ Employment growth – remodelling of Gunnels Wood and Park (the largest employment area in the County) to ensure that it remains fit for modern businesses.

The strategy sets out clear pathways and mechanisms for delivery. The Local Plan includes key strategic policies upon which the Council is committed to focus. These are:

- ◀ Sustainable development.
- ◀ Creating a strong, competitive economy.
- ◀ Supporting a vital Town Centre.
- ◀ Development of infrastructure and transport.
- ◀ Building high quality homes.
- ◀ Undertake rigorous planning to ensure inclusive design and high-quality sites.
- ◀ Enabling healthy communities by providing accessible sport and leisure facilities.
- ◀ Protecting and utilising the Green Belt.
- ◀ Protecting against climate change, flooding and reducing pollution.
- ◀ The nature and historic environment.

A partial review of the Local Plan is currently being carried out with a view to carrying out a full Local Plan Review.

### Corporate Plan: Making Stevenage Even Better (2024-2027)

This sets out SBC priorities, focus, outcomes and actions for the next three years. The five key strategic priorities, all of equal importance, which the Council would like to achieve within the next three years:

- ◀ Transforming our town – regeneration, enterprise and skills.
- ◀ More social, affordable and good quality homes – building new & sustainable homes and maintaining good quality homes.
- ◀ Thriving neighbourhoods – clean neighbourhoods and green spaces, community safety and culture and leisure.
- ◀ Tackling climate change.
- ◀ Balancing the budget.

Alongside the five strategic priorities, there are three key areas of work that intersect with and support the delivery of these priorities:

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- ◀ Equality, diversity & inclusion (EDI) – SBC will work with partners, staff, local businesses and community groups to advance EDI across the workforce and community.
- ◀ Health & wellbeing – SBC will work with partners to tackle health inequalities and improve the health and wellbeing of residents.
- ◀ Technology & innovation – SBC will embrace technology and innovation to enhance how it operates and deliver systems efficiencies that empower residents to use digital services.

## Hertfordshire Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2026

The strategy seeks to work in partnership and with communities to improve their health, wellbeing and quality of life to reduce health inequalities and help people live longer and healthier. The strategy has three overarching ambitions for the health and wellbeing of residents.

- 1) Strong communities
- 2) Healthy and Fulfilling lives
- 3) Effective, joined up health and care services

The following principles underpin how these ambitions will be achieved by working in local communities over the next four years.

Table 2.1 – priorities in the Hertfordshire Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2026

Principle	Key facts and actions
Every child has the best start in life	Support maternal and post-maternal physical and mental health Positive early experiences are associated with better social/emotional development, better performance at school and work, higher income and better health. The Council will increase vaccination rates for MMR1, MMR2 and DTPP to move closer to the 95% national target.
Good nutrition, healthy weight and physical activity	15.7% (2,075) of children in year 6 in Hertfordshire were classified as obese in 2019/20. 34,299 people had coronary heart disease in 2020/21. 63,322 people aged 17+ were known to have diabetes in 2020/21. Health and wellbeing issues will be embedded in major planning applications and the Council will promote/embed social prescribing for adults, children and older people.
Good emotional and mental wellbeing throughout life	<b>Having good mental wellbeing is important to people's quality of life. In 2019/20, the prevalence of patients with severe mental illness was 0.81% in Hertfordshire, representing 10,377 individuals. This was significantly lower than England (0.93%).</b> SBC will address the stigma around mental health and champion initiatives such as the Just Talk campaign. SBC will develop mental health first aiders
Reduction in smoking and substance misuse	Tobacco use is the single greatest cause of preventable deaths in England. Likewise, alcohol consumption is associated with many chronic health problems including several types of cancer. Alcohol is also linked to a number of social problems, including recorded crime assaults and domestic violence. In Hertfordshire in 2020/21, there were 3,800 hospital admissions for alcohol specific conditions and 12.6% of people aged 18+ currently smoke. SBC will introduce smoking bans in areas where more vulnerable people congregate e.g. outside schools. SBC will help more people to quit smoking, leading to fewer people with smoking-related health conditions and fewer smoking-related hospital admissions.

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Principle	Key facts and actions
A healthy standard of living for all	<p>Insufficient income is associated with long-term physical, mental health and low life expectancy. Income inequalities have been widened by the current rise in cost of living.</p> <p>There is a strong relationship between cold indoor temperatures and cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, alongside higher winter mortality rates.</p> <p>Children living in cold homes are more than twice as likely to suffer from a variety of respiratory problems as children living in warm homes and mental health is negatively affected by fuel poverty.</p> <p>SBC will encourage residents to take advantage of any national grant schemes on energy efficiency and warmer homes.</p> <p>SBC will provide equitable and timely access to sexual health and reproductive health services.</p>
Healthy and sustainable places and communities	<p>The fraction of mortality (aged 30+) attributable to particulate air pollution in Hertfordshire in 2019 was 5.7%, higher than East of England average at 5.5% and England at 5.1%.</p> <p>Poor-quality housing harms health and evidence shows that exposure to poor housing conditions (including damp, cold, mould, noise) is strongly associated with poor physical and mental health.</p> <p>SBC will develop productive relationships with partners, to achieve positive air quality outcomes.</p> <p>SBC will reduce levels of pollutants within the air that we all breathe with a focus on indoor and external air quality.</p>

## Stevenage Arts and Cultural Strategy

Stevenage's 10-year Arts and Heritage Strategy aims to establish the town as a cultural hub by creating flagship venues, creative spaces, and public art to attract talent and improve accessibility to the arts. It emphasises inclusive programs, such as LGBTQ+ and diversity-focused events, to boost engagement and foster community pride. Collaborative projects like the Junction 7 Creatives Hub promote leadership and participation, while integrating culture into town regeneration supports economic and social growth. The strategy seeks to enrich lives, strengthen identity, and drive vitality for residents and visitors.

## Stevenage Regeneration

Stevenage is undergoing a £1 billion regeneration program led by the Council and private sector partners. The aim is to revitalise the town centre with a mix of residential, retail, and leisure spaces, including a public services hub. Key initiatives include a £50 million upgrade to Queensway North, affordable housing, and enhanced public spaces. Funded by £37.5 million from the Towns Fund, nine projects will enhance local infrastructure and economy. Collaboration with the community ensures the town's transformation aligns with its heritage and future needs.

As part of Stevenage Regeneration, SBC is proposing to bring the two existing public leisure facilities under one roof. The proposed facility will include a six-court sports hall, a main swimming pool and a learner/teaching pool, interactive wet play, changing village and health and fitness suite with studio spaces. The aim is to open the new leisure centre in late 2027.

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## Herts Sport and Physical Activity Partnership

This is the active partnership area in which Stevenage is located. The Partnership's vision is to 'strategically and collaboratively improve the lives of the people of Hertfordshire, by using the power of sport and physical activity to tackle inequality and disadvantage'. It is one of 43 active partnerships across England and is funded by Sport England to locally deliver the Uniting the Movement Strategy. Key insights which informed its Strategic Plan 2022-2027 are:

- ◀ The need for a joined-up approach between schools and community sport.
- ◀ The Covid-19 Pandemic affecting the most disadvantaged communities.
- ◀ Opportunities to use sport and physical activity to tackle the number of long-term health conditions and wider societal issues.
- ◀ Widening inequality gaps.
- ◀ The need for well-designed spaces to increase physical activity levels and improve mental health.

## Leisure operator

Since 2023, Everyone Active (EA) has been contracted to manage the two council-run public leisure centres in Stevenage: the Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre and the Stevenage Swimming Centre. It also manages Ridlins Athletics Stadium, the Stevenage Golf & Conference Centre, Fairlands Splash Park, and all outdoor pitch bookings and pavilions. Additionally, EA delivers the Active Communities outreach programme in Stevenage. The company manages more than 200 centres nationwide. SBC's management contract with EA runs until 2033, with the option for two 5-year extensions.

## Stevenage Sports Facility Assessment and Strategy 2014-2031

SBC commissioned a review of indoor sports facilities in 2014. The audit for this recognised that the Council's highest priority is to replace the two separate (and ageing) public leisure centres (Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre and Stevenage Swimming Centre) with a modern facility located in the heart of the Town. The proposed leisure centre, which was at the time envisioned to open by 2020 at a cost of £12-15 million, would offer better accessibility, enhanced parking, and more modern amenities.

The audit also identified that a new secondary school will need to be built in Stevenage due to the level of local housing growth planned. The proposed school will incorporate various on-site sports facilities which should cater for community use. The 2014 audit also recognised the importance of Ridlins Athletics Stadium to two clubs, local schools and a disability sport group which all use it on a frequent basis. At that point it was recommended that the stadium be retained at competition level and ancillary facilities improved but that ways should be found to reduce costs.

The audit also recognised challenges with the indoor bowls hall at the Arts and Leisure Centre. Temporary surfaces were being utilised to turn the space into a multi-use area during certain times but this was having a negative impact on the overall quality from a bowls perspective. The report suggested exploring development of a dedicated indoor bowls centre to resolve these issues and better meet community demand.

## Summary of local policy

SBC has identified several initiatives to create a borough which is an attractive place to live, work and visit. The Local Plan outlines the vision for town development, targeting 7,600 new homes, job creation, and enhanced community facilities, while the Corporate Plan focuses on the abovementioned five priorities. Stevenage has higher levels of deprivation than the rest of Hertfordshire and SBC is seeking to address by implementing the above policies.

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The importance of being a healthy, physically active town is recognised. In collaboration with EA, the Active Partnership and other partners SBC is keen to achieve the aims set out in the Hertfordshire Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2026 to create thriving local communities.

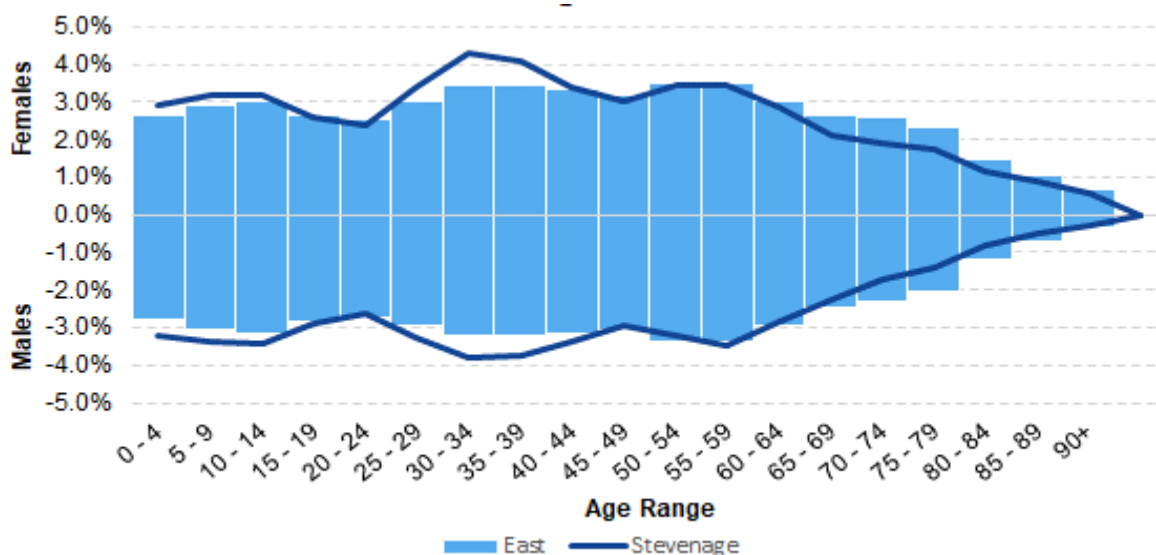
# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

## 2.3: Demographic profile

**Population** (Data source: 2022 Mid-Year Estimate (MYE), ONS)

The total population of Stevenage is 89,737, comprising 44,356 males and 45,381 females. Its population age and gender composition is shown below. Overlaying the dark blue line for Stevenage on top of the blue bars for the region makes it easy to see where one dataset is higher or lower than the other.

Figure 2.4: Comparative age/sex pyramid for Stevenage and East

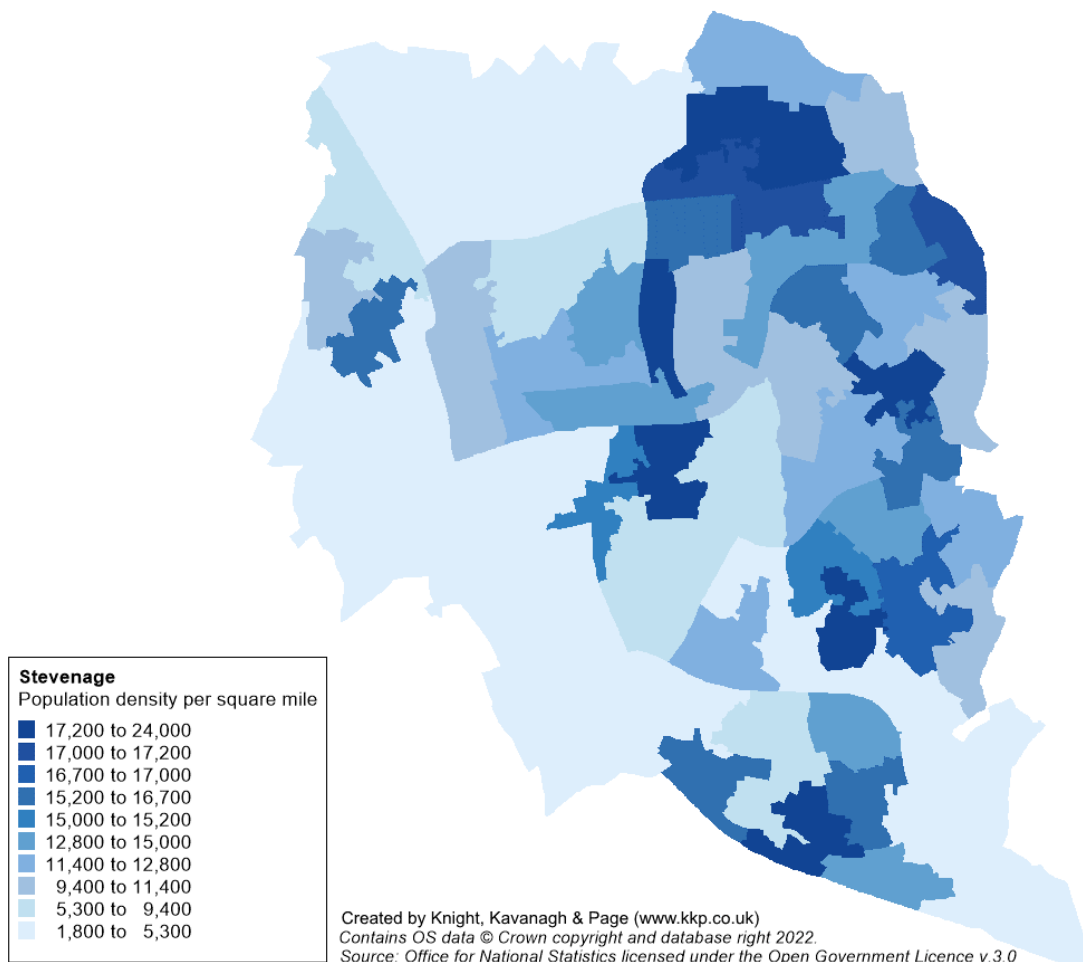


There is a higher proportion of 5–34-year-olds (Stevenage: 38.4%, East: 35.5%), this may suggest a higher level of demand from what are generally regarded as the main sports participation groups and also from young families. There are, however, fewer in the age groups from 45-69 (Stevenage: 29.7%, East: 31.0%). As a combination of factors, it suggests careful consideration should be given to the pitching of sports and physical activity offers within the area – Sport England’s segmentation model may be interpreted in relation to this age structure (see later).

The population density map overleaf is based on lower super output areas (LSOAs) from the most recent ONS Census. It covers all parts of the country irrespective of whether the SOA is in an area of high-density housing and flats or it covers farms and rural villages. Map shading, however, allows concentrations of population to be easily identified, for example, major urban areas such as flats, terraced houses and estates tend to be illustrated via the darkest shading while rural areas, housing adjoining parks and other non-residential land uses tend to be the lightest shades.

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Figure 2.5: Population density 2021 Census: Stevenage (LSOAs).



## Ethnicity (Data source: 2021 Census, ONS)

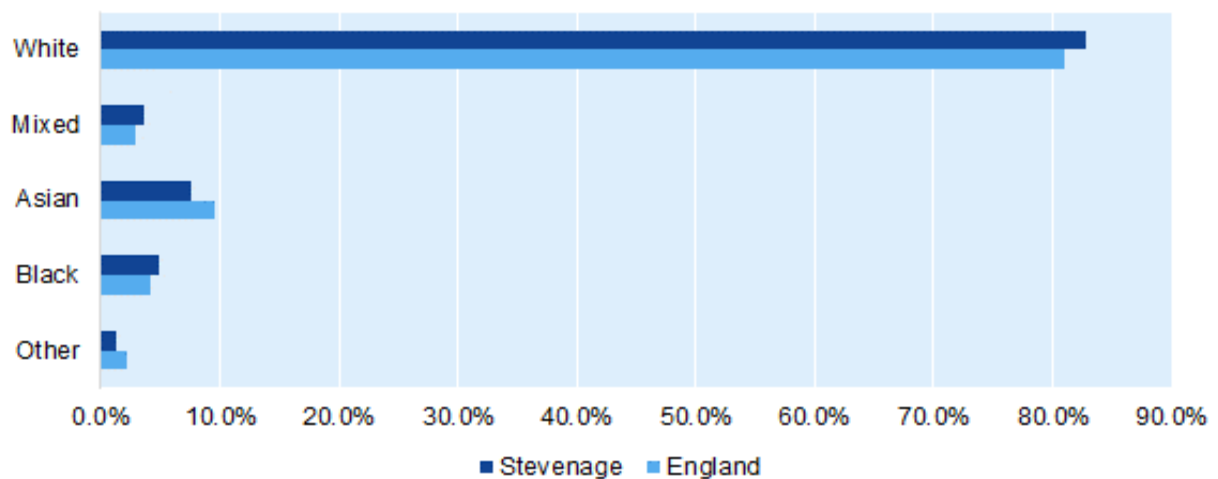
In broad terms, Stevenage’s ethnic composition reflects that of England as a whole. The largest proportion (82.8%) of the local population classified its ethnicity as White; this is marginally higher than the comparative England rate of 81.0%. The next largest population group (by self-classification) is Asian, at 7.5% this is lower than the national equivalent (9.6%).

Table 2.2: Ethnic composition – Stevenage and England.

Ethnicity	Stevenage #	Stevenage %	England #	England %
White	74,099	82.8%	45,783,401	81.0%
Mixed	3,216	3.6%	1,669,378	3.0%
Asian	6,700	7.5%	5,426,392	9.6%
Black	4,340	4.8%	2,381,724	4.2%
Other	1,143	1.3%	1,229,153	2.2%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>89,498</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>56,490,048</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

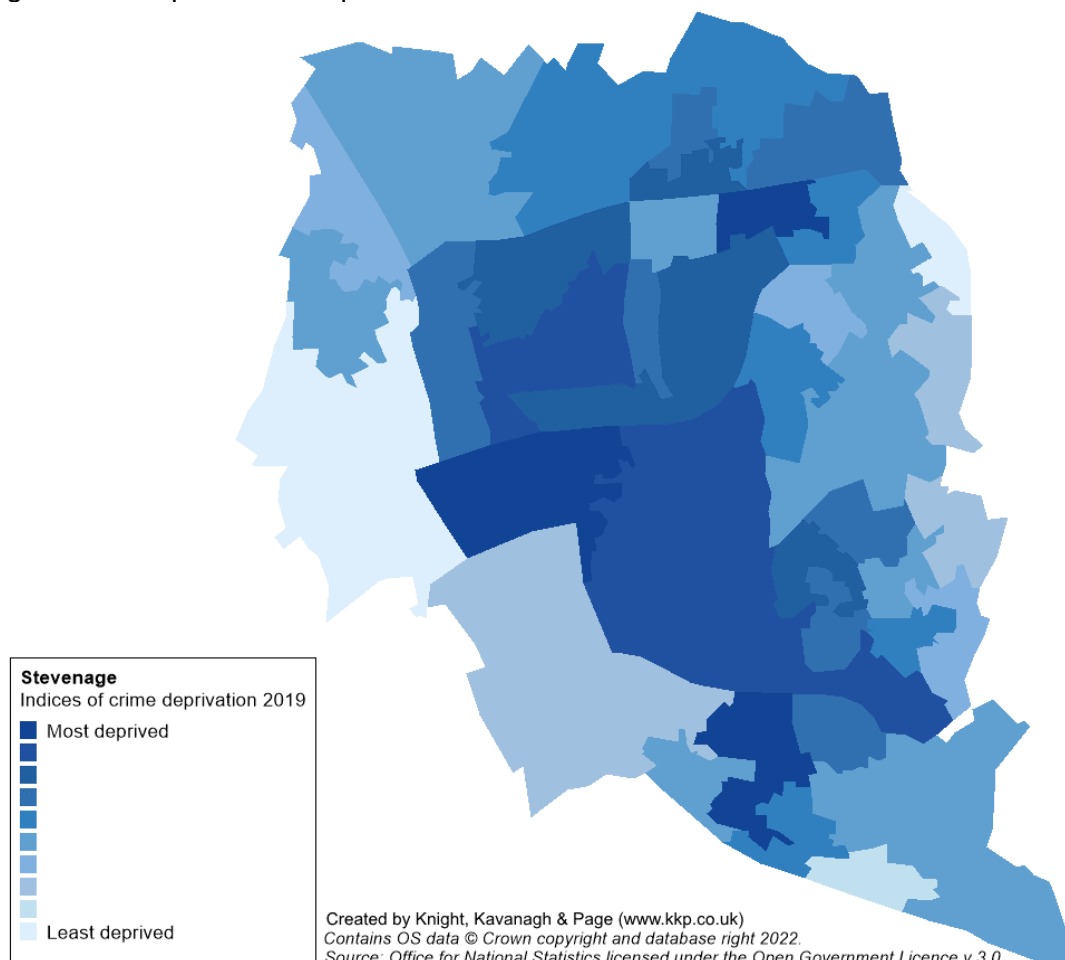
Figure 2.6: Ethnicity in Stevenage and England



## Crime (Data source: Crime in England and Wales year ending June 2023, ONS)

Crime data is only available for police force areas. Stevenage is in the Hertfordshire Police Force Area, which comprises ten local authorities (Broxbourne, Dacorum, East Hertfordshire, Hertsmere, North Hertfordshire, St. Albans, Stevenage, Three Rivers, Watford, and Welwyn Hatfield). The Stevenage population accounts for just 7.4% of the Police Force Area.

Figure 2.7: Map of crime deprivation.



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During the 12 months to June 2023 the number of recorded crimes per 1,000 persons in the Hertfordshire area was 63.7. (2022 MYE) This is markedly lower than the equivalent rate for England and Wales as a whole which was 92.5. The number of recorded crimes in the Hertfordshire area has risen (by 1.4%) since June 2022 (2021 Census). The number for England and Wales has risen by 1.1% over the same period.

Table 2.3: Comparative crime rates: Hertfordshire and England & Wales.

Authority/area	Recorded crime (Jul '22 – Jun '23)	Population 2022 MYE	Recorded crime per 1,000 population
Hertfordshire	76,684	1,204,588	63.7
England & Wales	5,572,143	60,238,038	92.5

As an alternative to the crime figures for police force areas the Index of Deprivation measures the risk of personal and material crime at a more local level. In Stevenage, 31.9% of the population are in the top three cohorts most at risk compared to 30.0% nationally.

### Income and benefits dependency (Data source: Nomis 2023)

The median figure for full-time earnings in Stevenage is £34,601; the comparative rate for East is £36,697 (+6.1%) and for Great Britain is £35,496 (+2.6%)

1,900 people in Stevenage claimed out of work benefits<sup>7</sup> in May 2024. This is an increase of 8.9% when compared to May 2023 (1,745).

### Deprivation (Data source: 2019 indices of deprivation, MHCLG)

Relative to other parts of the country Stevenage experiences low levels of deprivation; one in seven of the district's population (13.6%) lives in an area that is within the country's three most deprived cohorts compared to a national average of c.30%. Conversely, 7.2% live in the three least deprived groupings in the country, this compares to a 'norm' of c.30%.

In respect of health deprivation, around one in 16 of Stevenage's population (6.2%) lives in an area in the three most deprived cohorts, this compares to a national average of c.30%. Conversely, 14.2% live in the three least deprived groupings compared to the 30% 'norm'.

Table 2.4: IMD cohorts – multiple deprivation in Stevenage.

10% bands	Population in band	%	Cumulative %
Most deprived - 10.0	0	0.0%	0.0%
20.0	3,263	3.8%	3.8%
30.0	8,491	9.8%	13.6%
40.0	20,265	23.4%	37.0%
50.0	19,680	22.7%	59.7%
60.0	16,565	19.1%	78.8%
70.0	12,099	14.0%	92.8%
80.0	1,657	1.9%	94.7%
90.0	2,964	3.4%	98.2%
Least deprived - 100.0	1,595	1.8%	100.0%

<sup>7</sup> This includes both Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) and Universal Credit. Universal credit also includes other benefits including employment and support allowance (ESA) and child tax credits.

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Figure 2.8: Stevenage - multiple deprivation.

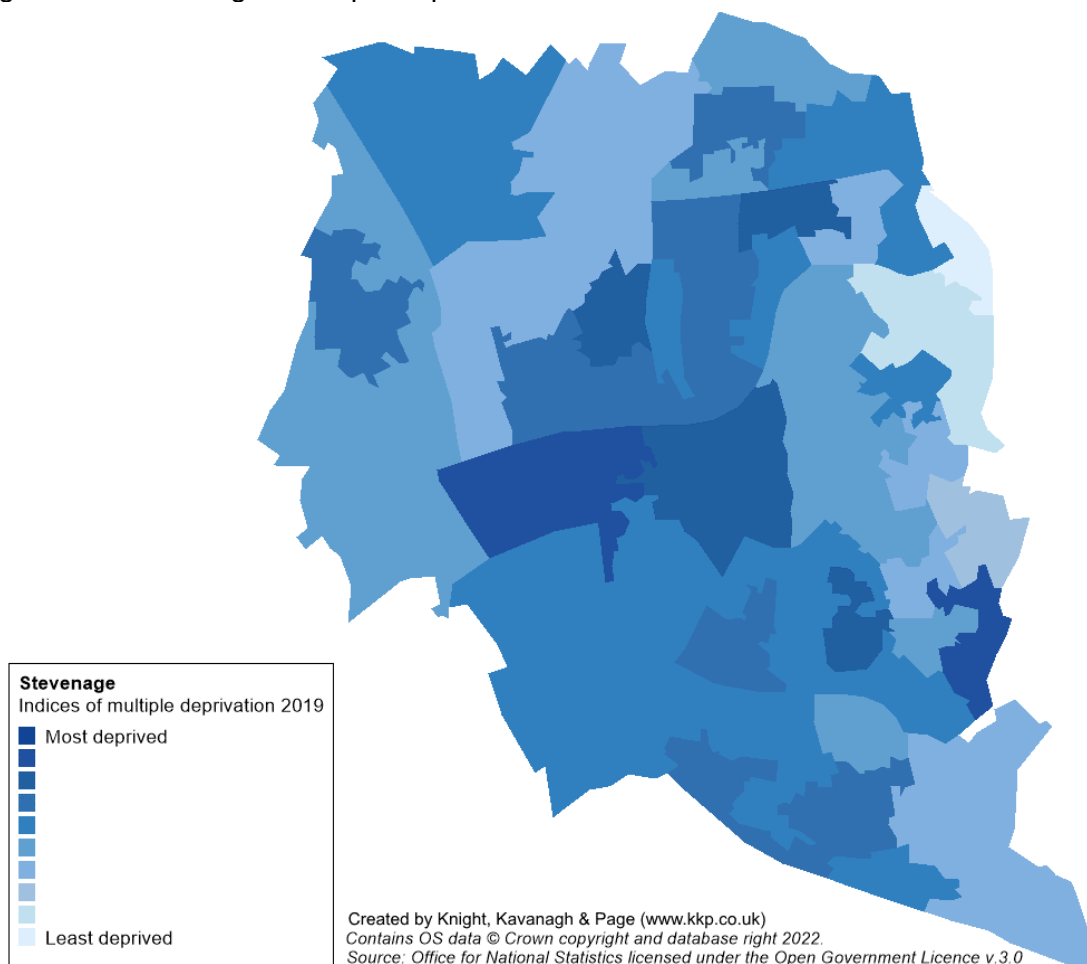
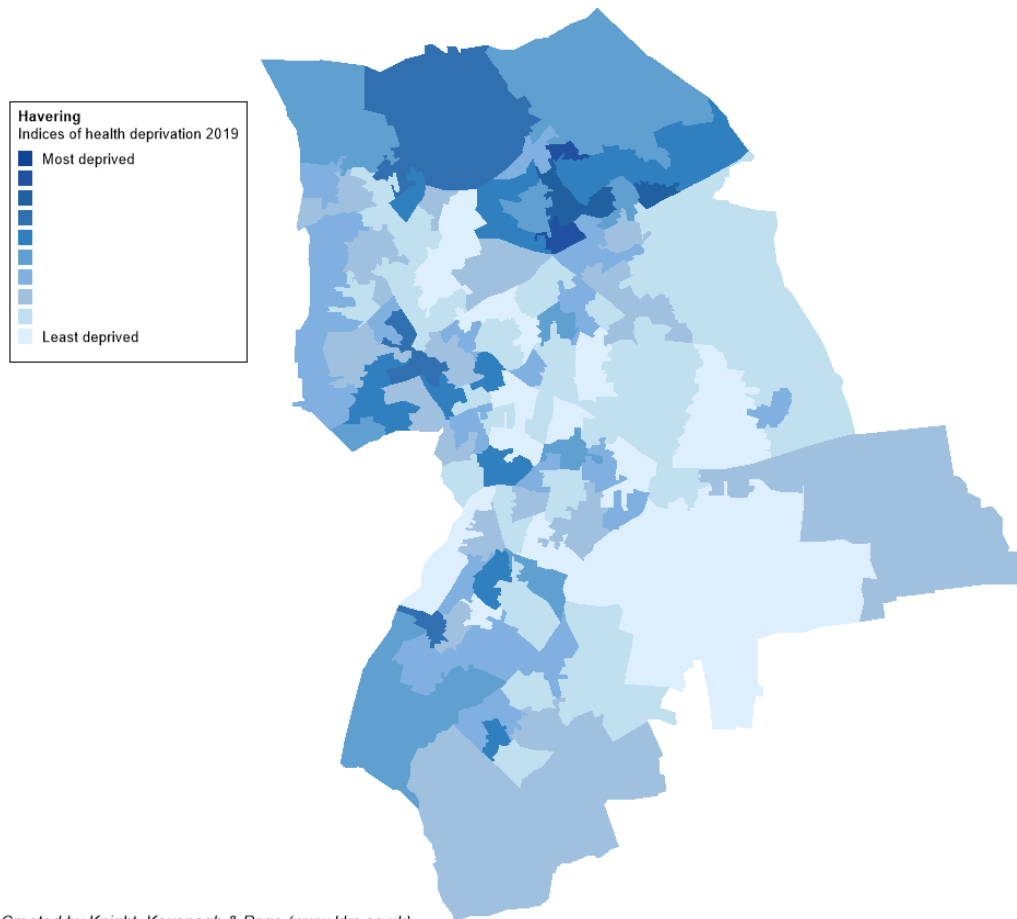


Table 2.5: IMD cohorts – health deprivation in Stevenage.

10% bands	Population in band	%	Cumulative %
Most deprived - 10.0	0	0.0%	0.0%
20.0	3,263	3.8%	3.8%
30.0	2,065	2.4%	6.2%
40.0	19,956	23.0%	29.2%
50.0	10,890	12.6%	41.8%
60.0	15,269	17.6%	59.4%
70.0	22,865	26.4%	85.8%
80.0	5,097	5.9%	91.7%
90.0	7,174	8.3%	100.0%
Least deprived - 100.0	0	0.0%	100.0%

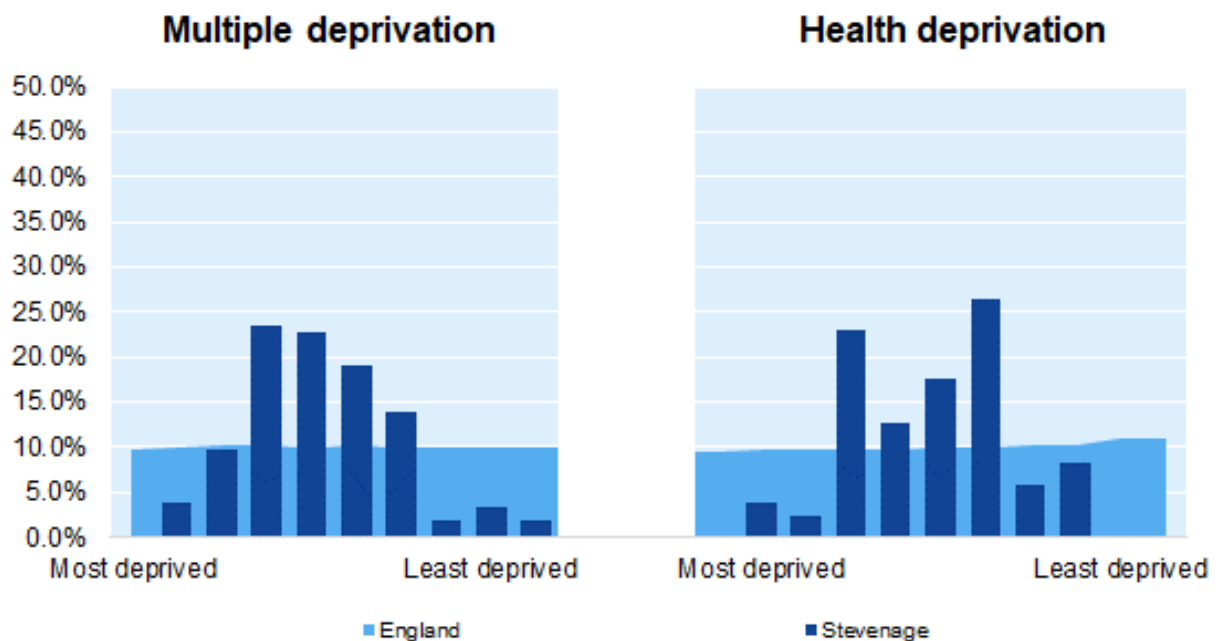
# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Figure 2.9: Stevenage - health deprivation.



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Figure 2.10: Index of multiple and health deprivation.



# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

## Health data (Data source: ONS)

Life expectancy in Stevenage is slightly higher for males than the national figure and slightly lower for females. The male rate is currently 79.5 compared to 79.4 for England, and the female equivalent is 82.8 compared to 83.1 nationally<sup>8</sup>.

## Weight and obesity (Data sources: NCMP<sup>9</sup> and NOO<sup>10</sup>)

Obesity is widely recognised to be associated with health problems such as type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer. At a national level, the resulting NHS costs attributable to overweight and obesity are projected to reach £9.7 billion by 2050, with wider costs to society estimated to reach £49.9 billion per year. These factors combine to make the prevention of obesity a major public health challenge.

Adult rates of obesity and excess weight in Stevenage are exactly the same as the national rates but above regional levels. Furthermore, child rates are below national levels but above regional rates.

Figure 2.11: Adult and child obesity rates.

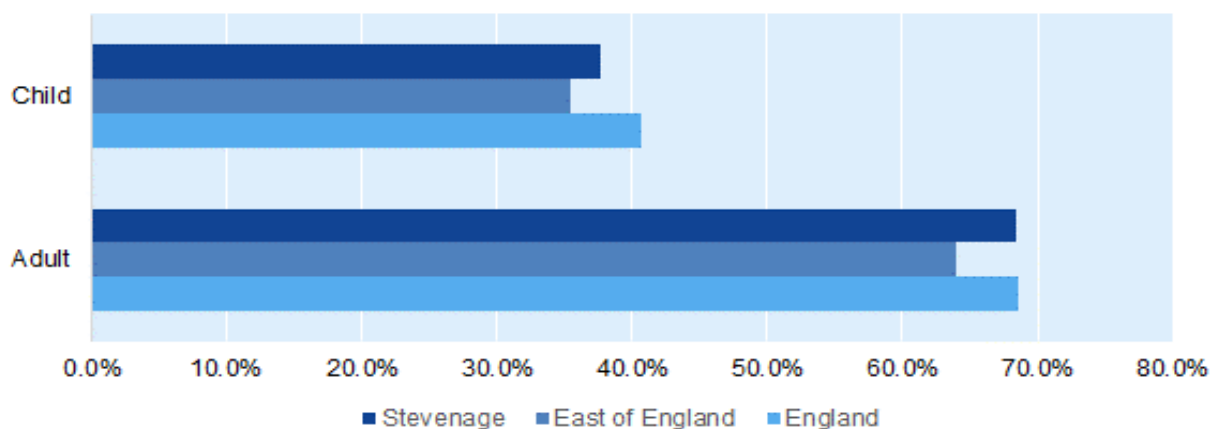
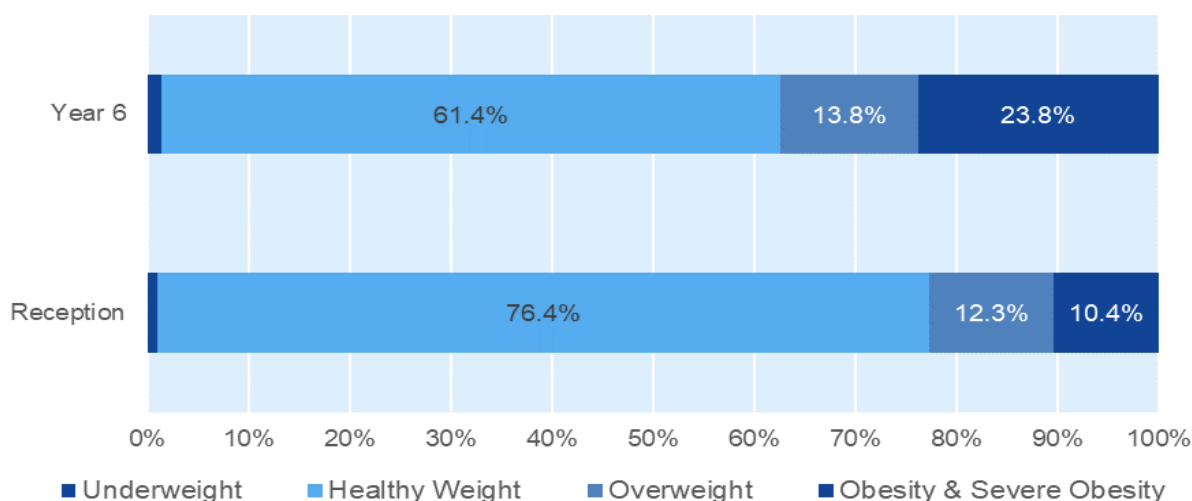


Figure 2.12: Child weight – reception and year 6.



<sup>8</sup> Office of National Statistics: Life Expectancy at Birth by local areas in the United Kingdom, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> National Child Measurement Program

<sup>10</sup> National Obesity Observatory

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As with many other areas, obesity rates in Stevenage increase significantly between the ages of 4-11. More than one in ten children (10.4%) in Stevenage are obese in their reception year at school and 12.3% are overweight. By Year 6, this rises to almost one quarter (23.8%) being obese and 13.8% overweight. In total, by Year 6, 37.6% are either overweight or obese.

### Active Lives Survey (Data Source: Sport England November 2021/22)

This is based on 16+ year olds taking part in walking, cycling, fitness, dance and other sporting activity. As identified in Table 6, a higher percentage of the Stevenage population is inactive compared to England, but a slightly lower percentage of Stevenage is inactive compared with regional levels. A lower percentage is considered to be active in Stevenage than both England and the East region. This is defined by Sport England as follows:

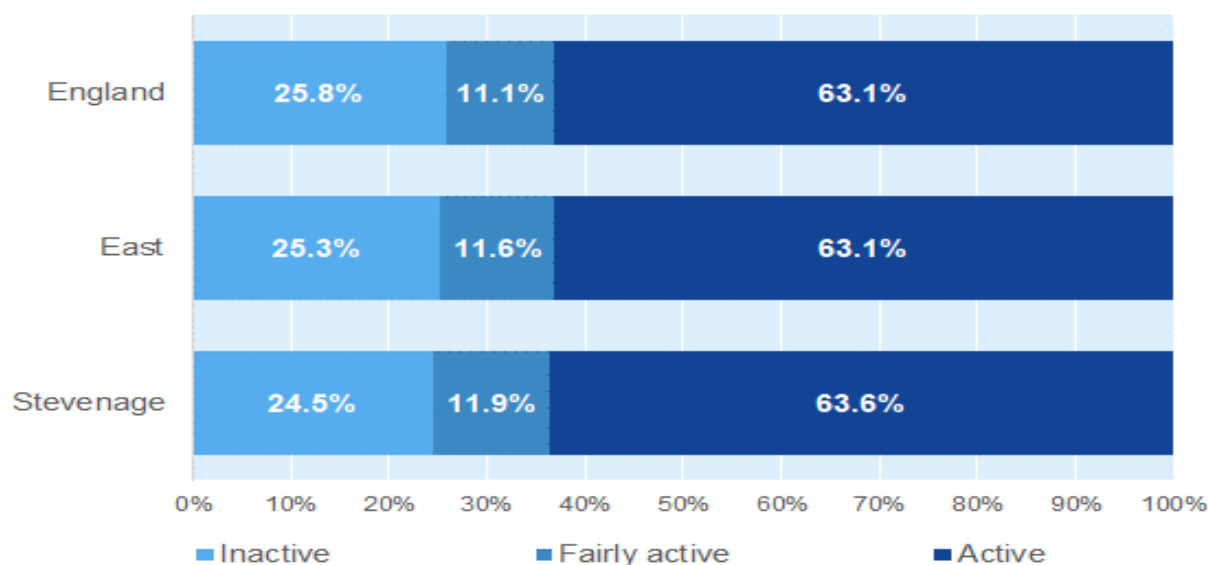
- ◀ Inactive - <30 minutes per week.
- ◀ Fairly Active – 30-149 minutes per week.
- ◀ Active – 150+ minutes per week.

Table 2.6: Active Lives Survey results: November 2021/22.

	Inactive #	Inactive %	Fairly active #	Fairly active %	Active #	Active %
England	11,874,800	25.8%	5,131,700	11.1%	29,062,000	63.1%
East	1,305,500	25.3%	599,400	11.6%	3,257,000	63.1%
Stevenage	17,400	24.5%	8,500	11.9%	45,200	63.6%

Rate/population totals for sport and physical activity levels (excluding gardening) of adults (16+) in English local authority areas.

Figure 2.13: Levels of activity (Active Lives 2021-22)



### Popular sports (Data source: Sport England Active Lives Survey November 2020/21)

As with many other areas, fitness and cycling are among the most popular activities and are known to cut across age groups and gender; in Stevenage around a quarter of adults take part in fitness activities, on average, at least twice a month. The next most popular activity is cycling which 14.5% of adults participate in on a relatively regular basis.

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Table 2.7: Most popular sports in Stevenage.

Sport	Stevenage #.	Stevenage %	East #	East %	England #	England %
Fitness	17,100	24.5%	1,264,600	25.0%	11,374,600	24.9%
Cycling	10,100	14.5%	916,500	18.1%	7,472,900	16.4%
Athletics	8,600	12.4%	694,100	13.7%	6,252,000	13.7%
Swimming	2,600	3.7%	231,200	4.6%	2,001,600	4.4%
Golf	1,700	2.4%	97,000	1.9%	763,000	1.7%

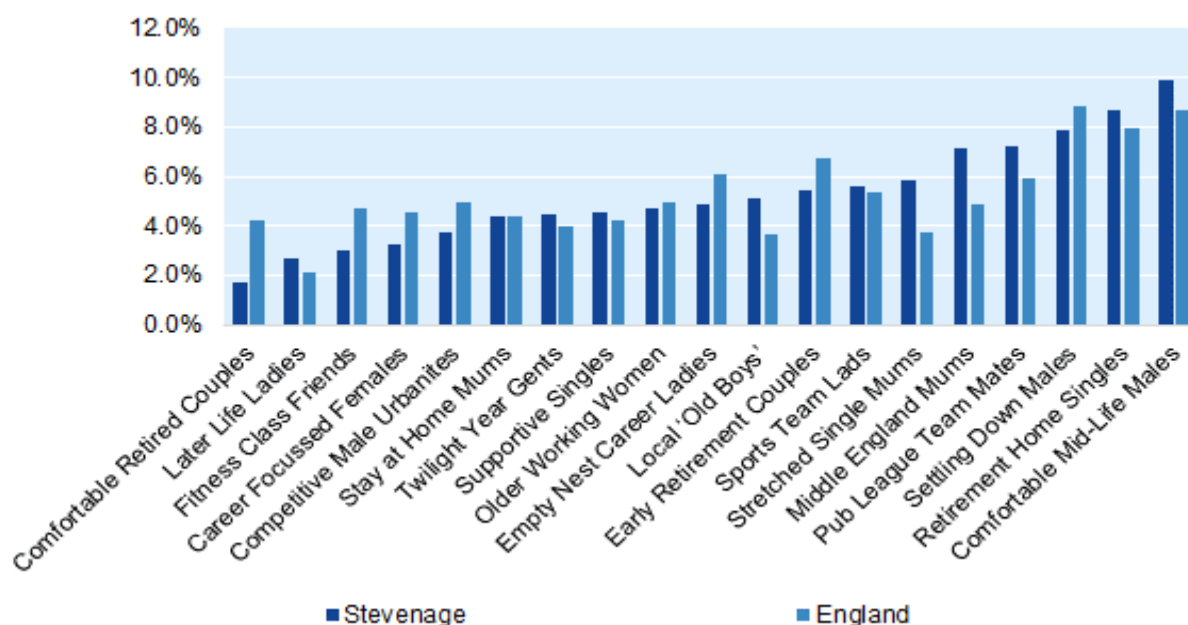
## Sporting segmentation (Data source: Sport England Sports Market Segmentation web tool)

Sport England classifies the (England) adult population via a series of 19 market segments which provide an insight into the sporting behaviours of individuals throughout the country. The profiles cover a wide range of characteristics, from gender and age to the sports that people take part in, other interests, the newspapers that they read etc.

Knowing which segments are most dominant in the local population is important as it can help direct provision and programming. Segmentation also enables partners to make tailored interventions, communicate effectively with target market(s) and better understand participation in the context of life stage and lifecycles.

The segmentation profile for Stevenage indicates 'Comfortable Mid-Life Males' to be the largest segment of the adult population at 9.9% (6,083) compared to a national average of 8.7%. This is followed by 'Retirement Home Singles' (8.7%) and 'Settling Down Males' (7.8%). At the other end of the spectrum, there are fewest 'Comfortable Retired Couples' with only 1.7%, 'Later Life Ladies' (2.7%) and 'Fitness Class Friends' (3.0%).

Figure 2.14: Sport England Market Segmentation – Stevenage compared to England.



# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

**Mosaic** (Data source: 2023 Mosaic analysis, Experian)

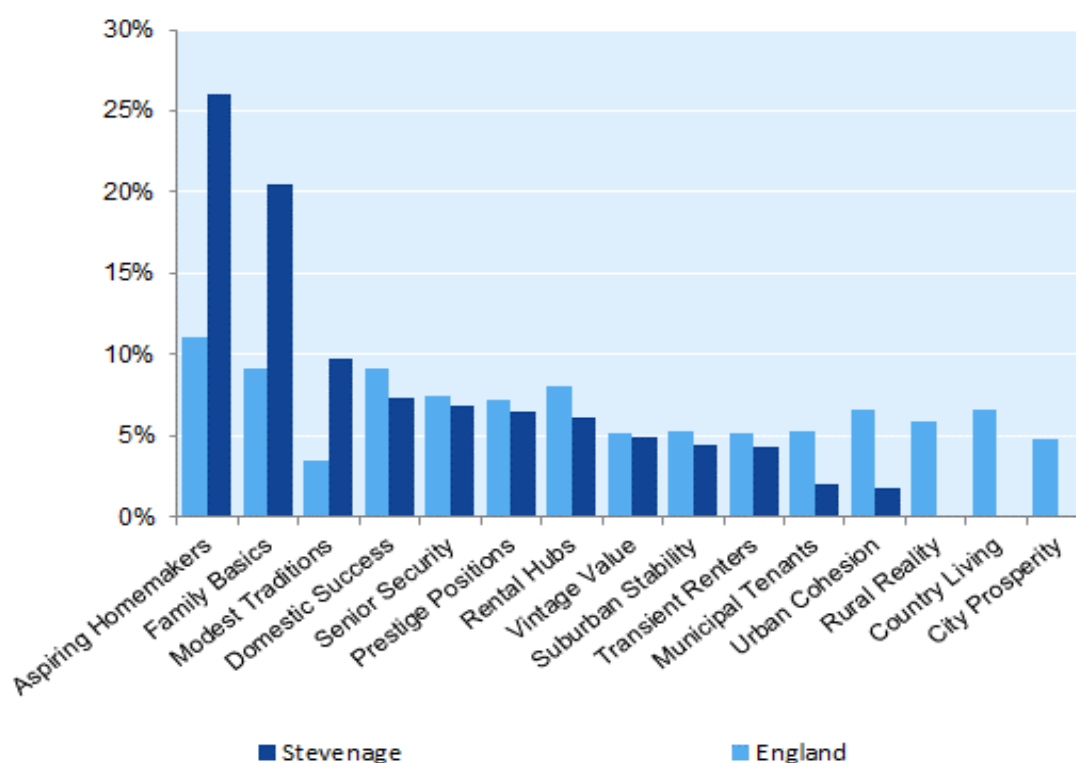
Mosaic 2023 is a similar consumer segmentation product. It classifies all 28.6 million households into 15 groups, 66 household types and 238 segments. This data is then used to paint a picture of UK consumers in terms of their social-demographics, lifestyles, culture and behaviour and tends to be used to draw out population characteristics for the backdrop to library usage and other non-sporting activities. The following table shows the top five Mosaic classifications in Stevenage compared to the country as a whole. The dominance of these five can be seen inasmuch as they represent 7 in 10 (70.2%) of the population compared to a national equivalent rate of just over 4 in 10 (40.2%).

Table 2.7: Mosaic – main population segments in Stevenage.

Mosaic group description	Stevenage #	Stevenage %	National %
1 - Aspiring Homemakers	23,231	26.0%	11.0%
2 - Family Basics	18,332	20.5%	9.1%
3 - Modest Traditions	8,707	9.7%	3.5%
4 - Domestic Success	6,506	7.3%	9.1%
5 - Senior Security	6,053	6.8%	7.4%

The largest segment profiled for Stevenage is the Aspiring Homemakers group, making up 26.0% of the adult population in the area, this is more than double the England rate (11.0%). This group is defined as younger households who have, often, only recently set up home. They usually own their homes in private suburbs, which they have chosen to fit their budget.

Figure 2.15: Mosaic segmentation – Stevenage compared to nationally.

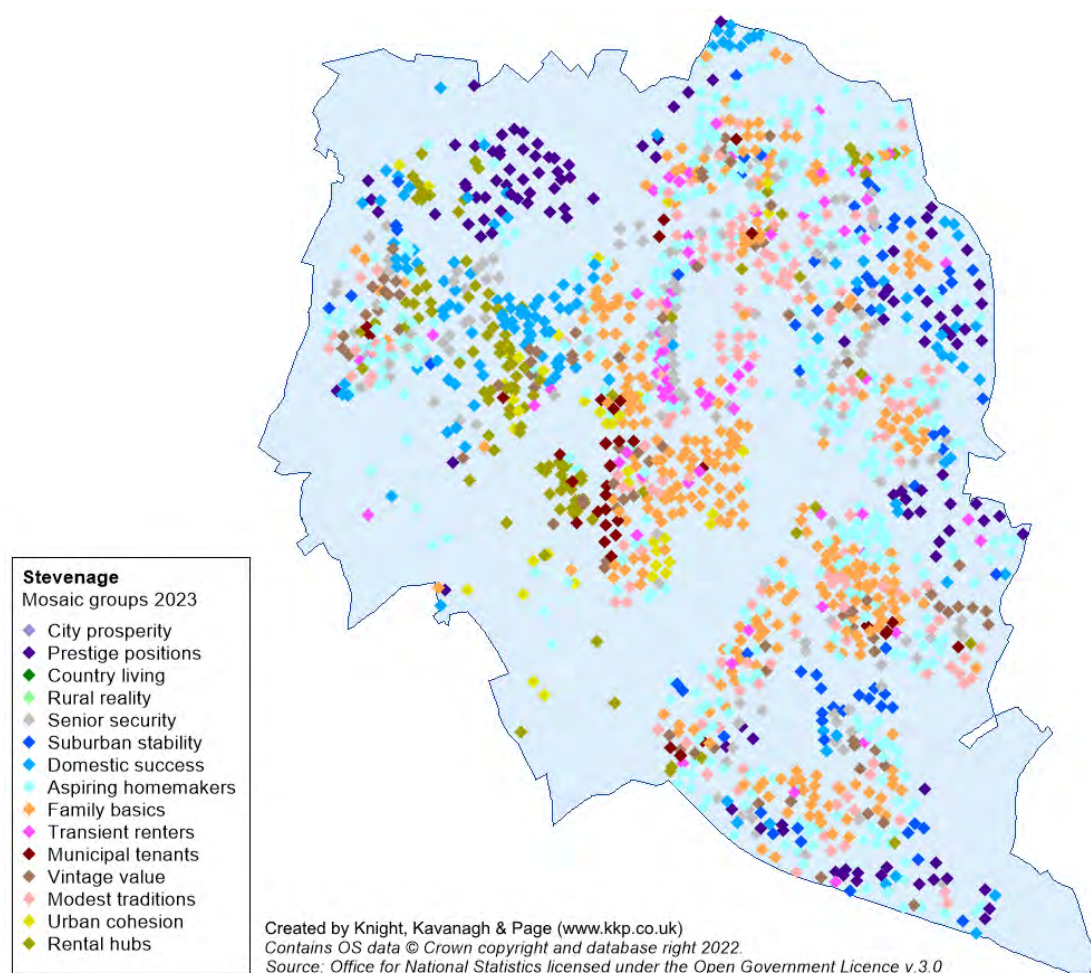


# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Table 2.8: Dominant Mosaic profiles in Stevenage.

Aspiring Homemakers	Younger households who have, often, only recently set up home. They usually own their homes in private suburbs, which they have chosen to fit their budget.
Family Basics	Families with children who have limited budgets and can struggle to make ends meet. Their homes are low cost and are often found in areas with fewer employment options.
Modest Traditions	Older people living in inexpensive homes that they own, often with the mortgage nearly paid off. Both incomes and qualifications are modest, but most enjoy a reasonable standard of living. They are long-settled residents having lived in their neighbourhoods for many years.

Figure 2.16: Distribution of Mosaic segments in Stevenage



## Population projections (Data source: 2018-based population projections, ONS)

Strategic planning: change over 13 years (2018 to 2031)

The most recent ONS projections indicate a rise of 2.1% in Stevenage’s population (+1,848) over the 13 years from 2018 to 2031. Over this timeframe there are fluctuations at different points across the majority of age groups.

## STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

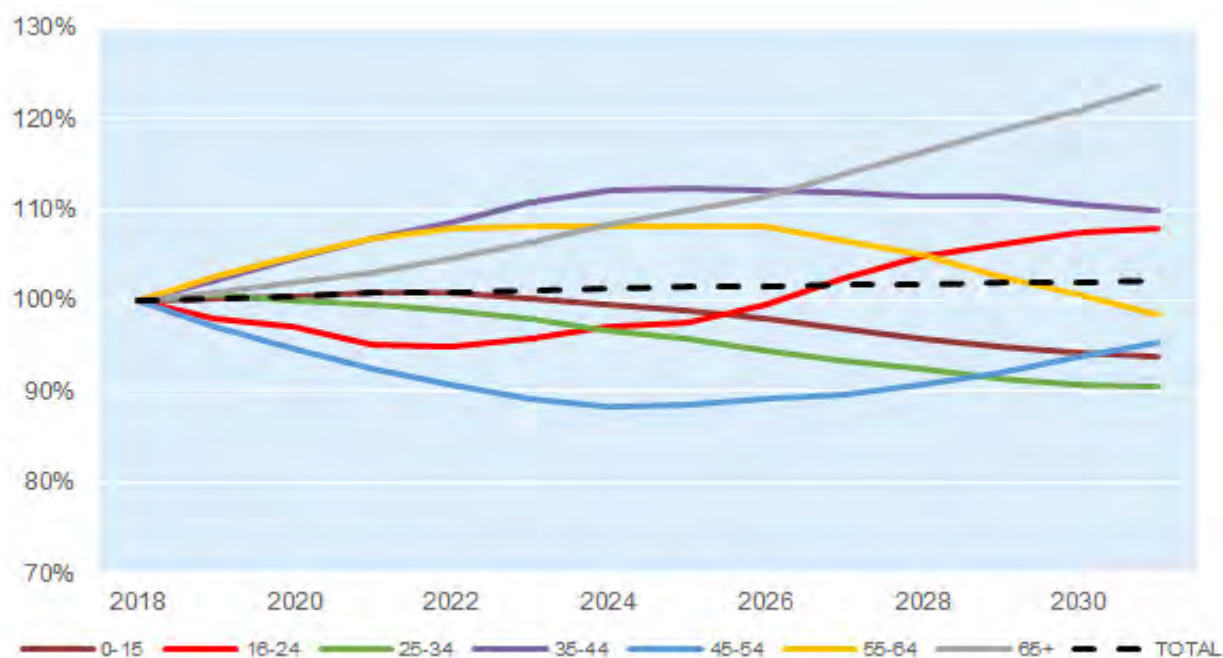
Key points for Stevenage are that:

- ◆ The number of 0-15 year olds, rose by +1,160 (+1.3%) over the first half of the projection (to 2024).
- ◆ There was a predicted decrease in the number of 16-24 year olds, -2.8% in the first period (+239) followed by an increase of 10.9% (-909) in the second period.
- ◆ There is a continuous increase in the numbers of persons aged 65+. There was an increase of +8.4% (+1,160) in the first period and numbers will continue to rise to +23.5% (+3,136) between 2018 and 2031. While the age group represented 15.2% of Stevenage's population in 2018 it is projected to be 18.4% of the total by 2031 - almost one fifth of the population.

Table 2.9: Stevenage – ONS projected population (2018 to 2031)

Age (years)	2018 #	2024 #	2031 #	2018 %	2024 %	2031 %	2024 Change	2031 Change
0-15	18,221	18,124	17,083	20.8%	20.4%	19.1%	99.5%	93.8%
16-24	8,537	8,298	9,207	9.7%	9.3%	10.3%	97.2%	107.8%
25-34	13,043	12,604	11,793	14.9%	14.2%	13.2%	96.6%	90.4%
35-44	11,768	13,190	12,935	13.4%	14.8%	14.4%	112.1%	109.9%
45-54	12,429	10,971	11,847	14.2%	12.3%	13.2%	88.3%	95.3%
55-64	10,415	11,270	10,261	11.9%	12.7%	11.5%	108.2%	98.5%
65+	13,341	14,458	16,477	15.2%	16.3%	18.4%	108.4%	123.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>87,754</b>	<b>88,914</b>	<b>89,602</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>101.3%</b>	<b>102.1%</b>

Figure 2.17: Projected population change (2018 – 2031). Data source ONS 2018 projections



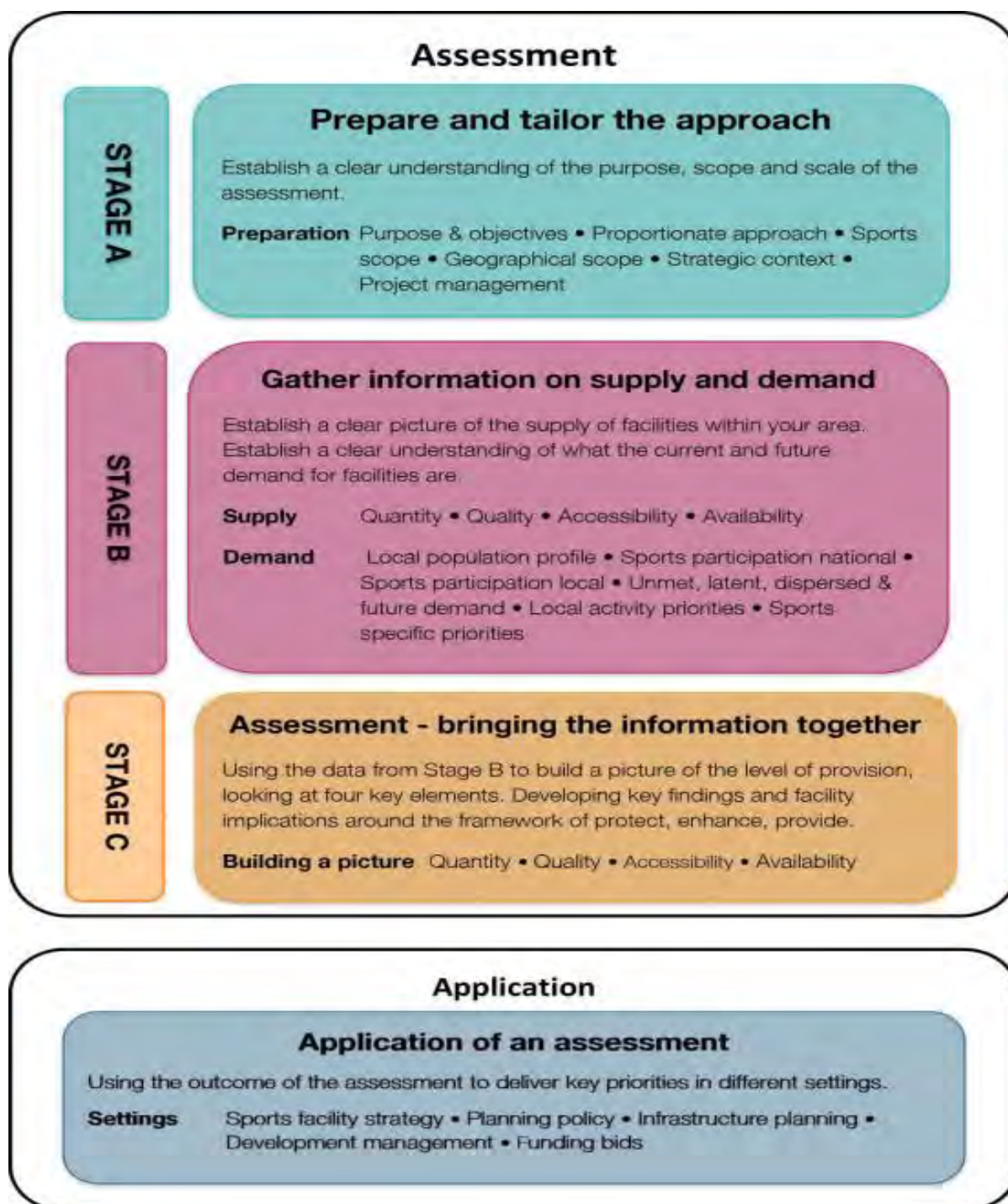
# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

## SECTION 3: SPORTS FACILITIES ASSESSMENT

### 3.1: Methodology

As noted above, the assessment of provision is based on the Sport England Sport England Assessing Needs and Opportunities Guide (ANOG) for indoor and outdoor sports facilities.

Figure 3.1: Recommended approach



This is the recommended approach to undertaking a robust assessment of need for indoor and outdoor sports facilities (excluding playing pitch provision which has been assessed separately within the Playing Pitch Strategy and uses Sport England's Playing Pitch Strategy Guidance).

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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ANOG has been produced to help (local authorities) meet the requirements of the Government's NPPF, which states that: 'Access to high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation can make an important contribution to the health and well-being of communities. Planning policies should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the needs for open space, sports and recreation facilities and opportunities for new provision. Information gained from the assessments should be used to determine what open space, sport and recreational provision is needed, which plans should then seek to accommodate.' (NPPF, Paragraph 98).

Provision assessment involves analysis of quality, quantity, accessibility and availability for the identified facility types (e.g., sports halls and swimming pools). Each venue is considered on a 'like for like' basis within its own facility type, to enable it to be assessed for adequacy.

Demand background, data and consultation is variable, depending upon levels of consultation garnered. In some instances, national data is available whilst in others, it is possible to drill down and get some very detailed local information. This is evident within the demand section.

The report considers the distribution of and interrelationship between facility types in the Authority and provides a clear indication of areas of high demand. It identifies where there is potential to provide improved and/or additional facilities to meet this demand and, where appropriate, to protect or rationalise the current stock.

## 3.2: Site visits

Active Places Power (APP) is used to provide baseline data to identify facilities in the study area. Where possible, assessments are undertaken in the presence of facility staff. This tends to add value as it enables access to be gained to more areas within venues and more detailed in-situ discussion of issues such as customer perspectives, quality, maintenance etc. Where possible it adds value to the audit (which is a 'snapshot' visit) enhancing the accuracy of insight gathered about the general user experience.

Site visits to key indoor facilities, those operated by other partners and the voluntary sector were undertaken. Where a physical visit was not possible a telephone consultation with the facility/site manager was delivered. Via the audit and via informal interviews with facility managers this report identifies 'relevance' and 'condition' and describes (e.g.):

- ◀ Facility and scale.
- ◀ Usage/local market.
- ◀ Ownership, management and access arrangements (plus, where available, facility owner aspirations).
- ◀ Management, programming, catchments, user groups, gaps.
- ◀ Location (urban/rural), access and accessibility.
- ◀ Condition, maintenance, existing improvement plans, facility 'investment status' (lifespan in the short, medium and long term).
- ◀ Existing/ planned adjacent facilities.

The assessment forms utilised capture quantity and quality data on a site-by-site basis and feeds directly into the main database allowing information to be stored and analysed. Quality assessments undertaken are rated in the categories set out in Table 3.1 overleaf. These ratings are applied throughout the report, regardless of facility type.

Ratings are based on non-technical visual assessments. These consider facility age and condition. Surfaces, tiles and walls, line markings and safety equipment are considered and problem areas such as mould, damage, leaks etc. are noted. The condition of fixtures, fittings and equipment is recorded.

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Maintenance and facility ‘wear and tear’ is considered as is compliant with the Equality Act, although this is not studied in detail for the purposes of this report. When all data is collated, key facility elements receive an overall quality rating.

Table 3.1: Quality ratings of indoor sports facilities using ANOG

Quality rating	Description
<b>Good</b>	Facility is new (less than 10 years old) or recently invested in, up to date, clean, well maintained and presented. Fixtures, fittings, equipment and sports surfaces are new or relatively new with little if any wear and tear. They are well-lit with a modern feel. Ancillary facilities are new or well maintained, fit for purpose, modern and attractive.
<b>Above average</b>	Facility is in reasonable condition and is well maintained and presented. May be older but it is fit for purpose and safe. Fixtures, fittings, equipment and sports surfaces are in an acceptable condition but may show some signs of wear and tear. Ancillary facilities are good quality, but potentially showing signs of age and some wear and tear.
<b>Below average</b>	Facility is older and showing signs of age/poor quality. Fixtures, fittings, equipment and sports surfaces show signs of wear and tear. It is usable, but quality could be improved. The facility is not as attractive to customers and does not meet current expectations. Ancillary facilities are deteriorating, reasonable quality, but usable.
<b>Poor</b>	The facility is old and outdated. Fixtures, fittings, equipment and sports surfaces are aged, worn and/or damaged. The facility is barely usable and at times may have to be taken out of commission. The facility is unattractive to customers and does not meet basic expectations. Ancillary facilities are low quality and unattractive to use.

### 3.3: Catchment areas

Applying catchments areas for facility types listed in Sections 3-10 enables identification of areas currently not served. These vary from person to person, day to day, hour to hour. This problem is overcome by accepting the concept of ‘effective catchment’; the distance travelled by around 75-80% of users (used in the Sport England Facilities Planning Model - FPM). Sport England data indicates that most people will travel up to 20 minutes to access sports facilities. This, coupled with KKP’s experience of working in/with leisure facilities and use of local data enables identification of catchment areas for sports facilities as follows.

Table 3.2: Facility catchment areas

Facility type	Identified catchment area
Sport halls, health and fitness, swimming pools, squash courts.	20-minutes’ walk/ 20 minutes’ drive
Indoor bowls/tennis centre, gymnastics provision.	30-minutes’ drive

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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## SECTION 4: SPORTS HALLS

Indoor multi-purpose sports halls are prime venues for community sport enabling a range of sport and recreational activities to be played. The standard methodology for measuring sports halls is the number of badminton courts contained within the floor area.

They are generally considered to be of greatest value if of at least 3+ badminton courts in size with sufficient height to allow games such as badminton to be played. However, 4+court sports halls provide greater flexibility as they can accommodate major indoor team sports such as football (5-a-side and training), basketball and netball. They also tend to have sufficient length to accommodate indoor cricket nets and indoor athletics and, thus, offer more sports development flexibility than their 3-court counterpart. There is often variance in the dimensions of 4-court halls, and only those which meet current Sport England Design Guidance of 34.5m x 20m can accommodate the full range of indoor sports, especially competition/league activities.

Larger halls, for example those with six or eight courts, can accommodate higher level training and/or competition and meet day-to-day need. They also provide an option for more than one pitch/court increasing flexibility for training and competition and hosting of indoor central venue leagues for sports such as netball. This assessment considers all 3+ court facilities in Stevenage. Halls that function as specialist sports venues (e.g., dance studios) are excluded.

In 2025 the Council commissioned Sport England to produce a Facilities Planning Model (FPM) analysis to better understand the future demand for sports hall provision based on changes to facilities and population growth. Where relevant, data from the FPM has been included in this section.

### 4.1: Supply

#### Quantity

There are 14 sports halls accommodating 37 badminton courts. Some venues have more than one activity/sports hall on site.

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Figure 4.1: All sports / activity halls in Stevenage – regardless of size

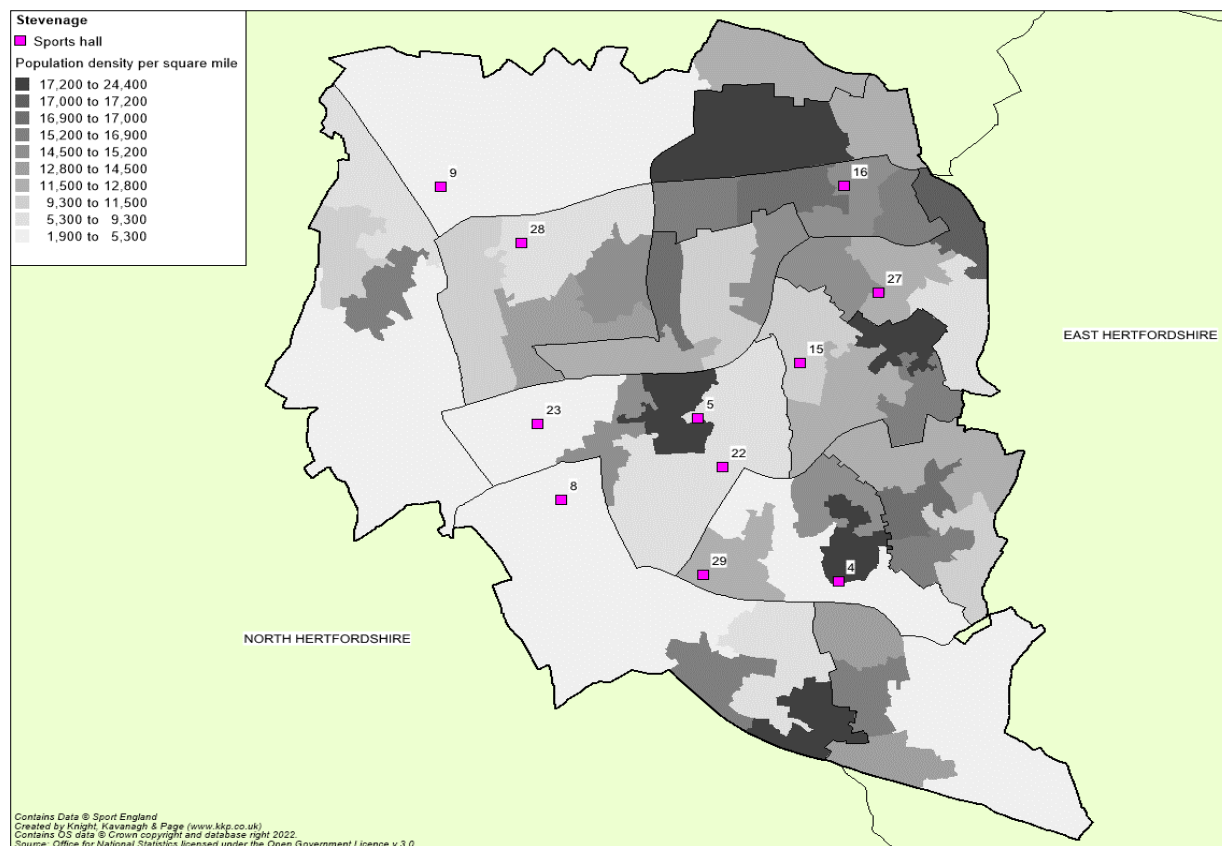


Table 4.1: All sports / activity halls in Stevenage

KKP ref	Site	Courts
4	Barnwell School	4
5	Bedwell Community Centre	1
8	GlaxoSmithKline	4
9	John Henry Newman School	4
15	Marriotts Sports Centre	4
16	Martins Wood Primary School	1
16	Martins Wood Primary School	1
22	St Nicholas CE School & Nursery	1
23	Stevenage Arts & Leisure Centre	8
27	The Nobel School	4
27	The Nobel School	1
28	The Thomas Alleyne Academy	3
28	The Thomas Alleyne Academy	0
29	The Valley School	1

(0 court halls identified in Active Places but not large enough to accommodate 1 badminton court)

Sports halls are well distributed throughout the Authority. Most are located in its densely populated areas. The exception is along the southern border of Stevenage, where population density is high and there is no sports hall provision. Seven of the sports/activity halls have two or fewer badminton courts marked out. While often appropriate for mat sports, exercise to music and similar provision, the size of these smaller halls limits the range and scale of recreational/sporting activity that can be accommodated.

## STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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The current sports hall facilities are based on outdated Sport England standards. Any new provisions will require larger spaces, and if current standards were applied to the existing sports halls, the number of courts would decrease.

Several sites have more than one activity/sports hall. One example is John Henry Newman School, which has two. As noted above, only sites with sports halls containing three or more marked badminton courts were subject to assessment for the purpose of the needs assessment as these can accommodate a range of sports and be potentially used by the community depending on the access policy. Seven sports halls in Stevenage have 3+ marked badminton courts (31 badminton courts in total).

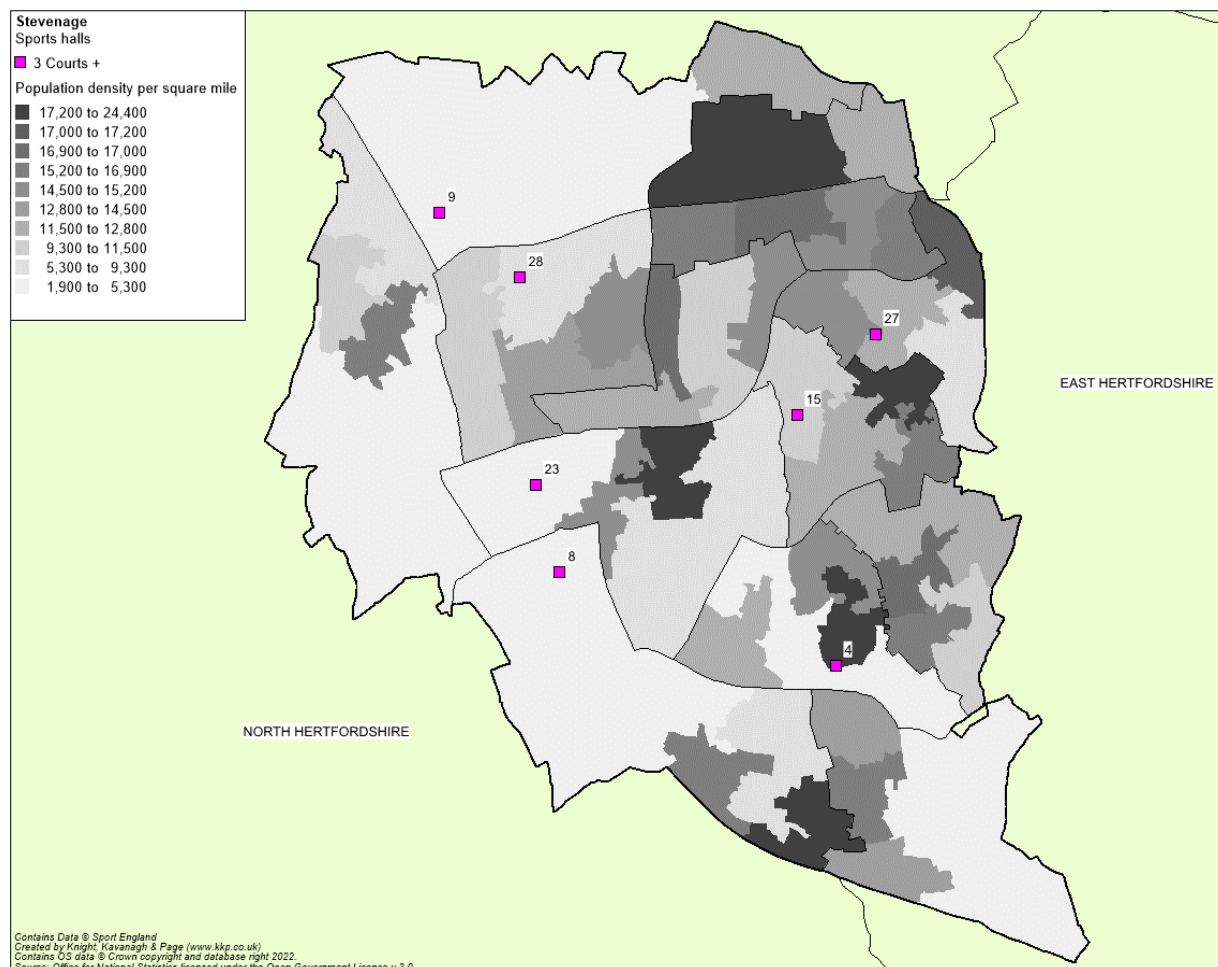
Sports halls with 3+ courts are well distributed. As with most authorities the 4-court sports hall is the most common size hall. A larger sports hall (4+ courts) can cater for sports that require more floor space such as futsal and handball or can offer multiple courts for events and competitions. The largest sports hall in Stevenage is located at Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre, which has 8 marked badminton courts. Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre is located close to the town centre which has good public transport links.

Table 4.2: Sports halls with 3+ badminton courts

Map ID	Site name	Courts
4	Barnwell School	4
8	GlaxoSmithKline	4
9	John Henry Newman School	4
15	Marriotts Sports Centre	4
23	Stevenage Arts & Leisure Centre	8
27	The Nobel School	4
28	The Thomas Alleyne Academy	3
-	<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Figure 4.2: Sports halls with 3+ courts on population density



## Facility quality

All 3+ court sports halls were subject to non-technical assessment to ascertain quality. Assessments took place between August and October 2024. Any investment made after this date is not accounted for. Known or planned investment is mentioned in the site notes.

Table 4.3: Quality of 3+ sports halls

KKP ref	Site	Courts	Condition
4	Barnwell School	4	Below average
8	GlaxoSmithKline	4	Above average
9	John Henry Newman School	4	Poor
15	Marriotts Sports Centre	4	Below average
23	Stevenage Arts & Leisure Centre	8	Below average
27	The Nobel School	4	Above average
28	The Thomas Alleyne Academy	3	Poor

As shown, Stevenage has two above average quality sports halls, three of below average quality and two poor quality halls. Changing room provision for sports halls at educational sites was largely unassessed due to pupil use at the time of the site visit. In general, their quality is commensurate with that of the adjacent sports hall. School changing facilities tend to be less modern than those provided at public leisure sites.

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Figure 4.3: Quality of 3+ sports halls on population density

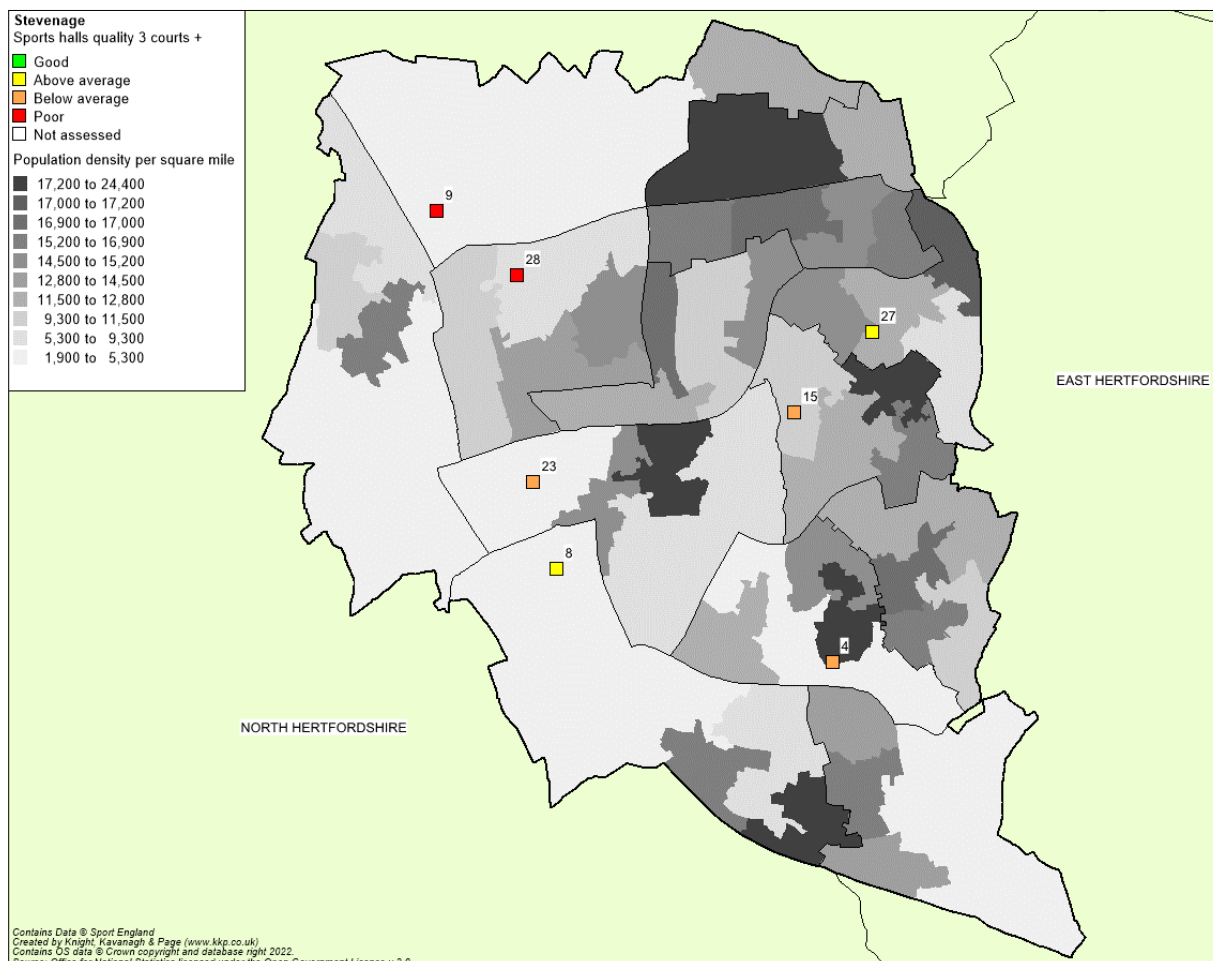


Table 4.4: Reported quality issues at below average and poor-quality sports halls

Site name	Rating	Audit findings
Barnwell School	Below average	This is It is a large hall with good run off space which is 22 years old and has had little refurbishment. The roof is prone to leaks and there is an ongoing issue with the air conditioning.
John Henry Newman School	Poor	This has a hard granwood floor which is ageing. Run off space is limited, lighting is poor and the décor is old fashioned and unattractive. The roof is affected by moisture during wet weather.
Marriotts Sports Centre	Below average	Despite only being 11 years old, the roof is prone to leaks which has had a negative impact on the quality of the floor and caused dead spots on the back wall. The floor was sanded in 2022, the line markings are good and run off space is reasonable.
Stevenage Arts & Leisure Centre	Below average	The floor is patched up due to age, wear and tear. The hall can be sub-divided and is also used as a theatre. It has bleacher seating for up to 500 people. Wall décor is suitable for badminton, and lighting is of reasonable quality.
The Thomas Alleyne Academy	Poor	An old sports hall (built 1989) with little if any refurbishment since. The roof is prone to leaks and the walls have been water damaged. Decor is dated and in need of modernisation.

## STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The lack of recent investment into sports hall space is a significant factor in quality ratings. No sports hall in the Borough has received significant investment in the last ten years. Barnwell School serves the south of Stevenage and is located close to four areas of higher deprivation. Overall, the audit illustrates that there are significant challenges in respect of sports hall quality in Stevenage. Residents in the north of the borough live closer to poor quality halls but are also nearer to the (above average quality) sports hall at the Nobel School. This is in contrast to the rest of the Authority, where sports hall quality is generally below average.

The Nobel School sports hall opened in 2012. It features good lighting levels and the sprung wooden floor is in reasonable condition. Line markings are good and run off space is generous for badminton. The wall colour is teal, and therefore suitable for badminton. The hall at GlaxoSmithKline could not be assessed in person as GSK did not initially respond to consultation request. Consultation was carried out virtually to gauge facility quality. It confirmed that the sports hall floor and décor is regularly refurbished to keep the facility attractive for its members.

Table 4.5: Date of opening and refurbishment of sports halls

Site	Year built / opened	Last refurbished	Age since opened/refurbished
Barnwell School	2002	n/a	22
GlaxoSmithKline	1995	n/a	29
John Henry Newman School	1989	n/a	35
Marriotts Sports Centre	2013	n/a	11
Stevenage Arts & Leisure Centre	1975	2011	13
The Nobel School	2012	n/a	12
The Thomas Alleyne Academy	1989	2005	19

### Accessibility

Sports hall accessibility is influenced by how far people are willing and able to travel to and from them. Walk and drive-time catchments are applied to determine facility accessibility to different communities. The normal (industry) standard is a 20-minute walk time (one-mile radial catchment) for urban areas and a 20-minute drive time for rural areas.

Table 4.6: Accessibility to sports halls with 3+ courts

IMD 10% bands	Persons	Population %	Persons inside catchment	Population inside (%)	Persons outside catchment	Population outside (%)
0 - 10	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
10.1 - 20	3,263	3.8%	3,263	3.8%	0	0.0%
20.1 - 30	8,491	9.8%	8,491	9.8%	0	0.0%
30.1 - 40	20,265	23.4%	17,738	20.5%	2,527	2.9%
40.1 - 50	19,680	22.7%	18,679	21.6%	1,001	1.2%
50.1 - 60	16,565	19.1%	13,665	15.8%	2,900	3.3%
60.1 - 70	12,099	14.0%	11,223	13.0%	876	1.0%
70.1 - 80	1,657	1.9%	1,577	1.8%	80	0.1%
80.1 - 90	2,964	3.4%	2,964	3.4%	0	0.0%
90.1 - 100	1,595	1.8%	1,595	1.8%	0	0.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>86,579</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>79,195</b>	<b>91.5%</b>	<b>7,384</b>	<b>8.5%</b>

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

In Stevenage, 91.5% of residents live within a one mile walk of a sports hall. This reduces to 91.1% of residents when applying the same calculation to sports halls with community access. There are 11,754 people in Stevenage living in defined areas of higher deprivation (0-30% IMD bands) all of whom live within 1-mile of a community use sports hall.

Figure 4.4: All sports halls with 3+ courts on IMD with one-mile radial catchments

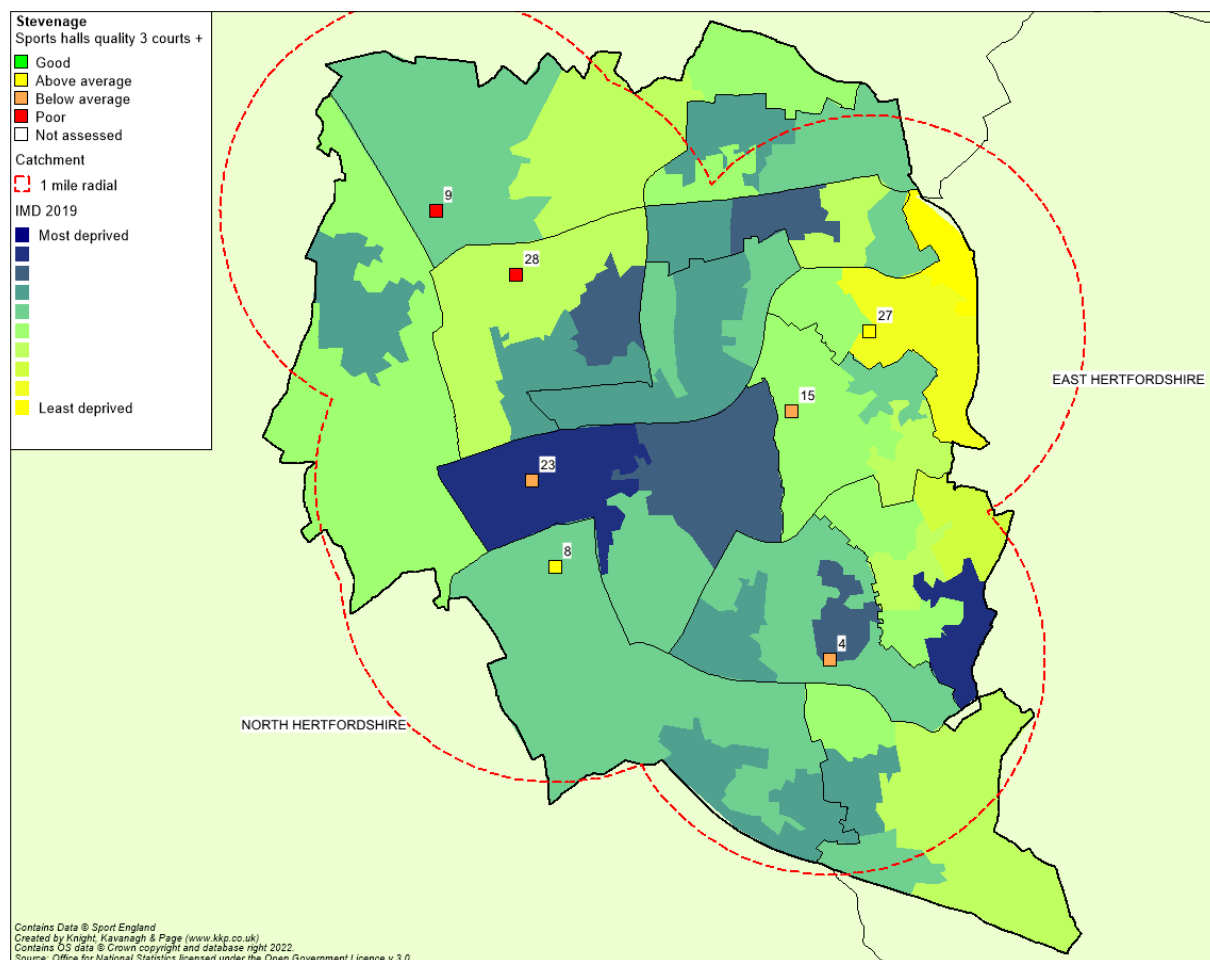


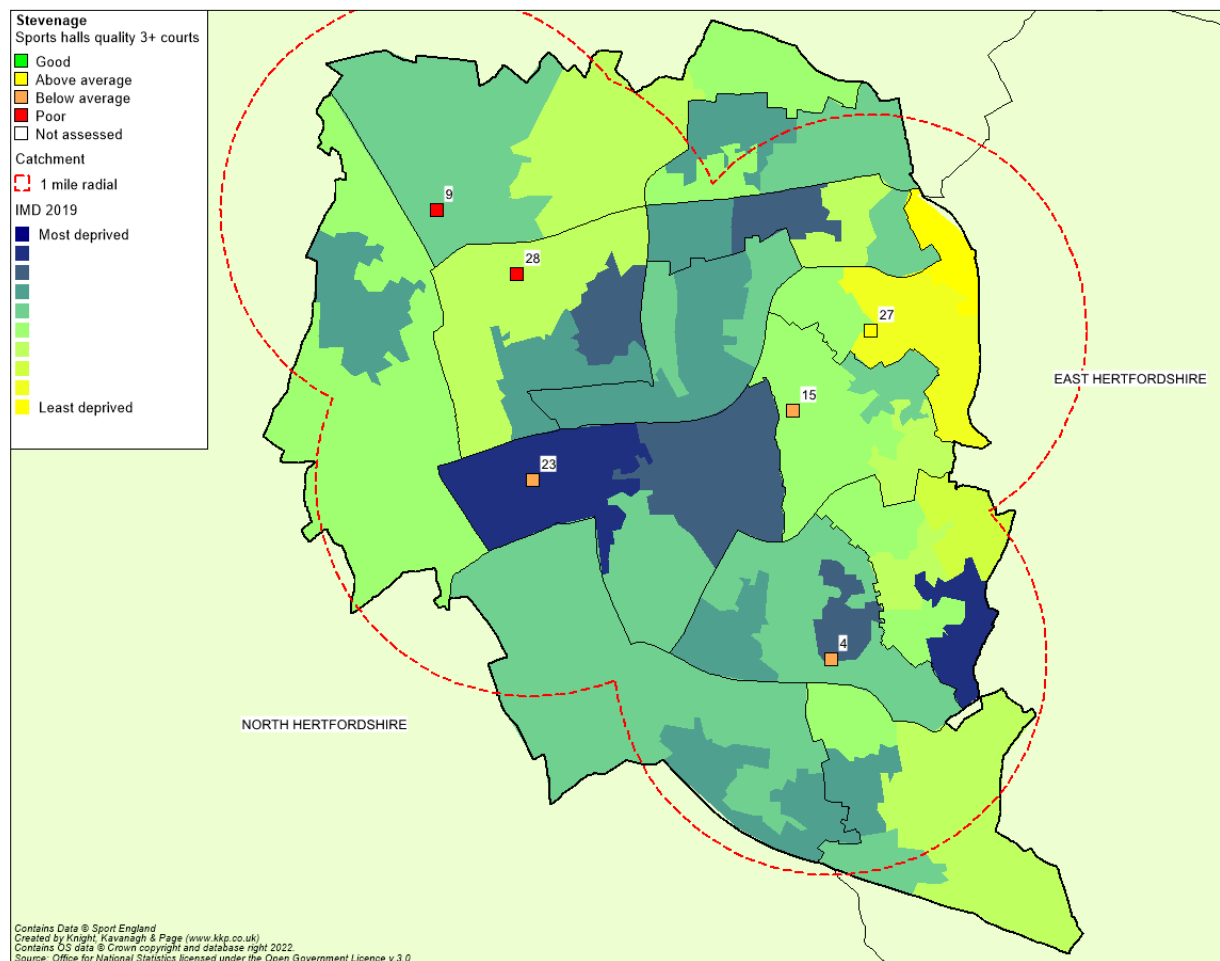
Table 4.7: Accessibility to community use sports halls with 3+ courts

IMD 10% bands	Persons	Population %	Persons inside catchment	Population inside (%)	Persons outside catchment	Population outside (%)
0 - 10	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
10.1 - 20	3,263	3.8%	3,263	3.8%	0	0.0%
20.1 - 30	8,491	9.8%	8,491	9.8%	0	0.0%
30.1 - 40	20,265	23.4%	17,738	20.5%	2,527	2.9%
40.1 - 50	19,680	22.7%	18,327	21.2%	1,353	1.6%
50.1 - 60	16,565	19.1%	13,663	15.8%	2,902	3.4%
60.1 - 70	12,099	14.0%	11,223	13.0%	876	1.0%
70.1 - 80	1,657	1.9%	1,577	1.8%	80	0.1%
80.1 - 90	2,964	3.4%	2,964	3.4%	0	0.0%
90.1 - 100	1,595	1.8%	1,595	1.8%	0	0.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>86,579</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>78,841</b>	<b>91.1%</b>	<b>7,738</b>	<b>8.9%</b>

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

It is reported that 21.2% of the Borough population do not have access to a car (2021 Census). This means that 21,806 people in Stevenage are reliant on public transport or walking/cycling to get to a sports hall. This can add to the cost of participation.

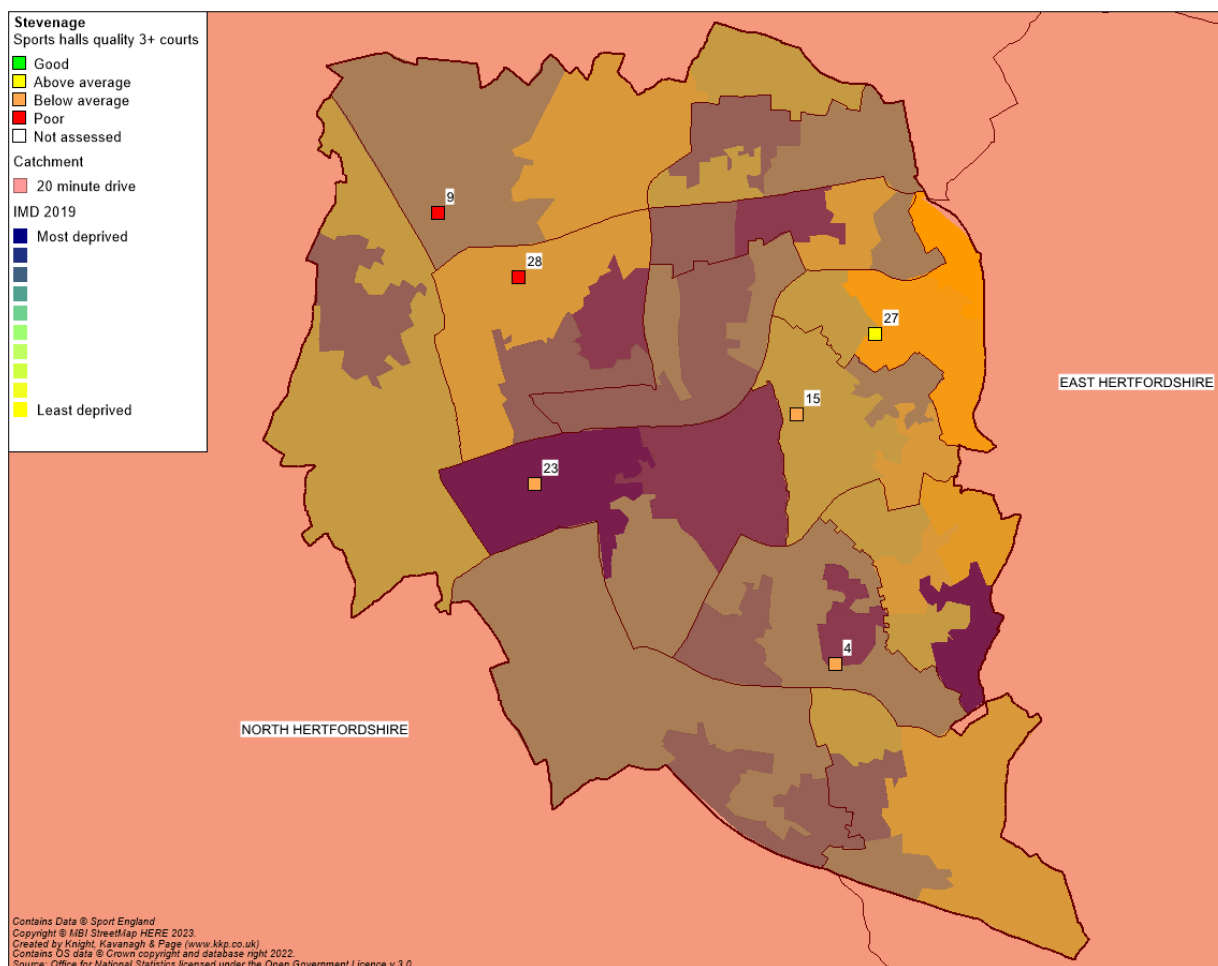
Figure 4.5: Community use sports halls with 3+ courts on IMD with one-mile radial catchments



All of Stevenage’s population lives within a 20-minute drive of a publicly accessible sports hall with 3+ badminton courts, or a sports hall of equivalent dimensions.

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Figure 4.6: Sports halls on IMD background based on 20-minute drive time catchment.



## Facilities in neighbouring authorities

Accessibility is influenced by facilities located outside the authority. No sports halls are located in neighbouring authorities within 2-miles of the Stevenage boundary. This is, in part, attributed in part to the rural nature of the wider Hertfordshire area.

## Availability and facility management

Table 4.9 overleaf illustrates that management and ownership of 3+court sports halls varies across the Authority. Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre is the sole venue owned by the Council. All school sports halls are meanwhile managed in house.

The sports hall at GlaxoSmithKline is the only facility to not offer community use. It is only available to employees of GSK. Consultation with GSK outlines that it has no intention to open the facility up to the wider public in the near future.

Once community unavailable sports halls are removed from analysis, six sports halls containing 27 courts in Stevenage are available to the public.

## STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Table 4.8: Ownership and management of 3+ court sports hall facilities with community access

Site name	Ownership	Management
Barnwell School	Secondary school	In house
GlaxoSmithKline	GSK	In house
John Henry Newman School	Secondary school	In house
Marriotts Sports Centre	Secondary school	In house
Stevenage Arts & Leisure Centre	Stevenage Council	Everyone Active
The Nobel School	Secondary school	In house
The Thomas Alleyne Academy	Secondary school	In house

Only Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre provides daytime (off peak) availability to its users. Availability during the day and relevant programming can be important (and attractive) for residents who wish to use facilities at such times (such as older people and shift workers). Given that the number of older people in the authority is increasing, providing adequate daytime available sports hall space is important to servicing the needs of this part of the population.

Not unreasonably, school site availability is normally limited to evenings and weekends. This significantly lowers the number of hours during which five of the six community available sports hall facilities are available to Stevenage residents.

Four of the five school sites provide community use seven days per week. The Thomas Alleyne School does not open on Sundays due to a planning condition imposed when the facility was built. As a result, it is only available for 31 hours per week, 28 of which are during the peak period. Moving forward, it would like to increase the number of community use hours it makes available by amending this agreement.

Peak period hours are calculated using Sport England guidance in line with the Facilities Planning Model (FPM). Between 09:00-10:00 and 17:00-22:00 are peak period hours during weekdays, and 08:00-16:00 on weekends. The maximum number of peak period hours a facility can be open per week is 46 hours.

Marriotts Sports Centre is available between 17:00-21:00 during weekdays, for six hours on a Saturday and three hours on a Sunday. Other facilities at the same site, e.g. the dance studio, are available from 16:00, however, the sports hall is not available until 17:00 due to after school club commitments.

Barnwell School, The Nobel School and John Henry Newman School all provide a good amount of community access during peak period hours. Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre provides the most due to it offering daytime access, totalling 95.5 hours (46 peak period hours).

Table 4.9 details the total community use hours available for each sports hall. Figures are calculated using intelligence gathered via the audit and desk research. Table 4.10 details the used capacity at each site. The percentages were determined based on booking information provided by the site plus information gained through consultation. It is not possible to exactly gauge used capacity due to the changing nature of bookings on a week-by-week basis, the seasonality of sports and the varied use of sports halls for school exams.

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Table 4.9: Opening hours and activities in sports halls 3+ courts in Stevenage

Community use hours	Peak period hours	ID	Site	Courts	Main sports played
None	None	8	GlaxoSmithKline	4	None
29	29	15	Marriotts Sports Centre	4	Badminton, gymnastics, karate, hockey.
31	28	28	The Thomas Alleyne Academy	3	Indoor football, martial arts.
44.5	38.5	4	Barnwell School	4	Badminton, basketball, futsal.
45	41	27	The Nobel School	4	Gymnastics, archery, badminton, indoor cricket.
51	41	9	John Henry Newman School	4	Futsal, netball.
95.5	46	23	Stevenage Arts & Leisure Centre	8	Badminton, pickleball, futsal, table tennis, netball, basketball, group exercise.

### Used capacity

Non-technical site audits identify the used capacity of each sports hall. Used capacity is the percentage of available community use hours used. Sport England identifies 80% as a 'comfortably full' benchmark so, for example, the 29 hours available at Marriotts Sports Centre are used for 80% of the time whereas the Nobel School is available for 41 hours per week during the peak period and is operating at 75% of used capacity.

Table 4.10: Used capacity of sports halls

Used capacity	FPM used capacity	Peak CU hours	Site
None	-	None	GlaxoSmithKline
40%	56%	28	The Thomas Alleyne Academy
60%	58%	41	John Henry Newman School
70%	58%	38.5	Barnwell School
75%	93%	41	The Nobel School
75%	77%	46	Stevenage Arts & Leisure Centre
80%	69%	29	Marriotts Sports Centre

(80% -Sport England's guidance threshold which is considered to be a "comfortably full" sports hall)

The Thomas Alleyne School has the lowest levels of community use. It reports that this is partly due to the quality of the facility, which is not attractive to users. Additionally, it uses the sports hall for exam tables for up to 12 weeks each year. This discourages clubs from using the site, as sourcing alternative provision during this period (which often coincides with other clubs facing the same issue) is problematic. The hall is also only a three-court facility, which makes it less appealing to sports such as netball, basketball and handball.

The John Henry Newman School also loses its sports hall space during up to ten weeks of the year as the School uses it for exam space. This is having an impact on its used capacity. Clubs traditionally looking to hire sports hall space, such as badminton and netball clubs, require year-round access.

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Barnwell School and the Nobel School all report a reasonable used capacity. Both of these report that the majority of bookings are clubs based on weekly block bookings. They are both operating just below Sport England's 80% threshold.

Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre is operating at a used capacity of 75% for its eight courts during peak periods. EA reports having very little spare capacity on Mondays, Wednesday and Fridays. Weekend usage is lower; peak periods on Saturdays and Sundays are at c.40%. The sports hall at the Centre is also used for shows and events during weekends which take priority over existing sport and leisure bookings, which are cancelled within the notice period.

Marriotts Sports Centre has the highest used capacity of 3+ court sports halls in Stevenage. Potentially, community use hours could be extended by one hour per evening between 21:00-22:00 to accommodate more sports hall use. Weekend hours, such as Sunday afternoons, could also be extended. It is the only facility in Stevenage operating above the Sport England threshold.

FPM used capacities are not too dissimilar from KKP audit findings. The most significant difference between KKP audit findings and FPM findings is at the Nobel School, which was found to be accommodating less demand than the FPM suggests.

## Future developments

SBC is proposing to develop a new leisure facility in the town centre, next to the current Stevenage Swimming Centre site. Current plans are that it will contain a 6-court sports hall, a 10-lane 25m swimming pool, a teaching pool (both with moveable floors), interactive wet play area, soft play, health and fitness suite and four studios. It is anticipated that it will open in 2027, at which point, all sport and leisure provision will be brought under one roof. The Council is considering options for how Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre can be utilised following the closure of the leisure facilities. The theatre will remain operational.

This change will result in the loss of two badminton courts at public leisure sites in Stevenage. This loss of court space will be offset by the fact that theatre bookings, which are currently accommodated in the sports hall at Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre, will not be hosted in the sports hall at the proposed new venue.

Conversely, club bookings may be affected by the loss of two courts when the new leisure facility opens. EA data provided for this audit would appear to indicate that during numerous bookings, at least one court is unused during several busy periods. Competitive netball, which currently takes place at Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre will be heavily impacted. The new facility will provide a reduction in courts (as Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre has two netball courts as opposed to the one planned court at the new site). Furthermore, netball users will be forced to hire all the whole hall to access the one central netball court. This will increase the cost of participation for netball players and increase the value in badminton bookings.

## 4.2: Sport England Facilities Planning Model<sup>11</sup>

An FPM report was commissioned by the Council in 2025 to better understand the impact of the potential reduction in sports hall courts following the replacement of the existing 8-court sports hall at Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre with a 6-court facility at a new site. To do this, three scenarios or 'runs' were undertaken:

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<sup>11</sup> This document has been produced by ORH on behalf of Sport England for Stevenage Borough Council on 14 July 2025. This document can be reproduced by Stevenage Borough Council, subject to it being used accurately and not in a misleading context.

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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- ◀ Run 1 – A baseline assessment of provision in 2024.
- ◀ Run 2 – A forward assessment of demand for indoor sports halls and its distribution, based on the projected changes in population between 2024 and 2031.
- ◀ Run 3 – A forward assessment of a change to supply (the smaller replacement sports hall at Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre) with future demand in 2031

## Headline Strategic overview

Stevenage's supply of sports halls can meet nearly all its demand in 2024 and 2031 in all three FPM runs. Consideration should be given to increasing the size of the new facility from the 6-court hall to an 8-court hall as the new facility is estimated to be completely full in Run 3. This is representative of the wider demand for sports hall space within Stevenage, as a large proportion of Stevenage's sports hall capacity is estimated to be used in all three runs. Supply is heavily reliant on the education sector, which has five of the six halls in all three runs.

Unmet demand is generally low in all three runs, with almost all unmet demand being located too far from an existing facility as opposed to capacity issues. The age of the sports hall stock is worth noting in all three runs, despite some modernisation. None of the three sports halls built between 2002 and 2013 have been modernised.

## Key findings:

### Supply

Runs one and two have the equivalent of 38.7 badminton courts with 32.4 courts available for community use. In Run three the total supply decreases by two courts. 16% of sports hall space is unavailable in runs one and two, increasing to 17% in Run three.

### Facility availability

Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre is well used in runs one and two (used capacity of 77%) during the peak period hours. The new Stevenage Sports and Leisure Centre is fully utilised (100% capacity) during peak period hours in Run three. There is no room to expand capacity at either site.

### Population

Stevenage's population is set to increase by 9% between 2024 and 2031. This will lead to a rise in sports hall demand of 8%.

### Met and unmet demand

In all three runs, 97% of demand is met. The fewest visits are met in Run one, with the most taking place in Run two. Run two has the largest capacity and the joint highest demand levels with Run three. Met demand is slightly lower in Run three compared to Run two due to lower supply levels.

In runs one and two, almost all unmet demand is located too far from an existing facility (although this figure is not great enough to justify the development of a new hall). In Run three, capacity levels of the new hall become an issue with 13% of unmet demand living within catchment area of a sports hall but being unable to access provision due to capacity levels.

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## Interventions and next steps

The Council should look to increase the scale of the sports hall at the new Stevenage Sports and Leisure Centre. If this is not possible, it should seek to increase access to educational sites for more community use.

The new facility will be located in an area of high demand and is estimated to be 100% full in Run three. If it is not viable to increase the scale of the new sports hall, the alternative option is to negotiate increased access at education sites to accommodate more demand. However, the scope is limited here. The Nobel School is estimated to be almost completely full in all three runs. It is already available for the maximum hours at an educational site, with no scope to increase availability and capacity. Marriotts Sports Centre is most suitable site for increasing the availability for the following reasons:

- ◀ Closest sports hall to The Noble School and near to Stevenage Sports and Leisure Centre and the centre of the Borough.
- ◀ The only other sports hall that is not uncomfortably full in every run.
- ◀ Most recent sports hall to open in 2013.
- ◀ Four-court hall with dimensions suitable for club development.
- ◀ Availability could be increased by up to 12 hours in the weekly peak period.

If availability at Marriotts Sports Centre cannot be increased, then Barnwell School is the alternative. It has a four-court hall with dimensions suitable for club development and two activity halls. It opened in 2002 but has not been modernised. It is available for 38.5 hours in the weekly peak period, therefore, availability can only be increased by 2.5 hours.

## 4.3: Demand

### NGB consultation

National governing bodies of sport (NGBs) and active clubs were consulted to ascertain current use, participation trends and the needs/challenges facing sports halls in the area.

### Badminton England (BE)

BE is the national governing body of sport (NGB) for badminton. Its latest strategy, Discover Badminton 2017-2025 presents a vision for the sport to become one of the nation's most popular and to consistently win medals at world, Olympic and Paralympic levels. To achieve this, it has identified three key objectives:

- ◀ Grow grassroots participation.
- ◀ Create a system that identifies and develops player potential to deliver consistent world class performers.
- ◀ Built financial resilience to become a well governed organisation and demonstrate compliance with the UK governance code.

The Badminton Facilities Strategy Model 2020-2030 – Stevenage overview

Badminton participation statistics

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- ◀ 3.01% of adults (77.99%; male and 22.01%; female) have played badminton at least twice in the last 28 days<sup>12</sup>. This equates to 2,100 regular adult players.
- ◀ 6.00%<sup>13</sup> of juniors<sup>12</sup> have played badminton at least twice in the last 28 days. This equates to 288 regular junior players.
- ◀ It is estimated that 8.58% of adults have played badminton at least once in the last 12 months. This equates to 3,800 occasional adult players<sup>14</sup> (5.49% latent demand).

## Demand

- ◀ The presumption is that regular adult players play once per week for one hour and that their average need is for 3 adults per court. This equates to a weekly requirement for 700 court hours (current demand).
- ◀ The presumption is that regular junior players play once per week for 45 minutes and that their average need is for 4 players per court. This equates to a weekly requirement for 55 court hours (current demand).
- ◀ The presumption is that occasional adult players play four times per annum for one hour and that their average need is for 3 adults per court. This requires 98 court hours (latent demand).
- ◀ To service all badminton demand there is a need for 853 court hours per week.
- ◀ Projected increase in regular demand in 2030 is 80 court hours.

## Supply

- ◀ There are seven (3+court) sports halls containing 31 courts in Stevenage.
- ◀ Two hall(s) are for private use only; thus 23 courts are available for badminton.
- ◀ The total number of court hours per week (3+ court sports halls) available in Stevenage during stated peak time is 745<sup>15</sup>
- ◀ All<sup>16</sup> badminton courts in Stevenage meet the Badminton England quality threshold (above average/good) which equates to 745 court hours<sup>17</sup>.
- ◀ There is a need for 114.57% of the 745 good quality peak time court hours, available each week, to service current and latent badminton demand.
- ◀ Additional court hours required per week in 2030 are 80.

## Strategic overview

Consultation with BE outlined a strong demand for badminton in Stevenage, however, BE expressed concern about the supply of suitable facilities for clubs and the county to access. It stated that several schools are unable to offer community use in sports halls/activity halls during examinations periods. This can take as many as 12 weeks per year out of the equation in some circumstances. It is actively trying to set up more badminton activity in the Authority, but accessing good quality facilities on a regular basis is hindering its ability to do this.

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<sup>12</sup> ALS states that people that have participated at least twice in the last 28 days. For modelling purposes, it is assumed that they participate every week

<sup>13</sup> ALS states that 6.0% of juniors nationally (14-15 year olds) have played at least twice in the last 28 days. For modelling purposes this has been extended to include 11-13 year olds.

<sup>14</sup> Occasional players equates to all players minus regular players

<sup>15</sup> Peak time hours are defined as; Monday – Friday 17:00-22:00, Saturday 09:30-17:00, Sunday 09:00-14:30 & 17:00-19:30

<sup>16</sup> National figure: 75.0%

<sup>17</sup> Assumes that all courts of all standards available during all peak hours.

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Three BE affiliated clubs are currently utilising facilities within the Authority:

- ◀ Stevenage Badminton Club.
- ◀ St Johns Badminton Club.
- ◀ Strings Badminton Club.

The audit did not identify any No Strings badminton sessions taking place in Stevenage, but they are being delivered in neighbouring North Herts. EA delivers the equivalent of No Strings sessions at Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre on Friday evenings however, the cost to attend these (at £8) is considerably higher than BE-run sessions.

## Club consultation

All clubs were approached for consultation; no response was received from St Johns Badminton Club and Strings Badminton Club. Where consultation did not take place, desk research was carried out to understand club size and facility usage.

Stevenage Badminton Club has c.23 members, of whom approximately 20 attend sessions on a weekly basis. Players can either attend club nights on a pay and play basis or pay an annual fee. Club nights take place at Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre on Friday evenings; however, this often clashes with events taking place within the sports hall leading to the Club being moved into the bowls hall where a temporary surface is installed to protect the bowls carpet.

The Club would prefer to use a facility which is not affected by other events, as this reportedly happens quite frequently. It reports a lack of school facilities being suitable for badminton as the majority are older buildings and unattractive options for club use. The loss of regular access due to school examinations is also problematic.

Overall, the Club is happy to continue accessing the Leisure Centre despite frequently having to use the bowls hall. It is keen to access modernised public leisure provision when available and hopes that its long-standing booking will be honoured when this happens.

St Johns Badminton Club operates out of Barnwell School on Monday and Wednesday evenings. It is content with the facility due to the high ceilings, good supply of parking and changing facilities. It does not charge an annual fee for membership as all members are encouraged to pay and play at a cost of £5. It has several mixed gender teams and competes in the Stevenage Badminton League.

Desk research suggests Strings Badminton Club may have folded. Despite still being listed as affiliated with BE, no information regarding club nights is available. They previously took place at Barnwell School on Sunday evenings.

## Netball

In November 2021, England Netball (EN) launched a ten-year 'Adventure Strategy' for the game along with a new organization brand identity. Its new strategy shares a purpose-led ambition for the game, to build on the momentum the sport has seen in recent years and to take it to new heights for the decade ahead. The strategy outlines its intention to:

- ◀ Accelerate development and growth of the game to every level, from grassroots to elite.
- ◀ Elevate the visibility of the sport, and;
- ◀ Lead a movement to impact lives on and beyond the court.

## STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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At the heart of its purpose, EN commits to remaining dedicated to increasing opportunities for women and girls to play the game as a priority and to work to address the gender participation gap in the sport which has widened since the Pandemic. Underpinned by years of engaging with and delivering netball for female communities, EN pledges to understand, support and nurture women and girls more deeply at every life stage, at every age.

It is committed to opening the sport to new audiences in every community, so netball better represents the rich diversity of the country it represents, and continues to evolve, adapt and thrive in the future, helping to create a truly inclusive sport for all where everyone can belong, flourish and soar. A recent partnership announcement with England Men's and Mixed Netball Association (EMMNA) to help develop and grow male participation in the game, supports this commitment as EN pledges to promote difference and embrace the opportunity to make the sport available to all.

Transforming netball for children and young people is a strategic priority to help protect the future of the sport. EN is working with schools and policy makers to extend physical literacy within, and after the school day with a focus on netball specific provision. It is committed to accelerating the expansion of its Bee Netball programme for young children, whilst supporting teens and young women to stay in the game.

The elite game is also a focus. EN's ambition is that the Vitality Roses will be the best female sports team in the world. It thus has to support the national team to win consistently on the world stage and to have an outstanding talent pathway in place to fuel sustainable successes on court and set new standards. Professionalisation of the game over the next decade is a priority – with a specific focus on growing world-leading international and domestic competitions and events and creating more careers in the sport.

The Adventure Strategy was developed on the back of feedback from the Netball Family, with over 3,000 members and stakeholders consulted as part of the strategic process to understand what they wanted netball to 'look like' in 2031, the plan is aspirational and ambitious, and sees EN pledge to continue as a trailblazer for women's sport.

Facility development aspirations stated within EN's Strategy are to:

- ◀ Take a fresh look at the spaces required to support the sport, creating accessible places in every community to allow netball to be incorporated into how and where women and girls live their lives.
- ◀ Protect, enhance, and extend the network of homes that house the sport at a local and regional level.
- ◀ Develop an elite domestic professional competition that supports full-time athletes underpinned by a world-class infrastructure and environments.

For EN to achieve its ambitions to make the game accessible to wider audiences and in every community, it encourages local authorities to adopt policies within outdoor and indoor sports facilities strategies that:

- ◀ Facilitate informal netball activity within neighbourhood multi-use games areas. neighbourhood equipped areas for play (NEAPs).
- ◀ Incorporates the cultural and health needs of women and girls within any designs for improved or new facilities.
- ◀ Protects and enhances netball facilities within all primary and secondary school environments so they offer a positive first experience of the sport for students and the wider community during out-of-school hours.
- ◀ Supports the installation of floodlights on outdoor courts to increase all-year-round use.

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- ◀ Facilitates the development of netball growth programmes, club training and competition within public leisure centres.
- ◀ Where appropriate, supports development of netball homes and performance environments to enable local women and girls to pursue a career in netball as an elite athlete, official, coach or administrator.

EN reports that the sport is growing fast nationally. Its YouGov<sup>18</sup> report indicated that the 2019 World Cup inspired 160,000 adult women to take up the sport. In addition, at the time when the report research was undertaken, 71% of clubs reported that more people had shown an interest in playing netball than before the tournament started.

Netball is played both indoors and outdoors. For outdoor provision please refer to the 2025 SBC Playing Pitch Strategy. Current indoor provision in Stevenage is as follows:

- ◀ Back 2 Netball sessions are designed to re-introduce players to the sport. Sessions are run by coaches. Currently no Back 2 Netball sessions being delivered in Stevenage, however desk research suggests that some were delivered at Barnwell School prior to the Pandemic.
- ◀ Walking Netball (netball played at a walking pace) is designed so that anyone can play it regardless of age or fitness level. Consultation suggests that weekly walking netball sessions are held at Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre on Wednesdays. Sessions are free of charge for aged over 50.

Table 4.11: Netball clubs in Stevenage

Club name	Affiliated	Club response
Stevenage Storm	Yes	No

Stevenage Indoor Netball League is a central venue league. Matches take place at Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre where it currently only requires access to one indoor court due to demand levels. Sessions take place on Monday evenings between 18:45-22:30 and Thursday evenings 20:40-22:10.

Whilst the League is content with the current facility access, it does not meet the required EN guidelines for indoor netball competitions. Posts are not socket mounted, run offs are insufficient and there is little room for umpires on the side of the court.

Commercial netball leagues have a strong presence in Stevenage. Netball Leagues delivers a weekly competition for eight teams at the John Henry Newman Leisure Centre. Play Netball runs four leagues at Marriotts Sports Centre on Monday evenings.

### Club consultation

Stevenage Storm Netball Club did not respond to consultation requests. Desk research indicates that it has a large junior and senior section and competes in the Herts Netball Association Senior & Junior League, utilising both indoor and outdoor courts. It also delivers its own Back to Netball sessions to encourage new players into the sport. It is actively recruiting new players of all abilities. It accesses the sports hall at Marriotts Sports Centre on Wednesday evenings for club nights.

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.uk sport.gov.uk/news/2019/10/02/netball-world-cup>

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## Basketball (BBE)

BBE is the NGB for the sport in England. Its latest strategy, Transforming Basketball in Britain Together (2016 - 2028) aims to improve basketball from grassroots to GB teams, by adopting a whole sport approach and working closely with the basketball community. To achieve this, a series of key objectives have been identified:

- ◀ Develop successful GB teams.
- ◀ Build high-quality men's and women's leagues and teams.
- ◀ Support talented players, officials and coaches and coach development pathways.
- ◀ Drive increased awareness and profile of the sport.
- ◀ Increase opportunities to play the game at every level.
- ◀ Transform the leadership and culture of the sport.

To increase the opportunities to play the game at every level, BBE has produced a facilities strategy which aims to create community hubs including, where appropriate, arenas that sit at the heart of communities and are homes for the leading British Basketball League (BBL), Women's British Basketball League (WBBL) and community clubs. The stated intent is that as part of its facilities strategy implementation, BBE will regularly monitor provision in schools, colleges, universities, clubs and at local authority sites and identify any gaps, looking to improve connections between these organisations to increase the availability and affordability of facilities of the right quality. BBE reports having one affiliated club in Stevenage: Stevenage Royals.

Stevenage Royals Basketball Club, originally founded as East Herts Royals in 2014, rebranded in 2022 to focus more on competitive basketball rather than development. It serves both male and female players at various levels and has a membership of c.250 active players, including 50-60 senior members. It offers programmes for juniors, operating at several age groups. It reports currently being at capacity.

It currently uses several venues in Stevenage and surrounding areas for training and matches. The most frequently used is Barnwell School, where it trains every day except Friday and Saturday. The School and Club have a good relationship and there are plans to make it the Club's primary home venue, given its larger size and the available space around the courts. However, the outdated sports hall floor, which has non-NGB standard lines, remains a significant issue.

Currently, Marriotts Sports Centre is used as its home venue for weekend matches. However, it faces challenges at Marriotts due to restrictive contract terms that prevent improvements such as installing scoreboards and repainting lines. It also operates out of The Nobel School, but this floor can become slippery due to dust and the use of exam mats, raising safety concerns.

During exam periods, it uses alternative venues such as Woodson Park, which is more expensive at £50 per hour, compared to the usual £30. Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre was previously a regular venue, but it has reportedly become harder to book due to high costs, limited parking, and the priority given, on occasion, to performing arts.

The ideal facility for Stevenage Royals would include a double-basketball court, allowing it to run concurrent training sessions. This would reduce scheduling conflicts and improve the coach-to-facility ratio. Currently, the only facility to provide this configuration is Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre, however, issues identified above makes growing the Clubs membership more difficult. The Club would also wish to have the option to use a show court with bleacher seating, which would allow it to host larger events and accommodate more teams. Access to a dedicated, high-quality venue would streamline operations and help the Club meet the needs of its what is a potentially expanding membership.

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## Indoor cricket

The Hertfordshire Cricket Board (HCB) is the overarching NGB for cricket in Stevenage. Working closely with the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB), it is responsible for the management and development of every form of recreational cricket for men, women and children in the County. The HCB was invited to be part of the consultation, but no response was received. Indoor cricket competitions are most often played between two teams of six or eight players. It can take place in any suitably sized multi-purpose sports hall, offering amateur and professional cricketers an option to play the game during winter months.

There is no dedicated indoor cricket facility in Stevenage. The closest dedicated venue is located in East Herts, at the Hertfordshire and Essex Indoor Cricket Centre, where the Hertfordshire Indoor Cricket League is hosted. Stevenage Cricket Club does not currently compete in indoor cricket leagues, utilising indoor space solely for winter training.

Where clubs cannot access dedicated indoor cricket provision, they normally look to use nets in 4-court sports halls for winter training. These facilities, whilst often adequate for junior practice, are not long enough to allow pace bowlers to complete a full length run up for senior cricket training. In addition, the quality of sports hall floor surfaces, particularly at education sites, is often problematic. Because of this, many clubs travel further afield to access good quality facilities. Indoor cricket does take place at the Nobel School, which is frequently used during winter months by Stevenage Cricket Club.

## Volleyball

The audit did not identify any volleyball clubs or any club-based participation in the sport in Stevenage. The sports hall at the Nobel School is the only one which has line markings to accommodate volleyball participation. There are volleyball lines and sockets at Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre, however, no volleyball participation takes place. England Volleyball was contacted to discuss plans to grow the game in the area, however, no response was received.

## Futsal

Futsal is a popular sport in Stevenage. It takes place at three indoor facilities in the Authority. Stevenage Futsal Club (SFC) uses the sports halls at Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre, Barnwell School and John Henry Newman School. It also operates out of a facility in Buntingford (East Herts) as no facilities in Stevenage meet the specification to host higher level futsal due to a lack of seating for spectators.

Sessions at Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre are more costly than other facilities, and SFC is also unable to book the times it would like to due to the number of longstanding bookings the Leisure Centre already accommodates from other clubs/sports. It does not report having any difficulty securing additional sessions at the other two facilities it uses in Stevenage. One of these, John Henry Newman School, can accommodate additional bookings when required as it does not have many block bookings with other clubs.

The Club has c. 220 members and reports itself to be continuously growing. It has aspirations to deliver sessions six days per week (currently three) to continue to grow the game in the Stevenage area. It is interested in hiring facilities within a 20-minute drive of the existing sites at which it has a presence to widen the catchment area.

## Pickleball

Pickleball is a sport for which sports halls across Hertfordshire are now in demand. Currently, free pickleball sessions are being delivered at Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre on Monday

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mornings. The sessions re reportedly popular with older and retired residents. Stevenage Pickleball Club also functions out of Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre, using the facility for social and competitive sessions. It hires the facility six days per week.

The Club will be impacted by the loss of two badminton courts at the replacement leisure facility.

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## 4.4: Future demand and the Sport England Sports Facilities Calculator (SFC)

The SFC helps quantify additional demand for community sports facilities generated by new growth populations, development and regeneration areas. It is used to estimate facility needs for whole area populations but should not be applied for strategic gap analysis as it has no spatial dimension and does not take account of:

- ✦ Facility location compared to demand.
- ✦ Capacity and availability of facilities – opening hours.
- ✦ Cross boundary movement of demand.
- ✦ Travel networks and topography.
- ✦ Attractiveness of facilities.

FPM calculations for Stevenage are set out in the table below.

Table 4.12: Sport England: Sports Facilities Calculator

	Population 2018: (ONS)	Population estimate: 2031 (ONS)
ONS population projections	87,754	89,602
Population increase	-	1,848
Facilities to meet additional demand	-	+0.49 courts (+0.12 halls)
Estimated cost*	-	£376,663

(Build costs as of Q3 2024)

Calculations do not take into account the loss of two courts from within the existing public leisure site if the proposed new replacement facility is developed as currently planned. The projected increase in population will lead to a small increase in demand for sports hall space. The SFC indicates a requirement for an additional 0.49 of a (badminton) court, up to 2031.

ONS population growth does not account for growth generated through housing growth (shown in Table 4.13). It is, thus, useful to show the demand generated via both SFC and housing growth detailed in the local plan. This is shown in table 4.13:

Table 4.13: Table 4.15: Strategic housing impact- proposed allocations

Housing growth increases from strategic sites (500+ houses to 204)	Average number of people per owner occupying household (England)	Population increase due to proposed housing	Additional sports hall space required	Estimated cost (£)
7,600	2.4	18,240	4.61 courts / 1.15 halls	£3,810,266

Given that all existing sites report spare capacity and/or room to increase community use hours, encouraging and assisting school sites to modernise existing sports hall space should be a priority before considering development of new provision. The current facility stock in Stevenage is relatively poor, five of the seven sites are of below average or poor quality. It is Building a new leisure centre with a brand-new sports hall which will mean one additional good quality venue.

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

## 4.5: Summary of key facts and issues

Facility type	Sports halls	-
Elements	Assessment findings	Specific facility needs
<b>Quantity</b>	Stevenage has 14 sports halls containing 37 badminton courts. It has seven 3+ court sports halls (containing 31 badminton courts).	There is capacity at existing facilities to accommodate existing demand and an increase in population. Community use hours could also be extended at several school sites. The proposed leisure centre will mean that there are two fewer courts than are provided at the existing public leisure site and, crucially, the effective loss of a 4-court hall. School sports halls are unable to provide community use for up to 12 weeks of the year. This is a real issue for clubs seeking year-round access.
<b>Quality</b>	Two sports halls are rated above average quality, three are below average (one of which is the 8-court sports hall) and two are poor quality.	Investment is required in the poor and below average sports hall stock in Stevenage. The replacement of Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre will have a positive impact on facility quality.
<b>Accessibility</b>	More than 90% of the Stevenage's population lives within one mile of a community accessible sports hall. All residents live within a 20-minute drive of a sports hall with community use.	There are good levels of accessibility. It will be important that a balanced programme of use is maintained at Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre, as the only technically fully pay and play accessible sports hall.
<b>Availability</b> (Management and usage)	Six of the seven 3+ court sports halls provide community use. Only one (Marriotts Sports Centre) is operating at the Sport England threshold of 'comfortably full'. Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre is the only facility to provide daytime sports hall availability.	Ensure that schools continue to offer peak time availability to cater for local sports clubs. Working with schools to look to mitigate the extent to which clubs lose access to facilities during exam periods should be prioritised. Consider options to extend school community use hours where used capacity is above 80% e.g. Marriotts Sports Centre.

### Strategic summary

- ◀ Each facility is important to the community served and all venues need to be protected in accordance with paragraph 104 of the NPPF.
- ◀ The quality of below average and poor sports halls needs to be improved. This is particularly the case with Barnwell School, which serves Stevenage's population in the south of the authority. School-based sports halls account for a significant volume of sports hall space during peak times. Positive relationships between clubs, NGB's and schools should be maintained to ensure accessibility remains high.
- ◀ The sports hall at Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre also functions as an events hall at weekends, which impacts club use. The replacement leisure centre, due in 2027, will not operate in the same way and this issue should, at that point, be alleviated.
- ◀ School sites have potential to increase community use hours to accommodate additional demand. Marriotts Sports Centre could increase its hours on Sunday afternoon, as could the Thomas Alleyne School were existing planning restrictions to be overturned.

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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- ◀ Clubs currently accessing the sports hall at Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre will require support when moving to the new site in 2027. The proposed facility will have two fewer courts than the existing one. It could be argued that overall capacity within the sports hall programme will remain the same due to the removal of arts programming, however, netball and pickleball will be significantly impacted due to the loss of one netball court and the inability to hire half of the hall.
- ◀ In line with the FPM findings, SBC should consider opportunities to increase the size of the proposed sports hall. If this is not possible, It should consider opportunities to extend community use hours at existing school sites.
- ◀ The Council has the opportunity to ensure that the redeveloped Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre sports hall is designed, programmed and marketed to be as welcoming as possible to residents who are currently inactive, who may be returning from a long-term health condition or are accessing the facility via a health referral pathway.
- ◀ To help address the net loss of courts at Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre, alongside the future shortfall of provision based on housing growth identified in the Local Plan, the Council should support the principle of any new sports halls on school sites that are developed during the strategy being made available to the community to help with addressing peak time demand.

## SECTION 5: SWIMMING POOLS

A swimming pool is defined as an “enclosed area of water, specifically maintained for all forms of water-based sport and recreation”. It includes indoor and outdoor pools, freeform leisure pools and specific diving tanks used for general swimming, teaching, training and diving. Many small pools are used solely for recreational swimming and will not necessarily need to strictly follow the NGB recommendations. It is, however, generally recommended that standard dimensions are used to allow appropriate levels of competition and training and to help meet safety standards. Relatively few pools need to be designed to full competition standards or include spectator facilities.

Training for competition, low-level synchronised swimming, and water polo can all take place in a 25m pool. With modest spectator seating, pools can also accommodate competitive events in these activities. Diving from boards, advanced synchronised swimming and more advanced sub-aqua training require deeper water. These can all be accommodated in one pool tank, which ideally should be in addition to the main pool.

The NGB responsible for administering diving, swimming, synchronised swimming and water polo in England is Swim England.

Swim England’s report ‘A Decade of Decline: The Future of Swimming Pools in England’ provides a national analysis of the current swimming pool stock across England. It notes that the average age of a pool built from 1960 onwards is 43 years. On this basis it suggests that many of these pools are now coming to the end of their lifespan.

Many pool operators were placed in a serious financial situation during the pandemic, when many local authorities provided emergency financial support through direct grants, deferred payments or loans to subsidise pool operators who had suffered loss of income due to pool closures.

UK Government’s £100 million National Leisure Recovery Fund also provided assistance to enable pools to re-open once restrictions had been lifted. Despite this, Swim England reports that 206 pools (including 68 public pools) closed, either permanently or temporarily over the period of the Pandemic.

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY

## NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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In preparing for the future, Swim England recommend that local authorities conduct analysis of their pool stock to understand if they have the right pools in the right places to meet the needs of the local community. In the light of leisure facilities accounting for over 40% cent of some councils' direct carbon emissions it advocates capital investment into renewal of pool stock in order to support efforts to reach net zero targets, alongside combating the predicted overall future deficit of water space nationally.

In 2025 the Council commissioned Sport England to produce an FPM analysis to better understand the future demand for swimming pool provision based on changes to facilities and population growth. Where relevant, data from the FPM has been included in this section.

### 5.1: Supply

This assessment is mostly concerned with larger pools available for community use (no restrictions to accessing the pool as a result of membership criteria). As such, those less than 160m<sup>2</sup> (e.g., 20m x 4 lanes) water space and/or located at private member clubs are deemed to offer limited value in relation to community use and delivery of outcomes related to health and deprivation. It is recognised that smaller pools can accommodate learning/ teaching sessions, but they are, for modelling/needs assessment purposes, deemed unable to offer a full swim programme and, thus, eliminated from the supply evaluation, when considering accessibility and availability later in this section.

Lidos are included in the assessment where they are of 160m<sup>2</sup>+ and are offering an extensive programme (Learn to swim, casual and club swimming) and are open all year round.

### Quantity

There are five swimming pools across four sites in Stevenage (including all pools irrespective of size and access). They comprise two main/general pools, one lido and two learner/teaching pool.

Swimming facilities are well located and distributed across the Authority. The largest swimming pool in the Authority is Stevenage Swimming Centre which has a 33m x 6-lane main pool with a fixed boom reducing the length of the pool to 25m It also has a 12m teaching pool. It is well located in the centre of the Authority, close to the town centre. In total, it has 480m<sup>2</sup> of pool space.

Figure 5.1: All swimming pools in Stevenage

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

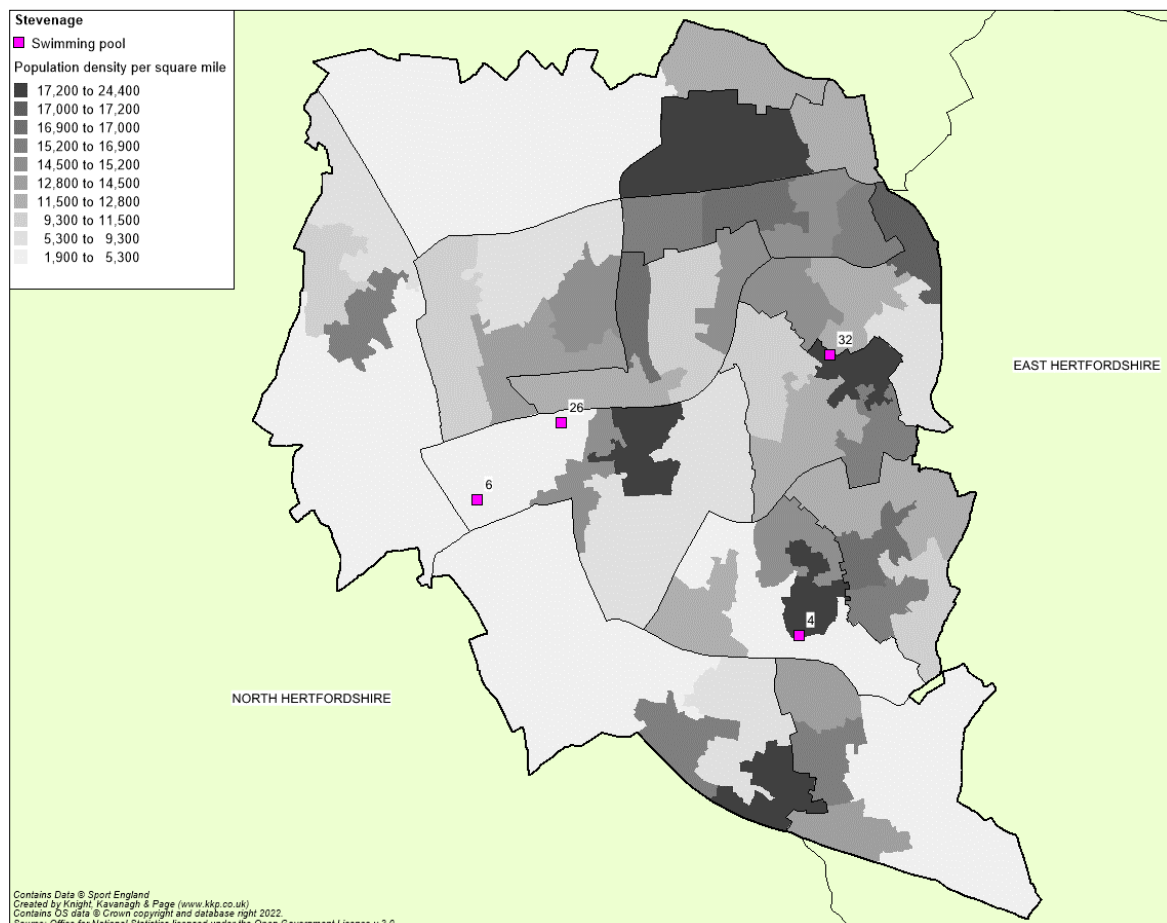


Table 5.1: All swimming pools in Stevenage

ID	Site name	Facility type	Lanes/Length	Area (m <sup>2</sup> )
4	Barnwell School	Lido	0x22m	176
6	David Lloyd (Stevenage)	Main/general	4x25m	275
26	Stevenage Swimming Centre	Main/general	6x33m	396
26	Stevenage Swimming Centre	Learner/teaching/training	0x12m	84
32	Little Fins Pool	Learner/teaching/training	0x10m	50

## Quality

When considering pools larger than 160m<sup>2</sup>, only three sites remain. The lido at Barnwell School is currently closed. It has been out of use since 2019, when the school stopped using it due to the high cost of operation and maintenance. Recently, discussion has taken place about the possibility of reopening the facility in partnership with a commercial swim lesson provider. This would involve creating a new access point to allow community groups to use the pool without requiring the school to remain open. The existing plant room is reportedly still functional, and the school would also like to enclose the facility. It should be noted that, reportedly, previous attempts to pursue this course of action have foundered because of planning restrictions.

Two pools larger than 160m<sup>2</sup> are operational. One is rated as good quality (David Lloyd Stevenage) while Stevenage Swimming Centre is rated as being of below average quality.

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Figure 5.2: Swimming pools larger than 160m<sup>2</sup> with quality ratings.

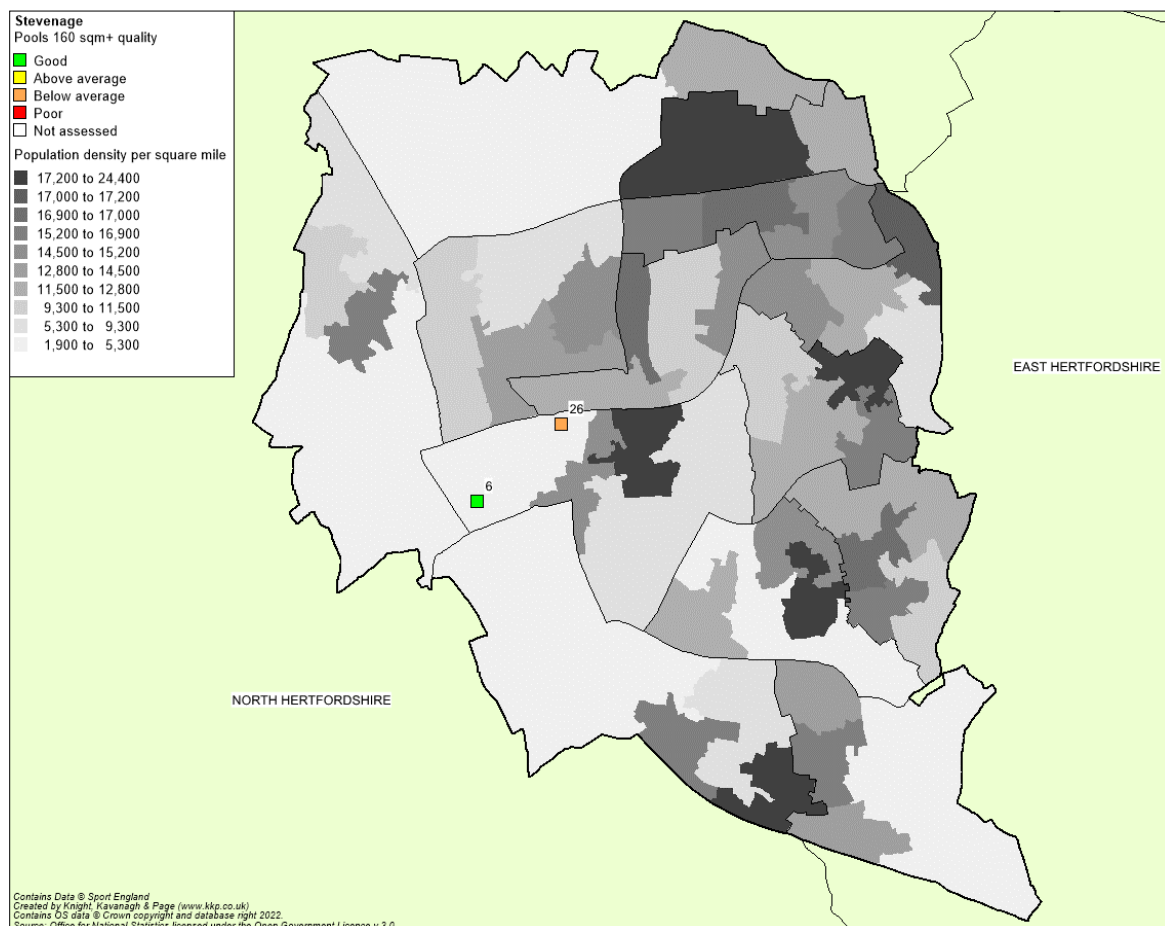


Table 5.2: Quality of 160m<sup>2</sup>+ swimming pools in Stevenage

ID	Site name	Facility type	Lanes/length	Pool condition	Changing condition
6	David Lloyd (Stevenage)	Main/general	4x 25m	Good	Good
26	Stevenage Swimming Centre	Main/general	6 x 33m	Below average	Above average

The rating of Stevenage Swimming Centre is primarily due to its age and the reported lack of significant investment. Opened in 1962, the building was last refurbished in 2001. It is the oldest swimming facility in the Authority. The flat roof now requires repair and the diving boards have been decommissioned. Despite its age, the centre has positive features: the water quality remains good, lighting was upgraded to LED in 2023, and new pool covers have been installed. Hoists have also been installed at both ends.

Work was carried out in the pool plant room in 2018 and is in good condition, however the heating and ventilation equipment is showing signs of aging, and the frequency and cost of repairs are increasing. The outdated equipment used to heat the pool is inefficient. The high volume of users and the town centre location of the facility reportedly causes issues with the quantity of adjacent available parking space.

David Lloyd (Stevenage) is a good quality swimming facility. The pool and changing rooms were refurbished in 2017. Pool tiles, décor and lighting are modern and attractive. Despite being built over 25 years ago, it is the newest swimming facility in Stevenage.

## STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Table 5.3: Age of swimming pools (160m<sup>2</sup>+) and refurbishment dates (where applicable)

Site name	Year built/ opened	Year last refurbished	Age (years) since built/refurbished
David Lloyd (Stevenage)	1997	2017	8
Stevenage Swimming Centre	1962	2001	24

### Accessibility

Swimming pool accessibility is influenced by physical (i.e., built environment). Appropriate walk and drive-time catchments are applied to determine accessibility to communities. The normal acceptable standard is 20-minutes' walk time (1-mile radial catchment) for an urban area and a 20-minutes' drive time for a rural area. This enables analysis of the adequacy of coverage and helps identify areas currently not serviced by existing provision.

Figure 5.3 and Table 5.4 overleaf illustrate the walk-time based accessibility of the two swimming pools in Stevenage.

Catchment analysis indicates that 29.3% of the population lives within one mile of the two swimming pools (160m<sup>2</sup> or larger) that offer some level of community use. Residents living in the east of the Authority have poorer access to swimming pool provision than elsewhere. This is where the more densely populated parts of the Authority are located, yet both pools are located to the east of these settlements.

Of the 11,754 people living in areas of higher deprivation in Stevenage (i.e., those living in the 30% most deprived areas nationally), 7,383 (62%) live within one mile of a swimming pool. Figure 5.3 suggests that Stevenage Swimming Centre is well located to attract users from areas of higher deprivation, assuming that other barriers to access can be overcome.

Drive time catchment suggests that the whole Stevenage population lives within a 20-minute drive of a swimming pool larger than 160m<sup>2</sup> as evidenced in Figure 5.4.

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Figure 5.3: Accessibility of swimming pools in Stevenage

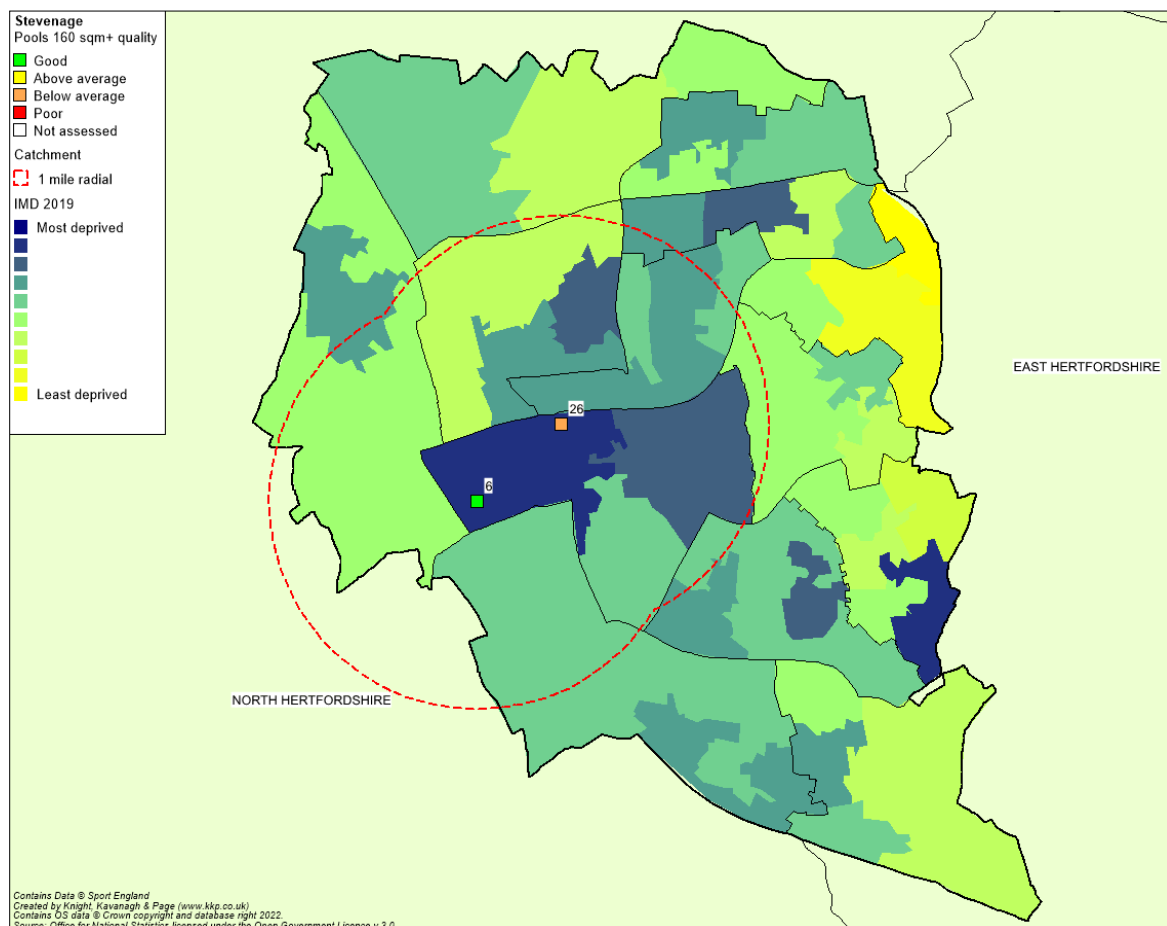
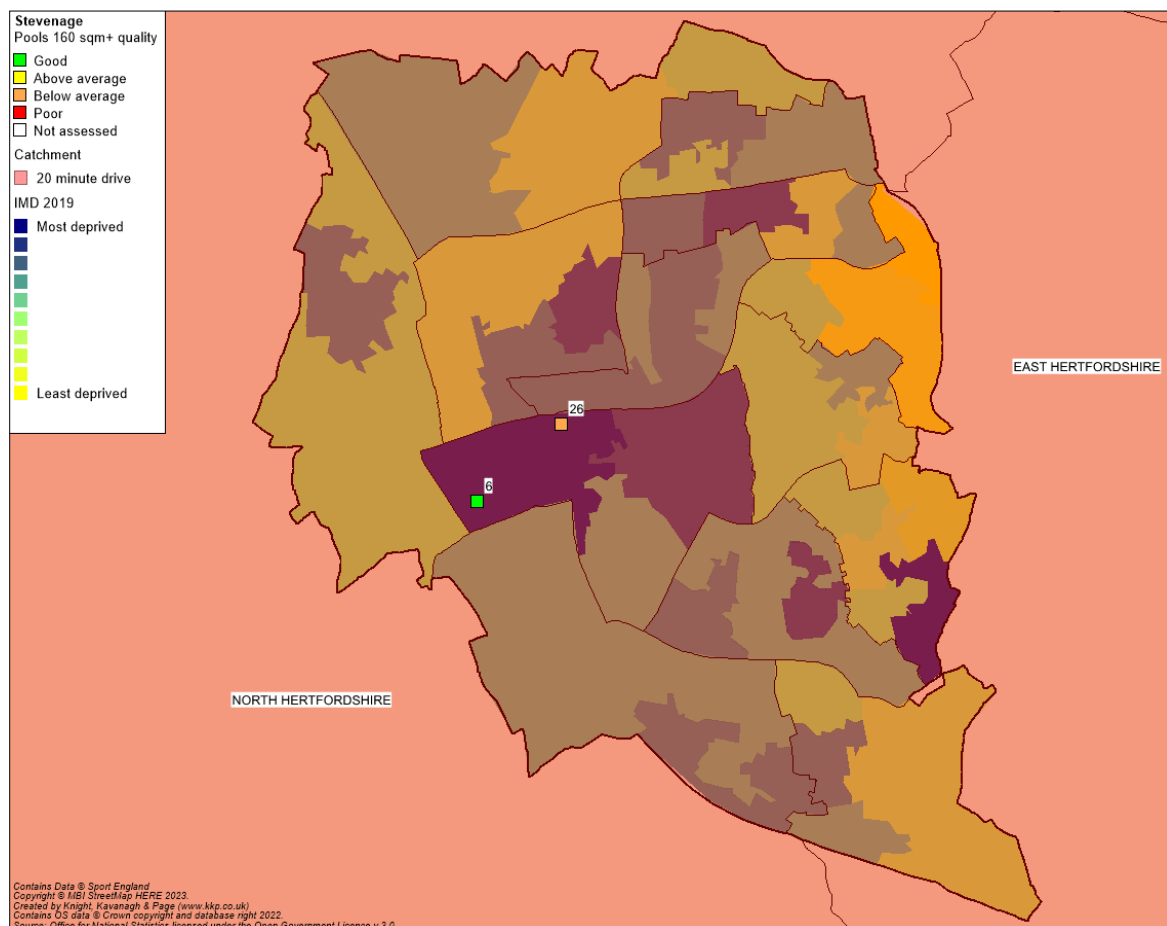


Table 5.4: Accessibility of swimming pools in Stevenage

IMD 10% bands	Persons	Population %	Persons inside catchment	Population inside (%)	Persons outside catchment	Population outside (%)
0 - 10	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
10.1 - 20	3,263	3.8%	2,045	2.4%	1,218	1.4%
20.1 - 30	8,491	9.8%	5,338	6.2%	3,153	3.6%
30.1 - 40	20,265	23.4%	6,559	7.6%	13,706	15.8%
40.1 - 50	19,680	22.7%	4,780	5.5%	14,900	17.2%
50.1 - 60	16,565	19.1%	2,170	2.5%	14,395	16.6%
60.1 - 70	12,099	14.0%	4,497	5.2%	7,602	8.8%
70.1 - 80	1,657	1.9%	0	0.0%	1,657	1.9%
80.1 - 90	2,964	3.4%	0	0.0%	2,964	3.4%
90.1 - 100	1,595	1.8%	0	0.0%	1,595	1.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>86,579</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>25,389</b>	<b>29.3%</b>	<b>61,190</b>	<b>70.7%</b>

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Figure 5.4: Swimming pools within 20 minutes' drive time



## Availability of swimming pools

Swimming pool availability differs dependent upon ownership and/or management. The facilities audited each offer some form of public access – as is detailed below.

Table 5.5: Access policy of swimming pools

Site name	Access policy
David Lloyd Stevenage	Registered membership
Stevenage Swimming Centre	Pay and play

Stevenage Swimming Centre is the only venue which provides a pay and play option in the Authority. In part because of this, only 27.7% of the population live within one mile of a pay and play accessible swimming pool.

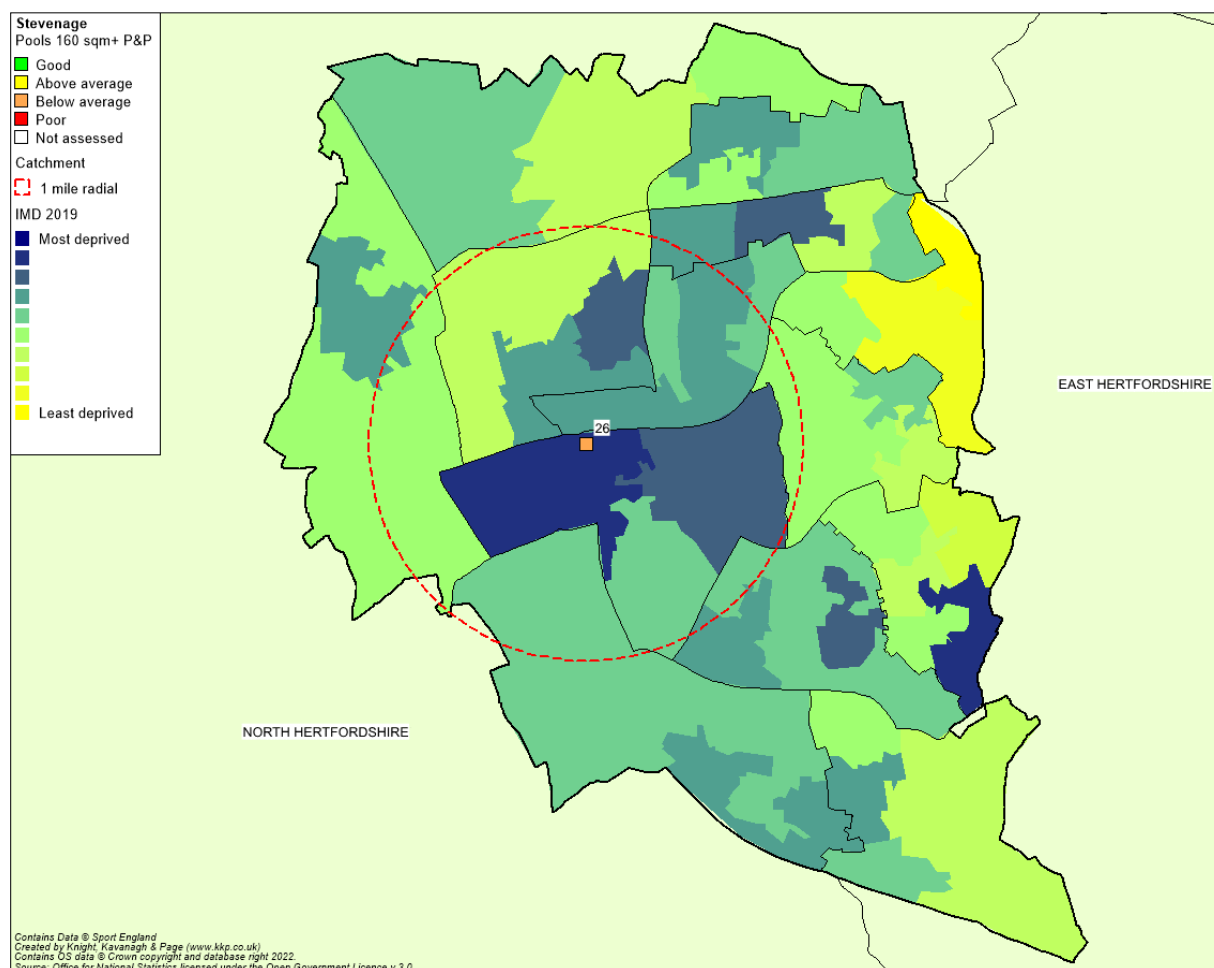
David Lloyd (Stevenage) is a commercial operator, which whilst it caters for specific market segments, it is not always available to all sections of the community and may not necessarily be affordable to all households.

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Table 5.6: Accessibility of pay and play pools in Stevenage

IMD 10% bands	Persons	Population %	Persons inside catchment	Population inside (%)	Persons outside catchment	Population outside (%)
0 - 10	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
10.1 - 20	3,263	3.8%	2,045	2.4%	1,218	1.4%
20.1 - 30	8,491	9.8%	5,338	6.2%	3,153	3.6%
30.1 - 40	20,265	23.4%	6,161	7.1%	14,104	16.3%
40.1 - 50	19,680	22.7%	4,360	5.0%	15,320	17.7%
50.1 - 60	16,565	19.1%	1,588	1.8%	14,977	17.3%
60.1 - 70	12,099	14.0%	4,497	5.2%	7,602	8.8%
70.1 - 80	1,657	1.9%	0	0.0%	1,657	1.9%
80.1 - 90	2,964	3.4%	0	0.0%	2,964	3.4%
90.1 - 100	1,595	1.8%	0	0.0%	1,595	1.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>86,579</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>23,989</b>	<b>27.7%</b>	<b>62,590</b>	<b>72.3%</b>

Figure 5.6: Pay and play pools quality on IMD 1-mile catchment

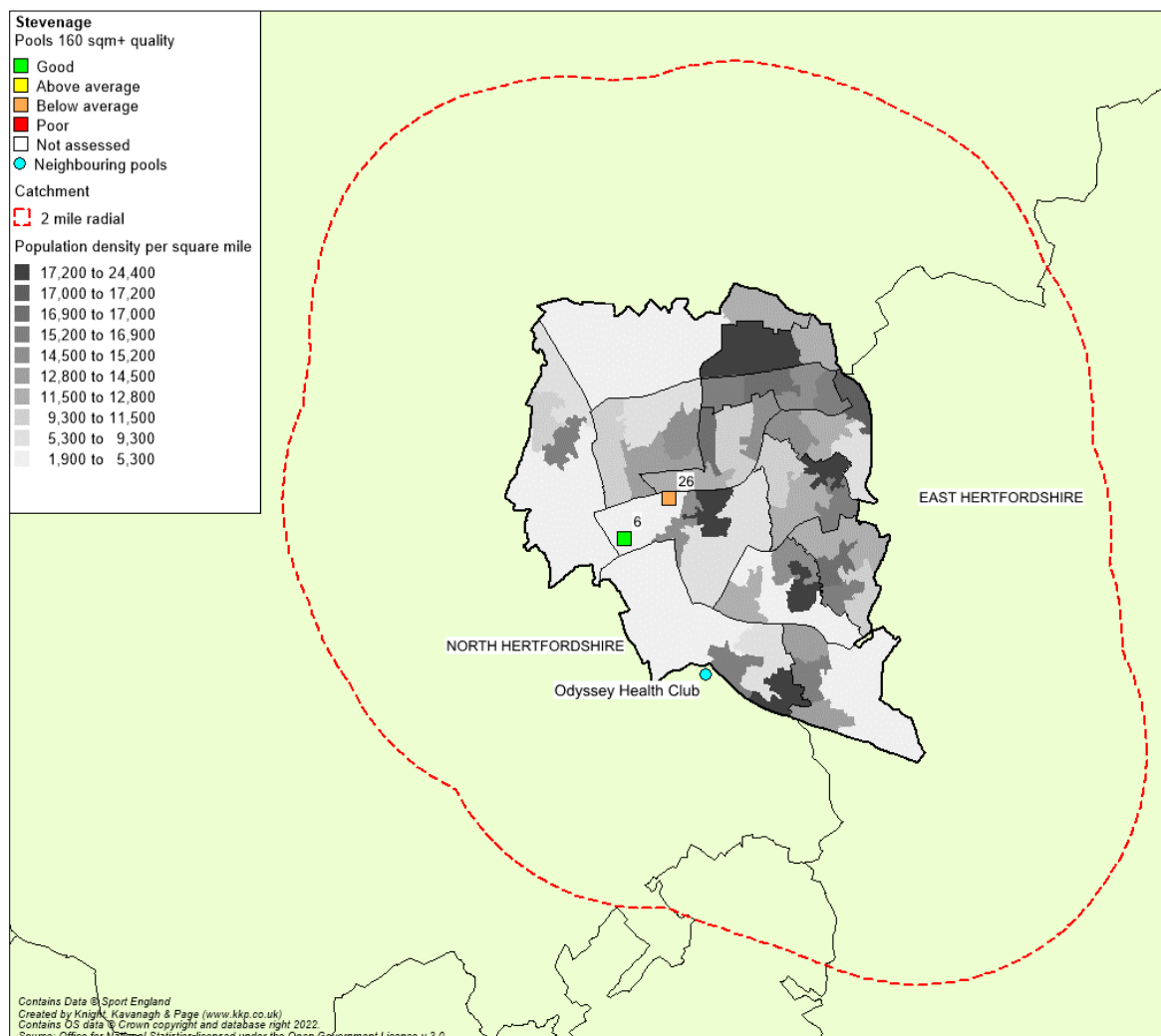


## Facilities in neighbouring authorities

Accessibility is influenced by facilities located outside the authority's boundaries. Due to the rural nature of the areas surrounding Stevenage's authority boundary, only one facility (Odyssey health Club) is located within 2-miles of the Stevenage boundary.

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Figure 5.7: Facilities in neighbouring authorities within a 2-mile radius



Odyssey health Club is situated just outside of the Stevenage Authority boundary, almost certainly serving some Stevenage residents. The pool operates on a registered membership access.

## Future enhancements / new developments

The proposed new leisure facility will combine sports hall, swimming pools and health and fitness provision under one roof. Stevenage Swimming Centre will be functional until the new leisure facility is open for public use to avoid a loss of pool space for general swim sessions, club use and the EA lesson programme.

The dated 480m<sup>2</sup> swimming pool space at Stevenage Swimming Centre will be replaced by a 10-lane 25m main/general pool and a teaching pool in 2027. In the case of the main pool, this will result in a shorter, wider pool space. Both pools will feature a moveable floor to allow for depth variation – primarily to support the expansion of EA’s learn to swim programme. EA confirmed that the proposed pool will not have an area with the same depth as the existing ‘diving end’ at Stevenage Swimming Centre. The deepest section of the new pool will be 1.8m, ensuring that scuba can still access the pool and synchronised swimming will be able to train, but not complete advanced sessions. A separate interactive splash pad will also be included.

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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There is, notwithstanding the potential planning restrictions, potential for the lido at Barnwell School to be brought back into use, ideally as a covered swimming facility. This would offer primarily commercial swim lessons but the School reported that it would also consider accommodating block-booked club swimming.

Odyssey Health Club has planning permission to develop a new outdoor swimming pool. The size of the pool has not yet been confirmed and the timescales of this development are currently unknown.

## 5.2: Sport England Facilities Planning Model<sup>19</sup>

An FPM report was commissioned by SBC in 2025 to better understand the impacts of its new leisure centre development (which contains swimming provision, due to replace the provision at Stevenage Swimming Centre) in line with population growth to 2031. To do this, three scenarios or 'runs' were undertaken:

- ◀ Run 1 – A baseline assessment of provision in 2024.
- ◀ Run 2 – forward assessment of demand for swimming pools and its distribution, based on the projected changes in population between 2024 and 2031.
- ◀ Run 3 – forward assessment of a change to supply (the new pool at Stevenage Swimming Centre) with future demand in 2031.

The focus of Run three is assess whether a larger public leisure centre replacing the existing centre is justified in terms of its scale to meet the projected demand to 2031 and beyond.

### Headline Strategic overview

Nearly all current and future demand for swimming pools in Stevenage can be met by the supply in each run. The FPM supports the development and scale of the new Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre, which will replace the dated centre built in 1962.

The new centre is expected to be completely full at peak times due to the attractiveness and location of the facility. This reduces the utilisation of other swimming pools in the catchment area. A very large proportion of Stevenage's demand is met in all three runs, with increased demand being met within the Borough in Run 3. Unmet demand is low, meaning no additional provision is required.

Around 25% of the used capacity of Stevenage's pools is imported from neighbouring authorities in Runs one and two. This figure increases in Run three due to the attractiveness of the facility.

### Key findings

#### Supply

Public leisure provision supplies the majority of swimming provision in all three runs (64% in Runs one and two, 73 % in Run three. David Lloyd provides the remaining supply.

#### Facility availability

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<sup>19</sup> This document has been produced by ORH on behalf of Sport England for Stevenage Borough Council on 14 July 2025. This document can be reproduced by Stevenage Borough Council, subject to it being used accurately and not in a misleading context.

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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Both sites operate at maximum availability in all three runs (52.5 hours per week in the peak period). There is no room to expand capacity at either site.

## Population

Stevenage's population is set to increase by 9% between 2024 and 2031. This will lead to a 7% rise in swimming pool demand.

## Met and unmet demand

In Runs one and two, 95% of demand is met. 94% of demand is met in Run three. This equates to a slightly lower number of visits in Run three, despite increased capacity.

The amount of satisfied demand within the Borough increases significantly from Run one (57%) to 80% in Run three. This is due to increased capacity at the new public leisure site and its attractiveness.

Run one has an unmet demand level of 44m<sup>2</sup>, Run two has 48m<sup>2</sup> and Run three has 58m<sup>2</sup>. In Runs one and two, unmet demand is due to distance from facilities, whereas unmet demand in Run three is in part due to a lack of capacity at the new site. This is not enough to justify increased pool space than planned. The new centre draws demand from neighbouring authorities but cannot accommodate all of it.

## Interventions and next steps

The FPM findings support the scale of the development of the new leisure centre. Increasing the scale of the new centre would accommodate some of Stevenage's unmet demand from lack of swimming pool capacity, but this amounts to only 11 sqm of water in Run 3.

The limited intervention is therefore to ensure that the management and programming of both pools maximises pool time to provide for the most popular activities at peak times.

## 5.3: Demand

### Consultation

Swim England responded to consultation request. By its calculations (which only takes into account public leisure swimming pool provision at Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre), there is a total public water space of 480m<sup>2</sup>. Swim England has a target public water space of 12m<sup>2</sup> per 1,000 population. By applying this calculation to North Herts, there is a water provision surplus of 587m<sup>2</sup>.

Given that this data only accounts for public leisure pool space and not pool space available at commercial or school sites, it does not accurately paint the full picture of pool provision in North Herts. Swim England also recognises the need to create a strong facility mix for versatile pool space, ensuring that new provision makes use of moveable floors and boom systems

The four swimming clubs in Stevenage were contacted with regard to the consultation to inform the audit, two responded.

### Club consultation

## STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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Stevenage Swimming Club is the largest swimming club in the Authority. It was formed over thirty years ago and merged with Six Hills Swimming Club in 2003. It caters for a range of swimmers, from young people on its learn to swim programmes to nationally ranked swimmers. It uses Stevenage Swimming Centre, which is its primary venue, on five days per week. It also uses the 50m pool at Inspire: Luton Sports Village on Thursday mornings.

It reports having a waiting list for its younger and development squads, meaning that it has limited capacity to take on more young people aged under 11 years. To enable the Club to grow, more pool space needs to be identified. It reports having a good relationship with EA but that no additional pool space is on offer at Stevenage Swimming Centre due to general swim time allocation and the commitments made to other clubs.

Aqualina Artistic Swimming Club also operates out of Stevenage Swimming Centre and two other facilities in neighbouring authorities. Artistic swimming requires pools with a minimum depth of 2.2m for lifts and stacking. Suitable provision is becoming harder to access as shallow pools are now more common due to their greater suitability to accommodate swimming lessons and better energy efficiency. The cost of gaining access to suitable provision is, thus, increasing.

Aqualina Artistic SC's booking at Stevenage Swimming Centre is its most expensive - it has to hire the whole pool, as EA does not give it an option for partial pool hire. In comparison, at Hatfield, it is able to hire only the diving pit for its sessions. This results in a price difference of £79 per hour. It presently has c. 40 members and reports that it could grow by c. ten before reaching capacity, given current pool space. It noted its concern that future public leisure provision in Stevenage is unlikely to offer the required pool depth for advanced artistic swimming and will need to source alternative provision, which will likely mean longer travel times.

Stevenage Dolphins is a SEND swimming club for people with a physical or mental disability. It has operated out of Stevenage Swimming Centre on Sunday afternoons since the pool opened in 1962. It operates an open membership policy, which has resulted in a fairly stable membership base over recent years. It is well-known within the SEND community, primarily recruiting new members through word of mouth.

Stevenage Swimming Centre meets its needs. It has always has concerns about the accessibility of the changing facilities but it recognises that the layout of a building of this age does not necessarily lend itself to being disability-friendly. It expects the new leisure centre, when developed, to be more suitable. Following the Covid-19 pandemic, its session time was reduced by 15 minutes, largely due to scheduling concerns from another swimming club. However, this change has not significantly impacted operations, as members attend sessions flexibly, and the current time allocation is generally sufficient to meet their needs.

Stevenage Sub Aqua did not respond to a consultation request. Desk research suggests that it accesses Stevenage Swimming Centre on a weekly basis as well as hosting outdoor dives at the weekends in Arlesey and further afield.

### **Swimming lessons**

Children's swimming lessons are delivered at Stevenage Swimming Centre. It currently has 1,540 members on the scheme, which is operating with about 20% spare capacity. The depth of the pool at Stevenage Swimming Centre limits the volume of sessions that can be delivered for younger children. Lessons for younger swimmers are, thus, at full capacity, with the spare capacity only applying to provision for older age groups.

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

EA reports having added several sessions to its pool programme to accommodate the needs of different users. These include:

- ◀ Adult only swimming – Monday, Tuesday & Thursday 21:00-22:00.
- ◀ Good Boost (Instructor lead for Muscular Skeletal conditions) – Tuesday 12:00-13:00.
- ◀ Good Boost Aquanatal – Thursday 12:00-13:00.
- ◀ Inclusive Quiet Adult Swimming – Thursday 12:00-13:00.
- ◀ Women only swimming – Thursday 20:00-21:00.
- ◀ Inclusive family swimming – Friday 14:00-15:00.

## 5.4: Sport England’s Facilities Calculator (SFC)

As noted earlier, this assists local planning authorities to quantify additional demand for community sports facilities generated by new growth populations, development and regeneration areas. It can be used to estimate facility needs for whole area populations but should not be applied for strategic gap analysis as it has no spatial dimension as it does not take account of:

- ◀ Facility location compared to demand.
- ◀ Capacity and availability of facilities – opening hours.
- ◀ Cross boundary movement of demand.
- ◀ Travel networks and topography.
- ◀ Attractiveness of facilities.

Table 5.7: Sports facilities calculator

Factor	Population 2018 (ONS)	Population estimate 2031 (ONS)
ONS population projections	87,754	89,602
Population increase	-	1,848
Facilities to meet change in demand	-	0.38 lanes / 0.09 pools
Estimated Cost	-	£446,072

(Build costs as of Q3 2024)

Calculations assume that the current swimming pool stock remains available for community use and the quality remains the same. The projected increase in population will lead to a small increase in demand for swimming space. The SFC indicates a requirement for an additional 0.38 lanes (equivalent to 0.09 swimming pools, up to 2031 (estimated cost: £446,072). This figure does not take into account the development of new pool provision as part of the proposed leisure centre development or the removal of the existing facility. The SFC does not take into account the condition of existing facilities or housing growth, and therefore may not represent the overall need for new pool provision.

ONS population growth does not account for growth generated through housing growth (shown in Table 5.8). It is, thus, useful to show the demand generated via both SFC and housing growth detailed in the local plan. This is shown in table 5.9:

Figure 5.8: Strategic housing impact- proposed allocations

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Housing growth increases from strategic sites (500+ houses to 204)	Average number of people per owner occupying household (England)	Population increase due to proposed housing	Additional swimming pool space required	Estimated cost (£)
7,600	2.4	18,240	202.78m <sup>2</sup> (equivalent to 0.95 pools)	£4,818,094

The proposed 10-lane main pool and learner pool will create a total of 300m<sup>2</sup> water space, and the accompanying splash pad will provide an early introduction to swimming to boost interest in the EA learn to swim programme and general admissions. In the shorter term, the programming of Stevenage Swimming Centre should be reviewed – to assess the present balance of opportunities for pay and play swimming, learn to swim programmes and club use.

## 5.5: Summary of key facts and issues

In summary, the above consultation and analysis indicates that Stevenage is in the following position with regards to its swimming pool provision:

Facility type	Swimming pools	
Elements	Assessment findings	Specific facility needs
<b>Quantity</b>	There are five pools across four sites in Stevenage. Four are larger than 160m <sup>2</sup> . however, one is currently closed.	Stevenage Swimming Centre is the only public swimming pool facility in Stevenage and is, thus, a key strategic site. It is scheduled to be replaced in 2027 by new main and teaching pool facilities which will be housed in a new public leisure centre. The shallower pool depth of this will have a negative impact on Aqualina Artistic Swimming Club and Stevenage Sub-Aqua.
<b>Quality</b>	Of the two pools to receive a quality rating, David Lloyd Stevenage is good quality and Stevenage Swimming Centre is below average. Stevenage Swimming Centre is due to be replaced in 2027.	Continue to maintain Stevenage Swimming Centre to keep the pool in an acceptable condition prior to development of the new site. Assess the feasibility of (and potential planning constraints to) developing the lido at Barnwell School to bring it back into use -all year round.
<b>Accessibility</b>	29.3% of the population lives within a one mile walk of a swimming pool 160m <sup>2</sup> + This increases to 100% for 20-minute drivetime. Pay and play access is available within a 1-mile walk for 27.7% of residents. 62% of residents from areas of higher deprivation live within 1-mile of a pool.	Whilst the two pools are located centrally in the Authority and the public leisure centre is situated in close proximity to the town centre, walk time accessibility is poorer in the east of the Borough given its high levels of population density. This is offset by the high level of car ownership and drive time catchment findings. Developing the lido to make it a more viable lesson and club swimming venue would partially improve accessibility to pool space in the east of Stevenage.
<b>Availability (Management and usage)</b>	Stevenage Swimming Centre is the only pool available on a pay and play basis. An additional pool is located at David Lloyd (Stevenage).	There is a need to regularly review programming at Stevenage Swimming Centre and ensure that the new public swimming pools continue to provide for clubs, swimming lessons and general public swimming.

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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## Strategic summary

- ◀ Each facility is important to the community served and should be protected in accordance with Para 104 of the NPPF.
- ◀ The only public leisure centre based main swimming pool is of below average quality although it is expected to be replaced in 2027. The scale of the development is supported by this audit and the FPM.
- ◀ Routine maintenance should be carried out throughout this period to ensure that it remains a viable option for club use, general swimming and swimming lessons.
- ◀ The proposed leisure centre will provide a larger, modernised swimming offer for Stevenage residents. It will be able to offer a more flexible programme of learn to swim, lane and club swimming however, the two clubs which require deeper water space will be forced to find alternative provision.
- ◀ The Council has the opportunity to ensure that the replacement swimming pools are designed, programmed and marketed to be as welcoming as possible to residents who are currently inactive, who may suffer with long term health conditions or access the facility via a health referral pathway.
- ◀ Ensure that sufficient car parking is available at the proposed development given the increased number of users/user visits that the new 'combined' leisure centre will generate.
- ◀ Assist Barnwell School to bring its lido back into use on the basis of guaranteed club access and consider opportunities to cover this pool to increase the volume of community use opportunity.

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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## SECTION 6: HEALTH AND FITNESS SUITES

According to the most recent ALS data<sup>20</sup>, around 11.4 million adults regularly engage in some form of fitness type activity (i.e., using gym equipment, a weights session, fitness class, or interval session). The popularity of fitness activities is reflective of their taking place across wide range of facilities including larger gyms (run on behalf of the local authority by companies and/or Trusts, managed in-house or private sector operators), and also other smaller activity spaces such as village and community halls.

Fitness studios also vary in their size and function, from relatively large rooms within leisure centres often containing a sprung floor, to smaller spaces (often within community and village halls) which may serve as dedicated spinning (indoor cycling) studios or to hold virtual fitness classes. Studio based timetabled classes such as Pilates, yoga, dance, step, boxercise and Zumba usually generate a significant amount of activity within publicly operated provision and comprise a core benefit of a health and fitness membership.

In terms of trends in the market, prior to the Covid-19 Pandemic, the UK health and fitness industry was enjoying a strong period of growth. It had more gyms, more members and a greater market value than ever before. The State of the Fitness Industry Report UK for 2022 found that membership levels dropped by around 5% since 2019 as a result of the Pandemic and numbers of facilities had also reduced. This correlates with ALS data which measured regular pre-Pandemic activity levels at around 14 million. Pure Gym and GLL remain the UK's leading operators (by number of gyms and members).

Health and fitness facilities are a core element within the transitioning of public leisure facilities towards delivering on wider health improvement outcomes. A leisure operator's role in providing for people with long term health conditions, including via exercise referral is critical. Fitness studios may 'double up' as spaces where NHS services such as physiotherapy, health screening, and weight management can take place alongside gentle exercise classes.

Larger health and fitness gyms containing a mix of flexible spaces (such as cardio, free weights and boxing equipment, (80 stations +<sup>21</sup>) remain central to the financial viability of public sector leisure centres. When combined with multiple studio facilities offering a good mix (and sufficient number) of classes, these usually offer the most profitable spaces within a typical leisure centre.

The past decade or so has also seen a growth in the prevalence of operators offering 'functional fitness' type equipment and activities. This form of fitness is a type of strength training that readies your body for daily activities and includes lifting, loading, pushing, pulling, squatting and hauling. This is manifested both in terms of small private facilities, and the incorporation of functional fitness spaces within publicly operated health and fitness facilities.

### 6.1: Supply

#### Quantity

The ten health and fitness gyms in Stevenage have a total of 757 stations. The facility stock is generally well spread to cover all areas of the Authority. A high proportion of the facilities are located close to the town centre.

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<sup>20</sup> [Active Lives adult survey Nov 20-21 report](#)

<sup>21</sup> A health and fitness 'station' is defined as a piece of static fitness equipment – KKP normally audits facilities of 20 stations or more.

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Figure 6.1: All health and fitness gyms on population density

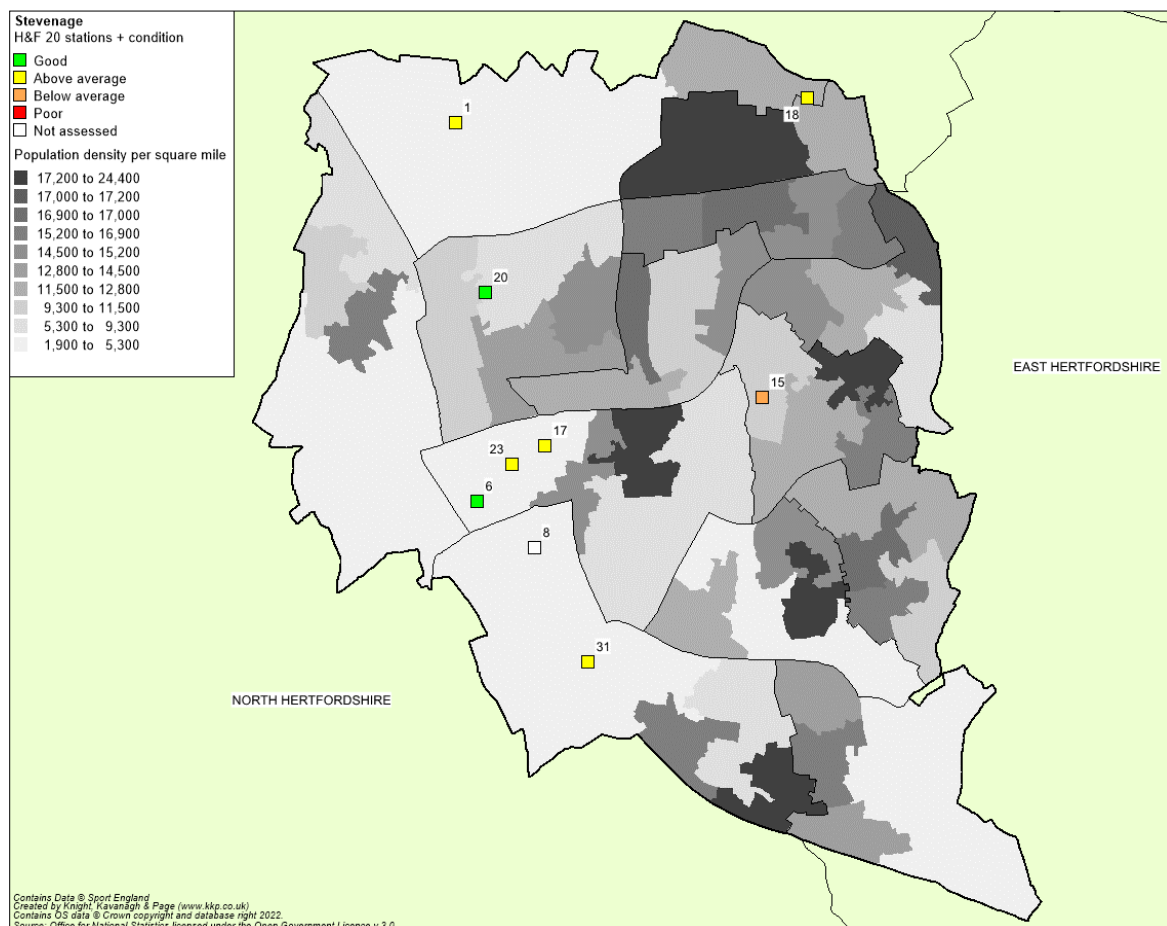


Table 6.1: All health and fitness gyms in Stevenage

ID	Site	Stations
1	Active Fitness Club (Stevenage)	40
6	David Lloyd (Stevenage)	100
8	Glaxo SmithKline	50
15	Marriotts Sports Centre	30
17	Puregym (Stevenage)	220
18	Renegade Fitness Academy	40
20	Rise Gym (Stevenage)	90
23	Stevenage Arts & Leisure Centre	125
27	The Nobel School	12
31	Lifearner Fitness	50

Fitness facilities with fewer than 20 stations are typically not assessed/considered large enough to be a community gym although they can service small sections of the community. When these smaller facilities are removed from the supply calculation, nine venues with 20+ stations (745 stations in total) remain. Three are of a significant size (100+ stations).

Table 6.2: Health and fitness suite (20+ stations)

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

ID	Site	Stations
1	Active Fitness Club (Stevenage)	40
6	David Lloyd (Stevenage)	100
8	Glaxo SmithKline	50
15	Marriotts Sports Centre	30
17	Puregym (Stevenage)	220
18	Renegade Fitness Academy	40
20	Rise Gym (Stevenage)	90
23	Stevenage Arts & Leisure Centre	125
31	Lifearner Fitness	50

## Quality

All health and fitness sites received a non-technical quality assessment. Two are rated as good quality, five above average and one below average. One site was not assessed.

Figure 6.2: Health and fitness gym quality (20+ stations)

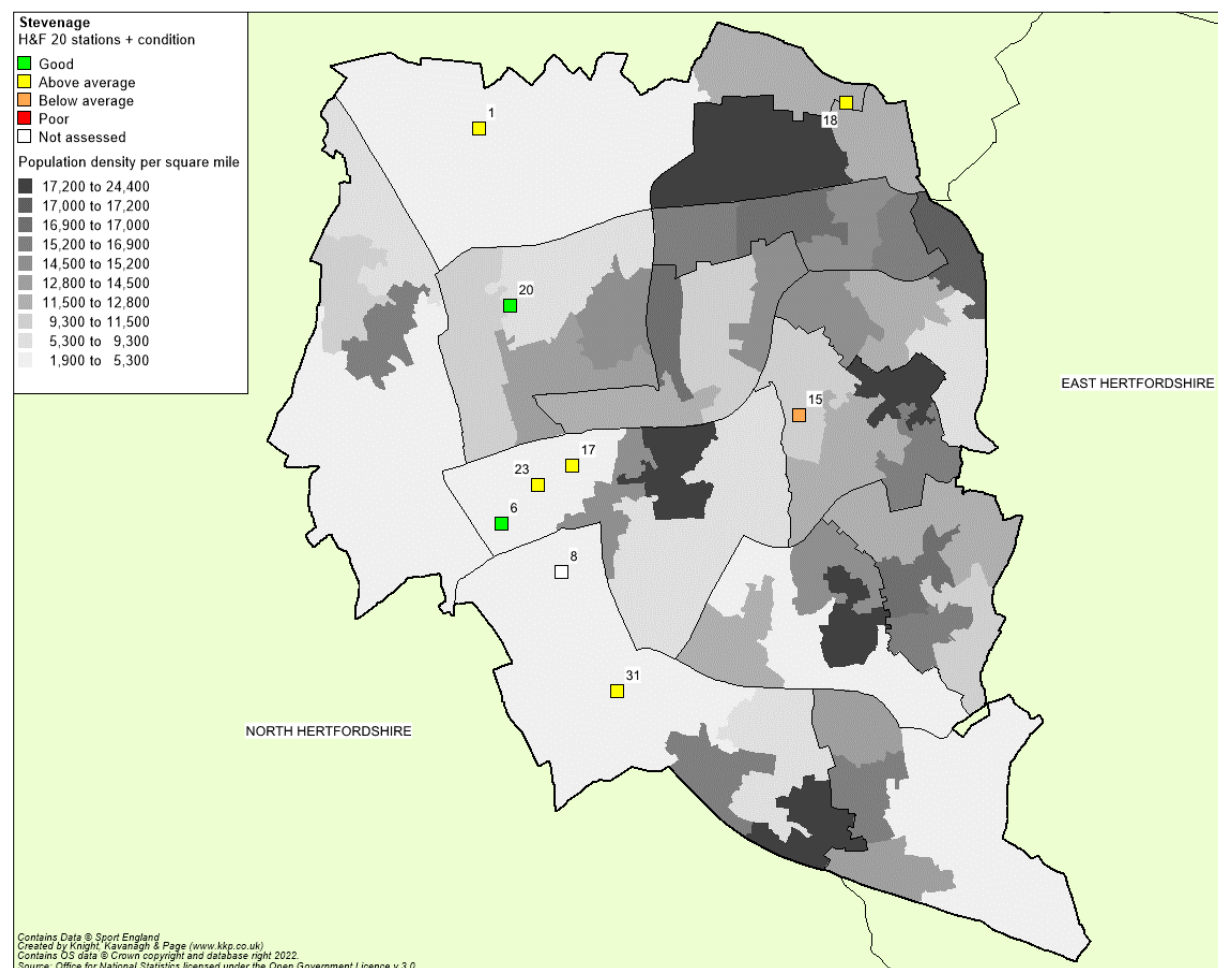


Table 6.3: Health & fitness suites with 20+ stations by condition

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

ID	Site	Stations	Condition
1	Active Fitness Club (Stevenage)	40	Above average
6	David Lloyd (Stevenage)	100	Good
8	GlaxoSmithKline	50	Not assessed
15	Marriotts Sports Centre	30	Below average
17	Puregym (Stevenage)	220	Above average
18	Renegade Fitness Academy	40	Above average
20	Rise Gym (Stevenage)	90	Good
23	Stevenage Arts & Leisure Centre	125	Above average
31	Lifelearner Fitness	50	Above average

EA confirmed that the health and fitness suite at Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre was refurbished in 2023 when the décor was modernised and the majority of equipment was updated. The facility is split over two floors and four separate areas; however, it does not feature a lift inside which makes accessibility more challenging.

The health and fitness facility at Marriotts Sports Centre is available to the public between the hours of 16:00-21:00. It is not purpose-built but rubber flooring has been installed to improve the usability of the facility. The School funded new equipment in 2023.

## Accessibility

The Sport England classification of access type defines registered membership use facilities as being publicly available. For health and fitness suites, this generally means payment of a monthly membership fee which can vary considerably. Private operators do not have a contractual obligation to, for example, offer exercise referral nor do they generally actively target people/communities who face barriers to participation as is the case in Stevenage. It is also acknowledged that some memberships are expensive while others are cheaper than those offered by public sector venues. There is little doubt that the various private operators can take pressure off the more available public facilities.

As with pools and sports halls, appropriate walk and drive-time accessibility standards are applied to health and fitness suites to determine provision deficiencies or surpluses. The normal acceptable standard for an urban area is a 20-minutes' walk time and 20-minute drive time for a rural area.

86% of Stevenage's population lives within 20 minutes' walk of a health and fitness facility with 20+ stations. All residents in Stevenage live within a 20-minute drive of a community accessible facility with 20+ stations. Consequently, 21.2% of the population is likely to need to use a car or public transport to access facilities.

13.6% of Stevenage's population lives within an area of higher deprivation (IMD bands 0-30%). Of those 11,754 residents, 9,857 (83%) live within 1-mile of a health and fitness facility with community use.

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Figure 6.3: Health and fitness gyms 20+ stations+ with 1-mile radial catchment

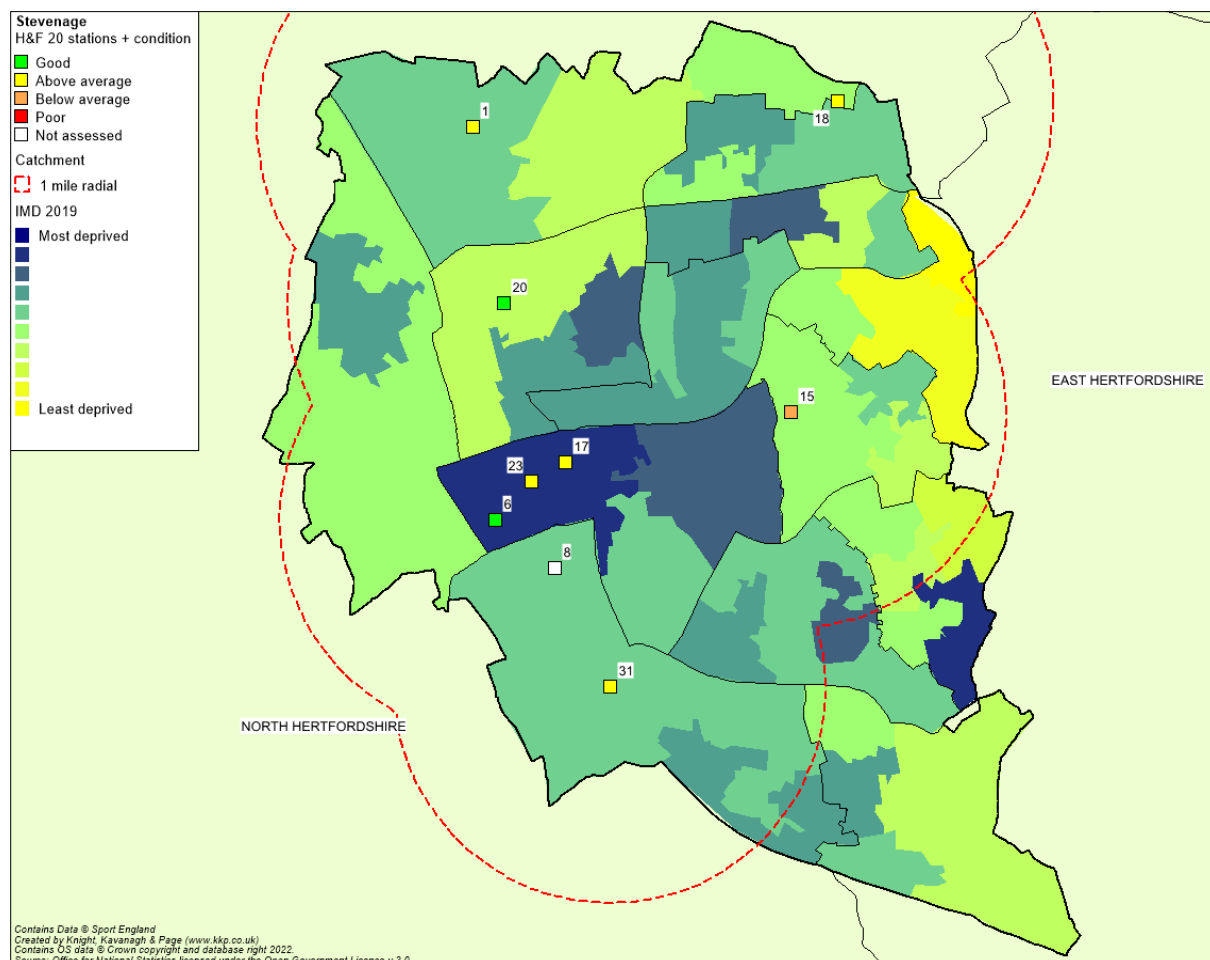


Table 6.4: Health and fitness 20+ stations with 1-mile radial catchment

IMD 10% bands	Persons	Population %	Persons inside catchment	Population inside (%)	Persons outside catchment	Population outside (%)
0 - 10	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
10.1 - 20	3,263	3.8%	2,072	2.4%	1,191	1.4%
20.1 - 30	8,491	9.8%	7,785	9.0%	706	0.8%
30.1 - 40	20,265	23.4%	17,298	20.0%	2,967	3.4%
40.1 - 50	19,680	22.7%	17,439	20.1%	2,241	2.6%
50.1 - 60	16,565	19.1%	14,139	16.3%	2,426	2.8%
60.1 - 70	12,099	14.0%	10,349	12.0%	1,750	2.0%
70.1 - 80	1,657	1.9%	976	1.1%	681	0.8%
80.1 - 90	2,964	3.4%	2,964	3.4%	0	0.0%
90.1 - 100	1,595	1.8%	1,491	1.7%	104	0.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>86,579</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>74,513</b>	<b>86.1%</b>	<b>12,066</b>	<b>13.9%</b>

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

## Neighbouring facilities

Health and fitness facility users do not just use venues in their own authority. As a consequence, those within two miles of the border are considered. There is only one facility within 2-miles of the Stevenage boundary. Odyssey Health Club (Knebworth) is located in North Hertfordshire, to the south of Stevenage.

Figure 6.4: Health and fitness suites with walk and drive time catchment on IMD

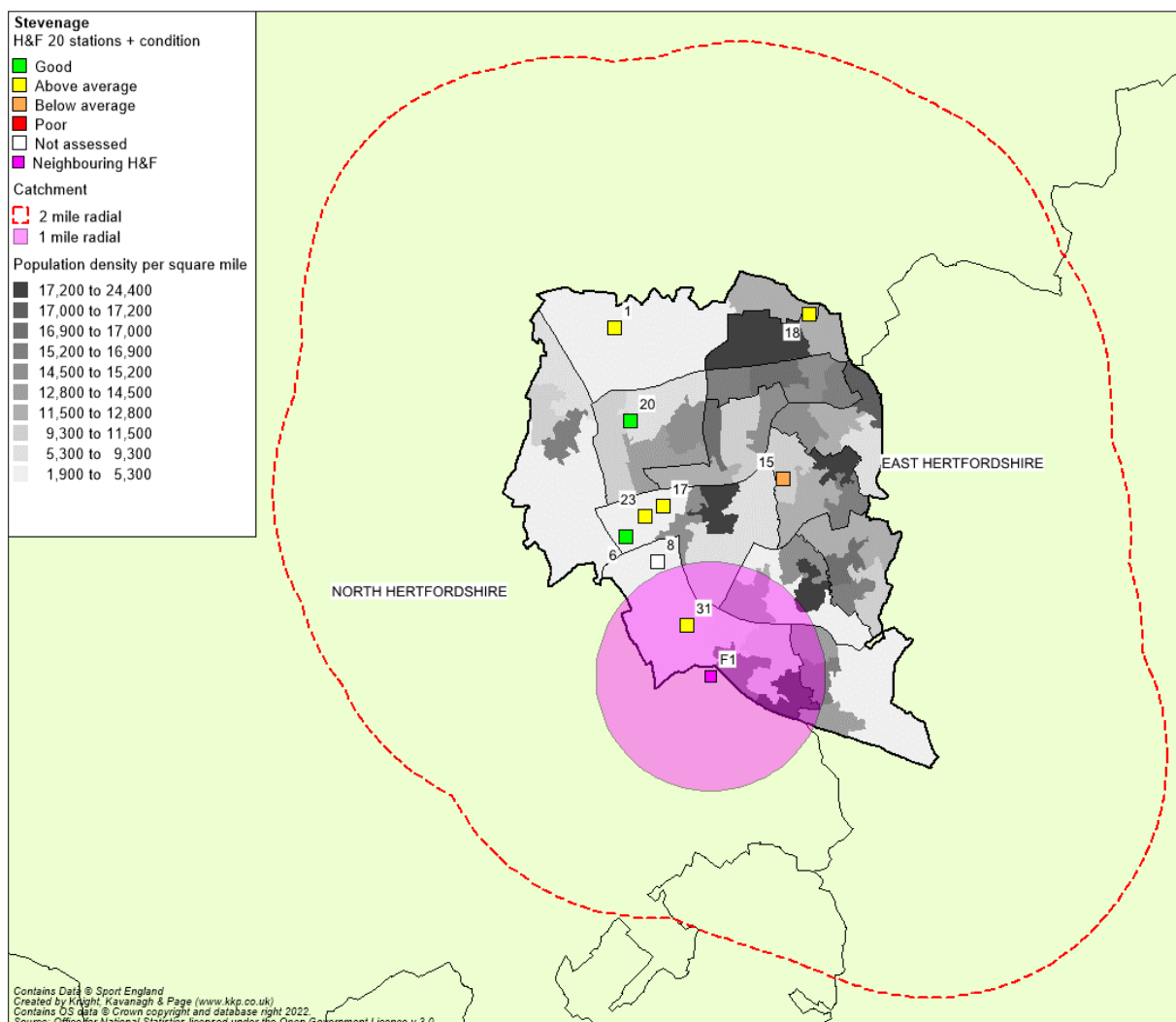


Table 6.5: Community available health and fitness (20+ stations) within 2 miles of Stevenage

ID	Site	Stations	Access	District
F1	Odyssey Health Club (Knebworth)	100	Registered membership	North Hertfordshire

Source: Active Places Power 28/10/2024

## Availability and programming

Sport England's classification of access type defines registered membership use facilities as publicly available. However, the cost of monthly membership fees can vary considerably. It is acknowledged that those which may be considered expensive offer access to different market segments and can ease pressure on facilities which offer cheaper membership options.

## STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Of the nine health and fitness suites with 20+ stations, eight provide some form of community use. Five provide a pay and play offer via the pre-purchase of a one-day pass or pay on arrival. All the five gyms which offer pay and play access also offer a monthly membership scheme, which may work out as a more cost-effective option based on regular usage. Only one facility (located at GlaxoSmithKline) does not offer community use.

Table 6.6: access policy of fitness gyms (20+ stations)

ID	Site	Stations	Access type
1	Active Fitness Club (Stevenage)	40	Pay and play
6	David Lloyd (Stevenage)	100	Registered membership
8	GlaxoSmithKline	50	Private
15	Marriotts Sports Centre	30	Registered membership
17	Puregym (Stevenage)	220	Pay and play
18	Renegade Fitness Academy	40	Registered membership
20	Rise Gym (Stevenage)	90	Pay and play
23	Stevenage Arts & Leisure Centre	125	Pay and play
31	Leaner Life Fitness	50	Pay and play

The facility at GlaxoSmithKline is only available to employees of GSK. The operator has no plans to open this facility up for wider community use. Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre can be accessed on a pay and play basis; however, a (free) leisure card must be obtained in order to do this. In total, the eight-community available health and fitness facilities with 20+ stations provide 695 stations.

Table 6.7: Pricing structure of health and fitness suites with community use and 20+ stations

Site name	Pay & play	Annual	12-month DD	Notes
Active Fitness Club (Stevenage)	£7	£349.50	£34.95	Also provides access to sauna and steam room.
David Lloyd (Stevenage)	-	-	£129	Pool and spa access included.
GlaxoSmithKline	-	-	-	Private use for GSK employees only.
Marriotts Sports Centre	-	-	£20	Only available between 16:00-21:00.
Puregym (Stevenage)	£8.99	-	£19.99	24-hour access. No contract membership.
Renegade Fitness Academy	-	-	£39	-
Rise Gym (Stevenage)	£12	-	£48.40	-
Stevenage Arts & Leisure Centre	£8.50	£299.90	£29.99	Provides access to the pool at the Centre. Concessionary rates also available.
Leaner Life Fitness	£12.50	-	£39	-

\*Pricing as advertised in October 2024

As shown, the cost of accessing health and fitness facilities varies across the Authority. Stevenage Arts & Leisure Centre provides the most comprehensive membership as it includes multi-site access, gym, swim and class use with prices varying depending on age. The cost to book a pay and play general gym session is £8.50.

Active Fitness Stevenage provides the cheapest pay and play offer in the Authority; however, this must be done in advance via online payment methods as the site requires code entry. At the opposite end of the scale, Rise Gym (Stevenage) is the most expensive, costing £12.00 per session. The most expensive monthly membership is at David Lloyd Stevenage.

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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It is recognised that well run health and fitness facilities with studios can offset the costs and enhance the financial viability of other venue elements such as swimming pools and in many instances are used to cross subsidise such facilities. EA currently operates an exercise referral scheme in partnership with We Are Undefeatable. It comprises a 12-week programme designed to help individuals self-manage long-term health conditions such as asthma, arthritis, high blood pressure, diabetes and obesity. GP referral is currently taking place at Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre. As of August 2024, EA had 350 members currently accessing the site via GP referral.

Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre also provides a Healthy Hub, delivered by Everyone Active. The Hub provides support on a range of topics including getting more active, mental health, weight management, parenting and other life matters.

## Future developments

The number of health and fitness stations in Stevenage will increase when the proposed new public leisure centre replaces the existing facilities in 2027. The proposed venue will have 200 stations, 75 more than the existing dry facility. It will be located close to the town centre, providing good public transport and active travel opportunities. The site will also have a good parking supply.

In this new facility, all health and fitness equipment will be situated on the same level to improve the user experience for those with mobility issues. As of 2027, gym use, swimming and group exercise classes will all take place at the one public leisure site. This should significantly improve the public leisure offer.

The Gym Club has a planning application in place to build a health and fitness facility in a former carpet land unit. The number of stations is yet to be confirmed.

## 6.2: Demand

EA reports that demand for health and fitness membership at Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre is strong. As of September 2024, it had approximately 4,300 members and 125 stations (just under 35 per station)<sup>22</sup>. Consultation with EA suggests that this figure may dip slightly when the new leisure facility opens, as it expects to lose some ‘sleeper’ members but it then anticipates an influx of new members due to the significant local interest in the development.

Health and fitness via exercising in a gym or class environment is a highly popular form of exercise, appealing to men and women across a range of age groups. To identify the adequacy of provision a demand calculation based upon the assumption that ‘UK penetration rates’ will increase slightly in the future is applied. Population increases are also factored in to enable a calculation of whether current supply will meet future demand.

Table 6.8: UK penetration rates; health/fitness in Stevenage (ONS Data)

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<sup>22</sup> The calculation of number of members per station is based upon its membership data and the number of current stations at each site. Typically, a health and fitness suite with 100 stations will have a sales target of 3,500 members (35 members per station).

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

	Current (2018)	Future (2031)
Adult population (16+ years)	69,533	72,520
UK penetration rate	16.0%	17.0%
Number of potential members	11,125	12,328
Number of visits per week (1.75/member)	19,469	21,575
% of visits in peak time	65	65
No. of visits in peak time (equated to no. of stations required i.e., no. of visits/39 weeks*65%)	324	360
<b>Number of stations (with comfort factor applied)</b>	<b>487</b>	<b>539</b>

Model applies 1.75 visits/week by members and 65% usage for 39 weeks of the year. (Figures rounded up/down)

Based upon UK penetration rates there is current need for 487 stations in Stevenage. This will grow to 539 stations by 2031, taking into account the comfort factor (particularly at peak times). When comparing the current number of community available stations (695) and accounting for a comfort factor, there is currently a positive supply of 208 stations. This figure will increase to 231 when taking into account the increased number of stations at the new public leisure site and future demand by 2031.

This indicates that there is capacity to accommodate future demand from projected population growth. To counter this, the KKP audit has identified high participation rates across the authority, and it is presumed that there will be some import and export of demand whereby residents in the Authority will access facilities in neighbouring local authorities, especially larger sites and vice versa.

It is not uncommon for the private sector to identify niche markets and fill them with stations which make the market appear congested. The key issue is that while some of these may be budget operators this does not necessarily make them available to people/communities who face barriers to participation and people from areas of (relative) disadvantage (as cost is only one factor which may hinder usage). It could be argued that this applies particularly to those who require transport to access such facilities.

All leisure centres in the borough have cashless systems. The price point and the requirement to register, book and pay online in order to access 'pay and play' sport and leisure provision means that the option could be restrictive. It is important that people are able to access provision without barriers. Whilst centres are generally well used, there is a need to create opportunity for people considered to be digitally excluded.

## Supply and demand analysis

Fitness facilities are an important facet of leisure provision and have been a successful addition to sports centres over the past three decades. Income derived can help offset the cost/underpin the viability of other areas of provision such as swimming pools or targeted physical activity programmes (i.e., GP referral).

### 6.3: Dance studios

Dance studios are an important element of the wider health, fitness and conditioning market. They vary in size, shape, quality of environment, access to sprung wooden floors and quality of ancillary facilities. There has been an increase in the number of people accessing fitness classes as identified in increased UK penetration rates. Activity types offered also vary from low impact classes such as Pilates and yoga to dance, step, boxercise and Zumba. It is worth noting that dance classes/clubs are key users of studio spaces throughout the country.

## STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

There are 17 studios in Stevenage, across nine sites. Of these, 16 facilities were subject to a non-technical assessment.

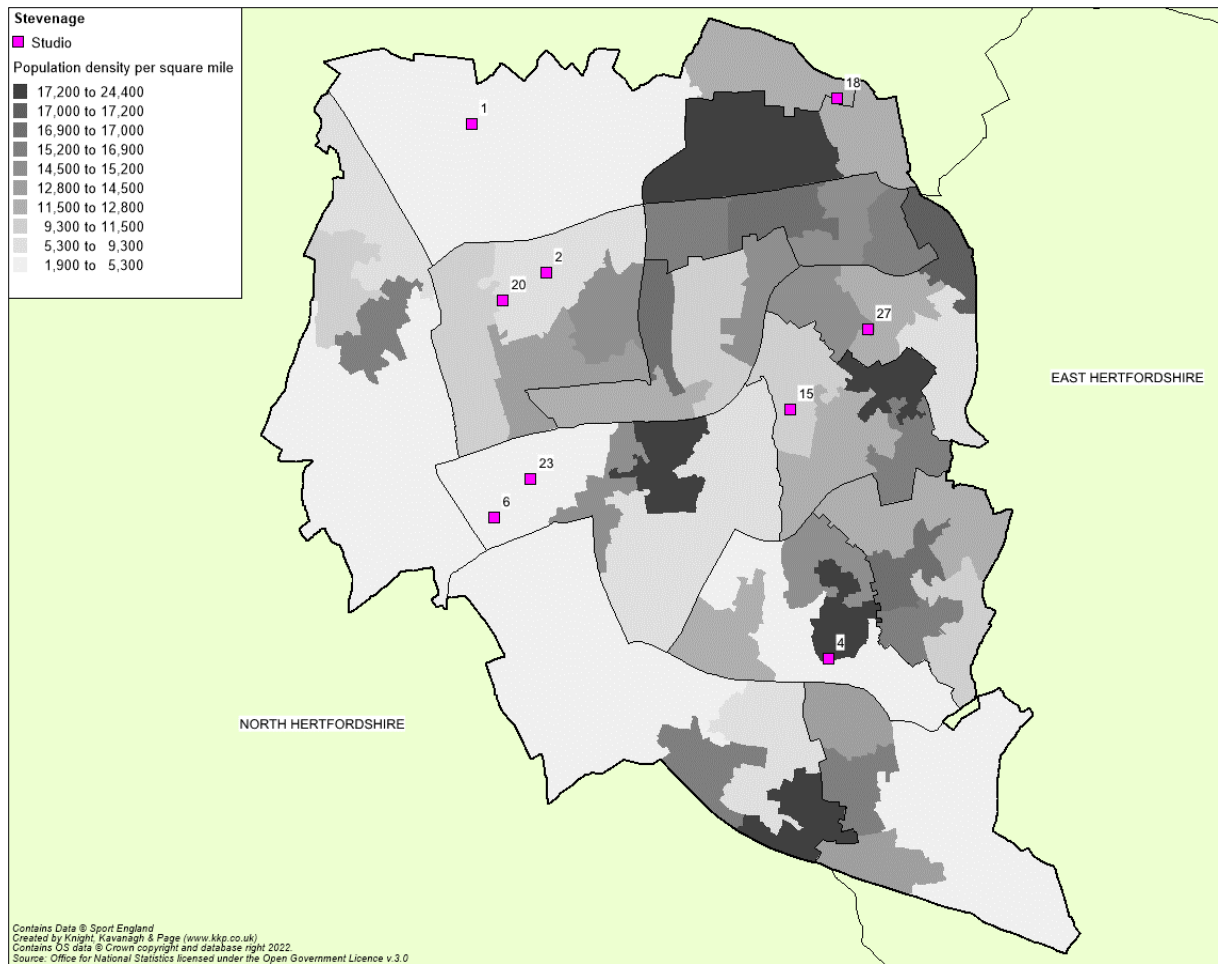
Table 6.9: Table of studios in Stevenage

ID	Site name	Sub- type	Access	Condition
1	Active Fitness Club (Stevenage)	Fitness	Pay and play	Above average
1	Active Fitness Club (Stevenage)	Fitness	Pay and play	Above average
1	Active Fitness Club (Stevenage)	Fitness	Pay and play	Above average
2	Barclay Academy	Fitness	Private use	Not assessed
4	Barnwell School	Fitness	Sports club/CA	Below average
4	Barnwell School	Fitness	Sports club/CA	Above average
6	David Lloyd (Stevenage)	Fitness	Reg. membership	Good
6	David Lloyd (Stevenage)	Fitness	Reg. membership	Good
15	Marriotts Sports Centre	Fitness	Pay and play	Below average
15	Marriotts Sports Centre	Fitness	Pay and play	Below average
18	Renegade Fitness Academy	Fitness	Reg. membership	Above average
20	Rise Gym (Stevenage)	Fitness	Reg. membership	Good
20	Rise Gym (Stevenage)	Fitness	Reg. membership	Good
23	Stevenage Arts & Leisure Centre	Cycle	Pay and play	Above average
23	Stevenage Arts & Leisure Centre	Fitness	Pay and play	Above average
23	Stevenage Arts & Leisure Centre	Fitness	Pay and play	Above average
27	The Nobel School	Fitness	Sports club/CA	Below average
*	John Henry Newman School	Fitness	Sports Club/CA	Below average

(NB: Sports club/CA= Sports Club / Community Association use)

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Figure 6.5: Studios in Stevenage



In terms of access policies, eight of the 17 studios can be accessed on a pay and play basis. A further five can be accessed via registered membership, and three via sports club/community association use. One studio, located at Barclay Academy, is private use only.

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

## 6.4: Summary of key facts and issues

Facility type	Health & fitness	-
Elements	Assessment findings	Specific facility needs
<b>Quantity</b>	<p>There are ten health and fitness suites containing 757 stations.</p> <p>Nine of the ten have 20+ stations, totalling 745 stations.</p> <p>Eight sites providing 695 stations are available to the community.</p> <p>There are 17 studios, 16 of which offer some form of community access.</p> <p>There is a positive supply demand balance of facilities in the area.</p> <p>The audit identified high demand at the existing public leisure site.</p>	<p>Whilst there is currently sufficient supply, should the upward trend in demand continue, there may be a need to increase the volume of provision in the area.</p> <p>Demand at the new public leisure centre, when built in 2027, should be monitored to understand uptake levels.</p>
<b>Quality</b>	<p>Seven of the nine 20+ health and fitness facilities are of good or above average quality. One is below average, and one was unassessed.</p>	<p>Maintain the good quality stock.</p> <p>Ensure that Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre remains attractive to users until the new leisure centre opens to the public.</p>
<b>Accessibility</b>	<p>86% of Stevenage residents live within a one-mile radius of a health and fitness suite. This rises to 100% for those within a 20-minute drive of a community accessible facility.</p> <p>83% of people living in areas of higher deprivation live within a one mile walk of a facility.</p> <p>There is just one fitness facility within two miles of the Authority boundary.</p>	<p>Accessibility in Stevenage is good. The proximity of Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre to the town centre of the new public leisure site will ensure that active travel remains an option for users.</p>
<b>Availability (Management and usage)</b>	<p>Five pay and play health and fitness facilities with 20+ stations are publicly accessible.</p> <p>A further three can be accessed via registered membership.</p>	<p>Ensure that facilities cater to the full range of market segments.</p> <p>Commercial gyms offer the least expensive membership options but do not, typically, offer concessionary pricing or programmes designed to enable people with barriers to participation to engage.</p>

### Strategic summary

- ◀ Current and future demand is well catered for given the quantity and quality of existing health and fitness suites in the Authority.
- ◀ The new leisure facility will provide a high-quality option for Stevenage's residents. Unlike the current EA offer, gym, swim and class use will all take place under one roof. Accessibility within the health and fitness suite (currently set out over two levels) will also be improved.
- ◀ The Council has the opportunity to ensure that the fitness facilities in its new leisure centre are designed, programmed and marketed to be as welcome as possible to those residents who are currently inactive, who may be returning from a long term health condition or are accessing the facility via a health referral pathway.

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

## SECTION 7: SQUASH

Squash is now on a new strategic path, implementing a rebrand and undergoing a major restructure. England Squash (ES) has achieved core strategic goals agreed with Sport England and is committed to supporting the traditional infrastructure of county associations, clubs, coaches and officials to grow the game via key programmes (e.g., Squash101) and campaigns (e.g., Squash Girls Can) but will be apportioning resources in a significantly different manner.

Table 7.1: England Squash strategic aims:

Element	Aim
Governance	Adhere to the highest standards of organisational governance.
Membership	Provide a membership model that caters to and provides benefits for anyone interested in playing and coaching squash irrespective of their ability.
Programmes	Enabling and supporting partners to be at the forefront of adult and player recruitment and retention.
Talent & high performance	Provide a support and development programme that identifies, develops and delivers world leading individuals and teams.
Commercial	Create a diversified and effective revenue model that minimises risk and reduces dependency on funding.

Squash In a Changing World (2021-2025) outlines the vision, principles and strategic pillars for ES. Its vision for the future of squash in England is a thriving, diverse and growing community. Its Purpose is to serve as custodians of the game's past, its present and its future. It is to serve as a catalyst for positive change across the sporting community at home and abroad. The 2021-2025 strategy sets six key objectives:

- ◀ Drive increased participation in the game, with a radical advance in equality, diversity and inclusion.
- ◀ Inspire and train a community of world class coaches, referees and volunteers at every level, who drive participation and increase engagement in the game.
- ◀ Sustain world-leading talent pathways and programmes for high performing players who achieve success on the global stage and inspire others to realise their potential.
- ◀ Empower creativity and innovation in the game and in ES's culture, using ideas and technology to support the squash community and to engage with new audiences.
- ◀ Spearhead new and creative ways to enhance the visibility and appeal of squash at local, national and international levels, including the pursuit of Olympic inclusion.
- ◀ Provide leadership for the game nationally and internationally, including addressing the Climate and Ecological Crisis.

ES has set a benchmark of one court per 10,000 people in each local authority in order for squash to thrive. It estimates that there is currently one court per 12,617 people in England. This reflects the significant number of court closures and/or non-replacements when new facilities are developed to replace older venues - seen over the past two decades.

Stevenage's current population is **87,754** (ONS 2018) and it has seven courts. Applying the ES model would suggest that there is demand for an additional two courts to meet local community needs. When taking future population growth (to 2031) into account there is a need for 9 courts in total courts.

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

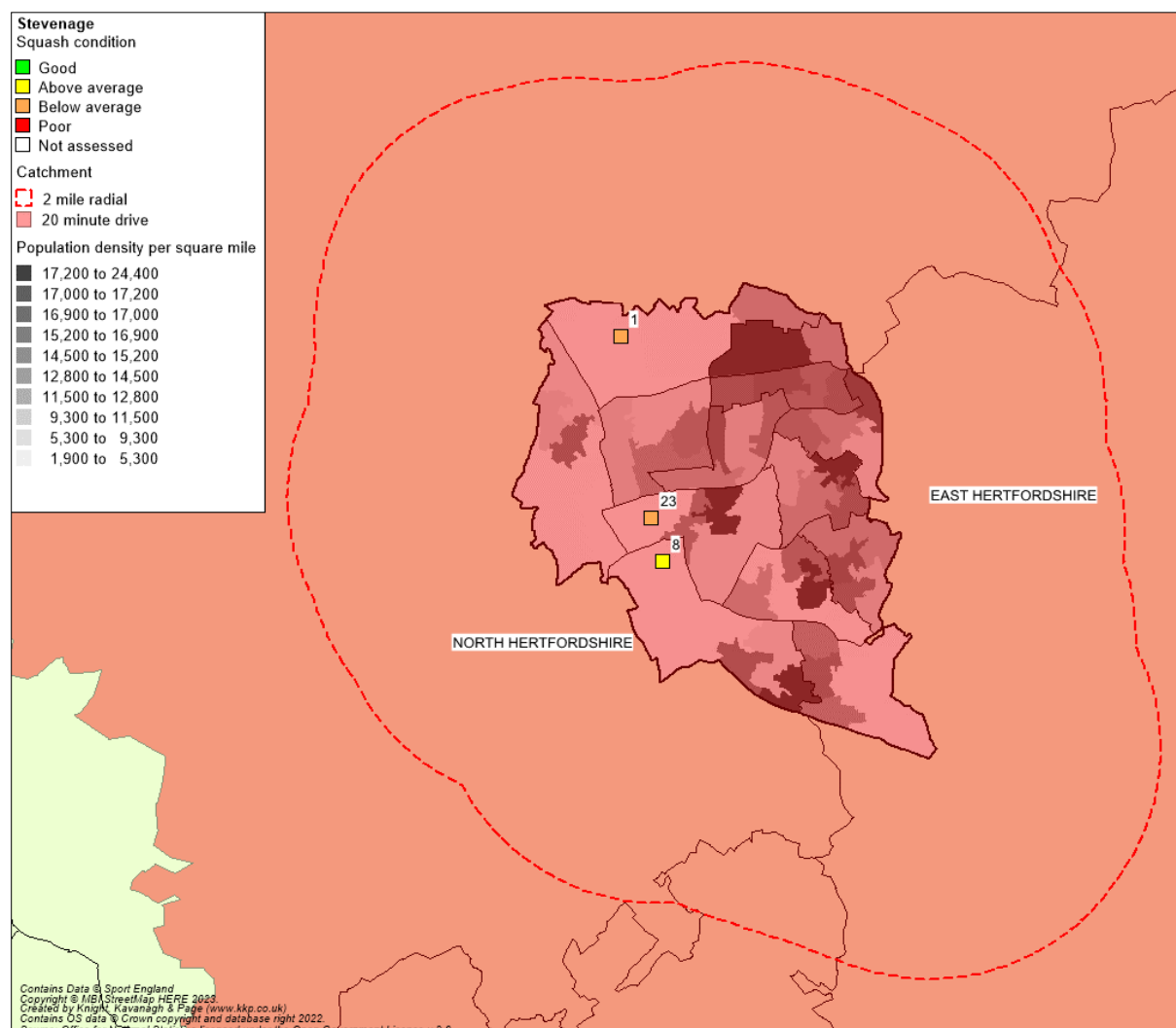
## 7.1 Supply

There are seven squash courts in Stevenage. Two are located at Active Fitness Club Stevenage, two at GlaxoSmithKline and three at Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre. Consultation with the Council and EA outlined that the existing squash courts at Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre are not to be replaced in the new facility. This will leave Stevenage with just four courts.

Table 7.2: Squash courts in Stevenage

ID	Site name	Access	Courts	Condition
1	Active Fitness Club (Stevenage)	Registered membership	2	Below average
8	GlaxoSmithKline	Private	2	Above average
23	Stevenage Arts & Leisure Centre	Pay and play	3	Below average

Figure 7.1: Location of squash courts in Stevenage with 20-minute drive time



The audit did not identify any squash facilities in neighbouring authorities within a 2-mile radial catchment of Stevenage's boundary.

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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## Quality

Five of the seven squash courts in Stevenage are of below average quality. The three courts at Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre (all below average quality) have poor quality flooring and walls which are showing signs of wear and tear. EA confirmed that it has no plans to refurbish these courts.

Active Fitness Club Stevenage also has two below average squash courts. Both require better lighting and one has water damage from a leak in the roof, which has now been fixed.

The two above average courts at GlaxoSmithKline are regularly refurbished. Consultation with the operator outlined that an annual maintenance programme is in place which involves sanding and resealing the flooring and painting the walls.

## Accessibility and availability

100% of Stevenage's population lives within a 20-minute drive of a squash facility.

Active Fitness Club Stevenage requires a monthly membership to access to facility. It costs £20 per month and courts can be booked without any further fees. The membership is required because the health and fitness facility is located on the same site and there is a code entry system. As part of the monthly membership fee, individuals are automatically enrolled into Stevenage Squash Club.

Only five of the seven squash courts in the Authority are available for community use. The two at GlaxoSmithKline are only available to employees of GSK. It has no plans to change its access policy. The courts at Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre can be accessed on a pay and play basis.

## Future developments / changes to provision

The three courts at Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre will be lost when the new leisure centre opens. Consultation with EA and the Council suggests that the limited demand for the courts at Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre means that it is not feasible to install new squash court provision at the new site.

This change will result in the Authority only having four courts, and no pay and play options for Stevenage residents. The only two community accessible courts will be accessible via a monthly membership at Active Fitness Club (Stevenage).

## 7.2: Demand

England Squash was invited to take part in consultation with regard to squash provision in Stevenage. Despite multiple attempts to contact, no response was received.

Stevenage Squash Club, which operates out of the courts at Active Fitness, is in a position to accommodate additional members upon closure of the courts at Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre. It has c.45 members and could accommodate closer to 100 (as it has previously). Should demand significantly increase, it has a disused court (currently occupied by health and fitness apparatus) that could potentially be reconverted should demand dictate. The Club cannot provide a pay and play offer due to its code entry system; however, a monthly fee of £20 for unlimited court bookings is cost-effective for new members looking to play more than once per month.

## STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

As noted above, limited demand for squash provision was identified at Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre. EA's view is that those looking to play squash regularly are more likely to approach local clubs, as this option is more cost-effective and are able to access better quality provision. The cost to hire a squash court at Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre during the peak period is £11.90 for a 40-minute booking. A (free) leisure card is also needed in order to book this. EA data outlines that the courts currently have a used capacity of 16.6%. This considers off-peak and peak time usage. It is expected that when considering peak time only, as with sports halls, usage would be considerably higher.

### 7.3: Summary of key facts and issues

Facility type	Squash	-
Elements	Assessment findings	Specific facility needs
<b>Quantity</b>	There are seven squash courts in Stevenage. No further courts can be accessed within a 2-mile radius in neighbouring authorities.	Stevenage currently has seven courts, five accessible to the population. This number will reduce by three upon closure of Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre in 2027, as the proposed replacement leisure centre does not contain squash courts.
<b>Quality</b>	Two courts, both at GlaxoSmithKline, are of above average quality. The other five courts are below average.	Undertake general maintenance to court décor to improve the user experience at Active Fitness Club (Stevenage) and Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre.
<b>Accessibility</b>	All Stevenage residents live within a 20-minute drive of a squash facility.	-
<b>Availability</b> (Management and usage)	Currently, three of the seven courts in Stevenage are technically available on a pay and play basis. Two further courts can be accessed via a registered membership (£20 per month for unlimited court use). Two courts are private use only.	Monitor demand to understand the effect of closing the three squash courts at Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre when the LC closes.

### Strategic summary

- ◀ Squash provision in Stevenage is currently sufficient. If the three courts currently located at Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre are not replaced in the new leisure facility, Stevenage Squash Club can accommodate additional members due to spare court availability at Active Fitness.
- ◀ This will require those currently accessing the squash courts at Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre to take up a registered membership. Depending on usage, this may be more cost effective.

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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## SECTION 8: INDOOR BOWLS

The five forms of bowls that are played indoors (flat/level green, crown green, long mat, short mat and carpet mat) each require a different venue and each format of the game has a different technical specification for their indoor facility.

Indoor flat/level green bowls is played on a purpose-built indoor green which complies with the laws of the sport of bowls. The NGB is the English Indoor Bowling Association (EIBA). It requires a standard bowling green; a flat area 31-40 metres long divided into playing areas called rinks. The number of these varies, depending on the width of the green.

Crown green bowls requires a standard crown green, artificial grass (carpeted) area of approximately 38m square which is crowned i.e. higher in the centre than round the perimeter. Indoor crown greens are relatively rare – substantially less common than those provided for flat green bowls. The NGB is the British Crown Green Bowling Association (BCGBA).

Carpet bowls is played on a rectangular carpet (45 x 6 feet) that is rolled out. It can be accommodated in any indoor space large enough to accommodate the mats which come in different lengths. It tends to be played at a recreational level. The NGB is the English Carpet Bowls Association (ECBA).

Short mat bowls is typically played in sports halls, parish council rooms, outdoor bowls club pavilions and on indoor flat green bowls club greens. The NGB is the English Short Mat Bowling Association (SMBA). Long mat bowls is played on a rolled carpet typically laid on a sports hall floor. There are no ditches in this game. It is typically found in areas of low flat-green supply and/or where crown green bowls is played outdoors. There is no NGB for this version of the game.

An indoor bowling centre typically comprises a single flat green with a number of rinks and ancillary accommodation such as changing rooms, lounge/bar, viewing area, kitchen, office/meeting rooms and stores plus designated car parking. Ancillary accommodation scale varies according to the number of rinks available. A successful indoor bowls centre requires a combination of the right location, design, and financial and general management. Sport England<sup>23</sup> guidelines on catchment for indoor bowls centres are set out to be interpreted in the light of local circumstances:

- ◀ Assume the majority of users live locally and not travel more than 30 minutes.
- ◀ Assume that 90% of users will travel by car, with the remainder by foot.
- ◀ As a guide, calculate demand on the basis of one rink per 14,000-17,000 total population.
- ◀ The number of rinks required can be related to the estimated number of members, assume 80-100 members per rink.

EIBA stated priorities are:

- ◀ Recruitment of participants.
- ◀ Retention of participants.
- ◀ Clubs are recommended to:
  - Develop and implement a robust sports development plan
  - Actively review the Sport England 'Buddle' website.
  - Actively promote the club in the local community amongst those who are able bodied and disabled. Wheelchair users and visually impaired people are particularly keen on the sport of bowls.
- ◀ Retention and improvement of facilities.
- ◀ New indoor facilities in areas of low-supply and high-demand.

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<sup>23</sup> Sport England Design Guidance Note Indoor Bowls 2005

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY

## NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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### EIBA Outline Plan 2022-2025

The EIBA plan is focused on: recruit and retain 45+ and recruit and retain 70+. Both markets require growth. The idea is that people aged 45+ need new versions/formats of the game to play and the 70+ will wish to continue with current formats. Its focus areas are:

- ◀ Getting core bowlers back playing following COVID lockdowns.
- ◀ 45-59 year old participants.
- ◀ Volunteers.
- ◀ Health and Wellbeing.
- ◀ Inclusivity – women, ethnic communities.
- ◀ Facilities: build, improve, retain.
- ◀ Youth and the family.
- ◀ Disability.
- ◀ Competitions.
- ◀ Internationals.
- ◀ Promotion.
- ◀ Commercial partnerships.

The “Recruit and Retain Strategy” is to concentrate on encouraging and supporting clubs to increase participation and improve the experience of all participants. Its objectives include:

- ◀ Growing participation across the adult population in local communities. Targeted work to increase female participation.
- ◀ Growing participation in the 12-18 age range as part of the EIBA Development Pathway.
- ◀ The provision of an excellent sporting experience for new and existing participants.
- ◀ A growth in Indoor Bowls participation by people who have disabilities.

Running alongside this is the Sport England funded development work provided jointly by the Indoor NGB (EIBA); Outdoor NGB (Bowls England) and the “Bowls Development Alliance” (BDA). Each NGB has two directors on the Board of BDA.

The Sport England funding for the 2022-2025 period, focuses on the delivery of:

- ◀ **Club hubs:** ensure that all clubs remain sustainably positioned at the heart of the communities, and there are good pathways to increase membership.
- ◀ **Communities:** develop healthy bowling communities, with good quality competitions, options to increase coaches and volunteers and healthy relationships between clubs.
- ◀ **Health and wellbeing:** support clubs promote health and wellbeing of members with a range of programmes and activities.
- ◀ **Inclusion:** ensure clubs are as inclusive as possible, promoting the sport to all including females and people from diverse communities.

Alongside these core objectives the BDA works with key partners on:

- ◀ **Safeguarding:** ensuring the sport is safe for everyone to play by working across all five National Governing Bodies (NGBs) [BE, EIBA, British Crown Green BA, English Short Mat BA and English Bowling Federation] to have policies and processes in place. Training is also available to support the network of Club Safeguarding Officers.
- ◀ **Disability:** the BDA works in partnership with Disability Bowls England, Activity Alliance, BE and the EIBA to ensure everyone regardless of disability can access the sport of bowls.
- ◀ **Women Can:** the BDA are driving a campaign alongside BE and the EIBA to encourage more women to play bowls, coach bowls and volunteer in bowls.
- ◀ **Equality & Diversity:** the BDA, BE and the EIBA are all striving to ensure the sport of bowls is as diverse as it can be.

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

## 8.1: Supply

### Quantity and quality

There is one indoor bowls facility in the authority - at Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre. It has six rinks. There is no facility within 20 minutes' drive time in neighbouring authorities.

Figure 8.1: Indoor bowls facilities in Stevenage & within 20 minutes' drive time

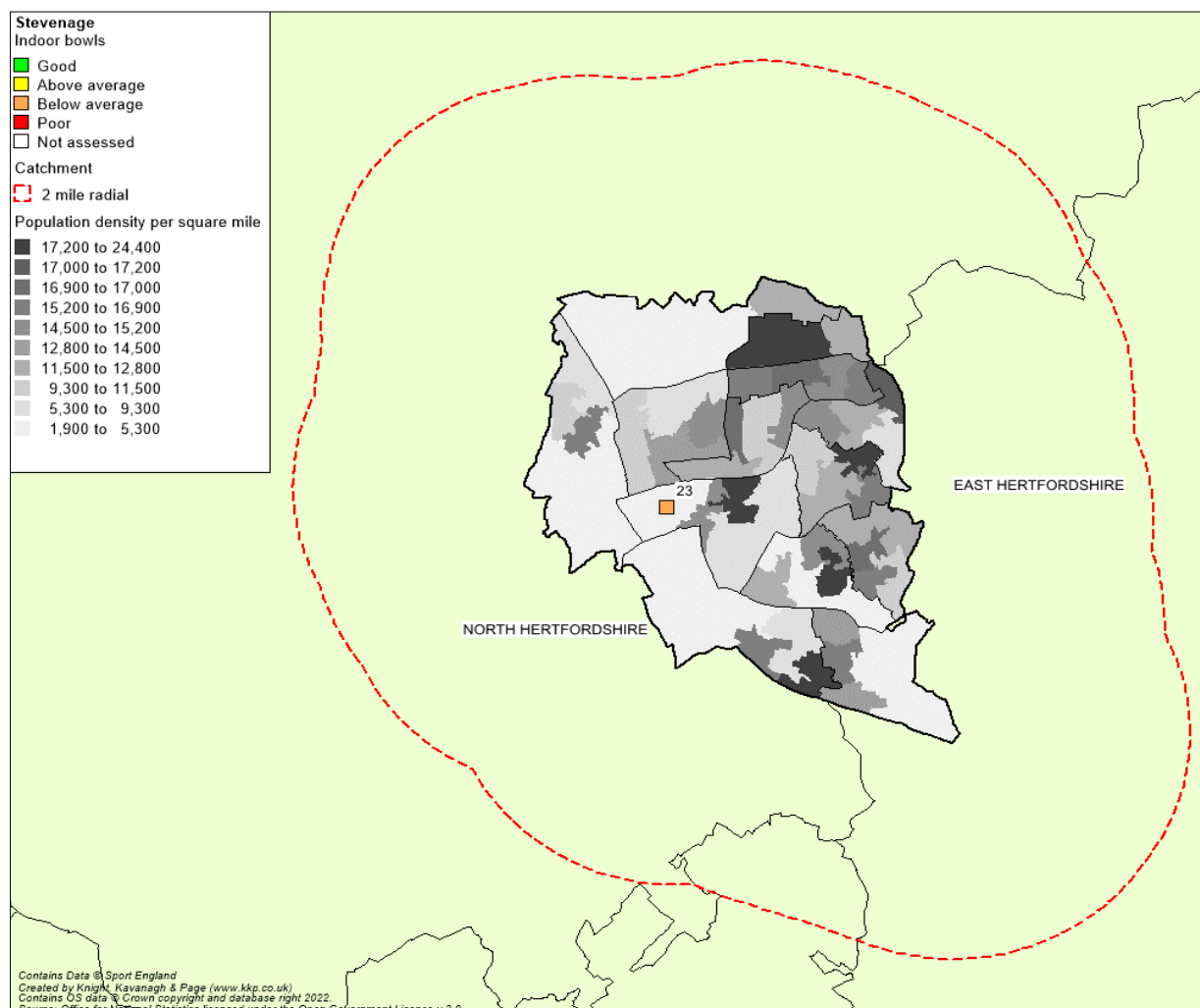


Table 8.1: Indoor bowls facilities in Stevenage

ID	Site name	Rinks	Access type	Condition
24	Stevenage Arts & Leisure Centre	6	Pay and play	Below average

This facility is rated as below average in quality. The carpet is serviced on an annual basis; however, the bowls hall is often utilised for alternative activities (such as badminton), where portable playing surfaces are placed on top of the carpet. This has had adverse effects on the playing condition of the indoor bowls facility.

The long-term security of the indoor bowls facility is in doubt. The current specification for the proposed replacement public leisure facility, set to open in 2027, does not contain an indoor bowls facility. Stevenage Borough Council confirmed that due to the low and seasonal usage, the cost required to subsidise participation, the high cost of developing new indoor bowls

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

provision and the limited space available at the new site, it is not affordable to include indoor bowls at the new leisure centre.

## Accessibility

Drive time catchment modelling suggests that the whole Stevenage population lives within a 30-minute drive of an indoor bowls facility within the Authority. Should the facility currently located within Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre not be replaced, this figure would decrease as residents would have to access facilities in Luton, Hatfield, Harpenden or Hitchin, which are all approximately 30 minutes' drive away from the existing facility.

## Availability

An EA leisure card (free) is required to access the indoor bowls facility within the Leisure Centre. This involves online registration. Those accessing the facility on a pay and play basis can do so by attending sessions Monday to Friday 10:00-12:00. Sessions are delivered by qualified instructors and equipment is provided. Those looking to access bowls provision can do so by acquiring an EA membership, which costs £26.99 per month. This allows members to gain access to the facility anytime the Leisure Centre is open. There is also a pay and play option. However, this is not a cost-effective option for those looking to play more regularly.

Outdoor bowls is present in Stevenage, with 18 rinks across two sites. For further detail on outdoor bowls provision, refer to the Stevenage Borough Council PPOSS Assessment Report.

## 8.2: Demand

Consultation with the EIBA indicates that, while the organisation would be enthusiastic about developing a new indoor bowls facility if funding were available, this approach is not considered feasible. Stevenage's proximity to four existing indoor bowls facilities, combined with its relatively small population, are significant factors influencing this assessment.

A range of bowls-related activities currently takes place within the Leisure Centre. Stevenage and District Indoor Bowls Club utilises the facility for its league matches and competitions, and a range of short mat bowls activities take place on a weekly basis

The Club was contacted to take part in consultation as part of the audit process; however, no response was received. EA confirmed that it has received contact from several members of the Club, who have concerns about the future of indoor bowls in the Authority.

## 8.3: Summary of key facts and issues

Facility type	Indoor bowls	
Elements	Assessment findings	Specific facility needs
<b>Quantity</b>	There is one indoor bowls facility in Stevenage, containing 6 rinks.	Its future is in question given the closure of the Leisure Centre in 2027. No replacement has yet been identified.
<b>Quality</b>	The 6-rink facility is below average in quality primarily as a result of other activity in the hall.	Given the limited lifespan of the current facility, the carpet should be maintained to a reasonable, cost-effective standard.
<b>Accessibility</b>	All Stevenage residents live within a 30-minute drive of an indoor bowls facility. This figure will reduce should alternative indoor bowls provision not be identified when the existing leisure centre is replaced.	-

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Facility type	Indoor bowls	
Elements	Assessment findings	Specific facility needs
<b>Availability</b> (Management and usage)	Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre can currently be accessed on a pay and play basis during limited hours, or more frequently through an Everyone Active membership.	This is a key facility providing daytime activity for older residents. EIBA notes that while replacing the facility would be ideal, SBC's limited population and proximity to a number of other bowls facilities makes building a new facility unfeasible.

## Strategic summary

- ◀ The indoor bowls facility within Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre may not be replaced as initial plans for the proposed facility do not feature indoor bowls provision. Despite this, the EIBA does not believe that a replacement facility is feasible.
- ◀ SBC should consider alternative activity options for older people at the new leisure centre in order to provide for a growing local population of older people. It should also actively support the relocation of existing bowls users to find alternative short mat or outdoor bowls sessions.

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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## SECTION 9: INDOOR TENNIS

The Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) is the NGB for all tennis provision within the UK. It administers the sport at national and regional level. One of its key objectives is to get more people playing tennis more often. To achieve this, through its most recent Investment Framework (Vision 2019 – 2023), prioritises will be given to the following sites:

- ◀ New and existing indoor tennis centres
- ◀ Park tennis
- ◀ Tennis clubs
- ◀ Schools and other educational establishments

This will be supported through the following key funding objectives:

- ◀ Funding through interest free loans.
- ◀ Investing in venues that have a proven record of increasing participation.
- ◀ Investing where there is thorough community engagement.
- ◀ Support venues that encourage participation growth.
- ◀ Target investment that is demand led.
- ◀ Invest in venues that are financially sustainable.
- ◀ Support venues that have successfully sourced partnership funding.

Central to any investment will be the provision of a sustainable business case.

This section considers indoor tennis facilities provision in Stevenage. It uses two terms to describe indoor building types:

**Traditional** - A permanent structure made of traditional materials using traditional construction techniques. This commonly takes the form of steel or timber portal frame spanning the full length of the court (including run backs) clad in a material to suit local conditions e.g. metal cladding, brickwork or timber boarding.

**Non-traditional** - A permanent or non-permanent structure made of non-traditional materials using non-traditional construction techniques. Three types of structure fall into this category:

- ◀ Air supported structures (air halls).
- ◀ Framed fabric structures.
- ◀ Tensile structures.

### 9.1: Supply

Indoor tennis is based on specialist facilities which appeal beyond local authority boundaries. This report considers provision within with a 30-minutes' drive time catchment. There are two indoor tennis courts in Stevenage, both located at Lister Tennis Club.

#### Quality

The two acrylic courts at Lister Tennis Club are of above average quality. They are in reasonable condition and line markings are good. The motors which pump the air into the air hall need upgrading as the dome is beyond its designed lifetime. The Club is currently in the process of finding a company to undertake the work required. The Club leases the facility from a private landlord, who has indicated that at the end of the current lease period (approx. 12 years remaining) they may consider selling the land. This would force the club to relocate elsewhere so it is reluctant to invest heavily in the current playing and changing facilities until/unless a further lease has been agreed.

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Figure 9.1 Indoor tennis facilities in Stevenage and within 30 minutes' drive time

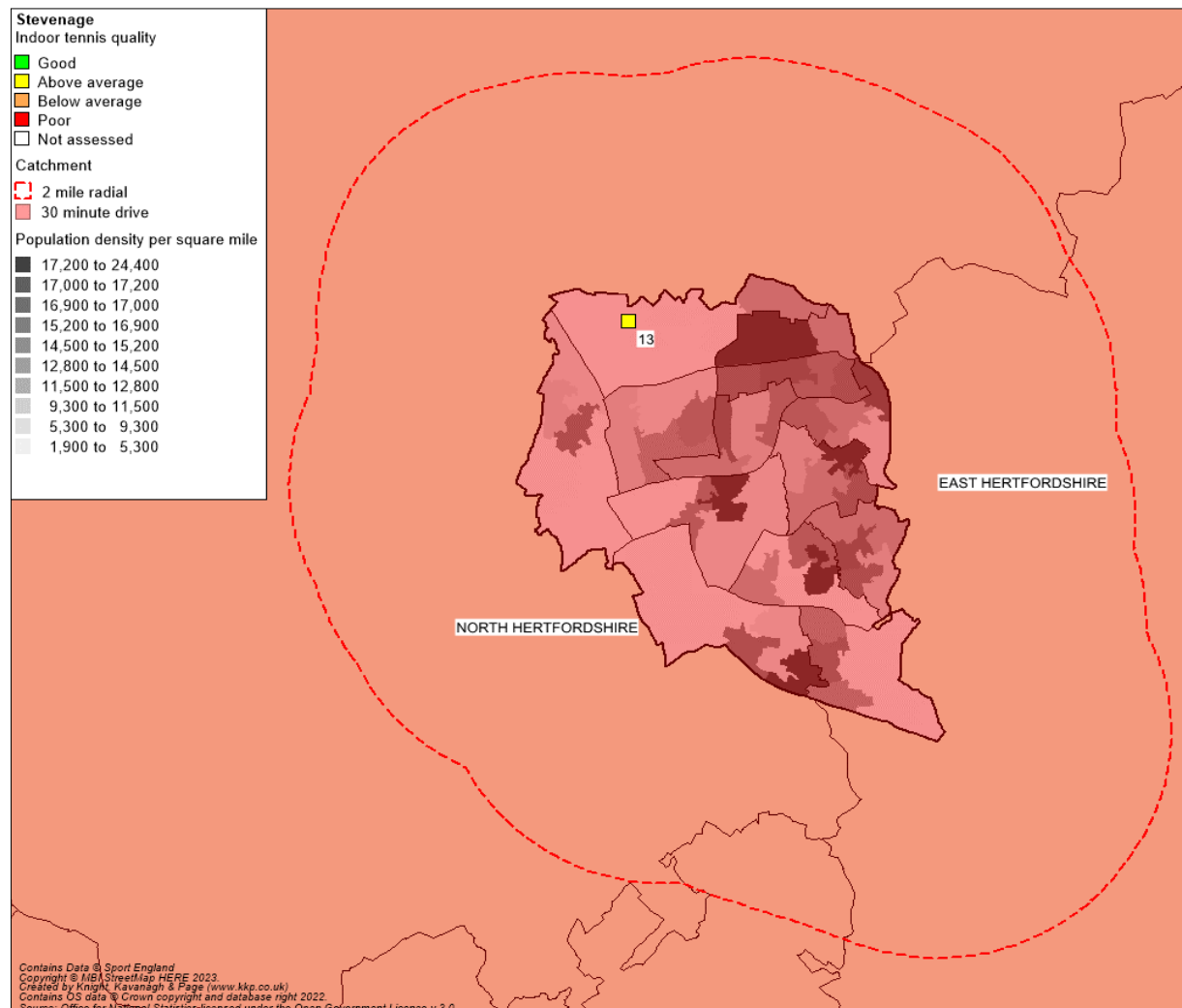


Table 9.1: Indoor tennis sites in Stevenage

ID	Site name	Courts	Access type	Condition
13	Lister Tennis Club	2	Pay and play	Above average

There is no indoor tennis facility within a 2-mile radial catchment of the Stevenage boundary in neighbouring authorities.

## Accessibility and availability

Drive time catchment modelling confirms that all Stevenage residents live within a 30-minute drive of the indoor tennis facility at Lister Tennis Club, which provides a pay and play option for non-members.

## 9.2: Demand

The LTA has recently restructured its strategic approach to target key national focus areas, ultimately to grow participation. Future investment in facilities will be based on detailed analysis of potential demand throughout the UK. It has identified 96 priority target areas for development of new indoor courts in the UK of which Stevenage is not one.

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The Club reports that demand for indoor court hire is high during the winter months, particularly on weekday evenings and during periods of persistent poor weather. Outdoor court hire is free for members; however, they must pay £15 per hour to use the indoor court. This increases to £17 per hour for non-members. It has c.100 members, c.70 of which are over the age of 18.

There is a need to monitor demand for indoor tennis courts at outdoor court venues. This will be captured within the SBC Playing Pitch Strategy 2025.

## 9.3: Summary of key facts and issues

Facility type	Indoor tennis	
Elements	Assessment findings	Specific facility needs
<b>Quantity</b>	Lister Tennis Club is the sole facility for indoor tennis in Stevenage, with two acrylic courts.	The club requires long term security given the length of time remaining on its current lease.
<b>Quality</b>	The site is rated as above average quality with suitable ancillary provision. Work should be taken to ensure the hall remains well-ventilated and court quality does not deteriorate.	Maintain court and changing room quality and replace playing surface when required.
<b>Accessibility</b>	All residents live within a 30 minutes' drive time of an indoor tennis facility.	-
<b>Availability</b> (Management & usage)	Lister Tennis Club offers a pay and play option for Stevenage residents. Acquiring a club membership reduces the rate at which this can be accessed.	-

### Strategic summary

- ◀ Support Lister Tennis Club to extend the lease at the current facility if this option is available. If this is not possible, work with the LTA to identify other potential sites from which the Club can operate.
- ◀ Undertake regular maintenance to the indoor playing surface and air hall to ensure the current quality is maintained/improved.

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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## SECTION 10: GYMNASTICS AND TRAMPOLINING

In 2023 British Gymnastics released its new strategy – Leap Without Limits: A New Vision for a New Era. The strategy is developed as a shared vision for gymnastics across all four home nations.

To help achieve the vision It focuses on five ‘leaps’:

- ◀ **The Why Leap** - Nurturing and celebrating the positive impact of gymnastics on individuals, communities and wider society.
- ◀ **The Empowerment Leap** – Supporting everyone involved in gymnastics to play their part in making a positive difference.
- ◀ **The Experience Leap** – Making positive experiences and memories central to everything we do, at every stage, in every role.
- ◀ **The Creative Leap** – Encouraging and welcoming new ideas to support meaningful change.
- ◀ **The Together Leap** – Uniting the community, existing and new partners to maximise impact, learning and growth.

To bring the vision to life, British Gymnastics are working on the following actions:

- ◀ **Membership** – Develop a new more relevant membership offer that provides value for all its members, and an improved membership system.
- ◀ **Education** - Implement a reformed and reimagined approach to supporting the learning and development of the gymnastics workforce, ensuring it feels valued and supported by British Gymnastics and the clubs and delivery environments you operate within.
- ◀ **Community** – Celebrate and recognise the contribution and stories of those in the gymnastics community on British Gymnastics channels and more widely, including further developing the British Gymnastics Awards as an annual platform for this.
- ◀ **Reform** - Deliver all of the 40 actions British Gymnastics has committed to in Reform '25 over the next two years to create safe, positive and fair experiences for all in gymnastics, including a major Safe Sport campaign.
- ◀ **Events** - Work with its Technical Committees to agree a clearly defined and sustainable long-term national event programme for each discipline and develop new competitions and events at a recreational level.
- ◀ **Disability** - Work to build international support for our ambition for gymnastics to become a Paralympic sport, with the aim of agreeing a plan and pathway for this to become a reality.

The new strategy outlines six key impacts:

- ◀ More people enjoying the sport and its benefits, across all abilities, ages, and backgrounds, and as a gymnast, coach, club owner, official or fan.
- ◀ Everyone is safe, supported and is able and confident to speak up, whatever their role or involvement in gymnastics.
- ◀ More inspirational moments that are seen, shared and enjoyed by more people.
- ◀ The NGB membership experience is a positive one, which meets your needs, is easy from start to finish. and being a member of British Gymnastics is something that provides you with both pride and value.
- ◀ Members/participants feel connected to British Gymnastics and trust it to be positive custodians of this incredible sport.
- ◀ A united sport, where everyone is working together to ensure that collectively we deliver an uplifting gymnastics experience for all.

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

## 10.1: Supply

Four sites providing gymnastics provision in Stevenage, one of which is a dedicated facility.

Figure 10.1: Gymnastics provision in Stevenage

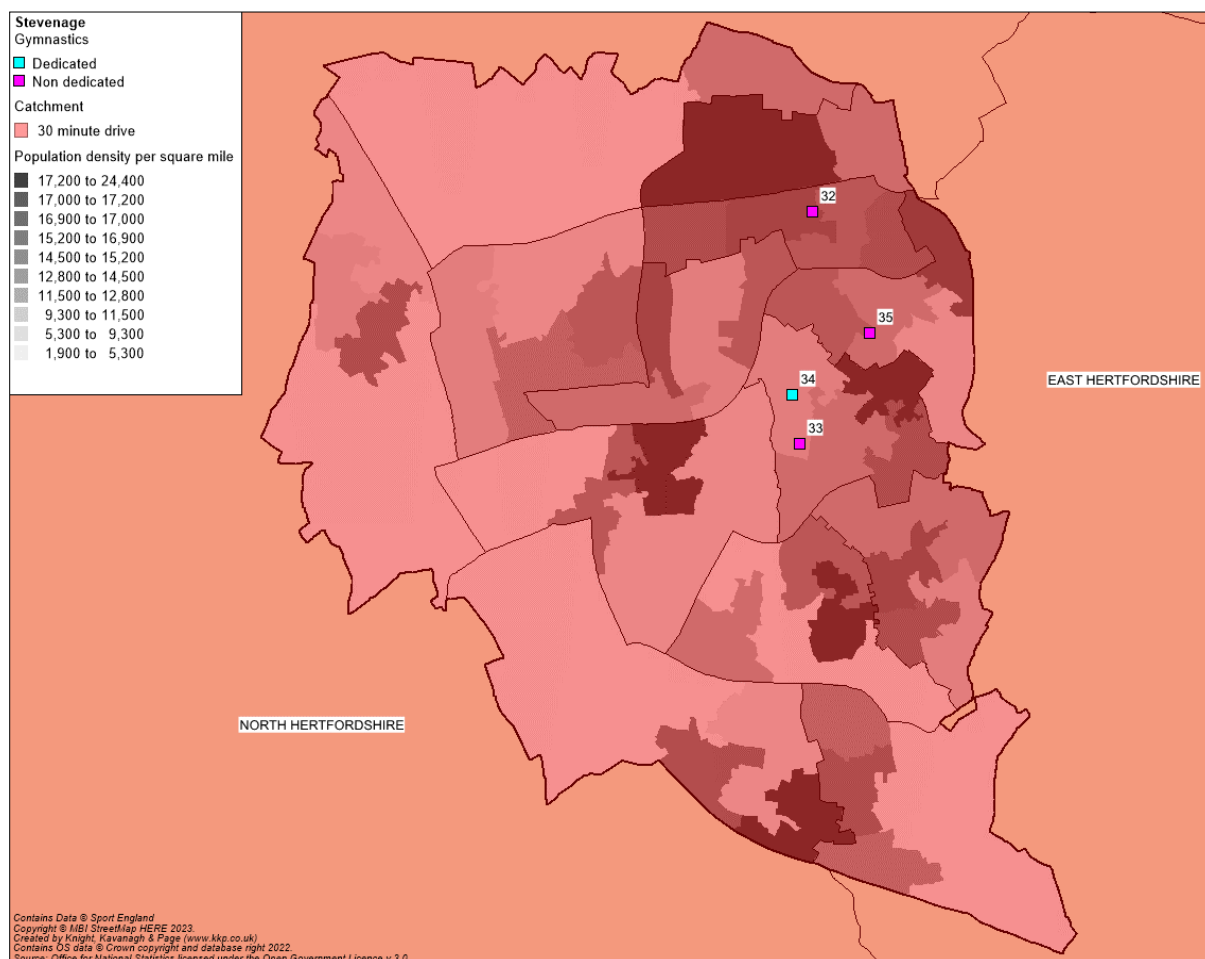


Table 10.1: Dedicated gymnastics facilities in Stevenage

Map ID	Site name
34	Marriotts Gymnastics Club

Table 10.2: Non dedicated gymnastics facilities in Stevenage

Map ID	Site name	Club name / operator
32	Stevenage Gymnastics Club	Martins Wood Primary School
33	Marriotts Sports Centre	Stevenage Sports Acrobatics Club
35	The Nobel School	Swan Gymnastics Academy

Marriotts Gymnastics Club is the only dedicated site within the Authority. Its training/activity space is 38m x 26m with a height clearance of 10m, which allows the Club to deliver competitive trampolining. County competitions are regularly hosted at the facility, and it is also a British Gymnastics recognised venue for courses and exams. The other three facilities being used for gymnastics participation are located at school sites.

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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## Accessibility and availability

Gymnastics facilities appeal beyond a local authority boundary. Consequently, this report considers provision within a 30-minutes' drive time catchment to demonstrate accessibility (Sport England suggests that drive time to specialist sports facilities can be modelled at 30 minutes as opposed to the 20 minutes modelled for sports halls and swimming pools). As shown in Figure 10.1 the whole Stevenage population lives within 30 minutes of a non-dedicated gymnastics facility.

### 10.2: Demand

British Gymnastics reports that participation in gymnastics is increasing rapidly. It also reports substantial demand and that many clubs have waiting lists - restricting access to gymnastic activity due to lack of time within dedicated and generic facilities. As with most indoor based sports, membership levels were impacted by the Pandemic although British Gymnastics reports that the sport is experiencing a strong recovery with current membership numbers tracking c.5% below 2019 levels.

A key part of the NGB's strategy to increase participation is to support clubs, leisure providers and other partners to move to their own dedicated facilities, offering more time and space for classes. It provides a range of products and programmes and expert assistance to support local delivery; gymnastic activities which are successfully driving membership growth and retention across the country.

British Gymnastics confirmed that developing additional existing provision is a key strategic target in Stevenage. This will support clubs to increase participation and expand provision. It also highlights that the availability of qualified coaches is a limiting factor in clubs delivering additional sessions.

### Club consultation

All four clubs identified were invited to consult, only one of which responded.

Marriotts Gymnastics Club (MGC) is the largest gymnastics club in Stevenage. It has c.1,000 members, all of which attend sessions at the gymnastics hall at Marriotts Sports Centre (Marriotts School). Of its regular participants, approximately two thirds are female. The Club is popular in the local area. It has a significant waiting list and people on this list can have to wait for up to two years to transition into weekly participation. It has c.100 members competing at a regional, county, national or international level, and several members representing Great Britain.

It has been based at this facility since it opened in 2002, when it worked in collaboration with the School to generate £1.3 million of lottery funding from Sport England to build it. Over this period, it has invested in several new pieces of equipment and club demand has grown significantly. Most recently, the Club purchased a top-level competition trampoline for £10,000.

The original community use agreement between the School and the Club provides MGC access to the facility outside of the school day during evenings and weekends. The Club stated that the original agreement has now expired, and as such, it could lose access to the facility. It has been assured by the School that it has no plans to do this.

The Club's development since moving into Marriotts Sports Centre has meant that it is approaching a time when further space is required for continued growth. It has considered either extending the current facility or trying to gain access to a second venue. Its long-term ambition is to expand its trampolining activities to include either four or six trampolines, with two at competition level – in a hall with 12-metre height clearance.

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

It also requires office space and a reception area. It is heavily impacted by its inability to access facilities during the school day. Should an extension or new building proceed, it would strive to ensure separate access for delivering pre-school sessions during weekday daytime hours.

Consultation with British Gymnastics was undertaken to better understand the demand for gymnastics at clubs that did not respond to the consultation request. Stevenage Gymnastics Club operates out of Martins Wood Primary School on a term-time basis, using the school hall four times a week to deliver classes for participants of all ability levels.

Stevenage Sports Acro has approximately 180 members. It operates out of the gymnastics facility at Marriotts Gymnastics Club when access is available, as well as the sports hall at Marriotts Sports Centre. It aspires to develop a dedicated facility and has made connections with the council and local schools to explore opportunities.

Swan Gymnastics Academy is based at The Nobel School. It has c.350 members and has no plans to operate out of any additional/new facilities in the near future.

### 10.3: Summary of key facts and issues

Elements	Assessment findings	Specific needs
<b>Quantity</b>	There is one dedicated gymnastics site in Stevenage. It is operated by Marriotts Gymnastics Club. Gymnastics participation also takes place at three non-dedicated facilities, all of which are school sites.	Marriotts Gymnastics Club should prioritise implementing a new CUA to ensure that it can continue to operate out of its existing facility. Additional activity space could then be explored. Support should be given to Stevenage Sports Acrobatics Club to seek dedicated provision.
<b>Quality</b>	No reported quality issues.	-
<b>Accessibility</b>	All Stevenage's residents live within a 30-minute drive time of a club/venue within the Authority.	-
<b>Availability</b> (Management & usage)	Marriotts Gymnastics Club has a two-year waiting list. Stevenage Sports Acrobatics Club is also reportedly at capacity.	Support clubs to find larger, dedicated facilities to decrease waiting lists and increase participation.

### Strategic summary

- ◀ Work with British Gymnastics to help to ensure that clubs can gain access to suitable facilities to accommodate their operation and help reduce waiting lists.
- ◀ Prioritise the security of Marriotts Gymnastics Club to ensure the continued delivery and further development of gymnastics provision in the area.
- ◀ Consider how new dedicated provision could be accessed by both Marriotts Gymnastics Club and Stevenage Sports Acrobatics Club to accommodate the high demand for the provision made by both clubs.

# STEVENAGE INDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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## SECTION 11: INITIAL STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

The strategy which follows will take account of the findings of this needs assessment, the Authority's demographic make-up and the Council's vision. There is a general requirement to continue to invest in sports facilities in Stevenage to ensure that they are fit for purpose for the 21st Century (e.g., welcoming, clean, attractive, flexible spaces, wide programme offer, ability to learn to swim cost-effective to manage and operate etc). This should lead to increased participation and a more active Borough. Strategy recommendations are likely to be predicated upon some or all of the following:

RE the proposed redevelopment of Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre:

- SBC should investigate opportunities to increase the size of the proposed new sports hall at the new leisure centre to 8-courts. If this is not possible, it should collaborate with schools to increase community use hours. This is supported by both this audit and FPM findings. If this is not feasible, support should be offered for the delivery of new sports halls on school sites if opportunities arise to complement the proposal for increasing community use hours on existing school sites.
  - SBC should work with EA to ensure that the sports hall programme provides the correct balance to support current sports hall users, such as badminton and netball clubs, alongside pay and play access, and introductory offers for residents who may be inactive, returning from long term health conditions or part of a health referral scheme.
  - Consideration into the court layout should be carried out to identify opportunities to better support netball and pickleball. The loss of one netball court/two pickleball courts and the increased cost of having to hire the whole hall due to the central layout of the new provision could prevent clubs/leagues utilising the facility.
  - SBC should work with EA to ensure that a balanced swimming pool programme is put in place to support club, learn to swim and casual lane swimming alongside targeted programmes such as Good Boost and inclusive swimming sessions.
  - SBC should work with Stevenage Sub Aqua and Aqualina Artistic Swimming to assist them to find alternative facility options following the proposed leisure centre replacement.
  - SBC should work with regular indoor bowls and squash users to ensure that alternative facility options are sourced.
  - SBC, in collaboration with EA, Public Health, The Herts Sport and Physical Activity Partnership, and other relevant stakeholders, should assess how low-cost opportunities to engage in sport and physical activity at the new centre can be more effectively promoted, including memberships and casual participation options.
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- ◀ Prior to the opening of the new leisure centre, SBC should continue to make the necessary investment at the two existing public leisure sites to ensure they remain attractive options for users.
  - ◀ The Authority's school sports hall stock is of relatively poor quality. SBC should collaborate with The Herts Sport and Physical Activity Partnership, and schools to improve the quality of school sports hall facilities and to encourage more clubs and social booking groups to use them.
  - ◀ An assessment should also be undertaken to better understand how school sports halls can continue to cater for sports hall users during periods in which school examinations are taking place. Several clubs report difficulty hiring school facilities due to this factor.
  - ◀ In line with SBC's Corporate Plan, ensure that existing facilities are made as energy efficient as possible, and that new development considers energy efficiency as a high priority.
  - ◀ Develop a system to, as early as possible, identify and tackle ongoing investment, maintenance, and refurbishment requirements to protect and improve existing sports facilities.

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- ◀ Support Barnwell School's ambition to bring the existing lido back into community use. Several swimming clubs identified the need for additional pool time to cater for unmet demand. Developing this facility could ease the pressure on the public leisure site, which will also be accommodating an increased volume of swimming lessons. A feasibility study should be carried out primarily.
- ◀ Lister Tennis Club requires support from the Council and LTA with regard to the renewal of its lease on its site. Should the Club be forced to relocate, the Authority will have no indoor tennis courts within or adjacent to the Stevenage boundary.
- ◀ The community use agreement between Marriotts Sports Centre and Marriotts Gymnastics Club has expired. This needs to be renewed in order to protect the long-term future of the Club, which is significant in size. A potential extension to the existing facility could feature as part of a new agreement, if funding could be identified. This would allow the Club to bring down the length of its waiting list and continue to provide a high-quality gymnastics offer.
- ◀ If an extension to the existing facility is not feasible, then consideration into further dedicated gymnastics provision should be undertaken. Stevenage Sports Acrobatics Club is also in need of further provision.