

**Have
your
say...**

on proposed
changes to the
provision of leisure
centres in Cornwall





**Have
your
say...**

Tell us how this might affect you

Online: letstalk.cornwall.gov.uk/leisure

For general enquiries or comments about this consultation phone **0300 1234 100** or email **leisureconsultation@cornwall.gov.uk**

Public consultation: Please submit your views by midnight on Sunday 31 October 2021

Why change?

The pandemic has had a devastating impact on the leisure sector across the country, and Cornwall has been no exception. From March 2020 to March 2021, leisure centres were forced to close for a total of 251 days. Usage is not expected to return to pre-pandemic levels for some time to come.

Cornwall Council does not have a statutory duty to provide leisure centres. In 2014 it adopted a Leisure Resources Strategy that set out the ambition to support a network of public leisure centres for both residents and visitors to Cornwall at no cost to the council taxpayer. The challenges we face in achieving this ambition are now greater than anyone could have foreseen, and a review of the strategy is needed to ensure it is fit for purpose in the current situation.

In Cornwall there is a mix of leisure centres and facilities operated independently by the private or voluntary sector (such as Carn Brea Leisure Centre and Par running track) and leisure centres operated by social enterprise Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL) through a contract with Cornwall Council.

Despite significant Government support, the loss of income due to the pandemic is having a long term impact on GLLs finances. GLL have formally requested Cornwall Council to make a change to the contract to enable them to continue operating the majority of leisure facilities.

GLL have asked Cornwall Council to allow them to stop operating the leisure centres in Wadebridge, Launceston, Saltash and Falmouth, and hydrotherapy pool within St Austell leisure centre or, alternatively, to subsidise the operation of these facilities.

Supporting residents through Covid 19 has already hit the Council's finances hard. Whilst no one can disagree or dispute the importance of leisure in improving health, social and economic outcomes, the Council has to consider this within the context of funding other competing priorities.

Our first duty is to balance our books and provide those statutory frontline services we are legally obliged to provide for our residents. We do not have a budget for subsidising GLL operations or for operating any centres directly.

Earlier this year, Cornwall Council commissioned Strategic Leisure Ltd to undertake a strategic review of leisure services provision to inform a future approach which supports viability and to explore all of the options. The outputs of this review, discussions with the leisure operators and the emerging picture of the national situation have all helped to shape this refreshed Leisure Resources Strategy.

Cornwall is not alone in having to make difficult decision about the future of leisure provision. A recent survey of district councils found one in three expect to be forced to close gyms and swimming pools due to the devastating impacts of the pandemic, with 117 leisure centres in England estimated to be at risk of closure.

What is the current strategy?

Good leisure provision helps people of all ages stay healthy, active and socially connected. It enables our children and young people to reach their potential, whether they aspire to be in the Olympics or just love taking part. It contributes to our economy and also our communities, providing training facilities for our lifeguards and other community groups.

Historically, many District Councils provided leisure centres alongside commercially operated leisure facilities. Cornwall Council inherited many of these leisure centres from the 6 District Councils. Some of these have since been devolved to local communities.

Our 2014 Leisure Resources Strategy set out an approach to ensure residents and visitors alike can access a network of leisure facilities and activities across Cornwall, at no cost to the council taxpayer. This network includes our public leisure centres alongside the countless free outdoor resources that Cornwall has to offer such as our parks, beaches and cycle trails.

In line with this strategy, we entered a contract with the social enterprise GLL in 2016 that was intended to enable the Council to sustain and invest in our network of public leisure centres without needing to subsidise their operation. This approach enabled us to remove the annual subsidy of £3.5 million a year.

The pandemic-related forced closures and reduced usage caused a serious short term loss of income for GLL and they are having to take steps to manage that situation so as to retain their longer-term financial resilience.

What are we consulting on?

We are consulting on the draft Leisure Resources Strategy which sets out how Cornwall Council will support the provision of leisure facilities and activities into the future.

The draft strategy includes our proposed response to GLL's request to change their contract requirements with regards to Falmouth Ships & Castles, Launceston, Saltash and Wadebridge Leisure Centres and the Hydrotherapy pool at St Austell Leisure Centre.

Some facts about Leisure provision in Cornwall

- **The rural nature** and relatively **small population** centres in Cornwall make it more difficult to sustain large leisure facilities. The dispersed network of Leisure Centres in Cornwall means many centres serve a small catchment area and the footfall (and therefore income) is considerably lower than would be the case in larger urban areas.
- **There is significant additional leisure provision across Cornwall** in addition to public leisure centres. Our natural environment is used extensively for a range of outdoor activities. There is also a significant private sector provision of fitness facilities, holiday parks, spas and hotels.
- Most of the leisure centres in Cornwall **were built in the 1980s and 1990s**. The useful life expectancy of a Leisure Centre is between 35-40 years. The older the centre, the higher the running costs. The typical cost of building a new leisure centre is estimated at £8.35m.
- During the summer, **tourists generate additional demand** which helps the viability of leisure provision, but this demand is both seasonal and highly weather dependent, creating recruitment challenges during the high season.

School swimming

Ensuring young people learn to swim is a key priority for Cornwall Council given the proximity of the County to the sea and other bodies of water. Learning to swim is a statutory requirement at Key Stage 2 of primary school. At the moment circa 64% of primary schools in Cornwall use Cornwall Council facilities managed by GLL for swimming lessons.

Our proposals in detail

Our proposals are set out in detail in the draft Leisure Resources Strategy document.

The strategy continues to be based on the ambition that was set out in the 2014 strategy:

The Council's ambition for leisure provision in Cornwall is that there is a sustainable network of leisure facilities and activities available to residents and visitors across Cornwall that contributes to local health, wellbeing and the economy of Cornwall, at no cost to the Council.

The strategy sets out a vision in which every resident has equitable access to good quality, fit for purpose, sustainable leisure offer, enabling our communities to be more active and benefit from improved health and wellbeing'.

This vision reflects that leisure facility provision in Cornwall will continue to include a wide range of provision delivered by different operators, including village halls, high street gym fitness providers, schools, community and public leisure centres.

The vision is underpinned by a set of design principles for a sustainable leisure offer. These include:

- ✓ **A network of public leisure facilities that will provide the vast majority of the residents in Cornwall access within thirty minutes (by car) to:**
 - **Sports Halls** – badminton, indoor football, basketball, cricket, netball, volleyball
 - **Swimming pools** – recreational and learn to swimming programmes and swimming clubs
 - **Health and Fitness** – gyms and group exercise classes.
- ✓ **There will be at least one leisure centre in each of the 6 former District Council areas.**
- ✓ **All facilities, within the context of local circumstances, should provide**
 - a) a balanced offer, including:**
 - Pay and play activities
 - Membership
 - Programmed courses and activities
 - Club use
 - Targeted activities for young children
 - Targeted activities for older people and those with a disability
 - Targeted activities for those who are inactive
 - Targeted activities for families
 - Events and competitions
 - Social prescribing and GP Referral
 - b) A comprehensive concessionary pricing regime to support participation amongst the vulnerable and most disadvantaged.**
 - c) Targeted outreach and marketing to encourage use by communities who are most deprived or are not traditional users of leisure centres.**
- ✓ **The sustainability of public leisure centres is dependent on usage of the centres. If a centre becomes unsustainable due to lack of use, closure of the centre would need to be considered.**
- ✓ **The potential of our open spaces, playing fields, community centres, schools and colleges should be maximised by enabling our community groups, sports clubs and volunteers to bring local leisure opportunities to life for people of all ages and abilities. We will help local communities to innovate and develop financially sustainable delivery models.**

Based on those principles, the strategy sets out a hierarchy of leisure provision for meeting the recreational and sporting needs of Cornwall residents.

Tier 1. Leisure Hubs

- These are destination facilities in Cornwall's larger towns and catchments that provide a wide range of facilities and leisure opportunities.

Tier 2. Community Leisure Facilities

- These are local facilities within smaller towns and catchments potentially providing a more limited range of leisure opportunities.

Tier 3. Informal Leisure Activity and Recreation.

- This is about bringing leisure opportunities into the heart of every community through the expansion of informal leisure and recreation networks. This includes children's play areas, multi-use games areas, skate park, parks and gardens, natural green spaces and public spaces, walking and cycling trails, outdoor gyms as well as community-managed leisure facilities.

Tier 1 Leisure Hubs would be serving the following towns and surrounding areas (up to a 30-minute radius by car): Penzance, Camborne/Redruth/Pool, Truro, Newquay, St Austell, Bodmin, Liskeard.

Tier 2 Community Leisure Facilities would be serving the following towns and surrounding areas (up to a 30-minute radius by car): St Ives, Helston, Falmouth/ Penryn, Camelford, Bude.

This hierarchy will shape the Council's and partners planning policies and investment plans for leisure for the coming years.

The draft strategy also sets out a range of actions for the next year and beyond to strengthen and sustain leisure provision in Cornwall. This also includes actions to develop a longer-term strategy to support the modernisation of leisure facilities.

Our proposed changes to the current arrangements – in response to GLLs request for a change in their contract

To safeguard the operation of the majority of leisure centres in Cornwall, we propose to remove the contractual requirements on GLL to operate the four leisure centres in Wadebridge, Launceston, Saltash and Falmouth, and the operation of the hydrotherapy pool at St Austell leisure centre.

Falmouth Ships & Castles

This centre mainly provides a leisure pool, but also includes a small health and fitness studio.

Issues:

- Expensive to maintain due to ongoing investment in flumes, rides, and other features and the associated operating costs especially in staffing to ensure a safe environment.
- Constrained physical water space for swimming and has a very limited school swim offer with only five schools currently using the facility currently.
- The centre is only profitable during the summer months and is predominantly serving Cornwall's tourist demand rather than resident's needs.
- There is large competition in the area for gyms and swimming pools.

There is a continued need for a leisure facility in the Falmouth and Penryn area and we will be working with our partners to explore opportunities in the area. The Falmouth Ships and Castles site lends itself to redevelopment to support the delivery of other council priorities. However, opportunities will be explored to combine redevelopment and leisure facilities.

Should the centre close, we believe alternative provision is available within a 30 minute radius, including elsewhere in Falmouth or alternatively in Helston and Carn Brea.

Launceston

This centre provides a small gym, studio, 25m swimming pool and learner pool together with squash court, sports hall and outside multi-use games area.

Issues:

- The site is owned by a local charity called the Coronation Park Trust. The lease between the Council and Coronation Trust expires in January 2023. The Council intends to work with GLL and the Trust to ensure the operation of the centre continues until then.
- The Council would then hand back the site to the Trust so they can determine how they want to use their site going forward and whether they want to continue operating it as a leisure centre.

Should the centre close, we believe alternative provision is available within a 30 minute radius, including elsewhere in Launceston or alternatively in Camelford or Liskeard.

Saltash

This centre provides a 25 swimming pool, learner pools with gym and studio. There is no sports hall at the centre.

Issues:

- The Saltash Centre has a relatively small user base.
- The nature of the swimming and the additional lifeguards required make it expensive to operate

The Council is happy to explore with local communities the devolution of either assets or services. Should the centre close, we believe alternative provision is available within a 30 minute radius, including in Plymouth and Liskeard.

Wadebridge

This centre provides a 25m swimming pool, learner pool, gym, fitness studio and sports hall.

Issues:

- The site is not central and is constrained by the school site and car parking particularly in the daytime.
- The catchment served by the centre is small and overlaps with multiple other leisure provision. Bodmin Leisure Centre is eight miles away from Wadebridge and has a larger offer in slightly newer facilities with better parking arrangements.
- The majority of daytime usage is by the adjacent school, reducing opportunities to generate income.

The Council is happy to explore with local communities the devolution of either assets or services. Should the centre close, we believe alternative provision is available within a 30 minute radius, including in Bodmin Leisure Centre.

Hydrotherapy pool, St Austell Leisure Centre

St Austell's hydrotherapy pool can hold up to nine customers at a time and with most users requiring carers to support, capacity is limited.

There is state of the art hydrotherapy pool very close by at the Merlin Centre in Hexas Water.

The hydrotherapy pool at St Austell Leisure Centre is currently not open. It is proposed the pool will not re-open until further notice, whilst we are exploring if viable alternatives are available and work with user groups and the Merlin Centre to discuss transition arrangements.

We have experience in Cornwall of working with local communities to help them manage assets and services.

We are ready to work closely with any local councils or community groups that believe they could offer a solution capable of making some of these facilities financially viable and to explore other sustainable alternatives. However, if no solution or alternative is found, these facilities would close.

Saltash, Wadebridge and Falmouth leisure centres would close on 31st March 2022 and Launceston Leisure Centre from January 2023.

The hydrotherapy pool at St Austell Leisure Centre is currently not open. It is proposed the pool will not re-open until further notice, whilst we are exploring if viable alternatives are available and work with user groups and the Merlin Centre to discuss transition arrangements.

We remain open to discussing and considering other options.

Organisations potentially interested in operating any of these leisure facilities or able to suggest viable solutions or alternatives, should contact us on leisureconsultation@cornwall.gov.uk.

Who would be impacted by these proposals and how?

We believe our proposals are the best way of guaranteeing a sustainable and viable network of public leisure centres in Cornwall, without needing to use additional council taxpayers money. We believe these proposals are the best way of ensuring Cornwall residents who want to use leisure facilities have access to these facilities for the foreseeable future.

However, the proposals could have a significant impact on individuals, schools and community groups that are currently using leisure centres in Falmouth, Launceston, Saltash and Wadebridge and the hydrotherapy pool in St Austell or are planning to use them in the future.

We are ready to work closely with any local councils or community groups that believe they could offer a solution capable of making some all or any of these facilities financially viable and to explore other sustainable alternatives. However, if no solution or alternative is found, these facilities would close.

For each of these facilities, we believe alternative services are available within reasonable distance, but they are likely to be further away and may be more difficult to reach, in particular for people without access to a car.

How the consultation will work?

The consultation begins on 22 September and will end at midnight on 31 October 2021.

During the consultations, we will be holding a series of virtual meetings. This will be an opportunity to find out more about the proposals to help inform your response to the consultation. The events will include information about the proposals in general as well as providing an opportunity to discuss the proposals for the leisure facilities that are at risk under these proposals.

Date	Time	Leisure facility focus of the meeting
06/10	7pm	Falmouth Ships and Castles Leisure Centre
07/10	7pm	Launceston Leisure Centre
11/10	7pm	Wadebridge Leisure Centre
13/10	7pm	Saltash Leisure Centre
14/10	7pm	Hydrotherapy Pool in St Austell Leisure Centre

You will be able to join these events using a computer or laptop.

To register for these events, please visit **letstalk.cornwall.gov.uk/leisure** or contact us at **leisureconsultation@cornwall.gov.uk** before noon on the day of the event.

Please let us know if you require support to enable you to participate in the event.

To submit your views, please fill out the consultation questionnaire and make sure it reaches us by midnight on 31 October 2021 at the latest.

The questionnaire is available online on **letstalk.cornwall.gov.uk/leisure**

Paper copies of the questionnaire are available on request by calling **0300 1234 100**

If you are able to, please complete the questionnaire online as it will save us money. You can send your completed questionnaire to the following address

Leisure Services Consultation
Cornwall Council
Have Your Say
Room 4S, New County Hall
Truro
TR1 3AY

For general enquiries or comments about this consultation phone **0300 1234 100** or email **leisureconsultation@cornwall.gov.uk**

What happens next?

Following the consultation we will consider all the responses received and a report will be taken to the Council's Cabinet in December 2021 to help inform the Leisure Resource Strategy.

If we receive credible proposals or alternative solutions from organisations with regards to the future of leisure centres in Falmouth, Launceston, Saltash or Wadebridge and the hydrotherapy pool at St Austell Leisure Centre, we will work with those organisations to develop viable proposals at the earliest opportunity.

However, if no solution or alternative is found, Saltash, Wadebridge and Falmouth leisure centres would close on 31st March 2022, Launceston Leisure Centre from January 2023 and the hydrotherapy pool at St Austell Leisure Centre would remain closed permanently.



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If you would like this information in another format or language please contact us:

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Email: equality@cornwall.gov.uk www.cornwall.gov.uk

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