

SPORT AND LEISURE

Nottingham's joint ventures

The principle of Joint Provision — two or more authorities, such as county and district, pooling their resources to provide maximum-use community leisure facilities — appeared in the late 60s with Nottinghamshire playing a leading part in its evolution. First there was the Bingham sports centre and now the Rushcliffe Leisure Centre, a joint venture of Notts CC and Rushcliffe BC. The facilities at the centre are described by the director, B R Hughes.

One of the most remarkable features to emerge on the recreational and educational landscapes during the late 1960s and early 1970s was the community sports and leisure centre. The economies of scale achieved by the strategic grouping together of individual units, and an appreciation of the need to obtain maximum use of recreational facilities by both school-children and the general public, were largely responsible for the acceptance by many local authorities of the principle of Joint Provision.

Nottinghamshire played a prominent role during the early stages of this evolution, with Bingham, a small town on the edge of the Vale of Belvoir, opening in 1967 as the first joint-provision sports centre in the country — a striking illustration of two authorities pooling their resources to provide far better sports facilities than they could have done separately.

Rushcliffe leisure centre

The latest project, Rushcliffe Leisure Centre which is situated in the West Bridgford suburb of Nottingham, shows how an even greater use of resources can be achieved by further integration in both design and management.

The leisure centre, opened on 1 October 1976 by Baroness Masham, has as its main feature a free-shaped leisure pool. It incorporates a beach area, a learn-to-swim area, chutes and a carpeted surround; particular attention was paid to the inclusion of a substantial deep-water area. It is the first swimming-pool of its type in the midlands and the first leisure centre in the country to have been designed and built as part of a joint-provision scheme, which in this case involved Rushcliffe BC and Nottinghamshire CC.

In addition to the joint-provision areas, the pool, sports hall, table-tennis area and committee/classrooms, single provision areas have been incorporated into the leisure centre complex. These areas are to some degree similar to those found in conventional joint-provision centres and are financed by the borough, viz bar and lounge, restaurant, administrative offices, first-aid room, crèche and squash courts.

But it is the amount of single provision educational facilities, financed by the county council, which are encompassed within the complex that gives the centre its uniqueness, certainly within Nottinghamshire and probably in the country. The centre of the school's administrative department, senior teaching staff offices, a staff room, two additional classrooms, the school library and a Teacher's Centre all form an integral part of the building; there is also a youth wing which has been transferred from Education to Leisure Services.

As well as these innovations in design, the joint-provision package included facilities within one of the existing school blocks, namely a concert hall, gymnasium, sports barn and tennis courts to be programmed outside school hours by the centre director, thereby much increasing their usage.

The tasks facing the management of the centre with its opening were no different from those which had been confronted in similar establishments — how to involve the whole community in socio-economic, cultural and chronological terms; how to develop a working relationship between the school staff and the centre managers; how to provide a balanced programme of activities within an acceptable subsidy level, sometimes at the expense of maximising usage.

The centre has only been open for a rela-

tively short period but there is a welcome indication that these difficulties are in part being overcome. Although the basic premise is that the school has priority in the joint-provision areas daily until 5 pm, close cooperation with the education authority in the timetabling of the pool has resulted in day-time sessions being available for specific groups: handicapped persons, mothers and babies (for which the beach area is eminently suitable) and senior citizens. A senior citizens' club for the West Bridgford area meets weekly in the bar lounge for whist, yoga and keep-fit exercises, while the crèche is used on three mornings each week for a pre-school playgroup, and on other occasions for housewives' meetings.

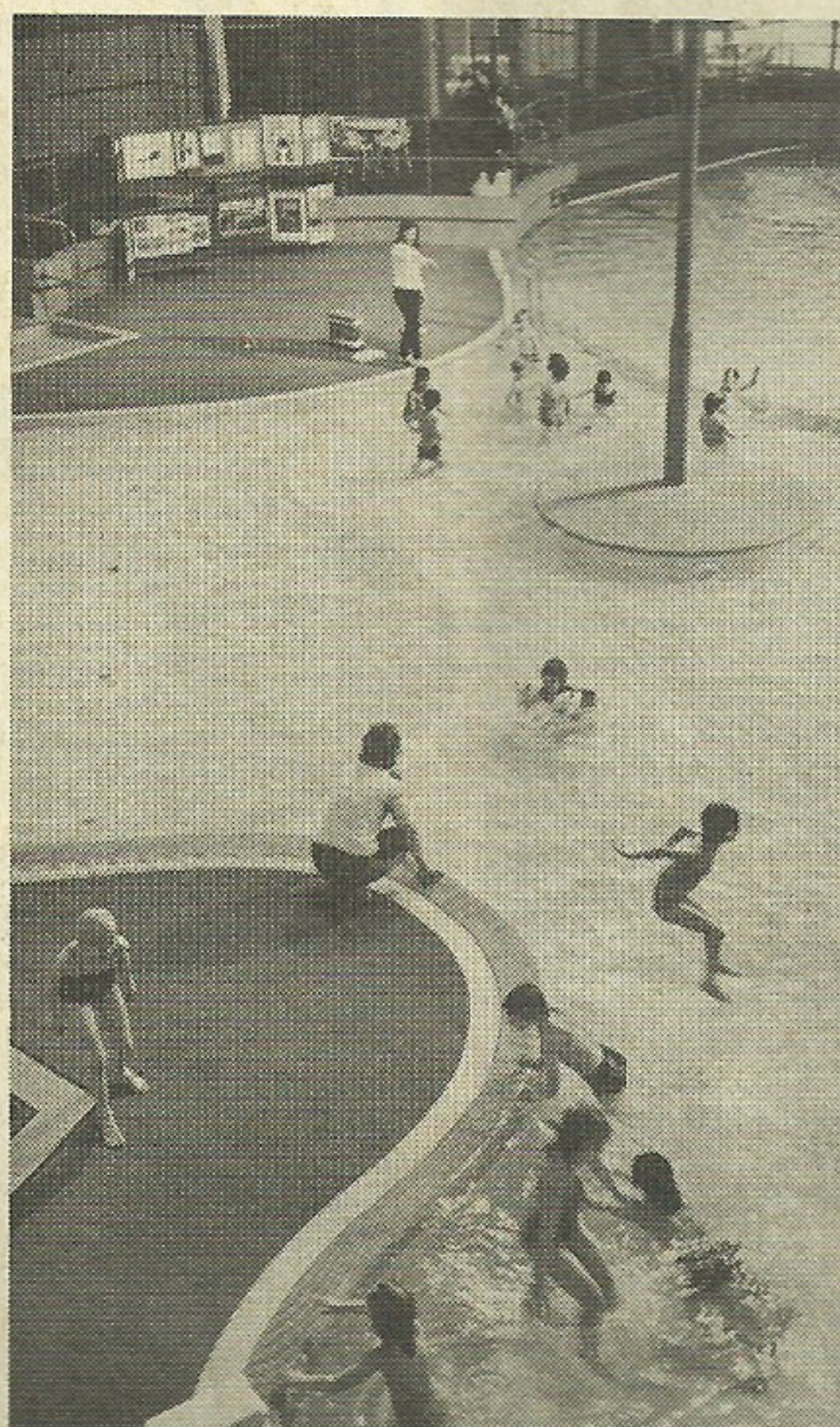
The teachers' centre is used during the day for conferences and interviews, and the youth wing as a 6th form common-room. The centre's restaurant caters to members of the general public, squash players, school staff and to mature students from the local college of further education who use the bar lounge as an overspill classroom. Conversely the school has the use of two of the four squash courts during the day, and evening use of the facilities for PTA meetings, school concerts and competitions have invariably been accommodated.

Rationalised responsibilities

With such interchange it is essential that basic responsibilities are retained in one department, and at Rushcliffe these responsibilities lie with the centre director and his staff who have control of cleaning, maintenance and security in both single and joint-provision areas; this rationalisation leads to greater efficiency and to mutual understanding. It is helped further by weekly meetings between the director, headmaster, teachers' centre warden and the youth and community tutor.

During the evenings, weekends and school holidays, various leisure pursuits are undertaken. Inevitably sport predominates; 22 badminton clubs applied to be based at the centre; percentage use of squash court time and numbers of swimmers using the leisure pool are extraordinarily high. Other activities are by no means excluded. On the contrary, there has been a considerable number of social and cultural functions, ranging from poolside Caribbean evenings, to dances, concerts and lectures featuring personalities such as Julie Felix, Los Paraguayos and Chris Bonington. These events are promoted either by the centre itself or by outside groups, and by the recreation and amenities department to which the centre is answerable.

Throughout the summer, events being staged include a fashion show of swimming and leisure wear, a mid-summer's eve poolside dance, a water-safety week, a Radio One show, two disabled sports days, and a summer youth coaching scheme, though the number of special events has been limited in anticipation of the increase in casual usage, particularly of the leisure pool.



Swim-time for children in the Rushcliffe Leisure Centre pool, designed and built under a Notts CC/Rushcliffe BC joint-provision scheme