



Leisure Local

Key briefing material for
enabling physical activity
by design

Think of the environment. Please avoid printing
this A4 document unnecessarily.

sportengland.org

Sport England's design guidance notes aim to:

- Increase awareness of good design;
- Help built environment professionals, clients, user representatives and stakeholders to follow best practice;
- Encourage well-designed facilities that meet the needs of sport and physical activity and are a pleasure to use.



Document accessibility

This document has been designed for comfortable reading at A4 and on a laptop screen, but can also be printed at A3 for large print versions. The pdf is accessible and has been tested to work with text readers.

User guide

Before using this design guidance note for any specific projects, all users should refer to the on-line User guide which explains when and how to use the guidance as well as understanding the limitations of use.

[Click here for User guide and other Design and cost guidance](#)

Forewords

Sport England overview

Access to good-quality affordable facilities is key to getting more people physically active as demonstrated by participation patterns in numerous sports facilities across the country. However, changing demographics and trends in how people access sport and physical activity have given a new focus on more localised and smaller-scale provision. Places and spaces are required for people of all ages and abilities to take regular exercise close to where they live.

Swim England and Sport England have been leading the sector in exploring new ideas. The Leisure Local concept combines water activity space with health and fitness provision that is efficient and accessible. It allows flexibility to respond to local needs and priorities. For example, programmes to encourage healthier lifestyles, improving health outcomes, reducing social exclusion, increasing participation in target groups and supporting the sector in their Active Wellbeing Services and Uniting the Movement.

Options include water space to suit the community with a small fun wet area, a fitness suite, flexible activity space and changing provision. The layout is designed around a reception hub that is welcoming and with flexibility activity space. Options for additional items of accommodation to suit local demand are also included.

Kevin Mills, Director Place Development Sport England

Swim England overview

Swimming continues to be one of the most popular activities in the UK, enjoyed by millions each year. With an ageing stock of swimming facilities, it is essential that sustainable, fit-for-purpose swimming pools are accessible to communities. Swim England is pleased to have worked with Sport England on the development of the Community Leisure Hub and Leisure Local concept.

Swimming pools are often natural hubs within local neighbourhoods and contribute significantly to feelings of place and a community, as well as improving physical and mental wellbeing.

The provision of water space within local authorities should be flexible in order to meet the needs of local communities. That can result in a variety of provision, including a more localised smaller-scale provision such as leisure local, which provides an excellent way to extend Swim England's approach to water wellbeing and deliver learn to swim lessons. Equally, Community Leisure Hub provides examples of a fully encompassing aquatic offer, which can meet the demands of all swimmers – including the ability to compete competitively. We have a core focus on environmental sustainability, ensuring the future provision of aquatic leisure considers our carbon footprint and delivers energy efficient swimming facilities.

Andy Salmon, CEO Swim England

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See the animated walkthrough film to take you on a virtual journey, highlighting some basic design ideas that will help you to make the best of your facility.

Introduction

Purpose of document

This document includes key briefing considerations for a local leisure facility in a community setting that offers swimming and a range of other physical activities. It describes a concept that can be fine tuned to suit the individual features of a particular location and at the same time promote the benefits of physical activities.

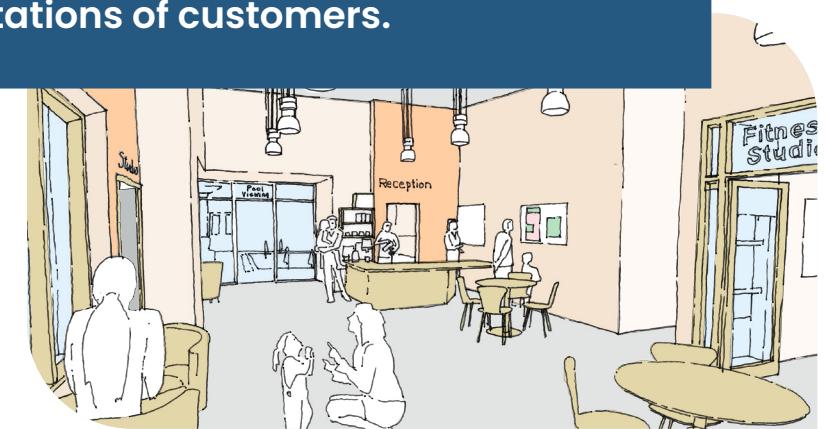
Community consultation

The way local community buildings are designed has a significant impact on how welcoming they feel and how well they operate. Facilities should be attractive and function well in order to retain existing users and attract new ones. There are some simple design principles that can be used to benefit all users. The best examples of thriving local provision are those based on a continuous, conscious effort to design, manage, operate and maintain their facilities with their customers' needs in mind.

Careful consideration should be given to the need for people to feel welcome and comfortable with adequate privacy and to feel safe and secure at all times. The building will be used by the whole community so the design should be appealing to all users.

Community consultation, whether in a small rural village or inner city neighbourhood, is essential to fully develop the brief and range of provision based on an understanding of the specific needs and expectations of customers.

Community consultation and engagement, whether in a small rural village or inner city neighbourhood, is essential to fully develop the brief and range of provision, based on an understanding of the specific needs and expectations of customers.



Customer-based provision

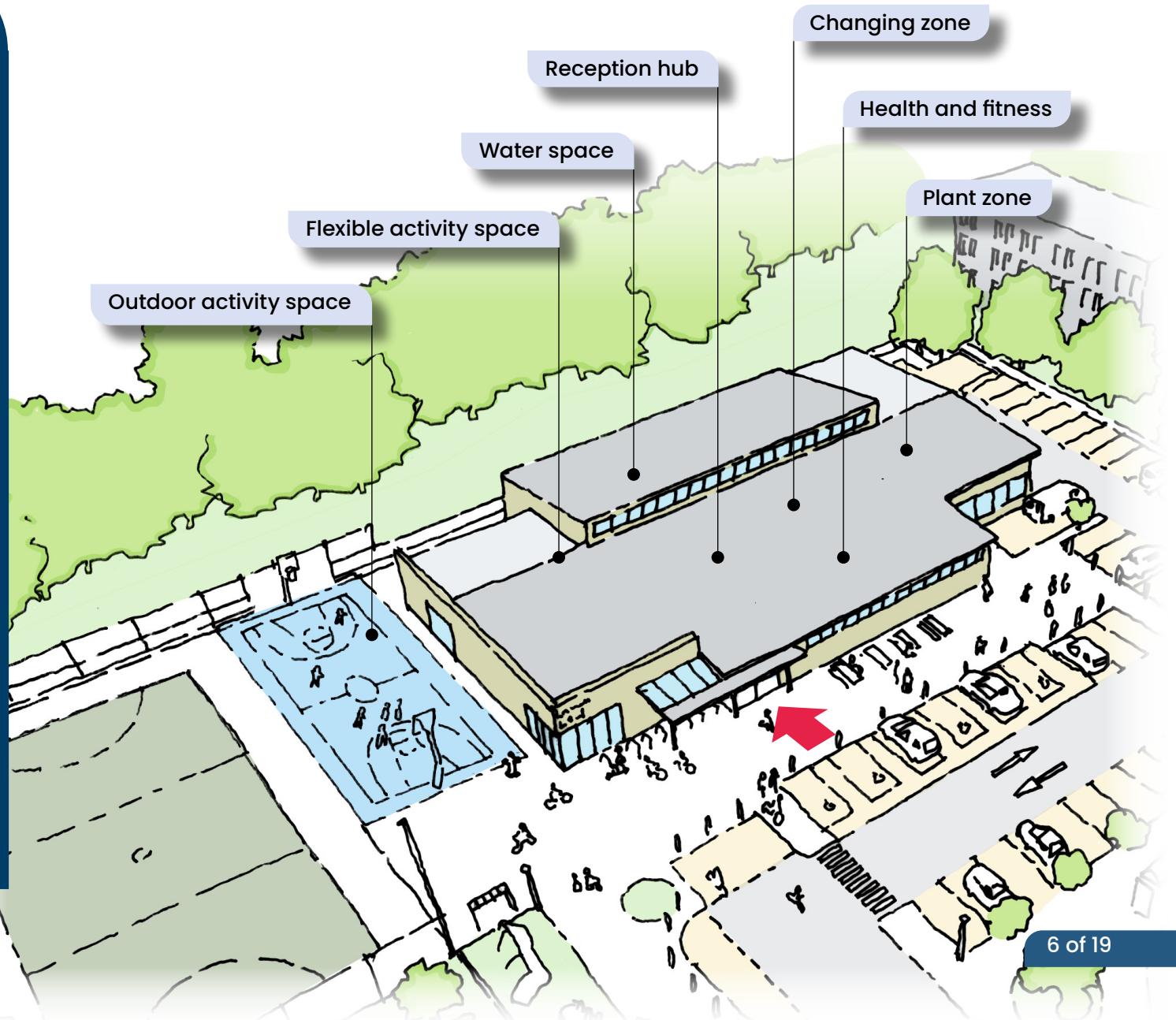
Treating end users as valued customers and putting them first is a fundamental principle to increase the number of people engaging in sport and physical activity. As well as improving the physical and mental wellbeing of individuals, this can bring wider benefits to communities and general economic development; investment is most beneficial where the impact on outcomes will be greatest and where solutions are appropriate and proportionate to local community needs.

In addition to large traditional sports facilities programmed for formal sport, the concept of more bespoke local leisure facilities can be targeted at general physical activity and recreation.

Responding to customer needs

Key considerations

- Access for all;
- Welcoming and inclusive environment;
- Active Environments;
- 'Small' offer to reach the whole community;
- Emphasis on flexible space for physical activity;
- Size and configuration;
- Flexible 'village' changing with individual privacy;
- Link to complementary services e.g. school, GP surgery, large sports centre;
- Access to outdoor space or other provision.



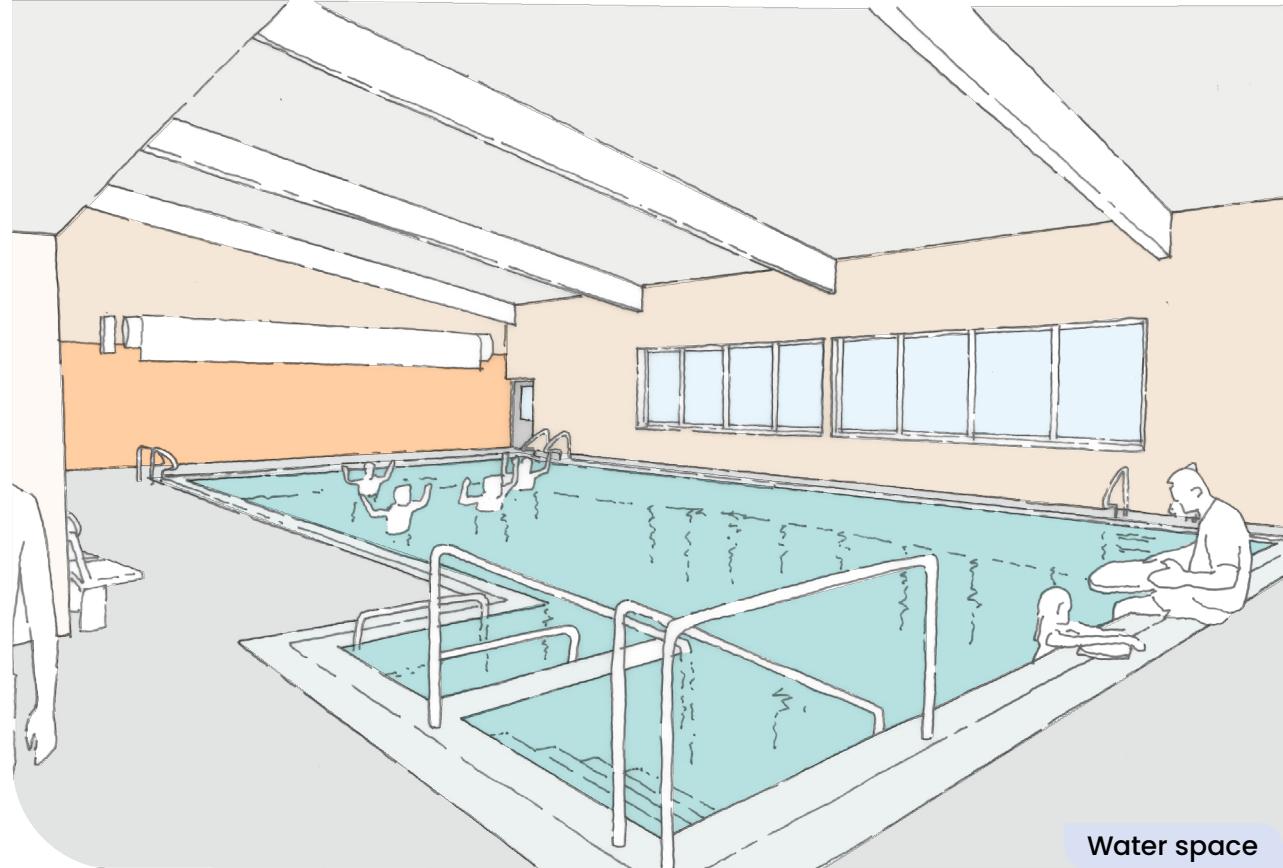
Range of accommodation

This document provides examples of carefully considered options for local community leisure provision. The intention is that the facility mix provides an acceptable level of quality and flexibility in design that responds to the needs of customers and specific local circumstances.

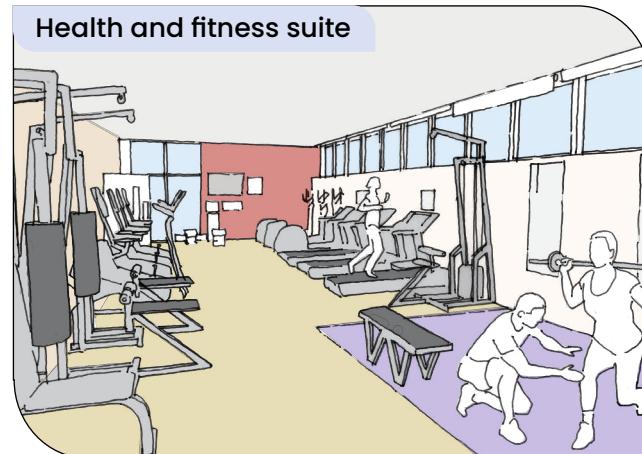
Typical facilities

The core elements in the examples illustrated include:

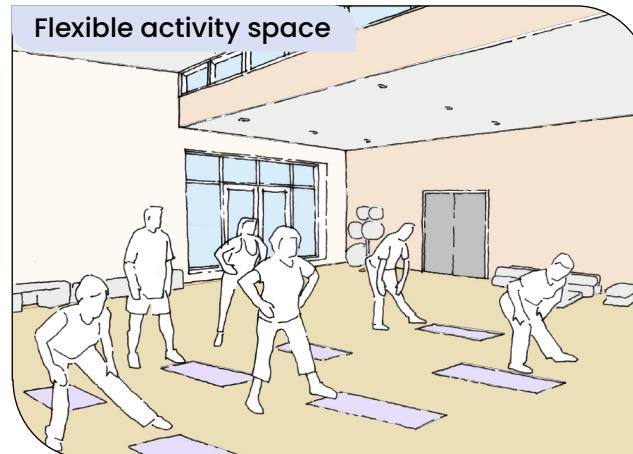
- Reception hub;
- Water space (pool sized to suit the community needs and fun water area);
- Health and fitness suite;
- Flexible activity space;
- Accessible and standard changing / WCs;
- Plant room.



Health and fitness suite



Flexible activity space



Changing facilities



Additional facilities

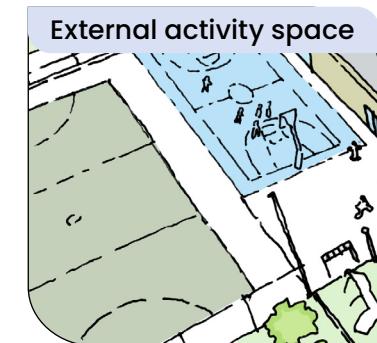
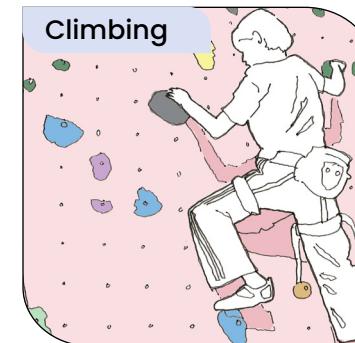
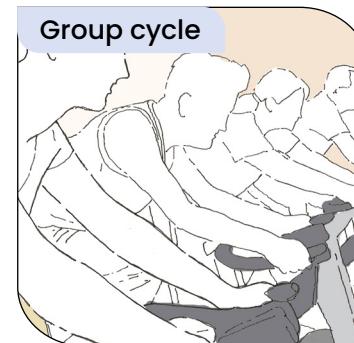
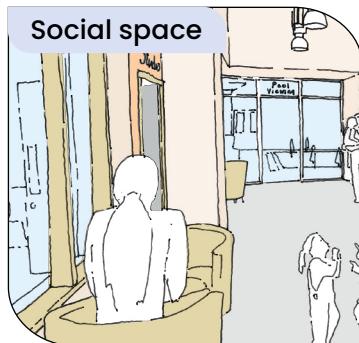
The examples could be enhanced with a range of other potential facilities that could include:

- Movable pool floor;
- Social space (inc. cafe);
- Adventure Play / childcare;
- Group cycle;
- Climbing facility;
- External activity space & community links;
- Fitness and cycle trails;
- Other forms of tennis (eg Padel Tennis);
- Other forms of basketball (eg 3v3 basketball)

Any facility mix options should comply with relevant standards. The idea has been to create places in which a range of activities can take place, as opposed to designing spaces for a specific number and standard of activities.

The Leisure Local idea has been to create places with sufficient flexibility to accommodate a wide range of potential activities. The facility mix in the examples outlined should be adapted to suit local requirements and be supplemented with further facilities to meet outcomes and demand.

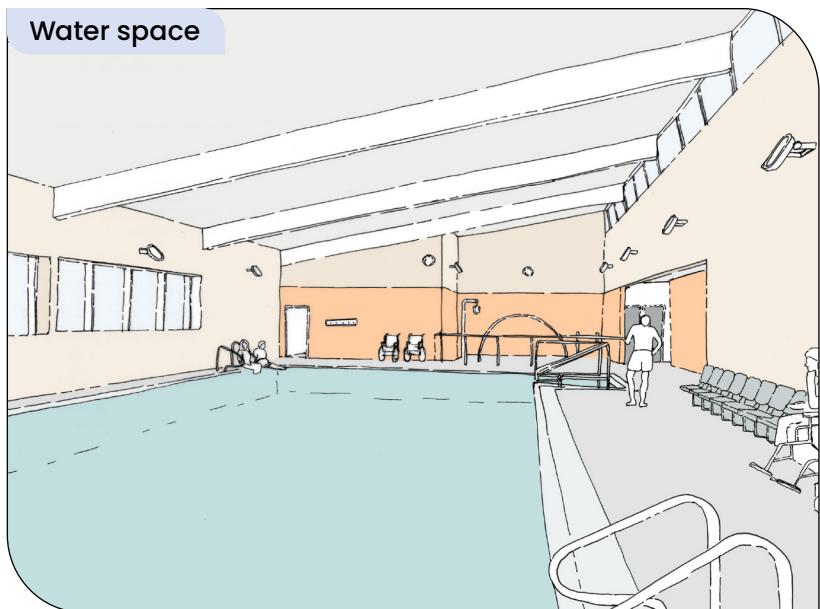
In developing these ideas, it has been important to challenge the marketplace, current practice and guidance. Through this process, many options have been considered including varying sizes of water space, health and fitness suite, flexible activity and play spaces. The two core examples outlined can be adapted to suit local requirements and be supplemented with further facilities to meet demand.



Typical facilities

Reception hub

- Flexible community hub area;
- Reception area with adjacent staff office;
- Space for small vending, informal seating, information point and notice boards;
- Accessible WC provision;
- Entrance lobby.



Water space

- Accessible and inclusive;
- Variable 900 – 1200 mm pool depth (option for movable pool floor to maximise flexibility of use depending on proposed programming);
- Pool surrounds to suit the proposed uses with additional space where needed for poolside seating, pool transfer chair storage and pre-swim shower area at changing room access point;
- Pool store to suit activities;
- Poolside seating with supervised access from reception – no provision for formal spectator viewing areas;
- Poolside pre-swim shower area;
- First aid integrated within staff areas.

Health and fitness suite

- The health and fitness suite may include a range of cardiovascular, resistance and inclusive equipment to suit all users;
- The health and fitness suite capacity will depend on the size and proportions of the space and the equipment and operations.

Flexible activity spaces

- Flexible spaces can accommodate a variety of opportunities for formal and informal sport, recreation and physical activities including small group sessions such as martial arts, table tennis, aerobics, yoga and community uses;
- Store to suit activities.

Changing facilities

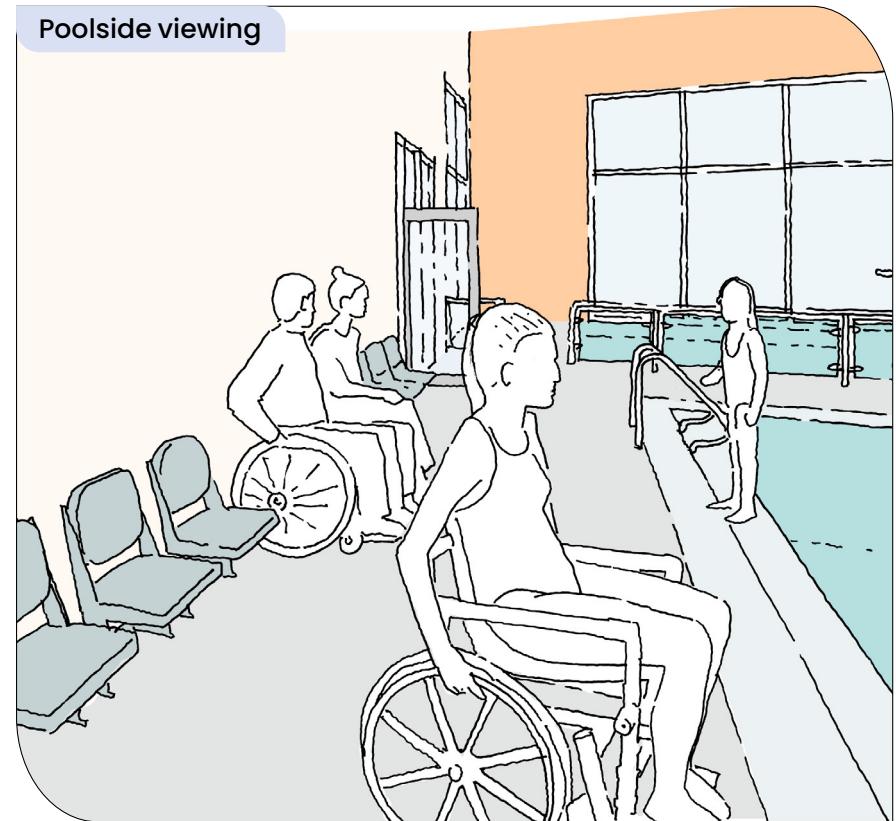
- Flexible inclusive and accessible changing accommodation incorporating a range of changing cubicles;
- Appropriate toilet, shower, vanity and locker provision;
- A cleaner's store servicing both wet and dry areas;
- Wheelchair storage / buggy storage;
- The changing accommodation serves users of the wet and dry facilities. Additional separate changing facilities should be considered for other outdoor activities.

Support and ancillary space

In addition to the example facilities consideration should be given to a nursing mother / parent room, faith rooms, as well as quiet / restorative rooms.

There will also be administrative and support rooms such as staff rooms, cleaning stores, plant space and circulation, extensive cycle parking and Electric Vehicle (EV) charging points.

Poolside viewing



Facility mix examples

There are many potential combinations of facilities depending upon the outcomes and needs of the community. A typical facility mix for two examples is given below.

Table 1

Accommodation mix

Example 1

Example 2

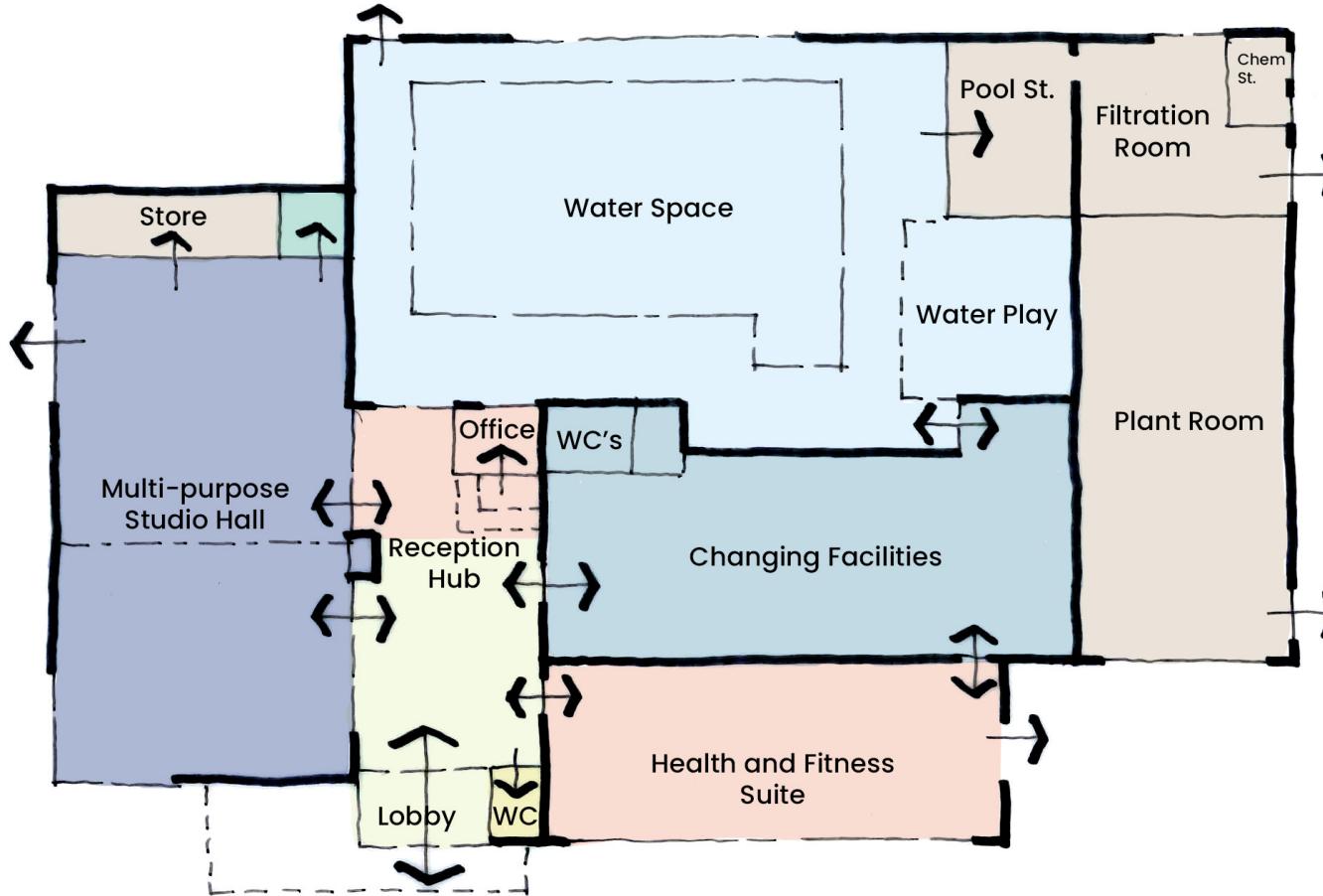
Activity Examples

Reception Hub	●	●	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible community hub area with entrance lobby; • Staff office with reception window; • Controlled access to poolside seating; • Space for small vending, informal seating, information display; • Accessible WC provision.
Water space	15 x 8m	20 x 8m	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Casual / fitness swimming; • Lessons / school use / aqua aerobics / swim parties; • Teaching (learn to swim / aquarobics); • Poolside water play area; • Poolside swimmers / spectator seats.
Multi-purpose studio hall	●	●	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity space dividable into two separate spaces; • Flexible space for physical activity e.g. (modified) forms of martial arts, table tennis, aerobics, soft play, yoga, community uses, badminton, bowls, fencing, sitting volleyball, health classes etc; • Store and community kitchen etc.
Health & fitness suite	●	●	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20 station; • Individual / personal training / instruction.
Approximate Gross Internal Floor Area (GIFA)	1,070m ²	1,170m ²	

To support these traditional activity spaces a number of administrative and plant rooms will be required including staff welfare, stores, cleaning cupboards and a full range of accessible and inclusive changing facilities to cater to individuals and groups.

Facility layouts

Example 1



Key features include:

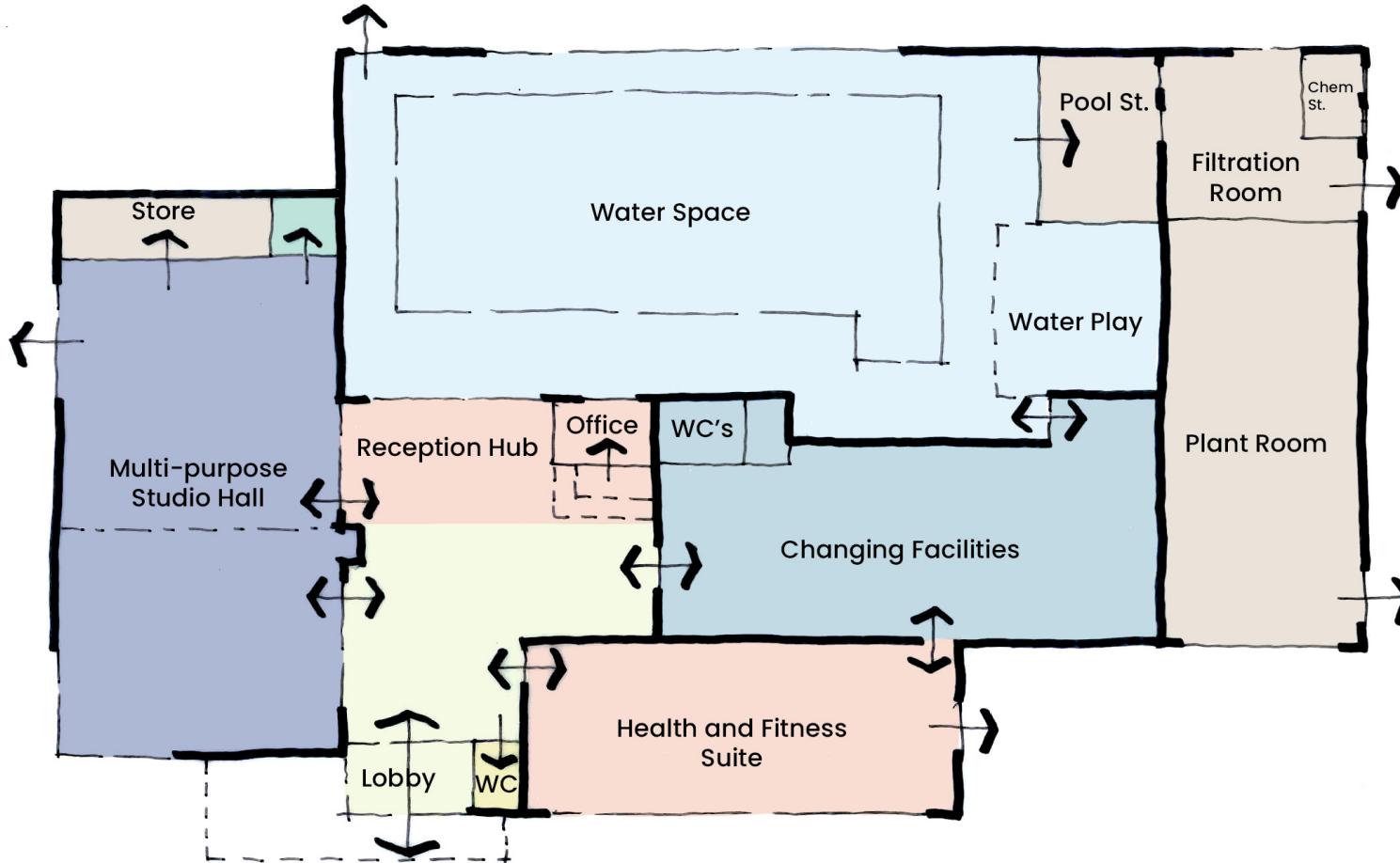
- Easy to navigate and compact form;
- Accessible and inclusive layout;
- Reception hub;
- Swimming pool 15 x 8m (120m²) with variable water depth (0.9m - 1.2m);
- Poolside water play area;
- Flexible and accessible changing zone;

- 180m² flexible activity space sub-dividable into two spaces;
- 100m² fitness suite area.

Other activities can be accommodated within the dry spaces or further activity spaces added, such as dedicated studio space, café, soft play, group cycling, etc. Access can also be provided to external activity spaces, although separate dedicated changing for grass pitches would be recommended.

Facility layouts

Example 2



Key features include:

- Larger swimming pool 20 x 8m (160m²) with variable water depth (0.9m - 1.2m);
- Larger reception hub to accommodate additional community facilities.

Other activities can be accommodated within the dry spaces or further activity spaces added, such as dedicated studio space, café, soft play, group cycling, etc. Access can also be provided to external activity spaces, although separate dedicated changing for grass pitches would be recommended.

Environmental design

Planning / Building Regulations

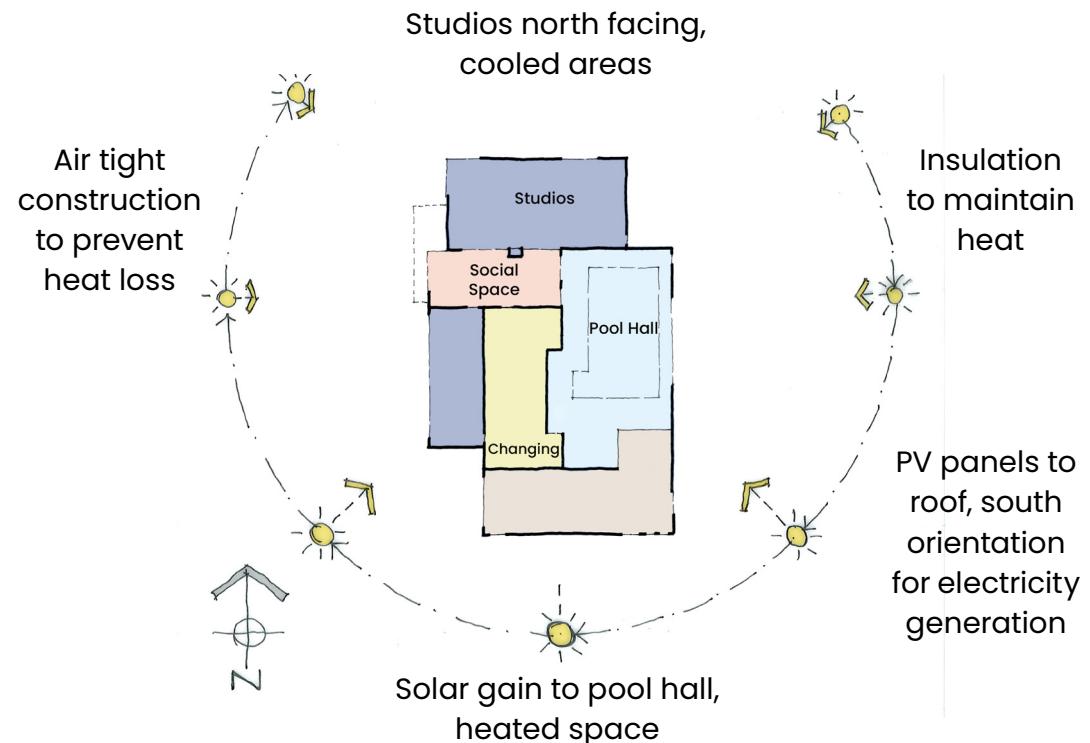
Local planning policies should be reviewed as some local authorities have sustainability targets over and above the requirements of Building Regulations.

Compliance with Building Regulations involves meeting ever increasing environmental standards. Normal assumptions currently include minimising energy use through use of efficient building services, high standards of insulation and air tightness and incorporation of renewable technologies such as heat pumps and solar panels.

Climate Emergency

Reducing the carbon impact of leisure facilities poses additional challenges and considerations beyond Building Regulation compliance, including:

- Whether to retain and adapt existing buildings which generate CO₂ in their construction or build more suitable new facilities;
- Accessibility of the site to the local community, minimising reliance on transport;
- Investing in higher standards of insulation and airtightness;
- Should the building aim for net zero carbon, by eliminating natural gas from the design;
- Considering all energy use, such as that used by pool water treatment plant - currently outside the scope of Building Regulations;
- What construction materials are used, where they come from and their environmental impact.



Methods towards more sustainable facilities

Various methods and accreditations may be used to demonstrate the sustainability of the facilities including: Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and BREEAM. Other accreditation such as WELL and Fitwel can also be used to demonstrate good sustainability design standards.

Although useful tools, accreditation does not guarantee carbon neutrality without a well-considered brief. Therefore, sustainability and low carbon objectives and outcomes need to be considered from the start and integrated into the project brief. Carbon calculators can be used as an additional tool to assess the carbon impact of the scheme. See Sport England's Environmental Sustainability Check List for further guidance.

Planning / Building Regulations

Methods to reduce the requirement for energy use should be the starting point, correct orientation and enhanced fabric performance, specifically targeting the pool hall which has the highest energy demand. Well insulated walls, triple glazing and pool covers will be effective in the pool hall. Understanding which technologies are the most applicable, is key to an efficient design. Some technologies to consider are:

- **Air Source Heat Pumps:** use electricity to generate hot water by extracting heat from the air. Excellent with underfloor heating.
- **Ground Source Heat Pumps:** similar, but more efficient than air source heat pumps, but much more expensive.
- **Air Source CO2 Heat Pumps:** a form of air source heat pumps, which are used exclusively for generating domestic hot water.

Where heat pumps are used instead of natural gas running and capital costs will increase, but the carbon emissions will reduce.

- **Photovoltaic Panels:** capture the energy from the sun and convert to electricity. Will assist in reducing running costs, especially useful with all electric buildings, using heat pumps.
- **Pool Covers:** used to cover the pool overnight. When in use a pool cover reduces water and heat loss due to evaporation and allows the pool hall to be kept at a lower temperature and the ventilation plant to be run at reduced speeds.

Other technologies which can be considered are:-

- **Water Cooled Heat Pumps:** can be used effectively in fitness suites. Heat rejected from the space is transferred to heat the pool. Can be expensive to install, but achieve good carbon reductions.
- **Micro Filtration:** an innovative way to filter the pool water, it reduces the amount of water discharged during the filter cleaning cycle and reduces pumping costs.

Technology	Application	Capital Cost	Running Cost	Carbon Emissions
Air Source Heat Pumps	Space Heating	✗	✗	✓
	Pool Water	✗	✗	✓✓✓
	Domestic Hot Water	✗	✗✗	✓✓
Ground Source Heat Pumps	Space Heating	✗✗✗	✗	✓
	Pool Water	✗✗✗	✗	✓✓✓
	Domestic Hot Water	✗✗✗	✗	✓✓✓
CO2 Heat Pumps	Space Heating	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Pool Water	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Domestic Hot Water	✗✗	✗	✓✓✓
Photo-voltaic Panels	Electricity Generation	✗	✓✓✓	✓✓✓
Energy Efficient Fans	Ventilation Plant	✗	✓	✓
Enhance Fabric Performance	Reduce Heating Demand	✗	✓	✓

Comparison of technologies to a base building, which uses natural gas.

Key to Table:

- ✗ = Small Increase
- ✗✗ = Medium Increase
- ✗✗✗ = Large Increase
- ✓ = Small Reduction
- ✓✓ = Medium Reduction
- ✓✓✓ = Large Reduction

Examples:

Air Source Heat Pumps providing space heating: small increase in capital and running cost and small carbon reduction.

Photovoltaic Panels generating electricity: small increase in capital cost, significant reduction in running costs and carbon emissions.

Operation

Programming

Leisure Local is a concept designed to create opportunities for participation at a very local level, particularly amongst those who are inactive or unable, for whatever reason, to access a larger traditional sports centre.

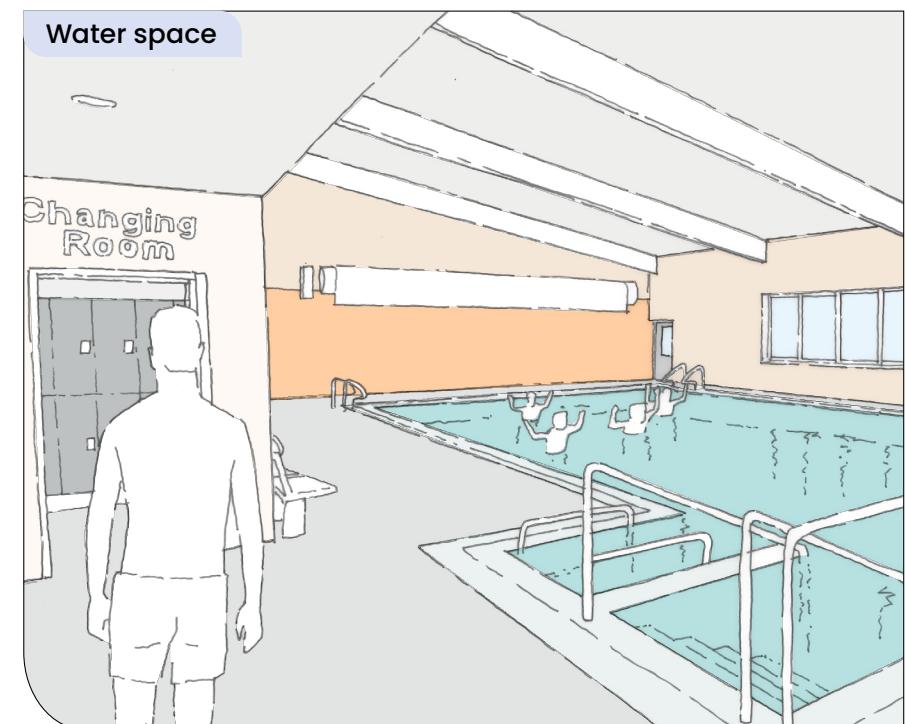
It combines a pool, fitness suite and studio spaces which could be used for a range of activities. The facilities can exist as a standalone model or can be enhanced with, for example, a café, an external multi-use games space, or a movable floor in the pool which would enable the generation of additional income.

The facility is 'programmed' to demonstrate the potential levels of throughput and income generation. However, this concept is about customer participation first and foremost, and therefore it may be programmed less intensively, or have a different pricing structure etc., depending on its aim and locality.

Examples 1 and 2 combine formal programmed use for the pool, multi-purpose studio hall and health and fitness suite, but are not programmed to capacity. Whilst the health & fitness suite offers membership, it is also available for pay and play use. It is focussed on offering opportunities to use a range of fitness equipment, appropriate to both active individuals and those who have never used a health & fitness suite before.

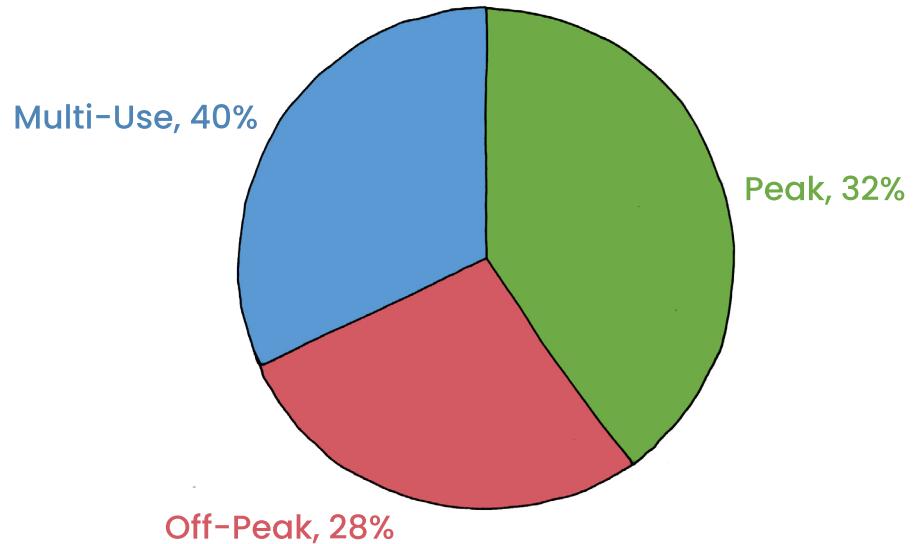
Swimming lessons and casual swimming are important income streams. However, there are many other aspects of the swimming market that can increase participation opportunities such as fun and splash sessions for young people and activities that encourage and attract people who are less active.

The concept's indicative design examples are not intended as fixed, off-the-shelf solutions but rather starting points for discussion to help establish provision to match the specific needs of a local community.



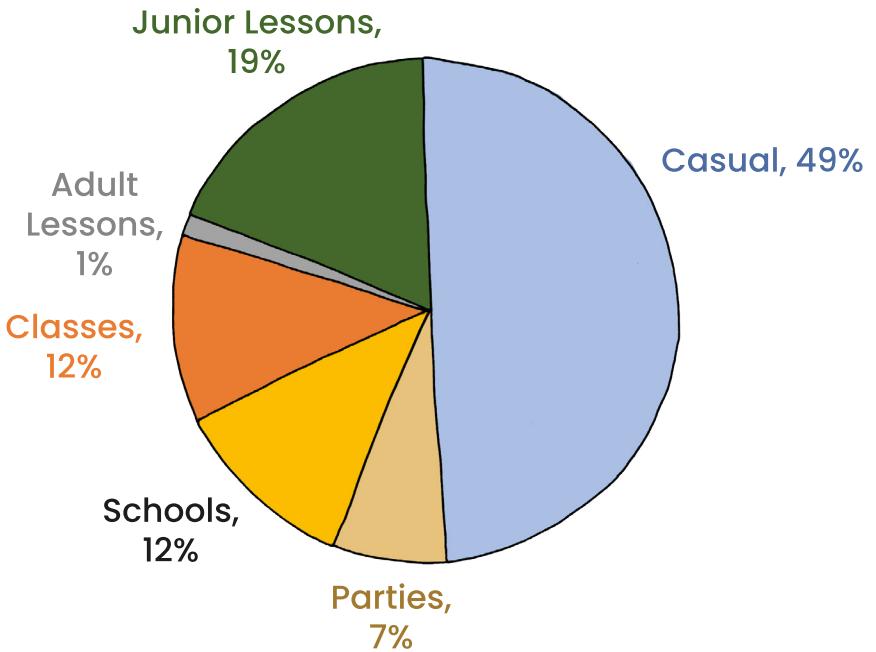
Typical usage breakdown

The pie charts show a potential typical usage breakdown of the flexible activity spaces and water space based on Example 1.



Flexible activity space

The following illustrates how the usage of the key spaces (studios & water space), in Leisure Local could be programmed to achieve the indicative income projections. Programmes and activities should respond to identified community needs as part of addressing barriers to participation in a place, whilst ensuring provision is sustainable long term.



Water space

Programming for the fitness suite is not illustrated above as it is a single-use space, with the main variant being whether users are members or non-members. The café social space could be used for a range of activities e.g. one-to-one meetings, membership advice, displays of health info, some health advice, etc; none of these are likely to be charged sessions but are more about interaction with Leisure Local users. The flexible activity space is exactly that so its use will vary according to location, community need, etc.

Potential income

Revenue business planning

Indicative revenue business plans have been developed as an aid to local authorities and other organisations in developing their own business plans for their centre.

Each centre will have its own catchment of customers with varying propensities to use the facilities. Each catchment may include other centres that can complement the activities and programmes. The indicative revenue business plans have therefore been based on 'industry standard' and 'average' pricing points and staff wage levels. However, regional variations across the country will impact on the development of business plans.

Potential revenue summary

Table 1

Example	Facility description	Revenue (excl.LCC)
1	15 x 8 m pool Fitness and flexible activity space Water play area	£34.8K
2	20 x 8 m pool Fitness and flexible activity space Water play area	£62.0K

* LCC - Life Cycle Costs.

Assumptions

Usage Assumptions

The assumptions behind the usage are:

- Community access at all times; it is more likely that use by schools will be during the daytime;
- Pay and play use, particularly to engage and involve people who have low levels of activity, will be the priority followed by community bookings e.g. parties, and clubs / schools;
- Health-related activities targeting a range of conditions will be a programme priority e.g. disability, social prescribing, GP referral, dementia friendly, mental ill-health;
- Gender specific sessions as relevant to local community;
- Operational management will be by a leisure operator / trust;
- Membership will predominantly cover fitness – classes, use of the fitness suite, and pool access at some times;
- Minimum opening times envisaged as 6am – 10pm Mon-Fri; 8am – 4pm weekends, depends on local needs;
- The multi-purpose space is designed to accommodate a range of active uses as well as activities to engage and involve people in physical activity;
- Outdoor formal spaces are predominantly programmed during spring and summer;
- There will be at least some element of holiday programming in school holidays, but less in Example 1 given the scale of the pool;

- No specific outdoor facilities are included but, wherever possible, the opportunity to develop outdoor facilities should be considered e.g. MUGAs, other forms of tennis, outdoor gyms, play areas, low level climbing / bouldering features, cycling facilities (Learn to Ride, Mountain Bike trails, pump tracks, BMX etc). The aim should be to provide for a minimum of a 20 minute neighbourhood;
- It is assumed walking and cycling routes connect to the Leisure Local, creating an active environment.

Capital costs

Cost summary

An overview of the capital costs for the two core examples is given in the following table based on benchmark data and respective gross internal floor areas.

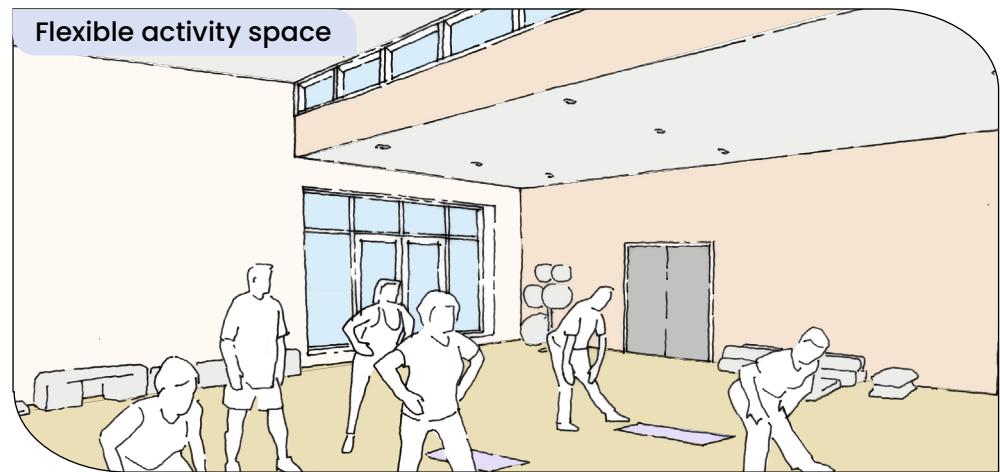
Table 2

Example	Facility description	Indicative cost*
1	15 x 8 m pool with pool cover Fitness and flexible activity space Water play area	£5.7m
2	20 x 8 m pool with pool cover Fitness and flexible activity space Water play area	£6.0m

* Costs are indicative and do not reflect abnormal impacts on market conditions.

General Assumptions

- Building costs at 3Q2024;
- A flat level site with no abnormal ground conditions;
- The works are competitively tendered to regional contractors via an industry standard procurement route;
- External works are included as a notional allowance (Example 1 £150K, Example 2 £175K);
- Incoming services are assessed as a notional value, assuming availability from existing infrastructure with sufficient capacity;
- Preliminaries are based on an unrestricted site with a construction period in the order of 52 weeks.



Exclusions

- VAT;
- Professional fees;
- Statutory fees;
- Land acquisition costs;
- FF&E including water play area;
- Movable pool floor.

Document accessibility

This document has been designed for comfortable reading at A4 and on a laptop screen, but can also be printed at A3 for large print versions. The pdf is accessible and has been tested to work with text readers.

Contributors

Sport England, Swim England, Roberts Limbrick, Strategic Leisure, Max Associates and Abacus Cost Management Ltd.

Acknowledgements

Sport England wishes to thank all individuals and organisations referenced or credited within this document.

User guide

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Issue tracker

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