

SWINDON BOROUGH COUNCIL

CONNECTING PLACES: SPATIAL STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

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QUALITY, INTEGRITY, PROFESSIONALISM

Knight, Kavanagh & Page Ltd
Company No: 9145032 (England)

MANAGEMENT CONSULTANTS

Registered Office: 1 -2 Frecheville Court, off Knowsley Street, Bury BL9 0UF
T: 0161 764 7040 E: mail@kkp.co.uk www.kkp.co.uk



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PART 1: INTRODUCTION

This is the Knight, Kavanagh & Page (KKP) draft connecting places spatial strategy and action plan for Swindon Borough Council (SBC). It builds upon the borough's recently completed playing pitch and outdoor sport (PPOSS) and indoor built (IBF) facility strategies.

SBC, as part of delivering its new Local Plan is aiming to create a holistic and integrated approach to sport, leisure and active travel infrastructure to support its growing population. This will affect residents living in new communities such as the New Eastern Villages development as well as those residing in neighbourhoods closer to the town centre which are a focus within its Sport England sponsored place-based work.

Swindon's IBF notes that its existing leisure assets are in the main ageing and in need of replacement. It also states that additional capacity is needed to cater for its growing population. Its PPOSS also confirms the need for new facilities. Furthermore, research implemented via Swindon's place partners demonstrates that in delivering new and improved infrastructure, it is essential that the broadest range of environments (i.e. informal, formal) are considered and that communities are involved in the co-design of such improvements.

SBC and its place partners have recently updated the Get Swindon Active (GSA) strategy. This recognises that, whilst levels of physical activity among residents have risen in recent years, some face persistent barriers when accessing opportunities to be physically active. In addition, healthy life expectancy is currently low in Swindon when compared to England as a whole and the boroughs near neighbours¹. In addition, in line with national trends the proportion of older people in its population will increase significantly over the next 15 years².

This strategy will set out the context in respect of the challenges and opportunities in respect of better connecting indoor and outdoor infrastructure for physical activity and sport in the Borough. The strategy action plan will offer recommendations as to how SBC working with its place partners can address such barriers.

In line with the findings of GSA, where possible recommendations will prioritise supporting individuals and areas of the Borough which are most at risk from physical inactivity. The broadest spectrum of activity will be supported, so as to promote and encourage the maximum potential contribution towards improving the health outcomes of Swindon residents.

1.1: The context

Swindon Local Plan

SBC is preparing a new Local Plan to guide growth and development across the borough to 2043, with a wider vision to 2060.

¹ Swindon Health and Wellbeing Strategy: females are likely to spend 21.4 years and males 18.4 years of their life in poor health.

² Between now and 2040 the number and proportion of people aged 60+ will rise. There will be a projected additional 4,000 residents over the age of 85 by 2040.

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It will set a strategic vision for housing, employment, infrastructure, transport and the environment to support sustainable growth that meets the needs of residents, businesses and the community. It anticipates housing growth of around 24,000 new homes by 2043, delivered via new urban extensions mainly to the north and east of the town centre. Of these, the New Eastern Villages development will comprise at least 8,000 new units and include a new secondary school.

Swindon Place Partnership

Swindon has been selected as one of Sport England's place partnership areas. This is a collaboration between SBC, Central Swindon North Parish Council, South Swindon Parish Council, Voluntary Action Swindon, Wiltshire & Swindon Sports Partnership and Sport England.

The aim of Sport England's Place Partnerships Programme is to address community needs by targeting resources and efforts in areas experiencing high levels of inequality. It focuses on partnering with local organisations to understand specific community needs and leverage local assets to promote physical activity.

Swindon plan

The plan's ambition is to "make Swindon a fairer place, reduce disadvantage and reduce big disparities in life expectancy, education levels and social justice." A key intended health outcome is to reduce childhood obesity (one in five reception aged children are currently classified as overweight)

The premise is to work collaboratively, adopting a whole systems approach prioritising support in areas of greatest need to address underlying factors contributing to obesity. A primary target is to make physical activity, including access to green spaces an easy choice at every stage of life.

The plan acknowledges that in respect of built assets, a better understanding of their availability across the authority is required to ensure that they are used to the greatest effect and deliver an improved experience for customers who need council services.

In respect of building a better Swindon it recognises the importance of providing leisure facilities for the enjoyment, health and well-being of residents and that in order to ensure that they are sustainable and affordable, they need to use less carbon and reduce levels of energy consumption to lower running costs.

In respect of active travel, the plan includes an aspiration is to implement Swindon's Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) and create a comprehensive network of safe and convenient routes throughout the authority.

Heart of Swindon Vision

A key aim of Swindon's town centre vision (2025) is to reduce disadvantage and remove disparities in health, education, and social justice by investing in community facilities, affordable homes, and diverse learning opportunities.

It cites the renovation of Oasis Leisure Centre as key to creating a vibrant town centre for a diverse cross section of residents, alongside a 'health on the high street' cluster around the Health Hydro. Spaces for soft play, gyms and bike workshops are also noted as being important in this regard.

Other priorities include working with communities to make Swindon a leader in environmentally sustainable design and supporting active travel via development of connected safe routes and infrastructure, low traffic zones around schools and implementing Swindon's LCWIP .

Swindon Healthy Weight Strategy 2023-33

The overarching principle underlining the priorities of this strategy is to embed a whole systems approach in Swindon and to work collaboratively to promote healthy weight and reduce inequalities.

The latest data from 2024/5³ shows that 23% of children in reception (ages 4-5) and 35% of children in year 6 (ages 10-11) are overweight or obese. This represents an improvement over the period of the healthy weight strategy and Swindon's rates are lower than regional and national levels. However, the prevalence of overweight and obesity in adults (age 18+) - at 70%, remains higher than both the regional and England levels.

It recognises the importance of physical activity in promoting healthy weight and the impact of the built and natural environment on levels of activity. It notes that this can be encouraged by providing opportunities for active travel and enabling people to enjoy open spaces such as parks, woodland and allotments. The built environment includes neighbourhood design, housing and transport. Its strategic priorities are to :

- ✦ Prioritise active travel in transport and planning policies.
- ✦ Improve the physical environment in Swindon to promote physical activity.
- ✦ Provide opportunities and encouragement for Swindon residents to move more.

Draft Swindon Green Infrastructure (GI) Strategy (2024)

This strategy which is part of the council's Local Plan evidence base provides the basis for a coordinated approach to the creation and sustained management of GI. This comprises, among other spaces, public rights of way, footpaths, cycleways, towpaths, bridleways tracks and grass sport pitches.

It emphasises the need to improve the quality and multi-functionality of GI to maximise its impact on health and wellbeing provision for the widest range of users, including its role making multiple opportunities for activity and relaxation available. It acknowledges that access to high quality green spaces can vary across socio-economic groups and areas, contributing to unequal health outcomes.

Its recommendations include the need to consider how green and blue infrastructure can combine with that for active travel to make routes more attractive and appealing and to consider how green active travel routes could be designed with accessibility in mind.

³<https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/static-reports/public-health-outcomes-framework/at-a-glance/E06000030.html?area-name=Swindon>

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It makes the point that , (in respect of children and young people) if residents can safely cycle or walk to a play area or there are active travel links between schools and play areas, this increases the range and accessibility of opportunities to have fun and be active.

Get Swindon Active (GSA)

This is Swindon's refreshed physical activity strategy. Its jointly developed strategic priorities recognise the link between physical activity and improving residents' health and wellbeing. It notes that participation is unequal across Swindon's communities and that the borough's more deprived neighbourhoods and those with housing higher concentrations of ethnically diverse residents are more likely to be inactive, thus contributing to wider health inequalities. GSA sets out three key strategic priorities:

- ▶ Active people - Increasing participation in daily physical activity for all Swindon Residents , with a particular focus on children and young people and older residents.
- ▶ Active spaces – Developing and improving physical and sporting infrastructure, including for active travel.
- ▶ Active systems – including enhancing training opportunities, and the use of data to inform decision-making.

To achieve this vision, the strategy states that the council will:

- ▶ Engage with and listen to Swindon's diverse community.
- ▶ Identify areas of priority to embed daily physical activity.
- ▶ Deliver interventions and raise awareness for what is available in Swindon.

The two key stated strategy outcomes to improve physical activity levels are based upon the ambition to:

- ▶ Increase the overall percentage of physically active children, young people and adults in Swindon based on Active Lives data.
- ▶ Increase the proportion of physically active children and young people and adults who reside in Swindon's more deprived areas (based upon Active Lives data).

Levels of activity

Sport England Active Lives⁴ (ALS) data confirms that the number of adults considered to be active for at least 150 minutes per week (at 62.1%) in Swindon and the rate of inactivity (at 25.1%) are broadly in line with regional and national levels.

There is however a significant gap in activity levels evident between those adults of a higher social status (NS SEC 1-2), 80% of whom active compared to those of a lower (NS SEC 6-8) social status, of whom 59% are active. At neighbourhood level, research undertaken by the Swindon place partnership identified that Pinehurst and Penhill wards, in the vicinity of the town centre face the highest health inequalities and lowest activity rates. The GSA strategy notes that whilst the ALS survey provides generalisable data on activity levels, there is limited data for children and young people in respect of age, ethnicity and

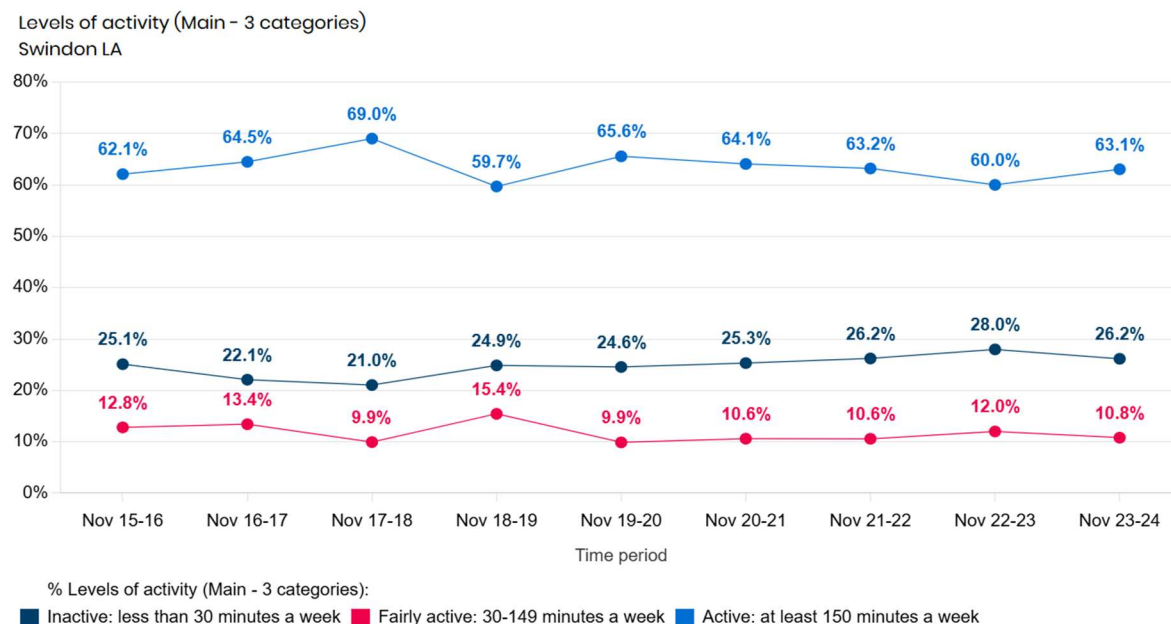
⁴ Active Lives Survey November 2023 to November 2024

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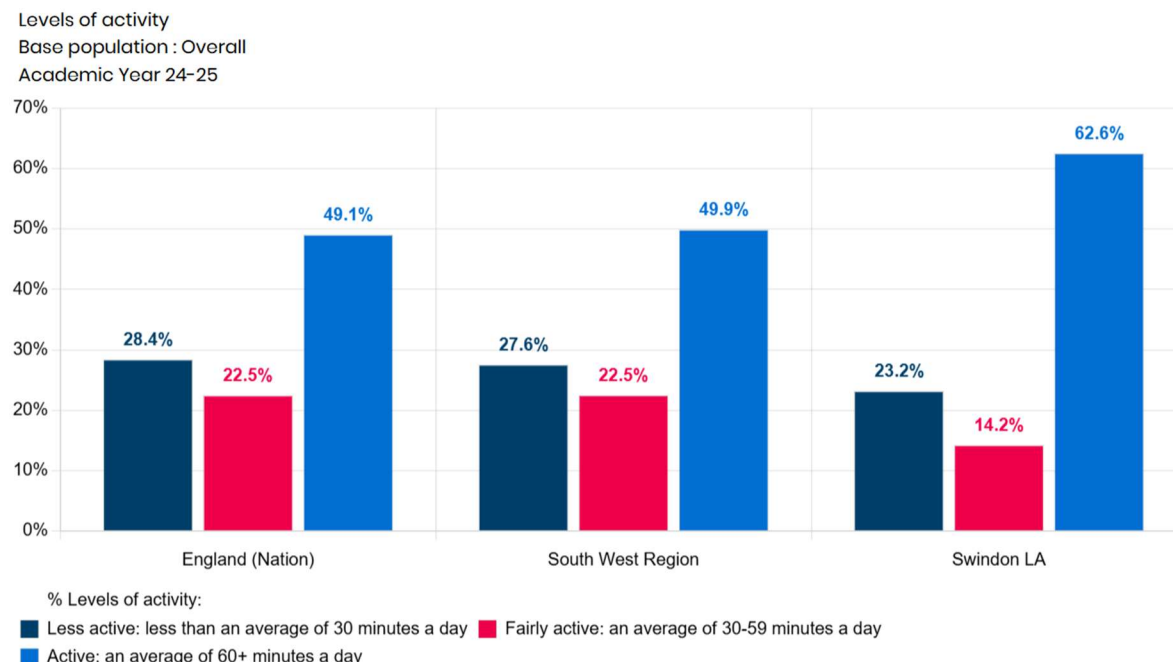
disability and long-term health conditions. For adults there is limited data about gender, age, ethnicity and sexual orientation.

Figure 1.1 Active Lives adult data : Swindon, 2023/4



Overall levels of activity amongst children and young people in Swindon (63% undertaking 60+ minutes per day) are significantly above those of the South West region and England (both c.50%). Levels of inactivity in Swindon (23%) are also below those in the region and England (c.28%).

Figure 1.2 Active Lives children and young people data : Swindon 2023/4



GSA lists the following potential solutions to tackle current barriers to participation in the borough

- ✦ Create supportive environments: Improve access to safe, inclusive, and well-connected green spaces and active travel routes.
- ✦ Embed activity into daily life: Design places and services that encourage walking, cycling, and active travel as part of everyday routines.
- ✦ Reduce financial barriers: Support free or low-cost activities, concessions, and equipment-sharing or lending schemes.
- ✦ Offer flexible opportunities: Provide activities at varied times and locations to fit around work, education and or caring responsibilities.
- ✦ Promote inclusion and cultural relevance: Co-produce activities with communities to ensure they are welcoming, culturally appropriate, and accessible.
- ✦ Support people with health conditions or disabilities and their carers (unpaid or paid): Promote inclusive, adaptive activities and strengthen links between health services and physical activity opportunities.
- ✦ Build confidence and motivation: Use social support, community champions, and behaviour-change approaches to encourage and sustain participation.
- ✦ Improved awareness: use tools and the Get Swindon Active website to share health education, champion activities and highlight what is being delivered and available in the town.

PART 2 : INFRASTRUCTURE CONTEXT

The outdoor environment

The importance of the outdoor environment (including green infrastructure) and the benefits it provides in respect of Swindon residents' health and wellbeing is reflected in the results of the 2023 Annual Resident Survey. This confirmed that a majority of respondents counted parks and open spaces and one of the three most important things to their household.

In broad terms Swindon contains strong coverage in terms of its green and open space. Its core cycle routes also provide good connectivity (albeit predominantly east/west) across the borough. It has five country parks which offer space for adventurous play, walking and cycling. The stated aim of SBC's [Country Park framework](#) (2026) is to build greater engagement with community groups to further understand barriers to access, expand the range of activities offered and invest in facilities and infrastructure (e.g. food and beverage, signage) to support self-led and organised activity. In recognition of the value of accessible and inclusive play, SBC also supports street closures under the ['playing out'](#) initiative.

Research⁵ however suggests that residents do not always perceive these kinds of spaces to be safe or welcoming and that perceptions related to anti-social behaviour affect people's visit propensity. Pursuing a partnership approach which will include engaging with Swindon's [community safety partnership](#) will be key to changing to changing such perceptions.

Outdoor playing pitches are vital to sustaining and growing engagement in physical activity and sport. Swindon's [playing pitch strategy](#) confirms that whilst demand is being sufficiently met for many sports, there are some current shortfalls identified for football, cricket, rugby league, rugby union, pétanque, tennis (a need to improve existing park sites), netball, golf and speedway. In respect of 3G pitches, the need for eleven new 3G pitches is confirmed in Swindon's [Local Football Facility Plan](#). In respect of new housing development, the PPS makes explicit recommendations in terms of :

- ◀ Ensuring that any large housing developments are provided for and assess the need for new pitch provision through master planning on an individual basis.
- ◀ Consideration of using planning contributions to improve existing sites where a housing development is not of a size to justify on-site football provision.
- ◀ A focus on the creation of multi-pitch sites that reduce existing shortfalls where a development is of a size to justify on-site football provision.

Built facilities

Research which informed Swindon's [built facility strategy](#) shows that there is high demand for provision both currently and when factoring in population growth. Demand in the town centre (which encompasses a substantial proportion of those living in areas of highest deprivation in the authority) is highest.

⁵ <https://www.wiltssport.org/uploads/agreed-golden-threads.pdf?v=1764237419>

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Following its investment to deliver re-opened facilities at the Health Hydro, SBC is committed to refurbishment of provision at Oasis Leisure Centre. This is critical to meeting demand for swimming pool, sports hall and health and fitness in the town centre.

Remaining indoor sports provision in the borough is approaching the end of its asset lifecycle and there is a need for a medium/long term investment strategy to address the significant investment required to refurbish or replace key facilities – albeit in the context of the financial constraints that impact upon the council's ability to finance large scale capital projects. Access cost continues to be a barrier to access for some residents. Whilst 'pay as you go' membership is available in the borough; it is vital that such pricing mechanisms are retained, improved and promoted. Growing the number of residents accessing 'Healthwise' health referral membership is a priority for this strategy.

The authority also needs additional health and fitness provision (i.e. studio and consultation space) within which to deliver health referral activity.

In the context of meeting the needs of more vulnerable residents in particular, this places short/medium term emphasis on the role of small community halls operated by the council or partner parish councils' and community groups in providing opportunities to get active.

Specific facility needs identified in the built facility strategy include :

- ◀ A need to include the quality of sports hall provision at the Dorcan Centre, Highworth Recreation Centre and Ridgeway Leisure Centre.
- ◀ A need to provide additional sports hall provision in the town centre (equivalent to 6 badminton courts).
- ◀ Ensure delivery of the Oasis centre redevelopment including provision of a 6 lane x 25 m swimming pool.
- ◀ A need to secure additional funding to complete the programme of refurbishment at the Health Hydro, including reopening the small pool.
- ◀ A need to secure capital funding and provide refurbishment works at the Dorcan centre, and to complete required capital works at the Link Centre.

Active travel

This refers to journeys made by modes of transport that are fully or partially people-powered, irrespective of the purpose of the journey. It includes walking, people using wheelchairs, cycling (including e-bikes)⁶ and 'wheeling'. Wheeling represents the action of moving as a pedestrian, wheeled or whilst walking using a mobility aid e.g. a wheelchair, mobility scooter, walking frame, pram or buggy.

One of the key priorities for this strategy is the need to improve active travel connectivity more broadly across the borough, including town centre leisure assets. SBC is committed to working cohesively with partners including Active Travel England to achieve this.

Swindon has a relatively extensive network of cycle routes in place and has plans to extend these during 2027 via the refreshed LCWIP (see figure 1.3 ,p.12) - drawing on potential funding from Active Travel England. SBCs [Travel plans](#), produced to promote walking and cycling connectivity associated with new housing developments demonstrate how

⁶<https://www.transport.gov.scot/publication/active-travel-strategies-guidance-for-completion/active-travel-is-walking-wheeling-and-cycling/>

residents. Swindon is also aiming to be an exemplar place in terms of young people walking and cycling to school.

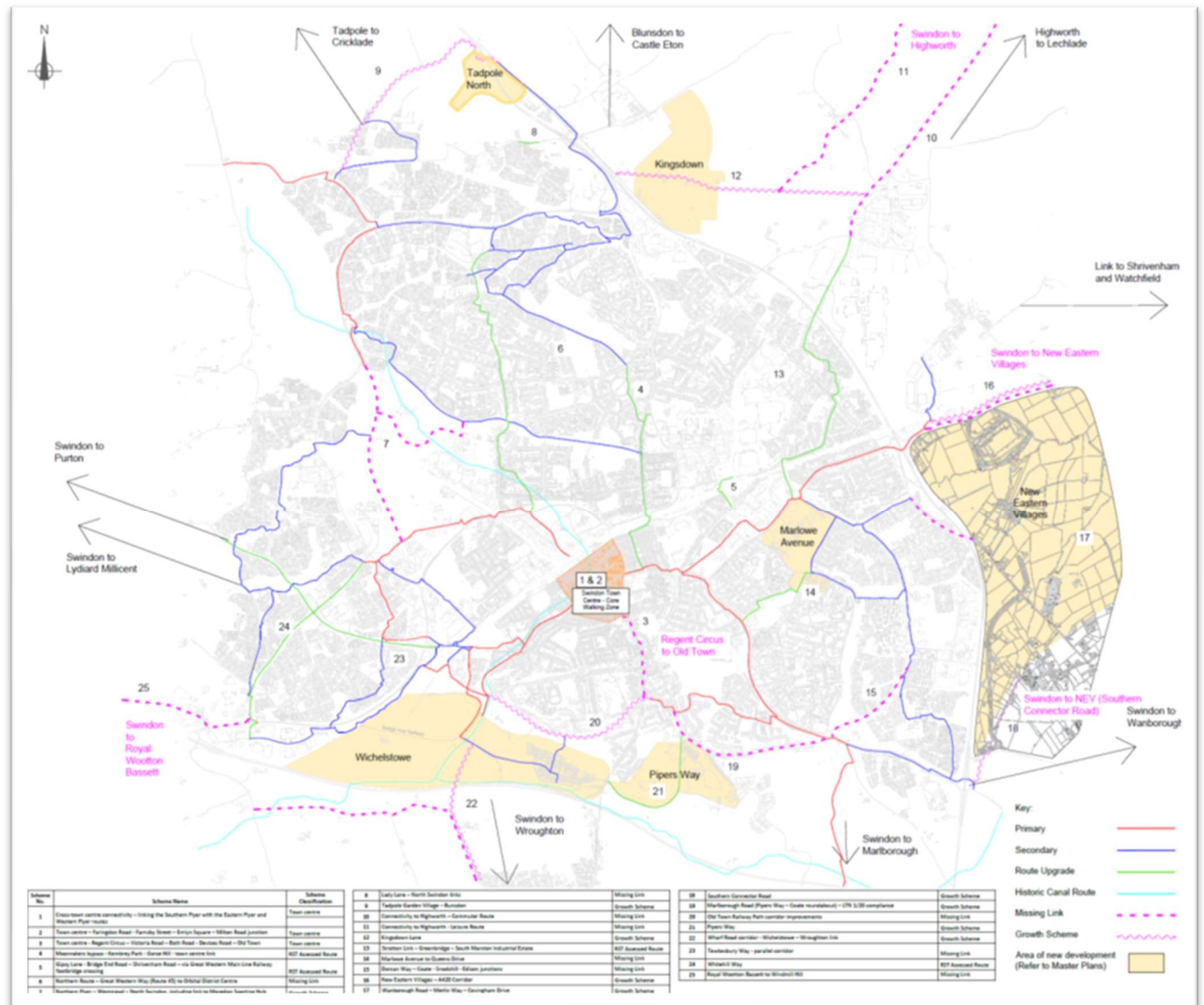
In respect of understanding current challenges and opportunities in respect of walking and cycling specifically, views were sought from North Swindon parish councils, Swindon's cycling development officer and the Ramblers Association (North East Wiltshire Group).

Key feedback included:

- ◆ Safety concerns, including specific reference to the lack of traffic-free infrastructure, particularly for those learning to cycle.
- ◆ A need to ensure that shared paths are welcoming to both cyclists and walkers and to address conflicts in use i.e., clear route marking.
- ◆ A need to improve signage and awareness of safe, traffic free walking and cycling routes, especially in areas such as North Swindon.
- ◆ A desire to see further improvements to ancillary facilities (including WCs linked to some country park facilities) and to improve maintenance of certain paths and access points.
- ◆ The necessity to ensure adequate resourcing of rights of way responsibilities within SBC (i.e., staffing/finance).
- ◆ A desire to create family-friendly, traffic-free loops in country parks.

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Figure 1.3 : Swindon LCWIP map



PART 3 : KEY CHALLENGES : AN INTEGRATED APPROACH FOR SWINDON

The following is a summary of the challenges currently evident in Swindon in respect of achieving an integrated spatial strategy for physical activity and sport. It is derived from consultation with SBC, WASP and insight collected by the Swindon Place Partnership.

What are the key challenges faced in respect of better integrating the physical activity and sport offer across the indoor (built) and outdoor environments (including active travel?)

In respect of **built facilities**, the principal challenges are the need to:

- ✦ Address issues related to the (old) age, condition and layout of current publicly operated leisure provision via a programme of significant capital investment.
- ✦ Provide additional facility capacity for swimming, sports hall-based activities and health referral.
- ✦ Increase levels of health referral activity – which take place in/ across a broad range of formal, informal settings.
- ✦ Address the lack of consistency in connectivity between physical activity assets and those for active travel(and public transport infrastructure).
- ✦ Address the requirement for significant capital investment, particularly in town centre leisure centre assets (Oasis and Health Hydro).
- ✦ Better animate and improve accessibility to, Swindon's existing strong network of community halls aligned to investment in their maintenance and upkeep.
- ✦ Deliver more consistent regular (50-week) access to school sports hall provision and for further improvements to school facilities to better enable inclusive community access.
- ✦ Address the issue of cost of access which continues to be a key barrier for people living in poverty and other 'high need' groups.
- ✦ Provide better swimming pool accessibility to/for schools swimming
- ✦ Grow engagement with the Healthwise referral programme.

What does good look like ?

- ✦ A long-term investment strategy is required (and recommended) to provide modern, attractive facilities containing the requisite spaces (such as for health consultation), accessible layouts (to attract a broader cohort of residents), sufficient bike storage etc.
- ✦ In the short to medium term (and given the paucity of likely available capital) there is a necessity to promote the role of Swindon's existing strong network of smaller community venues to provide informal activity opportunity and to play a growing role in delivering health referral programming.
- ✦ Ensuring that design of schools and community buildings associated with new housing development is appropriate to community physical activity and sport use (i.e. Active design, SE guidance for community halls) and to realise the potential to provide new community hall spaces linked to housing development.

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In respect of the **outdoor environment (including active travel)** principal challenges are:

- ◀ In terms of parks and open spaces, the fact that residents experience barriers to access associated with perceptions of personal safety & ASB.
- ◀ A need to improve the quality of walking and cycling infrastructure accompanied by associated signage.
- ◀ The lack of capacity for sports clubs in respect of them accessing grass and 3G pitches.
- ◀ The fact that connectivity with, and promotion of, active travel infrastructure is better in respect of new housing developments/outlying borough areas than in the town centre.
- ◀ SBC's desire to improve the rate of delivery of new active travel infrastructure.

What does good look like?

- ◀ Delivery of further investment (including via planning gain monies) to create improved/new multi-activity environments incorporating informal provision for play and physical activity.
- ◀ Achievement of an equitable level of cycling and walking connectivity across Swindon (via implementation of LCWIP) on a par with that related to new housing developments.
- ◀ A greater and more equitable take-up of walking, wheeling and cycling *per-se* across the borough.
- ◀ Improvements to the quality, encouraging greater resident involvement in and securing involvement of partner organisations (including community police) in the management/maintenance of parks and open spaces - thereby creating more welcoming, accessible safe community environments.
- ◀ Combining both formal pitch and informal physical activity provision (drawing up lessons learnt at the successful [Buckhurst Field](#) project) will be key to meeting increased demand generated by Swindon's growing population. Further external investment will need to be sourced, such as that available as part of the Football Foundations multi-sport programme.

Common challenges across **all environments include the need to:**

- ◀ Consider how to better communicate and encourage consistent, accessible community engagement with and about physical activity/sport assets (i.e. pricing , programming) particularly for those facing the greatest barriers to engagement.
- ◀ Promote the broadest range of spatial settings in which people can be active i.e., schools, faith settings, family hubs, parks, community centres, libraries, workplaces, streets and neighbourhoods. These need to sit and function with and alongside more 'traditional' places to be active such as leisure centres and parks.#
- ◀ Generate further insight re activity levels (and as necessary barriers to engagement) amongst particular demographic groups.
- ◀ Co-design activities with local residents, especially those who face exclusion or barriers.
- ◀ To deliver the [Wichelstowe community sports hub](#) southwest of the town centre. This is a key positive outcome for physical activity and sport linked to the Local Plan. Funded via Section 106 monies, and comprising facilities for various sports plus play provision, its aim is to create a space which serves the whole community and encourages people to get active via competitive activity as well as via its linked walking and cycling routes.

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PART 4 : ACTION PLAN

NB: Responsibility for actions set out in the plan are not solely the responsibility of SBC and are assigned across a number of agencies including SBC, town and parish councils, the Wiltshire and Swindon Active Partnership (WASP), locally trusted organisations (LTOs), NGBs and sports clubs. This reflects that, whilst the strategy has been commissioned by SBC, it will require a partnership approach to deliver its recommendations over the designated strategy period.

Space/issue:	Recommended actions – SBC to:	Responsibility (with SBC)
Outdoor green and open spaces	Invest in maintenance of parks, play areas and walking/cycling infrastructure and route continuity. Fix lighting, toilets, pavements and overgrowth. Improve safety of parks (including country parks) by working with police, community wardens, friends of groups to, install lighting, CCTV, and encourage patrols. Establish 'safe routes' to and within parks and green spaces, incorporating speed reduction and visible safety measures. Make parks and green spaces inclusive, welcoming to people of all ages, genders, cultures and abilities, including involving local people in the (co)design of improvements.	Friends of groups, community policing teams., town/parish councils, LTOs.
Walking & cycling including active travel	Improve signage for walking and cycling and visibility of assets, clearly show these are “for everyone.” Create walking and cycling loops connecting homes, schools, shops and parks. Ensure that adequate resourcing is given to retaining 'rights of way' expertise within SBC. Ensure that delivery of the refreshed LCWIP is adequately resourced by SBC and that schemes progress in line with key milestones. Promote active travel through travel plans. One measure of success is to have school, residential and workplace travel plans nationally accredited as part of the Modeshift STARS platform (see https://modeshift.org.uk/modeshift-stars/)	Town/parish councils, The Ramblers Association, LTOs, WASP
Playing pitches	Implement the recommendations of the SBC PPOSS, including addressing sport specific shortfalls in football, cricket, rugby league, rugby union, pétanque, tennis , netball, golf and speedway , maximising opportunities to increase grass pitch capacity, and to provide additional 3G pitch provision	Pitch sport NGBs, local sports clubs

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Space/issue:	Recommended actions – SBC to:	Responsibility (with SBC)
Indoor spaces	Implement the recommendations of the Indoor & Built Facilities Strategy (IBFS) : - Deliver additional swimming pool capacity via re-built Oasis and Health Hydro facilities. - Deliver new sports hall provision in the town centre. - Ensure that new school-based provision in NEV is designed and operated appropriately for community use. - Work with existing school and academy providers to maximise community use availability. - Deliver the phase 2 refurbishment of the Health Hydro including additional capacity for health consultation. - Maximise the potential of health referral delivery within built facility assets inc. leisure centres, community centres inc. community resilience hubs (one-stop community setting). - Identify where support is needed in respect of the programming/booking/marketing of small community halls . - Identify where support is needed in respect of maintenance/small capital works to improve the quality of small community halls. - Use moving communities data to better understand current leisure centre user profiles.	Leisure operators, school and academy providers, WASP, town/parish councils
Planning & Investment	- Utilise the existing IBFS and PPOSS needs assessments to inform and align investment of CIL/S.106 monies in improved physical activity and sport infrastructure. - Adopt Sport England Active design principles for the design and delivery of new physical activity / sport infrastructure. - Utilise the PPOSS and IBFS evidence bases to attract funding for the creation of multi-activity environments, incorporating informal provision for play, physical activity and sport.	Housing developers, WASP, NGBs, LTOs,