

INDOOR SPORTS CENTRES – RESEARCH ON THEIR USE, USERS, AND NON-USERS, AND ITS IMPACT ON POLICY, PROVISION AND MANAGEMENT

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Introduction

- i Over the past six decades, and especially from the 1960s to the late 1990s, no national sporting topic received so much attention through reviews, reports and publications as the planning, development, management of, and research into, community indoor sports centres. In the 1960s several were initiated by the Central Council of Physical Recreation (CCPR) and the National Playing Fields Association (NPFA). From 1965 it was The Sports Council, assisted from 1966 by the Regional Sports Councils (and their successor bodies), that led the charge through the 1970s, 80s and 90s, ably led from 1972 by the late Mike Collins, Head of Research and our former boss, whose role was massively influential. Academia too was quick to latch on to this emerging social phenomenon, producing copious research papers and books. Indeed, sports centres spawned a ‘small industry’ in research, reviews and strategic planning over the period.
- ii Our intention here is to cover one small, but highly significant, part of all this endeavour – research studies of the use and users of sports centres and, in the later years, studies of people not using sports centres, and how this fed back into policy, provision and management. Our views are both personal and partial (and we would welcome feedback, additional contributions, and alternative perspectives from others): personal because we are inevitably influenced by work undertaken by ourselves, and partial because, despite huge searches, copies of many once seminal works appear to have vanished from the face of the earth.
- iii Our contribution is partial in another sense as well. We do not cover the huge raft of technical research and guidance on sports centres published, or sponsored, by our erstwhile colleagues in the Technical Unit for Sport (TUS) at The Sports Council. Over a period of 25 years they researched, reviewed and made recommendations on a whole variety of sports centre related matters: the design of facilities; low cost variants; centres suitable for rural areas; optimum dimensions and layouts for halls; alternative structural, mechanical and electrical solutions; provision for disabled people; surfaces for sport; colour schemes for halls to optimise visibility; changing accommodation, and so on. Much of this accumulated wisdom was brought together in their four volume ‘Handbook of Sports and Recreational Building Design’ (1), first published in 1981, and subsequently updated in the mid-1990s to coincide with the launch of the National Lottery.
- iv Our contribution is in four Sections, broadly chronological. However, the breaks in date are approximate, and we sometimes overlap them to conclude an earlier Section or to set the context for a later Section:

- Section 1 1965 – 1972 The Search for a Standard of Provision or ‘Build and Hope’
- Section 2 1972 – 1982 Understanding the Users or ‘New Political, Social and Financial Imperatives’
- Section 3 1982 – 1992 Priority People or the ‘Demise of Catchment Area Studies’
- Section 4 1992 – 2006 The Return of the User Surveys or the ‘Rise of the Consultants’

Section 1

1965 – 1972 The Search for a Standard of Provision or ‘Build and Hope’

- 1.1 **When the first community sports centres were emerging in the 1960s Town and Country Planning was itself evolving rapidly.** The historic roots of the profession in architecture, landscape design, civil and municipal engineering, and surveying, whose practitioners had overseen post-war reconstruction and the development of the New Towns, were being augmented by a new wave of young planners, for whom it was their first discipline. Other disciplines too, such as sociology and economics, were increasingly being brought to bear on the subject, often from academia. ‘Standards’ of (space) provision were starting to give way to carefully researched methodologies which better reflected the human activities for which they were designed. Thus Keeble (2), writing in 1964, was able to devote a Chapter to open space standards, including provision for outdoor sport (but not of course anything on indoor provision), but was also able elsewhere to suggest that “in preparing the town plan it is useful to know the catchment areas of influence of various public services” (though again, of course, he did not have indoor sports centres in mind).

‘Planning for Sport’ (3)

- 1.2 **It was in the above broader context that in December 1965 the recently formed Sports Council established a Working Party under the chairmanship of Sir John Lang, its Deputy Chairman, to consider scales of provision for sports facilities.** Among its membership were two of the most eminent town planners of the day – Aylmer Coates, from Lancashire, and Wilf Burns, from Newcastle – Denis Molyneux, latterly an academic at Birmingham University, and recently appointed Deputy Director of The Sports Council, and Margaret Willis, a sociologist from the Ministry of Housing and Local Government.

- 1.3 Its Terms of Reference were:

“To consider and make recommendations on the scale of provision of facilities for sport and physical recreation to meet the leisure time needs of urban communities in regard to:

- Sports grounds.....
- Swimming pools.....
- Sports halls and other indoor facilities, including large complexes with halls of 7,000 sq ft or more, smaller halls of 5,000 sq ft, facilities for dance and movement and for other activities such as squash, judo, weight training, etc”.

It was further urged to take into account the contribution which school facilities and those of the voluntary sector could make to community provision.

- 1.4 The Report from the Working Party was published nearly three years later, in October 1968. Pointing to regional and local differences in sporting tradition, and differing densities of population, it indicated that, “We decided therefore that it would be highly misleading to recommend scales of provision for different sizes of community. For this reason, we have attempted to devise methods which, when supplemented with data drawn from local sources, will enable authorities to assess their own requirements”.
- 1.5 However, **in the case of sports halls and indoor facilities, it was obliged to conclude that, “We do not consider that the data available from the small number of existing examples (nearly all recently constructed) is sufficient to enable us to put forward at present even a tentative method of calculating total requirements”.**
- 1.6 It went on, “There is an urgent need for carefully planned documentation and research on the use of existing sports halls and indoor sports centres, so that an appraisal can be made as soon as practicable of the pattern of use. A pragmatic approach to the problem is both inevitable and desirable until further knowledge is available”.

‘Initial Appraisals’ of Facilities

- 1.7 **While the ‘Planning for Sport’ (3) Working Party deliberated a considerable volume of information on every type of existing facility came on stream.** In 1964, a Joint Circular by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government and the Department of Education and Science, ‘Provision of Facilities for Sport’ (4), had “recommended that all Local Authorities should carry out reviews of their areas to determine what further provision for sport and recreation is needed. Consultation with other Local Authorities will be necessary.....”. Most Local Authorities set about this work diligently, and it was given added impetus and co-ordination by the Regional Sports Councils from 1966.
- 1.8 Thus by 1968 many of these ‘Initial Appraisals’ of existing facilities had been published, usually on a County basis, and some running to several volumes (see, for example, (5) (6)). But there was of course precious little on indoor sports centres and, having collected so much existing data on a wide range of facilities, most Local Authorities bemoaned the absence of any guidance on how to use it in planning for the future. Cheshire County Council (7) spoke for many when it said, **“At the present time data relating to Great Britain or any areas within Britain is meagre, unrelated and insufficient to establish quantitative results enabling a prediction of future demand”.**
- 1.9 An overview on the ‘state of play’ in February 1968 was made by Denis Molyneux in a paper to the Town Planning Institute (8). Bringing together his background as an academic and his current role as a public administrator (and also covering closely similar debates which were going on in countryside recreation), he suggested, “The approach we are adopting on The Sports Council is that research in the short term should centre on groups of activities and on specific facilities concentrating on their catchment area, the characteristics of their users, and

questions of capacity which certain categories of facility can sustain under different types of management and administration". Step up John Birch.

'Indoor Sports Centres' (9)

- 1.10 Well, in fact, he was already on the case. **In June 1967 The Sports Council had agreed a proposal by the CCPR for research into the use of sports centres.** Surveys of the users of the chosen five centres (on the basis that they had facilities in addition to a sports hall, were widely available for public use, and had been in operation for at least 12 months) – Afan Lido, Bracknell, Harlow, Lightfoot and Stockton – were carried out for a one-week period between November 1967 and March 1968. For a further year, from April 1968 to March 1969, the centre managers would record the use of the centres in a standard format.
- 1.11 The resulting report (9), published in 1971, was a detailed and scholarly work, which has survived the test of time. A very small selection of the key data obtained is shown in the table below.

Percentages	Afan Lido	Bracknell	Harlow	Lightfoot	Stockton
Distances travelled to the centres (cumulative in brackets)					
Under 1 mile	55	48	36	19	22
1-3 miles	23 (78)	10 (58)	41 (77)	44 (63)	50 (72)
3-5 miles	4 (82)	17 (75)	8 (85)	20 (83)	12 (84)
5-10 miles	9 (91)	8 (83)	7 (92)	9 (92)	9 (93)
Over 10 miles	9	17	8	8	7
Methods of Transport Used					
Car	38	67	66	55	68
Bus	22	5	10	23	19
On Foot	37	21	17	18	10
Bicycle	1	4	4	0	1
Other	2	3	3	4	2
Age of Users					
Under 10	14	8	5	4	2
10-14	32	16	21	11	9
15-19	23	19	15	25	20
20-24	10	16	17	27	23
25-29	4	12	12	12	14
30-34	5	12	12	9	11
35-39	7	9	9	6	9
40-44	3	4	5	4	6
45-59	3	4	4	2	5
Over 60	<1	<1	1	<1	1

Gender					
Male	63	69	69	76	78
Female	37	31	31	24	22
Socio Economic Group of Users (summarised)					
Non-Manual	43	66	71	70	72
Manual	57	34	29	30	28

1.12 Even the most cursory look at the above highlights the under-representation of older people, women, manual workers and non-car owners, all of whom were to become significant issues for sport in the years ahead, and in several cases lead to specific policy initiatives by Government, The Sports Council, Local Authorities and other providers.

1.13 But, **on the crucial aim of the enquiry, “to provide factual information about the use of indoor sports centres upon which recommendations for future provision could be based”, Birch was obliged to conclude, “it is envisaged that the material from this study will be of use for subsequent research, the need for which cannot be too highly emphasised. In this respect this report, limited by the few examples of indoor sports centres, should be regarded as a first glimpse at the problem”.**

1.14 Throughout the report Birch was able to highlight the variance in the system, not just the data presented above, but by matters such as: differences in the facilities provided (one had a swimming pool; four had athletics tracks); differences in the user characteristics of individual sports (swimming in particular attracted lots of young children, often on foot); differences in management; and differences in programming, not just between individual sports activities, but between the levels of school, club, course, and public casual use, not to mention other community uses of halls for ‘social’ activities ranging from dog shows to concerts.

1.15 **Nevertheless, in his concluding chapter, Birch put forward an attempt at an outline method of assessing requirements.** Taking a then prevalent demand and supply approach, in the latter case he was able to use data from the study to develop hourly capacities of different components of a centre (eg sports hall, ancillary hall, squash courts), and then to convert this to a weekly capacity via hours of availability and likely levels of use, which could then be applied to any permutation of planned facilities. He concluded with two exemplar centres:

- Centre A – A one court sports hall, 2 ancillary halls, a weight training room, and 3 squash courts, with an estimated weekly capacity of 1,437 users
- Centre B – A 2 court sports hall, 3 ancillary halls, a weight training room, 3 squash courts, and a hard-porous pitch, with an estimated weekly capacity of 2,123 users.

1.16 On the demand side, he concluded on the basis of the data “that it is reasonable to define the catchment area for indoor sports centres as that area encompassed by

approximately a 20 minute car journey or around 4 miles”. Interestingly, Keeble (2) had suggested “it is probably safe (in defining a catchment area) to omit the most remote 10 or 15 per cent of users” (sometimes referred to in the business as the ‘lunatic fringe’!). Birch suggested, therefore, that population criteria should be based on the population aged under 45 within a 20 minute car journey, and that in assessing demand this should be mediated assuming a one hour period of active participation, and a frequency of one visit a week. Next came the always vexed question of participation rates. Birch produced four alternative scenarios: 2.5% of the population under the age of 45, which broadly reflected existing use; 5.0% to reflect current demand that could not be fulfilled; and 7.5% and 10.0% to reflect possible increases in demand.

1.17 Working on the “modest 5% rate of participation”, **he concluded that Centre A (see paragraph 1.15 above) would be suitable for a community containing an under 45 population of 30,000 (total population 48,400), and that Centre B could serve an under 45 population of 42,500 (total population 68,500).**

1.18 Throughout his work, Birch was always careful to display his reservations and caveats. But this was indeed a brave piece of work and a massive leap forward.

‘Provision for Sport’ (10)

1.19 **Shortly after the publication of Birch’s work The Sports Council published in 1972 “a first assessment of the need for facilities to meet some of the major requirements for recreation”, ‘Provision for Sport’ (10).** It dealt with indoor swimming pools, golf courses and indoor sports centres, but here we are only concerned with the last of these. The work had actually been started in 1970, and had largely been undertaken by the regions under the working title of ‘the 1981 Assessment’, with The Sports Council having a collation and oversight role.

1.20 The report makes frequent references to the work of Birch, and suggests that “the scales adopted for this exercise derive from the analysis of an intensive study carried out in 1968/69 on five well established indoor sports centres”. But at this distance the connection seems a little tenuous. The report describes the ‘Method of Assessment’ as follows:

“The scale of provision adopted for use in the assessment of requirements first establishes spheres of influence related to the crucial factor of travel time and then their populations projected to 1981. The requirement within each sphere of influence allows a first indoor sports centre for a population of between 40,000 and 90,000 and an additional centre for every 50,000 population above 90,000”.

1.21 **The result of the exercise was an estimated need for 842 indoor sports centres in England and Wales by 1981, against 27 currently in existence. The total capital cost of addressing the deficit of 815 centres was estimated at £148.4m (1972) (£1.92bn 2017).**

1.22 To all intents and purposes that appears to us to run contrary to the view expressed in 1968 by the ‘Planning for Sport’ (3) Working Party that, “We decided therefore that it would be highly misleading to recommend scales of provision for

different sizes of community” (see paragraph 1.4). But it is important to remember, in closing this Section, that The Sports Council always suffered from two dilemmas:

- ‘methods of assessment’, based on the use of local data, will always be most helpful to Local Authorities and other providers, and give the most accurate results taking account of local circumstances. But broad national standards or scales of provision are far more easily understood by those outside the profession, particularly politicians (eg the NPFA six acres per thousand open space standard, or even the current four hours waiting time at A&E Departments).
- the second is the extent to which its planning documents should be firmly grounded in a ‘realistic’ assessment of the likely resources available or, on the other hand, should be ‘bid’ documents which are aspirational and challenging, particularly to Government and politicians. There is no doubt that ‘Provision for Sport’ (10) was the latter.

Section 2

1972-1982 Understanding the Users or 'New Political, Social and Financial Imperatives'

- 2.1 In 1972, as indicated above, The Sports Council (10) suggested that there were currently 27 indoor sports centres in existence; in late 1974 Tony Veal suggested that this had risen to 50 in total (11). Most had been provided by Local Authorities, some jointly with Education Authorities, and a few by specific Trust arrangements.
- 2.2 Much of this newer provision was fuelled by the Local Government Act, 1972 (12) as Local Authorities which were to be merged into larger units sought to spend existing reserves and balances before the new Local Authorities came into being on 1 April 1974.
- 2.3 But questions were increasingly being asked.
- 2.4 Firstly, **the provision of most of these early centres was essentially focussed on putting together the necessary capital package, with little or no concern for the ongoing revenue costs.** In fairness, of course, there was very little data available from the few centres which existed, nor experience of modelling the revenue consequences. In the mid-1970s it was to prompt an academic to quip that it would be cheaper for Local Authorities to offer anyone turning up for a swim £1 to go away again (when admission charges were c 20p)! But 1974 was the year of the three-day week, 16% annual inflation, and severe pressure on public sector budgets. Those operating existing sports centres, and those planning new ones, were understandably keen to understand more about their performance, not least their financial performance.
- 2.5 **There were as well two General Elections in 1974, which saw the return of a Labour Government and the indefatigable Denis Howell as Minister for Sport.** Within 18 months of re-assuming office Howell had published a White Paper, 'Sport and Recreation' (13), asserting the value of sport and recreation to all members of the community. This was followed up by the Government in 1977 with a more generic White Paper, 'Policy for the Inner Cities' (14), which sought to show, and put forward policies for redressing, the way in which many inner-city residents were being left behind by provisions of the State. One of the key responses of The Sports Council was to introduce an additional grants scheme for 'Areas of Special Need' and the impact of this programme is assessed at paragraphs 3.13 to 3.18 below.
- 2.6 **These Government initiatives reinforced what many in the sporting community itself, and many academics, were saying.** Many of The Sports Council's own staff were concerned that its policies, such as the awarding of grants to sports clubs, with their requirements for matched funding, did little to extend 'Sport for All', and simply ensured that land owning 'middle class' golf, tennis, cricket and similar clubs were improved, whilst publicly owned football pitches, such as Hackney Marshes or Hough End in Manchester, were as bad as ever. Similarly, an emphasis on 'larger than local' facilities in grant awards to Local

Authorities ensured the provision of some major regional and sub-regional facilities, but did little for local communities.

- 2.7 Throw into this mix the understandable curiosity of academics from various disciplines at this ‘new kid on the block’ – indoor sports centres – and whether their support with public funds was justifiable, and the prejudices and myths (some of which we examine later) of a few local Councillors, and **it is clear that the field was ripe for some good research to try to pin down a few facts.** Whether the research community delivered is for others to judge but, speaking for our own efforts, we certainly gave it our best shot, even if some lines of enquiry led up blind alleys.
- 2.8 But before we examine the research response in detail it is firstly necessary to examine two other contemporary documents.

‘Multi-Purpose Recreation Centres in Britain: Some Observations’ (11)

- 2.9 **This report in 1974 by Tony Veal, who was to become one of the great sports research gurus of the 1970s and 80s, provided a very useful perspective on the sports centre scene at the time.** He identified a number of prevailing, influential factors: the most important included the move towards dual-use and joint provision of school facilities, and its economic sense; the role of the New Towns Development Corporations; a potential trend to mix sports and arts provision; the case for indoor sports provision, which generates participation; the growth of integrated Local Authority Recreation Departments, and the work of The Sports Council and Regional Sports Councils.
- 2.10 The report reflected on the need for economy and the rise of joint provision and dual use. In 1971/2 capital expenditure on sport and physical recreation in Britain had been £48m, of which £21m was spent by educational institutions. Local Authorities had turned to joint provision and dual-use, despite some of the planning and operational difficulties involved.
- 2.11 Significantly he said, sports centres were on the one hand following a trend in society and meeting a need for more indoor sport, and on the other hand playing a large part in leading and moulding that trend.
- 2.12 Veal mentions the possible broadening of the concept to the arts, for example the inclusion of theatres at Billingham Forum and Wythenshawe. Whilst such broadening of interests was encouraged by, for example, the House of Lords Select Committee on Sport in 1973 (15), they remained the exception.
- 2.13 There were, Veal said, good examples of the growth of sports activity resulting from the arrival of sports centres. Karate, judo, yoga, and indoor bowls had all grown, as had sports hall-based activities such as five-a-side football and badminton. He concluded that centre development was still at a very early stage, stating that “development, research, and experiment is progressing at an accelerating pace leading hopefully to improved policy formulation, planning and provision”.

'Sports Halls: A New Approach to their Dimensions and Use' (16)

2.14 **Although published in 1975, work on this report by The Sports Council actually began in 1971; its sub-title indicates that it sought to revise Chapter IV of 'Planning for Sport' (3). It suggested key changes under two main headings:**

- **the recommended sizes of sports halls**
- **scales of provision.**

2.15 On the first, it suggested that the modular hall size recommended in 'Planning for Sport' (3) of 36.5m (120ft) x 18.3m (60ft) had 'serious limitations'. It continues, "a relatively small increase in width, with perhaps some reduction in length, permits greater flexibility of use, without great increases in cost". In general, more floor space is suggested than in the first edition of 'Planning for Sport'. This section of the report also took the opportunity to update the space requirements and layout advice for individual sports, and the design advice on such matters as storage space, changing accommodation, social and other amenities, etc.

2.16 On 'scales of provision', of course, 'Planning for Sport' (3) did not actually recommend any (see paragraphs 1.4 and 1.5 above)! Rather, the new report attempted to modify the scales prescribed in 'Provision for Sport' (10), and described at paragraph 1.20 above, in respect of three specific sets of circumstances where there had been difficulties in application:

- towns with overlapping catchment areas
- conurbations or large towns
- sparsely populated rural areas.

2.17 So how did the research community react to these new imperatives and latest policy pronouncements of 1973/1975?

The Financial Imperative

2.18 **Although flagged at paragraph 2.4 as a key driver, it is reasonable to conclude that research was able to contribute little to the understanding of the revenue effects of providing indoor sports centres.** An early attempt, in 1973, by the Local Government Operational Research Unit (LGORU) (17) to develop a swimming pool pricing model produced interesting data, but ultimately did not contribute to operational management. In 1975 the ever-visionary Mike Collins asked our team to pilot the collection of 'Base Management Data' from sports centres with a view to developing a national database of use and financial information. We worked with centres in the Metropolitan Boroughs of Stockport and Knowsley for several months, but ultimately had to conclude that such a system remained a vision and not a reality. In particular, it should be remembered that this was before the days of mass computer use ('data transfer' required a weekly visit!) and, given the recent reorganisation of local government, even

centres within the individual Authorities were using different tills and different systems, often on paper, for bookings, recording use data, etc. So the development of reliable revenue data essentially fell back on individual Local Authorities, exchanges between their officers within their professional bodies and Regional Sports Councils, and the annual statistical series produced by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) (18). The last of these had considerable problems of definition, and there was often therefore a lack of uniformity in the ways different Local Authorities collected and presented data. Many leisure professionals were doubtful if 'like' was being compared with 'like', and often fell out with their Borough Treasurer!

The User Imperatives

2.19 **In contrast, the research community responded to the user and political imperatives – who is using centres?, who is not using centres?, what sports are they playing?, how do they travel?, and a host of similar questions – ‘in spades’.** Indeed, in the second half of the 70s it became a small cottage industry. The often unwritten text was to seek to refine and develop the work of John Birch (9) in the search for the ‘Holy Grail’ of indoor sports centre catchment areas.

2.20 Such studies arose from a variety of sources. Some were commissioned by The Sports Council to examine specific aspects in which it was interested, such as dual use or rural areas. Some were undertaken in house by The Sports Council via teams such as our own. Some were undertaken by academia – a variety of self generated work, paid commissions from Local Authorities and The Sports Council, Masters’ research projects, and occasionally undergraduate projects as well. Perhaps interestingly, only a few, where they had the staff capacity, were undertaken by Local Authorities themselves. In our own experiences we found the overwhelming majority of Local Authorities which we approached very keen – at both Director and Centre Manager level – to support the work, assist in data collection, and join us in the learning experience; only a couple come to mind where there was a reticence.

2.21 We list below all such studies of which we are aware:

A. Specific Indoor Sports Centres

Year	Centre(s)	Author(s)	Ref
1974	Vernon Sangster (Liverpool)	Merseyside Youth Association	19
1974	The Oval (Wirral)	BR Thomas	20
1975	Guildford	Greater London & SE Sports Council	21
1975	Hoyland	Barnsley MBC	22
1975	Pontypool	Gwent County Council	23
1976	Park Hall (Walsall)	CURS, Birmingham University	24
1976	Broomfields (Warrington)	DS Donald	25
1976	Rugby	CURS, Birmingham University	26
1976	Haslingden	C McConnell	27
1976	Congleton	NW Council for Sport & Recreation	28
1976	The Oval (Wirral)	Wirral MBC	29
1976	Guildford, Leatherhead	Greater London & SE Sports Council	30

1977	Billingham Forum	Public Attitude Surveys	31
1977	Harlow	Built Environment Research Group, PCL	32
1977	Moss Side (Manchester)	NW Council for Sport & Recreation	33
1978	Meadway (Reading)	Built Environment Research Group, PCL	34
1978	Michael Sobell (Islington)	Built Environment Research Group, PCL	35
1978	Community Schools, Walsall	BJ Murphy & AJ Veal	36
1978	5 centres at schools	PN Grimshaw & P Prescott-Clarke	37
1979	Billingham Forum	G Arrowsmith	38
1979	Six Low Cost Centres in London, Rochford, Nottingham, Bolton and Steyning	AJ Veal	39
1980	Guildford, Leatherhead, Woking, Farnborough and Elmbridge	J Atkinson & MF Collins	40
1980	Newton Aycliffe	J Boothby & MF Tungatt	41
1980	Torfaen Centres	B Whaley	42
1981	Rugby	CURS, Birmingham University	43
1982	Howe Bridge (Wigan)	NW Council for Sport & Recreation	44

B. Freestanding Swimming Pools

Year	Pool(s)	Author(s)	Ref
1977	Fifteen pools in London and the East Midlands	Public Attitude Surveys	45
1977	Ashton-under-Lyne, and surrounding pools	AJ Veal	46
1979	Bletchley, Whitley Bay and Rotherham Leisure Pools	Public Attitude Surveys	47
1979	Ashton-under-Lyne, and surrounding pools	AJ Veal	48

C. Other Relevant Studies and Publications, including Summary Documents

Year	Short Title	Author(s)	Ref
1976	Transport Realities and Planning Policy	M Hillman, I Henderson and A Whalley	49
1976	Urban Recreation Facilities and Organisations	J Boothby and MF Tungatt	50
1977	Fair Play for All	M Hillman and A Whalley	51
1977	Indoor Swimming Pools in Britain	MF Collins	52
1977	Clubs for Sports and Arts	J Boothby and MF Tungatt	53
1979	Development of Guidelines for Indoor Sports Provision	J Boothby and MF Tungatt	54
1981	A Sporting Chance?	J Boothby, MF Tungatt, AR Townsend and MF Collins	55
1982	Identifying the Market	D Cowling, M Fitzjohn and MF Tungatt	56

2.22 It is not our intention to review all the above studies for two very simple reasons:

- Despite extensive searches we have only been able to obtain copies of those flagged in **yellow**. If any readers have copies of the others which they would be willing to lend/give to the Project we would be pleased to hear from you
- They have been reviewed and summarised in other places, and contemporaneously which eliminates the benefit of hindsight, most notably by George Torkildsen (57) and by ourselves in 'Identifying the Market' (56). We deal with both below.

2.23 Torkildsen (57), in his review in 1983, concluded:

First, it is clear that new indoor centres increase participation substantially. In the 1970s there was an increase of over 200% in indoor activities. This change in the pattern of usage may, in part, be attributable to the slowing of the indoor sport centre building programme during the late seventies coupled with the rise in the provision of outdoor all-weather synthetic pitches and courts. The 1983 GHS figures show only minor changes to the general picture of participation since 1980.

Second, at present levels of indoor sports provision, it would appear that new 'dry' centres scarcely affect the use of existing facilities.

Third, the centres are used by a far higher proportion of young people in virtually all centres.

Fourth, sport centre users generally have higher proportions of participants from the professional, non-manual and skilled groups than from the semi-skilled and manual groups.

Fifth, at present levels of distribution, the bulk of users of centres continue to come from within 4 miles, although a recent survey undertaken for the Sports Council (Study 24 – *Identifying the Market*) (56) reveals that within this generalisation there is an enormous amount of variation from centre to centre.

Sixth, jointly provided centres appear to be more cost-effective than separate provision, especially in 'dry' centres and especially in large or small centres rather than medium sized centres".

2.24 On the key policy area in the latter half of the 1970s, 'Inner Cities', our own work at Moss Side Leisure Centre (33), in Manchester, was to conclude, "Visit rates by local residents are very much lower than for centres in other situations.....the use of the swimming pool is overwhelmingly by local residents.....the catchment area for 'dry activities' is similar to other non 'inner city' areas.....the centre is currently used well below capacity with marked low visit rates from the local population..... it is apparent therefore that the provision of

recreation opportunities to residents of inner city areas does not achieve great success through conventional management styles”.

2.25 This was very much echoed in the study of the Michael Sobell Centre (35), in Islington, where skaters came from closer at hand compared with the participants in racket sports. As a manager who worked at the Centre at the time put it, “one of the things we were always accused of at Sobell was that we only attracted ‘the badminton ladies from Highgate’, which was unfortunately true initially, but we worked hard to change it after the study, which is a good example of how research helped to change management approaches”.

‘Identifying the Market’ (56)

2.26 It is interesting that when Mike Collins first asked us to undertake this work it was to be a review of studies of the catchment areas of sports centres and swimming pools; that became its working title, and that is what we delivered in the first draft. Once more it was the lateral brain of Mike which quickly concluded that there was sufficient information in the document to develop a suggested development process, which was added before publication, and, reflecting this, the title became ‘Identifying the Market’. Mike was able to write in the Foreword, “Much research on sports facilities in the past has attempted to assess what has taken place; now we can distil this descriptive research into prescriptive”.

2.27 Thankfully, we have a couple of copies available to the project, and would be happy to provide photocopies to any interested reader. But we provide a summary of the key findings in the following paragraphs.

2.28 On catchment areas and distances travelled to indoor sports centres the number of visits from within one mile ranged from 10% (Crystal Palace) (9) to 59% (Moss Side) (33) whilst, at the opposite extreme, the number of users travelling more than 5 miles varied from 8% (Meadway, Reading) (34) to 55% (Leatherhead) (30).

2.29 On catchment areas and distances travelled to indoor swimming pools (some within indoor centres, and some freestanding) the amount of variation from the average was even greater than for indoor centres. Visits from within one mile ranged from 18% (Afan Lido pool) (9) to 81% (Central Baths, Tottenham) (45), whilst at Afan Lido, 69% of users travelled more than 5 miles.

2.30 We concluded that “what is clear from these surveys is that **the amount of variation between the individual centres is so great as to make average figures of limited value for planning purposes**”.

2.31 On methods of transport to indoor sports centres there was again considerable variation. Car use ranged from only 38% (Afan Lido) (9) up to 85% (Congleton) (28), bus use from as low as 1% (Congleton) (28) up to 34% (Vernon Sangster, Liverpool) (19), and even travel on foot varied from 3% (Crystal Palace) (9) up to as high as 50% (Park Hall, Walsall) (24).

2.32 On methods of transport to indoor swimming pools (some within indoor centres, and some freestanding) we observed that on average swimmers tended to walk

more and rely less on car travel than sports centre users. Again, however, there was very significant variation, with visits by car ranging from only 6% (Gorton, Manchester) (46) to 84% (Congleton) (28). The number of visits on foot also varied widely from 12% (Billingham Forum) (31) and (Rotherham Leisure Pool) (47) up to 75% (Oldham) (46).

2.33 We concluded that “**generalisations based on average results from surveys of travel patterns are also fairly meaningless in planning terms**”.

2.34 We went on to examine the factors which influenced this variation under three distinct headings:

- User characteristics
- Facility characteristics
- Facility location

2.35 User Characteristics

a) Age/Sex of Users. The majority of people using indoor facilities were under the age of 35, and for swimming pools in particular the major users were under 15s. Children travelled shorter distances than adults, especially for swimming. Almost twice as many adults as children travelled by car, but almost 4 out of 10 children walked to pools. Bus use amongst children was more than double that amongst adults.

There appeared to be little variation in the distances travelled according to the sex of users, nor in the mode of travel used, but male players outnumbered female players by 2 to 1. Nevertheless, men were three times as likely to drive as women, and 3 out of 4 cars were taken to work (49). For many women, therefore, buses and travel on foot were more important methods of transport than for men for all aspects of daily life.

b) Social Class. The majority of indoor sports players were from social classes A, B and C1 (essentially non-manual), whereas the majority of swimmers were from social classes C2, D and E (9, 52). Although car use was still the predominant mode of travel for all social groups, slightly more users in the C1 and C2 groups tended to walk than in the A and B groups, and considerably fewer semi and unskilled manual workers travelled by car (26, 27, 31).

c) Car Ownership. The vast majority of users were from car owning households, though the proportions varied according to individual activities (31, 34). But many users from car owning households did not in fact travel by car because they lived close to the centre, were too young to drive, or the family car was not available (49).

d) Education. Educational attainment was an important factor in determining the use of centres. Those finishing full time education after the age of 19 represented

22% of users at Rugby (26), 26% at Meadway, Reading (34), and 34% at the Sobell Centre (35).

e) Summary of User Characteristics. The exact relationship between these user characteristics and the catchment areas and travel patterns is difficult to establish, and several of the factors are closely correlated. Nevertheless, **“as long as sports centres and swimming pools continue to attract different groups of the population in unequal volumes, their catchment areas and the methods of travel used to visit them will continue to be dependent on where the potential users live in relation to the centre or pool”**.

2.36 Facility Characteristics

a) Activities Catered For. Comparing the four most popular activities played at sports centres, Birch concluded that badminton had a relatively compact catchment. Squash catchments showed greater variation between centres, but it was clear that more squash players travelled longer distances than most other activities. On the other hand both indoor soccer and table tennis had much more local catchments (9). Car travel accounted for a high proportion of squash players, whilst the local catchment of table tennis generated a higher proportion travelling on foot (31, 35).

The development of leisure pools showed customers attracted from much further afield than for conventional pools, with a much greater use of the car and less reliance on walking (47, 52).

b) Age and Attractiveness of Facilities. In the case of indoor centres most were sufficiently new for their ages not to have any marked effect on distances people travelled to them. However, at Harlow, there was an increase in the number of users attending by car between 1968 and 1973 (32).

In stark contrast, however, while almost three-quarters of users of pre-1914 swimming pools travelled less than a mile, with hardly anybody travelling more than 3 miles, almost a third of users of post-1963 pools travelled more than 3 miles. While travel on foot accounted for over half of all trips to older pools, and travel by car a quarter, the figures were almost exactly reversed for newer pools.

‘Attractiveness’ was also increased by the provision of ancillary facilities. A high correlation was noted between ‘user satisfaction’ and the provision of diving facilities, parking space and refreshment facilities (48). Spectator accommodation, bars, social areas and cafes were appreciated by users and had a bearing on catchment areas (23). At Newton Aycliffe, 75% of users had used the social facilities in isolation on at least one occasion in the past (41).

c) Size of Facilities. Size of facility per se did not affect catchment areas to any great extent, and variations were more likely explained by specific locations. There was some evidence that more people visit small centres on foot than large leisure complexes, but again this was more likely to be explained by the individual activities catered for.

In the case of modern (post-1963) swimming pools, small pools (under 30 metres) attracted slightly more visits from under one mile and on foot than larger pools (over 30 metres).

d) Pricing Policies. Although there was little direct evidence, there is no doubt that high admission charges selectively discriminated against certain groups of the population; LGORU (17) indicated that the attendance of children for swimming is more sensitive to pricing than that of adults. Both catchment areas and travel patterns can be affected by price differentials between adjacent facilities and by differential price increases, and also by external economic factors, both short term (such as petrol price rises) and long term (such as rising unemployment).

However, the most common aspects of pricing to affect catchment areas were differential prices within individual centres. The effect of block booking, for example, was to encourage clubs and organised groups, where players tended to travel greater distances than the majority of casual users (9, 53).

e) Opening Hours. In particular, people were prepared to spend longer travelling at weekends. Birch (9) found that in midweek only 17% of users travelled more than 4 miles, whereas at weekends 42% of users made journeys of this length.

f) Programming and Booking Procedures.

- Club use. Veal (39) noted that one of the reasons for low-cost facilities having wider catchments than expected was the extensive use by clubs which attracted members from a wide area
- Course Use. Evidence from Teesside indicated that the catchment area for courses at sports centres was wider than for casual players, and in some cases for clubs (54)
- Spectator Events. The limited evidence available pointed to spectators coming from further afield than ordinary participants (9)
- League Use. Clubs based at sports centres were often involved in leagues, thereby bringing 'away' teams from further afield on a regular basis
- Membership. Membership affected the catchment area, with a higher proportion of members living in the local area than other centre users (32, 38)
- Booking Procedures. Although there is no clear evidence, the need for advanced booking, the procedures for booking, the need for payment in advance, priority for members, etc all represent obstacles to some potential participants, and hence are likely to affect participation and catchments.

g) Joint Provision and Dual Use. A survey of five such centres (37) found that users were drawn from a far wider area than the school catchment, and 3 out of 4 users had no association with the school. Although similar results were found in primary schools in Walsall (36), more users were attracted from the immediate vicinity of the centres, which was also apparent from the high proportion of users travelling on foot.

h) Image and Publicity. Evidence from Teesside (55) indicated that most people are not only aware of the sports centres in their area, but many had visited them, even though they were not currently active sports players. Nevertheless, evidence from the same study, and indeed other surveys, showed that certain groups failed to 'identify' with the facilities.

i) Summary of Facility Characteristics. The characteristics of centres and pools can be seen to vary greatly and, for this reason alone, probably have a greater effect on individual catchment areas and travel patterns than any other factors. Clearly **“what activities are provided, how attractive a centre is, and the way it is managed, etc, are all aspects that can be influenced by planners and managers, and it is important that the effects of such factors are recognised and taken into account when attempts are made to predict the potential ‘market’ of any centre or pool”**.

2.37 Facility Location

a) Distribution of Population. For swimming pools we were able to identify four 'settlement types' ranging from 'conurbations and large towns (90,000+ population)' down to 'villages'. In the case of post-1963 pools, in general terms it could be seen that the larger the settlement in which a pool was located the more localised was likely to be its catchment. This was also reflected in the travel patterns, where the number of visits by car increased and the number by bus or on foot decreased as settlements got smaller.

Although less information was available for sports centres, some comparisons were possible between 'conurbations and large towns' and 'settlements under 90,000 population'. For table tennis players the distances travelled in large settlements were generally shorter than in smaller settlements. For squash, badminton and indoor soccer, however, large town sports centres attracted fewer players from nearby, but more from beyond 2 miles, than do centres in smaller settlements. These locational differences were also reflected in travel methods.

b) Geographical Location. In a number of cases sports centres and pools had been built near to natural or man-made barriers which had distorted the effective catchment area. Birch (9) was moved to remark in the case of the Lightfoot Centre that its proximity to the River Tyne “effectively cut off three-quarters of the catchment area in south Tyneside”.

Conversely, good transport links can stretch catchment areas considerably, particularly for car users. Regular bus services can create corridors of improved access, though several sports centre studies showed a reluctance of people to travel by bus even when services were good (20, 22, 51).

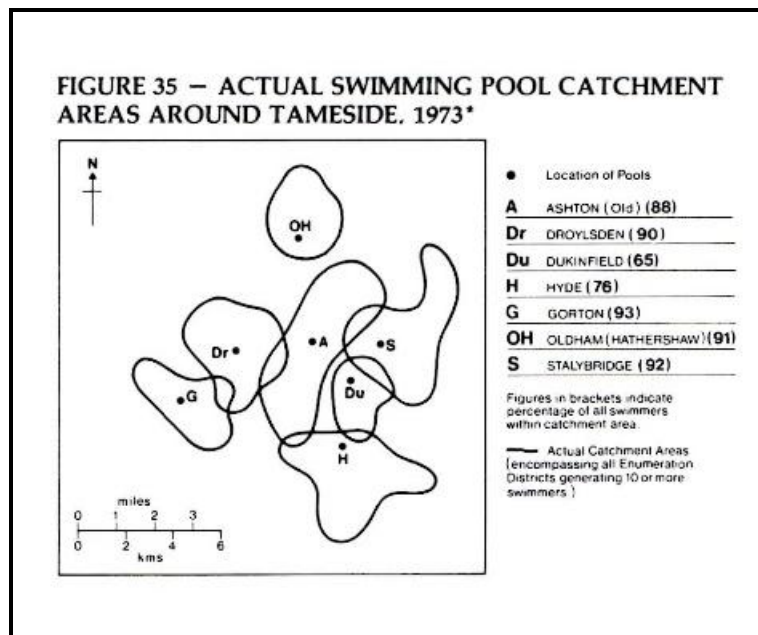
c) Competition. Where facilities were situated close together, choices and patterns of use became complex. Participants may use a facility further from home than another because of its cleanliness, quality of facilities, modernity, or even because access is quicker or easier. In addition, participants may patronise more than one centre. 44% of all Sobell Centre (35) users who had played elsewhere prior to its opening were continuing to do so, even though most lived nearer to Sobell than

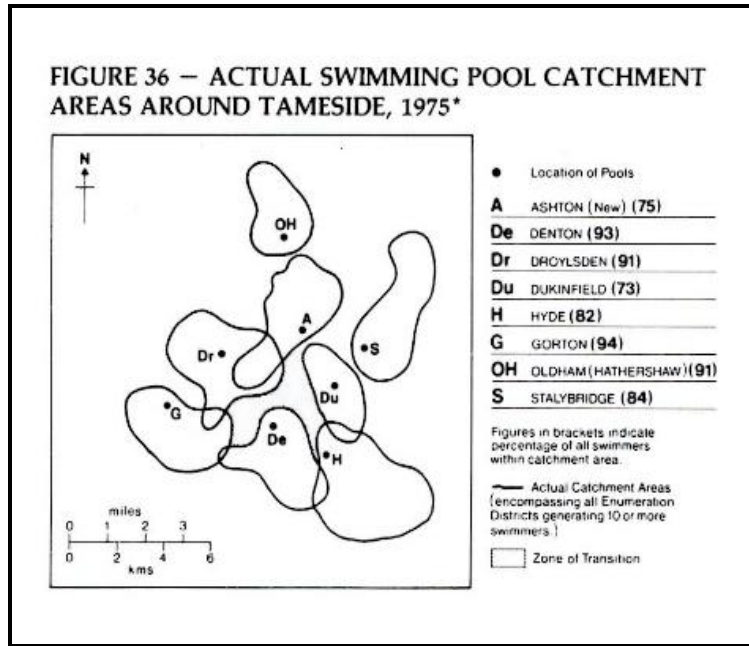
their previous venue. Indeed, the conclusion of the study of Guildford Sports Centre (40) was that it is possible to provide facilities as close to one another as Guildford and Woking (less than 5 miles) without diminishing the potential use for either.

d) Summary of Facility Location. There are indications that “in the past the opportunist nature of many developments in terms of site availability has made their precise location less than optimal. Clearly the implication of these locational factors must form a vital consideration in any planning or management decision-making process”.

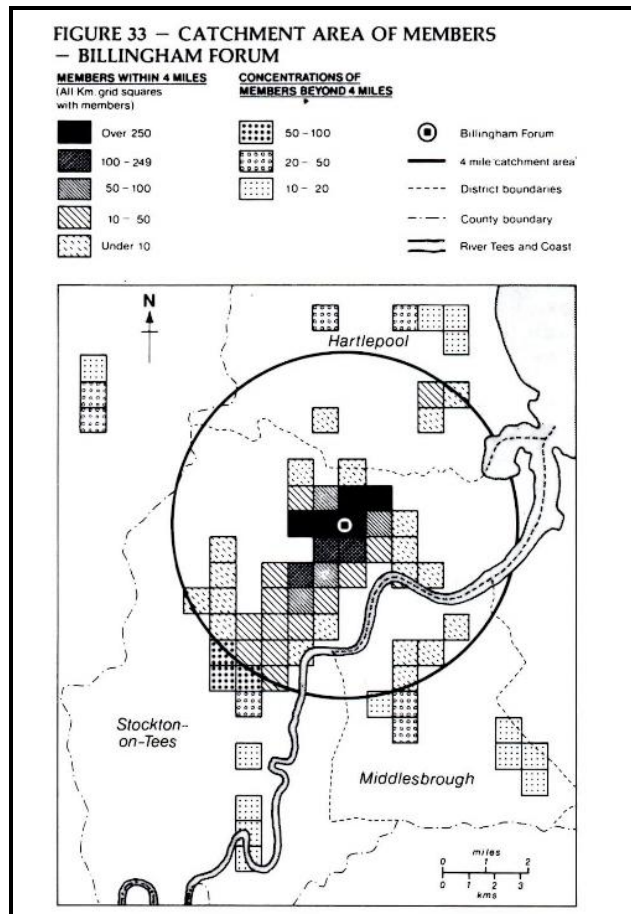
2.38 With this mass of data, much conflicting, in front of us we sought to draw constructive conclusions which would be helpful to practitioners moving forward. Our peer, Tony Veal, had questioned in an unpublished memorandum in 1978 whether “the option of doing away with catchment areas as a planning tool should be considered as a possibility for the future”. In his 1979 follow-up study of the new pool at Ashton-under-Lyne, and its surrounding pools (48), Veal went on to say, “catchment areas cannot be precisely defined.....facilities do not draw their users from perfectly circular areas. Neither do catchment areas have exact boundaries – they merely ‘fade out’ ”.

2.39 We re-worked some of Veal’s data at Enumeration District level and the two diagrams below, copied from ‘Identifying the Market’ (56), show the irregular shaped catchments (a colleague described them as ‘amorphous blobs’) which had existed at the old Ashton pool and surrounding pools in 1973, and also the way these had changed by 1975 when the new pool had opened and an additional pool had been provided in nearby Denton.





2.40 This substantially confirmed earlier work by Boothby and Tungatt at Billingham Forum (50). The diagram below, also copied from 'Identifying the Market' (56), shows the reality of the catchment area. The authors noted that “only about one third of all of the Km squares within the four mile circle generated members, and 61% of all members lived within one and a quarter miles of the centre; in effect an ‘inner’ catchment area.”



2.41 We summarised it thus:

“What is clear from the many studies that have attempted to designate catchment areas is that **much more sophisticated techniques than have been used in the past are required if the results are to be usefully applied by planners and managers.** The Billingham and Tameside examples indicate that facilities do have definable catchment areas and zones of transition where catchments ‘fade away’, **but each individual pool or centre has a unique catchment which cannot be reflected in general terms. Simplistic statements in relation to average distances or population provision targets are of little value, and may in fact serve only to confuse”.**

2.42 **In our conclusions we went on to suggest that there was really no substitute for planners and managers undertaking regular detailed monitoring of existing centres and gathering similar local information when planning new centres. We put forward a suggested development process to assist, which others have kindly suggested had wide acceptance:**

SUGGESTED DEVELOPMENT PROCESS FOR AN INDOOR SPORTS CENTRE OR SWIMMING POOL

(References in brackets refer to paragraph numbers above)

1. EXAMINATION OF MARKET IN BROAD AREA (2.35)

- a) Age/Sex Structure
- b) Social Class Structure
- c) Car Ownership Levels
- d) Education
- e) Housing Tenure

2. OUTLINE SPECIFICATIONS FOR FACILITY AND ITS MANAGEMENT (2.36)

- a) Activities to be Provided
- b) Social Facilities to be Provided
- c) Size of Facilities
- d) Pricing Policies
- e) Opening Hours
- f) Programming and Booking Procedures
- g) Possibilities of Joint Provision/Dual Use
- h) Image and Promotion

3. CONSIDERATION OF POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVE SITES (2.37)

- a) Population Density and Distribution
- b) Geographical Obstacles
- c) Public Transport Services
- d) Competing Facilities

4. SELECTION OF OPTIMUM SITE

5. DETAILED FEASIBILITY STUDY OF MARKET IN RELATION TO CHOSEN SITE

See checklist at Stage 1 above

6. MODIFY SPECIFICATIONS FOR THE FACILITY AND ITS MANAGEMENT

See checklist at Stage 2 above

7. BUILD AND OPEN

8. CONDUCT USER SURVEYS AND EVALUATE ACTUAL MARKET AGAINST ANTICIPATED MARKET

9. CONSIDER NEED FOR FURTHER FACILITIES

Repeat from Stage 1

AND/OR

10. MODIFY MANAGEMENT

See checklist 2d – 2h above

Repeat from Stage 8

'The Impact of a New Sports Centre on Sports Participation and Sporting Facilities: A Case Study of the Atherton Area 1976-1981' (44)

2.43 **Finally in this Section we want to highlight this particular report**, not because it is the longest title in history, nor because it was completed too late to be included in 'Identifying the Market' (56). Rather, **to our knowledge, it is the only published 'before and after' study of the provision of an indoor sports centre.**

- 2.44 The 'before' study (58) was carried out in 1976 at a time when a new sub-regional indoor sports centre, Howe Bridge, was under construction. In addition to this reason, the town of Atherton (just to the north of Leigh, and incorporated into Wigan MBC in 1974) was chosen because it was a reasonably compact and self-contained entity, had no purpose-built sports centre or sports hall, and was manageable in terms of size and population (21,000) to allow a detailed research examination. The headline finding was that some 40 premises were used in connection with sport (public facilities; sports club facilities; youth centres; schools; church premises; social clubs; public houses; works premises; and three others), although significantly only 7 of these were purpose-built sports facilities.
- 2.45 We re-visited the town in 1981, both to conduct follow-up surveys of the clubs and facilities revealed in the 1976 survey and to undertake user surveys of the new Howe Bridge centre.
- 2.46 **We summarised our conclusions as follows** – the style based, with a bit of poetic licence, on some of the comments from local Councillors which we had had to sit through at meetings of the North West Council for Sport and Recreation!

SOME FACTS AND SOME MYTHS ABOUT SPORTS CENTRES

'Sports Centres are only costly replacements for older buildings that could still be used'

WRONG Most older buildings are still used. Only one building in Atherton has stopped being used as a result of Howe Bridge opening. Since the centre opened the number of other buildings used for sport has increased from 40 to 44.

'Sports Centres help all sorts of people take up new sports'

RIGHT Just over a third of all users had never played their sport before Howe Bridge opened. This includes 40% of all elderly swimmers, over 50% of young sports players (under the age of 24), and nearly 60% of all female sports players.

'Sports Centres simply provide additional facilities for players who already have somewhere else to play'

WRONG Only about a third of Howe Bridge users go on playing elsewhere. Amongst those living close to the centre in Atherton, 3 out of 4 swimmers no longer go elsewhere and 2 out of 3 sports players have similarly stopped using their previous facility.

'Sports Centres help young players carry on playing when they leave school or college'

RIGHT The most common reason given for no longer using another facility was 'leaving school or college', and as many as 40% of young people (under the age of 24) give this reason. What would they be doing now if the centre wasn't there?

'Sports Centres are mainly used by people who live close to them'

RIGHT Even though Howe Bridge is halfway between two towns with few people living nearby, 3 out of 4 users live less than 3 miles away. Only 4% live more than 6 miles from the centre.

‘Sports Centres aren’t needed as they only provide the same sort of things as voluntary sports clubs’

WRONG They serve a different sort of player. Only a third of players using Howe Bridge had ever been a member of a sports club. Moreover, only 15% of the facilities used by players before the centre opened were owned by sports clubs.

‘Sports Centres help kill off local clubs by taking players away from them’

WRONG Indeed the reverse seems likely. Despite the fact that many casual users of Howe Bridge have stopped playing elsewhere, this is not the case with club players. In fact club membership in Atherton has increased by nearly 25% since Howe Bridge opened.

‘Sports centres prevent new sports clubs developing’

WRONG The Howe Bridge centre has actually helped new clubs to get off the ground. At least 6 new sports clubs have been formed as a direct result of players having facilities available regularly at the centre.

‘Sports Centres are used mainly by private club players using them for extra games’

WRONG Only 1 in 4 players using Howe Bridge were active members of a sports club, and many of these were actually members of a club based at the centre itself, either for club activities or for training.

‘Sports Centres are too expensive and too crowded for sports clubs to use’

PERHAPS Some smaller clubs in Atherton can’t afford to book the centre. Nevertheless, 61 clubs used the centre during Autumn 1981 and some Atherton clubs found it difficult to get a regular booking because the centre is so popular!

‘Sports Centres can be built near to one another because each will generate its own users locally’

RIGHT At Howe Bridge, 2,000 new users were generated in under 5 years, and yet there are 7 other sports centres and 12 swimming pools within 6 miles of the town.

TO CONCLUDE

Far from undermining the position of existing clubs and facilities, Howe Bridge Sports Centre has helped new clubs to form and existing ones to expand their membership. Local sports centres can therefore co-exist with local clubs, each serving a different type of ‘sportsman’. Ultimately the needs of any community are best met by the existence of healthy clubs and well-managed public sports facilities, with public money invested in both sectors of provision.

2.47 But by 1982 the ‘ground rules’ had changed. The ‘golden days’ of user surveys and catchment area studies had passed, perhaps forever. There were new political and policy imperatives, and therefore a whole new research agenda.

Section 3

1982 – 1992 Priority People or the ‘Demise of Catchment Area Studies’

The Evolution of the New Political and Policy Imperatives and their Implications

- 3.1 Although we will later link this ‘new research agenda’ to the publication of The Sports Council’s new strategy, ‘Sport in the Community... The next Ten Years’, in 1982 (59), this was not a revolution, but an evolution that had begun half a dozen years before in Teesside and, once again, it was the fertile brain of Mike Collins that had begun this process. It was also set against the background of a substantial shift in the scale of facility provision and an even greater shift in The Sports Council’s grant funding, to which we will return later.
- 3.2 In 1975 Mike Collins approached an inter-disciplinary unit based at Durham University to establish a project to conduct research across the Teesside area. The ‘North East Area Study’ unit had established a track record over the previous four years of driving research into educational, geographical, cultural and economic issues across the North East region, led by Dr Alan Townsend, formerly of the University’s Geography Department. It brought together economists, an emerging breed of computer scientists, educational specialists, and North East cultural experts to work collaboratively across a range of projects.
- 3.3 Mike Collins agreed to fund a 15-month research project, jointly funded by the Arts Council, to investigate sporting provision in Teesside which had led the country in the provision of sports facilities since the formation of the County Borough in 1968. The new project was entitled ‘The Teesside Recreation Project’ and a two-man team was appointed in January 1976, led by Dr John Boothby, a former Loughborough geographer, and supported by a former University of Hull geographer, one Malcolm Tungatt!
- 3.4 The project’s objectives were to identify the urban recreation facilities and clubs for sports and the arts, and the supporting structure for them across Teesside. However, it became apparent early in the project’s life that the administrative geography of Teesside had changed substantially with Local Government re-organisation in 1974, and the remit of the work was extended to cover the whole of the new County of Cleveland. As well as the traditional detailed analysis of the ‘membership’ catchments of four of the five major sports centres in the area (Billingham Forum, Thornaby Pavilion, Eston Leisure Centre and the Stockton YMCA Centre; the Stockton North End Centre did not operate a membership scheme), the project analysed the distribution of clubs and the structure of provision for five sports and arts interests (soccer, badminton, fencing, bowls, and folk clubs) and the specialist arts facilities at Thornaby Pavilion and the YMCA Dovecot Centre.
- 3.5 The conclusions with regard to the sports and arts club structures were largely in line with the more detailed study in Atherton in 1981 (44), which we discussed in the previous Section. Although the large sports centres had leagues based at them for five-a-side soccer and housed clubs for badminton, **the majority of the sporting provision, and the league and club structure, for the sports studied**

operated totally independently of these major centres. The indoor sports clubs were based in, or operated out of, church halls, school halls, Working Men's Clubs and public houses, and some small scale privately operated facilities, particularly those linked to the major industrial companies. For the outdoor sports, some privately-owned facilities for bowls and soccer existed, but most of the clubs were reliant on publicly-owned playing fields, recreation grounds and park bowls facilities. The folk club structure was dominated by public house venues. We will return to the importance of these conclusions in the context of 'Sport in the Community...The next Ten Years' (59).

- 3.6 The membership catchments of the four major centres also reflected the later conclusions of 'Identifying the Market' (56), with one additional significant factor emerging. The closeness of the four centres to one another allowed a study of the way the catchments overlapped, similar to the evidence from Ashton-under-Lyne described above in paragraph 2.39. **But it was not the overlap, per se, that was of significance, but the social structure of that overlap.** Based on a detailed analysis of the members' addresses within individual one kilometre grid squares on Ordnance Survey maps, several features stood out. Of course, the kilometre squares closest to the individual centres had substantial numbers of members of those centres, but it was clear that members travelling some distance away from the smaller towns in County Cleveland, and from County Durham and North Yorkshire, were almost exclusively from the more affluent areas; more mobile users and more able to afford the time for the journeys involved. This was particularly true of the members of the various arts sections at Thornaby Pavilion and the theatre members at Billingham Forum.
- 3.7 However, one of the most interesting parts of this analysis was the number of members of the four centres living in Middlesbrough district, which itself had no large indoor sports centre provision. Again, the membership patterns reflected the social make-up of Teesside. The grid squares covering the affluent areas of Acklam, Marton, Nunthorpe and Linthorpe dominated the *overall* membership pattern. At the time these findings were of significance because it proved that where the centres were actually located was not that relevant. What was relevant was that the more affluent people had workplaces close to one of the centres, often some distance from their homes, and that they were willing to travel to experience the more up-to-date facilities of the leisure centres. In particular, family membership was also higher amongst people living in these areas.
- 3.8 In direct contrast, the number of members living in the more deprived parts of West Stockton, particularly the Hardwick, Ragworth and Roseworth areas, was much fewer by comparison with the rest of the Stockton area. Similarly, the number of members in the deprived areas of East Middlesbrough, including the Berwick Hills and Netherfield estates, and the deprived former steel-making suburbs of North Ormesby and South Bank, was low in comparison with the rest of east Middlesbrough and Eston.
- 3.9 The conclusions of this initial analysis of the Cleveland sporting structure led Mike Collins to extend The Sports Council's funding for the project for a further three years, now based within the Department of Geography, to which Alan Townsend had returned following the end of the North East Area Study's funding agreement

within the University.

- 3.10 The extended study was designed to focus on four aspects of the changing structures of provision to which we referred in the opening paragraph of this Section, but also to concentrate on the 'social aspects' of participation. If the indoor multi-sport centres were operating largely outside the overall sporting structure, and more affluent users dominated their membership and usage patterns, how could provision be changed to better reflect the overall needs of the wider population of County Cleveland, and how could the outcomes of the research be best applied across the country as a whole? **The shift towards 'sports sociology' dominating future leisure research in the 1980s had begun!**
- 3.11 The first part of the extended research would focus on the 'Development of Guidelines for Local Indoor Multi-Sports Provision' (54). If the current indoor sports centres were not the answer to equitable participation patterns, what could, and should, be done to make better use of the facilities which were being used for sport locally and how might these uses be extended? The aim was to "understand more fully the possible social contexts and procedural problems for establishing such local centres [with] less emphasis to the technical problems of local provision". The study included an analysis of the potential for wider sporting use of schools, colleges, evening institutes, community centres, social clubs, and public houses, as well as the potential for wider community use of facilities owned by sports clubs. The general conclusions were that, even within any one of these categories of potential local provision, the particular circumstances of each facility "would attract or repel users or potential users". In particular, for the community facilities, high prices versus subsidised pricing, membership versus non-membership, the presence of 'social facilities' or not, and the style of management were all important factors. For sports clubs, the perceived need to have already attained a certain level of expertise in the sport would often deter potential casual users.
- 3.12 The concluding paragraph of the report noted that "there is no doubt that there is sufficient gross demand for sports facilities to justify the provision of local indoor centres, [but] we have tried to show that local demand is not simply mass demand on a local scale; local provision should thus aim at specific local needs. Unfortunately, this raises the ever-present problem of the measurement of need for recreational facilities; we must reiterate here that assessment beyond purely technical matters is a socio-political exercise".
- 3.13 The second part of the extended research reflected the changing Sports Council funding for facilities across the country in 1977/78 linked to the new grant-aid programme, 'Providing for Sport in Areas of Special Need'. This new approach to funding was introduced in 1977 following the recommendations of the Government White Paper on Sport and Recreation (13). Significantly, much of the related research focussed on a new approach to developing sport, which we will term for want of a better phrase, 'direct intervention'. **The main thrust of this new approach centred on the concept of outreach work. If people living in deprived areas were not accessing existing public facilities, what could be done by the sporting community to intervene?**

- 3.14 In September 1977, the Minister for Sport, Denis Howell, stood in the centre circle of a new breed of sporting provision. Sited in the Blue Hall Recreation Ground in the Ragworth area of Stockton, he kicked the first ball on a 'floodlit kick-about area'. Funded by The Sports Council's grant-aid scheme and maintained by Stockton and Middlesbrough Councils' Recreation Departments, five other kick-about areas had been provided in some of the most deprived areas of Teesside. Basic by modern-day standards, they consisted of an artificial 'tartan' surface, tennis court-style fencing with two access gates at the sides, two fixed metal goals and, of course, floodlights. Just bring your ball and play from dawn until 10pm!
- 3.15 Each had a slightly different management philosophy which allowed the Teesside research team to assess the best approach. The research looked at usage patterns and analysed the resultant issues of 'wear and tear' and design problems in the first three months of their use (60). Continued monitoring took place throughout the Spring of 1978, but most of the detailed conclusions were based on the period between July and September 1978. Daily use of the facilities themselves was intensively surveyed, but interviews also took place with local residents, local young people using the facilities, and those playing-out elsewhere in the local neighbourhood. **The key was to assess the relevance of this type of small-scale provision in the social context of the area.**
- 3.16 The main conclusions of the research were confirmed by later Sports Council studies in other parts of the country (61, 62). It was clear that in the future any successful 'intervention' to increase local casual participation would be more about how these types of facility were promoted and micro-managed rather than their location. **Just putting small scale facilities in to deprived neighbourhoods was not the answer. If the facility was not embraced by local community users it was just as likely to be perceived as 'not for them'.**
- 3.17 In the Autumn of 1978, another new approach was launched by The Sports Council, again under its 'Areas of Special Need' funding. Known colloquially as the 'urban deprivation grant scheme', it was managed by The Sports Council's Regional Offices and, for the first time, funding decisions were taken at a regional level. The grant-aid focussed on providing a range of sports equipment to existing community groups catering for young people. Local Authority youth clubs, community based young people's clubs and small independent sporting groups, such as boxing clubs, could apply, with 75% grant-aid funding the norm. However, the total national 'pot' was very small in comparison with other grant aid schemes and the maximum per scheme was only £5,000. **Whilst research evidence of its success was limited, it did mark a new relationship with what might be termed the 'sporting fringe' which would continue into the 1980s.** It also prompted a lively debate at national level as to whether 'pool-tables' were an eligible item of sports equipment, which perhaps reflected a lack of knowledge amongst the traditional sporting providers of the reality of what the sporting fringe might need to provide to attract young people!
- 3.18 In 1981, Mike Collins launched yet more research projects with the sporting fringe in Leicester, Derwentside and Hockley Port, where schemes to attract unemployed people were sponsored in partnership with the Local Authorities and

local 'action groups', with grant-aid from The Sports Council. The key was to make the existing sports facilities, small scale and large scale, more relevant to the needs of unemployed people, particularly the young unemployed. The full research report was not published until 1986 (63), but the early lessons were that those schemes which had dedicated outreach workers, whether professional or voluntary, to encourage their take-up and usage were more successful.

- 3.19 This concept of outreach workers was further expanded when The Sports Council launched the experimental Action Sport programme in 1982, with pilot programmes in London and the West Midlands regions, in partnership with Local Authority Recreation Departments. Each of the host Authorities had to make a commitment to make time available to the Action Sport teams in their leisure centres as part of the participation agreement with The Sports Council. In some cases this resulted in the Action Sport Team Leaders being formally integrated into the wider work of the Recreation Departments to promote the cross-fertilisation of ideas. **It marked the beginning of a new phenomenon that would dominate much of the sporting world for the next three decades; the concept of 'Sports Development Officers' and, more importantly, Local Authority 'Sports Development Units'.**
- 3.20 Although there was some criticism of the pilot Action Sport programme that it was not monitored and evaluated well enough, the evidence of its success was sufficient for the concept to be 'rolled-out' across all of The Sports Council's regions in partnership with the Manpower Services Commission, which provided the bulk of the funding for the outreach workers on the ground. Each of The Sports Council's Regional Offices hosted a central leadership team to co-ordinate the programme at a regional level and develop the partnership agreements with the selected host Local Authorities.
- 3.21 But reverting to Teesside, the third aspect of the research project was entitled 'Response to Innovation'. An analysis of the use of a new Public Golf Course in Middlesbrough and the usage patterns of new small pavilions in the deprived East Cleveland mining villages are not relevant to the current topic. But the analysis of the impact of a new Indoor Bowling Centre in Newton Aycliffe in 1978 certainly is. Although some sports halls provided opportunities for indoor bowls and Thornaby Pavilion had an indoor bowls hall built into its design, the Newton Aycliffe centre was one of the first modern, separately managed, indoor bowls centres in England. It also marked a wider trend; **the shift towards indoor *single-sport* provision**, and the fact that many of these facilities would now function more like local 'clubs', with a membership base attracted by the common interests of their fellow members and by the ancillary facilities on offer, as much as by playing the sport itself (41).
- 3.22 A further study of indoor bowls centres carried out by The Sports Council in 1982 suggested that free-standing bowls halls, rather than rinks within sports centres, would be the preferred model, although this study did recognise that rinks within sports centres had raised the visibility of the sport. Indoor bowls centres would be provided in large numbers over the next twenty years and are now, of course, extremely popular local facilities across most of the country. But in the early 1980s they would be followed by the emergence of privately owned and managed indoor

cricket centres, an ever-increasing number of private indoor tennis centres, notably the first 'David Lloyd Centre' in 1982, and smaller scale centres for martial arts and other minority sports. Of course, the late 1970s pre-dated the fitness boom, but some stand-alone privately operated fitness centres were also beginning to be provided, notably some 'City Gyms' close to travel hubs in London (64). **How this trend for single sport provision would affect the future use and programming of indoor multi-sport centres was an unknown at the time!**

- 3.23 Finally, the Teesside research team carried out an in-depth household survey, with individuals' interviews typically lasting for 90 or more minutes. The aim was to assess 'Opportunity, Perception and Participation', analysing in detail the sporting backgrounds, lifestyles, current family 'roles', and perceptions of sporting activity of over 250 individuals, half in the affluent Fairfield area of Stockton and half in the deprived Hardwick area, separated geographically by just a disused railway line. Perhaps the most important finding published in 'A Sporting Chance?' in 1980 (55) was the overwhelming influences of gender and age, which explained 82% of current participation versus non-participation in sport.
- 3.24 Significantly, the 18% that did not conform to this pattern had many things in common. Young non-participants were often single-mums or married women who had had their children at an early age. Most young non-participants, whether male or female, had a poor experience of sport at school and many perceived existing sporting provision as "not for them". Amongst the more elderly people who were still participating, the most common reasons were easy access to *local* facilities, long-term membership of clubs, particularly for tennis and badminton, and the presence of younger friends and relatives who they played alongside.
- 3.25 Also of significance for our current topic was the fact that, as noted in paragraph 2.36 h), whilst the majority of respondents knew about the network of sports centres in Teesside and, in the Fairfield area at least, many had visited them in the past, **they seldom featured in the *current* sporting experiences of these individuals, whether from the affluent suburb or the deprived council estate. This confirmed the need for a new-style approach to increasing existing participation levels that went far beyond building more centres on the same model.**

The Impact on Strategy and Planning

- 3.26 For the second part of our evolutionary story, we head for the North West Region to see how this new-style approach was to take shape. The North West Council for Sport and Recreation was charged with developing the new-style 'Regional Recreation Strategy' when it was established in 1976. Together with our colleague, Paul Chambers, we carried out most of the background research for the Strategy and, indeed, were responsible alongside the Strategy Steering Group for the drafting of the initial proposals and the publication of the final Strategy in December 1980.
- 3.27 A substantial part of the research programme over the two-year period focussed on the Council's early recognition, based on the evidence then available to it, that **recreational provision across the region was not accessible to many of the**

residents of the North West. Whether this was access to mainstream sporting provision, access to the countryside and water based activities, or access to the many tourism-based facilities, the message was the same. And **this applied equally to the many indoor sports centres that had been built across the Region in the growth years between 1973 and 1975, and after.**

3.28 Most of the reasons for this inequality were identified in the early stages of the development of the Strategy:

- Low disposable household income across many of the urban areas
- Multiple deprivation in the inner cities of Manchester and Liverpool, and in the inner urban areas of most of the large towns in Lancashire and Greater Manchester
- Low levels of car ownership in most urban areas
- High levels of unemployment, and in particular youth unemployment
- Few sports facilities in many of the 1950s housing estates and the 1960s 'overspill' estates
- High numbers of black and ethnic minorities in Manchester, Liverpool and the Lancashire cotton towns
- An increasing number of households with young families, as the 'baby boomer' generation began families of their own
- Rural isolation, even in the affluent parts of Lancashire and Cheshire, where many mothers were isolated by the loss of the family car to the husbands' workplace on weekdays.

3.29 The Regional Council decided to concentrate on these issues as a major plank of the development of the Strategy, 'the Disadvantaged Study'. However, as with previous studies of this nature, the assumed starting point was what could be done to solve the problem in 'areas of special need' from a *geographical* standpoint. The evidence from a more detailed analysis of the issues outlined in the previous paragraph suggested this approach would not solve most of the issues. It was not *where* people lived that mattered, but their lifestyle circumstances, reflecting the findings of 'A Sporting Chance?' (55)

3.30 As a result most of the work on this aspect of the Strategy focussed on a new approach; **the concept of 'identifying target groups' and proposing policies and practices to try to solve their particular issues.** And the negative image of solving 'disadvantage' was turned on its head as a result. The final Strategy documents were all about '*increasing opportunities for participation*' across the region in the future (65).

3.31 The Strategy identified fourteen such target groups. These were not 'priority groups' versus 'priority areas', to use the language of the day, but we were proposing an approach to increasing participation that involved what in 21st Century language would be termed 'market segmentation'. The Strategy recommended that, "All Local Authorities and Government agencies should include schemes aimed at the target groups in their future recreation programmes". **This was as relevant to the promotion and marketing of sporting opportunities in the existing and future indoor sports centres as it was to identifying innovative 'sports development' approaches to provision across the wider sporting community.**

3.32 The groups identified were:

- *Young children*
- *Teenagers aged 14-16*
- *School-leavers*
- *All unemployed people, but a priority on schemes to address long-term youth unemployment*
- *Young families with children under 5*
- *Elderly people, with a focus on elderly women*
- *Low-income households*
- *Ethnic minority communities*
- *Non-car owners*
- *Disabled people*
- *Housewives*
- *One parent families*
- *Workers with irregular hours*
- and finally, *Recent migrants to the area.*

3.33 It is not our intention to look at any of the proposed solutions at this stage of our analysis, but to turn instead to **the impact of the entire ‘evolutionary process’ that we have described on the proposals and recommendations set out in ‘Sport in the Community...The next Ten Years’ (59) and their impact on indoor multi-sport centres and the related research.**

‘Sport in the Community...The next Ten Years’ (59) - What did it Propose?

3.34 Not surprisingly, the analysis behind the Strategy highlighted many of the factors in its evolution that we have discussed above. **Growth in participation in indoor sports had doubled in the 1970s and the Strategy recognised that “the mainspring of the growth in indoor sport has been the multi-sports centres”.** However, it also recognised the facts that we have set out in our previous Section. “These [indoor multi-sport centres] are essentially local in their impact, and introduce new people to sport without emptying existing facilities or damaging clubs. Where they are readily accessible and well marketed and managed, they attract a wider use by the local population”. But the Strategy went on to confirm many of the other findings we have already highlighted; “there are groups which are low in participation – housewives, especially those with young children, semi- and unskilled workers, people over the age of 45, and the handicapped [sic], ethnic minorities and the unemployed”.

3.35 Although in its ‘claim for resources’ **the Strategy recognised the continuing contribution these types of facilities could make, with an identified need for a further 800 sports halls, 150 of them in areas of special need,** there were significant caveats. Firstly, the sources of the funding needed to change and “partnership schemes with sporting and other voluntary bodies and commercial interests will need to be widely used”, in addition to the contribution of Local Authorities and the wider public sector.

3.36 Secondly, the Strategy recognised the need for two of the shifts in the scale of the

provision that we highlighted in our introductory paragraph to this Section:

- “Some venues for *competitions and specialist events* are needed in some inner cities, large resorts, and other towns and rural areas”
- “But many *smaller and cheaper ones* are needed to make indoor sport more accessible. Many could be provided at modest cost by adapting schools, church halls, or industrial buildings, or by using a package design that the Council is developing”.

3.37 The *italics* in the paragraph above are our own, but it **emphasises the subtle shift from the typical provision model of the 1970s**. To increase participation, the Strategy recognised that The Sports Council “could have chosen to concentrate on markets which are buoyant and where success is fairly assured”, simply increasing the numbers within the existing groups of users aged between 25 and 45 and dominated by skilled manual workers and professional groups; **the predominant users of the indoor multi-sport centres**.

3.38 However, it recognised that “these groups already enjoy the lion’s share of the provision made by commercial, voluntary or public agencies”. As a result, the Strategy set out a different approach:

- “there will be greater extensions of participation and bigger benefits to be derived from encouraging those age groups on either side, the 13-24 and 45-59 year olds,” reflecting the findings from the Teesside sociological research that “any sports participation developed at these times is more likely to carry over into later periods of life”
- “although participation is made *possible* by facility provision, it is made *actual* only by sensitive management, inspiring leadership and energetic promotion”
- “it is evident that manpower [sic] rather than land or money, will become the most available resource in the later 1980s”.

3.39 In addition, **the shift towards funding and training resources for ‘sports development’ was a significant change from the 1970s**; “the ingenuity, skill and effort of staff, whether full or part time, paid or voluntary, will be the heart and machine that is needed to implement the Strategy”. As a result, it set out a range of sports development schemes to promote participation amongst the target groups, typical of the ‘market segmentation’ approach we have described in the context of the North West Regional Recreation Strategy. Much of this would need to embrace ‘intervention’ and ‘outreach work’.

3.40 However, it also set out the need for six types of ‘generic’ approach to be adopted more widely, **many of which could be promoted within the context of the management of indoor multi-sport centres**:

- Schemes to prevent drop-out
- Schemes based on existing social networks

- Transport based schemes
- Residential schemes
- Publicity oriented schemes
- Festival events

3.41 Finally in the context of the Strategy, The Sports Council committed itself to the introduction of “carefully selected **demonstration projects** [inviting] partnership schemes between Local Education Authorities, Local Authorities, sports clubs, voluntary organisations and commercial operators [and] those schemes selected will receive a high level of grant-aid and detailed monitoring”. It went on to say that it would seek out “experiments with brewers and Working Men’s Clubs”.

Delivering ‘Sport in the Community...The next Ten Years’ (59) – What Were the Implications for Indoor Multi-Sport Centres and Related Research?

3.42 The new emphases on publicity programmes, intervention schemes, outreach work, working with non-traditional partners, and delivering local initiatives through a new workforce of Sports Development Officers and local activity promoters might, on the face of it, seem to be marginalising the role of indoor multi-sport centres into the 1980s and beyond. However, as we will set out in the remainder of this Section, that would not be the case!

3.43 And although the ‘related’ research would change dramatically in its style and delivery between 1982 and 1992, the focus on ‘non-users’ would certainly not marginalise the research into the continuing impact of the indoor multi-sport centres.

3.44 **Let us begin with the research agenda.** We ended our second Section with the Howe Bridge Study (44); in our view probably the most sophisticated analysis of ‘catchment areas’ and the ‘impact’ of an indoor multi-sport centre ever carried out, given the before and after nature of the research. We concluded that it might be the last of this type of study given the changing political and policy agenda. The majority of academic and practitioner research programmes (and we place our own research efforts in the latter category!) were carried out by trained geographers and planners who had focussed their interests on ‘leisure research’. This was set to change dramatically.

3.45 Some eminent geographers would continue to be involved at the forefront of national research. These included Professor J. Allan Patmore of Hull University, who had chaired the Policy Planning Committee that delivered ‘Sport in the Community...The next Ten Years’ (59) and Professor H. Brian Rodgers of the University of Manchester, who had chaired the development of the North West Regional Recreational Strategy (65). And some geographers and planners would remain involved in research on the ground, notably Dr Sue Glyptis at Loughborough University and, of course, ourselves!

3.46 But there were ‘new names in the frame’ by the early 80s; names that would become synonymous with the type of ‘leisure research’ that was addressing the new agenda. These included:

- Drs Rhona and Robert Rappoport of the Institute for Family and Environmental Research, specialising in family research issues
- Dr Fred Coalter of North London Polytechnic, and later at the University of Edinburgh and Moray House College, specialising in sports sociology and related provision issues
- Dr Michael Smith of the University of Salford, another sports sociologist
- Dr Jonathan Long of the University of Edinburgh, and later Leeds Metropolitan University, tackling issues relating to the broad social agenda and specialising in research with older people
- Dr Tess Kay at Loughborough University, tackling issues of marginalisation
- Professor Tony Travis at the University of Birmingham, looking at the changing role of Local Authorities
- Dr Chris Gratton at Manchester Polytechnic and Dr Peter Taylor at North Staffordshire Polytechnic, both later at Sheffield Hallam University, focussing on the economic issues surrounding sport
- Stanley Parker at the Leisure Studies Association, who together with The Sports Council's Brian Rees, often took an overview of the changing agenda
- and Bob Lentell, initially part of the pioneering Action Sport outreach team, and later at North London Polytechnic.

3.47 Perhaps the most significant shift in the nature of some of the research into the new agenda was a focus on what was styled 'action research'. It was first proposed and implemented by Dr Mayer Hillman and Anne Whalley, who led the 'Leisure and the Quality of Life' research programme on behalf of the Department of the Environment between 1974 and 1976 (66).

3.48 The key difference with this style of research is that the researchers are integrated into the delivery of projects from the planning stage, through their initial establishment and throughout the life of the work on the ground. What makes this approach different is that, whilst retaining an independent view from an evaluation standpoint, the research process is able to influence the development of the project over time; a totally different approach to the concept of 'catchment area and use/user' analysis of what has already been provided, or the more usual approach adopted by most public bodies at the time of commissioning a research programme *after* the projects have begun or the buildings built!

3.49 We make no apologies at this stage for focussing the majority of the rest of this Section on the 'demonstration projects' proposed in 'Sport in the Community...The next Ten Years' (59) as, together with our colleague Deborah McDonald, we were to conduct the 'action research programme' linked to these projects for a ten-year period between 1983 and 1993! **What makes these projects important to the current topic is the overt emphasis on working with the groups of people in our communities who were identified in the Strategy as *not* usually accessing indoor sports centres.** We have shown earlier why we believe this was the case; we will now look at what was done to try to reverse this situation.

3.50 Before moving on to the 'demonstration projects', though, we will **take a look at the role of indoor multi-sport centres in other areas of the implementation of**

the Strategy in the years that followed its publication. To address some of the priorities identified in the Strategy, The Sports Council launched three high-profile national publicity campaigns, but they were dependent for their success on the partners in the community, particularly the indoor sports centres, to deliver the 'goods' on the ground.

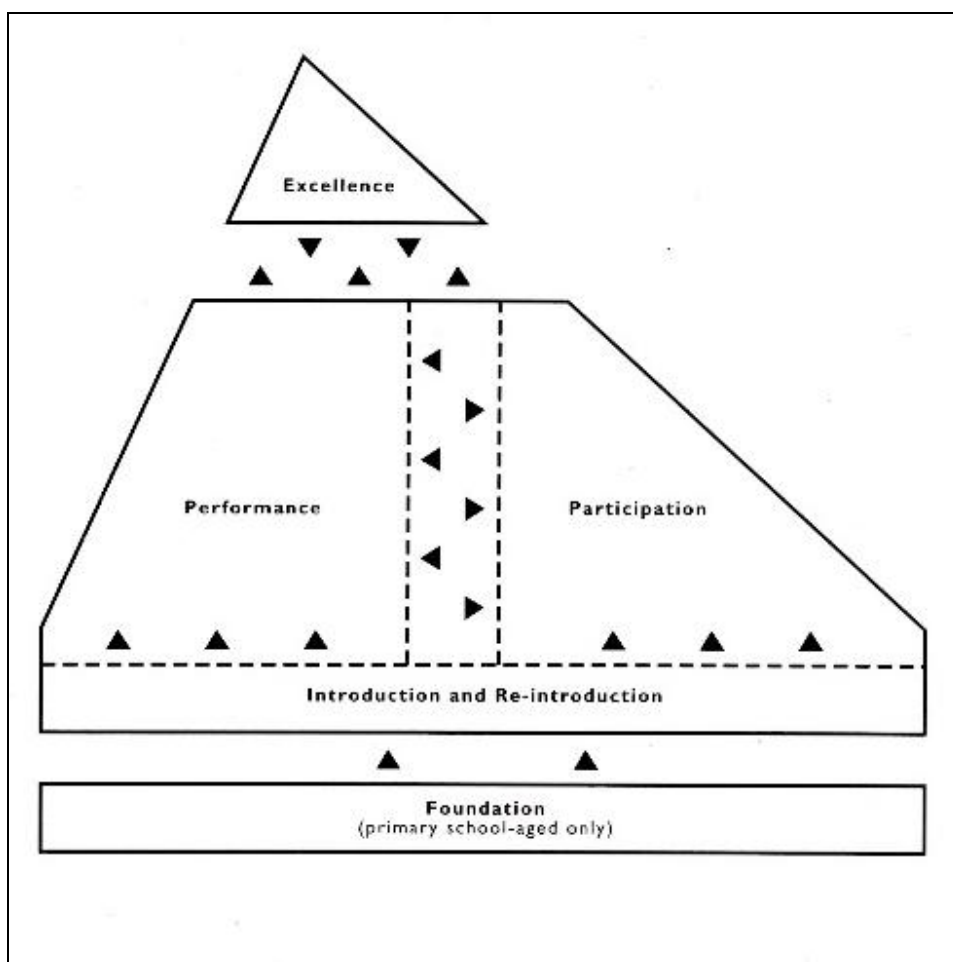
- 3.51 The first campaign, launched at the end of 1982 was focussed on the older age group, with the slogan, '*50-plus! All to Play For*'. **It was embraced enthusiastically at the time by most leisure centre managers with the promotion of local schemes and 'come and try it' packages linked to the activities thought most likely to attract this age group.** Generally speaking, this campaign was well received and subsequent analysis found it had a considerable impact in encouraging this age group to consider trying out some of the activities on offer. It also had a major influence on sports centre programming and continues to do so to this day. Very few centres do not have some form of age related programme, often now re-branded under 'healthy living' or 'active lifestyles'. However, the campaign did not seem to have any long-term impact on *continued* participation by individuals, which was the stated aim of the Strategy.
- 3.52 The second campaign was, however, generally considered to be a disaster! In an attempt to attract teenagers between the ages of 16 and 19, the campaign adopted the language and style of publicity thought to be 'in vogue' with this age group. No one involved in sport at the time will ever forget the slogan, 'Ever Thought of Sport?', and the publicity material linked to the 'switched-on' image of young people with light bulbs on their heads playing sport while their contemporary non-participants just sat around doing nothing! Designed to appeal to the generation in tune with the 'alternative comedians' popular at the time, it was fronted by Alexei Sayle with TV advertisements and other linked visual material, together with his famous appeal in his London accent; "Oh! Ever Fort o' Spall? **It was no fault of the partners in indoor sports centres that this approach was not successful. As with many teenage fads, the appeal of these 'famous' people was short-lived and actually popular only with a small segment of the teenage population.**
- 3.53 Nevertheless it was a lesson for the future that needed to be taken on board by everyone involved in sports development and in managing sports facilities; **to attract young people the product and its presentation needed to be ultra-sensitive to changing fashions, changing attitudes and most importantly, locally expressed needs.** We will return to this theme later in this Section in the context of women's participation.
- 3.54 The third campaign launched in 1988 had the simple title, 'What's Your Sport?' Again, it sought to bring non-participants in to sport, this time of all ages, by better publicising the available opportunities. Based around Local Authority information centres and other local sources of information such as libraries, the campaign helped to publicise not just *where* facilities were, either Local Authority managed or sporting clubs, but more specific details of the sports on offer and how to access them. Again, **there was a significant role to be played by indoor sports centres in responding positively to any subsequent enquiries and in running 'come and try it' and 'taster' sessions.** Although this campaign was thought to

be successful in the short term, the task of continually updating the information available meant that in most cases the long-term impact was limited.

National Demonstration Projects (NDPs)(67)

- 3.55 So let's now move on to the **National Demonstration Projects (NDPs)**. Following an extensive trawl across The Sports Council's Regions for projects which fulfilled the aims of the Strategy, particularly for innovative approaches and what we will term 'alternative partnerships', over 20 potential schemes were submitted to the Council's newly-established Participation Development Committee, chaired by the Council's Vice-Chair Judith Mackay and led by Mike Collins and Bev Stephens (at the time Head of Research and Head of Facilities respectively). The Council's Education Sub-Committee was also invited to submit proposals, reflecting the desire to involve Local Education Authorities in the NDP programme.
- 3.56 At this stage, six schemes were selected, each being offered an initial three-year funding package beginning in early 1984. During the next seven years further selection trawls took place, with an additional nine schemes joining the NDP programme, the final three schemes launched in mid-1990. The initial monitoring and evaluation research programme was designed to report on the development of each scheme in three phases. Phase 1 would examine 'Establishing the Project' over the first six-months; Phase 2 would report in detail on each of the projects' progress over 'The First Two Years', and Phase 3 was planned to be a 'Final Evaluation Report'. Because of limitations on staff resources and different needs, over time, to 'promote' the messages, these proposed reporting patterns would differ for each project over the following ten years. However, the 'action research' philosophy of using the on-going research findings to influence the progress of the projects would remain in place (67).
- 3.57 With their emphasis on outreach programmes, each scheme being led by 'a Sports Development Officer' (although as we will show their titles varied to match their circumstances!), supported in most cases by assistants or a team of intervention workers, **the question 'what has all of this got to do with indoor multi-sport centres?' is a legitimate one to ask at this point.**
- 3.58 To answer that question, we need to fast-forward for the moment to the end of 1991 and the publication by The Sports Council of a summary report on the NDP programme as a whole, 'Action Not Words. National Demonstration Projects. Major Lessons and Issues for Sports Development' (68). **One of the most significant aspects of this report was the proposal, in the light of the NDP evidence, to refine the so-called 'sports development continuum'** which had become an accepted part of the sporting agenda during the 1980s. Our new model, which became known colloquially as 'the sailing ship model' (because of its design on paper, as seen below!), soon received widespread acceptance within the sporting community, particularly being endorsed by our boss, Derek Casey, who was then Director of National Services within The Sports Council, but who had been influential in a previous role in formulating the definitions of the existing 'pyramid' model.

The new Sports Development Continuum model



3.59 Two of the proposed changes to the model were important in the context of the future role of indoor multi-sport centres. The first was **to recognise the importance of the ‘introduction’ and ‘re-introduction’ processes:**

- “the value of developing new partnerships to achieve what might best be termed mass introduction”
- “and to recognise the importance of ‘re-introduction’ for many adults whose previous sporting interests may have lapsed”.

3.60 The second, and probably in our view, the most important refinement of the model was **the proposed inter-relationship between ‘participation’ and ‘performance’**. In this context, it is important to remind ourselves of the accepted ‘definition’ of performance at the time. It was *not* the more familiar 21st century interpretation of ‘performance athletes on the competitive stage’, but was defined as follows: “amongst those already participating the opportunity to improve their performance from whatever base they start; where the desire to improve is the key factor for involvement and where ‘excellence’ is measured on a personal as opposed to a public scale”.

3.61 The report noted two contributory factors that were critical to the proposed more complex inter-relationship:

- “the development of opportunities for participants to progress within each of their chosen activities must have a high priority. ‘Mass performance’ is definitely in demand
- however, “we now have a growing body of evidence to support [the notion] of a performance decision point where [for many participants] a conscious decision is often taken to remain at a certain level of competence or commitment, ***usually within a specific social participation context***”.

3.62 The bold italics above are our own in the context of the current topic. **We will show below that for many individuals within the NDP programme this specific social participation context was often a local indoor multi-sport centre.** We went on to assert in ‘Action Not Words’ (68) that, “The Sports Council [should urge] its partners in Local Authorities and governing bodies to look closely at the existing structure of sport at a local level”.

3.63 To date in this Section we have *deliberately* made the supposed distinction between the ‘facility provision, policies and management linked to indoor sports centres, and the associated research agenda, of the 1972-1982 period’ and the ‘outreach, intervention and sports development models in community sport, together with the associated research agenda, of the 1982-1992 period’. **We hope to show in the paragraphs that follow that the evidence from the NDP programme showed this to be a false dichotomy.**

3.64 So let us take a trip around the country to see how 11 of the 15 NDPs worked in partnership with their local indoor multi-sport centres. The remaining four NDPs had objectives that were not relevant to this approach: in Dudley the project focussed on giving primary school teachers better skills to give their pupils the necessary ‘foundation’ in PE and games; in Cheltenham students training to be PE teachers were encouraged to develop better practices to make links between school and community sport when they graduated; in Langbaugh, on Teesside, the community motor-sport project aimed to tackle some of the nuisance problems caused by teenage motor-bike ‘joy-riders’ by introducing them to more formal motorsports opportunities; in the North West region, the ‘Sport’s Cool’ project focussed on using secondary schools as a basis for links with primary schools and the local community - the prototype for the 1990s ‘School Sports Coordinators’ programme.

3.65 We will begin in Norwich, where the **Activities Promoter for Women** NDP began its life explicitly linked to the three sports centres in the city and sponsored by the Recreation Department. The aim was to use publicity, outreach work and ‘come and try it’ sessions to fill the downtime in the facilities by attracting women users. However, we must stress that these centres were not indoor multi-sport centres within the definition of our current topic! None of them had a sports hall because all three were converted premises: the Duke Street Centre was a converted two-storey school, with a martial arts centre in an adjacent former church; the Crome Centre was a converted single-storey school, with a new purpose-built indoor bowls centre in what was originally the quadrangle; and, the Norman Centre was also a converted school. It was initially felt that these more informal surroundings might be better placed to attract women than the more intimidating atmosphere of the conventional indoor centres in other parts of the country. We will return to this

latter assertion in the closing paragraphs of this Section. In addition, minor adjustments were made to the centres to cater for the new women users, including the provision at each site of a new 'women-only' multi-gym room, although we did comment at the time that the pink curtains provided at the Crome Centre were somewhat stereotypical!

- 3.66 And indeed this 'stereotyping theme' dominated our early evaluation. Although some women *were* attracted to the daytime sessions, simply providing these sorts of opportunities did not solve the problem that many of them then faced of continuing the activities. For example, the very popular 'introduction to self-defence' session on a Tuesday morning did not fit in with any of the opportunities to continue similar activities, and the introductory fencing session on a Wednesday afternoon did not fit in with the fencing club's Tuesday and Friday night club structure. We concluded that "the stranglehold of the project's objectives", simply to fill downtime, was limiting the project's success in achieving longer-term participation. **In 'Action Not Words' (68) we summarised this by emphasising "the need for a 'participation' structure which complements the performance ladder"; an important lesson at the time for everyone involved in the programming and management of indoor sports centres.**
- 3.67 As a result, the project's objectives were widened: making use of other facilities across the city, including Norwich City FC's Community Sports Hall; links to a wider range of sports clubs in the city, including outdoor and water sports; and diversifying the project's own opportunities into evening and weekend sessions for women at the three centres. For the next three years the project's success in attracting new women and giving them the opportunities to continue their interests at a time and place that suited them enabled the City Council to mainstream the Activities Promoter's post, significantly though, now housed within the Community Services Department emphasising the change in direction of the work.
- 3.68 We will now move to Cambridgeshire, where a similar post was created in partnership with the Federation of Women's Institutes. The **WI Activities Promoter** NDP sought to attract women in to sport through the network of Women's Institutes across the County, using the many church halls, village halls and community halls where the formal monthly meetings were held. The project's success in introducing aerobics and carpet bowls into the venues was matched by the enthusiasm of WI members and their relatives to 'come and try' a wide range of sports. Taking on board the lessons of the early days of the Norwich project, the Promoter sought partnerships which were able to deliver activities beyond the initial introduction, ensuring sports clubs and other venues were in a position to offer membership to the women. **And significantly, many of these partnerships were with the indoor multi-sport centres across the County.** Centres in Soham, Wisbech, Peterborough, March, St Ives, Cambridge and Ely all played an important part in the project's programme. **As a result of this successful approach, we noted in 'Action Not Words' (68) that in the future "we believe it is important to seek out precisely what any particular group of women, once attracted, want out of their sporting experience".**
- 3.69 Four aspects were important for **everyone involved in promoting opportunities for women, including, of course, the indoor multi-sport centres:**

- Catering for women who wanted to join a club or improve through a coaching programme after their 'come and try it' experience
- Preparing options for individuals to progress at their own chosen level and social context
- Matching the atmosphere or level of any activity to the needs of the women, but also preparing to react if those needs changed over time
- And for groups who had become self-supporting, maintaining contact on a long-term basis. We will return to this aspect of sports development in the context of our next NDP.

3.70 The mostly rural context of Cambridgeshire was matched in nearby Northamptonshire where the **Community Sport and Recreation Development Programme (COMSPORT)** NDP was sponsored by the County Council's Leisure and Libraries Department. Here the aim was to introduce sport in to rural villages and suburban estates by a partnership with the Manpower Services Commission (MSC). Teams of MSC workers were based in the main towns of the County, but with 'mobile' sports equipment, and local programmes of activity on offer in many of the rural villages and the suburbs of Northampton. Many of the project's activities became self-supporting and independent of COMSPORT, but here the concept of long term 'support' at a distance was often vital to their continued success; what we termed in 'Action Not Words' (68) as sports development workers "adopting the role of a *guardian angel* to solve any problems and offer sympathetic support".

3.71 However, as the COMSPORT project became more mature, it was clear that partnerships with the individual Local Authorities within the County (Wellingborough, Northampton, East Northamptonshire, South Northamptonshire, Kettering and Corby) would help deliver the project's wider objectives of sustaining participation beyond the initial introductory phase. This partnership was eventually fundamental to the long term support for the project at the end of its three year Sports Council funding agreement, with each of the Authorities contributing financially, but **it also meant that the project could negotiate access to the indoor multi-sport centres. The centres in Wellingborough, Daventry, Kettering, Corby and Northampton all became an integral part of COMSPORT's sports development work**, together with some Local Authority controlled youth centres which had sports facilities. This type of partnership between the 'traditional' Local Authority Recreation Departments and the newly-created Sports Development Units would become more and more common throughout the 1980s and, with the introduction of Compulsory Competitive Tendering, many Local Authorities specifically wrote access for their local Sports Development Units into the first round of their leisure centre contracts.

3.72 For our next NDP, we must return to Teesside! The aim set out in 'Sport in the Community...The next Ten Years' (59) to seek partnerships with Working Men's Clubs came to fruition with the **Associated Sport and Recreation (ASR)** NDP, sponsored by Cleveland County Council. Based on an earlier pilot, a consortium of

three Working Men's Clubs joined up to support an MSC funded programme to develop sporting opportunities, both for their members and for their local communities. With a 'drop-in and take part' philosophy, the project provided multi-gym equipment in each of the clubs, and the regular programme of subsidised aerobics classes, 'olde tyme' dancing, indoor hockey, yoga and carpet bowls was well-supported, with a fourth club joining the consortium in the second year. Many of the participants were local elderly people, male and female, but the project also attracted young unemployed people and large numbers of local women used the lunchtime aerobics classes.

- 3.73 However, **it was the project's wider objectives of introducing ASR 'members' to other facilities in the Teesside area by providing transport that were to forge the project's links with the local indoor multi-sport centres and local swimming pools.** Indeed, the partnership with the nearby Stockton North End Centre (the Tilery) was so successful that, in the third year, the project 'block-booked' the centre during the daytime and one of its Sports Development Workers was housed full-time at the centre to develop opportunities for the project's members, including a five-a-side soccer league, a basketball 'club', introductory badminton lessons and indoor hockey, all available to ASR participants at subsidised rates.
- 3.74 Two NDPs were established in partnership with the local Health Education Units. The **Health and Recreation Team (HART)** NDP in Liverpool had a full time Activities Development Officer housed on the site of the Princes Park Health Centre in Toxteth. **The Staff Health Issues and Fitness Training Scheme (SHIFTS)** NDP was based in Nottingham, employing two full time Development Officers. HART worked in partnership with the health professionals at the Health Centre, promoting exercise and fitness for the practice's patients. SHIFTS worked with three local employers to promote exercise and fitness and the concept of a 'healthy lifestyle'; the Health Education Unit's own staff, Nottinghamshire County Council's staff, and staff at the Raleigh Cycle Works.
- 3.75 Both projects promoted their own activities, HART utilising the 'Look After Yourself' six week fitness package across a range of venues in Merseyside, and SHIFTS using the Trent Bridge Cricket Ground's training facilities and the nearby Local Authority managed Trent Pool Fitness Suite to deliver exercise and fitness sessions. However, **the work in Liverpool also involved the concept of 'GP referrals', building a close working relationship with the new SASH Sports Centre in the heart of Toxteth and Picton Leisure Centre to 'receive' new participants, while SHIFTS provided information and practical advice for its 'clients' on opportunities within the Leisure Centres managed by the City of Nottingham, Broxtowe Council and Rushcliffe Council.** Indeed, the overall conclusion in 'Action Not Words' (68) to the 'health related approach' to increasing participation was that it was best seen as a two stage approach. The first stage of promoting better health through exercise and fitness was best led and funded by the 'Health Sector', whilst the second stage ought to be delivered by the local sports development system, including indoor multi-sport centres; "[The Sports Council should] urge its sports development partners to focus their attention on the best means of getting potential new participants who have learnt the health value of exercise into regular sporting participation".

- 3.76 A similar two stage approach was used in Southampton and Portsmouth, but with a totally different set of potential 'clients'! **The Solent Sports Counselling** NDP forged a partnership with Hampshire Probation Service to investigate, and later prove the value of, using sport and exercise as a tool to encourage Probation Service clients to lead a better life. Of course, claims that 'sport could prevent re-offending' were seldom proven, but what was clear was the value of sport in helping to give clients some purpose to their lives and building new social structures that might get them out of what the Project Leader described in 'Action Not Words' (68) as "the products of bed-sit land" and the stigma of long-term unemployment. The two stage process was simple; firstly, the provision of 'drop-in centres' around the two-cities, delivered again by MSC funded staff, to which Probation Officers referred their clients, or where word of mouth within the area attracted young people 'at risk', particularly those in care or in bail hostels.
- 3.77 Having built their trust that the project was 'there for them', the next stage was to introduce them to sporting opportunities. The sight of a 'team' of young offenders taking part in the Totton Indoor Cricket League, and beating teams of accountants, solicitors and shopkeepers was one of the most satisfying experiences of the NDP action research! **And the role played by the local indoor centres in the two cities in accommodating opportunities for five-a-side soccer teams, hosting some of the project's fitness sessions, and providing opportunities for the important socialisation process was a significant contribution to the work.**
- 3.78 In North East England, the **Every Body Active** NDP used a similar two stage approach, again with a very different type of individual; a focus on young people with disabilities. Based at Sunderland Polytechnic, some of the academic staff within the Polytechnic and colleagues at Newcastle-upon-Tyne Polytechnic and the Fieldfare Trust in Sheffield drove the project, with a full time administrator and an outreach worker delivering partnerships with community sport providers in the Sunderland area. As with the experience on the South Coast, the key to getting young disabled people to take part in sport was initially about *developing trust* and *fostering confidence* in them, and at the same time *developing action plans* with leisure providers' staff and *delivering appropriate training programmes* to give the staff the confidence needed to work with young disabled people.
- 3.79 The second phase involved the basic *provision of opportunities*, including the development of awareness within the community of disabled people, providing support services and in many cases transport, and identifying restrictions. The final part of this second stage is to enable the young people to become involved in *planning and reviewing* their own activities. Three schemes within the programme focussed on providing outdoor activities, developing training programmes for PE staff in schools, and training sports coaches to work with disabled people. **However, the fourth and fifth schemes, promoting swimming and 'Every Body for Leisure', were both dependent on the Crowtree Leisure Centre in Sunderland for their development and delivery.**
- 3.80 With the aim to deliver each of the stages of development identified above, the Centre's Management Team were instrumental to the success of the project's work. This included:

- making improvements to the access and use of the changing and social facilities at the Centre to suit disabled people
- providing swimming sessions exclusively for the use of the project's young disabled people, many of whom had initially been attracted to swimming by special lessons in small school pools around the Sunderland area
- providing dry-sport opportunities within the Centre's programme, including establishing a 'boccia' club
- promoting and publicising 'the Crowtree Young Disabled People's Club', which eventually formed the basis for the vital involvement of the young people in planning and reviewing the provision at the Centre
- introducing subsidised use for the project's 'buddy' system, where local able-bodied people not only provided transport, but also took part in the sporting activities alongside their disabled buddies.

3.81 **It was hoped that by publicising these approaches within the centre, other indoor multi-sport centres might consider adopting this 'total approach' to catering for the needs of young disabled people.** We summarised this need for a fresh look at the issues in 'Action Not Words' (68): "in the past, programmes for people with disabilities have promoted opportunities and simply hoped for involvement; often all concerned have been disappointed. Positive action, trust, and confidence building must not be overlooked if future programmes are to be successful". From our perspective in 2017, it is clear that these lessons have not always been learned!

3.82 This 'total approach', and the emphasis on confidence building and trust, were also vital components in our next example in Scunthorpe; the **Ethnic Minorities Recreation** NDP. Although the HART project had worked closely with the black African-Caribbean and Somali communities in the Toxteth area, the aim of the Scunthorpe project was to work with the large Muslim, Hindu and Sikh communities in the town and, in particular, to attempt to address the needs of women within those communities. Led by the Recreation and Leisure Department and by Humberside County Council's Education Department, the project sought to **learn lessons as to how best to make the indoor multi-sports facilities, both in the community and on school sites, and the swimming pool at Scunthorpe Leisure Centre, more attractive to these minority communities.**

3.83 The 'staged' approach was again a significant factor:

- careful consultation with the 'leaders' of the Hindu, Sikh and Islamic faith groups and the appointment of two Development Officers from within those communities established the project's goodwill 'on the ground'

- adaptations to the programming and delivery at the facilities, including women-only swimming sessions at the Leisure Centre, with appropriate privacy and, obviously, women lifeguards and support staff
- a focus on the 'value' of exercise within the context of 'leisure education', where success in involving the women from the communities in 'lifestyle' and 'cookery' courses had already been achieved
- recognising the need for 'alternative programming' for young adults employed in the service industry, particularly the restaurants in the town; in particular, the dedicated use of school sports halls at weekends proved popular
- the recognition that 'awareness training' for all of the Departments' staff of cultural differences within the individual faith communities might play a vital role.

3.84 The penultimate project in our analysis is the **Active Life Styles** NDP in Coventry, which promoted sporting involvement amongst the pupils in four Secondary schools in the city, later successfully extended to seven Secondary schools. At the time regarded as The Sports Council's 'flagship' education based project most of the development work took place within the schools. It was in many ways the prototype for the 'School Sport Partnerships' that would be introduced across the country in the late 1990s!

3.85 However, in the context of our current topic, **the involvement of Coventry Sport and Leisure Centre and, from 1987, the project's partnership with the new privately operated Centre AT7 (the brainchild of the former athlete David Moorcroft) reflected the need to introduce young people to opportunities beyond school.** The project's 'health-related fitness and body awareness courses' within the curriculum were supported by visits to the two centres; 58% of fifth and sixth form students when questioned in our surveys identified a healthy lifestyle with taking part in sports and exercise. **And the project's 'Education for Leisure courses', linked to targeted information of opportunities in the community, including the indoor sports centres and swimming pools, seemed to have had an important impact.**

3.86 The surveys of young people carried out by the project during their final year at school in 1985 showed clearly the desire to continue participation after leaving school:

- 73% of all pupils wanted to continue at least one of their sporting interests
- 37% had a firm intention of taking up a new sport
- 64% wanted to try a new sport.

3.87 However, our follow-up survey three years later revealed the reality of post-school participation, described in The Sports Council publication 'Young People and Sport - Myths and Realities' (69). Most of the project's former pupils were still active three years after leaving school (78%), but many had not been able to realise their expressed ambitions to get involved in a particular activity. Only 30%

of those intending to take up a particular new sport had done so and only 8% of those wanting to try a specific sport had succeeded. Nevertheless, irrespective of their previous intentions, 36% of all of the respondents *had* taken up a new sport not previously mentioned by them in the original survey. Despite the fact that many of the sports originally mentioned had lost significant numbers of their future participants, the evidence showed that for most people the so-called 'Wolfenden Gap' was a 'drop-off' in individual levels of participation and not 'a drop-out'. Our conclusion in 'Action Not Words' (68) was that there was now "a sports-literate generation, whose interests are highly flexible and changeable. Future Sports Council work ought to concentrate not on highlighting a spark of interest, typified by the 'Ever Thought of Sport?' Campaign, but on enabling the existing spark of interest to turn into a flame". **The role of indoor multi-sport centres, and the clubs within them, would be a significant contribution to this process for those sports predominantly catered for by these centres in the early 1990s and we have no reason to believe that this is not still the case in 2017.**

- 3.88 For our final NDP we head for Ipswich and the partnership with Tollemache and Cobbold Brewery. The Brewery employed a Sports Development Officer within its Marketing Department, with the enthusiastic support of the Marketing Director, under the brand name of "**Tolly's Sportsline**". Tolly Cobbold were proud of the fact that they were seen by many local people in North Essex and Suffolk as a 'community-orientated' business and the project's objectives of taking sport into village and suburban public houses fitted this brand image. For 18 months the project successfully developed keep fit, carpet bowls, and dance activities in the lounge bars of Tolly's pubs across the region and **also successfully publicised the opportunities available in the local indoor sports centres and other commercially operated facilities, such as the dry ski slope and water based activities, often organising 'pub trips' to these venues.**
- 3.89 However, despite these 'sports development successes', the *reality* of partnerships with the commercial sector became clear when a new Marketing Director took over. It appeared to the Sports Development Officer that the 'community image' of the brewery was no longer important within the Marketing Department's strategy. It was also already clear that, although many of the pub landlords were happy to work with the sports project, the 'brewery' itself was regarded with an element of mistrust and, in some cases, outright antagonism! This became more evident after the change of emphasis within the Marketing Department and the Tolly's Sportsline project was terminated, to use the familiar sacked football manager language, by mutual consent after a little under two years.
- 3.90 To conclude the 1982-1992 period we return to what was one of the last contributions to the indoor sports centre research agenda by Tony Veal before his departure to Australia. In 1985 the Polytechnic of North London was commissioned by the Greater London Council under its 'Stress Boroughs' funding programme to take a different look at the 'performance' of seven 'Leisure Centres in Inner London', including the London Boroughs of Hackney, Southwark, Lewisham, Haringey, Islington, Camden and Brent. **We are highlighting this research because of the different emphasis to the usual research agenda of the 1972 - 1982 period which we have described in Section 2 and because it**

makes a useful link to the predominant agenda of the post-1992 period which we will discuss in Section 4.

3.91 The objectives of the research were wide ranging, but significantly the focus was on the 'management' of the centres as well as their users. Specific objectives included:

- an examination of the centre's stated policies and objectives
- an examination of each centre's programme and the effectiveness of their marketing strategy
- the organisational efficiency of each of the staffing structures
- and the pricing policies of each of the centres.

3.92 We do not intend to look at the performance of each of the centres revealed in this research report (70), but **some of the general conclusions were fundamental, and frightening, at the time!** The authors noted that "the centres are making a significant contribution to the quality of life of Inner London, but this contribution could be even greater if management were guided by clearer policy objectives against which progress could be measured". They were very critical of data collection methods, in particular with regard to delivering on a wide social agenda; "how can an Authority know whether it is providing for the whole community or is achieving 'Sport for All' if this sort of information is not available"? They noted the "relatively poor financial performance of some centres due to their failure to generate sufficient income", but felt that "managers could be given more freedom to experiment with special events in slack periods, to vary prices to create 'special offers', and so on. A more commercial approach need not involve abandonment of social objectives".

3.93 But the authors reserved their biggest criticism for the 'image' of the centres, and we will let the quotes below finish this Section on a worrying note for everyone involved in the world of indoor sports centres in the late 1980s:

- "generally speaking the centres studied offer a rather sombre, even forbidding face to the world"
- "they do not, from the outside, or even from the inside, appear to be 'fun' places"
- "in the recent campaign against rate-capping, colourful banners have proclaimed the existence of Local Authority facilities to the citizen: perhaps in future such banners can be used to tell them what goes on inside!"
- **"the image projected by many Local Authority leisure facilities is a dour, 'municipal', inward-looking image, whereas a facility which is meant to be providing an enjoyable service to the community should have an image which is bright, outgoing and welcoming"**.

Section 4

1992 - 2006 The Return of the User Surveys or the 'Rise of the Consultants'

- 4.1 We will begin this Section with a look at some of the policy, provision and management factors which impinged on the research agenda around indoor multi-sport centres from 1992 - 2006 and a quick review of the wider 'sports development' picture during this period which would also change the focus of research.
- 4.2 By 1992 there had already been fundamental changes to the delivery of leisure services under the Local Government Act, 1988 (71), with the introduction of **Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT)**. The first stage of CCT to affect sports and leisure services was its introduction to 'grounds maintenance' which had an impact on outdoor pitches, courts etc, and the second stage of CCT saw its extension into 'leisure centre management' in 1989. We highlight the research implications later.
- 4.3 Also during this period, The Sports Council had embraced the concept of a '**Facilities Planning Model**' (**FPM**). The aim was to solve the un-resolved issue of *supply and demand*. Driven initially by the Scottish Sports Council, it involved the collection of significant amounts of data over relatively small geographical areas and used a predictive 'model' to estimate the need in the future to increase or rationalise the supply side of the equation. Given our own attempts in the past to solve some of these issues, we were both sceptical of its contribution, but nevertheless it became the predominant planning tool and an important contributor to the concept of 'planning gain' with housing development companies post 2000. (We think it is only fair to say that we remain sceptical of the accuracy of the FPM to this day!).
- 4.4 In 1994 the launch of the National Lottery led to an immediate impact on provision through the introduction of the **National Lottery Sports Fund**. In addition to a significant contribution to improving the standard of facilities at sports clubs around the country, the substantial sums available through this new funding stream saw the creation of new multi-sports centres, once again led by Local Authorities.
- 4.5 The partnership between the Lottery Funding and Local Authorities became the driving force behind this new wave of provision until 2006 when Derek Mapp became Chairman of The Sports Council which, as we will note below, had been re-branded by then as Sport England! Not only did Derek Mapp introduce a new working relationship between the Sport England Main Board (the Council Members) and the Regional Sports Boards (created by Richard Caborn when he became Minister for Sport in 2001), but he sought to introduce a new working relationship between public sector funding and private/commercial finance. These partnerships were seen as fundamental to his new ideas for 21st Century sports provision; **Sports Villages**.

4.6 In 1999, Sport England introduced a new **National Benchmarking Service** for sports and leisure centres which, over time, would influence the *management* of multi-sport centres. We will return to its impact on the research agenda later.

4.7 So what was going on in the wider 'sports development' world during our final period under review?

- The early 1990s saw a major focus on young people, with the National Coaching Foundation creating '**Champion Coaching**' in partnership with Local Authorities, and the ensuing creation of Youth Sport Managers to drive this partnership (72)
- The short lived National Sports Development Centres (73) helped develop another project aimed at young people 'the 8-12 Playsport project'. By the beginning of 1995 this had morphed into the 'TOP Sport' and 'TOP Play' programmes which, together with 'TOPClub', would be managed by the newly created **Youth Sport Trust**. Led by Sue Campbell (later, of course, Baroness Campbell of Loughborough, and named by the *Women's Hour* radio programme as one of the 100 most influential women in the country) and Steve Grainger, the Trust would play a significant role in sport (and sports politics!) for the next 15 years
- The continued focus on young people was emphasised by The Sports Council's creation of the **National Junior Sport Programme** in 1996, with a new emphasis on working with schools and the introduction of two kitemark schemes; Sports Mark and Active Mark
- In 1996, the 'splitting' of the responsibilities of The Sports Council between the new public bodies **UK Sport** and the **English Sports Council**, and the re-branding of the latter as **Sport England** in 1997 created a new emphasis within the sports development continuum
- Perhaps the most significant influence on the sporting agenda through this period was the announcement by Virginia Bottomley (then Culture Secretary) in April 1997 that '**revenue schemes**' **would be able to access Lottery Funding**. This idea had previously been rejected by Government as it was seen to 'silt-up' funding and lock it in for future years
- As a result of the emergence of this new funding stream, Sport England launched the so called **Big Picture** in 1998, with some more new terminology for the Lottery funded programmes; Active Schools, Active Communities, Active Sports and the World Class programme (World Class Start, World Class Potential, and World Class Performance)
- Active Schools focussed on the creation of '**School Sports Partnerships**' led by the Youth Sport Trust with funding from the Lottery initially, and then substantial funding from the Department for Education. Active Communities was driven by a Development Fund ('**ACDF**') from the

Lottery aimed at small community schemes. **‘Active Sports’** provided a ten year partnership with governing bodies for ten sports popular with young people, and the **‘World Class Programme’** provided Lottery support for elite athletes, and continues to do so to this day, led by UK Sport

- In 2000 two more important developments hit the scene. **‘Sport Action Zones’** would provide Lottery Funding to develop a Needs Assessment and Action Plan across 12 deprived areas of the country with a five year funding programme and their own ‘Magnet Fund’ to attract partnership funding. And to help deliver the ‘Active’ programmes, Sport England created **‘County Sports Partnerships’**, which have played a significant part in sports development around the country and, in some people’s eyes, have contributed to the substantial reduction in Sport England’s Regional staff as a result
- Finally, a major breakthrough in research funding arrived in 2005 with the launch by Sport England of the £6m a year nationwide **‘Active People Survey’** to get accurate *representative* data on sports participation for the first time. It has provided this data for over ten years, being replaced by the **‘Active Lives Survey’** in 2015 to update the research methodology.

4.8 So let’s return to our principal focus on research. Much of Sport England’s research programme post 1994 was to focus on the impact of the new Lottery funded sports facilities, both within sports clubs and those provided by the public sector. The majority of our own research would continue to focus on ‘sports development’ issues throughout the 1992-2006 period, including the evaluation of the majority of the new Lottery programmes outlined in the previous paragraph and helping to design the Active People Survey.

4.9 However, **within The Sports Council/Sport England a renewed focus on research around indoor sports centres and swimming pools would emerge**, led in the main by Nick Rowe, who was head of the Facilities Research team in 1992, but went on to become Head of Research and, during one of Sport England’s restructuring periods, Head of Strategy, Research and Planning (2003-2006). Nick was to become a major player in the world of sports research until his retirement in 2013.

4.10 In theory, the **introduction of CCT** should have helped solve many of Tony Veal’s criticisms outlined graphically at the end of the last Section. Local Authority Leisure Departments would now have to specify much more clearly defined ‘service objectives’ and ‘methods of implementation’ in order to take the tendering process forward. This would normally need to address the *types of users* (eg women, young people, older people) and *the types of use* (eg schools, sports clubs, casual users, representative squads). However, there are evident flaws in this process for the consumer. In his analysis of the impact of CCT as a whole in 1994, Danny Frederick concluded that “the values to be produced are defined by the Local Authority and not by the consumer or taxpayer”, and that “in many instances Councils may not even be interested in providing people with what they really want themselves, but are instead concerned to get people to take the

services that the Council thinks they *should* want". However, he did go on to note that, "Many Councils now carry out surveys to find out what the public think of the services provided and how they would like the services improved" (74). Customer satisfaction would be a new driving force!

4.11 In the context of Leisure Services these assertions by Frederick were confirmed by Fred Coalter's analysis of 'The CCT (Sport and Leisure Management) National Information Survey' which was undertaken by The Sports Council in conjunction with Local Authorities in 1993. The survey of 373 English Local Authorities achieved an 84% response rate (75). In Coalter's view this "presents a very accurate picture of the CCT process and market, and the impact the legislation has had on Local Authority structure, functions and service provision in England". In his analysis Coalter concluded that there were three main types of 'management typologies' within the contracts, based on the 'types of use', and a fourth group which did not fit neatly into the first three categories:

- **A Demand led policies:** these had the least prescriptive management contracts, with six Authorities not defining types of use at all (3% of all responding Authorities) and the rest (11%) had formal references to types of use, but no specified methods of implementation. Coalter concluded that "these contracts give the greatest autonomy to managers [but] it was not possible to speculate about the programming of such facilities and there are at least two possibilities". First, where "performance is assessed solely on aggregate throughput and income and the management practice is non-developmental, with high volume/high income activities predominating and negative implications for sports equity", or second, and more preferable, "management is responsive to local needs and provides a balanced programme"
- **B Management of space:** these are more prescriptive management policies specifying both types of use and specific time allocations. However, they do not have defined throughput targets to assess the numbers of users in each category. They make up 40% of all contracts
- **C Prescriptive welfare:** these are the most prescriptive contracts, specifying type of use, time allocations and throughput targets. For these 11% of Authorities Coalter concluded that "the definition of such performance targets implies the need for an active and targeted approach which should have an impact on usage"
- **D The residue:** these Authorities, which make up 35%, have "less coherent specifications [but] who have *some* formal service objectives accompanied by *some* methods of implementation".

4.12 It is important to note, however, that these distinctions were based on the first tranche of CCT contracts because with later tranches Ministerial 'guidance' became much stronger and more proscriptive, placing much greater emphasis on financial return, particularly when Nicholas Ridley was Secretary of State for the Environment. His stated aim was to "get Local Authorities out of the provision business." Fred Coalter's analysis did not differentiate between in-house and

external suppliers of management services. Allied to this, the increased financial pressures on Local Authorities meant *financial*, rather than *social*, factors tended to dominate. Another impact of CCT on research was a general unwillingness of commercial companies and the new generation of commercial trusts to share management information on the grounds of 'commercial sensitivity' and 'maintaining a competitive advantage', which meant some Local Authorities lost the capacity to monitor performance or acquire data from their operators.

4.13 The renewed focus around research into indoor sports centres within The Sports Council's own programme was to be given another boost in 1994 when Nick Rowe decided to tackle **the issue of how to get accurate comparable nationwide usage and management data on a longitudinal basis** for sports centres and swimming pools (essentially re-visiting the idea of Mike Collins nearly 20 years before - see paragraph 2.18). Nick brought together research representatives from the four UK Sports Councils and some of the leading academic research practitioners for a 'Think Tank'. The key was to find a way to provide **representative 'trend' data**, as opposed to the case studies and one-off research surveys of the past that we have described in Section 2. The 'Think Tank' discussion paper (76) concluded that three broad types of information needed to be collected; usage information, user information, and management information. However, the 'impact of management' was seen as a core issue, as the Sports Councils were concerned, as other commentators had already predicted, that a combination of Compulsory Competitive Tendering and broader changes in the financing of local government services would have a detrimental impact on the use of sports facilities and on the composition of users. The 'Think Tank' paper noted that if long term changes in usage and use are identified in the proposed survey, the hypothesis is that this will be a product of supply side factors.

4.14 As a result, Fred Coalter, now at the Centre for Leisure Research at Edinburgh University and Steve Dowers of the Planning Data Management Service (PDMS), also at Edinburgh University, were commissioned to take forward research into the feasibility of such a project. Their final report, published in May 1995, made interesting reading (77).

4.15 We do not have the space in this Section to describe the arguments for the different approaches suggested in the report (it is 56 pages of detailed analysis!). However, the main conclusions were:

- The collection of usage and management information would be best carried out by postal survey of facilities
- The collection of user information would need to be face-to-face interviews, based on the 'Model Survey Package' that had then recently been piloted by The Sports Council (78), but that a market research company should be commissioned to carry out all of the surveys to ensure consistency and accuracy
- The need to adopt a 'sample frame' of facilities, with the data requirements for some disaggregation (eg analysis by different activities, or by social

class, and so on) suggested a sample of around 200 sports centres and 50 swimming pools.

4.16 Perhaps the most interesting discussion in the report relates to this 'sample frame' and **how to get a representative sample of facilities** given the varied nature of the types of provision and the differences in management style. There were also doubts as to the accuracy of the Sports Councils' 'facilities databases' which would be the principal source for selecting any sample. The conclusion was that the '**size**' of the facility for sports centres should be the main delineating factor, based on the number of 'badminton courts' in each centre. In this respect the report suggested four 'categories' of centre, although the presence in some centres of an ancillary hall was an issue. The methodology adopted in the Facilities Planning Model was suggested as a solution, with small ancillary halls adding two 'courts' and larger halls adding 'four courts'. The suggested stratification was defined as follows:

- Centres with 1-3 'court' halls, where "the size of the hall limits the types of activity available, greatly reduces the ability to provide for more than one activity at a time and places severe constraints on the ability to cater for performance and excellence"
- Centres with 4 'court' halls, which "is the standard size hall. Here the assumption is that there will be competition for space between various types of usage"
- Centres with 5-7 'court' halls, where "the presumption is that there will be moderate and variable competition in such halls (depending on location)"
- Centres with 8 plus 'court' halls, where "there should be least competition for space, with the potential to cater for a wide range of uses and performance and excellence".

4.17 To address the issues around a sample frame that would give a representative selection of **different management styles**, it was suggested that the analysis of the CCT contracts set out in paragraph 4.11 should be used. The Table below, copied from the report, shows the breakdown of the 1349 centres in the 'facilities databases' at the time, with the preferred approach to randomly sample all relevant facilities within each of the sub-samples to obtain the required 200 centres.

Management	No info	1-3	4	5-7	8+	Total
A	22	38	29	27	53	169
B	71	94	101	85	134	485
C	15	18	22	14	40	109
D	40	63	55	61	115	334
Unknown	23	49	42	65	73	252
Total	171	262	249	252	415	1349

4.18 The ‘Think Tank’ had also suggested that the survey could be useful in providing information “**to enable the refinement and re-calibration of the demand parameters of the Facilities Planning Model**”. However, the report suggested a number of difficulties in achieving this aim:

- “this requirement raises the issue of the definition of *supply* and implies the need to extend the sample beyond Local Authority sport and recreation facilities”
- “demand can only be assessed satisfactorily via facility surveys if the assumption is made that all demand is able to be expressed. This requires surveys in ‘areas of good supply’ and in certain circumstances would need to include all relevant supply (eg schools, commercial sector provision)”
- “[this] need to include all relevant supply, in most areas, would require a sample of a wider range of facilities than that required to address the core concern [of the survey] of monitoring the use of *Local Authority facilities* and the impact of management policies”
- “it is not possible to speculate about the number of additional facilities which would need to be included. However, it is likely to be expensive [and] the cost of the FPM calibration exercise could equal that of the national user survey”.

4.19 However, the report did note that the “survey of users will provide important information about the frequency of participation, an important element in the calculation of demand” and that “the programming and usage survey will supply vitally important information [on] the sporting capacities of facilities at peak and off-peak times, good practice and ‘enlightened management’ and levels of throughput in relation to total space [which] will greatly assist in the re-calibration of the *supply* parameters of the FPM”.

4.20 **All of which would prove academic, as the proposals for the national survey itself were not eventually taken forward by the Sports Councils;** we can only assume that this was because of the cost implications. However, as we will outline below *some* elements of the proposals, particularly the Model Survey Package,

would form the basis of much of the research that was to follow in the late 1990s and early 21st century.

- 4.21 The launch by Sport England of the **National Benchmarking Service (NBS)** in 1999 marked the beginning of the return of the user surveys and the collection of information from sports facilities on a large scale. The aim of the NBS was, and still is, “to provide Local Authorities with rigorous and robust information on the performance of their sports and leisure centres compared with that of equivalent family facilities elsewhere in the country” (79). For each centre, clients of the NBS select an appropriate level of support for their data collection, deliver the required data, and receive a facility-specific report on performance relative to national benchmarks. Sports and Leisure Centres can choose from: a Full Report, assessing access, utilisation, finance and customer satisfaction; an Efficiency Report assessing finance and utilisation performance; or an Effectiveness Report, which takes access, utilisation and customer satisfaction into consideration. A one-page Executive Summary also ensures the reports are clear and easy to understand!
- 4.22 The **user questionnaire** was based on the development of the Model Survey Package, and seeks information from individual users, including ‘satisfaction’ with the services provided. The questionnaire is designed for either self-completion or interviewer administration, but interviewer administration is the recommended option. The survey is conducted over a standard survey period of nine consecutive days, including two weekends, and should be representative of ‘typical’ usage, for example not during school holidays. The aim is to achieve 350 completed survey forms by selecting, at exit points, an appropriate number of respondents aged over 14 who have participated in activities on the day of their visit. The number selected is based on total throughput (eg if the throughput was expected to be 1,600, every fourth person would be interviewed to achieve 350 completed responses, allowing for refusals and ineligible people, such as those attending but not participating). Sheffield Hallam University’s Sports Industry Research Centre was selected by Sport England to manage the analysis of the information from each centre and to produce the NBS reports.
- 4.23 The **NBS reports** are comprehensive as far as the analysis of what is happening at the centres is concerned, but the information provided, significantly, “will inform the sport and leisure centre on what they need to focus on to improve their performance, **but not how they achieve this improvement**”. The emphasis here is our own!
- 4.24 **Step forward the consultants!** The commissioning of consultants had been the norm within Sport Council research for most of the time before the 1990s, typically academic institutions, companies with specialisms in certain fields (eg accountants such as Coopers and Lybrand - later Price Waterhouse Coopers - and Ernst and Young), major market research companies such as MORI and BMRB, and specialist partners in the sporting world, such as the British Sports Association for Disabled People (BSAD).
- 4.25 However, the emergence of the information age in the 1990s and early 2000s saw a new breed of ‘leisure consultants’ becoming ever more important players on the

research scene. Some had been established in the early 1990s, such as John Eady's 'Knight, Kavanagh and Page' (KKP), Peter Mann's company (PMP), and Kit Campbell's consultancy in Scotland. Much of the focus of these consultants' work was on supporting Local Authorities and sporting bodies produce 'strategies' and supporting Local Authorities in carrying out Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) 17 assessments.

- 4.26 In addition, some academic institutions had developed 'commercial arms', such as the two we have already mentioned; the Sports Industry Research Centre in Sheffield and the Centre for Leisure Research in Edinburgh. Some specialist companies in other fields moved in to the leisure sector, such as Coussins Associates, with their marketing and communications base. **But it was the 'improvement' agenda of the early 2000s that sparked the rise of the specialists in sports development.**
- 4.27 Many were started by existing sports professionals, such as Simon Kirkland's 'Sporting Structures' (2002), Nikki Enoch's 'VAGA Associates' (2003) and Neil Allen's eponymous 'Neil Allen Associates' (2006). The concept of 'associates' allowed many of the new companies to assemble an expertise across a wide range of sports research interests to address specific issues on a bespoke basis, as 'Sporting Structures' strapline epitomises: "Delivering unique, flexible and innovative solutions in sport".
- 4.28 Significantly, many of our former Sport England colleagues are members of these 'associates'. A quick look at their current websites reveals ten of the 19 VAGA Associates have been members of Sport England's staff, along with nine of the 11 associates in Neil Allen's current team! We have managed, with a couple of exceptions, to avoid becoming involved in this 'associate' process during our own 'retirement'!
- 4.29 We will finish this Section with an update of the progress of the NBS reported by Sheffield's Sports Industry Research Centre in 2006; they had at their disposal over 35,000 completed survey forms from the NBS interviewing process, representing survey returns from over 100 sports centres. Not quite delivering Nick Rowe's vision for the National Longitudinal Survey, but a significant contribution to the research knowledge on indoor sports centres nonetheless.

Conclusion

- i We suggested at paragraph 2.7 that ‘whether the research community delivered is for others to judge’. We are, therefore, pleased to report that the following conclusion has been suggested to us by an eminent member of the Recreation Management profession.
- ii “Research over the whole period covered by the Project contributed significantly to a better understanding of why centres were needed; why and how they were provided; who used them and how; and the importance of active management in realising their potential. As an incidental, and also in response to the Yates Committee (80), it contributed to the emergence of a whole new specialist academic discipline concerned with leisure management and planning. Leisure Centre managers and planners who have kept a keen interest in how research has informed the debates around centre provision, social and customer attitudes to centres, and their impacts on their communities, have much to be grateful for in the pioneering work of the late Mike Collins, his associates, and successors in driving forward the leisure agenda and answering the sometimes contentious question of “why leisure centres?”

Postscript

- iii We have concluded in 2006 for one simple reason; Mike Fitzjohn had retired from Sport England in 2003 and Malcolm Tungatt moved from the Sport England Research Team to the National Policy and Improvement Team in 2006, before also retiring in 2009. As such, our knowledge of research into indoor sports centres (or any other field of sporting research for that matter, apart from ‘the Arsenal’!) after this date is usually based on hearsay and the occasional ‘hit’ on the Sport England website. Our regular meetings with former colleagues in ‘The Oxnoble’ public house in Manchester have also been one of our main sources of information, but these can hardly be regarded as academically rigorous!
- iv However, **the Project Editorial Group would welcome contributions from any other practitioners in the sports research field after 2006 to help to ‘fill the gap’ in the intervening eleven years.**

MF/MT, Manchester, November 2017

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