

King Alfred Leisure Centre

Public and Stakeholder Engagement Report

May 2025



allianceleisure



**Active
Insight**

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Project Background

This report summarises the key findings of the public and stakeholder engagement groups undertaken for Brighton Council, on behalf of Alliance Leisure.

Active Insight, the industry leader in customer insight and market intelligence within the active leisure industry, is pleased to present this report.

The objective of these engagement groups was to explore attitudes and perceptions towards the proposed redevelopment of a new King Alfred Leisure Centre.

There were four sessions in total; one with current users of the centre and the others with stakeholders, including disability groups, community groups and clubs or organisations that hire or use the centre.

The sessions were conducted by Active Insight facilitators – Julie Allen and Marie Doherty – during the last week of April and the first week of May 2025. The groups were held in person, except for the disability session, which took place online.

Executive Summary

The focus groups took place between the 26th of April and 6th May 2025. The sessions were arranged by council officers and Alliance Leisure.

For the public engagement sessions, attendees were recruited from current users, while stakeholders were identified and invited by the council.

Detailed notes from the sessions, along with a list of attendees, are available.



Executive Summary

Public Users

- ❖ Health, social connection, and inclusive fitness options were key priorities.
- ❖ Barriers included cost, poor transport links, and accessibility challenges.
- ❖ Strong desire for inclusive facilities, such as improved changing areas and a hydrotherapy pool.
- ❖ Mixed views on current operator; transparency and reinvestment were discussed.

Sports Groups and Clubs

- ❖ Value reliable, well-maintained facilities to support team activity and club growth.
- ❖ Concerns about outdated spaces and lack of specialised equipment.
- ❖ Emphasised the need for bookable, multi-use spaces and co-location with health services.
- ❖ Desire for partnership in shaping programming and facility planning.

Community Groups

- ❖ Physical activity was viewed as vital for social cohesion and wellbeing.
- ❖ Identified barriers include transport, session timing, and unclear communication.
- ❖ Need for flexible spaces and culturally appropriate sessions.
- ❖ Requested increased engagement in future planning and design.

Disability Group

- ❖ Called for meaningful inclusion, sensory-sensitive design, and community identity.
- ❖ Key needs: hydrotherapy, accessible changing, specialist equipment, and staff training.
- ❖ Emphasised the importance of regular programming during standard hours.
- ❖ Strong focus on emotional wellbeing, safety, and feeling part of the community.

Public Engagement – Residents and Community Groups – Key Findings

There were 14 attendees at this group including representatives from West Hove Forum and Friends of West Hove Lagoon. Below are the key findings from each of the themes discussed. Each topic was explored across four cross-cutting themes.

Topic 1: What do you consider to be important for your wellbeing?

Category	Ideas and Feedback
User Experience, Accessibility and Inclusivity	• Importance of swimming, sports hall, gym, salsa, yoga. • Need for flexible, multi-use/modular spaces dance, classes to adapt to new trends like Padel, Spin, Reformer/Pilates. • Desire for friendly gym environments with human-scaled spaces for older users avoiding design of vast spaces with rows of equipment. • Multi-functional spaces enable wider range of activities supporting an inclusive and diverse community across all age groups. • Retain ballroom (only sprung floor in Hove) space/large activity hall for special events, e.g., tea dance for older people to help alleviate loneliness and increase sociability. • Currently need to use several sites to maintain activity due to many facilities hired out to groups. • Accessibility by bike needs improvement - secure bike parking. • Pleased rebuilding on current site. • Concerned that there is a need to build bigger but believe that is not going to happen.

Public Engagement – Residents and Community Groups – Key Findings

Category	Ideas and Feedback
Sustainability and Environmental Considerations	- Concerns about the environmental cost of demolishing and rebuilding versus retrofitting the existing centre. - Emphasis on building longevity (current building has lasted 85 years). - Like to see that explore retrofit, e.g. Saltdean Lido - 1 year older than KALC, has been sympathetically restored and refurbished. - Concern that new build won't last longer than 20 years. - Sparrows will be displaced and would like to see a survey before the construction project starts as affecting 200/250 who 'reside' outside the gym and car park. - A 'one type fits all' design won't work for this project, especially in relation to the marine environment.

Public Engagement – Residents and Community Groups – Key Findings

Category	Ideas and Feedback
Innovation and Technology	• Desire for adaptable spaces to allow for future sport and fitness trends and innovation. • Ability to reconfigure spaces easily (modularity). • Playlist music choices in gyms to personalize user experience. • Streamline booking app across all sites in city. • Improve membership card system as current swipe system ineffective. • Incorporate an appealing design - not soulless.
Operations and Maintenance	• Concern that new spaces must be maintained well over time to avoid deterioration. • Need for clear, visible maintenance standards. • Building must withstand marine weather conditions (wind tunnels). • Current bike parking unsecure. • Need a building that allows people to have a better experience whatever the activity/service/facility.

Public Engagement – Residents and Community Groups – Key Findings

Topic 2: What, if anything, prevents you from accessing the current centre?

Category	Ideas and Feedback
User Experience, Accessibility and Inclusivity	- Limited parking, especially for disabled users. - Safety concerns for bike parking. - Swimming pool booked up with too many groups. - Gym isn't appealing as too small and smelly. - Reduced class offering especially yoga at weekend, dominated by Les Mills classes. - Inability to book as many classes as like. - Public transport access issues from west of the city - only 700 bus route along seafront as most are along Church Road. - Like to see better integration of public transport to access KALC. - General building tiredness and unfriendly spaces. - Weather (wind tunnels) affecting access.
Sustainability and Environmental Considerations	Worry that if new builds aren't designed for the marine environment, they will degrade quickly.

Public Engagement – Residents and Community Groups – Key Findings

Category	Ideas and Feedback
Innovation and Technology	• Poor app/website systems for booking classes and sessions across multiple sites; • Lack of intuitive digital booking experience, especially for older users.
Operations and Maintenance	• Building perceived as "run down" with limited maintenance - cold showers, leaks, broken infrastructure - not fit for purpose and can't be adapted any more. • Current building has been allowed to deteriorate over last 8 years. • Aging infrastructure like boilers poorly maintained until recent boiler installation. • Cleanliness standards have been poor, smelly gym, cockroach infestation.

Public Engagement – Residents and Community Groups – Key Findings

Topic 3: What facilities or services are important to you for accessing the centre?

Category	Ideas and Feedback
User Experience, Accessibility, and Inclusivity	• Retain swimming pools, gym, dance/yoga spaces, badminton, community meeting areas. • Restore the bowling alley for local use (without "disco" vibe). • Maintain ballroom facilities for social events like tea dances. • Maintain intimacy of spaces to avoid overwhelming users. • Provide variety of classes, not just one branded offering like Les Mills in place of classic yoga classes, especially at weekends. • Incorporate all existing facilities and new family facilities like soft play, climbing, ice rink, saunas and reinstate a restaurant-rooftop. • Ideally retain existing businesses on site - bowling club, independent gym, kid's amusements and golf. • Café affordability for all users .
Sustainability and Environmental Considerations	• Retrofit ideas inspired by Saltdean Lido instead of complete rebuild. • Consider not just the result but the carbon release of demolishing the building. • The current building is very well constructed with deep basements that have lasted 85 years. • Concerns the new building will be destroyed in 2-3 years. • Focus on reuse of structure where possible.

Public Engagement – Residents and Community Groups – Key Findings

Topic 3: What facilities or services are important to you for accessing the centre?

Category	Ideas and Feedback
Innovation and Technology	• Better integration of booking systems across sites. • Personal playlists in gym. • Use of solar panels and green energy features.
Operations and Maintenance	• Prioritize regular maintenance to avoid spaces falling into disrepair. • Belief that building been deliberately run down over last 20 years. • Concerns about the lack of plans in place to maintain new building after initial few years. • Building must be resilient and adapt to the harsh sea environment. • Reuse boiler/parts from existing facilities where possible.

Public Engagement – Residents and Community Groups – Key Findings

Topic 3: What health-related facilities or services are important to you, and could be provided at the centre?

Category	Ideas and Feedback
User Experience, Accessibility, and Inclusivity	• Interest in GP referrals for gym use - already in place, one of existing trainers at KALC very actively involved (successful centre in Eastbourne). • Multi-use spaces that could include fitness for physical rehabilitation (obesity, diabetes, recovery support). • Health-related cafes or shops e.g. chemist onsite, treat medical complaints onsite, physiotherapy, podiatry. • More inclusive services to complement leisure without replacing enjoyable experience. • Concern that square footage will be reduced with new building to 30% of total size of current space, however, overall useable space could be more due to current redundant spaces. • Question if good idea to mix enjoyable activities with medical services.
Sustainability and Environmental Considerations	• Consider using redundant spaces in current building in place of rebuild.
Innovation and Technology	• Technology for managing GP referrals and tracking fitness/health improvements through leisure activities.
Operations and Maintenance	• Any health service spaces must be clean, hygienic, properly maintained, and designed for medical-grade usage where needed.

Public Engagement – Residents and Community Groups – Key Findings

Additional Notes

- ❖ Concerns were raised that developers had already been appointed, although artist's impressions were not yet available.
- ❖ Some participants expressed concern about Freedom Leisure managing the contract and charging high fees without visible reinvestment. However, others noted that profits are reinvested after the management fee is deducted.

Stakeholders – Sports Groups and Clubs

– Key Findings

The following clubs were invited to attend - Brighton and Hove Boxing, , Brighton Stormers Roller Hockey, Swimming Club, Water Polo, Dolphins Disabled Swimming Club , Badminton, Roller Derby, City of Brighton &Hove Swimming Club

Topic 1: What do you consider to be important for your overall wellbeing?

Category	Ideas and Feedback
User Experience, Accessibility and Inclusivity	• Access to inclusive facilities for all ages, genders and disabilities (e.g., hearing/visual impairments, Parkinson's, additional learning needs). • Space is vital: enough room for sport safety (e.g., badminton and pickleball need adequate runoff areas and safe court separation). • Independence is key for older or less able users - safe pool access, working lifts, spacious changing/shower facilities. • Protection and inclusion for trans and LGBTQ+ users via gender-neutral facilities. • Need for social interaction, combating loneliness and building community ("we all need a home"). • Safe, welcoming environments, especially during darker hours (concern over walking to cars at night). • Continuity and identity: preserving long-established community clubs like boxing.

Stakeholders – Sports Groups and Clubs

– Key Findings

Category	Ideas and Feedback
Sustainability and Environmental Considerations	• Concerns about facility inefficiencies and underutilised dead spaces. • Requests for better use of space for multi-generational use and intergenerational sustainability.
Innovation and Technology	• Highlighted importance of sports tourism and showcasing innovative programmes (e.g., adaptive boxing). • Use of the centre as a platform for wider impact via nationally/internationally recognised programmes and events - swimming, boxing, pickleball.
Operations and Maintenance	• High value placed on keeping all ages and demographics engaged through programming and inclusive planning. • Importance of multipurpose space that doesn't feel overcrowded or unsafe. • Consideration/better scheduling of activity zoning to avoid noise/light clashes (e.g., curtain safety and loud music from adjacent classes).

Stakeholders – Sports Groups and Clubs

– Key Findings

Topic 2: What, if anything, prevents you from accessing the existing leisure centre?

Category	Ideas and Feedback
User Experience, Accessibility and Inclusivity	• Lack of sufficient parking, unaffordable fees (both for activity and parking) and limited public transport. • Long waiting lists and oversubscription for some facilities. • Lack of appropriate access (e.g., pool entry for those unable to use steps, cycling facilities, gender-neutral spaces). • Women felt some public facilities and spaces (like the seafront and lawns) were male-dominated and unwelcoming. • Ineffective and non-user-friendly booking systems.

Stakeholders – Sports Groups and Clubs

– Key Findings

Category	Ideas and Feedback
Sustainability and Environmental Considerations	• Issues with temporary plastic taping for court markings—unsustainable and wasteful. • Broken toilets and ongoing maintenance issues (sewage, leaks) leading to environmental degradation and health hazards - already seen in new Lawn's facilities.
Innovation and Technology	• Booking system needs overhaul as not user friendly.
Operations and Maintenance	• Facilities (e.g., lifts, toilets, showers) not reliably functional; repairs take too long. • Concerns about safety (e.g., slope used as toilet, poor external lighting). • Shared spaces (e.g., NHS stroke rehab vs. badminton) cause acoustic conflicts and reduce user enjoyment.

Stakeholders – Sports Groups and Clubs – Key Findings

Topic 2b: What facilities and services are important to you for accessing the leisure centre?

Category	Ideas and Feedback
User Experience, Accessibility and Inclusivity	• Provision of discrete, dedicated spaces for clubs and programmes (e.g., boxing gym, pickleball courts, community health groups). • Better layout for inclusive access (e.g., changing rooms, showers, pool access). • Seating for spectators and families to engage in the space. • Affordable and accessible healthy café/restaurant. • Clearly marked, permanent court lines for activities like pickleball. • Provision for a "home" environment for long-standing clubs with deep community roots.

Stakeholders – Sports Groups and Clubs

– Key Findings

Category	Ideas and Feedback
Sustainability and Environmental Considerations	• Permanent, eco-friendly court markings instead of single use plastic overlays. • Efficient layout and design to minimize environmental impact and wasting space as seen currently at KALC. • Open discussion about improving energy and resource use.
Innovation and Technology	• Requests for a modern, multi-use space that can accommodate changing trends. • Enable sports tourism and reputation-building through modern, flexible venues. • New design to consider the impact of windows and glare for both activities and communal areas for visually impaired. • Vending to be better considered not just an add on.
Operations and Maintenance	• Adequate soundproofing for both shared spaces and studio classes with loud music. • Facilities designed to be easier and cheaper to maintain. • Appropriate storage for activity equipment. • Efficient design to ensure facilities can be used by various groups simultaneously without interference.

Stakeholders – Sports Groups and Clubs

– Key Findings

Topic 3: What community health-related services are important to you and could be delivered at the leisure centre?

Category	Ideas and Feedback
User Experience, Accessibility and Inclusivity	• Support services for mental health, neurodiversity and loneliness. • Social prescribing opportunities via sport (e.g., pickleball, boxing). • Inclusive programmes for dementia, rehabilitation and disabilities. • Need for a structured, permanent home base to deliver long-term community health improvements. • Safe spaces that promote independence and participation.

Stakeholders – Sports Groups and Clubs

– Key Findings

Category	Ideas and Feedback
Sustainability and Environmental Considerations	• Space needs to be cleaned and maintained to reduce disease spread (e.g., foot infections in showers). • Environmental maintenance (e.g., cleaning external access and site, reducing public urination) to improve wellness experience.
Innovation and Technology	• Mention of physiotherapy and potential integration with healthcare services—links to NHS and digital health collaboration - within site redevelopment. • New pool to have an adjustable height floor to open up opportunities for diving.
Operations and Maintenance	• Health facilities such as physiotherapy rooms, social prescribing hubs, drop-in NHS services (e.g., stroke rehab). • Toilets and plumbing systems that can cope with large events. • Flexibility to support both grassroots and health-focused programming (e.g., from early childhood to elderly care).

Stakeholders – Community Groups

– Key Findings

The following groups were invited to attend - Beryl BTN Bike hire , Black Tri-Tribe, Sussex Sight Loss , Sussex Cricket, Community works, The Hangleton & Knoll Project , BD Manager at Brighton & Hove Buses and Metrobus., DINK Brighton Pickleball, CEO Soul Corporations, Brighton and Hove u3a.

Topic 1: What do you consider to be important for your overall wellbeing?

Category	Ideas and Feedback
User Experience, Accessibility, and Inclusivity	• Strong emphasis on access via safe cycling routes, with secure parking and close to the centre. • Priority for active travel (walking, wheeling, cycling) over private car use. • Support for high public transport accessibility, including possible bus diversions to the site. • Taxi rank. • Welcoming interior spaces: open, light-filled, with greenery. • Staircases should be as visible and usable as lifts - design should promote movement. • Access to sea swimming and safe connections between building and seafront. • Future design - no windows/designs with strong reflection or bright lights in communal areas and simple walkway designs for easy navigation around centre - for visually impaired.

Stakeholders – Community Groups

– Key Findings

Category	Ideas and Feedback
Sustainability and Environmental Considerations	- Concerns about sea-level rise and storm damage impacting the site. Sea wall planned in the near future will help protect the centre from high tides and shingle. - Building must be resilient to shingle, flooding and marine climate. - Passive design elements like solar panels and heat recovery encouraged. - Potential for '0' emission buses - financial constraints for the bus companies to develop without support. - No more than 25% ratio parking/facility.
Innovation and Technology	- Desire for seamless digital booking systems across leisure centres. - Smart design for wayfinding and user personalization. - High-quality Wi-Fi and potential for digital features like smart lockers and self-checkout. - Like to see VR rooms/Immersive environments.

Stakeholders – Community Groups – Key Findings

Category	Ideas and Feedback
Operations and Maintenance	• Need for well-maintained spaces with high hygiene standards. • Building should support easy maintenance access to reduce long-term costs. • Dedicated service entrance to avoid interfering with public space. • Multiple entrance to access building.

Stakeholders – Community Groups

– Key Findings

Topic 2: What, if anything, prevents you from accessing the existing leisure centre?

Category	Ideas and Feedback
User Experience, Accessibility, and Inclusivity	• Limited and inconvenient public transport routes, especially from the west and north. • No direct bus service (except the 700); walking from Church Road is difficult - street clutter must be kept to a minimum for visually impaired and disabled. • Bus access to/from Brighton and surrounding areas to leisure centre is poor. • Barriers for users with mobility scooters; lifts not always accessible. • Car parking and drop-off zones are poorly designed. • Unwelcoming building: spaces feel tired and unsafe. • Shared spaces need to plan better with acoustics as impacts different activities. • No ice rink: re-establish Brighton Tigers Ice Hockey team again. • No cricket nets. • Location of ceiling lighting for badminton is key to play effectively.

Stakeholders – Community Groups

– Key Findings

Category	Ideas and Feedback
Sustainability and Environmental Considerations	• Poor integration with active travel options discourages low-carbon journeys. • Lack of coordinated planning with wider transport network.
Innovation and Technology	• Outdated and unreliable booking systems deter use. • Poor user interface and lack of real-time information and bookings (especially difficult for older users).
Operations and Maintenance	• Longstanding issues with cold showers, leaks, poor acoustics, and smelly gyms. • Maintenance has been delayed due to redevelopment plans. • Current infrastructure is perceived as neglected.

Stakeholders – Community Groups

– Key Findings

Topic 2b: What facilities and services are important to you for accessing the leisure centre?

Category	Ideas and Feedback
User Experience, Accessibility, and Inclusivity	• Desire for 50m pool, diving boards, sea-swim changing access, saunas, rooftop café, badminton, gym, boxing, pickleball, padel. • Multi-use halls to cover all activities and to have all courts marked out permanently - currently pickleball spending time and money on tape to mark the courts. • Dedicated inclusive and neurodiverse-friendly design features. • Space for lesser-known sports (e.g., cricket, showdown-relies on senses so needs quiet space). • Integration with existing groups like Boxing Club and local gym. • Like swimming to offer something that sets apart from all other pool facilities in Brighton and Hove. • Ensure accessible to all different groups not just first come first served.

Stakeholders – Community Groups

– Key Findings

Topic 2b: What facilities and services are important to you for accessing the leisure centre?

Category	Ideas and Feedback
Sustainability and Environmental Considerations	• Passive energy strategies like solar panels and water recycling. • Durable materials suitable for marine environment. • Retrofit options should be considered before full rebuild. • Ice rink could potentially heat the pool?
Innovation and Technology	• Spaces should be modular to adapt to changing trends. • Personalisation through playlists or apps. • Live capacity displays and digital signage. • Integration with transport (e.g., real-time bus/train data)
Operations and Maintenance	• Spaces should be designed for durability and low maintenance costs. • Future-proofing against marine wear and tear is essential. • Priority on cleanliness, comfort, and clear upkeep responsibility.

Stakeholders – Community Groups

– Key Findings

Topic 3: What community health-related services are important to you and could be delivered at the leisure centre?

Category	Ideas and Feedback
User Experience, Accessibility, and Inclusivity	• Interest in GP referrals for physical activity and gym use. • Quiet spaces for mental health recovery and inclusive wellness. • Spaces to reduce stigma for those new to sport or managing chronic conditions.
Sustainability and Environmental Considerations	• Potential to share medical space with adjacent housing development. • Design for long-term community use and adaptability in response to changing health trends.
Innovation and Technology	• Tech integration for GP referrals and user tracking of health progress. • Online health and wellbeing resources tied to leisure services.
Operations and Maintenance	• High standards of hygiene and cleanliness essential. • Operational clarity on managing shared spaces with health partners.

Stakeholders – Disability Groups – Key Findings

The 4 attendees included people with visually impairments, mental health conditions, the mother of son with cerebral palsy, and a representative of the Parent Carer Council and mother to a child with Downs Syndrome.

1. What do you consider to be important for your overall wellbeing?

Participant 1 – Enjoys staying physically active through walking, parkrun and table tennis, which supports his mental wellbeing as a visually impaired person.

Participant 2 – Values social connection as a key part of maintaining his mental health.

Participant 3 – Stressed the importance of inclusive, accessible opportunities for children and young people to be active. Environmental factors like lighting and acoustics must be considered. Consistency, support and frequent sessions are essential for this community.

Participant 4 – Her son, who uses a wheelchair, needs social inclusion and access to local, familiar facilities. He currently feels excluded due to poor accessibility.

Group sentiment – Inclusivity is crucial for mental health. When children leave mainstream education, they risk isolation. Everyone should feel part of the community — they matter.

Stakeholders – Disability Groups – Key Findings

2. What, if anything, prevents you from using the existing leisure centre?

Participant 1 – No major barriers but would welcome more opportunities and clearer communications about safe, inclusive activities for visually impaired people.

Participant 2 – Faces financial barriers and would benefit from a hub where activities are clearly signposted.

Participant 3 – The entrance, bus stop location and limited Blue Badge parking are significant access issues, especially in poor weather.

Facilities – There is a shortage of accessible changing rooms which need to be located near key areas like the pool and gym.

Environment – Lighting and acoustics must be carefully designed to support those sensitive to light and sound, including spaces like the café.

Operations – Queuing can be stressful for some users, particularly young people and should be addressed from a front-of-house perspective.

Scheduling – Quieter sessions are lacking and should be offered during standard hours rather than at inconvenient times.

Hydrotherapy – A hydrotherapy pool is a high priority; one parent highlighted the difficulty of accessing existing provision, a concern echoed by others.

Stakeholders – Disability Groups – Key Findings

2b. What facilities and services are important for you to access the LC?

Specialist equipment for people using wheelchairs (example of upper body cycle and specialist gym kit that is accessible for those with disabilities).

Specialist knowledge of team members (operational consideration).

Clear and tactile markings on all equipment for those who are visually impaired, to enable tactile identification of essential information.

Good lighting (acknowledged this can be challenging for others who are sensitive to light but essential for those who are visually impaired).

Mental health groups – someone to check in on you if you haven't attended – a social group.

Hydrotherapy needs to be considered – this was a “plea from the heart” from a mother who continues to fight for her son to be able to access facilities and feel part of his community.

3. Additional community-health related services

Space for meetings and groups to come together (nutrition/mental health groups), physiotherapy.

A café is important for people to meet and socialise.

Acknowledgements

With special thanks to the public, local stakeholder groups and their representatives, for their engagement and contribution to this piece of research.

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