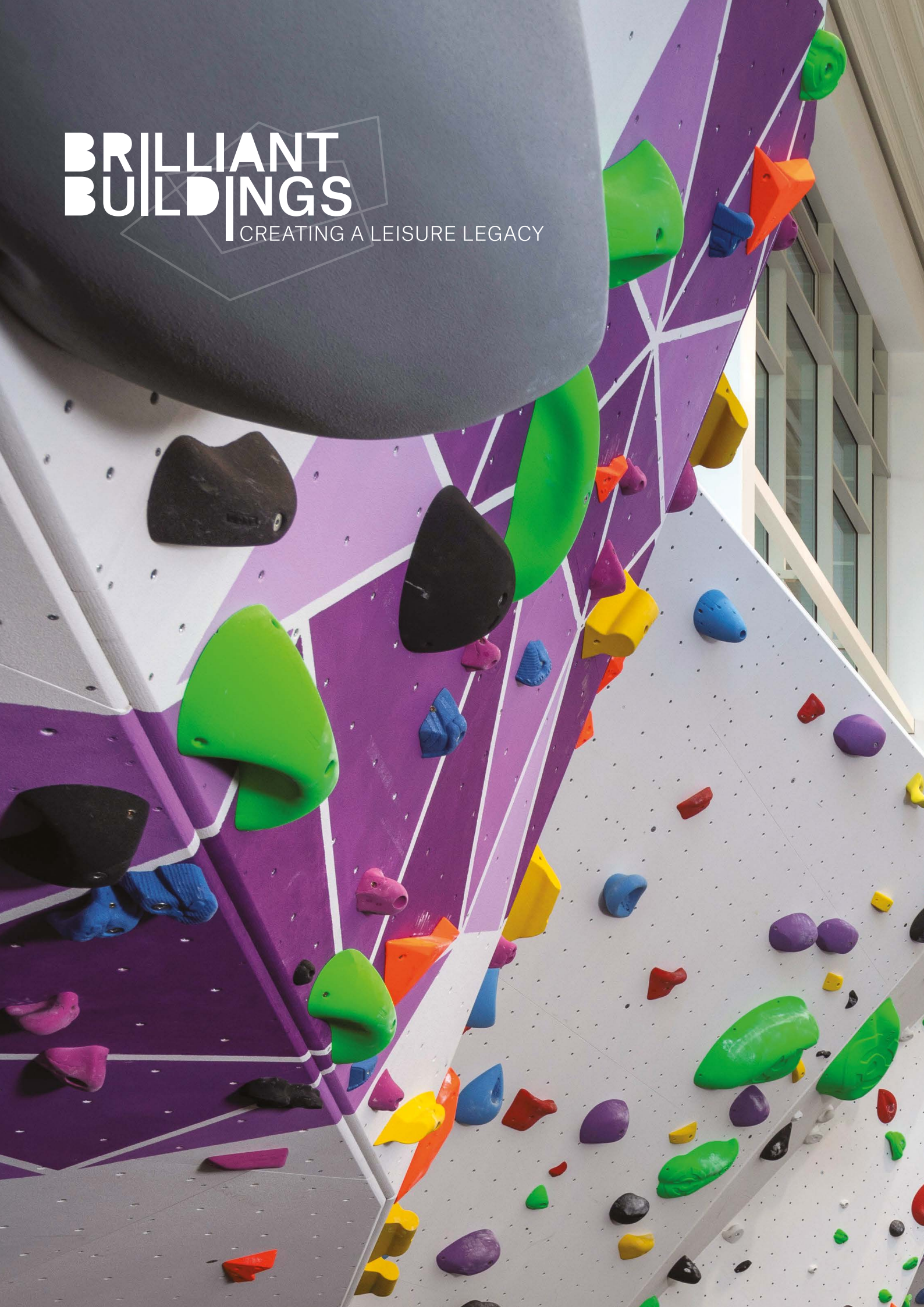


BRILLIANT BUILDINGS

CREATING A LEISURE LEGACY



The right fit

The leisure sector is now more diverse than ever, and Willmott Dixon is proud to be leading its transformation.



Twenty years ago, a leisure centre could be one of two things: an upmarket private gym with pool and sauna or a functional municipal facility. Today, the picture is much more diverse, particularly in the UK's big cities.

High-end gym-and-swim solutions no longer dominate the private sector. Budget gyms have changed the market and now we see the rise of specialist, boutique studios, particularly in London.

Local authority leisure centres are no longer simply functional facilities. They are community hubs with a wide range of activities and services such as libraries, toddler play areas, ten-pin bowling alleys and health facilities.

Other sectors are changing the leisure landscape, too. Hotel chains are putting exercise facilities at the centre of their offering, while universities are using state-of-the-art leisure to attract students.

The public mood is ready for this change. According to Allegra Strategies' Project Fitness UK 2018 report, health and leisure is the UK's fastest growing sector, valued at £5.1bn with a forecast growth of 8 percent a year.

The funding question

For local authorities, the aim is to generate revenue from centres while creating less tangible benefits such as improved community health and cohesion. Funding remains a challenge in a financially constrained environment.

Delivery requires both public and private sectors to find ways to be flexible in a fast-changing techno-charged environment, offering new ways to exercise and get health advice thanks to a raft of apps that cover everything from weight loss to yoga and high-intensity interval training.

New technology – such as Bluetooth beacons to emit and collect data – can also be harnessed to help optimise what centres offer their users. Willmott Dixon is proud to be helping leisure providers create a lasting legacy for customers and communities. This publication sets out our approach and showcases examples of our work.

Nick Mennell, head of leisure, Willmott Dixon

Cover image: Wycombe Leisure Centre (see page 6)



For further information on our projects and expertise, please visit: www.willmott-dixon.co.uk

A leisure revolution

Ranging from ice rinks to climbing centres, our leisure projects are boosting the health and wellbeing of communities up and down the country.



1 Scarborough Sports Village

This heralded a new era of leisure that included a ground for Scarborough Athletic FC. The complex also delivers a 25m pool and fitness centre, all acting as a catalyst for more regeneration and inward investment.



5 Tewkesbury Leisure Centre, Gloucestershire

This project replaced the town's Cascades Leisure Centre, and comes with a 60-station gym, sauna and steam rooms. There is also space for fun features such as water slides, shoots and fountains.



8 Hart Leisure Centre, Fleet, Hampshire

Replacing an existing facility, the centre features an eight-lane, 25m swimming pool, climbing wall and eight-court sports hall. Sustainability was key, with PV solar thermal panels and natural ventilation to the sports hall.



2 Horwich Leisure Centre, Bolton

Jointly funded by Bolton Council and Bolton Community Leisure Trust, Horwich has seen a huge footfall since opening. It is a fulcrum for people to take up sport, as well as strengthening links with community groups.



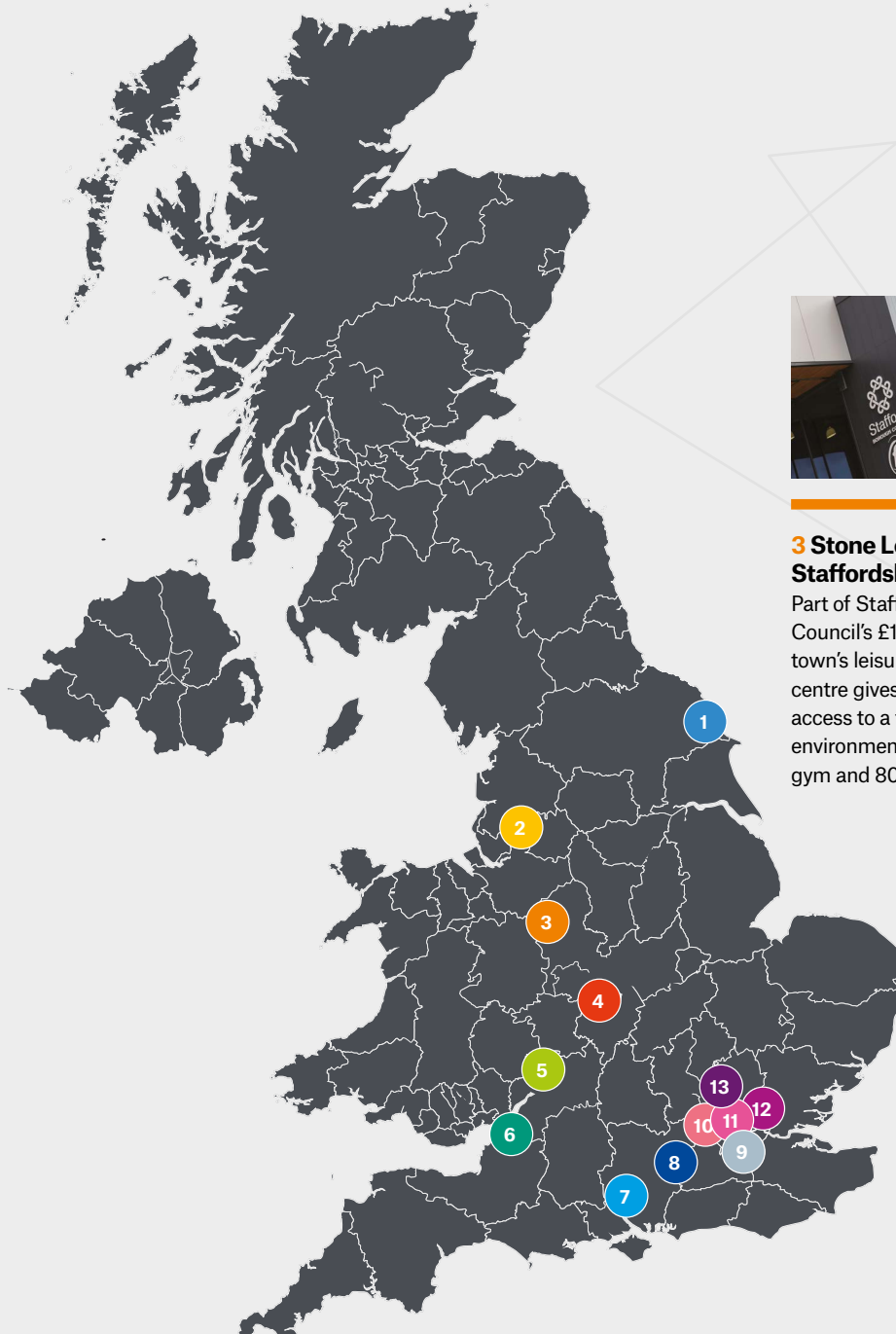
6 Village Hotel, Bristol

Leisure is a key part of the offering for Village Hotels, including in Bristol where its hotel includes high-end pool and fitness facilities to attract local people as well as guests. The 153-bedroom, four-star hotel is a short drive north of the city.



9 New Addington Leisure Centre, Croydon

A significant upgrade on current leisure provision in the area, this flexible space includes two multi-purpose halls, meeting rooms, changing rooms and a six-lane, 25m pool with seating for 150 spectators.



10 All England Lawn Tennis Club, London

We are constructing a world-class facility for the All England Lawn Tennis Club next to the venue for The Championships, Wimbledon, that will deliver 12 tennis courts and new clubhouse facilities.



11 nhow Hotel, London

Willmott Dixon Interiors converted an existing building in Shoreditch into the UK's first nhow Hotel. Within its footprint of 9,500sq m, it now houses 190 bedrooms, a restaurant, bar, gym and meeting spaces.



12 Sapphire Ice and Leisure, Romford

This facility is a catalyst for Romford's urban renewal, featuring a championship-standard, 900-seat ice rink on top of an eight-lane swimming pool. It is home to ice hockey team the London Raiders.



13 Westminster Lodge Leisure Centre, St Albans

This facility has smashed forecast membership targets and provides a net financial contribution to the council. Westminster Lodge has a 25m, 10-lane swimming pool and gym alongside a fitness suite and spa.

BRILLIANT BUILDINGS
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3 Stone Leisure Centre, Staffordshire

Part of Staffordshire County Council's £10m renewal of the town's leisure facilities, the centre gives Stone residents access to a fresh, modern fitness environment with a six-lane pool, gym and 80-station fitness suite.



4 University of Warwick Sports and Wellness Hub

This is one of the best sports facilities at a UK university, part of Warwick's goal of becoming the "most physically active campus community in the UK by 2020". It also showcases the latest smart building technology.



7 Winchester Sport and Leisure Park, Hampshire

With the aim of encouraging wide community use, facilities include a 50m swimming pool, water confidence area, sports hall and climbing facility. A hydrotherapy suite will serve people with disabilities.

1. The business case

A key driver for a local authority to build or refurbish its leisure centres is financial. New and improved facilities are a valuable opportunity to generate revenue.

There are other potential benefits too: reduced operational costs, an opportunity to rationalise or optimise real estate, longer-term savings to health and social care costs, and the political value of a new community asset.

The right development can also be a catalyst for regeneration. This is the case in Romford, where the council negotiated a complex land deal to create a combined swimming pool and ice rink, which is helping to draw families into the town centre and revitalise its night-time economy.

Another is Croydon's New Addington Leisure Centre, part of a wider regeneration plan, which includes a significant community facility and the development of eight family homes.

In some cases, councils join forces with a leisure centre operator in the earliest stages of the project. This approach helped Arun District Council to replace its old sports centre with Littlehampton Wave, a brand-new facility with a 25m pool, 85-station gym, studio space, sports hall and cycling studio.

"The agreement between the council and the operator, Freedom Leisure, made the development less speculative for the council," says Willmott Dixon operations

manager Joe Conway, who oversaw the construction of the facility. For other authorities, it makes sense to delay deciding on an operator in order to create competition.

Whether public or private, an important consideration for any would-be leisure centre is how demand will change. "In such a diverse sector, you need an understanding of what the demographics will be in 10 years' time," says Willmott Dixon's head of leisure, Nick Mennell. "That includes housing plans, policies, political influences and general trends in the sector when creating a scheme. Will it be future-proof and fit for purpose for the next generation?"

Be creative with procurement

When establishing leisure schemes, it is important to select the right procurement route. "Do not settle for standard solutions if they do not meet your needs," says Mennell. "There are many procurement approaches available – seek advice and ensure everyone agrees with what is required."

"A procurement route that isolates any of the delivery partners will only lead to problems and increase risks."

Below: Sapphire Ice and Leisure Centre is helping to draw families back into Romford's town centre.

Opposite: The £26m Moberly Sports Centre in Westminster was paid for through the sale of new homes.

Sapphire Ice and Leisure, Romford

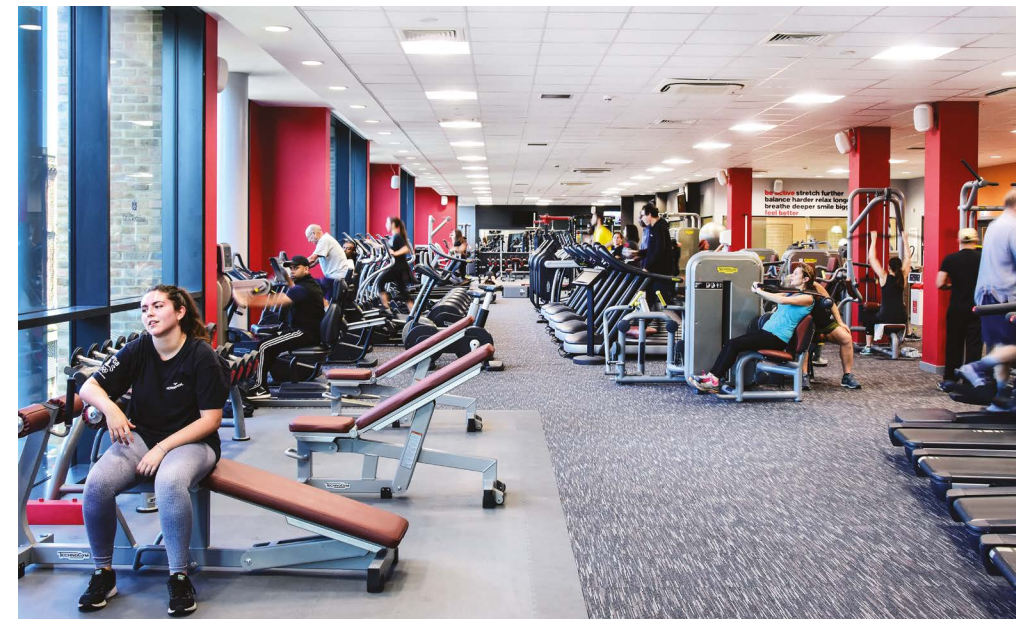
Key facts

Ice rink with seats for 900 spectators sits above a pool and fitness suite

Destination for families, helping to revive town centre

Visitor numbers hugely exceeding forecasts

£28m new build



Moberly Sports Centre, Westminster

Key facts

Cross-funded by building 156 new homes

Centre now creates revenue, whereas previous facility was a drain on council funds

In its first 10 months, use already exceeded target for the first year

£26m new build

2. Getting the funding model right

Austerity has spawned a generation of creative funding solutions from councils and leisure centre operators. Here are some delivery models that we have worked with.

Self-funding

Carl Westby is the former head of leisure at Hart District Council and is now an independent consultant. He says the best approach for local authorities where possible is to self-fund the development of a new facility. This allows them to use the low rates of borrowing that councils can secure, and combine this with developer funding due from section 106 payments through the wider housing strategy.

This capital then allows the council to secure a deal with a leisure operator. Westby cautions against arrangements where a council hands over its land to an operator for them to develop and run for longer periods.

"This effectively means that the council has lost all control over the future management of the

facility. In addition to relinquishing responsibility for leisure policy over the coming years, the council will almost certainly not be getting the best value for money for the community," he says.

In central London, Westminster City Council was able to leverage the value of its land to create a £26m, multi-use leisure facility, paid for by the sale of new homes. The deal between the council and Willmott Dixon saw 120 new homes funding a leisure centre that has a 25m pool, teaching pool, sports hall, health and fitness suite, exercise studios, health spa, boxing hall and gym.

This type of structured scheme is the future of leisure development, says Stephen Parker of Willmott Dixon. "It is also very exciting and creative for all involved – delivering on housing and supporting that with leisure that gives the community a focal point."

Rationalise and renew

Oldham Council decided to replace four outdated sports



"IF A COUNCIL HANDS OVER ITS LAND TO AN OPERATOR, IT EFFECTIVELY MEANS IT HAS LOST ALL CONTROL OVER THE FUTURE MANAGEMENT OF THE FACILITY."

CARL WESTBY, LEISURE CONSULTANT

centres with two new ones. Under the old regime, Oldham paid a subsidy of around £1.7m a year, which reduced to less than £400,000 once the new centres were up and running. These savings could be used to pay back the capital investment.

University dimension

Universities are also new entrants, seizing on the power of leisure to drive business models. The University of Warwick's new Sport and Wellness Hub is part of a huge estate plan and central to the university's ambition to be "the most physically active campus community in the UK by 2020". But it is a revenue generator too.

Aside from community use, Warwick's hub is hosting a range of sporting events with facilities built to world-class standards. One of the first is the Corporate Games, involving 100 companies and over 7,000 athletes. Any surplus created from Warwick Conferences' use of the hub is reinvested into the university.



3. A clear sense of purpose

“The important thing is to know the community and what sort of things they want to do,” says Liz Blenkinsop, service manager for sport and health improvement at Wakefield Council. “It’s not just commercial – although having the right pricing structure helps. It’s much more about thinking about programming so that we attract people who would not normally come in and encourage them to do some physical activity or a nutritional programme.”

Having completed Wakefield’s £5m Minsthorpe Leisure Centre last year, Willmott Dixon is now working with the council to deliver the £17m Five Towns Leisure and

Wellbeing Hub in Pontefract. This will provide additional facilities including a community meeting room, referral rooms, outdoor tennis courts, a wellbeing garden, play area and 3G pitch.

Creating opportunities for local people to play as much sport as possible was also top of the agenda for Elmbridge Borough Council when developing its Xcel Sports Hub. Situated next door to an existing leisure centre, the hub provides an athletics track, two full-size synthetic football pitches, training pitches, clubhouse, spectator stand and floodlighting, and is home to multiple local clubs.

To deliver this, Willmott Dixon had to rethink the remediation strategy for the contaminated ground on which the centre is built, finding a solution that cost a fraction of the initial one. “It was up to us to devise a solution that came within the council’s budget,” says Phil Brooks, Willmott Dixon’s construction manager responsible for delivering the hub. “That’s what you can expect by getting your contractor involved early.”

At Wycombe Leisure Centre in Buckinghamshire, one of the South-east’s biggest facilities, a 50m pool built to competition standards was central to client requirements. One of the first

events saw athletes competing to qualify for the British Swimming Championships, making it a national facility. Having a clear vision, however bold, is essential.

That said, flexibility is also important. At Horwich Leisure Centre, the team accommodated a change of scope part way through the build. Reorganisation at the council meant that some upstairs offices were no longer needed. “We worked with the council to transform that space into extra studio rooms that could bring in more income for the centre, without impacting on programme or budget,” says Willmott Dixon operations manager Guy Lacey.

Wycombe Leisure Centre Key facts

- 50m-long Olympic pool, which required tight dimensional accuracy
- Varied facilities including cycling studio, badminton courts, indoor bowls and 15-station gym
- Membership has doubled compared to old facility
- £25m new build



“IT’S ABOUT THINKING ABOUT PROGRAMMING SO THAT WE ATTRACT PEOPLE WHO WOULD NOT NORMALLY COME IN AND ENCOURAGE THEM TO DO SOME PHYSICAL ACTIVITY OR A NUTRITIONAL PROGRAMME.”

LIZ BLENKINSOP,
WAKEFIELD COUNCIL

Above left: At Wycombe Leisure Centre, facilities include a 10m climbing wall with 50 different routes.

Right: Warwick’s Sport and Wellness Hub is intended to express the aspirations and ethos of the whole campus.

4. The rise of universities

Society’s changing attitudes to exercise are being reflected in higher education, where institutions are vying for the best students.

The University of Warwick’s new Sport and Wellness Hub is a case in point. The university wanted to create a state-of-the-art facility, not only to attract new students, but to express the ethos and aspirations of the whole campus.

Well-equipped facilities and a range of fitness classes and services are high on the agenda of most universities, as they look to attract young people from

an altogether more discerning generation of paying customers.

“Universities can often build bigger buildings because they have more budget,” says Nick Mennell of Willmott Dixon. “They want an elite performance experience because they want to provide the opportunity for people to be the best.”

As well as providing superior training experiences for students, high-quality gyms in universities are aimed at attracting customers – and an alternative revenue source – from the surrounding community.

Sport and Wellness Hub, University of Warwick

Key facts

- 16,684sq m, designed for both general and elite use
- Smart building technology provides comfort to users
- 230-station gym, 15m-high climbing wall and augmented-reality rowing room, among other facilities
- £36m new build





Village Hotel, Bristol Key facts

- New hotel close to city centre
- Leisure club with a 20m swimming pool
- Focus on high-end facilities, attracting local community
- £25m new build

5. Local authorities keep pace

When the budget gym sector started growing 10 to 15 years ago, some commentators questioned whether these private, low-cost players would spell the end for local authority facilities. This hasn't been the case.

"Local authorities can take a strategic approach. They can create lovely facilities that support their communities and create a sense of 'place' in a way that a boutique studio or a private-sector gym can never do," says Willmott Dixon's Stephen Parker, who is heavily involved in the leisure sector for the company.

This was the case with Hart District Council, which replaced its ageing facility with a £24m development that has three swimming pools, a 130-station gym, four exercise studios, an eight-court sports hall, a climbing wall, steam room and cafe. Not only did it increase participation from the local community, it is also a revenue generator for the council, in contrast to its money-draining predecessor.

It was a similar story for St Albans District Council. Its old leisure centre had been making a loss, whereas the new Westminster Lodge delivers £1m a year in revenue, hosting major swimming competitions.

"It's a very nice facility," says Chris Tredget, Willmott Dixon's

managing director for North London and Northern Home Counties. "It's up there with the best of private clubs." Membership has grown and it is on track for early repayment of the money borrowed to fund it.

Hotels to the fore

In the hospitality sector, fitness facilities are becoming integral to the offer of some hotels. Knowing a high proportion of guests want to exercise during their stay has led to new ideas including specialist studios and classes, and even training equipment in hotel rooms – for instance, Hilton's Five Feet to Fitness rooms and Westin's in-room Peleton Bikes in the US.

A new entrant in this growing sector is Village Hotel, promising high-tech, modern leisure, open to the community, on all of its sites. The locations of its 29 hotels – and 15 planned ones – are carefully chosen, with Village's leisure-driven model aiming to offer guests a top-class experience, while also attracting local users.

Willmott Dixon has worked with Village at Portsmouth, Bristol and now Basingstoke. Alongside pool, steam and sauna rooms, each hotel offers a range of classes over the week, with meeting rooms and co-working spaces adding to the "hub" effect.

Left: Each hotel in the Village chain offers a range of fitness classes, alongside a pool, steam and sauna rooms.

Opposite: Fairfield Pools and Leisure Centre in Kent. The £17m refurbishment retained the centre's pools while adding a new-build sports hall and reception area.



6. Repurpose, remodel, refurbish

Often the decision whether to refurbish an old leisure centre or build a completely new one is glaringly obvious. Tewkesbury Leisure Centre, for example, would have required £3.8m to get the existing facility up to scratch. A new centre cost £8m to build and turned a £148,000 a year subsidy into revenue for the council.

The same was true for Littlehampton Wave in West Sussex. Early studies looked at refurbishing the existing facility, but it soon became apparent that this would have been prohibitively expensive. The new £17m centre provides a 25m pool, learner pool, dance and cycling studios, sports hall and cafe.

Sometimes things aren't so clear cut. This was the case at Fairfield Pools and Leisure Centre, where Dartford Borough Council elected to take the existing building back to its concrete frame and add a new-build sports hall and extension to the



"THE BIGGEST COMPLIMENT WAS WHEN PEOPLE VISITED AND SAID, 'IT LOOKS LIKE A NEW BUILD, NOT A REFURB.'"
NEIL LOCKE,
WILLMOTT DIXON

front of the building for soft play and reception.

"This was a cheaper solution than starting again," explains Willmott Dixon operations manager Neil Locke, who managed the programme. "The centre had a good-sized swimming pool and a diving pool, which the council wanted to retain."

Refurbishments often offer more technical challenges than a new build. At Fairfield, there were a host of issues, from asbestos to a non-vertical frame to a very confined space for installing new pool equipment. Good upfront site investigations and close attention to detail are vital to success, says Locke.

Now the technical challenges have been overcome, the final product certainly meets the council's aspirations for a high-end feel. "The biggest compliment we received when people visited was when they said, 'It looks like a new build, not a refurb,'" says Locke.

Fairfield Pools and Leisure Centre Key facts

- 1976 building taken back to its original concrete frame
- Steel-framed extensions added to create sports hall and entrance
- Replacing pool plant was challenging due to limited space and access
- £12m refurbishment

7. The big picture: meeting national priorities

In its 2015 publication, *Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation*, the government signalled a change in outlook from trying to win medals to optimising social outcomes: namely, physical wellbeing, mental wellbeing, individual development, social and community development and economic development.

Sport England's funding ethos reflects these goals. "Sport England funding is very, very difficult to get hold of because they have tight criteria around people or areas with disabilities or disadvantages. It's worth applying for, but certainly don't rely on it," advises leisure consultant Carl Westby.

This is borne out by the figures. Between 2012 and 2016, 24 percent of Sport England investment went to facilities. From 2016 to 2021, it will be just 16 percent.

One new centre that has attracted Sport England funding is Tameside Wellness Centre in Denton, Greater Manchester,

awarded £1.5m because of its focus on community involvement and social inclusion. As well as a main and support pool, 24-7 fitness centre, sauna and steam room, the facility will have multi-use studios, a 10-pin bowling alley, soft play area, cafe, and meeting and consultancy rooms.

An outdoor roof area, with sensory garden, will also host a pop-up cinema or performance space, and the foyer will become a community space, equipped with high-speed wifi, comfortable seating and a small library. The centre will be the first in the region to have two accessible "changing spaces" rooms to allow any client to be changed and showered comfortably and effectively.

"We recognised it was going to be a variant from a traditional sports complex, as the title suggests," says Reg Patel, deputy CEO of Active Tameside, which will run the centre. "We want to create something socially enriching, a hub site that meets the needs of the community."

Diversity of offering can make good social sense too, he adds. "The reason we have included 10-pin bowling and soft play is that they create income which can be put into activities such as school swimming and outreach. It reduces the subsidy needed from the council and gives people activities at an affordable price."

Centres that combine sports, health and wellness services will become more prevalent. "Sport England is very much pushing the co-solution," says Wakefield Council's Liz Blenkinsop. "The more that council budgets get squeezed, the more we have to think about other ways we can use our facilities."

Meanwhile, beacon technology is also adding an extra dimension to the way leisure centres serve their customers. Communicating with mobile phones via Bluetooth, beacons can also send messages to customers, for instance telling them how to work gym equipment or offering advice on training and recovery.

Right: CGIs of Tameside Wellness Centre in Greater Manchester. The centre's focus on community involvement helped it to secure £1.5m of Sport England funding.



"We have other local authorities saying, 'Wow, how did you get this for £5m?' We cut out all the wasted space, so that every bit of space is useful and focuses on what the customer wants or needs."

Liz Blenkinsop, service manager, sport and health improvement, Wakefield Council



"If you are signing a contract with a leisure centre operator, try to include something that gives you the right to review the philosophy of use at certain intervals. This is important because policies, environments and objectives change as the years pass and, without the opportunity to effectively review the operator's delivery process, the council will eventually find itself at odds with the needs of its community."

Carl Westby, former head of leisure, Hart District Council



"Willmott Dixon tries to understand the needs of the clients from the outset. They held a couple of think-tank events involving key staff from different services. We talked about what we all wanted from the facility. It was really inspiring that this opportunity to cross-fertilise came from the build agent. They have been a true pleasure to work with."

Reg Patel, operations director, Active Tameside

8. Shaping up for success

Our leisure specialists give advice on getting your project into tip-top condition.

1

Talking early is crucial

"Creating solutions from discussions within local authorities helps improve regeneration for communities from all perspectives. It is not the bricks and mortar that is important; it is the bricks and mortar of people's lives that is."

Stephen Parker, national leisure and hotel sector lead

2

Invest in proper surveys

"Don't skimp on the ground investigation. Spend the right amount of time and money upfront to reduce potential risks in the ground later."

Phil Brooks, construction manager

3

Get costs early

Early engagement with a contractor is key. The sooner you can engage, the sooner they can give you cost certainty and identify potential issues, so they can be ironed out before you get to site."

Mike Walmsley, operations manager

4

Rein in the architects

"You need a good design manager to make sure that the architects are not getting carried away. It has to be a nice building but it's a business as well: perhaps space could be used to bring in more revenue elsewhere."

Joe Conway, senior operations manager

5

Pay early attention to detail

"On developments like this, there will be lots of non-standard details. You have to look at those details very early in the process, you have to research them and hold workshops with the suppliers and experts involved."

Simon Cook, senior operations manager

6

Address change together

"Change comes, it's how you attack it that matters. Having a long-term relationship makes a difference because there is mutual trust."

Chris Tredge, managing director

7

Get close to the operator

"The relationship with the leisure operator in the final stages of a project is fundamental. Knowing who is doing what and when is really important to getting everything closed out."

Joe Conway, senior operations manager

8

Use video training

"When we carried out training on how to get the most out of the building with the initial team of staff, we created videos which are now in a library and are used as part of the induction process for new staff."

Nick Preedy, construction manager



WILLMOTT DIXON

SINCE 1852

BRILLIANT BUILDINGS

CREATING A LEISURE LEGACY

Willmott Dixon is a privately-owned contracting and interior fit-out group. Founded in 1852, we are family-run and dedicated to leaving a positive legacy in our communities and environment. Being a large company means we can create a huge and lasting positive impact on our society. This is not only done through what we build and maintain; it's achieved through the fantastic efforts of our people who make a major contribution to enhancing their local communities.

www.willmottdixon.co.uk
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We'd like to hear from you:

Our leisure specialist Nick Mennell would love to hear your feedback. Drop him a line at nick.mennell@willmottdixon.co.uk

Check out our thought-provoking leisure videos at the Willmott Dixon YouTube channel:

The Future of Leisure
Building Communities through Leisure

