

7.1 Play, Active Recreation and Sport (PARS) Plan with Sport Waikato

Report To:	Local Services Committee
Meeting Date:	Thursday, 8 May 2025
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Purpose

To provide the Committee with the intentions of the Play, Active Recreation and Sport (PARS) Plan with Sport Waikato and to provide guidance and direction to organisations who support and provide for play, active recreation, and sport in the South Waikato District. It provides a strategic framework for investment in play, active recreation and sport in the district using evidence from a range of national, regional, and local sources (local play, active recreation and sport providers, community members) to map current and future priorities that will enhance the participation levels and experiences of people and communities in the South Waikato.

Recommendation

That the Local Services Committee:

- a. receives and notes the Play, Active Recreation and Sport (PARS) Plan with Sport Waikato Report (Resolve # 2025-98).
- b. endorses the Play, Active Recreation and Sport (PARS) Plan with Sport Waikato (attachment 1) to be adopted at the June Council meeting.

Executive Summary

The South Waikato faces significant social challenges, with over half of its youth and nearly two-thirds of adults living with disabilities, and many residents experiencing high levels of deprivation. Physical activity—whether through play, active recreation, or sport; is crucial for community well-being. The district has a strong desire for accessible spaces where families can be active together, including well-maintained parks, walkways, and aquatic facilities.

Sport remains integral to local culture, and maintaining fit-for-purpose facilities is vital for both community needs and economic opportunities. However, local clubs and organisations are under financial strain, with funding and volunteer shortages being key concerns. Collaborative solutions, such as shared facilities and resource pooling, should be explored.

Context

Future planning must recognise shifting participation trends, as many people face time and financial constraints. The plan emphasises evidence-based decision-making, optimising existing assets, and fostering partnerships to increase activity levels. South Waikato District Council and Sport Waikato will continue working together to ensure accessible, quality opportunities for all, with a formal review every three years to maintain relevance.

Discussion

The PARS Plan encompasses the following outcomes for our district:

- **Social challenges:** Over half of youth and nearly two-thirds of adults in South Waikato have disabilities, with many facing high levels of deprivation.
- **Importance of physical activity:** Play, active recreation, and sport are essential for community well-being.
- **Need for accessible spaces:** Strong demand for well-maintained parks, walkways, and aquatic facilities for families to be active together.
- **Sport's cultural role:** Remains a key part of the community, requiring well-maintained facilities for both local engagement and economic benefits.
- **Club and organization pressures:** Funding and volunteer shortages create financial strain
- **Collaborative solutions:** Shared facilities and resource pooling should be explored to support sustainability.
- **Changing participation trends:** Time and financial constraints shape how people engage in physical activity.
- **Strategic planning:** Emphasizes evidence-based decisions, asset optimization, and partnerships to enhance activity levels.
- **Ongoing collaboration:** South Waikato District Council and Sport Waikato will continue working together, with formal plan reviews every three years.

Attachments

1. SouthWaikatoDC PARS Plan_2024 (002)

HE RAUTAKI HĀKINAKĪNA ME NGĀ MAHI A TE RĒHIA

PLAY, ACTIVE RECREATION AND SPORT PLAN

2024-2034

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RAAPOPOTONGA MATUA

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The South Waikato has a proud history of high-performance sporting heroes and a District with a natural environment that boasts some of the best in the country. Despite this, the South Waikato community is less physically active than those in the Waikato region, and there are a number of barriers to participation including time constraints and health issues.

The South Waikato has 55% of youth and 63% of adults having a disability and with a large percentage of the population living in areas of high deprivation the social benefits and opportunities associated with physical activity is very important for the wellbeing of the South Waikato.

There is a large appetite for provision of spaces and places that allows for families to be active together.

Of particular significance to the District, rivers, walkways and footpaths and parks and reserves that provide amenities that enhances the use of play and active recreation spaces they feel safe in and are easily accessible.

Although there is an increasing shift towards active recreation, sport still plays a major role in the culture of the South Waikato so the importance of providing well maintained, fit for purpose facilities that meet the needs of the community whilst providing opportunities for economic growth through business and tourism is important. With a network approach to optimisation of all

spaces and places including schools and private facilities and innovative ways to fund projects, the District is in good stead to remain well serviced.

Local clubs and organisations are also feeling economic pressures with the majority citing funding and volunteer numbers as concerns for their organisations.

With an appetite from several clubs and organisations to collaborate and share facilities, conversations around the benefits of sharing human, administrative, and physical resources through proven successful models with local clubs and organisations such as hubbing should be explored.

The community values existing walkways, footpaths, parks and reserves for cycling, particularly as a mode of active transport for school children.

Additionally, swimming is noted as the second most popular activity. A focus on supporting initiatives that provide safe and fun ways to use the network alongside connecting local communities to the

natural environment, reflecting the proud Pacific island and other cultures of the District alongside pūrākau/ancient legends of local iwi and mana whenua should be considered.

In addition, water safety programmes, maintenance and access to aquatic facilities and natural swimming spots are also important.

With a significant rural population and a number of areas with deprivation, alongside the ongoing economic pressures following the effects of the pandemic, the pressures on families to be able to provide opportunities to be physically active can sit outside the normal traditional based ways of playing sport and traditional sports themselves.

This creates an opportunity for collaborative, innovative ways for play, active recreation and sport provision that contributes to wellbeing outcomes and supports the strategic outcomes for both the South Waikato District and Sport Waikato.



WHAKATAKINGA

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 Overview

The Importance of physical activity

Physical activity through play, active recreation and sport has a crucial role in supporting community health and wellbeing outcomes.

It plays an important part in building communities that are healthy, vibrant, resilient, and connected while helping people to improve their overall physical, mental, social, and emotional health.

84% of adults (18+ years)
89% of young people (5-17 years)

feel that being physically active is important¹

59% of young people (5-17 years)

49% of adults (18+ years)
do enough physical activity to positively impact their wellbeing¹

Challenges to being physically active

The Waikato region (and Aotearoa/New Zealand more broadly) has some fantastic natural resources (e.g., lakes, rivers, waterways and coastlines) and publicly-provided/managed facilities (such as indoor and outdoor courts, aquatic facilities, parks and open spaces, playgrounds and play spaces, skateparks, BMX tracks, cycleways and walkways) to support people to be active, but we have further work to do to raise activity rates among people and communities in ways that help to lower our high rates of non-communicable health issues and instances of psychological stress that lead to poor and declining mental health².

Despite understanding the benefits of being active, barriers to participation remain for people and communities, reflecting rapid changes within our society where people are increasingly time-poor and cash-strapped and therefore, the ways they desire to or can participate are changing.

Future planning needs to recognise these changing needs and demands and help to provide for participants in ways that support access to quality opportunities to be active via play, active recreation, and sport for life.

For Council, the Plan provides direction on

what should be done and crucially, what should not be done, focusing thinking on the maximising of current assets, supporting evidence-based decision-making about current facility provision and potential future needs, opportunities for partnership and responding to changing participation trends and preferences. For both Sport Waikato and Council, the Plan provides guidance on strategic approaches to the delivery of services to improve experiences of participants, grow participation and support sustainability.

This Plan is a 10-year plan which will be formally reviewed after three years but informally reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that insights, data and trends are still current and reflective of the community.

Partnership

South Waikato District Council and Sport Waikato currently work in partnership for the delivery of services that support the people of the District to access play, active recreation, and sport opportunities.

By continuing to work together as lead agencies of the Plan, we can deliver a coordinated and clear pathway of activity for the provision of play, active recreation, and sport for the South Waikato District.

The purpose of this Plan is to provide guidance and direction to organisations who support and provide for play, active recreation, and sport in the South Waikato District. It provides a strategic framework for investment in play, active recreation and sport in the District using evidence from a range of national, regional, and local sources (e.g., local play, active recreation and sport providers, community members) to map current and future priorities that will enhance the participation levels and experiences of people and communities in the South Waikato.

2.2 Alignment to Strategic Focuses

South Waikato District Council

South Waikato District Council has a Vision to have a thriving community and robust economy that outpaces the rest of New Zealand. This includes a focus on thriving communities, sustainable environment, and a robust economy:

- **Thriving communities**
- Our diverse people are healthy and well, with ample opportunities to support their quality of life
- **Sustainable Environment**
- The District is a national leader in benefitting from a circular economy
- **Robust Economy**
- Leveraging our location and rich soils, we rebuilt a strong foundation for our grandchildren

The key strategies to achieving these visions and outcomes include:

- More people own their own home than ever before
- More people participate in community activities and events than ever before
- No waste or rubbish leaves the District
- Our economy grows faster than anywhere else in the country
- All our young people are in education or employment

Council understands the provision of and investment in play, active recreation, and sport to be an important component to achieving this goal.



Sport Waikato

Sport Waikato is a Regional Sports Trust, whose mandate is to grow the physical activity levels of people and communities in the Waikato region through play, active recreation, and sport. The work of Sport Waikato is guided by Moving Waikato – the region's strategy for physical activity, which has a vision of 'everyone active' and sets out the organisational goal of having 75% of all Waikato region adults and young people active enough to positively impact their wellbeing by 2030.

The strategy sets out three strategic pillars:

The current Horizon of Moving Waikato focuses on **rangatahi (12-17 years), and tamariki (5-11 years)** in education, play, active recreation, and sport (e.g., community) settings.



HOROPAKI RAUTAKI

3. STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The South Waikato District (not unlike the Waikato region and Aotearoa/New Zealand as a whole) faces a number of challenges in the future that necessitate the use of a planned and collaborative approach to the delivery of opportunities for play, active recreation and sport. Equally, there are a number of opportunities to entice and grow participation that can and should be realised. These challenges and opportunities are outlined below.

3.1 A Growing, Aging Population with Communities in High Deprivation



The South Waikato District has a usual resident population of 25,900 people (Statistics New Zealand, 2023). This population figure is up 6.5% from 2021, which shows growth in the number of New Zealanders calling the South Waikato their home.

South Waikato District's population was 25,900 in 2022, up 1.2% from a year earlier. Population growth in South Waikato District averaged 1.1% p/a over the last 5 years with the District's population



National average 17%;
Waikato regional average 24%



Nationally, 34% are under \$50,000

increased by 300 people in the year to June 2022. This net increase was made up of an internal net migration of 40, an international net migration of 60, and a natural increase of 190.

South Waikato District had a slightly higher proportion (22.7%) of young people (0-14) and a slightly higher proportion (17.5%) of people 65 years and older than the country as a whole (18.8%) compared with New Zealand (16.4%)².

The South Waikato also has a significantly higher number of Pacific Peoples living in the District than nationally with 7% more than the regional average.

This equates to 1 in 3 identifying as Māori and 1 in 8 identifying as Pacific Islander within the South Waikato District.

Of course, a growing and aging population with a large percentage of the population living in areas of high

deprivation presents challenges when thinking about providing for play, active recreation and sport, particularly when considering access and provision that is low cost and overcomes barriers around transport costs.

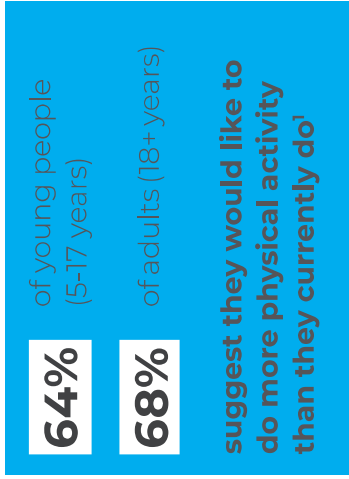
3.2 The Value of Sport and Physical Activity

Sport and recreation opportunities are essential to effectively manage and enhance the overall wellbeing of communities as well as to minimise any negative social issues. Research has consistently demonstrated the value of sport and recreation in the lives of people and communities in Aotearoa/New Zealand³.

Having an understanding and appreciation of participation trends, preferences and barriers is essential to enabling communities through sport and active recreation.



HOWEVER



3.3 Changing Play, Active Recreation and Sport Preferences, Trends and Barriers

How people like to be physically active is consistently changing, as are their barriers to participation.

Preferred Activities for YOUNG PEOPLE



Preferred Activities for ADULTS

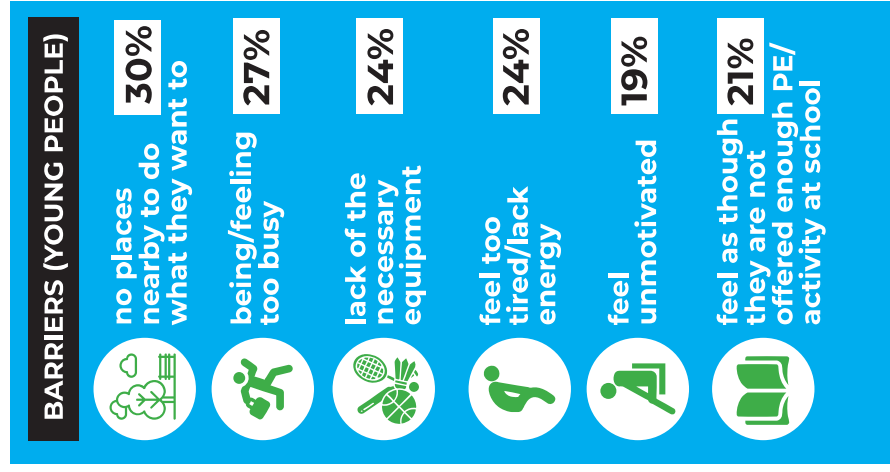


ACTIVE RECREATION and PLAY are the preferred modes of physical activity for South Waikato District residents



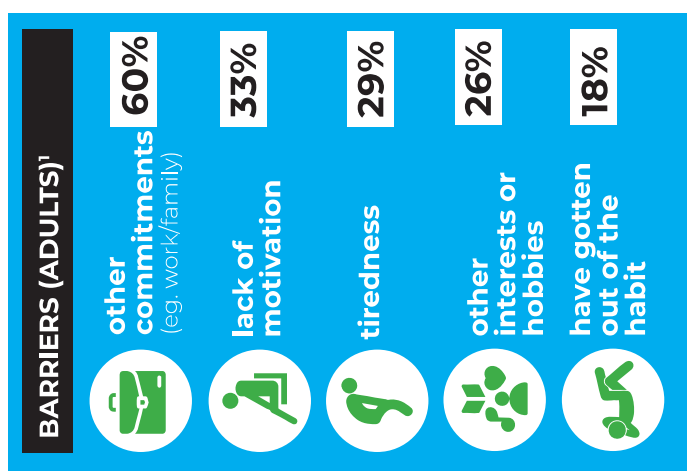
Sport does not rank in the top 10 activities for young people, nor the top 5 activities for adults.

Interestingly, however, while sport ranks low when it comes to activity preferences, 69% of young people are active in Physical Education classes at school, 33% training without a coach/instructor and 29% training or practising with a coach or instructor.



Whilst the majority of South Waikato District residents indicate they are physically active at school or home, the importance of Council provided spaces with outdoor facilities such as parks, fields, playgrounds, outdoor pools (64%), other outdoor locations such as the road/footpaths (38%) and indoor facilities such as community halls and indoor pools (34%) featured in the top 5 locations for physical activity¹.

While at a glance many of South Waikato's young people and adults are doing enough physical activity to positively impact their wellbeing, and 77% of adults in the District indicate they understand the benefits of physical activity for their mental or emotional wellbeing, there



are, however, a number of barriers that prevent both young people and adults from being as active as they would like to be¹.

Despite challenges for young people, there is a desire to be involved. Regionally, 64% of rangatahi/teenagers in Year 7 want to do more physical activity in school, a figure which decreases by age for in-school activity but rises in the community setting, such that by Year 13 67% of rangatahi/teenagers want to be active outside of school¹.

The social benefits and opportunities associated with physical activity participation are important to South Waikato with many adults and young people choosing to be active with family and/or friends. Noting these trends, preferences and barriers, an inter-agency approach to supporting physical activity participation through play, active recreation and sport is necessary to enhance community wellbeing.



Equally, as people's lives change (e.g., increasing demands on time and financial resources) new and innovative approaches to support physical activity participation are required. For example, prioritisation of low-cost, low-commitment, family-friendly and fun play, active recreation and sport opportunities are increasingly more likely to satisfy the participation needs of both young people and adults as user groups.

3.4 Maintaining Assets, Facility Sustainability and Service Levels

In many communities in the South Waikato District (and nationally) facilities are aging and maintenance costs to keep these facilities functioning can become increasingly high and burdensome.

The ongoing sustainability of facility and service provision is likely to become increasingly difficult in some locations, especially those where populations are decreasing or aging. Equally, those areas with a number of facilities for the same sport and with no multi-sport usage require careful thought and planning to ensure a robust and sustainable District facilities network.

3.5 Improving Collaborative Approaches and Working with Neighbouring Local Authorities

Historically, decision-making in the sport and recreation sector, particularly around facility development, has been made on an ad hoc basis and with little foresight about sub-regional use and/or the potential of collaborative models of operations and investment.



Additionally, collaborative approaches to facility provision and the combining of current clubs should be considered in the future to boost participation and to help relieve both financial and human resource (e.g., volunteer) burdens to support increased sustainability.

Collaboration should be considered an option between local authorities, communities and community groups, and schools/education.

3.6 Climate Change

Climate change is and will continue to have an impact on the way people choose to be physically active, as well as on sport and active recreation infrastructure. For example, the impact of rising sea levels and coastal erosion are already proving to be key factors in some Districts, as is increasing (and traditionally unseasonal) rainfall.

Equally as social consciousness focuses more on the impacts of climate

change globally, and particularly on how to minimise these, it will become increasingly important to reduce the dependence on vehicles (emissions) when planning spaces and places for sport and recreation.

Provision of active transport (walking, running, cycling) and shared pathways will become increasingly important with the move toward more sustainable facility design as well as environmental policies and practices.

WAIKATO REGION

70% travel outside of their District to be physically active with migration noted across multiple Districts within and outside of the region.¹

SOUTH WAIKATO District

72% travel outside of their District to be physically active.

Indeed, as the Waikato regional population remains increasingly mobile, community members' participation does and can cross District and regional boundaries more frequently.

South Waikato's neighbouring Districts within the Waikato region and its closeness to the Bay of Plenty Region make it an area ripe for cross-boundary physical activity participation. In light of such migration, collaborating with other District and city Councils will become increasingly necessary to make sure that quality facilities, experiences and services are provided for the community while reducing unnecessary duplication.

Climate Change

The impact of climate change will require the need to focus on:



Facility location



Social conscious



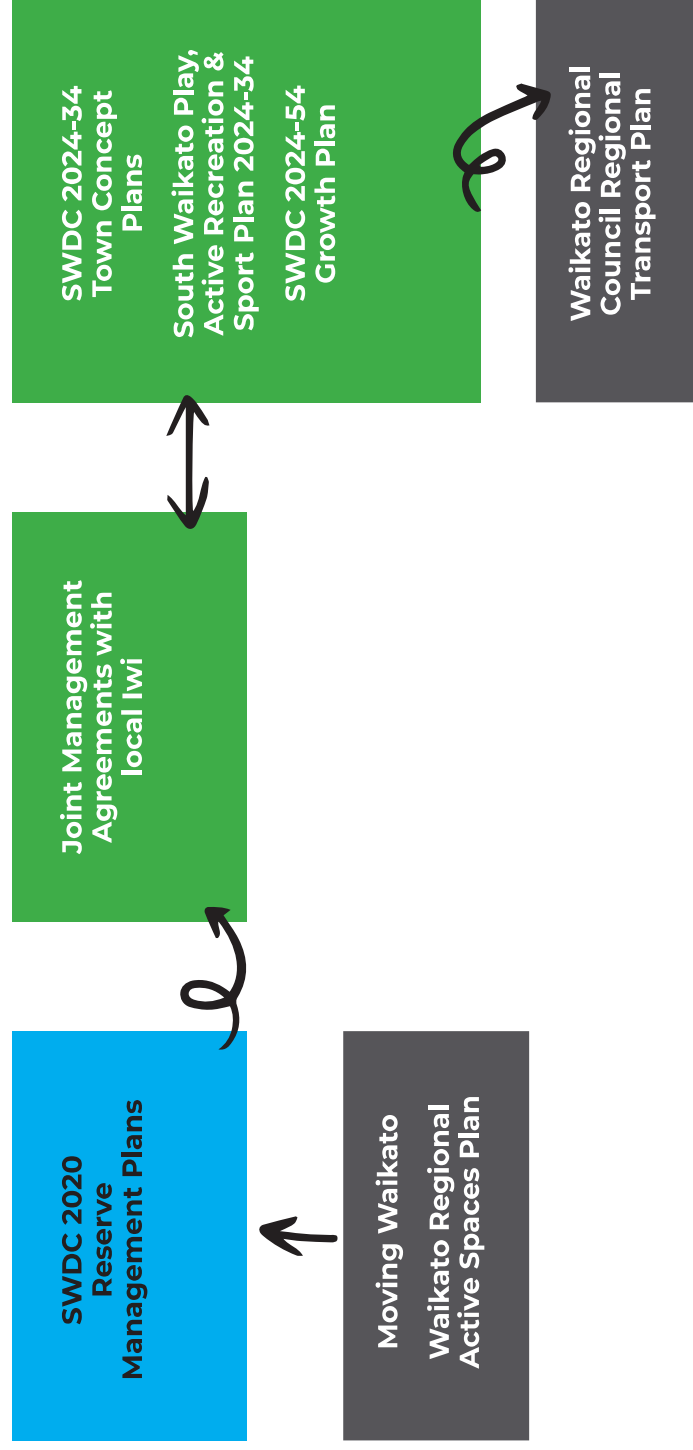
Sustainability facility design - lighting, energy use



Active transport

3.7 Alignment to Other Regional and Local Strategies and Plans

The following Plans have been reviewed to ensure the South Waikato District Play, Active Recreation and Sport Plan supports and aligns with their goals and objectives:



TIKANGA

4. METHODOLOGY

The process of developing the Plan included three key areas of focus being survey assessment, secondary data analysis (trends in play, active recreation and sport and District demographics) and community engagement. This approach provided the best means to gather **comprehensive, robust and triangulated** information to inform decisions made in developing the Plan.

To support the updating of the 2021 Plan, a project team was established to oversee the development of a strategic and partnered approach to growing participation in play, active recreation and sport participation among people and communities in the South Waikato District.

District Council and Sport Waikato were involved in the Plan development process.

4.1 Information Gathering Process

Three separate surveys were distributed to support the development of this Plan and in particular, to gain local insight about the preferences, challenges and

trends of play, active recreation and sport in the District. These surveys included a Regional Sports Organisation Survey (distributed at a regional level and including those National Sports Organisations based in the Waikato), Local Club Survey and Community Survey.

was sent via email to all Regional Sports Organisations in the Waikato region and the Local Club Survey was sent via email to Clubs in the South Waikato District (accessed via Sport Waikato's online club database). These surveys sought to highlight the key priorities of both regional and local sporting organisations with respect to facilities development and maintenance, as well as challenges

Representatives of both South Waikato

4.2 An Overview of Respondents

Regional Sports Organisation & Local Club Surveys

These surveys sought to highlight the key priorities of both regional and local sporting organisations with respect to:

- Facility development
- Maintenance
- Challenges
- Opportunities
- Membership trends
- Volunteer trends
- Service provision and sustainability

Community Survey

This survey canvased a greater breadth of topics with the main aim:

- How residents are physically active
- Opportunities for increased engagement
- How spaces and places are accessed and enjoyed
- Participation barriers

52

responses from Regional and National Sports Organisations

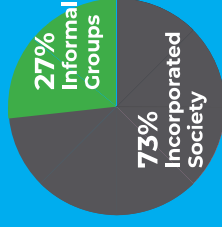
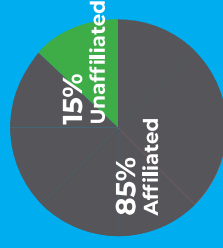
52%

had responsibility to **support their code's delivery and growth** in the South Waikato District

15

clubs took part from sports

such as: horse riding, rugby, boxing, bowling, dog training, golf, football, tennis, marial arts, woodchopping and cricket



Community Survey

150 responses

54% completed the survey on behalf of themselves as individuals

46% completed as or on behalf of their family unit

A range of ethnic groups:

59% New Zealand European

20% Māori

9% Pacific Islander

2% Other European

9% of respondents indicated they felt a sense of belonging to a further range of ethnicities, but not limited to: Asian, Kiwi, Pakeha NZ, New Zealander, British, South African, Vanuatu and mixed race.

All age groups represented but

25-44 & 45-64 year age demographics the most represented

2018 census information and the capture of information from survey sources, a draft Plan was formed collaboratively between South Waikato District Council and Sport Waikato. This draft was then presented for community feedback, where additional community input was sought and fed into the Plan process.

4.3 Limitations

As with any and all data collection methods, there are limitations to the accuracy and reliability of the data received. The Plan has been prepared based on available data at the time of writing. It is likely that some data omissions do exist.

In order to alleviate these limitations, we have been careful to ensure a breadth of

As sporting codes and Sport NZ update existing national and regional facility plans and participation trends and community demographics continue to change, it is envisaged that this Plan will require updating, with formal review every three years in alignment with Council's Long Term Plan.



and opportunities such as membership growth/decline, volunteer recruitment and retention, and priorities linked to service provision and sustainability.

The Community Survey canvased a greater breadth of topics with the main aim being a deeper understanding of how South Waikato residents and their families are physically active, what their participation barriers are and any opportunities to increase engagement, as well as how spaces and places for play, active recreation and sport are accessed and enjoyed.

These surveys were promoted via social media in an effort to reach diverse communities and people of a range of ages, ethnicities, cultures and

backgrounds.

In addition to the surveys administered specifically for the purpose of forming this Plan, we have also utilised other survey sources, such as Sport NZ's Active NZ survey and the 2018 census.

Sport Waikato invests heavily in boosting the Waikato region's sample size for Active NZ, which ensures access to survey data from both adults and young people that is distinguishable by District. In 2021, we had 986 young people and 5,339 adults from the Waikato region share their experiences of play, active recreation and sport outside of our Plan-specific data gathering process. (Active NZ, 2021).

Following analysis of Active NZ data, the

WHAKATINANA RAUTAKI

5. STRATEGIC PRIORITIES & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Play

Intrinsically motivated, freely chosen activities with no predetermined outcome. Play is spontaneous, fun, accessible, challenging, social, repeatable, and occurring anywhere at any time. Play for tamariki is personally directed with limited or no adult involvement, but can also be undertaken together by whaanau.

Play is a popular form of physical activity for people and communities in the South Waikato. It appears in the top five activities for both young people and adults, meaning there is evidence of regular engagement in play across the lifespan for residents of the District¹.

In South Waikato, local parks and reserves, pools, playgrounds with facilities provided within are important spaces that provide for play.

Community survey results reveal that 26% as families and 5% as individuals of respondents are using existing playgrounds/fitness equipment with 64% being satisfied and a further 19% are very or extremely satisfied.

Despite the high levels of satisfaction

43%

of young people played games (eg. four square, tag, bull rush, dodgeball)

29%

played on playgrounds (eg. jungle gyms) in the 7-day period prior to the survey

9%

of adults played games (eg. with their kids) in the 7-day period prior to the survey

For young people in particular, 'playing or hanging out with family or friends' (78%) or 'playing on my own' (57%) are some of the most popular ways that they are active¹

there were still levels of dissatisfaction with 17% of respondents state that they were extremely dissatisfied or dissatisfied mentioning quality and safety and security as areas of dissatisfaction or the inability to play as a family (including opportunities for adults to play with their children, or inaccessibility – able to be played on/in/at by people of different abilities).

"An adult swing would be fabulous at every park" (Putāruru)

"The Putāruru playground by the library is constantly full of rubbish and vandalised so much there was not a swing that wasn't vandalised." (Putāruru)

Of particular concern was the lack of Playground Facilities in the Northern side of Tokoroa with several comments relating to this:

"Would like to see playground on North side of town. It has one of the largest primary schools. Closest playground is Elizabeth Drive. Not everyone has a car." (Tokoroa)

"The one we could walk to was removed due to land sale and now we have none on this side of town at all" (Tokoroa)

While young people are often most active at school and while engaging in playful activities, schools remain underutilised community play assets. 74% of youths reported using schools to engage in physical activity (play or otherwise), presenting an opportunity to develop a broader offer of both facilities and programmes that utilise the convenience of location and reducing the need to

duplicate facilities¹.

Schools are ripe for play (and often contain fantastic play infrastructure and resources), South Waikato schools are not currently being used to their full 'play potential' with several being closed outside of school time and this under-utilisation of school play facilities represents a missed opportunity to both widen and strengthen the South Waikato community play network.

Given the appetite for play in the District, it is important that spaces, places and opportunities for play are provided, and this includes less structured play (eg., play that is not defined by the use of playground equipment per se).

These spaces need to be easily and readily accessible for people to accommodate the spontaneous nature of play. Attention needs to be turned to modernising, innovating and increasing access and inclusivity when it comes to providing for play, this includes ensuring play spaces cater for multiple users:

"Parent and child swings, swings for those in wheelchairs" (Tokoroa)

"More preschool playground equipment needed" (Tokoroa)

Play Recommendations:



Promote the benefits of play to and for the community using **targeted campaigns** – normalise this in the effort of creating a playful District that contributes to community vibrancy



Undertake a **play space/facility stocktake** to ensure existing network of play facilities **meet the needs of users** (e.g., accessibility, inclusivity, localities, provision of seating, shade, amenities)



Explore different ways to provide for community play that are based on **sensory exploration, water play and built infrastructure** – look at simple ways to provide ‘pop up’ and changeable play spaces in communities to keep interest and excitement high



Engage with **schools** to consider providing **access to community use of play spaces** to broaden the South Waikato play network – this should include a focus on **partnerships** and **shared use arrangements** to ensure financial resources can be leveraged and maximised



When planning **new, built** community play spaces, look at ways of incorporating space and provision for **adults to play alongside their children**. Seek community feedback on play spaces to ensure appeal and useability



Consider the inclusion of **family-friendly assets** and **infrastructure** in and around play spaces – shade/shelter, fencing and amenities such as toilets and seating, and access to water



Explore opportunities to incorporate **stories/legends** in areas of significance that creates a sense of **belonging** and **connectedness** to place

Of course, as time and cost are and continue to be barriers to participation in physical activity for both adults and young people in the South Waikato community, play represents a significant opportunity to engage residents in regular physical activity that meets their needs.

5.2 Active Recreation

Active Recreation includes all other forms of activity, other than sport, that require some level of physical exertion as a core element. Active Recreation is undertaken by people for enjoyment in their own free time with a reasonable expectation that participation will increase physical fitness and may include indoor or outdoor activities.

YOUNG PEOPLE¹

74% are active at school/in school grounds

64% use outdoor facilities (eg. gym, playground, park, field, astroturf or outdoor pool)

38% at outdoor locations (eg. the beach, lake, bush, footpath)

34% use indoor facilities (eg. gym, community hall, church, marae or indoor pool)

10% somewhere else

Active recreation is currently the most popular way that people are being physically active in the South Waikato District. According to the recent Active NZ survey, running/jogging, playing games and walking sit in the top five activities

ADULTS¹

25%

use roads and footpaths

27%

at a private property, home, garden or pool

21%

using walkways

17%

accessing public parks, fields, playgrounds, skateparks or BMX tracks

14%

in or beside rivers, lakes and streams

MOST USED LOCATIONS



19%

use cycle trails as individuals

28%

use these facilities with their families

for both adults and young people with cycling sitting in the top five activities for young people¹.

These insights mirror regional trends that indicate walking tracks, cycling and mountain biking tracks are the most used and considered the most helpful infrastructure to enable movement among local communities. Not surprisingly, therefore, a range of spaces support the physical activity levels of people and communities in the South Waikato District.

Among respondents of the Community Survey, between 80 and 83% indicated there were either satisfied, very satisfied or extremely satisfied with the current provision of aquatics facilities, rivers and lakes.

"Te Waihou Walkway is beautiful"
(Tirau)

While high satisfaction rates shows that the community of South Waikato are extremely grateful for what they have, for many respondents' issues exist pertaining to the quality of provision, which can be related to the perceived need for upgrades and maintenance and/or the provision of infrastructure that increases accessibility, especially in relation to the Tokoroa indoor Pool facility with several comments relating to the need for an upgrade.

"Our pool is awesome. Please put the money into maintaining it as we need it in our community. Entrance cost could be a challenge for some people"
(satisfied – Tokoroa)

"Tokoroa pools need updating but are satisfactory for use" (very-satisfied – Tokoroa)

"Need to have better wheelchair access for a solo user" (dissatisfied – Tokoroa)

What is also clear from the data is the need to support and provide safe active transport routes and connectivity between assets for active recreation (and/or sport).

Connectivity was highlighted as both a barrier and opportunity to support active recreation in the District, with many Community Survey respondents indicating a need for increased connectivity between existing walking/cycle networks within towns but also between towns.

"Cycle lane or paths to schools, parks and across town"

51% of young people use active transport to and from school¹

45% use active transport to access locations to be active²

MOST COMMON MODES OF ACTIVE TRANSPORT

28% walking/running

16% cycling

"We live on Overdale Road in Putāruru and lots of people walk and bike out this road. It would be good to have a footpath for people to walk/cycle on ideally all the way to Tirau"

"Get a cycleway from Tirau to Putāruru to Arapuni. From Hora Hora Road to Tirau. This will increase tourism and mean locals are able to get out and enjoy their local area without battling 100km roads"

Of note, among Community Survey responses was also a need to consider provision for physical activity with their four-legged friends, dogs and horses.

"Nothing is provided for horse riding locally" (Tirau)

"More bridle/horse riding tracks. The roads aren't safe to ride on anymore."
(Tokoroa)

"More dog friendly areas"
(Tokoroa Resident)

"There needs to be designated dog walking areas that are fenced off with disability access the area should have equipment for the dogs to use eg a frames...short tunnels planks seesaws"
(Tokoroa Resident)

Given the significant participation by South Waikato people and communities in active recreation, it is important to consider how to further support popular activities such as walking, running/jogging, recreational swimming and cycling.

Active Recreation Recommendations:

 Consider options to support **safe walking, cycling, skateboarding and scooting routes** near South Waikato primary, intermediate and secondary schools to support sustained and increased active transport among young people.

 Consider ways to **better connect parks and reserves, shared paths and cycleways** to extend the active recreation network and enable active transitions between spaces for walkers, runners/joggers, cyclists and those using skateboards and scooters.

 Continue to support **connections between the community and the natural environment** – lakes, rivers, bush – for active recreation, including the provision of cycling, walking/running and hiking trails and safe access to natural bodies of water.

 Consider provision for **horse riding and dog friendly** environments

Like play spaces, spaces for active recreation enable physical activity opportunities for those with financial access barriers and time restraints that may preclude participation in more organised forms of activity, such as sport.

5.3 Sport

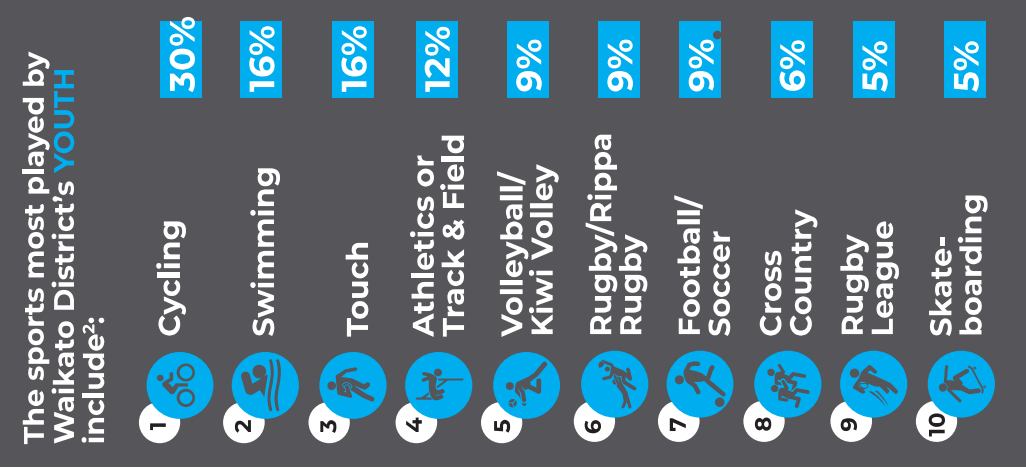
Sport has institutionalised rules, competition and conditions of play (e.g., time, space/boundaries, equipment).

It has a formalised structure and a recognised representative body at a local club, regional, and/or national level. Participation in sport is typically defined by competition between people or teams to determine an outcome/winner.

While sport is not participated in as frequently as play and active recreation by the young people and adults of South Waikato, it continues to be an important mode of physical activity that offers numerous benefits for participants – including social interaction and connection.

Secondary school aged young people in the South Waikato are participating in sport in lesser numbers than the regional average. In South Waikato, 48% of students (44% female and 56% male), whereas the regional average shows 53% of students meet the New Zealand Sport Councils' requirements¹ for sport involvement (49% female and 57% male).

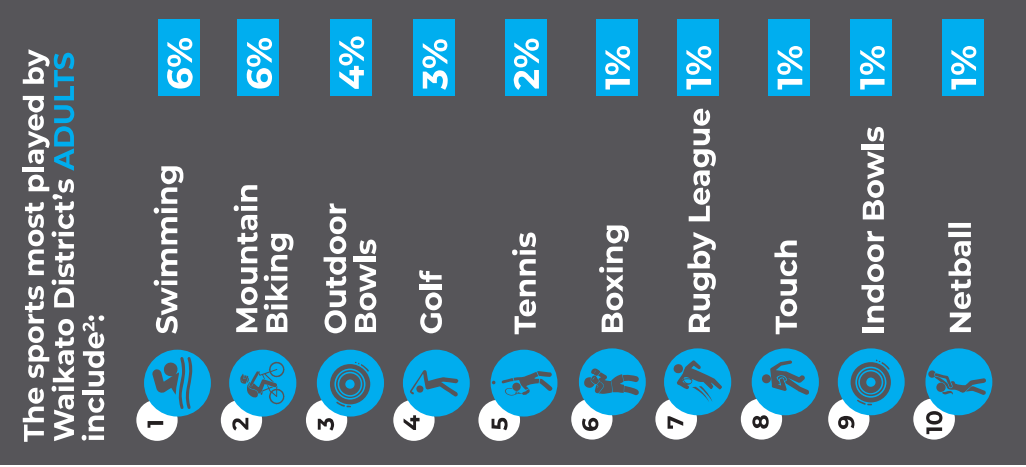
New Zealand Secondary Schools Council (NZSSC) requirements for sport involvement states a student must take part for 2-months in 'the sport' in order for it to be counted as taken part/involvement



in the sport.

Sport also does not feature in the top five activities for adults.

5.4 Sports Clubs, Groups and the South Waikato Sporting Landscape



Like participants in sport, volunteers who support the running of sport are struggling with being 'time poor' and the need to juggle family commitments.

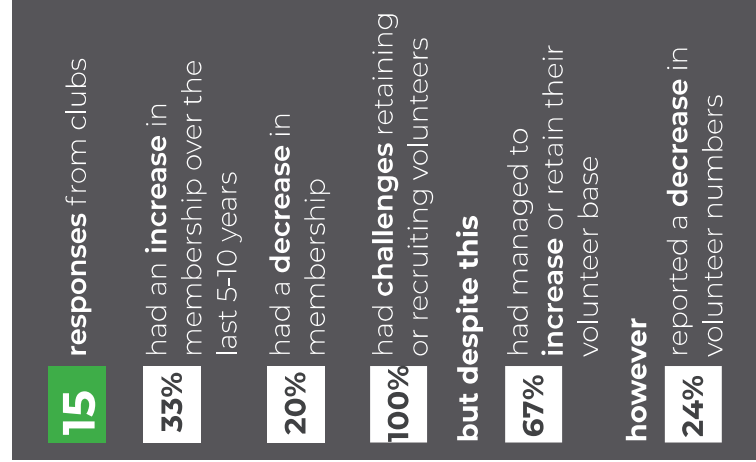
Survey responses indicate that clubs generally understand the importance of relationships with schools to support



their operations and memberships. 33% of clubs surveyed indicated that they are engaged with local schools and the benefit of this engagement includes supplying coaches, supporting with volunteers and engaging with Regional Sport Organisation's support.

There is evidence among clubs, of many actively looking for ways to connect to grow their membership and/or volunteer bases.

Among the top barriers for clubs is funding, with many clubs feeling that more is required to successfully run their operations and grow their code, but also to ensure the burden of cost is removed from participants.

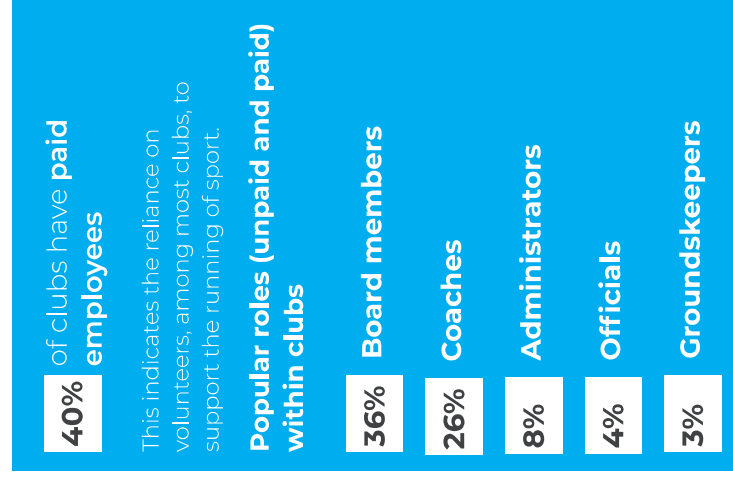


Almost half of all clubs surveyed (14) indicated that they need support with finances (including sponsorship) in order to continue to be sustainable, but also to keep costs down for participants.

Of those respondents who lease/hire facilities, 40% had received increases to hire and lease fees in the last five years.

"We rely on funding grants as we can't afford to, so it comes as a 'needs must' but some are big jobs we can't get funding for" (Local Club)

Travel continues to have an impact on the cost of providing for sport, and therefore, it continues to be reflected



in the top barriers for both clubs and participants (particularly young people who suggest their family cannot afford their participation).

73% of club respondents indicated that interclub/city competition was part of their sporting offerings and while most indicated that travel was regional, there are still those clubs who either choose to or require their participants to travel nationally and to other parts of the North Island to participate.

"Travel time and costs with many having families or work that get in the way of being able to have regular access to community sport" (Local Club)

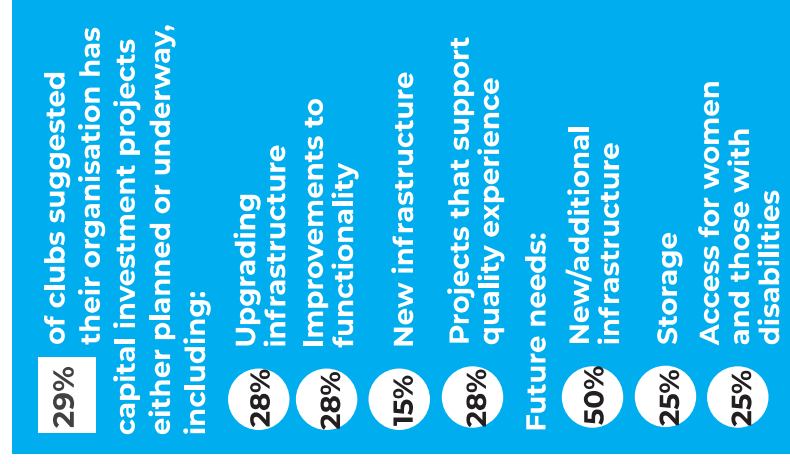


The maintenance and upgrade of assets (facilities and equipment) among clubs is one of the key challenges the local sector is facing, which comes down to both cost and expertise.

"We need significant change for disabled access and unisex/women's involvement" (local club)

Recruiting participants and volunteers, financial security and collaboration are among the most salient themes identified by respondents when asked to think about the future – all of which can be connected. Interestingly, 53% of respondents already share their facilities with other codes or organisations, while 47% of respondents are open to collaborating with a further 13% willing to consider it.

"Collaboration. We need to work



together for both participants and volunteers. We also need to engage the older community as well as the youth." (Club)

There is certainly appetite among clubs in the District to work together, including via co-location, and this is an important way to ensure that the maintenance and upgrade of facilities can occur in a sustainable way that supports the quality experiences of participants¹.

Sport Recommendations:

Consider options to **influence and support shared services and co-location** among clubs. With rising costs, scarcity of funding and appetite to work together, support for **‘hubbing’** is needed in the District to future-proof sport in South Waikato

Look for ways to **lower the ‘cost’ of participation** in sport both financially and from a time commitment perspective – investigate innovative solutions that will lead to the reduction of fees, alternative competition structures to attract volunteers and increase connection to participants. For example, pop-up, localised and less formal opportunities for engagement that require lower time commitments. This is particularly important for encouraging participation among high-deprivation communities and low socioeconomic groups

Support **increased engagement between sports clubs/organisations and the community** – increase connections between clubs and schools; support clubs to communicate well with audiences and to connect with volunteer workforces

Support **future planning for sport provision via the use of insights** – particularly, with a focus on multi-use facilities/ planning and governance/ leadership

5.5 Physical Activity in Spaces and Places

Spaces and Places refers to the locality, or preferred locality, where community physical activity occurs, whether this is play, active recreation or sport, and regardless of whether this occurs across built infrastructure or across informal natural settings¹.

As evidenced by the data, South Waikato residents are engaging in physical activity in a range of ways and in a range of spaces and places (e.g., from natural environments such as lakes, bush and rivers to parks and reserves and community buildings).

What has come through strongly is the emphasis South Waikato residents place on feeling connected to spaces and places and whether or not these meet their basic needs regarding infrastructure (e.g., amenities) and ‘feel’ (e.g., clean, welcoming, safe and inclusive).

The Community Survey highlighted the importance of the natural environment and being outdoors to South Waikato residents with the top three locations for activity being walkways/footpaths, beaches, rivers or lakes and parks and reserves.

Satisfaction was high with three in four people satisfied or extremely satisfied with the provided walkways/footpaths, four in five satisfied with parks and reserves in the community and five in six satisfied or extremely satisfied with the local lakes and rivers.

“Lake Moananui is generally well kept. Lovely to see all the daffodils out. Trees well pruned” (Tokoroa Resident)

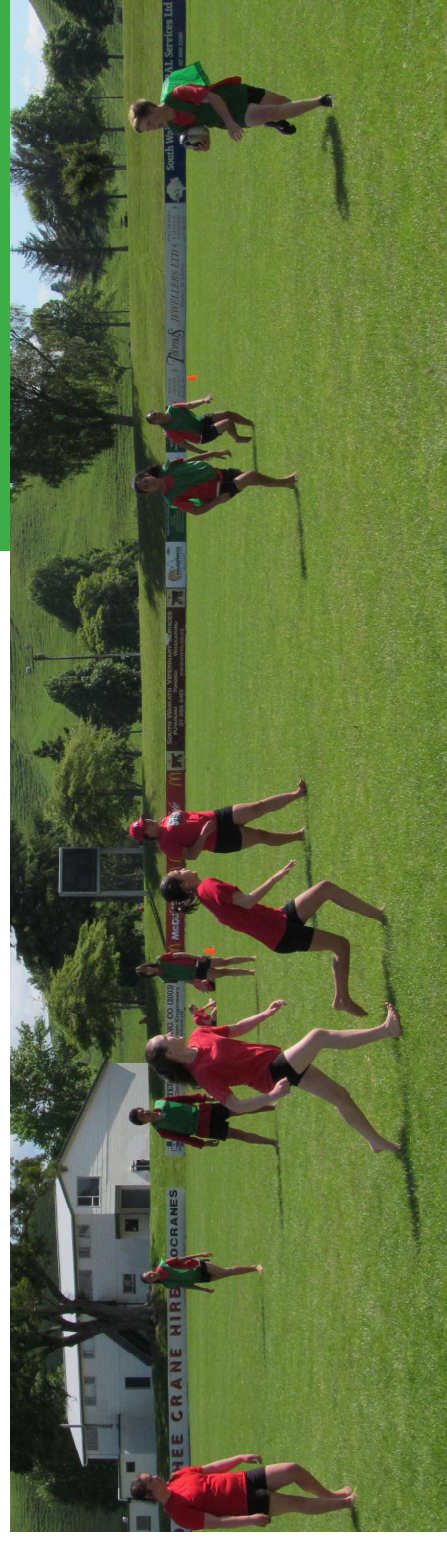
These insights mirror regional data, whereby family/adult/youth/child-friendly spaces and places (e.g., spaces that are inclusive of people regardless of age) are thought to be ways that spaces and places for physical activity could be improved¹.

Spaces & Places Recommendations:

Explore options to **enhance existing physical activity spaces and places** to include amenities that encourage social connection and provide for family-friendly opportunities – e.g., seating, shade/shelter, clean, quality amenity blocks and spaces where families can be active together

Consider ways to ensure safe access to natural spaces and places for physical activity (e.g., rivers, bush, footpaths) to support residents’ desire to be active in nature/outdoors

Consider ways to improve satisfaction levels of those using aquatic facilities in the District, with a focus on the provision of year-round options



RAUTAKI WHAAINGA

6. ACTION PLAN

Strategic Priority	Focus	Action	Responsibility	RAG	Suggested time-frame
Play	Neighbourhood Play System	Identify and report on opportunities and barriers for tamariki to play in their school and community through a Neighbourhood Play System approach (Neighbourhood Play System or NPS is a blueprint produced by Sport NZ to identify and address opportunities and barriers for tamariki to play in their school and neighbourhood)	SW		2024-25
Play	Play Workshops	Provide education for play via workshops and other forums to council staff and community groups to grow the knowledge of 'what is play'. Provide different options and regional examples to encourage a wider knowledge of play, different opportunities and the impact it can have within the community (providing time, space and permission for young people).	SW		2024-25
Play	Play on the Way	Consider incorporating play elements and opportunities through school grounds, footpaths, streets, alleyways, green spaces, waterways, industrial zones, marae, churches and shops-to promote play every day (e.g., stencils, bollards, interactive designs on fences, mowed strips for children to be creative with their play opportunities).	SW/Council		2026-27
Play	Play Trailer/Loose Parts Play	Investigate the need for community play trailer/Loose parts play within the District. Partnership approaches should be considered between councils and organisations to fund, manage and maintain, specifically considering rural communities and kaahui ako (school communities of learning).	Council/ Tokoroa North School		2024-25
Play	Playground Renewals	Where playgrounds are highlighted to be renewed, consideration for co-design of engaging age-appropriate play opportunities (inclusion of Adult Play), family-friendly social spaces, and meeting standards for universal design should be included.	Council		2024-25
Play	Play Trail	Consider blue, green and grey space sites (blue – water, green - vegetation, grey – built spaces) suitable for connected and engaging play opportunities, such as play trails, and as part of town concept planning (e.g., Lake Moananui).	Council/SW		2024-27
Play	Nature Play	Explore locations for natural play opportunities outside of built playgrounds, (e.g., Wetlands, water, planted areas).	Council/ Community/ Iwi/Pacifika		2024-27
Play	Cultural Play	Work with communities to identify suitable sites to co-design traditional cultural play opportunities (e.g., mara hupara playgrounds and features).	Council/ Community/ Iwi/Pacifika		2024-27
Active Recreation	Cycling	Continue supporting those providing for cycling provision with focus on connectedness between existing urban environment and specific cycling locations, e.g., Cougar Park, Tirau Domain.	Council		2024-27
Active Recreation	School Travel Plans	Continue to support active transport opportunities to and from school through school partnerships, design, infrastructure and footpaths, cycle paths maintenance including school Travel Plans.	Council/ MoE/SW		2024-27
Active Recreation	Connectivity	Continue to develop a connected, accessible, and maintained network of footpaths, tracks, trails and bridle paths for everyday usage, and recreation opportunities within grey, blue and green open spaces.	Council		2024-27

Strategic Priority	Focus	Action	Responsibility	RAG	Suggested time-frame
Active Recreation	Natural Bodies of Water	Investigate recommendations that come out of Waikato Regional Natural Bodies of Water strategy, that will include both on and off water investment recommendations and consider key user groups (e.g., water sports) and specific places (e.g., Lake Arapuni, Jones Landing).	Council/ SW		Ongoing
Active Recreation	Dog Friendly Areas	Consider development of fenced dog areas where people can safely recreate either with or away from dogs. Consideration to include Tirau, Putaruru and outlying areas.	Council		2025-27
Active Recreation	Equestrian Activities	Continue to engage equestrian groups and riders within relevant policies and strategies to provide safe and appropriate access to the bridle path network. Consider support for the creation of a Regional Equestrian Strategy.	Council		2024-27
Active Recreation	Seniors Activities	Support a regional approach (i.e., regional study) to help identify active recreation opportunities that support an ageing population as per recommendations within the Waikato Regional Active Spaces Plan with a focus on traditional (e.g., bowls, croquet) alongside emerging (e.g., Pickleball).	Council/ SW/Community		2026-27
Sport	Hubbing	Continue to support sport and community hubbing projects, encouraging clubs and community groups to combine resources, share and optimise facilities, share costs and services, and develop new ideas. Local examples include Putaruru and users of Tokoroa War Memorial Sport Ground.	SW		Ongoing
Sport	Resources and Signposting	Connect clubs with organisations that produce resources supporting club capability (e.g., Waikato Institute for Leadership Sport Studies (WILS), Community Waikato, Recreation Aotearoa).	SW		Ongoing
Sport	Low-cost and Localised Options	Connect clubs with organisations that produce resources supporting club capability (e.g., Waikato Institute for Leadership Sport Studies (WILS), Community Waikato, Recreation Aotearoa).	SW		Ongoing
Sport	Emerging Sports	Consider provision for emerging sports such as disc golf and ki o rahi. Identify opportunities to incorporate provision into existing and/or planned facilities. E.g., disc golf course at Lake Moananui Reserve.	SW		Ongoing
Sport	Diversity and Inclusion	Any new or existing facility development ensures principles of accessibility and inclusion (for example, race, gender, age, ability). Encourage local clubs to provide programmes that ensure principles of accessibility and inclusion are considered (for example, race, gender, age, ability).	SW		Ongoing
Physical Activity in Spaces and Places	Connecting to Taiao/ Environment	Continue to provide an appropriate level of service to existing parks and reserves with a view to investigate design and maintenance options that creates a sense of connectedness to the natural environment and allow people to feel safe in their environment, e.g., opening up spaces to view waterways.	SWDC		Ongoing
Physical Activity in Spaces and Places	School Access Partnerships	Explore school-Council partnerships where existing and future Ministry of Education infrastructure can support local communities (e.g., indoor halls, sports fields, pools, playgrounds).	SW/MoE/ SWDC		
Physical Activity in Spaces and Places	Indoor/Outdoor Court Provision	Recommendation that Council explore indoor and outdoor court provision priority in line with projected growth. Review District- wide court investment programme in accordance with Waikato Regional Active Spaces Plan and due to be released National Indoor Sport & Active Rec Facilities Strategy 2023 recommendations.	SWDC		
Physical Activity in Spaces and Places	Aquatic Spaces	Review District- wide aquatic investment programme in accordance with Waikato Regional Active Spaces Plan and due to be released National Aquatic Facilities Strategy 2023 recommendations.	SWDC		
Physical Activity in Spaces and Places	Artificial Turf – Hockey	Advocate for the development of multi-use facilities and/or school facility partnerships which configure existing synthetic surfaces so that they can be utilised for hockey and where feasible complimentary codes/users. Explore opportunities for indoor hockey in partnership with other providers, facility owners (including schools) to grow participation.	SWDC		

Strategic Priority	Focus	Action	Responsibility	RAG	Suggested time-frame
Physical Activity in Spaces and Places	Squash	Continue to support clubs with plans to upgrade facilities, those with low facility quality or with low membership ratios to improve the quality of provision as a mechanism to grow participation. Redevelopment planning will require a comprehensive feasibility study, including accurate demand analysis, mapping of current network and an understanding of national and regional participation trends, Co-location, multi-code use or partnering with other anchor tenants (including non-recreational use) will increase utilisation and sustainability.	SWDC		
Physical Activity in Spaces and Places	Sport Fields	Review and upgrade the provision, allocation, utilisation, quality and maintenance of sports fields based on current and future need. Upgrade support infrastructure such as toilets and changing rooms to facilitate quality utilisation of existing sports fields where need identified. Increase capacity of fields through provision of targeted flood lighting, reallocation of users, improved turf management or multiuse artificial turf (cost benefit required for each). Ensure any new sport fields have adequate amenities, parking and storage facilities where required and that consideration of climate change initiatives are considered	SWDC		
Physical Activity in Spaces and Places	Amenities	Careful consideration during planning and concept design stage for provision of appropriate amenities such as change facilities, drinking fountains, shade, seating, rubbish bins) in recreation reserves across the District.	SWDC		
Physical Activity in Spaces and Places	Linking Active recreation and Nature	Consideration could also be given to identifying synergistic opportunities between active recreation and conservation (e.g. wetland development and restoration) through initiatives such as 'Green Gym', which aims to provide people with a way to enhance their fitness and health while taking action to improve the outdoor environment, an initiative that can be seen as enabling people to get fit who would not normally attend a conventional gym or sports centre.	SWDC		
Physical Activity in Spaces and Places	Tracks and Trails	Work with Herenga a Nuku Aotearoa to develop a network map that provides a hierarchy of provision, reflecting access, proximity and challenge of each track and trail (through associated technology provider e.g., Plan My Walk, Pocket Maps). Develop a connected, boundaryless cycling and walking network that links to other play active recreation and sport sites, leveraging Central Government support through Regional Land Transport Plan and association New Zealand Land Transport/Waka Kotahi Cycling Plan. Continue to invest in development of cycling and walking tracks and trails where a need is identified while optimising and maintaining existing assets.	SWDC		
Physical Activity in Spaces and Places	Gymnastics	Work proactively with key stakeholders such as Council, Gymsports Clubs and the MOE/Schools to explore long term use/lease agreements and facility partnership approaches to secure quality Gymsports access to facilities. Prior to any major renewals or upgrades, undertake a needs and options analysis. If a need is identified, undertake a feasibility and business case analysis prior to developing any new facilities/refurbishments. Consideration included in the Community Facilities Strategy (Draft 2024)	SWDC		
Physical Activity in Spaces and Places	Business Cases	Feasibility and business cases progressed for all subregional facility development recommendations relevant to South Waikato District as outlined in the Waikato Regional Active Spaces Plan.	SWDC		