

***FaulknerBrowns Architects* and THE SPORTS LEISURE LEGACY PROJECT**

A 52-year voyage of discovery

FaulknerBrowns (FBs) was founded in 1963. For the last 52 years they have been pioneers and leaders in the design of sports and leisure projects. Following the success of their first sports hall in 1963, the Lightfoot Dome on Tyneside, FaulknerBrowns have been commissioned, here and abroad, for over 250 sports and leisure projects, by 110 public authorities, 30 universities, 50 private development companies and several World Games organisations. Rather like a *voyage of discovery*, FaulknerBrowns has ploughed through the politics and economics of 7 governments, 4 recessions and the constant swings in society's attitude to introduce new ideas and to promote the benefits of sport and leisure to the general public.

Key to their continuous involvement and inventiveness in the genre over the last 6 decades were the links, forged in the early years, with far-seeing managers and consultants, such as

* *George Torkildsen (the doyen of sports and leisure consultants)*, first manager of Harlow Sports Centre, consultant on 1969 Bletchley Leisure Centre, and who, with his partner, Ron Pickering, advised on many subsequent FB projects

* *Jack Black* . first manager of the Commonwealth Pool in Edinburgh, and part of the inspiration for FBs first UK leisure pool, opened in Bletchley in March 1974.

* *Mike Fulford*, first manager of Concordia, multi-purpose leisure complex in Cramlington, opened in 1977, whose philosophy of approach to community involvement in sport led to his appointment as adviser to the Shetland Recreational Trust (SRT) in the early 1980s.

* *John Nicolson and James Johnston, respectively*, director and general manager of the Shetland Recreational Trust, whose courage and foresight changed the lifestyle in Shetland through an ambitious programme for 10 community sports centres built between 1985 and 2002.

* *Stan Calvert*, the indefatigable first director of sport at Newcastle University, who showed that any obstacle could be overcome if the management will was there.

* *Gerry Montgomery*, manager, director of venues and entrepreneur, who understood in the 1960s that managers and designers had to raise their sights and expectations.

* *David Warden*, first manager of Ponds Forge, Sheffield, and Manchester Aquatics Centre, who set and maintained the highest standards of operational management and promotion of sport for all.

1960s- the Pioneering Years

The critical importance of understanding user needs and appreciating management input was realised on FaulknerBrowns very first sports project, the Lightfoot Dome. Here they witnessed that, whilst an architect could design the most wonderful structure, the facility's ultimate success or failure rested with those who understood the needs of the user and the value of good management.

The Lightfoot Sports Dome, Tyneside, 1963.

This pioneering sports project – one of the 4 first sports halls in the UK – was a product of the 1960 Albemarle Report, commissioned by the Government in the post-war era, which recommended new approaches to bolster the health and fitness of the youth of the day. A Government Fund was provided for new facilities for social, educational, sports and leisure and, between 1960 and 1968, £28 million was spent on 3,000 projects, including £55,000 for a gymnasium next to a secondary school in Walker-on-Tyne, three miles from the centre of Newcastle upon Tyne. The ambition expressed by Lord Albemarle was matched by Harry Faulkner Brown's determination to produce a full-size (120ft x 120ft) indoor hall – one of the first four of this scale in the UK - which would have the flexibility to accommodate all indoor sports. Inspired by the form of Pier Luigi Nervi's 1957 Palazzetto for Sport in Rome, he produced a 200ft (60m) clear span dome, still remaining as the centre-piece of the sports centre which has been extended and expanded during the last 50 years.

Dick Farrelly was the first manager to guide the local youth – and then people of all ages and abilities- to achieve new levels of achievement. But Tyneside, let alone Europe, had never had such a large capacity indoor space at its disposal and the opportunity was seized to use it for occasional large spectator events, public rallies (as when Harold Wilson came North in 1965) and even religious ceremonies – with forward echoes of “Paddy's Wigwam” in Liverpool.

The Lightfoot Dome produced a mine of information and became FaulknerBrowns' laboratory for sports research, with us using it as sportspersons and studying its performance over several years in close consultation with the manager and Newcastle City Council officers. It was clear that sports buildings had the potential to be powerful popular venues for everyone, but that this depended very much on welcoming and pro-active management to attract people to take advantage of the opportunities offered. The thrill of being part of a sporting and social revolution was tempered by our understanding that we must learn more of real user needs and aspirations and of operational considerations. This conviction was cemented into FaulknerBrowns' DNA.

Sports Hall for the University of Kent in Canterbury, 1967.

In many ways the antithesis of the *laissez-faire* Lightfoot design approach, the brief for this sports project had a strong focus on achieving ideal training conditions for student athletes.

Consequently, we visited sports halls and factories in Germany and France to research ideal lighting, ideal flooring materials and how to create a comfortable environment for players.

- Whilst attractive, we did not find the glazed walls in some sports halls conducive to good playing conditions because of the glare they produced (even when facing North) and proposed for the Kent project, opaque walls with roof lighting above a deep baffled ceiling to catch the direct rays of the sun – and with the added bonus of sound absorption.
- Nor did we find the hardness of many flooring materials acceptable for long training sessions and, with an entrepreneurial flooring company, developed a new type of sprung floor using a French vinyl surface, Mipolam, adhered to interlocking plywood panels on top of foamed-resin pads. This flexible floor was easier on muscles, became known as the *Canterbury Floor*, and was used extensively by FaulknerBrowns and other architects.
- A warmed-air heating and ventilation system was developed whereby perimeter ducts – concealed in the baffled ceiling – directed the warmed air onto the inside of the outer walls where it rolled down, as in a curtain, to floor level and general dissipation, without disturbing the flights of badminton shuttlecocks.

This university project is included, not just to illustrate the many strands of design detail to be taken into account, but also because it was FaulknerBrowns second sports project, following which we were known as specialist sports architects and, with an influx of commissions, were able to establish a dedicated sports and leisure unit within the office. We have found that a significant advantage of being a specialist in anything is that the opportunity for improvement presents itself time and time again.

1970S- the Rise of Leisure

Fascinated not just with sports activities but also with what people did in their leisure time, Faulknerbrowns coined the term "the Leisure Umbrella", under which was clustered a vast range of recreational active and passive activities, such as : playing, dancing, theatre, cinema, eating and drinking. Sites for such pursuits were seen to be more suitable nearer centres of population rather than attached to out-of-town sports fields.

Bletchley Leisure Centre. Phase 1: 1973; Phase 2: 1974; Phase 3: 1976.

FaulknerBrowns first so-called *leisure centre*, Bletchley Leisure Centre, was a true civic building – of the people and for the people - located in Central Gardens, adjacent town centre shopping, library, and directly served with a multi-storey car park. This was a landmark project which broadened the English Sports Council's perception of recreation and raised the standards of architectural and operational design for the building type : it became the touchstone by which future projects were measured. The driving force was John Smithie, the Town Manager of Bletchley UDC, who, on our advice, appointed George Torkildsen to help develop the brief and to work closely with FaulknerBrowns to produce a management efficient and effective complex. One of George's recommendations was that the first manager should be appointed a year ahead of completion to enable him/her to influence final detail, to be fully acquainted with what the building had to offer, and to launch its appeal to the public months ahead of the official opening by Sir Roger Bannister in February 1973. Griff Jones was duly appointed in early 1972 and proved to be a great manager.

Phase 1 comprised sports halls, an indoor bowling green, a youth club funded by Buckinghamshire County and a generous, carpeted social area for refreshments and exhibitions. The main sports hall was designed to accommodate cultural and social events, the first function being the Mayor's Ball - with the legendary Joe Loss and his Band. The game of Squash was very popular at that time, and, in association with England Squash & Racketball, a suite of 8 courts was designed in which a range of flooring systems (3 grades of traditional maple strip on semi-sprung timber battens , interlocking plywood panels on foamed resin pads, and the Canterbury System with welded vinyl sheet) was laid to aid research into the resiliences, anti-slip surface characteristics and floor colour. This section was inaugurated with an exhibition match featuring Jonah Barrington, the then British champion.

Phase 2 was the UK's first public leisure pool, opened in March 1974, and housed within a glazed pyramid, with a 300m², freeform, leisure lagoon decked out with colourful carpets, an exciting water slide, kiddies' sand pit, and exotic real, 10m tall, palm trees imported from Portugal – which produced a harvest of dates in 1975! By this stage the throughput of people to the centre was well over 500,000, with the majority favouring the new concept of the leisure pool. *This statistic, in itself, persuaded the English Sports Council to commission a study on the early leisure pools phenomenon - and then to add leisure to its existing remit for sport.*

Phase 3 completed John Smithie's concept for a leisure centre by adding a small theatre and indoor bowling alley.

Awards and Honours.

- Structural Steel Design Awards, 1974, Bletchley Leisure Pool Pyramidal Roof
- MOMA (the Museum Of Modern Art in New York), 1978, Faulkner Browns were invited to provide architectural photographs of Bletchley Leisure Centre for MOMA's exhibition of new and outstanding sports and leisure centres

Concordia Leisure Centre, opened by The Queen in her Jubilee Year, 1977.

Very much influenced by the success at Bletchley, this Cramlington New Town centre retained some features but progressed the freeform pool design by including a 4-lane 25m long stretch for swim-training, recreational swimming for health, and local school competitions. Added also were a suite of multi-purpose social and conference rooms and a dedicated play group unit and parents' gallery directly overlooking the leisure pool. As at Bletchley, the manager, Mike Fulford was appointed several months before completion of the building which he then operated for many years in an enterprising and exemplary manner. He was appointed in 1982 as management adviser to the Shetland Recreational Trust.

1980s- Unleashing the Power of Sport and Leisure

The steady growth of public and university sports and leisure centres in the 1960s and 1970s provided excellent feedback and fired the enthusiasm of clients, architects and managers alike. It had demonstrated their potential power to change lifestyles, boost tourism and to become symbols of economic growth and endeavour. The schemes described below are examples of this aspiration to progress to greater heights.

The Shetland Phenomenon, 1982 – the present day

Shetland is the most northerly group of islands in the UK. Its principal town, Lerwick, is closer to Bergen in Norway than to Edinburgh, and it lies further north than Leningrad. Despite its latitude on the 60th parallel, the influence of the Gulf Stream makes the islands temperate but its worst aspect is the incessant wind, often bringing with it rain: it is the windiest place in Britain. Islanders have a cultural distinctiveness with their own accent and some affinity with Scandinavia; the way of life is that of close-knit island communities in which fiercely defended individualism sits surprisingly comfortably alongside the ethic of the common good.

The Oxford Dictionary describes "*phenomenal*" as . . . "*extraordinary, remarkable, prodigious*", and all of these words apply to the bold conception by Shetland Islands Council, in 1980, for eight community sports centres, for a population of just 23,000, and for the realisation of their construction between 1985 and 2002. That they should then achieve a throughput of over 700,000 admissions for every year since 2003 is testimony to their creative management, initially with Andy Mayers, the first manager in 1985, and subsequently with James Johnston, general manager of the Shetland Recreational Trust. Sterling support on technical and engineering maintenance, from 1985 until his retirement in 2014, has been given by the redoubtable Bertie Cooper. Usage figures produce the mind-boggling statistic of more than 30 visits a year for every inhabitant of Shetland – including babies and old folk.

None of this could have been achieved without substantial support from the Shetland Charitable Trust. The aim was to improve the quality of life for all inhabitants . . . *young, old, families, disabled, disadvantaged, employed and unemployed* . . . of this wind-and-rain-swept country – to, literally, introduce a lifestyle change through the regular opportunity for recreation and leisure time occupations. The new sports centres would be seen as extensions of the traditional community halls where people met and socialised – and where they could now play, learn a vast array of new sports, and indulge in healthy recreations of swimming, bowling, tennis and indoor soccer and athletics. Moreover, management would also target the new facilities to bring to Shetland orchestras, pop groups, icons in sporting and social fields, car shows and a range of exhibitions and cultural displays. In this way, the buildings would also be a new part of their armoury in the attraction of tourists, which, in the early 1980s was seen to be an essential source of additional income.

By 1980, Shetland's Director of Recreation, John Nicolson, had visited state-of-the-art leisure centres in the UK and learned how flexible planning and design could deliver truly multi-purpose facilities. High up on his list, also, in finding a like-minded architect was the track record of using high quality materials detailed to withstand the often cruel climate of Shetland and to minimise ongoing maintenance. Following a rigorous selection procedure, FaulknerBrowns – because of their completed projects such as Bletchley Leisure Centre and Concordia in Cramlington - were privileged to be appointed.

Close discussion and co-operation with the Directorate of Recreation and, then, Shetland Recreational Trust, was the order of the day on all 8 projects, with the cumulative operational and management feedback informing all designs. Essentially, it was a thoroughly scientific process tinged with local prejudice and sparkled with new ideas. Flexibility was the name of the game whereby every space – from changing rooms to main halls –was designed to allow for every perceived sporting, social and cultural use. The thoughtful juxtaposition of spaces aided flexibility, too, as did the routing of corridors and escape routes.

Detailed consideration was given to accessibility for those with disabilities through discussions with the Council on Disability for Shetland (CDS). As in achieving flexibility in design, the process of welcoming those with disabilities requires an iron will by management in arranging transport, ensuring volunteer cover, receiving and acting on feedback from disabled people and carers.

Clickimin Leisure Centre, Lerwick. Phase 1: 1985; Phase2:1995. This first and largest complex is sited overlooking the ancient Clickhimin (original spelling) Broch. Partially sunk into the ground, the centre is planned over one and a half/ two storeys enabling its all-covering pitched roofs to nestle sympathetically into the slope leading down to the Clickhimin Loch. As with many FaulknerBrowns buildings, elevated views of the main activity spaces are provided from the entrance hall to attract those who are either shy or inexperienced in indoor pursuits to take part in the many activities available on display.

Phase 1,1985- Dry Sports Centre. The two-court hall has a maple strip floor, laid on semi-sprung plywood panels, with attractive, panelled walls which making it suitable for all internal sports, dances, and robust enough for large spectator pop concerts and motor shows. Linked to the hall is a studio space for fitness training, but, because it equipped with en-suite changing and kitchen provision, is also a popular venue for playgroups, weddings and a host of other functions. Shortly after opening in 1985, management decided to introduce mid-week fitness classes (in the studio) to the women of Lerwick, which has a mixed population of around 5,500. An amazing number (300)

of women applied which meant reprogramming activities in the main hall to cater for this enthusiastic group.

In its first full year, Clickimin Phase 1 attracted 125,000 users and visitors from Lerwick and from all parts of the Islands.

Phase 2, 1995– Pool and Indoor Bowls Hall. Designed and constructed 10 years after Phase 1, Phase 2 offers a host of new potential activities to Shetlanders.

Pool. Replacing the old pool in Lerwick, the new pool complex still provides a high board and deep water for the life-saving practice of fishermen (in their waterproofs and boots) and for NAFC Marine Centre Sea Survival Courses, but much more, too. Supported with a changing village and group rooms, there are three pool areas:

- a 6 lane 25m pool with a movable boom and movable floor to provide 2 distinct rectangular water areas, with great flexibility for swimming and bathing of all kinds and for people of all abilities;
- a leisure lagoon with fountains, lazy river and water rides;
- a hydrotherapy pool in a separate unit used by Disability Shetland and out-patient activities linked to the local hospital.

Bowls Hall. Carpet bowls on roll-out mats in the local community halls has been a traditional Shetland recreation for centuries, as has limited use of outdoor greens. Imagine then the impact of a state-of-the-art indoor bowls hall provided in 1995. Enterprising management has maintained a very high throughput through this, now, three-pronged complex with the pool and bowls hall boosting overall attendances at the Clickimin Centre to over 400,000 attendances per year.

Unst Leisure Centre, Yell Leisure Centre, North Mainland Pool, 1988; Whalsay Leisure Centre, 1990; Scalloway Pool, South Mainland Pool, 1993; West Mainland Leisure Centre, 2002. These seven centres for the more isolated islands and regions complete Shetland's master plan. Contained within just 900sqm (30m x 30m), the leisure centres are a microcosm of the Clickimin contents with each centre providing a main hall, a training and leisure pool, squash courts, hobbies, social and meeting rooms, and a spectator/refreshment area overlooking the pool.

All of the leisure centres serve relatively small catchment areas, with Unst and Yell being separate islands with communities of around only 1,000 people. Yet attendances are being maintained in all centres from 25,000 at Unst to 60,000 for the West Mainland Centre.

The North Mainland, Scalloway and South Mainland Pools are oases of calmness but busy, too, as they serve local schools in addition to the general public.

Awards. The Shetland Phenomenon illustrates the power of sport to do good when client aspirations are great, facilities are flexible and designed to high architectural standards, and where operational management is constantly alert to promoting new initiatives to increase and maintain attendances. These qualities have been recognised in the following awards – **particularly in the biennial, international IOC/IAKS awards scheme which require excellence to be proved in both design and management.**

- IOC/IAKS, 1987, Silver Award for Clickimin Leisure Centre Phase 1.)
- IOC/IAKS, 1991, Special Distinction for Unst and Yell Leisure Centres.
- IOC/IAKS, 1999, Bronze Award for Clickimin Leisure Centre Phase 2.
- European Community of Sport Award for 2013

Perth Leisure Pool, 1988.

Perth Leisure Pool is the main indoor public leisure and recreation centre in the City of Perth. With peak attendances of over 700,000 visitors per year, it remains one of the major tourist attractions in Scotland. The building was designed by FaulknerBrowns in 1984 after they had won the design competition run by the Royal Incorporation of Architects Scotland in conjunction with Perth Council.

Opened by HRH The Princess Royal in 1988, the complex is awash with sound and colour and, through its design and management set new standards of attraction, comfort and thrill. Comprising 5 pools/lagoons with flume rides, bubble beds and other features unique to Scotland at that time, the combination of leisure and formal pools has proved to be outstandingly successful. This project reflects FaulknerBrowns' continuous search to introduce new and high quality experiences to the general public. challenge.

Awards.

- RIBA, 1989, Regional Award
- IOC/IAKS, 1991, Silver Award

Doncaster Dome, 1989. In 1985 when the economic climate of Doncaster was at a low ebb, the Dome was conceived by the Council as a means to inject capital and confidence. It was to act as a catalyst for economic and qualitative regeneration and to herald a new age. Doncaster's project officer was Mike Clynch, whose enthusiasm maintained momentum during the early difficult days and who saw the project through. Following an intensive selection procedure over several weeks of visits and interviews, FaulknerBrowns were appointed architects in 1985 with work on site starting in late 1986s. George Torkildsen was appointed as the council's management adviser and, with the architects, drew up a programme of visits to the new European leisure attractions in Germany, particularly new forms of ice rinks and indoor/outdoor health spa pools.

The Dome is designed as an iconic structure- a magnet - with a central mall offering views into all facilities. It contains:

- The Ice Caps, the first UK leisure ice rink, , with two freeform ice pads, at different levels, linked with ice ramps and lit with disco lighting; it became a counter-attraction to public bars for boy-meets-girl and a regional attraction.
- The Lagoons, comprising seven interlinked pools, one of which is a warm-water outdoor lazy river ride.
- New-to-Britain health suite, with beehive-shaped specialist steam rooms.
- A 3-court (but multipurpose) hall with a large spectator capacity, which has allowed regional sporting and social events alongside its regular intensive use for the citizens of Doncaster.
- The Fitness Village is the largest facility of its kind in the North of England.
- But the crowning architectural glory is the central dome, resplendent with contrasting banded black and white polished masonry walls.

Opened by Princess Diana in 1989, the Doncaster Dome has certainly fulfilled the Council's ambition.

Awards.

- RIBA, 1991
- IOC/IAKS, 1993, Special Commendation

1990s- the Rise of Sport

If the 1960s were targeted at sport, the 1970s at leisure, the 1980s at lifestyle change, tourism and economic recovery, then, the 1990s returned to Sport in a big way, encouraging the design of a new breed of centres suitable for top-level competition and sporting achievement. But these new gladiatorial arena had also to serve as public and community facilities, too, because, after the “you’ve never had it so good years”, costs in use (seeking to balance expenditure with income) now became an important consideration. Increasingly, there was the quest to seek sustainable, year-on-year attendances as well as designing for sensible energy usage and CO2 reductions.

This was also the decade when the private sector took an interest in mixed developments- including indoor ski slopes integrated with commercial shopping.

Ponds Forge International Sports and Community Centre, Sheffield, 1991.

In 1987, Sheffield secured the bid to host the 1991 World Student Games and FaulknerBrowns won the architectural competition, arranged by the Council and Sport England, for the Aquatics (50m swimming, 10m to springboard diving, synchronised swimming and water polo finals) and Volleyball events. At that time, there were just six 50m pools in the UK with none of them satisfying world-class standards- nor were there any sports halls with the required height for world-class volleyball. Despite the breakneck construction programme to meet the Games deadline, FaulknerBrowns realised that this was an unequalled opportunity to produce a state-of-the-art international competition centre with a high proportion of community use, and that research was needed into relevant examples abroad.

To assist in the search through Europe, North America and Australasia, in 1988, George Torkildsen, sports and leisure management consultant, and Hamilton Bland, aquatics consultant, were brought into the client’s design team which already contained Gerry Montgomery, the author of the original brief and a key personality during the subsequent successful World Student Games of 1991. As at Bletchley and Cramlington, the council made the early appointment of a well-experienced manager, David Warden, to enable him to be *au fait* with the sophistications of this extraordinary complex and contribute to its fitting out.

More than in any other international venue visited, the design of Ponds Forge, through its flexibility, combined the strict formal requirements for international-level competition with the different needs of the recreational and leisure user (which would, of course, inhabit the centre for 90% of the time). Examples of flexibility include:

- the 25m warm and swim-down pool for competition was equipped with a wave machine and a host of water features including a 100m long lazy river ride as a family attraction.
- the large entrance foyer and cafeteria area needed to support competitions were designed as multi-purpose spaces for exhibitions and social functions.
- indeed, most spaces in the complex were designed for 3 or 4 different uses as either activity or support spaces. The competition pools have movable floors and movable bulkheads to create shallower and protected waters for swimming lessons as well as providing many options for international-level 25m swimming courses.

The lessons learned in our tour of 1988 as to what makes a swimming pool “fast” have paid off and world records have been broken at Ponds Forge. But recently, a back-handed compliment was paid

by the head coach of British Swimming who said he wished his elite squad could train elsewhere as it was too easy to swim fast at Ponds Forge!

The location is on a gateway site just a few metres from the main railway station. Externally, the architecture of Ponds Forge is simple and expressive in the International style, sculpted from a small pallet of excellent long-lasting materials- honey-coloured masonry, glass and aluminium panels. Internally, a crafted web of steel tubular arches springing from eight giant gunmetal castings spans the 90m x 60m pool hall, and elsewhere, high quality concrete columns punctuate the central entrance zone between the pool hall and the 12.5m high sports hall.

Attendance figures (excluding spectators at all 200+ annual events) are currently around 700,000, which is testament to good management and promotion of the centre.

Awards and Honours

- Structural Steel Design Award, 1991
- Royal Institute of British Architects, Regional Award, 1992
- Civic Trust Award, 1994
- UK Stadia Design Award, 1994
- Sports Council Award (most effective provision for spectators with disabilities), 1994
- British Steel Award (most imaginative use of steel in arena construction) Winner, 1994
- British Construction Industry Awards, 1991
- 1996, FaulknerBrowns appointed as Specialist Consultants with regard to maximising public and community use of the Olympic Aquatic Centre, both before and after the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney, Australia.

Manchester Velodrome- the National Cycling Centre, 1994.

Following Birmingham's unsuccessful bid for the 1992 Olympic games, there was a strong conviction in Government that new international-standard venues were needed to support bids for future major events. Consequently, the Manchester Velodrome was developed as a joint venture between Sport England, Manchester City Council and British Cycling to improve British Cycling and, importantly, to support bids for the 1996 and 2000 Olympics (both unsuccessful) and for Manchester's winning bid for the 2002 Commonwealth Games.

Designed by FaulknerBrowns, and opened in September 1994, Manchester Velodrome remained the only indoor Olympic-standard track in the UK for 18 years. It became the home to British Cycling in 1994 and to UCI ProTeam Sky in 2009 and has staged UCI World Masters Track Cycling Championships in 1996, 2000, 2008 and 2014. But, importantly, the track and its massive and flexible infield space is also a community centre with management playing a major role in promoting introductory taster cycling sessions and other dry sports activities to encourage the public to participate.

The Velodrome's iconic architecture features a 122m clear-span, 200 tonne central double arch allowing for unrestricted viewing around the 250m heavily banked (up to 42 degrees) cycle track which is acknowledged as one of the fastest in the World. It has been cited as the catalyst for Britain's achievements in track cycling during, and since, the Commonwealth Games of 2002.

Awards.

- IOC/IAKS, 1997, Golden Award.
- European Award for Steel Structures, 1995.

Manchester Aquatics Centre, 1999. Resembling a giant wave, Manchester Aquatics Centre is a key regional community sports centre serving the 2.7 million population of Greater Manchester Metropolitan County including its universities, colleges and schools. Provided to allow Manchester to host the 2002 Commonwealth Games, the design, nevertheless, majors on community and university legacy uses. The flexibility of its layout is such that, during the Games, 2000 additional spectators were able to be accommodated for the swimming event by erecting temporary seating tribunes over the diving pool and the leisure lagoon. Similarly, the suite of three multi-purpose studios overlooking the pool hall, became hospitality and media/press rooms for the Games and then reverted to their health and fitness roles thereafter.

Facilities include

- 2 x 50m swimming pools, each capable of being split into sections of various dimensions and depths using movable floors and booms,
- 25m diving/swimming/synchro swimming/ learner and teaching pool equipped to international standards and with the first 3m wide 10m diving stage in the UK: this pool is also used for water polo and scuba diving training,
- a shallow water leisure lagoon- with palm trees- suitable for mums-with-babies classes and younger users,
- work-out and fitness studios and a large poolside health suite including sauna and steam rooms
- poolside café

Well in advance of opening to the public, Manchester was fortunate to appoint David Warden as manager- with his unequalled experience of community/competition centres. He steered the complex through the 2000 Commonwealth Games and then for several years of highly successful community and university use.

Awards.

- IOC/IAKS, 2003, Silver Award