

Cheshire East Strategic Leisure Review (possible closure of Poynton Leisure Centre)

Hints and Tips

The following document is a detailed review of the Cheshire East Strategic Leisure Review and will assist residents to respond to the consultation without using the survey. The document has been produced by the Poynton Town Council Leisure Centre Working Group. The Group, made up of residents with sporting and leisure knowledge and expertise and Poynton Town Councillors, was formed to fight against the proposed closure of the Leisure Centre.

Background

Poynton Leisure Centre (PLC) is owned by Cheshire East Council (CEC) but is managed by Everybody Health and Leisure (EHL) on behalf of CEC under an operating agreement.

The consultation

CEC launched a Strategic Leisure Review on the 23rd November 2023. Residents now have until the 7th of January 2024 to respond to the consultation. You can respond to the consultation by completing the online survey https://surveys.cheshireeast.gov.uk/s/Strategic_Leisure_Review_Consultation_2023/, the paper survey or by emailing randc@cheshireeast.gov.uk.

The Working Group believes that the consultation is flawed and designed to prompt responses unfavorable to saving Poynton Leisure Centre. **We would strongly recommend that you respond to the consultation by email where you can state your views without being forced to answer specific questions unrelated to Poynton. Please do not copy and paste the document as this will devalue the responses. Please use the document as a guide to tailor your own response.**

Previous correspondence sent by residents will not be considered as part of this consultation. You **must** respond to this consultation for your view to be registered.

Responding to the consultation

We have used the headings from the consultation document for ease of reference – Here are some points to consider and adapt.

Alternative leisure service delivery approaches

CEC should adopt a more collaborative approach to delivering sport, leisure and physical activity across Poynton and we would encourage them to explore amalgamating elements of the Poynton Sports Club up at the leisure centre/high school site to maximise investment potential and create more of a destination facility and make it more financially sustainable. This would reflect aspirations outlined in Sport England's strategy 'Uniting the Movement'.

Focus on providing a smaller number of core larger leisure sites, withdrawing funding from those sites less well attended.

The consultation states that it will consider use of the site by registered EHL Members, community and sports groups who respond to the consultation and use by school. It doesn't indicate that it will count one off users or sports and community groups who do not respond to the consultation as part of the usage data.

In the initial report on the strategic leisure review that was discussed by CEC's Environment and Communities Committee attendance was assessed using the following matrix. Cheshire East Council stated that the assessment was weighted, however, it was clear that in essence the sites were merely ranked by their size.

Appendix C2 - Site Assessment Matrix - Score Weightings						
Site Usage Data						
Score	Visits	Standard Members	Options Members	Long Term Health	Wildcards	Learn to Swim (KS2)
0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1	<50,000	<1,000	<100	<25	<50	<500
2	50,000 - 124,999	1,000 - 1,499	100 - 199	25 - 74	50 - 99	500 - 999
3	125,000 - 199,999	1,500 - 1,999	200 - 299	75 - 124	100 - 199	1,000 - 1,249
4	200,000 - 299,999	2,000 - 2,499	300 - 499	125 - 199	200 - 299	1,250 - 1,499
5	300,000+	2,500+	500+	200+	300+	1,500+

Leisure Site	General		Site Usage 1st August 2022 to 31						
	Sole or Joint Use	Swimming Pool	Visits	Standard Members	Options Members	Long Term Health	Wildcards	Learn to Swim (KS2)	Sub Total Usage Score
			Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	
Alsager	Joint	Yes	3	2	3	2	3	2	15
Alsager Sports Hub	Sole	No	LINKED TO ALSAGER LEISURE CENTRE - CC						
Barony Sports Complex	Sole	No	LINKED TO NANTWICH LEISURE CENTRE - CC						
Congleton*	Sole	Yes	5	4	4	1	3	4	21
Crewe Lifestyle Centre	Sole	Yes	5	5	5	5	4	5	29
Cumberland Arena	Sole	No	LINKED TO CREWE LIFESTYLE CENTRE - CC						
Holmes Chapel	Joint	No	2	1	1	1	1	0	6
Knutsford	Joint	Yes	2	1	3	1	3	2	12
Macclesfield	Sole	Yes	5	4	5	4	5	5	28
Middlewich	Joint	No	2	1	1	1	1	0	6
Nantwich	Sole	Yes	4	4	5	3	5	4	25
Poynton	Joint	Yes	3	1	3	1	3	2	13
Sandbach	Joint	Yes	4	3	4	2	3	3	19
Shavington	Joint	No	3	2	4	2	2	0	13
Wilmslow	Sole	Yes	3	2	4	1	5	3	18

Although CEC have widened the scope of who is a "user" it is unclear whether they will use a similar assessment, based solely on volume of visits/members to determine "sites less well attended". This approach will favour larger sites even if a smaller site is used to capacity.

For example; Macclesfield is likely to score higher because they have greater numbers due to their increased town size and population, (population 61,700) over smaller towns like Poynton (16,000). It is highly unlikely that Poynton could achieve over 300,000 visits a year even if it had the capacity to do so.

By this measure, a site could be well used and near capacity but still score a low mark. Poynton Leisure Centre has 650 young people currently enrolled on the learn to swim programmes, with a further 100 on the waiting list for lessons but it only scored 2 on the matrix.

In three areas (Crewe, Nantwich and Alsager) sites have been combined which artificially increases the number of site visits to these locations and increases the score on the matrix.

Poynton recently received £46K from a £20 million central Government funding for swimming pools to mitigate increased running costs <https://www.sportengland.org/news/swimming-pool-support-fund-keeps-leisure-centres-afloat>. The award was based on demand for the facility and proximity to other swimming pools. CEC should consider using Sport England's assessment of sites which deemed Poynton worthy of funding.

Focus on providing leisure services in the area of greatest need

All residents should have easy access to some local leisure provision. We are concerned that the Tartan Rug data utilised for the health assessment is now outdated, with the majority of the data now superseded. Whilst it is appreciated that some public health data is collated infrequently, and not always at electoral ward level, in order for a robust assessment to be undertaken the most recent datasets must be utilised. For example, the Tartan Rug utilises data from 2013-16 for a number of categories including life expectancy, coronary disease deaths, respiratory diseases, strokes etc. More recent data available on the Office for Health Improvement & Disparities.

<https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/local-health/data#page/3/gid/1938133185/pat/401/par/E06000049/ati/8/are/E05008646/yr/1/cid/4/tbm/1/page-options/car-do-0>

In order for Cheshire East to plan effectively for its leisure services over the coming years, it is not appropriate to base decisions on data that is 10 years old, and in some cases 18 years old.

In addition, the recent 2021 Census data offers a much more updated overview of Cheshire East's population and other key metrics, including health, disability and deprivation. This comprehensive data source should feed into the latest health assessment, particularly as on initial analysis it appears to indicate a different story than that set out within the initial report of Strategic Leisure Review.

For example, the Strategic Leisure Review (via the Tartan Rug assessment) indicated that Wilmslow had higher public health needs than Poynton. However, analysis of the 2021 Census data indicates that Poynton has higher public health needs than Wilmslow, as set out in the table below.

	2021 Census	
	Poynton ¹	Wilmslow ²
Population Aged 65+	29.4%	23.1%
Population Aged 16 or under	17.4%	19.0%
Disability	16.4%	14.5%
Health	4.4%	3.9%
Deprivation (Households) of 1 or more dimension	41.1%	39.4%

Notes:

Disability – Proportion of residents acknowledging a disability according to the Equality Act whereby their day-to-day life is limited a lot or a little.

Health – Proportion of population acknowledging their health is either bad, or very bad.

Deprivation – Proportion of households which acknowledge deprivation in one or more of the following household characteristics.

Education: A household is classified as deprived in the education dimension if no one has at least level 2 education and no one aged 16 to 18 years is a full-time student.

Employment: A household is classified as deprived in the employment dimension if any member, not a full-time student, is either unemployed or economically inactive due to long-term sickness or disability.

Health: A household is classified as deprived in the health dimension if any person in the household has general health that is bad or very bad or is identified as disabled.

People who have assessed their day-to-day activities as limited by long-term physical or mental health conditions or illnesses are considered disabled. This definition of a disabled person meets the harmonised standard for measuring disability and is in line with the Equality Act (2010).

Housing: A household is classified as deprived in the housing dimension if the household's accommodation is either overcrowded, in a shared dwelling, or has no central heating.

Implement a differential pricing policy (gold, silver and bronze)

If differential pricing generates additional income for CEC we would support this. However, from the operating model we cannot see how additional income would benefit CEC and not EHL. If differential pricing does generate additional income for CEC then should the removal of some or all corporate memberships be considered.

Increase prices across all activities

As above

Reduce opening hours across all sites

It is not possible to understand the impact of this option as it depends on amount & proportion of fixed & variable costs.

¹ Poynton defined by 3 wards: Poynton East & Pott Shrigley, Poynton West & Adlington and Disley.

² Wilmslow defined by 8 wards, consistent with the Tartan Rug: Alderley Edge, Chelford, Prestbury, Wilmslow Dean Row, Wilmslow East, Wilmslow Lacey Green, Wilmslow West & Chorley and Handforth.

Reduce scope of high cost services such as swimming

It is not possible to understand the impact of this option as it depends on amount & proportion of fixed & variable costs.

Transfer ownership of third party operators

It is impossible to know what impact this would have. School are unlikely to be able to fund the substantial ongoing costs of the leisure centre from their own budgets. It is unclear which other third party operators CEC has approached with a view to the transfer of ownership.

Suggestions for funding to retain current level of provision.

- Make energy efficiencies to reduce costs:
 - Refurbish buildings, improve insulation, improve energy efficiency, install solar panels/heat pumps
- Why did it take so long to commission the solar panels at Poynton Leisure Centre. Why is the Heat pump still not working?
- The capital funding earmarked for Poynton should be used for the refurbishment including energy saving measures. There has been a prolonged lack of investment in the Poynton site when compared with other EHL sites. Underinvestment has put Poynton at a significant disadvantage.
- How have Cheshire East used the £46,000 allocated to Poynton by Sport England.

Benchmarking

CEC have carried out a benchmarking exercise which is referred to in the text of the consultation. The exercises compares itself with three neighbouring authorities the number of leisure facility sites per population and membership pricing schemes.

It is noted that Cheshire East is bounded by nine local authorities, and it is unclear how or why the three authorities were selected, or why the remaining six authorities were not included. An alternative to comparing Cheshire East to our geographical neighbours would be to use CIPFA³, a standard model for comparing local authorities to each other. This is commonly used to help local authorities compare themselves to statistically relevant neighbours. It suggests that areas like Bath and North East Somerset, Cheshire West and Chester, Solihull and Wiltshire would be suitable comparators, rather than selecting some (but not all) of our geographical neighbours.

Stockport is one of the authorities chosen for the benchmarking exercise but this authority is quite different to Cheshire East. As indicated within the table below, it is geographically smaller, and are made up of more densely urbanised neighbourhoods than Cheshire East, whose settlements are far more disparate, with a rural environment in between settlements.

³ Nearest Neighbour Model (cipfa.org)

Local authority	Geographical area (km ²)	Population
Cheshire East	1,165	398,800
Cheshire West & Chester	906	357,200
Warrington	181	210,900
Stockport	126	294,800

Given the differences with Cheshire East, it follows that Stockport's leisure requirements will also be quite different. For example, there may be fewer leisure facility sites given the geographical size differences, although it is acknowledged that each individual site may be larger than those in Cheshire East. Therefore, to use this as a comparison authority within the benchmarking exercise appears both inappropriate and flawed. It would be useful if CEC could provide the justification for its inclusion within their analysis.

For ease of comparison, we have summarised the analysis within the Report that focuses on swimming pool provision.

Taking swimming pools as an example, the benchmarking report compares the number of pool per 100,000 people

Local Authority	Total Pools	Population	Pools per 100,000 People	Difference from sample average (2.95)
Current position as at 5 October 2023				
Cheshire East	14	398,800	3.51	+0.08
Cheshire West and Chester	10	357,200	2.80	-0.63
Warrington	8	210,900	3.79	+0.37
Stockport	5	294,800	1.70	-1.25
Post review position				
Cheshire East	12	398,800	3.01	+0.06

It concludes the following based on the above table, 'Currently Cheshire East has a higher number of swimming pools by head of population than all but one of other neighbouring local authorities, with the review bringing this metric in line with the average.' However, if Stockport is removed from the benchmarking analysis, the results are quite different. Excluding Stockport, but including other neighbouring local authorities who, on face value, appear to have similarly disparate settlements to Cheshire East, making them a more suitable choice of a comparative local authority. The results are quite different.

Local Authority	Total Pools	Population	Pools per 100,000 People	Difference from sample average (3.51)
Current position as at 5 October 2023				
Cheshire East	14	398,800	3.51	+0.002
Cheshire West and Chester	10	357,200	2.80	-0.71
Warrington	8	210,900	3.79	+0.28
High Peak	3	91,662	3.27	-0.24
Staffs Moorlands	4	95,993	4.17	+0.66
Post review position				
Cheshire East	12	398,800	3.01	-0.50

This suggests that Cheshire East's number of swimming pools by head of population is currently in line with the average of the five neighbouring authorities presented. However,

the equivalent post review analysis (which assumes the closure of two swimming pools) indicates that provision would then fall well below the average of the five neighbouring authorities presented.

This highlights that the benchmarking analysis as presented within the Council report has been inappropriately skewed by including Stockport, which has resulted in misleading conclusions presented within the report.

Changes to concessionary membership scheme (Options)

It is unclear from the documentation how much the Options scheme costs CEC and what the potential savings could be for each option.

This is a vital concession for many users of the leisure centres. CEC as a community should be able to provide leisure provision to those who have lower incomes. In terms of the priority to reduce health inequalities, reducing the discount to those members of the community who may suffer from the poorest health would not help to meet this priority.

The subsidy for non-residents of Cheshire East should be removed.

Proposed changes to out of borough users

From the operating model it appears any additional income would go to EHL, and not benefit CEC. What happens if the prices in the neighbouring authorities are lower than Cheshire East leisure facilities. Will those residents be charged a cheaper rate than Cheshire East residents.

What should the council take into consideration when deciding where to focus its leisure services resources.

What other provision is available locally?

If sites are closed would neighbouring sites have sufficient capacity to accommodate the members from the closed site. Many of these classes in the leisure centres are already full. Would Bollington, Macclesfield or Wilmslow be able to accommodate the 650 children who are currently learning to swim and the 100 on the waiting list at Poynton.

Can provision in neighbouring areas be easily accessed by public transport during the day, evenings and weekends.

If Poynton closes the neighbouring EHL sites are Macclesfield and Wilmslow. Wilmslow is not accessible by any form of public transport from Poynton. There are no evening or weekend bus services to Macclesfield. Although train services are available to Macclesfield. This would be a typical journey on the train. (The bus journeys are similar).

Train from Poynton -10.07am arrive 10.17am, walk to bus station, Bus leaves 10.40am, arrives 10.53am,

1 hour session

Return bus- 12.11pm, arrive bus station 12.24pm, walk to train station, train 1.17pm, arrive in Poynton 1.28pm

There are no bus options available that would allow young people to use Macclesfield Leisure Centre after school. The first bus after school closing is 16.44pm arriving in Macclesfield at 17.41. Last returning bus to Poynton is 17.50pm.

The Council's commitment to net zero and CEC's carbon commitment.

Closing leisure sites will have an impact on CEC's commitment to net zero and its carbon commitment. If the site at Poynton closed the nearest sites are Wilmslow or Macclesfield, a 15 and 16 minute drive away. We have undertaken a high-level assessment of the additional carbon emissions that would result if all of the current swimming lessons currently undertaken in Poynton were relocated to Macclesfield. This doesn't include the additional trips for primary school lessons. This utilised the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) Emissions Factors Toolkit (EFT) v11.0, which is frequently used by local authorities to assist in undertaking their local air quality reviews and assessments as part of their duties under the Environmental Act 1995. This indicates that over 33,000 tonnes of additional carbon emissions would be generated annually by the car trips associated with transporting children to their swimming lessons in Macclesfield.

Table 1-3 Annual Carbon Impacts of Swimming Lesson Trips Relocating from Poynton to Macclesfield

Number of swimming lessons	Number of weeks a Year	Additional distance travelled (Two-way)*	Additional Tonnes of CO ₂ emissions (2023)
650	48	22km	33,120

* Note the additional distance has been calculated from St George's Church, Poynton to the A523/ A537 roundabout in Macclesfield.

This snapshot of additional carbon impacts indicates that the potential closure of Poynton Leisure Centre will have a negative impact on climate change by both increasing the number of private car trips and their associated carbon emissions.

Closure of Sites in Key Service Centres.

The Cheshire East Local Plan categorises a number of towns (including Poynton) as a Key Service Centre, 'whereby development of a scale, location and nature that recognises and reinforces the distinctiveness of each individual town will be supported to maintain their vitality and viability'. In turn this enables the maximum use of existing infrastructure and resources and allow homes, jobs and other facilities to be located close to each other. This has the potential to reduce the amount of people reliant on travel by car.

Closures of leisure sites could contravene Policy SC 1: Leisure and Recreation, which states that Council will seek to protect and enhance existing leisure and recreation facilities, unless a needs assessment has clearly proven them to be surplus to requirements to local community needs or unless alternative provision, of equivalent or better quality, is to be

made. It continues by stating that Council will support and promote the provision of better leisure, community and recreation facilities, where there is a need for such facilities, the proposed facilities are of a type and scale appropriate to the size of the settlement and are accessible. It sets out that facilities serving Key Service Centres to be located in or adjacent to their town centre or highly accessible locations. It continues that accessibility is a critical issue for community facilities as they are used by all groups, including those without access to a car and those with restricted mobility. Young people and elderly persons can be disadvantaged in terms of accessibility to community facilities. Again, the potential closure of Poynton Leisure Centre contravenes the policies set out within the Local Plan.

Cheshire East Indoor Built Facilities Strategy

In addition, in the Cheshire East Indoor Built Facilities Strategy prepared as part of the Site Allocation and Development Policy Document which was adopted in 2022 states in relation to Poynton:

Poynton:

- ◀ There is one six court sports hall, a 4 lane 20m pool, one squash court and 50 station fitness suite, all available at Poynton Leisure Centre.
- ◀ It is anticipated there will be 650 new homes which will increase the population by 1,001 people creating demand for an additional 0.5 badminton courts (halls), and 0.5 lanes of a swimming pool. There is currently an under supply of water space in this area as well as the need to improve the quality of the Health and Fitness offer.
- ◀ *Key challenge: to increase the size of the swimming pool and available water space and to ensure the maximum community use during the day, alongside improving the quality of the Health and Fitness offer.*

This clearly shows that leisure provision is already insufficient for Poynton.

The strategy goes on to state that there is a shortfall in terms of playing pitches in Poynton as identified by the Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) and suggests that...

Aligned to the PPS there is a need to invest, and consider the option of co-locating facilities or providing pitches at Poynton High School or in Poynton where a management presence already exists.

High School usage on joint sites

If joint sites are closed what mitigation will CEC put in place for the High Schools which rely solely on the space in the leisure centres for sports provision. In addition, the swimming pool at Poynton is used by 8 primary schools for swimming as part of the national curriculum. Closure of swimming pools is likely to cause significant impacts for local primary schools in providing essential curriculum. E.g. logistics and costs associated with taking children to Wilmslow or Macclesfield.

Cost of closing sites

No information in relation to closure costs has been provided in the consultation. The closure and decommissioning costs are likely to be significant including legal, contractual, employment and facilities costs.