



Introduction

Representatives from leading public leisure organisations, have identified that sedentary behaviours are carbon intensive behaviours, therefore investing in the leisure sector provides a real opportunity to engage more people in sport and physical activity in a carbon friendly way, as well as producing a variety of other benefits. People leading more active lifestyles and engaging in active travel methods such as cycling and walking, as opposed to sedentary behaviours and vehicle use, leads to benefits to health, air quality, climate change and congestion.

It is important to be proactive in reducing emissions from the leisure sector's higher carbon emitting areas such as ageing building stock and swimming pools. It is vital that we reshape and repurpose our current leisure stock with climate change in mind, and in doing so capitalise on a multitude of co-benefits that will occur due to redesigning the way in which we see local leisure provision.

The role of local authorities and leisure trust partners in community leadership and place making is vital. This work provides a key opportunity to engage the public in two important agendas, climate change and physical activity, that produce a variety of related benefits. There is also a very important link to addressing inequalities and encouraging the uptake of sport and physical activity in more deprived areas.

Achieving a low carbon leisure sector is vital for the UK to meet its climate targets. The local authority leisure sector can play a key role in supporting the government's priorities associated with the climate change emergency. The sector can play an important role in helping to achieve the 5 pillars laid out in the Climate Change Committee's (CCC) recent report – buildings, energy generation, land use, waste and transport.

This position statement forms a collective voice for the local authority leisure sector: it provides a vision for how we see the future of low carbon local authority leisure provision, as well as outlining some clear asks to the UK Government, in order to achieve this vision. Overall, this piece demonstrates a holistic way forward, underpinned by evidence and a credible vision. We say we can be part of the solution if you invest in us.

Vision

This piece sits within the wider context of place making and the local authority role in encouraging people to be physically active in a climate friendly way. Investing in this sector is one of the best long-term invest to save initiatives that the government can make in terms of physical health, mental health, social cohesion and climate change.

Over two thirds of local authority leisure facilities stock is past its' replacement date and will require significant retrofitting work to become net zero carbon. This creates a significant risk for the future of leisure provision, as many local authorities have declared a climate emergency and are working towards a net zero carbon target date. This is a chance to redesign and reshape our current stock with climate in mind, in order to future proof local authority leisure provision, for which investment is required.

If £1 Billion of additional funding were to be made available to local authorities, distributed over the next 3 years, through a decarbonisation capital replacement programme, based on a strategic needs assessment; this could see enough money allocated to each UK local authority to build/refurbish facilities to Passivhaus or similar standards over that time, supporting decarbonisation of the leisure estate.

An [example](#) of a current local authority Passivhaus leisure centre is from Exeter City Council. Exeter has built the first Passivhaus Pool & Leisure Centre in the UK at St Sidwell's point. It boasts a 70% reduction in energy usage and 50% reduction in water. To balance the competing demands of humidity and temperature throughout the airtight building it uses optimised thermal bridges, efficient heat exchange and recovery systems combined with substantial insulation.

Developing one of these Passivhaus leisure facilities, or a similar decarbonising standard, in each local authority area, following a strategic needs assessment, would increase the construction industry knowledge of Passivhaus type leisure facilities and drive down future costs, while also helping with job creation in the green agenda. These flagship projects could then encourage more to follow and form part of a replacement programme to reshape and repurpose our current leisure stock.

It is also important to understand that facilities are linked and can't be thought about in isolation. We need to assess our current facilities stock in the context of other local facilities and the communities they serve. Therefore, this is an opportunity to accelerate the reshaping and redesign of our current leisure sites to also act as community hubs. These sites can become focal points in the community, being used for swimming and the gym, while also being a place to hire bikes, sport equipment and even a site for EV car clubs. This is likely to encourage more people to partake in sport and physical activity, and links to promoting the sharing/circular economy and reducing emissions.

These hubs can also be thought about in relation to other key agendas such as the 20-minute neighbourhood idea and wider spatial planning. 20-minute neighbourhood policy work is vitally important to help people get active and reduce carbon. The hub model can help to provide more opportunity for sport and physical activity, helping people to better understand what they can do in a 20-minute walk/cycle from their houses. Local authorities will be able to choose the most appropriate sites for these hubs, whether this means transforming an existing facility or building a new one, while also improving active travel links to the hubs, further adding to the carbon reduction and increased health benefits brought about by an increase in active travel.

[NHS statistics](#) show that in 2018 (most recently available data), the majority of adults were overweight or obese; 67% of men and 60% of women. Public leisure plays a key role in town and city development, and with this contributes to active lifestyles. This supports the government's health agenda to reduce sedentary lifestyles and behaviours and prevent long-term health conditions. Specifically, public leisure contributes to the government's prevention agenda, obesity strategy, the school sport and activity action plan, and the staying mentally well: winter plan 2020 to 2021.

An illustrative example is Circadian Trust who have rebranded their facilities and service to Active Lifestyle Centres in collaboration with South Gloucestershire Council: <https://activecentres.org/about-us/>. Their refurbished Bradley Stoke facility is a great example of co-location of facilities, with leisure being the starting point – the facility includes a library, pool, studios, meeting rooms, toning suite, physiotherapy service, and parking with electric recharging stations – <https://activecentres.org/centres/bradley-stoke/>.

The local government sector and their leisure trust partners, are ideally placed to lead on this agenda and engage more people in sport and physical activity in a carbon friendly way. Local government has demonstrated throughout the current crisis that it is at the forefront of public health for local communities and has an intrinsic part to play in their short – and long-term recovery through its promotion of physical activity.

Councils, council run services and their leisure trust partners are well positioned to work with schools and higher education on educational projects that increase children's and the public's understanding of the current climate change crisis and what can be done about it, as well as educating them on the importance of healthy and active lifestyles.

The return on investment by government and local government in these services is huge. Increasing physical activity:

- supports physical and mental health and well-being
- helps reduce obesity related illness
- contributes to social cohesion
- contributes to place making and increased quality of life
- contributes to the establishment of sustainable communities
- contributes to the development and sustainment of vibrant local economies
- helps reduce loneliness and isolation amongst the elderly and keeps them out of the care system for longer
- can reduce inequality by both improvements in health inequalities and providing accessible services for all at a community level; this will be vital to the aims of the levelling up agenda
- is an important part of COVID recovery and building back better.

All of the above needs public funding to support its core activities but generates multiple benefits for society and is one of the best long term investments government(s) can make, as it promotes public health and cuts huge costs through ill health prevention. Sedentary behaviours are carbon intensive behaviours and getting the nation active reduces those carbon intensive sedentary behaviours.

Our Asks

In order to achieve the vision for a low carbon leisure sector, as outlined above, the supporting partners to this statement are calling for the following from government:

- £1 Billion of additional funding to be made available to local authorities, distributed over the next 3 years, through a decarbonisation capital replacement programme, based on a strategic needs assessment; this could see enough money allocated to each UK local authority to build/refurbish facilities to Passivhaus or similar standards over that time, supporting decarbonisation of the leisure estate.
- Funding for Community Hubs – Ring-fenced funding for local authorities to place leisure centres front and centre to the local community and invest in bike hire, EV car clubs at the sites and embed into 20-minute neighbourhood and wider planning, improve active travel links, including active travel links to local authority sports and leisure facilities.
- Investment in community outreach to gain a greater understanding about what the community wants in terms of low carbon leisure provision – Generate ideas from communities to ensure that

facilities align with needs and subsequently uptake.

- Support a national campaign for sport and physical activity that encourages the uptake in sport and physical activity post-Covid in a carbon friendly way.
- Put requirements in place for new and refurbished public buildings to prioritise energy efficiency and to invest in the co-location of facilities so that energy use can be off-set and shared. Planning requirements should also consider the 20-minute neighbourhood and equity of access. Many Council run services and Leisure Trusts now run health services from libraries and leisure centres as well as co-locating library services with a leisure centre. These types of investments can be encouraged and incentivised more with dedicated funding aimed at efficient energy usage. Another example would be to look at the co-location of high energy using facilities that are not traditionally co-located to off-set energy usage, such as the co-location of an ice rink and pool.
- Create a specific funding package that would allow all leisure venues to carry out carbon reporting so we can understand the current situation and how to drive through change.

Incentivise and invest in active travel networks, learning from the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013, the Welsh Government's [Active Nation Action Plan](#) and consequent investments.

Appoint an Active Nation Commissioner for England, who can work together with the devolved nations to drive investment in active travel, reduce carbon footprint and cut across policy areas. Lee Craigie, the Active Nation Commissioner for Scotland and Sophie Howe, the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales are great advocates from whom we can learn

There is an urgent need for the public leisure sector to develop its understanding on alternatives for single use items, most notably single use plastics. The government should fund Research and Development projects with organisations like Keep Scotland Beautiful (or similar partners) to develop understanding and positioning on this specifically for the public leisure sector.

- Climate action is recognised as vital not just as a UK wide issue but as global issue; the poorest communities globally will be the hardest hit by a changing climate with access to food, clean water and a safe place to live put in jeopardy by global warming, impacting on women and girls. The UK sports and leisure will work with government(s) to ensure that the future generations in the UK using sports and leisure facilities are supporting the fight against climate change at a global level.

Conclusion

Sport and physical activity are a force for good in addressing the climate change emergency, encouraging people to live healthier lifestyles and engage in active travel. Investing in the sector so that local authorities can decarbonise their building stock, as well as encourage more people to partake in sport and physical activity, is a clear way for the government to address multiple agendas and obtain a variety of benefits. Increasing financial support to the public leisure sector is one of the best long-term invest to save initiatives that the government can make in terms of physical health, mental health, social cohesion and addressing climate change.

Quotes from supporting organisations

Active Partnerships

Nigel Harrison, Active Partnerships, (National Team, CEO) said *"The leadership, role and value of public sector sports and leisure provision in significantly reducing sedentary behaviours and creating healthy and climate friendly communities and places is vital to improving population health and reducing carbon emissions. Now is the time to better invest in those local community facilities and places to help them decarbonise and ensure that all people can take part locally in sport and physical activity, in a carbon neutral way for their own health and the health of the planet"*.

APSE

Paul O'Brien, Chief Executive of APSE said *"Given the scale of the challenges to meet net zero in the coming years it is an imperative that councils are able to decarbonise their leisure assets. This will mean properly resourcing local councils to enable this vital work to continue enabling them to meet their climate change ambitions"*

Chief Cultural and Leisure Officers Association

Debbie Kaye, Chair of CLOA said *"The UK's much-valued public sports and leisure provision is at the heart of our nations' healthy recovery from COVID-19, but funding support is needed from Government to modernise our pools and sports centres so that they are accessible, low energy, low carbon and fit for purpose assets and can fully play their part"*

Community Leisure UK

Kirsty Cumming, Chief Executive of Community Leisure UK said *"Local authorities and leisure Trusts recognise that more environmentally sustainable approaches may be more expensive to run, however we recognise our responsibility in reducing emissions and absolutely welcome the move to improve both the facilities and programmes on offer to our local communities. This means at all levels of government there needs to be an understanding of the financial models that sit behind these vital services, and the fragility of the current financial landscape"*.