



**EAST HERTS DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**INDOOR SPORT NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND STRATEGY**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**JUNE 2026**

# EAST HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL: INDOOR SPORT ASSESSMENT AND STRATEGY EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## 1.0: Introduction

Knight Kavanagh & Page (KKP) has been commissioned by East Hertfordshire Council (EHC) to develop an Indoor Built Facilities Strategy and Playing Pitch Strategy. This work will form part of the evidence base for the new Local Plan to support the development of indoor and outdoor leisure facilities in East Hertfordshire. The Outdoor Sport and Playing Pitch Strategy was published in 2025 and this document focuses on indoor sport built facilities.

The purpose of the East Hertfordshire District Council's Indoor Sport Needs Assessment and Strategy is to inform the council's approach to improving sport provision in line with demand by providing an evidence base to inform sustainable capital investment for the council's indoor built leisure facilities. The Strategy will set out the rationale, evidence and facilities required to 2043 to improve existing facilities and provide new facilities to meet the leisure and sports needs of the growing population and encourage healthy and active lifestyles to meet council objectives.

A new Indoor Sport Strategy for the district will provide a more up-to-date understanding of the need for investment into indoor built facilities through a detailed consultation process in line with the National Planning Policy Framework and guided by the support of Sport England and NGBs. With East Hertfordshire Council, North Hertfordshire Council and Stevenage Borough Council conducting the process in tandem with one another, it has enabled more detailed imported and exported demand analysis, as well as bringing greater cohesion for national governing bodies of sport (NGBs) involved.

This is the executive summary for the Indoor Sport Needs Assessment and Strategy for East Hertfordshire District Council (EHDC). Both the Strategy and the preceding Needs Assessment Report have been produced in accordance with Sport England guidance and both have achieved sign off from national governing bodies of sport (NGBs) and Sport England.

## 1.1: Scope

The scope of the Indoor Sport Facilities Strategy will focus geographically on all local provision, regardless of ownership and management arrangements. Provision included within the project is as follows:

- ◀ Sports hall provision.
- ◀ Swimming pool provision.
- ◀ Health and fitness provision.
- ◀ Squash courts.
- ◀ Indoor bowls provision.
- ◀ Indoor tennis provision.
- ◀ Gymnastics and trampolining provision.
- ◀ Combat sports

## 1.2: Methodology

The study has been carried out in accordance with Sport England guidance and established industry best practice, using a blend of quantitative and qualitative methods. This has included a comprehensive audit of all indoor sports facilities, which took place between August and October 2024, incorporating assessments of their quality and accessibility and availability. Sport England's Facilities Planning Model (FPM) has informed the assessment of swimming pools and sports halls, to provide a more robust assessment of facility needs than traditional supply and demand analysis, taking into account accessibility, capacity and utilisation of facilities to better understand community

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needs and where unmet demand may exist. The FPM was undertaken by Sport England’s consultants in 2025 but its delivery was delayed by nationwide capacity issues. This has meant the timescale between the audit and the strategy document is longer than expected. However, to ensure information is up-to-date, the data has been reviewed and any changes to provision has been detailed and considered.

Sport England’s planning tools and demographic datasets have been applied to understand current and future demand, supported by consultation with key stakeholders such as facility operators, sports clubs, sports National Governing Bodies and Council officers. The work has also examined wider participation trends and local patterns of use, alongside an assessment of future needs arising from projected population growth and planned housing development.

When assessing the accessibility of differing provision types, the following catchment areas have been applied:

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, combat sports.	30-minutes’ drive
Village/community halls	800m radial catchment

## 1.3: Needs Assessment findings

Sports halls:

- There are 45 sports halls in East Herts, 19 of which have three or more courts.
- 11 of the 19 sports halls with 3+ court halls are good or above average quality. Two halls could not be assessed.
- 15 of the 19 sports halls with 3+ sports halls provide some form of community use – with nearly 59% of the residents in East Herts living within one mile of a sports hall providing community use. All residents live within a 20-minute drive of the same facilities.
- Halls are generally well used, with six operating at the Sport England threshold of ‘comfortably full’.
- Future population growth will be catered for through the planned development of five new sports halls by 2043. These will be located in Gilston, Birchall Garden and north and east Ware.

Swimming pools:

- At the time of the audit, there was 27 open swimming pools across 21 sites in East Herts, with 5 pools closed. Since this period, the previously named Fanshaw Pool (now The Chauncy School Pool) has reopened for club use, and Ward Freman Community Pool Group has plans to reopen the Ward Freman Pool in 2026.
- The two public pool venues have very limited spare capacity following the closure of three public pools since December 2023. Public swimming hours at Hartham Leisure Centre have been reduced to accommodate increased club and learn-to-swim demand.
- Pool quality is generally good: Three pools are rated good, four above average, two below average and one unassessed. Better quality provision is concentrated in the east of the district.
- 40.8% of residents live within one mile of a community-use pool, and 99% live within a 20-minute drive. Re-opening closed pools such as Ward Freman would significantly improve access for residents in the north.

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- ◀ Pay-and-play access is limited: only two sites (five pools) offer this option, and one has reduced public swimming hours to accommodate learn-to-swim programmes. A further three pools require registered membership. School pools primarily serve clubs and commercial swim schools.
- ◀ FPM findings indicate that nearly all current and future demand for swimming can be met by the available supply in both 2025 and 2043, assuming new swimming provision at Gilston Leisure Centre comes forward.

## Health and fitness:

- ◀ There are 35 health and fitness (H&F) suites in East Herts containing 1,761 stations. Twenty-six suites have 20+ stations (1,633 stations in total). Nineteen sites (1,434 stations) are available to the community.
- ◀ Quality is mixed: of the 20+ station suites, 12 are good or above average, nine are below average and two are poor. Two sites could not be assessed.
- ◀ 66% of residents live within one mile of a H&F suite, rising to 100% within a 20-minute drive.
- ◀ Six publicly accessible pay and play H&F suites (20+ stations) operate in the district, with a further 14 accessible via registered membership. Commercial gyms offer budget memberships but typically lack concessionary rates or targeted programmes for disadvantaged groups.
- ◀ Take-up of health referral programmes is low, and there is limited provision offering low-cost fitness opportunities for ageing or disadvantaged residents.
- ◀ There are 24 studios across the district, 23 of which offer some form of community access.

## Squash:

- ◀ There are 14 squash courts in East Herts, eight of which are glass-backed. A further 22 courts are accessible within a 20-minute drivetime.
- ◀ Based on England Squash benchmarks, East Herts currently has an undersupply of one squash court, increasing to three courts by 2043.
- ◀ All 14 courts in the district are rated above average in quality. Regular refurbishment should continue to maintain standards.
- ◀ Over 97% of East Herts residents live within a 20-minute drive of a squash facility, indicating strong overall accessibility.
- ◀ Haileybury Sports Complex provides the only pay-and-play option within East Herts, although courts are unavailable during the daytime due to school use.
- ◀ An additional ten pay-and-play courts are available within a 20-minute drivetime in neighbouring authorities.
- ◀ Clubs should be encouraged to offer pay-and-play access during off-peak periods to help address gaps in daytime availability.

## Indoor bowls:

- ◀ There are no indoor bowls facilities in East Herts; however, nearly all residents live within a 30-minute drivetime of provision in neighbouring authorities. Consultation with the English Indoor Bowls Association confirms that current demand can be met by these external facilities.

## Indoor tennis and padel:

- ◀ Legends Tennis Centre is the sole indoor tennis facility in East Herts, providing four acrylic courts. The venue is well used and reports limited spare capacity during peak times. Courts remain available for pay-and-play despite a busy coaching programme.
- ◀ The site is rated above average in quality and has suitable ancillary provision. Funding is already in place to replace the playing surface when required, helping to maintain long-term quality.
- ◀ 99% of East Herts residents live within a 30-minute drivetime of an indoor tennis facility, indicating strong overall accessibility.

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- ◀ Legends Tennis Centre offers pay-and-play access, although this is restricted to evenings and weekends. Programming should continue to ensure that adequate casual access is maintained alongside coaching and club use.
- ◀ The LTA estimates that East Herts has demand for around 12 padel courts, based on population density and current participation trends. This figure is not a target or cap but an indication of sustainable demand, recognising that areas with more established padel communities may experience higher usage. There are currently seven padel courts in East Herts – with planning applications in place which would increase this figure.

## Gymnastics and trampolining:

- ◀ There are five dedicated gymnastics facilities and three non-dedicated sites in East Herts. Stortford Gymnastics Club and Rib Valley Gymnastics Club both report waiting lists and a need for larger venues. Support should be provided to help clubs identify and secure larger facilities to reduce waiting lists and accommodate growth.
- ◀ Hertford Gymnastics Academy's dedicated facility is not fit for purpose during hot weather and has an outdated heating system. The club should be supported to undertake necessary renovations to ensure the venue remains safe, functional and sustainable.
- ◀ All East Herts residents live within a 30-minute drivetime of a gymnastics venue, indicating strong overall accessibility.
- ◀ Two clubs report capacity issues linked to limited facility size and staffing. Support should be given to help clubs access larger, dedicated spaces to increase participation and reduce waiting lists.

## Combat sports:

- ◀ There are 18 combat sport facilities in East Herts, four of which are dedicated venues. No clubs reported issues relating to facility size, and no quality concerns were identified through the audit.
- ◀ All residents live within a 30-minute drivetime of either a dedicated or non-dedicated combat sports facility, indicating strong overall accessibility.
- ◀ Most clubs and operators offer pay-and-play access, with memberships available for regular participants. There is a need to support clubs to expand provision where possible to meet demand and ensure continued access to suitable, fit-for-purpose facilities.

## Community halls:

- ◀ There are 57 village and community halls in East Herts, well distributed across the district and generally serving smaller population areas.
- ◀ No formal quality ratings were produced, although several halls have recently been refurbished through Biffa Award funding.
- ◀ 41.2% of residents live within 800m of a smaller hall.
- ◀ All sites report some level of spare capacity, with strong daytime availability—an important asset given the lack of public leisure sports hall space.

## 1.4: Strategic priorities

### **1) Invest in both new and existing leisure facilities to ensure they meet the needs of the growing population, while also ensuring that all facilities operate in a sustainable and responsible way.**

- ◀ New development should support the provision and enhancement of indoor sport provision, with facility size guided by audit findings; by 2043, at least a 6-court hall and 6-lane pool will be required.

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- ◀ Support the reopening of Ward Freman Pool—will improve access for current and future residents.
- ◀ Prioritise energy-efficiency upgrades at existing centres and ensure all new facilities meet high environmental standards.
- ◀ Once Local Plan growth is confirmed, officers should use the strategy and toolkit to reassess demand from new housing.

## **2) Strengthen partnerships with schools and community groups to secure long-term, high-quality community access.**

- ◀ Strengthen partnerships with schools and community groups to secure long-term, high-quality community access to facilities.
- ◀ Work closely with schools and Active Herts to maintain sports hall quality and ensure consistent year-round community access, supported by formal agreements that protect evening and weekend use.
- ◀ Ensure all five new sports halls planned to 2043 have robust CUAs.
- ◀ Monitor the closed Leventhorpe Pool and where possible support viable community or school-led plans to reopen it with sustainable operating models.

## **3) Improve affordability, pay-and-play opportunities and dedicated spaces across all facility types.**

- ◀ Work with partners to expand low-cost, flexible access for older adults, rural residents and low-income or disabled residents.
- ◀ Review concession schemes, discounts and pricing, and explore targeted offers for carers and other key community roles.
- ◀ Seek more reliable daytime access through stronger agreements and future projects such as Gilston Leisure Centre.
- ◀ Work proactively with NGBs to secure dedicated space for high-demand sports, especially badminton and gymnastics, where waiting lists exceed 750 young people.
- ◀ Where dedicated facilities are not feasible, ensure high-demand clubs receive priority access to appropriate spaces.

## **4) Support programming and facility development that reflects the needs of an ageing population.**

- ◀ With a growing older (65+ years) population, leisure programming should better support active ageing through more daytime sessions, low-impact activities, accessible pricing and clear health-referral pathways; new facilities should embed strong accessibility and wellbeing features.
- ◀ Encourage greater use of the district's community halls to expand physical activity opportunities, especially for residents living far from main leisure centres.

## **5) Consider forming a cross-border strategy implementation group with North Herts District Council, Stevenage Borough Council and Broxbourne Borough Council.**

- ◀ Needs assessment shows strong cross-border use of facilities between Broxbourne, East Herts, North Herts and Stevenage. With the same operator across three of the areas, a joint working group with Everyone Active could help address cross-border issues and review programming, discretionary pricing and compare FPM findings to improve alignment across facility networks.