



# New Mills Leisure Centre changes

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Alternatives to the current proposal

March 2024

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## Contact us



# Introduction

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## 1.1. Who we are

We are a group of residents living in New Mills and surrounding areas who are opposed to the current changes being proposed to New Mills leisure centre by the council, most notably the idea to shrink the hall and to remove the squash court. We have previously outlined the reasons for our opposition in detail.

We have demonstrated that there is wide-ranging support for this opposition through petitions\* and protests.

\*Petitions can be viewed [here](#) and [here](#).

## 1.2. Purpose of this document



While it's been important for us to demonstrate the clear opposition that exists to these plans, we would also like to engage in a **constructive conversation with the council** about which alternatives might exist.

We believe that the £2.4 million can be invested in the leisure centre to secure its long-term financial wellbeing, without removing much-loved and well-used facilities.

We'd like to share these ideas with you here.

# 1.3. Our understanding of the council's proposals

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Given that there are no plans available in the public domain, we'd like to first outline what we understand to be the plans for the leisure centre. This information has largely been gained through word of mouth.

We understand that the council would like to add 1x wellness centre, 1x gym extension and 1x fitness studio to New Mills Leisure Centre using a budget of £2.4 million in a bid to make it financially sustainable. It is not clear exactly what physical requirements a Wellness Centre has.

To do this they are proposing to:

- Convert one quarter of the sports hall into a gym and fitness studio.
- Replace the squash court with the wellness centre (AKA GP Referral Scheme)

They have assessed that it is too expensive to build up or out.

The plans are largely motivated by the need to make the leisure centre financially sustainable in the long term, although we have no sight of any financial modelling, or assumptions made in either the growth of certain types of activities or loss of revenue from sports no longer able to be played. We also do not know whether there are restrictions on how the investment can be used.

The ideas in this document are based on the limited information above.

# 1.4. Impacts of the current proposal

## Losing the squash court would mean:



### No more squash court

This expensive, tailor-made facility which is well used and was fundraised for by the community will be gone forever. Any potential to diversify its use and improve profitability would be gone.



### No more junior squash

The children currently developing a love and talent for the sport will no longer be able to play it locally. New Mills has several emerging medal winning juniors.



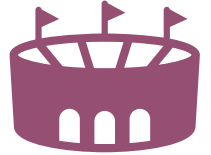
### No more men's squash league.

Two well established New Mills teams have played in the Northwest Counties Squash league for 40 years. Men benefit both mentally and physically from their participation and the league attracts visitors to the town.



### No more ladies' squash

The ladies who meet every Tuesday night and plan to start joining leagues would have the rug pulled from under them. Women look forward to these sessions all week where they have fun, make friends and get a great workout.



### Olympic opportunities lost

Squash fever is set to hit the world in 2028 when it becomes an official Olympic sport. As people take up the sport left, right and centre, New Mills would miss out.

## Shrinking the sports hall would mean:



### Reduced schools' provision

The sports hall is used by 1400 school children. New Mills is the only town in the High Peak which offers School Sport on this scale thanks to the full-sized sports hall. This success story would be at risk.



### Reduced league opportunities

The possibility to play many competitive sports in line with sporting governing body rules would be gone forever.



### Some sports would be eliminated

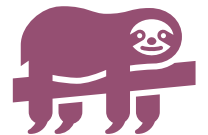
Some sports such as basketball, football, hockey, netball, handball and cricket require a full-size sports hall, or they cannot take place. Rollerblading would be difficult in a smaller space too.



### Reduced flexibility

At 33m x 18m the sports hall is already slightly below [the minimum size recommended by sports England](#). No one would choose to build a new hall smaller than this. However, with 4 courts, the space enables several activities to occur at the same time and minimises the time people spend waiting their turn.

## Overall impact:



### Reduced opportunities to 'Move More' – especially for children

These facilities provide people with options around how to get fit or stay fit. They can be used by adults and children alike – the same can't be said for fitness classes and gyms.

# 1.5. Values and principles

We believe that decision making on this project should be guided by strong values and principles such as:

- **Consult the public meaningfully** - The public, have a legitimate expectation of meaningful consultation being undertaken. This expectation arises from: the council's constitution stating that decisions will be informed by consultation and with a presumption in favour of openness; the proposal potentially amounting to the removal of a benefit with significant impacts to be considered; and the community's significant efforts to part-fund the original leisure centre facilities that are now at risk.
- **People over profit** – Decision-making should be anchored in a commitment to meeting the diverse and evolving needs of our community. While financial considerations are undeniably crucial for sustaining the facility, it is imperative that the primary focus remains on the well-being and satisfaction of the individuals who utilize it.
- **Sport is for all ages** – Any planned changes should consider how people of all ages are affected. Children are at a formative stage in their relationship to sport and health, and older people can remain healthy and fit for longer given the right opportunities. Age is also a protected characteristic under The Equalities Act 2010. Other protected characteristics should also be considered.
- **Support the Move More strategy** – Any decisions about the centre should consider the impacts on activity levels of the general population; ensuring we retain a wide variety of sports means that there is something for everyone.
- **Body and Mind** – The social and wellbeing benefits of sport are just as important as the health benefits. A community centre should encourage clubs and group activities that enable people to develop friendships and feel part of their community.
- **Evidence based decision making** – Councillors should properly scrutinise plans, collect robust evidence and base decision making on a thorough understanding of the community, its needs and its behaviours.



New Mills Leisure Centre is interesting because of the huge role the community played in raising funds for it to be built. A hardworking committee organised the carnivals, discos and many other fundraising events. It was a community wide endeavour and people even collected milk bottle tops and newspapers for cash!

*Image credit: High Peak Reporter, 'opening of sports hall in Leisure Centre', June 1988.*



# Gaining and optimising space

In this section we lay out how we think the council could achieve its aspired aims, without losing the squash court or the full-sized sports hall. We have provided a variety of suggestions.

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## 2.1. Current layout of leisure centre

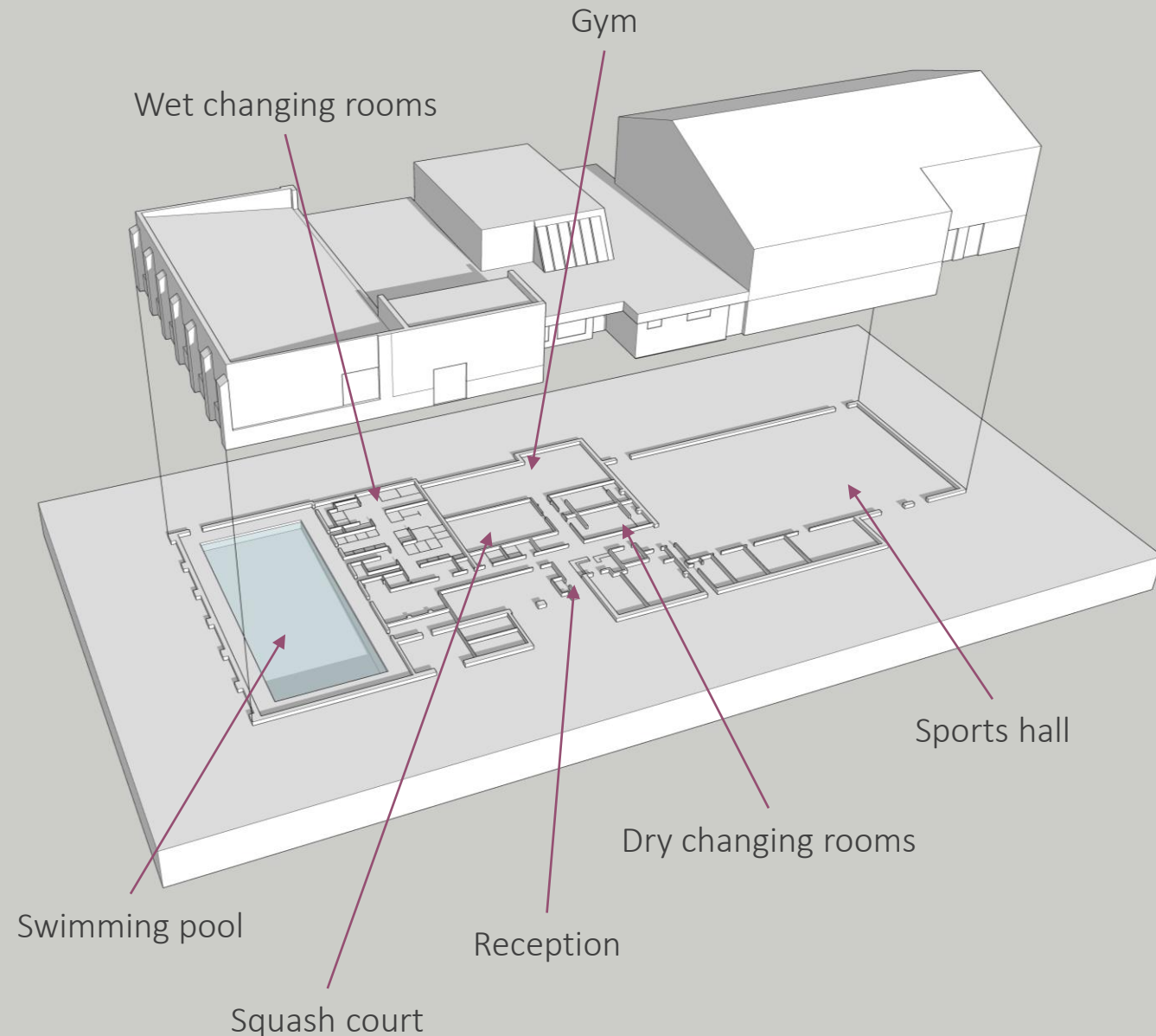
It is fair to say that the current layout of the leisure centre is not ideal! It is largely a single-storey structure spread out over a long and narrow site.

Large extensions to the site are difficult in any direction: car-parks and a medical centre surround it on three sides, and the fourth side slopes steeply down to a road.

We believe however that valuable extra capacity can be achieved by maximising the amount of double storey space, without significantly altering the existing building footprint.

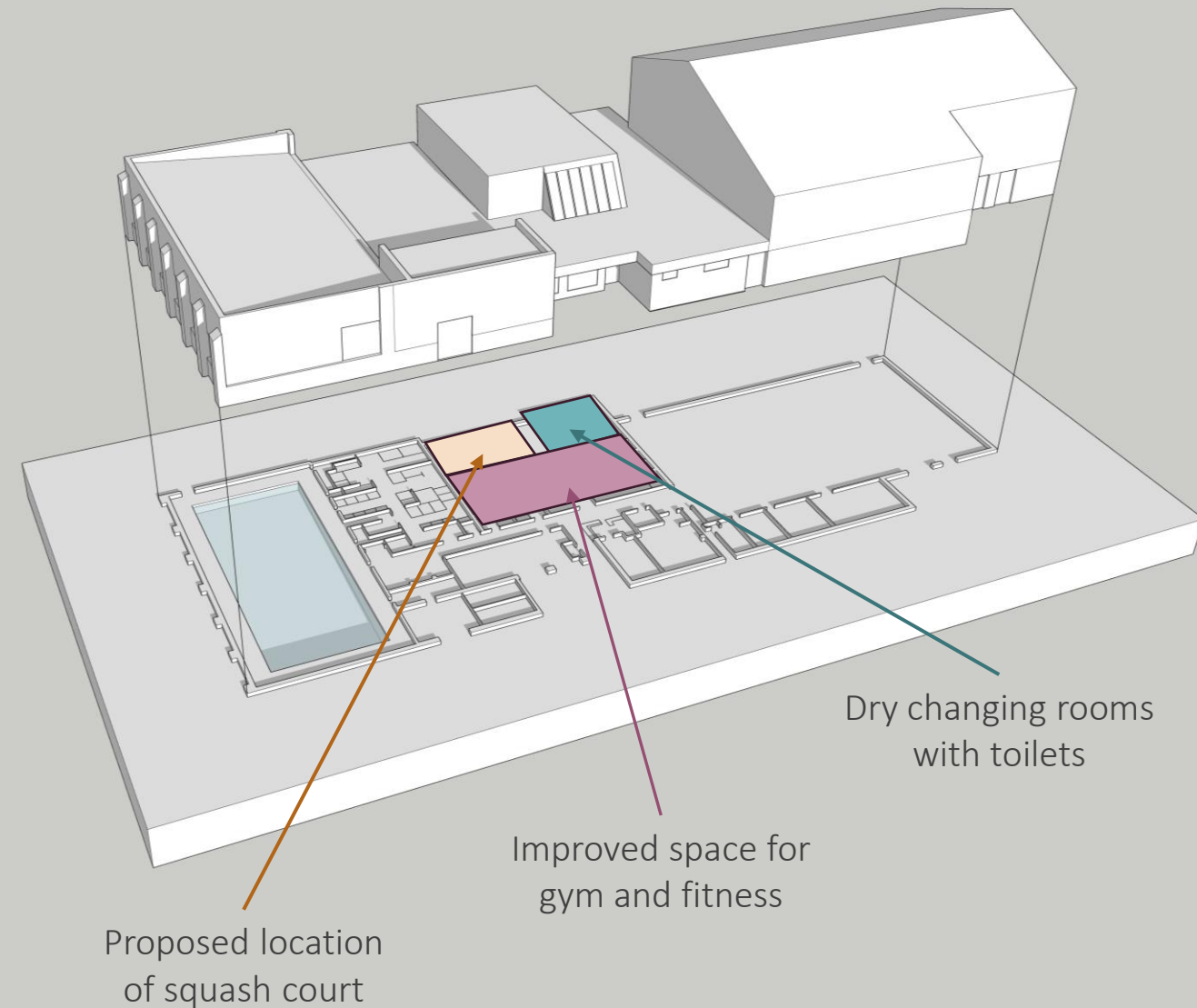
A more holistic approach to space planning should also free up valuable space to enable re-modelling works.

We have consulted a professional architect who has deemed that the proposals in slides 2.2 and 2.3 **should be possible within the £2.4 million budget with careful planning.**



## 2.2. Reorganising the floor plan

Part of the existing gym can be converted back into a squash court (as it was previously) and the dry changing rooms could also be moved. This allows the central section of the leisure centre to be used more efficiently.

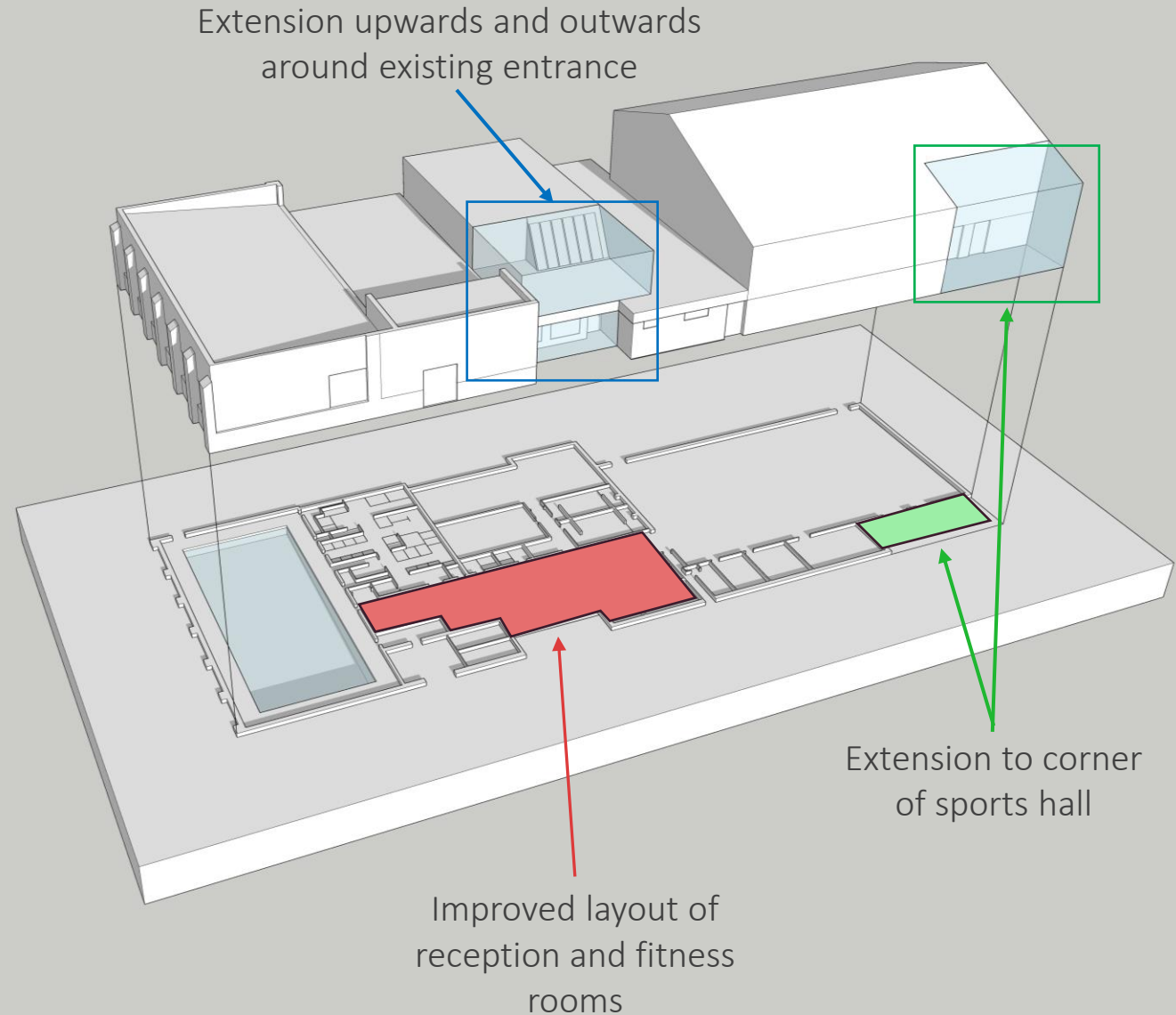


## 2.3. Creating new spaces

Although there is little scope to make large extensions, smaller changes could allow the space to be used more efficiently.

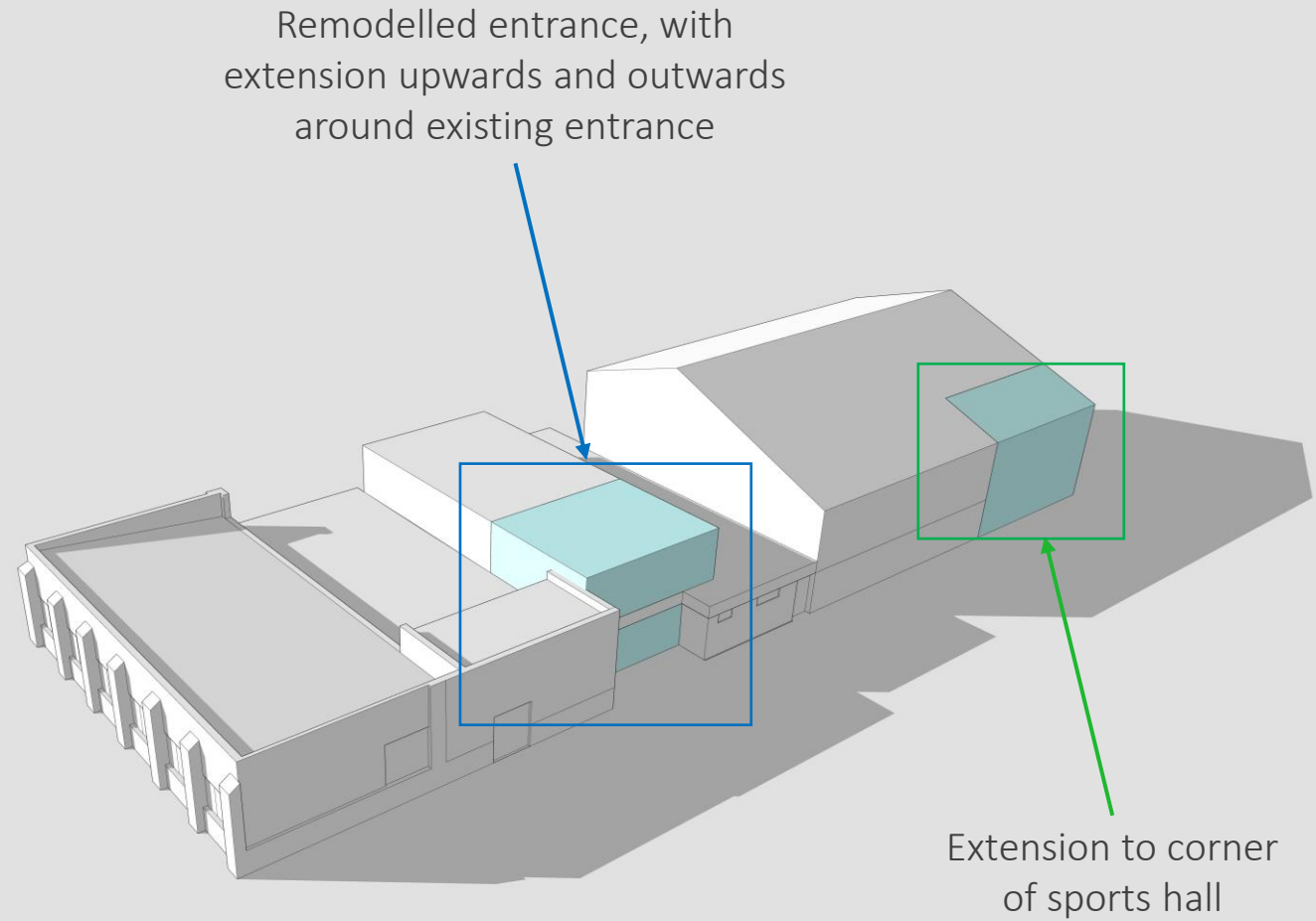
Extending the eastern corner of the sports hall would provide extra storage space, and also allow the mezzanine above to be extended. In addition, the existing storage spaces could be used more effectively.

Building outwards and upwards near the existing entrance would improve access to the pool, make better use of the rooms and areas near the reception, and allow all the facilities to work better together.



## 2.3. Creating new spaces (continued)

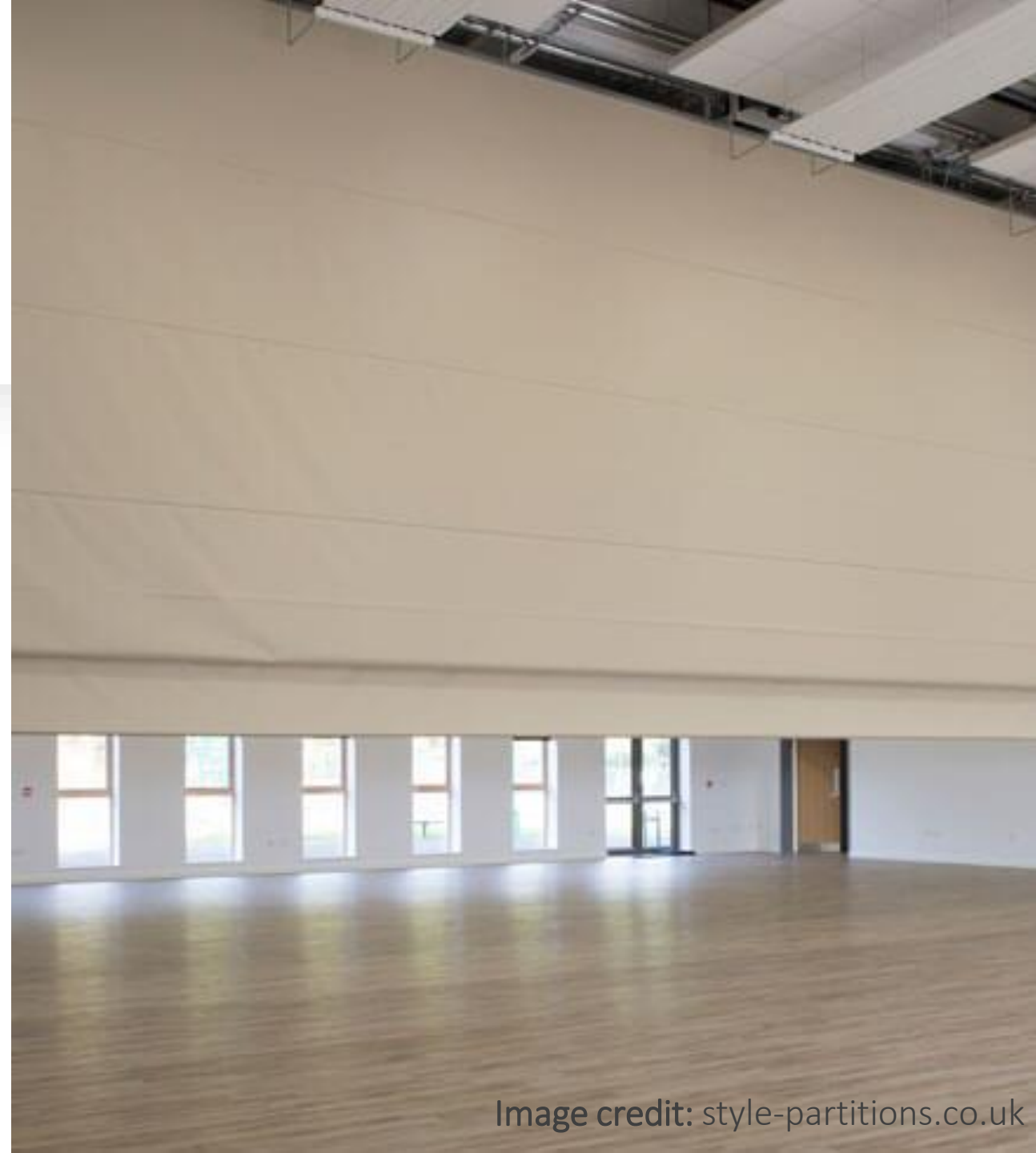
Full resolution images can be found [here](#).



## 2.4. A more multi-purpose sports hall and squash court

With some minor modifications the **squash court** becomes a multi-purpose space that can be used for a wide variety of sports and fitness classes, parties, kids' clubs, events as well as squash. Introducing an interactive squash wall creates a highly adaptable space with many profit-making opportunities (*see section 3.2 AND 3.2.1 for more on optimising the use of the squash court*).

Create one or two ceiling mounted drop-down multi-roll walls across the existing **sports hall** to give the flexibility to hold multiple exercise classes or other activities in the hall, whilst also allowing full hall use for other sports (*see section 3.3 for more on optimising the usage of the sports hall*).



## 2.5. Use other venues

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Adjacent public spaces could be used for fitness classes and / or the wellness centre.

Staff could do outreach to adjacent public buildings (e.g. walk-in clinic, St George's Hall, New Mills High School) to run fitness classes or even the wellness centre.

The newly installed gym and fitness centre at the High School (installed late last year) would be an ideal place to run GP referral sessions. The school only use it in school hours so it could be used from 3.15pm.

Using other venues requires a shift in mentality from running the Leisure Centre as a purely 'facility-based resource', **to becoming a 'community-based resource'**.



Staff are one of the most valuable assets of a Leisure Centre and could work flexibly across locations.

# Beyond space issues – how can we improve the leisure centre?

We understand the need to make the leisure centre financially sustainable and we embrace this investment opportunity. We consider that there are many ways to make the centre better, more financially secure, and more able to meet the needs of local people.

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## 3.1. Efficiency savings

### **Saving money and limiting environmental impacts.**

The leisure centre could make efficiency savings to protect its financial health and the planet.

#### **Invest in:**

- Solar panels
- Heat pumps
- Timers on radiators (they're on high in the middle of the summer)!
- Improved insulation

# 3.2. Squash court optimisation

We believe the true potential of the squash court has not been fully met in New Mills: According to Squash England *“a well-operated squash court should be making somewhere between £15,000 and £19,000 per annum. These figures are based on high peak usage and off-peak usage that includes a range of programmes and campaigns, coupled with use for alternative activity provision in off-peak hours.”*

The court at New Mills is already used for activities other than squash – and there are many other untried possibilities for its use (e.g. table tennis). With some acoustic and insulation improvements to make the court more comfortable, it could be used more frequently for a wider range of activities.

## Fitness classes

Image: New Mills Leisure Centre  
Sep 2023



## Table tennis and other sports

Table tennis has been shown to have benefits for people with dementia, Parkinson’s and Alzheimer’s disease.



## Training

Image: Nutrition & Exercise workshop, New Mills Leisure Centre June 2023



## Birthday Parties

Image: First ever child’s squash-based birthday party at New Mills Leisure Centre (December 2023)



# 3.2. Squash court optimisation (continued)

- Squash courts can be **easily modified/adapted to become multipurpose spaces** where classes can be run - for example by installing acoustic baffles from the ceiling the acoustics of the space would be improved; insulating the space would make the court warmer during the winter without necessarily needing any additional heating
- Once modified the court can easily be used for all sorts of activities from **fitness classes, yoga, pilates, table tennis, spinning and lots more.**
- Run **tournaments and squash parties for children** or school squash coaching during the week
- **Advertising space** on the squash court - contact local companies and ask them to sponsor for space. This could help pay for court maintenance
- **Table tennis** in the squash court - could be done as a **GP referral service** given the benefits of table tennis to ME patients.
- Create a **'plus squash' membership pricing bracket.** For an extra £xx a year members could gain free access to the squash court - this would mean it was making money even when not in use.
- **Better advertising** - better publicity would further improve its usage (it's even hard to find info about it on the website).
- **Racketball** (AKA 'Squash 57') - this is another sport that can be played in a squash court. There is an emerging racketball group and with a bit of encouragement/support could really take off.
- An example of where some of the above have **already been done** is from within the council's existing leisure provision at **Glossop**



Image: Junior squash coaching in action. February 2024.

# 3.2.1. Interactive squash wall

Lucrative and fun

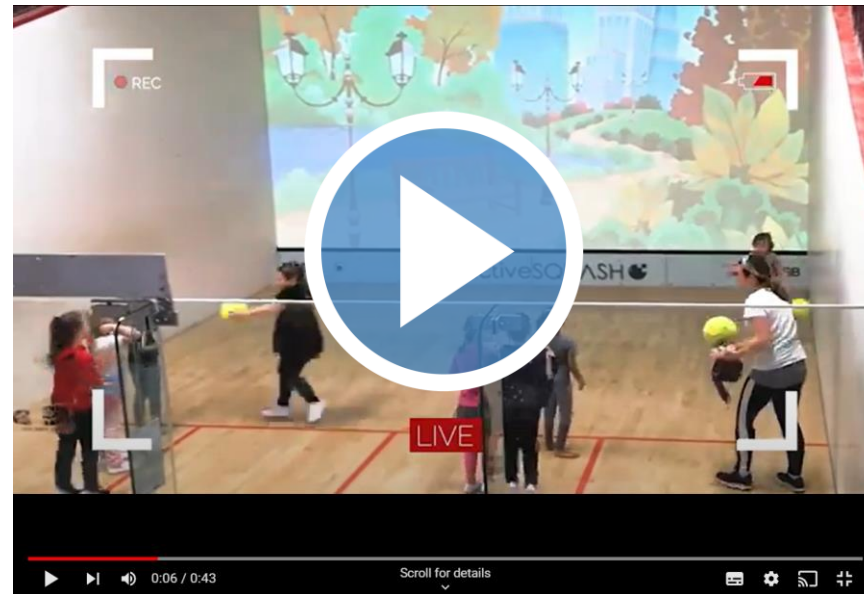
Installing an interactive squash wall in the leisure centre squash court could bring in extra revenue, improve usage (especially off peak) and create new activities and sessions for adults and children alike.

A typical installation costs between £30-40k with a £2.5k/year subscription. With income from usage pre-school sessions, holiday clubs and kids' birthday parties these costs could be easily covered.

Source: <https://funballfrenzy.co.uk/>

During the peak evening period and other key periods (e.g. Sat morning junior coaching) the court could be protected for squash usage only.

- Potential income from **birthday parties** would be £150-£200 for 1 hour with a member of staff
- Used for **holiday clubs, preschool play sessions and sessions for home schoolers**
- Installations at Center Parcs are fully utilised at £15-20 for each 40-minute session
- **Improved coaching sessions.** With targets to aim for, it not only helps develop skill but is great fun and will no doubt encourage more children to take up the sport
- The wall is a projector so it could potentially be used to **show films, hold training events or even play games on!**



# 3.3. Sports hall optimisation

Usage of the sports hall could be optimised by:



Installing more modern ceiling mounted partitioning such as this that enable seamless switching between fitness class usage, and full-sports hall usage.



Boosting attendance of sport sessions through funding, better marketing, increased staff support, taster sessions, coaching sessions, competitions and social activities.



Supporting the many new and emerging sports that have the potential to take off in a big way - for example, pickleball is one of the fastest growing sports with a reported increase in players of 65% in 2023.



Hiring it out for non-sport related activities; For example, Chapel-en-le-frith leisure centre has recently been hired out for the model railway exhibition.



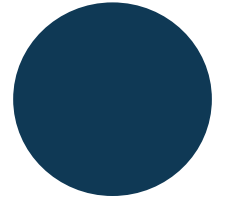
Introducing a system to alert local clubs and users to its availability of the sports hall should other bookings (notably those of schools over the summer) be cancelled.



Upgrading the space i.e. repairing the failed lights, and resurfacing the worn lining. Some modern sports halls have 'LED Smart floors' which illuminate the markings for five different sports in total.



The storage rooms could be much neater and make a better use of the space. Specialised brackets and shelves would help with this. It would also be worth replacing old and broken equipment.





## 3.4. Additional income streams

- **Café** - Additional revenue could be made from a small café. Whilst plans are pending it's hard to say where it would go. In the centre's current configuration, it could go in the sports hall mezzanine or swimming pool viewing area.
- **Referral scheme** - We believe the GP referral scheme/wellness centre suggested by the council makes sense as an additional income stream but must co-exist alongside the squash court.
- **Car park charging** - parking arrangements at the Leisure Centre are currently in chaos. People parked on pavements etc. Introducing a car park charge would make people think more about how they use the car park, and consider alternatives to driving. There is also nearby parking in the Co-op, Church Lane and Torr Top car park if people don't have alternatives to driving and the car park is full.

## 3.5. Making use of the outside space

If you removed the small 9-space car park next to the pool, you could convert it into a MUGA, a cross fit space or a grassy area to run outdoor fitness sessions. These are very popular in parks up and down the country.

In fact, this space is already used in emergencies (e.g. COVID or during a power cut)!

Separate from the leisure centre site itself, we would welcome the emerging idea to invest in a 3G pitch at the Pavilion.

Both endeavours could bring in extra revenue for the leisure centre.

It would need to be investigated, but there is also a nicely-sized piece of grassland that belongs to the school right next to the leisure centre which could potentially be used for outdoor activities.



# 3.6. Pool improvements



## Some ideas:

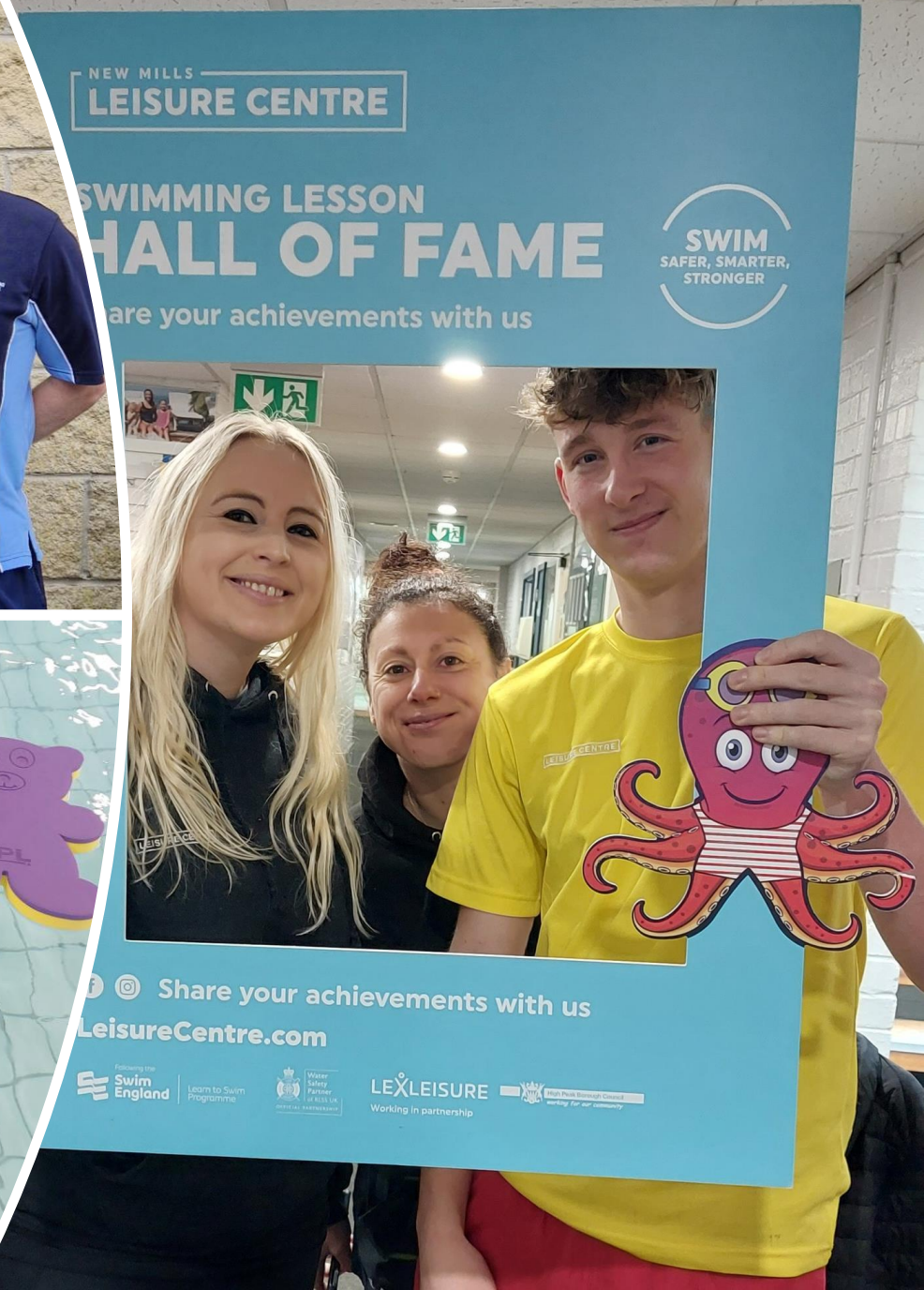
- The tiles could be replaced/cleaned due to mould issues
- The wet-side changing rooms smell of toilets – drainage issue needs to be addressed
- More interesting inflatables in the pool
- Better enforcement of speeds in the swim lanes so potential users aren't put off
- More times when the pool can be used for a general public swim
- Redesigning the disabled steps into the pool, by orienting them parallel to the length rather than perpendicular, and making them removable, creating more capacity and a better experience for slow lane swimmers.





# 3.7. Staff investment

- More staff to deal with GP referrals - a GP referral scheme isn't just about the facility; it also requires sufficient staffing.
- More staff to run additional lessons
- Improved staff retention: Develop payment framework for fitness instructors that rewards them for the clients they bring to the centre



## 3.8. Other suggested improvements

- Modernised gym equipment - the running machines for example are quite old. There aren't enough free weights benches.
- Secure 'Sheffield' style bike racks near the entrance rather than the ineffective butterfly stands - to attract people without access to a car, and free up car parking spaces for other users
- Fixing the automatic doors as you enter and leave the leisure centre.





## **Contact us**

If you'd like to hear more about our ideas (as you can see, we have plenty), please contact Jo-Anne or Oliver:

- Jo-Anne Witcombe (lead writer):

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- Oliver Veitch-Smith (architect):

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## **With thanks**

Putting this document together has involved the hard work of many people, all of whom are sports lovers, leisure centre users and residents of New Mills and surrounding areas.

**Contributors (in alphabetical order) are:**

- Chris Stephens
- Dave Aitken
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- John Eary
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- Julian Ashworth
- Matthew Thomas
- Maurice McCabe
- Natalie Hadden
- Oliver Veitch-Smith
- Richard Wood
- Simon Barlow
- Sue Fisher

Although many people were involved in creating this document, we appreciate that we cannot speak for all current and potential leisure centre users. We would urge the council to carry out a broad public consultation.