



Leisure gains importance in sustainability

Leisure options vary with cost, taste, age, time, location, physical and mental ability. Its significance to a good quality of life, however, is clear. In recognition of the contribution it makes to sustainability, via its social, environmental and economic benefits, we welcome the inclusion of the subject for the first time to this report.

As quality of life has increased, people have come to demand leisure as a right and necessity. Laws have been introduced to provide rest days, restricting working hours for safety and labour-saving devices are designed to increase time for it. More equipment exists than ever before to enjoy it and so has our understanding of its role in improving our physical and mental health.

The DCMS¹ exists to “improve quality of life through cultural and sporting activities to support the pursuit of excellence and to champion the tourism, creative and leisure industries.” Hertfordshire Cultural Partnership used DCMS’ suggested agendas to form their cultural strategy encompassing lifelong learning, public health, social inclusion, environmental sustainability, community safety, regeneration and the ‘Active Community’ initiative to reap the health and wealth benefits of leisure. Other organisations in the county that encourage leisure are the NHS, through its health agenda and Hertfordshire Forward, a Local Strategic Partnership, via its Local Area Agreement.

Hertfordshire’s Cultural Partnership Strategy Enjoy!²

Hertfordshire Cultural Partnership works with national, regional and local agencies to deliver a range of cultural and leisure activities effectively. Consisting of the eleven councils in the county, it has formulated a strategy called Enjoy! aimed to improve the quality of life for people living in the county by:

1. Making Hertfordshire a more prosperous and attractive place to live, work or visit
2. Offering children, young people and adults the opportunity to reach their full potential through access to learning and information
3. Encouraging children and young people to access and enjoy cultural and leisure activities
4. Enabling all members of the community to have more and easier access to different cultural and leisure pursuits
5. Valuing and supporting the diverse range of cultural and leisure activities enjoyed across the county

A review of the strategy’s and partnerships success is due in 2008 and we hope to report on this next year.

Indicator L1 - Satisfaction with Leisure Facilities

To gauge how successfully the county meets the leisure needs of its residents, it is useful to measure satisfaction levels to see if the means to it are being adequately provided. This is measured every three years under Best Value Performance Indicator 119³.

Hertfordshire Residents Leisure Facility Satisfaction Surveys				
BVPI ³	Description	2003/2004	2006/2007	change
119a	residents satisfied with council sport & leisure facilities	50.8%	66.0%	15.2%
119b	residents satisfied with council libraries	71.4%	77.0%	5.6%
119c	residents satisfied with council museums & galleries	48.8%	52.0%	3.2%
119d	residents satisfied with council art activities & venues	45.5%	43.0%	-2.5%
119e	% of residents satisfied with council parks & open spaces	71.5%	75.0%	3.5%

Source: NHDC Strategy & Support Services November 2007

2003 saw relatively low satisfaction rates³. This was partly driven by the success of the commercial gym and sports sector as expectations are raised for better facilities. In 2006-7 there was a general improvement, brought about by upgrading buildings and equipment. North Herts, for example, invested around £9.234m during 2004-7. This financed works to Royston’s Leisure Centre, North Herts Leisure Centre and Hitchin’s Swim Centre and includes installing energy efficiency measures. It also plans to spend a further £3.245m over the next two years.



An artist’s impression of the £4.6m William Penn Leisure Centre refurbishment in Three Rivers due to be completed Summer 2008

1 Department for Culture, Media and Sport - see www.culture.gov.uk
 2 <http://www.hertslink.org/portal/Observatory/Data%20by%20Subject/Leisure%20and%20culture/hertscultstrat.pdf>.
 3 Due to be replaced by a new set of government indicators next year.