

# **King Alfred Leisure Centre Regeneration Programme Research Project**

**The Trust for Developing  
Communities  
for  
Brighton & Hove City Council**

June – Sept 2023



## About TDC

The Trust for Developing Communities (TDC) is a registered charity with over 20-years' experience working with neighbourhoods facing deprivation and communities experiencing exclusion. Working with 13,570 local people and 450 community groups annually, we enable community-led solutions that tackle inequality across Brighton and Hove through community development, equalities and youth work, and training. We have considerable experience in carrying out community and participatory action research and a track record of proactively engaging with people experiencing poverty and exclusion and gathering the views of people that are seldom heard so they can influence decisions.

## Introduction and Background

Brighton & Hove City Council's sports centres and swimming pools are popular and essential in providing opportunities for health, wellbeing, and leisure activities. However, some of the current sports facilities, in particular the King Alfred Leisure Centre, are ageing, inefficient, expensive to maintain and need improvement. Upkeep and maintenance costs are high. The range and choice of public sport and leisure facilities in the city needs modernisation.

In seeking to resolve these issues, Brighton & Hove City Council created a Sports Facilities Investment Plan 2021-31. The investment plan proposes three modern large sports facilities ('hubs') located in the West, East and North of the city, which would support and be supplemented by improvements to smaller existing, locally accessible community facilities.

Replacement of the ageing King Alfred Leisure Centre (West) is now overdue. The Prince Regent Swimming Complex (East) needs significant improvement. As such, there is an opportunity to provide new sports facilities serving the East and West of the city, with the Withdean Sports Complex continuing to serve the North, although broadening the current provision.

The smaller community facilities are Moulsecomb Community Leisure Centre, Portslade Sports Centre, Stanley Deason Leisure Centre, and St. Lukes Swimming Pool.

Whilst developing the investment plan, the views of local people were sought through the council's 'Your Sport, Your Vision, Your City' residents online survey 2020 which received 1474 valid responses, 2.9% of responses were from young people aged 16-24. Between Autumn 2022 and Spring 2023 the council undertook a new programme of engagement specifically focussed on the King Alfred Regeneration Programme. This entailed many engagement meetings with local resident groups, sports clubs, national sport governing bodies, and voluntary organisations and associations. BHCC's Youth Council were among the groups whose views were sought, with the majority of the Youth Council being users of the King Alfred facility.

Brighton & Hove City Council understand that development of our public spaces and facilities needs to include diverse voices from the outset, to understand how the community will use the space and ensure that the community feels connected to change.

Public consultation has begun around replacing the current King Alfred Leisure Centre with a new sport and leisure facility for the west of the city. Brighton & Hove City Council's project team were committed to engagement with, and to gain insights from, young people and people from ethnically and culturally diverse communities. TDC were contracted to undertake a programme of community research, bringing our expertise in community research, engagement, and youth work.

The Sports Facilities Investment Plan 2021-31 seeks to achieve several aims, including:

- To provide modern, attractive, cost-effective facilities, which can better serve the sport and leisure needs of residents and increase activity levels and participation into the future.
- To stem the decline in participation of young people between the ages of 14 and 25.
- To provide good quality, accessible and sustainable facilities so more people can take part in sport and physical activity to benefit their physical and mental health.
- To ensure future sport and leisure provision appeals and engages local communities, including marginalised groups.
- To reduce inequalities – including amongst children and young people, older people, disadvantaged families, black and minority ethnic groups, people with disabilities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender groups, and women and girls.

The research discussion guide (Appendix 1) was developed by TDC in collaboration with Mark Healy, BHCC City Regeneration Programme Manager and Sophie Sargeant, BHCC Sports Facilities Programme Manager, and includes questions which consider these aims.

## Research methodology and sample

TDC were asked to engage and consult with 40 people from ethnically diverse communities and 40 young people from priority neighbourhoods across the city. By ensuring information and methodologies were relevant and accessible, we enabled the target groups to share their views, identify priorities and propose solutions.

### People from ethnically and culturally diverse communities

Our approach was to mobilise existing trained TDC community researchers who are from ethnically diverse communities themselves and have a wealth of skills and experience. Through their existing networks, trusted relationships, lived experience and shared language, our community researchers enable and support the participation of people from ethnically diverse communities.

The methodology was qualitative interviewing, which included a series of focus groups and one-to-one interviews:

- 2 x focus groups of 10 people in person
- 1 x focus group of 3 people
- 1 x focus group of 4 people
- 13 x one-to-one interviews

Of the forty participants, twenty-four were female, fifteen male and one person identified as non-binary.

The majority of participants (n=20) were in the 51 and over age range, with ten being aged 26-50, and ten aged 18-25 years.

ETHNICITY	
Arabic	5
Black African / Caribbean	13
East / Southeast Asian	16
White other / Eastern European	6

### Children and young people

Our approach was to mobilise TDC youth work leaders to engage and consult young people in community-based youth work settings. Although we started out by consulting young people through small focus groups, it quickly became apparent that we would hear more depth of experience, views and ideas, through individual questionnaires (Appendix 1).

Young people were invited to participate in the research consultation whilst attending community-based youth groups regularly delivered by TDC. These groups operate in different locations in the East and North of the city, notably in youth centres in Moulsecoomb and Woodingdean, and community settings in Whitehawk. Forty-six children and young people participated in short focus

groups or completed individual questionnaires. A further eight children and young people accessing the Turner Community Project were consulted. A Thorpe Park excursion proved a popular incentive to engagement.



Of the fifty-four participants, twenty-four were female, twenty-nine male and one trans identifying young person.

Participants ages ranged from 10 to 18 years. The majority (n=44) were in the 13-16 age range, with seven aged 10-12, and three aged 17-18 years.

Most young people were White British, with some participants from other ethnic groups:

ETHNICITY	
White British	44
Mixed heritage	3
British (unspecified)	2
Asian	1
Black British	1
White Italian	1
Not given	2
TOTAL	54

Although the number of people who are active for over 150 minutes per week is above the national average, there are wards in the east and west of the city where the rates of inactivity are higher than the national average. The young people who participated in this research live in some of the most economically deprived neighbourhoods within Brighton & Hove – Bates Estate, Bevendean, Bristol Estate, Craven Vale, Hanover, Hollingdean, Moulsecomb, Portslade, Turner, Whitehawk and Woodingdean.

# Executive summary

## Leisure activities

### **Leisure activities are important amongst ethnically diverse communities.**

Most respondents from ethnically and culturally diverse communities said leisure was very important to them. However, many said they were not taking part in active leisure pursuits as much as they would like to or felt they should do. In general, respondents under 50 years tended to have a broader range of activities they would take part in and involved exercise or sports mainly for pleasure. For respondents aged over 50, many spoke of having several, or a range of different pastimes they would define as leisure. There was much less focus on sports and activity, instead they approached leisure as doing something enjoyable that could offer additional benefits to keeping fit.

### **Swimming and football are the most popular activities amongst young people.**

By far the most popular sport and leisure activity mentioned by children and young people was swimming. This was closely followed by going out with friends. Football was the next most popular sport and leisure activity, followed by running, walking, and working out / going to the gym. Twice as many young people said they exercise regularly or somewhat regularly, compared to those who occasionally or never exercise.

## Brighton & Hove City Council Leisure Centres

### **A minority regularly use council leisure centres, King Alfred was the most referred to.**

The leisure centres frequently mentioned by people from ethnically and culturally diverse communities were King Alfred Leisure Centre, Prince Regent Swimming Complex and Withdean Sports Complex. King Alfred was referred to the most.

A minority of these respondents are regularly using Brighton & Hove City Council (BHCC) leisure facilities. Overall, respondents aged under 50 years are using commercial gyms. However, some had in the past regularly used BHCC leisure centres for group sports e.g., football. Most respondents aged 50+ tended to be infrequent or lapsed users of BHCC facilities.

When questioned on the extent to which they might use BHCC leisure facilities in the future, all respondents said they would to varying degrees. They were very open to using facilities that provided the types of leisure activities they were particularly interested in. Most respondents believed council leisure facilities would be cheaper than those offered by commercial gyms and more likely to provide a broader range of activities and group sessions. Respondents aged under 50 said the monthly cost of a commercial gym offered clarity and good value for money since these facilities sometimes provided a 24-hour service for a set fee, for which users had access to the most up-to-date equipment.

### **Swimming is the most popular use amongst young people.**

Some children and young people don't know what a leisure centre is without explaining it to them. Those who use BHCC leisure facilities mainly use them for swimming and don't really know what else



they can do in them. Of the three large sports facilities, young people in this study most often use the Prince Regent Swimming Complex, closely followed by King Alfred Leisure Centre. Most young people are accessing them to swim. Prince Regent swimming pool is generally considered nicer than the King Alfred. Of the local community facilities, five young people reported using the Moulsecoomb Community Leisure Centre, mostly for football. Of those who answered the question, the majority go to a BHCC leisure facility 'every now and then'.

## **King Alfred Leisure Centre**

### **Mixed experiences and perceptions.**

Most respondents from the ethnically and culturally diverse communities were aware of King Alfred Leisure Centre. Perceptions of the leisure centre produced mixed reactions. Many older respondents (aged over 50) spoke of when they had been frequent centre users, mainly when their children were young. Many said they had a nostalgic feeling towards it.

Those who liked King Alfred gave reasons that included:

- Sociable, friendly
- Familiar
- Comparatively inexpensive
- Wide range of mostly friendly staff

Some of the respondents aged under 50 also spoke positively regarding past use of the centre, typically when they were much younger. Swimming was often mentioned as the reason most respondents had used the King Alfred Leisure Centre. Some of the older respondents still use the leisure centre but had a less positive perception of it.

## **What people don't like about BHCC leisure facilities**

### **Issues around booking systems, upgrade needed and customer service.**

Amongst people from ethnically and culturally diverse communities there was some specific criticism of the King Alfred Leisure Centre. Most complaints came from respondents who knew the centre relatively well and were, or had been, regular users. Criticism included:

- Complicated booking system for specific classes.
- A worn feel and look about the centre's facilities (several respondents perceived that an upgrade and refurbishment was long overdue).

A few respondents said the centre and its staff required a comprehensive overhaul to regain the customer service standards lost over the years.

### **Cleanliness and upkeep of facilities, customer service, cost, location, and privacy.**

Children and young people also had much to say about BHCC leisure facilities and what can stop them using them. Their criticisms included:

- Swimming pools can be overcrowded, unclean, dirty, and unhygienic.
- Gym facilities are too expensive and lack up to date equipment.
- Young people's experiences of staff are mixed.
- Many young people find the costs to use the leisure facilities too expensive.



- The location of and distance to get to a leisure facility stops them using them.
- Some young people don't like being watched in a swimming pool by spectators and want bigger and more private changing rooms.

## **What would encourage people to use BHCC leisure facilities and a new King Alfred Leisure Centre**

### **Compete with commercial gyms, and a community hub with breadth of activities.**

Those aged under 50 from ethnically and culturally diverse communities felt leisure centres are competing with commercial gyms. Therefore, they needed to offer facilities and access that are distinctly different or better than from these gyms. Respondents over 50 typically would like a broader activity offer including non-physical activities, more of a community hub feel, support and guidance on health and fitness, and a place to socialise.

### **Swimming facilities akin to water parks and young people friendly gyms.**

Children and young people would like better swimming facilities akin to Butlin's style water parks or the facilities at The Triangle in Burgess Hill. They would like cleaner pools. Young people want to have fun in the water and would like wave machines, rapids, water flumes, more slides than currently offered, inflatables, and diving boards. Young people want young people friendly gyms. They would like better gym facilities on par with other gyms in the city.

## **What would make a BHCC leisure facility more accessible, inclusive, and welcoming**

### **Support from staff, specific classes, family positive and a social space.**

People aged over 50 from ethnically and culturally diverse communities made several suggestions:

- Support / guidance for those with mobility issues, and to combat aches, pains, or stiffness.
- Classes that recognise and consider the physical limitations of older people.
- A place that offers an opportunity for socialising, feel like a community hub.
- The fostering of an approach that would encourage family use.

### **Areas to relax, quieter and adapted sessions.**

Some children and young people similarly said they'd like a BHCC leisure facility to have a community feel. Some would like a young people's area, or somewhere to sit and wind down in a quiet place. To make a leisure facility more inclusive young people suggested activities for all ages, sessions for quieter times or people with autism, and to make adaptations for people with disabilities.

## **Location**

### **Proximity is a crucial factor to extent of use.**

The location of a leisure centre and gym facility was a significant factor for most respondents from ethnically and culturally diverse communities. Most said that the proximity to the gym or leisure centre was a crucial factor in the extent to which they may or may not use it; saying they would be prepared to travel at most 10-15 minutes, preferably within walking distance from their homes.

### **Closer to home encourages accessibility.**

There is a breadth of views around how far children and young people are willing or able to travel to a leisure centre. This ranged from 10 minutes to one hour by bus, and 5 minutes to 90 minutes walking. The most common response was 30 minutes by bus or car. Some young people will only access the closest swimming pool (often Prince Regent amongst this research sample) and don't want to travel more than one bus ride, others will travel further. One young person said, *"If facilities were better, I'd travel further."* Young people said if leisure facilities were closer to home that would make them more accessible and encourage them to use them.

### **Cost**

#### **A reasonable membership fee, additional fees for specific activities.**

Many respondents from ethnically and culturally diverse communities needed to become more familiar with the pricing structure of leisure centres. Nevertheless, for access to a new leisure facility, many said they would expect to pay a reasonable monthly or annual fee. All respondents said they would expect to pay at least £30 per month for basic membership, with additional costs for specific activities. However, respondents aged over 50 added that once a member reached pensionable age there should be a reduction in the membership fee.

#### **Free or low cost, improve awareness of Leisure Card.**

When asked what would encourage them to use BHCC leisure facilities, most of the responses from children and young people were in relation to cost. If the facilities were free or cheaper that would encourage and enable more young people to use them. Around 53% of respondents would pay £2 - £3 for an activity in a leisure centre, with 30% £3 - £4, and 17% £4 - £5. Eight respondents would like the leisure facilities to be free for young people. Some did not know they could get a Leisure Card.

### **Cultural sensitivity**

#### **Facilities and classes for women only, and greater privacy.**

People from ethnically and culturally diverse communities were asked to comment on the extent to which cultural sensitivity was a factor in their potential use of a local authority leisure centre such as King Alfred. The initial response of many was muted. Most respondents said they had not experienced cultural barriers or bias when using leisure centres or commercial gyms.

It was necessary to probe respondents further to get them to comment on or identify cultural factors that might impact their use of leisure centres. The most common issues mentioned were:

- Many women from Muslim backgrounds said they would prefer that some specific classes and facilities were only open and available to women.
- A few respondents said having a place for prayer would be appropriate. However, others challenged this, stating that leisure centres should be just for leisure.
- Several respondents aged under 50 commented that the current facilities for changing and having a shower did not provide the levels of privacy they would want.

Respondents were mindful to avoid making demands that might be perceived as unreasonable by those who do not share their characteristics. Some felt that if there were an overarching policy of respect and acceptance for all, their cultural values and beliefs would not be impacted.

## Summary Recommendations

### People from ethnically and culturally diverse communities

- The term 'leisure' needs to be carefully considered to ensure clarity of meaning and definition.
- There may be a need to distinguish (i.e., highlight the positives of) local authority leisure centres from modern commercial gyms.
- More detailed consultation would be beneficial once there is clarity on the new King Alfred Leisure Centre plans.
- If the decision is to relocate the King Alfred Leisure Centre, it might impact current users if its new location is no longer perceived to be close to where they live.
- The cost of membership and access to facilities in the leisure centre will dictate potential use.
- Culturally sensitive practices will be necessary for some.

### Children and young people

- Swimming facilities and experience could be improved.
- More private changing and shower facilities.
- Youth friendly and accessible gyms.
- Increase awareness of BHCC leisure facilities amongst children and young people.
- Design leisure facilities with visual aesthetics.
- Improve customer service standards of leisure facility staff and management.

### General

- Consider solutions to increasing activity levels and participation for those for whom cost and/or location are barriers to accessing the BHCC portfolio of sports facilities.
- Longer term consultations to contribute to the King Alfred development programme.
- Advisory Group of community members to support on-going dialogue around the King Alfred development programme.

# Main findings – people from ethnically and culturally diverse communities

## What people do in their leisure time

Overall, most respondents said leisure was very important to them. Many added that on reflection, they were not taking part in active leisure pursuits as much as they would like to or felt they should do. The main barriers were said to be:

- Other commitments (family responsibilities, work, school studies)
- Insufficient income
- Perception of no suitable / likeable leisure facilities in proximity
- Don't have friends or family to go with, so chose not to go.

A few said a lack of motivation was a major factor for their low engagement with active leisure pursuits. However, in exploring the approach and attitudes towards leisure amongst these respondents, there were attitudinal differences in perceptions between respondents under 50 and those aged over 50.

## Leisure activities and those aged under 50

In general, respondents under 50 tended to have a broader range of activities they would take part in to occupy their leisure time. Moreover, many of their leisure pursuits involved exercise or sports mainly for pleasure. When asked how much time they spent on leisure, an average amount was said to be 3-4 times per week, but that would depend on factors such as time of year (i.e., less in the winter months), where they lived (at home with parents or away at university), work commitments / shifts, and whether there was a friend or family member to go with.

Listed amongst the leisure pursuits for the respondents under 50 were:

- Playing sports, football, and basketball
- Weight training
- Regular running or jogging
- Swimming
- Circuit training

Many of these respondents were or had been active members of a commercial gym. A number had said their membership had lapsed due to their efforts to reduce their spending because of pressure on their finances. Although most said they would like to go to the gym again regularly, many needed to attach more urgency to reinstate their lapsed gym membership.

A few respondents said they accessed fitness and training online via their smartphone to participate in online fitness classes or work outs. The NHS online workouts were mentioned by one respondent.

Despite their use of commercial gyms, most respondents in the under 50 categories were familiar with the council-funded leisure services. In many cases, respondents said they had, in the past, used the services regularly. Some respondents suggested their first experience in a gym environment

(excluding school) was in their local leisure centre. And that early experience had caused them to have generally positive memories of those facilities.

*“I was only a kid when I used to go, really young. It was like for after-school swimming only. But I don’t use it anymore.”* (Male under 50)

When asked what facilities they had typically used in the leisure centres, the most common responses were:

- Weights
- Cycling and running equipment
- Occasionally a scheduled activity in the sports hall

Younger respondents typically used these services because they were the types of facilities that met their fitness and exercise needs. Nevertheless, there was a perception that the (newer) commercial gyms offered more state-of-the-art equipment and appeared to attract comparatively more people from their generation and peers. A few respondents spoke of societal pressures for young people to look 'fit' and that they enjoyed the camaraderie and social connections from team sports. And that the 'new gyms' reflect a perception of glamour not found in leisure centres. A few mentioned that the commercial gyms were typically staffed with (younger) people who could advise on the use of equipment and fitness workouts. They also felt this type of support was less available in council - owned leisure centres.

## **Leisure activities and those aged over 50**

For the respondents over 50, many spoke of having several, or a range of different pastimes they would define as leisure. Amongst these respondents, there was much less focus on sports and activity. Instead, they approached leisure as doing something enjoyable that could offer additional benefits to keeping fit. For some respondents, engaging in activities that supported their mental / cognitive fitness and ability was more important than regular physical activity exercise. Therefore, a good proportion of the older respondents' leisure time was spent not on physical activities but on pastimes such as:

- Reading
- Spending time with friends and family
- Taking part in creative activities and crafts
- Photography
- Watching TV
- Dancing

Nevertheless, respondents aged over 50 mentioned various physical activities they enjoyed participating in, including:

- Swimming
- Badminton
- Yoga
- Light exercise (weekly) - this typically took place as part of a group they were members of.

***“I go to the over 50’s badminton and table tennis classes. Both are lovely because they are two hours each and you don’t have to book it’s just walk in.”*** (Female over 50)

In contrast to the under 50 categories, the aged 50+ respondents were far less likely to use commercial gyms for the regular physical activities they participated in.

Most of these respondents said they were very familiar with and had been frequent users of local authority leisure facilities in the past. However, the frequency of use appeared to decline with age. Not surprisingly, few, if any, were regular attenders at a commercial gym and felt the core focus on exercise and fitness was the reason for this.

### **Use of Brighton & Hove City Council Leisure Facilities**

The leisure centres frequently mentioned by the research participants were King Alfred Leisure Centre, Prince Regent Swimming Complex and Withdean Sports Complex. King Alfred was referred to the most.

A minority of these respondents are regularly using Brighton & Hove City Council (BHCC) leisure facilities. Overall, younger respondents, aged under 50, are using commercial gyms. However, some had in the past regularly used BHCC leisure centres for group sports e.g., football. Most older respondents aged 50+ tended to be infrequent or lapsed users of BHCC facilities. The definition of frequency of use varied from 2-3 time per week (a younger respondent) to once a week or less.

When questioned on the extent to which respondents might use BHCC leisure facilities in the future, all respondents said that to varying degrees, they were very open to using facilities that provided the types of leisure activities they were particularly interested in.

Furthermore, most respondents believed leisure facilities and services provided by local authorities would likely be cheaper and more cost-effective than those offered by commercial gyms. They also said local authority leisure centres were more likely to provide a broader range of activities and group sessions (compared to commercial gyms), thus creating a community atmosphere amongst users. The older respondents (aged 50+) said this atmosphere was preferable because they welcomed guidance that could be provided by centre staff on how to get the most from sessions / classes offered in the centres. The friendliness from other users was also cited as a factor that could encourage attendance and use of leisure centres. Guidance and support provided by local authority staff was a critical factor in the extent to which older respondents said they use gym equipment.

However, some younger respondents (under 50 years) said access to exercise equipment was a primary factor for using leisure centres and commercial gyms. For them, there was a general sense that once they had the induction session at a commercial gym, they were less likely to need support or guidance from the staff. Some respondents said the level and nature of guidance and instruction on equipment use in local authority centres was less rigorous than in commercial gyms.

In addition, respondents aged under 50 said the monthly cost of a commercial gym offered clarity and good value for money since these facilities sometimes provided a 24-hour service for a set fee, for which users had access to the most up-to-date equipment. Some respondents said this was different for local authority leisure facilities.

## Use of King Alfred Leisure Centre

Most respondents were aware of the King Alfred Leisure Centre. Perceptions of the leisure centre produced mixed reactions.

Many older respondents (aged 50+) spoke of when they had been frequent centre users, mainly when their children were young. Those with this experience recalled the centre as a place where they could bring their children to participate in playful activities that encouraged fitness and offered pleasure. Furthermore, many said they had a nostalgic feeling towards it. Those who liked King Alfred gave reasons that included:

- Sociable, friendly
- Familiar
- Comparatively inexpensive
- Wide range of mostly friendly staff

Some of the younger respondents (under 50 years) also spoke positively regarding past use of the centre. However, in many cases these perceptions related to a time when they were much younger.

***“It’s a very family friendly place (King Alfred). I was always very comfortable there when our family went, and we never had any trouble.”*** (Female under 50)

Swimming was often mentioned as the reason most respondents had used the King Alfred Leisure Centre. Many (older) respondents had recollections of spending enjoyable periods with their family and friends, knowing they supported and encouraged their children to be active and fit in a safe and pleasant environment. Interestingly, some of these respondents still use the leisure centre, with and without their children, but had a less positive perception of it.

## What people don’t like about King Alfred Leisure Centre

There was some criticism of the King Alfred Leisure Centre. Most complaints came from respondents who knew the centre relatively well and were, or had been, regular users. Criticism included:

- Complicated booking system for specific classes.
- A worn feel and look about the centre’s facilities.
- Ineffective management.
- Poorly trained and motivated staff.

Regarding the latter point, some respondents found the staff not as helpful and as effective in their jobs as they would like or expected them to be, particularly inefficient when dealing with questions around bookings and membership. These respondents felt that too often staff did not possess, information or knowledge they expected them to have. These views are both historic and relatively



recent. A few respondents said the centre and its staff required a comprehensive overhaul to regain the customer service standards lost over the years. However, in some cases the criticism was not specific but related to a general sense of poor-quality service.

*“The staff at the King Alfred have always been a bit odd. We waited a few weeks to speak to the manager to become a member. It became a joke. We had to be a member to speak to the membership manager. So, we never became members.”* (Male over 50)

Several respondents were aware of the consultation to consider closing, then moving or upgrading the King Alfred Leisure Centre. Some of these respondents were critical of the time the consultation took, which was mainly based on their belief that an upgrade and refurbishment was long overdue.

## What would encourage people to use BHCC leisure facilities

### Respondents aged under 50

When asked what would encourage these (younger) respondents to use local authority leisure centres more often, among the common answers were:

- Longer, more convenient opening times that consider work, college, and university commitments.
- Broader range of state-of-the-art exercise equipment.
- A price structure that provided consistency on what they could access.
- Halls and courts for activities such as tennis, badminton, football, and basketball.
- Booking systems (online) that were easy, flexible, and convenient.
- More consideration given to the space and design of changing rooms and shower facilities.
- Price deals and concessionary offers that encouraged regular use.

These younger people felt leisure centres were competing with commercial gyms. Therefore, they needed to offer facilities and access that were distinctly different or better than from these gyms.

*“I haven’t been for a while, but the equipment didn’t cover everything.”* (Male under 50)

*“I like my gym because it opens really long hours, and you can go whenever you want. Sometimes it does get busy but there’s always a lot of equipment you can use.”* (Female under 50)

*“The gym I go to I discussed it with my friends this is the one convenient to us all and it’s got mostly everything we need. We like to go as a group.”* (Male under 50)

### Respondents aged over 50

Respondents aged over 50 identified what they felt necessary to encourage them to use local authority leisure centres more frequently. Amongst the common suggestions made were:

- A pricing structure that recognised older people tend to have more financial priorities and limited disposable income.
- A flexible and reliable booking system that guaranteed they would have a reasonable opportunity to book and confirm the types of activities they wanted to engage in.

- Accessibility features to encourage those with less mobility to use the centre.
- Support and guidance within the centre that would ensure those with mobility issues would know how to use the facilities available to maximise the benefits afforded them.
- Specific sessions and classes that recognise and consider physical limitations of older people.
- A culture / policy that clearly and explicitly encourages all people (regardless of background) to use the centre and access its facilities. Not just a centre where one went to get fit.
- Access to a sports therapist or physiotherapist, with knowledge on how to maximise the use of the centre based on age.
- On-site support on using the centre's facilities to combat minor physical aches, pains, or stiffness.
- A place that offers an opportunity for socialising, such as a coffee shop or a less physical activity that encourages learning new skills and socialising with others.
- The fostering of an approach that would encourage family use. This family-focused activity might entail sessions or specific periods where facilities would be allocated specifically for collective and family use.
- A sauna and jacuzzi.

***“The booking system is awful. For the yoga is always a scramble to book a session, I’ve given up.”***

(Female over 50)

Interestingly, several respondents pointed out that as this was a leisure centre and not a gym, the range of activities made available in the space did not have to be focused on physical activity and might also include things like craft, creative writing, learning languages and exploring health-based initiatives.

Many of the older respondents were concerned that the outcome of the wider King Alfred consultation process would result in a recommendation that the centre be moved from its current location and relocated to an alternative site. The prospect of the centre being located somewhere less convenient caused some unease. Nevertheless, the possibility of an upgraded leisure centre with new up-to-date equipment and facilities appealed to all respondents.

## **Location**

The location of a leisure or gym facility was a significant factor for most respondents. Most said that the proximity to the gym or leisure centre was a crucial factor in the extent to which they may or may not use it. Most said they would be prepared to travel at most 10-15 minutes to use these facilities, with many preferring the facilities to be located within 10-15 minutes walking distance from their homes. Only some respondents were prepared to travel more than 30 minutes to a leisure centre or gym.

When asked what might encourage them to use a centre outside their preferred proximity, many respondents were unsure if there was anything; some said they would not go. In exploring what might make them change their stance on using a centre considered far from where they currently live, there was a lack of suggestions from all age groups. However, amongst respondents aged over 50, there was a greater likelihood that if there was no leisure centre near where they lived, they

might not use any facilities of this type. Instead, they would choose an activity that didn't require a gym or leisure centre, for example, walking or jogging. Or become part of a club or group that provided opportunities to pursue leisure activities, including the possibility of light exercise sessions brought to the club / group. The under 50s said if they were to travel to use a leisure centre, it would have to provide the types of facilities that they would commonly find in a commercial gym. However, a few said it would have to offer more than a commercial gym if they had to travel further to attend.

Several people in the focus groups said it was important for the centre to be placed within a local community. This setting would establish it as a community resource and eliminate the need for people to get into cars to visit the centre.

## Cost

Many respondents were unfamiliar with the pricing structure of local leisure centres. Nevertheless, for access to a new centre / facility, many said they would expect to pay a reasonable monthly or annual fee and then pay on top for specific activities or courses.

All respondents said they would expect to pay at least £30 per month for basic membership, with additional costs for specific activities. However, older respondents added that once a member reached pensionable age, there should be a reduction in the membership fee to reflect the likelihood that they would have limited disposable income. Respondents under 50 said that although they were prepared to pay a monthly price in the region of £30, it was unlikely they would pay for additional activity as their primary use of the centre would be the use of the exercise space and gym equipment, which they expected would be included in the monthly membership fee. A reduction in the membership fee for students was suggested by some respondents.

Several respondents made the point that the membership cost to a new local authority leisure centre would dictate the types of people who use it. They thought it was important that it was affordable to most people. This price level would ensure the centre differed from the type of place that only the wealthy or those with disposable income could use. They also said if the cost were 'affordable to all', it would have the perception of being an inclusive, welcoming, and safe centre with a solid community-focused ethic.

***“We are very attached to the King Alfred Centre. Really, we would prefer it to be done up and don't have a completely new one. We know that if it's new it will cost a lot of money to use it.”***  
(Male over 50)

***“With a new centre, they would have to have all the fancy equipment and they should pump up the price. Then we might as well use the David Lloyds.”*** (Female over 50)

## Cultural sensitivity

Respondents were asked to comment on the extent to which cultural sensitivity was a factor in their potential use of a local authority leisure centre such as King Alfred.

The initial response of many respondents to the question of cultural sensitivity in leisure centres was muted. Most respondents said they had not experienced cultural barriers or bias when using leisure centres or commercial gyms. However, there was a perception amongst some respondents that staff typically avoided issues based on cultural differences, i.e., staff did not wish to get involved in situations that might become racially, ethnically, or culturally contentious. As a result, respondents felt the staff intentionally/purposely did not comment on/avoided interactions where they (the staff) might be faced with making decisions based on race, ethnicity, or culture. Overall, this was not seen as a negative approach, simply one they felt staff found preferable, as it reduced the possibility of causing offence or misunderstandings. Some respondents said the staff were 'okay' and they did not get a sense of any bias or discrimination based on a person's cultural or ethnic background.

***“You never really get any of that type of problem there (King Alfred). I think they make a special effort to try and be inclusive to everyone. They try and be really friendly.”*** (Female over 50)

It was necessary to probe respondents further to get them to comment on or identify cultural factors that might impact their use of leisure centres. The most common issues mentioned were:

- Many women from Muslim backgrounds said they would prefer that some specific classes and facilities were only open and available to women. This was explicitly mentioned about exercise classes, yoga, and swimming.
- Those respondents who also said they would welcome the introduction of a sauna also said this would have to be gender specific.
- A few respondents also said having a place for prayer would be appropriate. However, in the focus group, others challenged this, stating that leisure centres should be just that (i.e., for leisure). It should not attempt to address and include the religious faith-based requirements of those who use it. Concern was expressed that these actions may be seen as favouritism if only one religion was afforded this facility.
- Several of the younger respondents commented that the current facilities for changing and having a shower in both local authority and commercial settings did not provide the levels of privacy they would want. In some cases, this was because of the design and layout of the changing facilities. Some people said the space made available seemed inadequate for the number of people who were potentially likely to be changing at any one time.

Therefore, overall, broadly the views and perceptions of these respondents did not seem to be that different from those from a White UK ethnic background. Respondents were mindful to avoid making demands that might be perceived as unreasonable by those who do not share their characteristics. Some respondents felt that asking for special consideration and allowances might cause a backlash, resulting in not using the facilities. Some felt that if there were an overarching policy of respect and acceptance for all, their cultural values and beliefs would not be impacted.

***“In the gym I go to I find everybody treats me okay. I wear hijab I am the only one and it doesn't really matter. No one treats me any different to everyone else.”*** (Female under 50)

*“I think they do a really successful job at the gym [with people from different cultures], I haven’t seen anything I would be concerned about, they seem to treat everybody the same.”* (Male under 50)

# Main findings – children and young people

## What young people do in their leisure time

Due to the nature of this research study, all the children and young people attend community-based youth groups in their leisure time. By far the most popular sport and leisure activity mentioned by young people was swimming. This was closely followed by going out with friends, in this context, going to gigs and the beach were mentioned. Football was the next most popular sport and leisure activity, followed by running, walking (including walking dogs), and working out / going to the gym. Some young people work out at home, outdoor gyms in Preston Park and Saltdean were mentioned, as were David Lloyd and Pure Gym.

Creative arts and crafts were mentioned by a few young people, including creative writing, drawing, music, painting. Others enjoy reading, including anime; others like gaming, watching Netflix and TikTok videos.

Sports that were mentioned by participants were beach basketball, boxing, cricket, cycling, kayaking, mixed martial arts, rugby, skateboarding and tennis. Each were mentioned once only, or twice.

Other activities young people participate in are air cadets / cadets, camping, clubbing, cooking, dancing, dog training, Duke of Edinburgh awards, road trips with family, shopping and sleeping.

Two young people said they don't participate in any physical activity. Twice as many young people who gave a response said they exercise regularly or somewhat regularly, compared to those who occasionally or never exercise. Five young people reported their barriers to exercise as being health reasons, studies taking up time, not having enough people to exercise with, a lack of free gyms in Brighton, and the absence of an outdoor gym in East Brighton.

## Children and young people's use of BHCC leisure facilities

Some children and young people don't know what a leisure centre is without explaining it to them. Those who use BHCC leisure facilities mainly use them for swimming and don't really know what else they can do in them.

### Large sports facilities ('hubs'):

The most used leisure centre by young people who participated in this research study is the Prince Regent Swimming Complex, closely followed by King Alfred Leisure Centre. Just one young person uses Withdean Sports Complex, for climbing only. Her parents take her otherwise she might not go.

Prince Regent swimming pool is generally considered nicer than the King Alfred, although one young man likes *"the big 3m deep pool"* at King Alfred and another said, *"Prince Regent is nearer, but King Alfred is way better."*

### **Community facilities:**

Five young people reported using the Moulsecoomb Community Leisure Centre, mostly for football, which is located close to the 67 Centre (the youth centre used by TDC in Moulsecoomb). One young man aged 16 likes going there because, *“It’s easy to get to. It’s affordable. Good, well-maintained facilities.”* Portslade Sports Centre and Stanley Deason Leisure Centre were mentioned once each, whilst two young people use St. Luke’s Swimming Pool.

Many young people reported using more than one BHCC leisure facility, whilst seven young people said they don’t use the local authority leisure centres. Of those who answered the question, how often do you go? The majority response was ‘every now and then’. Three said monthly, and two go weekly. In Brighton & Hove, a third of the 5 - 16 age group are less active doing less than 30 mins activity per day.

Other facilities that young people stated using are Saltdean Lido (mentioned once and in relation to it being heated) and The Triangle in Burgess Hill (mentioned several times), operated by Places Leisure.

Most young people are accessing the King Alfred Leisure Centre and Prince Regent Swimming Complex to swim, *“Just like swimming, [it] keeps me calm.”* (Young man aged 14). Many are taking advantage of the free swimming for children and young people aged 18 and under. *“I only really go for the free swimming.”* (Young man aged 13).

One young person struggles to access the free-swimming offer, *“Young people can’t swim for free in school hours, which is not good for inset days; and can’t go after school because there are swimming lessons. Young people can’t get swimming after 6pm on a school night.”* This young person was unaware that free swimming is available on inset days.

Young people consulted are generally less aware of the other activities on offer. A small number of young people are using the gyms in the BHCC leisure facilities, although one young man commented, *“don’t like that you have to be over 16 to use the gym”*, and a young woman said, *“people over 13 should be able to use the gym.”*

## **What children and young people don’t like about BHCC leisure facilities and what can stop them using them**

### **Swimming pools**

Children and young people said that pools can be overcrowded and are too small to cater for everyone, the water slides are often or always closed, and swimming pools are unclean. One young person said, *“opening times on swimming can be frustrating.”*

### **Cleanliness of pools**

Several young people commented that the swimming pools are unclean, dirty, and unhygienic, particularly at Prince Regent.



***“Swimming pools are dirty; tiles on the floor are dirty and slippery.”*** (Young woman aged 14)

***“Changing rooms are not always kept as clean as they could be with rubbish inside.”*** (Young man aged 16)

The cleanliness of swimming pools was not mentioned by participants from ethnically and culturally diverse communities. In the public consultation, ‘Your Sport, Your Vision, Your City’, 47.4% of respondents said they would use BHCC leisure facilities more often if the cleanliness of the facilities were improved.

## **Gyms**

A few negative experiences were reported about the gyms in the council’s leisure facilities:

***“[Prince Regent] Gym doesn’t have up to date machines and isn’t as good as some I have been to.”*** (Young man aged 16)

***“Not a welcoming gym.”*** (Young woman aged 15)

***“Toilets are out of order a lot at the [Moulsecoomb Community Leisure Centre] gym”*** (Young man aged 16)

***“The [Prince Regent] gym is too expensive and not as good as other gyms.”*** (Young man aged 16)

## **Leisure facility staff**

Young people’s experiences of staff are mixed, from ***“friendly”*** and ***“good at managing ‘rowdy’ people”*** to ***“sometimes an unfriendly vibe from staff”*** and ***“their stares are deadly.”*** One young person said they were refused entry by Prince Regent staff who said they were closing, although the website said the centre was open for a further 2 hours. Another young person said the King Alfred staff are okay, but they wouldn’t let him in as his card didn’t work, and he had to pay instead.

Two young men disclosed they had been banned from Freedom Leisure facilities for dive bombing in a swimming pool. They said the lifeguards are bossy, shouted and picked on them. They have no understanding of how long they are banned for or what is required of them for their ban to be lifted.

When asked what would make a leisure facility more welcoming and accessible, one young person said, ***“Happy faces, happy reception staff”*** whilst another said, ***“Staff that make it exciting.”***

## **Cost**

Many young people find the costs to use the leisure facilities too expensive, ***“so expensive, charge too much”, “the cost of trying to be fit and healthy”, “I don’t like how the prices went up”, “all good exercise is expensive.”***

Some stated the costs prevent them from being able to use the leisure facilities altogether, ***“I don’t have the money”, “gym is ridiculously expensive”, “because nothing is free.”***

### **Lack of awareness of the offer**

When asked, ‘what stops you using a leisure centre?’, five young people said they don’t know where they are, what they are, or don’t know about them. One young person said, *“didn’t know Withdean is a leisure centre, just thought it was a carvery.”* Two young people responded with, *“not a strong swimmer”* and *“can’t swim.”* Another young person said, *“know about them, but don’t pay attention to what else goes on other than swimming.”* Two young people spoke about the need for better advertising to young people.

Two young women aged 13 and 14 spoke about a range of issues in relation to the swimming facilities, specifically around spectators, changing rooms and showers, and inappropriate sexual behaviour. They also suggested some solutions:

### **Spectators**

The young women proposed that the only spectators for swimming should be those watching their children, *“not random people.”* Other young people also said they don’t like being viewed in a swimming pool by spectators:

*“Don’t like people staring in the swim area to be frank.”* (Young woman aged 15)

*“Not general spectators, parents only.”* (Young man aged 14)

### **Changing rooms and showers**

The young women asserted the need for more private showers, with floor to ceiling walls and doors, and separate for boys and girls. They would like bigger and more private changing rooms and suggested *“changing rooms that you could lock, for mums and daughters to leave their stuff.”* Other young people spoke about the need for *“decent changing rooms.”*

### **Inappropriate sexual behaviour**

The young women spoke about being approached (“hit on”) by boys and older men in the showers. Another young woman aged 14 said *“men who are members of the public coming onto young women”* is a barrier to using the leisure facilities.

A further comment was made around sense of safety, *“the area is really run down in the back street – it doesn’t feel safe. No security and that makes it feel unsafe.”*

### **Other barriers**

Young people also mentioned the locations of and distance to get to a leisure facility as something that stops them using them, and the effort to get there. Two young people said the leisure facilities need to look better and the lighting being too dark (they suggested skylights). One young person said the climbing wall is too high, another said there are not many activities.

## What else would put children and young people off using a BHCC leisure facility

Children and young people would be put off using a leisure facility if it is too busy or if there are *“bad people in it”*. One young woman, aged 10, experiences social anxiety with larger groups. Another young person doesn't like swimming with older people.

Three young people don't like many mirrors and others don't like being observed:

*“Being watched is a big concern.”* (Young woman aged 16)

*“Self-conscious, not due to mirrors but maybe too many people.”* (Young woman aged 16)

*“I wouldn't like other people to be able to see me if I was working out as that makes me feel uncomfortable.”* (Young man aged 13)

## What would encourage children and young people to use BHCC leisure facilities

Children and young people were asked what would encourage them to use BHCC leisure facilities. Most responses were in relation to cost. If the facilities were free or cheaper that would encourage and enable more young people to use them. They mentioned free swimming all the time, swim cards for up to 21s, an affordable gym, and free gym use for under 18s. One young person said, *“locker keys are dodgy, and you have to pay.”* One young person would like spaces to relax and hang out without spending money. Two young people would like an affordable friendly café to buy food and snacks; and not vending machines. One young person would like free food.

Young people also said if leisure facilities were closer to home that would make them more accessible and encourage them to use them. None of the five young people in a Woodingdean focus group thought they would ever go into a leisure facility.

## What would make a great large sports facility (hub) for children and young people

Children and young people would like better swimming facilities akin to Butlin's style water parks or the facilities at The Triangle in Burgess Hill. One young person would like a *“little pool that would lead to a main pool waterfall with an aquarium next to the pool.”* They would like cleaner pools with better slides, and to be able to use diving boards.

Individual young people mentioned bigger lockers, a gym that isn't too busy, group activities, more physical activities, nutrition classes, and TV screens. At a local level, one young person would like a pool and skate facilities in Moulsecomb.

## The sports and activities young people would like available in a large sports facility (hub)

In line with previous responses, children and young people's top two requested sports/activities in a BHCC leisure facility are swimming and a gym respectively.

As well as swimming facilities, young people want to have fun in the water and would like wave machines, rapids, water flumes, inflated tube slides with longer drops, more slides than currently offered, inflatables, diving boards, a lazy pool, and a 3m deep pool that slowly ramps downwards. They mentioned aqua challenge, water volleyball and water games. They would also like large pool areas, an outdoor heated pool, and evening swimming with low lighting (for girls). Swimming lessons were also mentioned.

In the public consultation, 'Your Sport, Your Vision, Your City', the top priority for a new large sports facility was a main swimming pool (84.8% of respondents), 57.1% would like a teaching pool and 52.6% leisure water.

In relation to a gym, young people would like better gym facilities on par with other gyms in the city, a gym for children/young people, or an under 16s gym area assigned specifically for young people, or designated time slots for teenagers. Young people mentioned access to more medicine balls and cable machines, spin cycle and fitness classes with music, bungee fitness, 24/7 treadmills. Young women want cardio equipment rather than weights. Several young people would like a spa / jacuzzi.

After swimming and a gym, the next most requested sports and activities are climbing walls / bouldering / abseiling, badminton, basketball (indoor and outdoor), football (indoor and outdoor), roller skating rink (and 80s disco), tennis, trampolining, and yoga and Pilates.

Three young people mentioned a games room for Xbox & Nintendo Switch. A dance studio, obstacle course, running track and an indoor skate park / skateboarding, were each requested twice.

Various sports and activities were suggested once - archery, bowling, boxing, fencing, horse riding, ice hockey, Mixed Martial Arts, performing arts, pump track, rugby, table tennis and volleyball.

## What would make a BHCC leisure facility more accessible, inclusive, and welcoming to children and young people

A few children and young people feel that current facilities are sufficiently accessible for them. Others repeated requests for cleaner pools and better hygiene, cheaper or free activities, and facilities located closer to home. Having parking or a nearby bus stop were also mentioned.

In relation to swimming lanes, one young person said, "***better time schedules for the swimming lanes as adults get cross if we go in or splash***", another said "***don't like lane swimming, need a time when it's all open.***"

A young person commented that the King Alfred Leisure Centre looks too plain. One young person suggested, ***“more colour and not just purple and white. Bright and eye catching. Young people could design it.”*** Whilst another suggested having different sections with different looks and colours.

Some young people would like a young people’s area, or somewhere to sit and wind down in a quiet place, or a communal area to chill out with their friends, or an outdoor space for sitting and fresh air. They’d like it to have a community feel.

To make a leisure facility more inclusive, young people suggested activities for all ages, sessions for quieter times or people with autism, the need to consider a range of different people and their preferences (transgender young people were mentioned), and to make adaptations for people with disabilities.

Young people would like young person friendly gyms. They would go to gym sessions for young people, some felt that most gyms catered for adults – ***“think they don’t want kids to go.”***

One young person would like ***“access most of the time of the day, weekly”***. another would like drink stations, whilst another said, ***“having a coach or something.”***

One young person asked, ***“make the online sites easy to understand.”***

## **Community café**

Two thirds of children and young people that responded to this question would use a community café in a leisure facility, particularly if it was reasonably priced, e.g., ***“not £4 for a hot chocolate.”***

Two young people would like a Costa Coffee and a McDonalds. Young people don’t want ***“bad coffee or food”***.

## **Location - how far children and young people are willing to travel to a leisure centre and how they would get there**

There is a breadth of views around how far children and young people are willing or able to travel to a leisure centre. This ranged from 10 minutes to one hour by bus, and 5 minutes to 90 minutes walking. The most common response was 30 minutes by bus or car. One young person cycles 20 minutes to King Alfred Leisure Centre and another said he walks 90 minutes from Race Hill to King Alfred with friends. One young person said, ***“If facilities were better, I’d travel further.”***

Some young people will only access the closest swimming pool (often Prince Regent amongst this research sample) and don’t want to travel more than one bus ride, others will travel further.

Young people accessing the 67 Centre in Moulsecoomb stated that the Prince Regent Swimming Complex is more convenient to get to than the King Alfred Leisure Centre, which some described as an hour away and too far. The Withdean Sports Complex is also too far away. Some young people living in Woodingdean said the leisure centres are too far to get to by bus.

The most popular methods of transport are (1st) bus, (2nd) walking, (3rd) car, (4<sup>th</sup>) cycling.

## Cost

In asking children and young people how much they would pay to do an activity in a leisure centre, we proposed three price ranges for them to choose from: £2 - £3, £3 - £4, and £4 - £5. Around 53% of respondents selected £2 - £3, with 30% selecting £3 - £4, and 17% selecting £4 - £5.

Eight participants would like the leisure facilities to be free for young people; one young man said facilities should be free for juniors to encourage physical activity and wellbeing. One young person asked for *“some free stuff”*, and another would like the free swimming to continue. Two young men commented that gym memberships are too expensive.

*“No money. Free for under 18’s like it is at school. Also, if you have to pay for bus fare and then pay for the gym to be fit & healthy then that’s like nearly £6 a day! I’d be skint!”* (Young woman aged 15)

Not everyone consulted knew that they could get a Leisure Card. However, for many families in receipt of certain state benefits a discount of approximately 40% on selected activities would not be enough to enable their children to use the BHCC leisure centres.

One young person felt that a monthly membership of £10 - £15 was reasonable if it included multiple activities, another would be prepared to pay £25 per month for gym and swimming. One participant would like no contracts and the ability to pause their subscriptions.

## **Recommendations - people from ethnically and culturally diverse communities**

### **The term 'leisure' needs to be carefully considered to ensure clarity of meaning and definition**

Younger respondents (those aged under 50) from ethnically diverse communities use the terms leisure and physical activity interchangeably and typically refer to fitness, exercise and sporting activities when discussing leisure. Older respondents (those aged 50+) will also be thinking about activity but are much less likely to view leisure as purely physical activity or exercise. For many older respondents, leisure will include activities such as socialising, craft making, creativity, or watching TV.

### **There may be a need to distinguish (i.e., highlight the positives of) local authority leisure centres from modern commercial gyms.**

For some younger respondents, in particular, commercial gyms have a perception of providing more state-of-the-art equipment, flexibility when the facilities can be accessed, and often a set monthly fee with certainty of what that covers (i.e., access to all the equipment). In comparison, younger respondents' perceptions of leisure centres include less consistency in price and flexibility when they can be used. Also, the equipment in local authority leisure centres is seen as less current.

However, for many respondents, the advantages of leisure centres over commercial gyms are that the centres are more inclusive, likely to be staffed by a team, and more willing to be engaged, supportive and helpful to the centre's users. These local authority leisure centres can also be seen as a community resource, responsive to local needs and broadening the notion of leisure.

### **More detailed consultation would be beneficial once there is clarity on the new Kind Alfred Leisure Centre plans**

All respondents said the prospect of modernising the King Alfred Leisure Centre was hugely positive. Many respondents felt given the potential of a new (or refurbished) centre, there was a good likelihood they would use it. Naturally, they would expect the issues with the current centre to be addressed and the opportunity taken to introduce new activities that would broaden the definition of what leisure centres provide. For the younger respondents (aged under 50), having access to the type of exercise equipment and other facilities like those found in new commercial gyms is seen as a 'must have' if they are to consider using a new leisure centre.



### **If the decision is to relocate the King Alfred Leisure Centre, it might impact current users if its new location is no longer perceived to be close to where they live.**

Proximity to the leisure centre is a significant factor in its likelihood of use. Should a decision be taken to relocate the King Alfred Leisure Centre, it will be essential to note that if the location is perceived as substantially different from where it currently is, many users will not use it.

What might mitigate the potential reduction of use amongst some? For some respondents, no mitigating action or offer may encourage them to continue using King Alfred regardless of location. However, when available, further clarity on the site and facilities of the centre may prompt different (less adverse) reactions.

### **The cost of membership and access to facilities in the leisure centre will dictate potential use**

Most respondents were comfortable with and felt around £30 per month would be a reasonable amount to pay. Any fee above this must provide more than access to basic leisure centre facilities. Furthermore, issues regarding booking additional sessions or classes will need to be addressed if potential users believe a £30 membership fee is reasonable.

### **Culturally sensitive practices will be necessary for some**

The availability of female-only spaces, classes, and activities is likely to be a significant factor in the potential use of the centre by mainly women of Muslim faith but also other (non-Muslim) females. This female-only is a consideration that needs to be implemented. However, respondents were keen to state that they would not want other significant concessions to be made for them based on their cultural characteristics. Many felt overt positive action of this type could cause a backlash. And some culturally sensitive concessions would ultimately make them less comfortable using leisure services.

# Recommendations – children and young people

## Swimming facilities and experience could be improved

Swimming is popular with children and young people locally. However, several issues have been identified that need to be addressed, i.e., over-crowding, dirty and unclean swimming pools, public spectators (who aren't there as a parent or guardian), and all too often closed water slides.

Children and young people would like better swimming facilities akin to Butlin's style water parks or the facilities at The Triangle in Burgess Hill. Young people want to have fun in the water and would like improved facilities, including wave machines, rapids, water flumes, inflated tube slides with longer drops, diving boards, large pool areas, and an outdoor heated pool.

The free-swimming offer is enabling access to swimming and should continue.

## More private changing and shower facilities

When designing a new leisure facility or refurbishing current facilities, consideration should be given to the changing and shower facilities. Young people asked for bigger and more private changing rooms, with private showers that have floor to ceiling walls and doors, and separate areas for boys and girls. Furthermore, reports of young girls being inappropriately approached by boys and older men in the showers is a safeguarding concern and opportunities for this to happen again must be mitigated against.

## Youth friendly and accessible gyms

Children and young people propose either youth friendly gyms within BHCC leisure facilities or designated areas or times exclusively for them. Young people would like affordable or free gym access (like the free-swimming offer) and modern gym equipment akin to commercial gyms. Outside of BHCC leisure facilities, some young people asked for outdoor gyms in East Brighton and other areas of the city.

## Increase awareness of BHCC leisure facilities amongst children and young people

Some children and young people don't know what a leisure centre is without explaining it to them. Those who use BHCC leisure facilities mainly use them for swimming and don't really know what else they can do in them.

Involve young people in creating social media content and other promotional materials that reach, speak to, and engage children and young people. This could increase awareness and understanding of BHCC leisure facilities and incite their interest in taking up and participating in the sports and leisure activities on offer. This could help increase activity levels amongst children and young people. Messaging could also include promoting the health benefits of exercise.

### **Design leisure facilities with visual aesthetics**

BHCC aims to provide modern, attractive leisure facilities. When designing a new leisure facility or refurbishing existing ones, consult and involve young people in the visual design processes. This will help ensure these spaces are attractive and appealing to young people.

### **Improve customer service standards of leisure facility staff and management**

Respondents from ethnically and culturally diverse communities and children and young people reported mixed and at times negative experiences and perceptions of leisure facility staff and how facilities are managed. A few said the King Alfred Leisure Centre and its staff required a comprehensive overhaul to regain the customer service standards lost over the years. Perhaps an independent audit of customer experience would highlight both positive examples of customer service and how customer service could be improved. Furthermore, if requested, TDC would be happy to gauge the interest of young people to participate in a facilitated discussion with Freedom Leisure, which could be facilitated by TDC.

## **Recommendations - general**

### **Consider solutions to increasing activity levels and participation for those for whom cost and/or location are barriers to accessing the BHCC portfolio of sports facilities**

Two of the reasons why BHCC provide sport and leisure services are:

- To widen access to sport and provide participation opportunities for all, thus bringing social inclusion and engagement benefits.
- To promote active travel and develop informal outdoor areas to promote opportunities for increased activity.

However, for some people consulted through this community research study, cost and/or location of facilities are barriers to participation. Consulting those who are socially excluded through community engagement with a focus on identifying community-led solutions might identify new ideas and innovations that could help BHCC achieve its aims for residents. For example, one young participant in this research asked for an outdoor gym in East Brighton.

### **Longer term consultations to contribute to the King Alfred development programme**

If requested TDC would be very happy to develop a longer-term consultation project with an enhanced programme of community-led participatory research. This would involve training new community researchers from the target groups, to play a longer term, more sustained and engaged role in contributing to the King Alfred development.

### **Advisory Group of community members to support on-going dialogue around the King Alfred development programme**

If requested TDC could establish an 'Advisory Group' of community members to enable ongoing dialogue around the King Alfred development programme. The Advisory Group would be made up of community members engaged through consultation and research activity – ensuring people feel invested in the process and outcomes of the project. Members will be young people and people from ethnically and culturally diverse communities and would receive training and ongoing support from TDC. The Advisory Group will enable ongoing dialogue, trust, and collaboration between community members, commissioners, and decision-makers, and could have a direct link to the council's King Alfred Reference Group.

# APPENDIX I

## Research discussion guide and questionnaire

1. What do you like to do in your leisure /free time?
2. Do you regularly exercise, where do you exercise? And if not, why not?
3. Do you use the council's leisure centres.  
Circle your answers: King Alfred / Withdean / Prince Regent / Portslade Sports Centre / Moulsecoomb Leisure Centre / Stanley Deason
4. How often do you go?  
Weekly / Monthly / Every now and then
5. What do you like about any centres you use?
6. What don't you like, and why?
7. If you don't use a leisure centre, what stops you using them?
8. What would encourage you to use a leisure centre?
9. What do you think will make a really good leisure centre?
10. What sports and activities would you want to see?
11. What would make a leisure centre more accessible and welcoming for you?
12. Would you use a community café?
13. What would make it off putting to go in?
14. How much would you pay to do an activity in a leisure centre?  
Circle your answer: £2-£3 / £3-£4 / £4-£5  
Any other amount?
15. How far are you willing to travel to get to a leisure centre (in minutes)?
16. How would you travel there?

*The Trust for Developing Communities*

Contact:

Mark Cull [markcull@trustdevcom.org.uk](mailto:markcull@trustdevcom.org.uk)

Kaye Duerdoth [kayeduerdoth@trustdevcom.org.uk](mailto:kayeduerdoth@trustdevcom.org.uk)

Company limited by guarantee No: 3939332

Registered Charity No: 1106623

Registered office: Community Base, 113 Queens Road, Brighton, BN1  
3XG

Website: [www.trustdevcom.org.uk](http://www.trustdevcom.org.uk)

Telephone: 01273 234769

Email: [info@trustdevcom.org.uk](mailto:info@trustdevcom.org.uk)

