



Date: Wednesday, 5 March 2025

Time: 2.00 pm

Venue: The Council Chamber, The Guildhall, Frankwell Quay, Shrewsbury, SY3 8HQ

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CABINET

TO FOLLOW REPORT (S)

12 Management Arrangements at Much Wenlock Leisure Centre (Pages 1 - 70)

Lead Member – Councillor Rob Macey, Portfolio Holder for Culture & Digital

Lead Officer – Jane Trethewey

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Committee and Date
Cabinet 5 March 2025

Item

Public



Management Arrangements at Much Wenlock Leisure Centre

Responsible Officer:		Jane Trethewey, Assistant Director Homes and Communities	
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Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder):		Councillor Robert Macey, Culture and Digital	

1. Synopsis

This report outlines savings identified within the authority's medium term financial strategy at Much Wenlock Leisure Centre and presents a summary of the recent consultation exercise, with a recommendation for the future management of the facility.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. This report updates Cabinet on the outcome of consultation upon Shropshire Council serving notice on 3-18 Education Trust to cease to operate Much Wenlock Leisure Centre and withdraw subsidy for community use, contributing to Leisure savings identified in the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). It recommends that the Council proceeds to serve notice upon the Trust. This would lead to the centre no longer being operated by Shropshire Council for community use, and potential reduction in community provision, subject to options to be explored with the Education Trust for capital investment and alternative approaches to management of the centre.
- 2.2. The Council's financial challenges require consideration of priorities for spend, including reviewing all service areas that are discretionary, and exploring ways in which to deliver services in a more financially sustainable manner. This proposal will therefore support the Council's Healthy Organisation priority

- 2.3. Much Wenlock Leisure Centre is a joint-use facility integral to William Brookes School. It is owned by the William Brookes Academy Trust, a charity and company limited by guarantee. In April 2021 the school joined the 3-18 Education Trust, a Multi Academy Trust with nine schools.
- 2.4. Shropshire Council currently operates and manages the leisure centre on behalf of the Trust to provide community use when the facility is not in use for education purposes. This arrangement has been in place since 2010 when the facility reopened following a school rebuild. The Council's operational budget for this facility in 2025/26 is £267,210

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. That notice is served upon the 3-18 Education Trust by 31st March 2025 of the Council's intention to transfer operational responsibility for Much Wenlock Leisure Centre over to them at the expiry of the year's notice.
- 3.2. That the Council continues its engagement in dialogue with the William Brookes School, 3-18 Academy Trust and other key stakeholders to explore options for capital investment to support the shared ambition to retain public use of the Much Wenlock Leisure Centre on expiry of the Council's revenue subsidy, in support of which the Council will seek to secure capital investment funding to assist in ensuring continued public use and the smooth transition to a new operator.

Report

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 4.1. Leisure provision is discretionary service not a duty, but it is supported by the Council to promote the health and wellbeing of the community and to fulfil the compulsory element of the primary school national curriculum for swimming and water safety.
- 4.2. For leisure centres to be financially viable they require a level of local usage, which also relies upon a good quality facility to attract customers. Much Wenlock Leisure Centre would require further investment to improve its market appeal and support greater public use.
- 4.3. Shropshire Council supports 12 leisure centres across the county, 10 of which are managed by external providers funded by Shropshire Council. Whilst informal discussions have been held with potential operators for Much Wenlock Leisure Centre, on behalf of the William Brookes School, it has not previously been considered a sufficiently financially viable option to appeal to them.
- 4.4. Cabinet approval is therefore sought to serve notice on the 13-18 Educational Trust, to cease the Council's operation of the leisure centre and withdraw the associated subsidy for community use.

- 4.5. The local Councillor for Much Wenlock has been advised of the proposals. Discussions have also taken place with Much Wenlock Town Council, to support the consideration of alternative options for continued community access to the facility. The Council is committed to continuing discussion with the school and other local stakeholders to explore options for capital investment to support a viable long term public access arrangement, and will endeavour to secure a funding towards this.
- 4.6. Should the proposal for Shropshire Council to withdraw subsidy and cease to operate Much Wenlock Leisure Centre not be approved by Cabinet the required savings identified in the MTFS will not be delivered.
- 4.7. **Risk table**

Risks are summarised in the table below, firstly for the option of not serving notice on the Education Trust and continuing Council subsidy and management of the Leisure Centre, and secondly for the option of serving notice and withdrawing management and subsidy from 2026-27.

Risk	Likelihood	Consequence	Mitigation
Option 1 - Not Serving Notice			
Unable to meet MTFS savings Target	Certain	Financial pressure	Identify savings elsewhere within the Leisure service budget or other service budgets, requiring facility closure, reduction, or services losses elsewhere.
Centre requires capital investment	Certain	Difficult to keep operating the service with the facility and equipment in its current condition	Asset review undertaken identifying capital investment needs.
Option 2 - Serving Notice			
Were the facility to close because of funding withdrawal there is an anticipated negative impact upon people in Protected Characteristic groupings as defined in the Equality Act 2010.	Likely	<p>People would have to travel further to access leisure options.</p> <p>Some may choose to cease or reduce their indoor leisure activities, with consequent impact upon their physical and mental health and well being</p>	An initial ESHIA was produced to assess the impact of potential facility closure ahead of public consultation. A follow up ESHIA is presented with this Cabinet report, to set out the likely impacts in the light of feedback, along with actions envisaged to mitigate negative impacts

Academy may be unable to continue offering the same level of Public Access	Almost Certain	Contradicts the objectives of the Shropshire Plan	Work will continue with the Academy Trust and the Town Council to support alternative management arrangements to sustain some public access. The withdrawal of subsidy will make this challenging. The Academy Trust has experience of operating swimming & leisure facilities at other sites.
The Academy may not be able to continue employing staff.	Likely	Loss of skilled staff. Shropshire Council would be liable for redundancy costs.	Working with the Academy Trust to support them developing an alternative operating model to retain some leisure provision. The withdrawal of subsidy will make this challenging.
Significant changes to the level of public access offered.	Almost Certain	Under the terms of the original funding agreement from Sport England, some funding may need to be repaid.	The level of refund would be dependent on the level of public sport provision retained. Working with the Academy Trust to support them developing an alternative operating model to retain some leisure provision. The withdrawal of subsidy will make this challenging.
It may be difficult to progress with essential maintenance.	Likely	The condition of the centre may reduce customer usage and income.	Working with the Academy Trust to manage the transition to the new management arrangements.
The condition of equipment and facility making the site unattractive to alternative operators	Certain	Unable to transfer to an alternative operator	The Academy Trust has been unable to find an alternative operator willing to take on the site.
Challenge to due process resulting in delays to implementation	Unlikely	Delays	An appropriate public consultation process and requirements were established and have been followed.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1. Shropshire Council is currently managing an unprecedented financial position as budgeted for within the Medium-Term Financial Strategy approved by Council on 29 February 2024 and detailed in our monitoring position presented to Cabinet on a monthly basis. This demonstrates that significant management action is required over the remainder of the financial year to ensure the Council's financial survival. While all Cabinet Reports provide the financial implications of decisions being taken, this may change as officers review the overall financial situation and make decisions aligned to financial survivability. Where non-essential spend is identified within the Council, this will be reduced. This may involve
 - scaling down initiatives,
 - changing the scope,
 - delaying implementation, or
 - extending delivery timescales.
- 5.2. Council withdrawal of subsidy and management services from Much Wenlock Leisure Centre could only take place following service of 12 months' notice on the 3-18 Education Trust. However, the transfer could be brought forward by negotiation if required by the school. Should Cabinet approve the proposal, the savings of £267,210 per annum will arise in the financial year 2026/27.
- 5.3. The forecast cost to the Council for delivering this facility in 2024/25 is £316,341. The projected income for 2024/25 is £162,252, which is similar to the previous year but well below the target income of £201,510. The inability to reach the income target is likely to continue into 2025/26 and will require additional savings to be considered.
- 5.4. There are 4 employees and several casual staff who would be affected. This equates to 4.1 FTE Posts. The worst-case scenario for redundancy costs is estimated to be around £17,000.
- 5.5. A Sport England funding agreement relating to the construction of the facility is in place until 2031. Should public access be significantly reduced such that there was no longer regular availability to non-school users, Shropshire Council, as the original recipient of capital funding of £1,008,000, would be liable to repay a proportion of that capital, estimated to be in the region of £275K. The exact amount reclaimed would be subject to negotiation, depending on the level of future public access to the facility and reflecting the fact that 15 years of the 21-year agreement would have elapsed.
- 5.6. Should the proposal to cease operation and subsidy of Much Wenlock Leisure Centre not be approved, it would be necessary to explore alternative service reductions or losses to provide savings of a similar order. This would likely result in delayed delivery of savings, due to the need for further consultations, notice periods, and negotiations with contractors.
- 5.7. The potential to identify capital investment to support future public access of the Much Wenlock facility, allowing it to operate thereafter without ongoing revenue subsidy from the Council, must be subject to detailed review. Opportunities to draw in CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) funding, or source other capital will

be explored, along with confirmation of the long term viability of the facility following such an injection of funding.

- 5.8. The Council continues to explore additional routes to deliver increased income and reduced costs in the leisure budget to deliver its necessary MTFS savings, which will be the subject of further reporting in due course.

6. Climate Change Appraisal

- 6.1. Serving notice on the 3-18 Education Trust and withdrawal of management services at Much Wenlock Leisure Centre may result in reduction in community use. Those attending swimming lessons and utilising the swimming pool are therefore likely to travel further afield to access similar facilities, resulting in a probable increase in vehicle emissions.

7. Background

- 7.1. Shropshire Council's Leisure Services contribute to the delivery of The Shropshire Plan in the following ways:

- Healthy People - Leisure Services promote the physical and mental health of Shropshire residents, giving opportunities for physical activity, learning, and social interaction, reducing the risk of chronic disease and improving mental well-being.
- Healthy Economy - Leisure Services contribute to Shropshire's economic vitality by attracting visitors, supporting businesses, and creating jobs. They generate income for the local economy, support the growth of the tourism and leisure sectors, and provide employment and career opportunities for young people.
- Healthy Environment - Leisure Services promote environmental awareness and responsibility, implementing measures to reduce their environmental impact and encouraging the use of sustainable modes of transport. Local provision of leisure services around the county reduces travel distances and encourages active travel.
- Healthy Organization - Leisure Services work with multiple internal and external partners to support the delivery of services to residents and providing opportunities for early intervention activities. Leisure Services support demand management, reducing the need for direct social care by encouraging healthier active lifestyles, tackling social isolation, and strengthening community support networks.

- 7.2. The three principal strategies covering Shropshire Leisure Services are the

- Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sport Strategy – Updated 2024
- Indoor Leisure Facilities Strategy 2020-2038
- Vibrant Shropshire Cultural Strategy 2021-3021 7.3

- 7.3. The core principles of the Indoor Facilities Strategy are:

- Support for the creation of a high quality and sustainable indoor leisure facility mix, which provides accessible and inclusive activities for all Shropshire residents leading to increased participation and active lifestyles, thereby meeting community need.

- Recognising the importance of leisure facilities as relevant community spaces, accessible to all and offering opportunities for the delivery of a wide range of activities, services, support and entertainment to local communities and people.
- A commitment to work with a wide range of partner organisations and individuals as co-creators and co-deliverers of leisure facilities so that they best reflect the differing needs of local communities.

7.4. These strategic principles remain important but must now be interpreted within the context of the Council's financial constraints, with necessary changes to provision across a wide range of services now required to meet budgetary limits.

7.5. The Much Wenlock Leisure Centre is a joint-use facility located at William Brookes School. The facility is operated by Shropshire Council for community use, but it is held on a 125-year lease by William Brookes Academy Trust, which is part of the 3-18 Education Trust.

7.6. William Brookes School was rebuilt in 2010. The new campus included a leisure centre with the following facilities:

- Swimming pool (25m x 12.5m)
- Multi-purpose sports hall with four courts
- 20-station fitness suite
- Gymnasium
- Artificial turf pitch
- 200m athletics track, 100m straight and long jump pit
- Multi-Use Games area

7.7. Some areas of the centre are in poor condition, do not meet customer expectations and have contributed to reduced usage and income generation. The Academy is responsible for the repairs and maintenance of the centre and procuring utility suppliers. Shropshire Council engages a specialist contractor to maintain the swimming pool plant. Costs for repairs, maintenance and utility supply are split evenly between Shropshire Council and the Academy.

7.8. Shropshire Council currently employs 4.1 FTE staff at the centre who would be subject to compulsory redundancy if service provision changes or the centre closes because of the Council serving notice to the academy.

7.9. Performance indicators for Much Wenlock Leisure Centre show the following usage of the facility:

- Number of visits 2023/24 – 72,849 (swimming pool closed for 3 months due to filter replacement), 2022/23 – 102,597.
- 300 children attending swimming lessons.
- 7 primary schools use the swimming pool.
- 73 leisure centre members pay by direct debit.
- 90% of visits are made from within 10 miles
- 70% of visits are related to the swimming pool; 11% to the sports hall; 6% to the fitness suite.

7.10. The total population within a 10-mile radius is approximately 200,000. The catchment area for Much Wenlock town covers the town itself and stretches

westwards towards Church Stretton and eastwards towards Broseley. The closest alternative leisure facilities to Much Wenlock are: -

Abraham Darby Sports and Leisure Centre – 7.1 miles
Bridgnorth Endowed Leisure Centre – 8.7 miles
Oakengates Leisure Centre – 10.2 miles
Wellington Civic and Leisure Centre – 11.1 miles
Quarry Swimming & Fitness Centre, Shrewsbury 13.8 miles.

7.11. Ahead of the public consultation, an initial Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment (ESHIA) was undertaken on the proposal to cease to operate and subsidise Much Wenlock Leisure Centre for community use. It assessed the likely impact as low to medium negative across all nine Protected Characteristic groupings under the Equality Act 2010, as all current users of the centre are potentially affected by the proposed service change. A follow up ESHIA has now been carried out, which references the consultation responses and records consideration of the anticipated impacts in the light of the feedback from the consultation.

7.12. The overall impacts are now considered to be medium negative across the nine groupings and for the additional categories that we seek to have due regard to in Shropshire, i.e. social inclusion, veterans and serving members of the armed forces and their families, and young people leaving care. The consultation drew responses across groupings and demographics and so reflects considerations about the circumstances in which people may find themselves, including challenges of access to services and facilities in a large and rural county. It does need to be articulated that social inclusion is not a statutory grouping for which to have 'due regard'. Neither are socio- economic considerations, albeit these may yet come into force in secondary legislation. Government guidance (November 2023) is clear that decisions may still be taken where a negative equality impact has been identified, provided that due consideration has been given and that mitigation efforts are being made, and that there will be ongoing engagement with groupings affected.

7.13. Proposals to change the management and subsidy arrangements for the Much Wenlock Leisure Centre were subject to the public consultation for a period of eight weeks. There was a high level of community engagement with 1,770 responses to the online consultation survey and 49 written consultation responses. A full report on the outcome of the consultation is provided at Appendix 1.

7.14. The consultation presented 2 options: -

Option 1: Shropshire Council ceases operating Much Wenlock Leisure Centre for community use. This could result in a reduction of community use of the centre when operations become the responsibility of William Brookes School. Savings would be achieved.

Option 2: Do nothing, making no savings achieved. Additional savings would need to be found from other services elsewhere.

7.15 The council recommended Option 1. However, the community response showed little support for this, with most respondents (78%) preferring Option 2, while 15% did not answer. The Much Wenlock Leisure Consultation report reveals a strong community attachment to the leisure centre and many concerns about its potential closure. Feedback highlighted the importance of the centre for the health, wellbeing, and social cohesion of the local community. It also flagged the need to consider alternative options to ensure the sustainability of the leisure centre.

7.16 Key themes within the feedback from the consultation responses included the following:

- **Community Concerns:** the leisure centre has significance as a community facility, with many individuals reporting its positive impact, as well as benefits for social cohesion and reducing isolation.
- **Impact on Clubs and Groups:** ending public access to the leisure centre would affect local clubs and groups that rely on it for their activities, including sports clubs, swimming lessons, and other groups.
- **Impact on children and young people:** both adults and children responded to highlight concerns about the impact on children, noting the benefits they obtain from being involved in sport and clubs including confidence, making friends and social connections and the opportunity to learn skills and compete.
- **Impact on Health and Wellbeing:** The leisure centre is seen as a vital resource for promoting physical and mental health, with potential closure having a negative impact on their health and wellbeing. It was suggested that initial financial savings will see other costs increase over time as health and wellbeing impacts become evident.
- **Economic Impact:** Many felt that loss of this facility would make the area less attractive to live, work and bring up families, with some comments focused on a potential for job losses to result.
- **Lack of alternative provision:** A common theme was that other leisure centres will not be accessible to many due to distance, lack of public transport or cost concerns.
- **Criticism of Consultation Options:** Respondents criticised the limited options presented in the consultation, with neither of the two options being popular with some of the community.
- **Suggestions for Investment and Improvement:** Alternative suggestions were proposed for improving management and marketing to increase usage and revenue. These included better maintenance, extended opening hours, and more community involvement. Some suggested Shropshire Council's management of the centre has led to decline. Others suggested that a lack of experienced staff was an issue. There was a call to consider options such as capital investment,

seeking alternative funding, using volunteers, considering private or charity management and exploring options to partner with other organisations.

- **Criticism of Shropshire Council decision making:** Shropshire Council's investment in other leisure provision in Shropshire whilst suggesting savings in Much Wenlock was criticised. Many expressed the concern that the leisure centre is one of the few public facilities they have access to in the locality and questioned the value of their council tax for the community.

7.17. It is recognised that the limited options set out in the consultation result from the necessity to secure Council savings, and that, whilst engaging with the school as the facility owner, the complexity of design and access issues at this site have prevented alternative solutions from being developed at this stage.

7.18 However, the proposed service of notice on the school leaves a full year before the Council acts to secure revenue savings from the Much Wenlock site. This provides ample opportunity for the Council to continue dialogue with the school and other stakeholders, exploring potential sources of capital investment, testing the feasibility of different management options, and addressing the range of comments and suggestions provided through the consultation process.

8. Additional Information

- 8.1. The William Brookes School has been in discussion with alternative leisure management companies to explore options for the future management of the facility. However, this has not yet provided a viable solution to the future operation of the centre for public access.
- 8.2. The school is aware of the need for capital investment to remodel its facility to enable it to be more easily operated for public access. However, the school's finances have not to date allowed for this investment, given the priority it must place upon its education duties.
- 8.3. Should the school be unable to source an operator to manage the facility in a financially viable manner, or operate it in-house, this could well result in its closure to the public. In this event, Shropshire Council would likely be required to refund a proportion of its original Sport England grant funding.
- 8.4. Critical to the Council's proposal to serve notice on withdrawing subsidy and management from this site rather than other leisure facilities elsewhere in the county is that it is a facility owned by the school through a 125-year lease from the Council. It is therefore not an asset for which the Council has responsibility for repair, maintenance and ongoing investment during this lease term. Consequently, the Council cannot easily make changes to support the revenue or long-term success of a facility over which it has no direct control.
- 8.5. This is a unique arrangement and is not replicated in other Shropshire leisure facilities where the council either operates its own facility or contracts others to do so on its behalf.
- 8.6. School access arrangements at the facility restrict its opening hours to the public. The layout of the centre means that it is physically integrated into the school

building and, for safeguarding reasons, cannot be used for public access during the school day. This limits operational flexibility significantly and prevents a more commercial approach that would otherwise support the viability of the facility, in the way that other leisure centres can achieve.

- 8.7. The council's discussions to date with the school, the local councillor, and Much Wenlock Town Council representatives show strong interest in investigating alternative operating models for the facility. The success of these options would require a range of significant changes, including additional capital investment, a commitment to repair and maintenance, and a change in access arrangements.
- 8.8. Therefore the Council intends to continue its dialogue with the William Brookes School, the 3-18 Academy Trust and other key stakeholders over the course of the proposed notice period, to explore all options to draw in capital investment in support of the shared ambition to retain the public use of the Much Wenlock Leisure Centre on expiry of the Council's revenue subsidy.
- 8.9. In the coming year, the Council is committed to continuing constructive discussions with the school about immediate improvements to the experience of leisure centre users, to be achieved through closer working together on an operational matters.

9. Conclusions

- 9.1. The Council is obliged to review the operation of all its leisure facilities and seek best value approaches to their delivery. However, due to the unique design and ownership arrangements in place at the Much Wenlock Leisure Centre, it is not possible for the Council to improve the viability of the operation and reduce its costs.
- 9.2. Consultation has shown that residents very much value the Much Wenlock Leisure Centre and are keen to see it continue to provide a service to the community. It is therefore recommended to Cabinet that whilst there is a need to draw the current funding and management arrangements to a close, the year's notice period will be used to support the William Brookes School to explore all options to maintain the centre's community use.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Leisure Service Review Consultation report, Cabinet 4 December 2024

Local Member: Engagement with local councillors has been completed:
Cllr Dan Thomas

Appendices

Appendix 1 Much Wenlock Leisure Centre Consultation Report February 2025

Appendix 2 Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment (ESHIA) 2025

Much Wenlock Leisure Centre

Consultation Report

February 2025



1 Introduction and Methodology

Shropshire Council operates and manages Much Wenlock Leisure Centre at William Brookes School on behalf of 3-18 Education Trust, to provide community use when the facility is not in use for education purposes. This arrangement has been in place since 2010 when the facility re-opened following a school rebuild. The Council's operational budget for this facility in 2024/25 is £280,040.

Like councils all over the country, Shropshire Council's day-to-day budget is under pressure as costs have increased and a growing number of people need essential services like social care (which accounts for almost 80% of the budget). To save money, the council has already made some tough choices such as charging for garden waste collections, reducing road repairs, making changes to CCTV monitoring and moving out of Shirehall to a smaller and more sustainable building. A wide range of other changes are being explored within separate consultations.

The Much Wenlock Leisure Centre Consultation proposed to give 12 months' notice to 3-18 Education Trust, to cease to operate Much Wenlock Leisure Centre and withdraw subsidy for community use. This will contribute to Leisure savings identified in the Council's midterm financial Strategy.

The Council serving notice and withdrawing management services and funding would not automatically result in the removal of community use. The decision would rest with the William Brookes Academy and their parent trust, 3-18 Education Trust. William Brookes School/Academy Trust is keen to explore continuing to provide community use of the leisure centre should Shropshire Council cease operating at the end of a 12-month notice period.

The notice period would enable the school/academy to explore suitable operating models and investigate the potential for acquiring funding to support community use of the centre and capital investment to improve the facility.

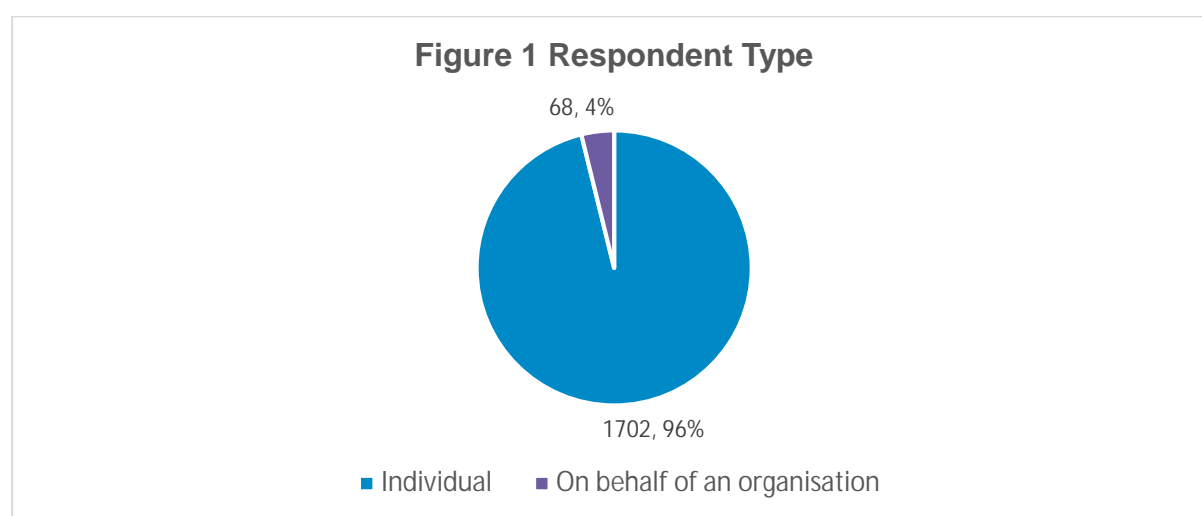
The consultation ran for 8 weeks from the 11th December 2024 to the 5th February 2025. The consultation was hosted on Shropshire Council's Get Involved webpages but also shared widely with stakeholder groups, local networks and publicised using Facebook and a range of other social media and communication methods. BBC News also ran an article on the consultation and advertised it under the Local News section of its website. The consultation also included an option for people unable to feedback online to email, write or request alternative versions of the consultation survey.

Consultation findings are set out within this report under the following sections:

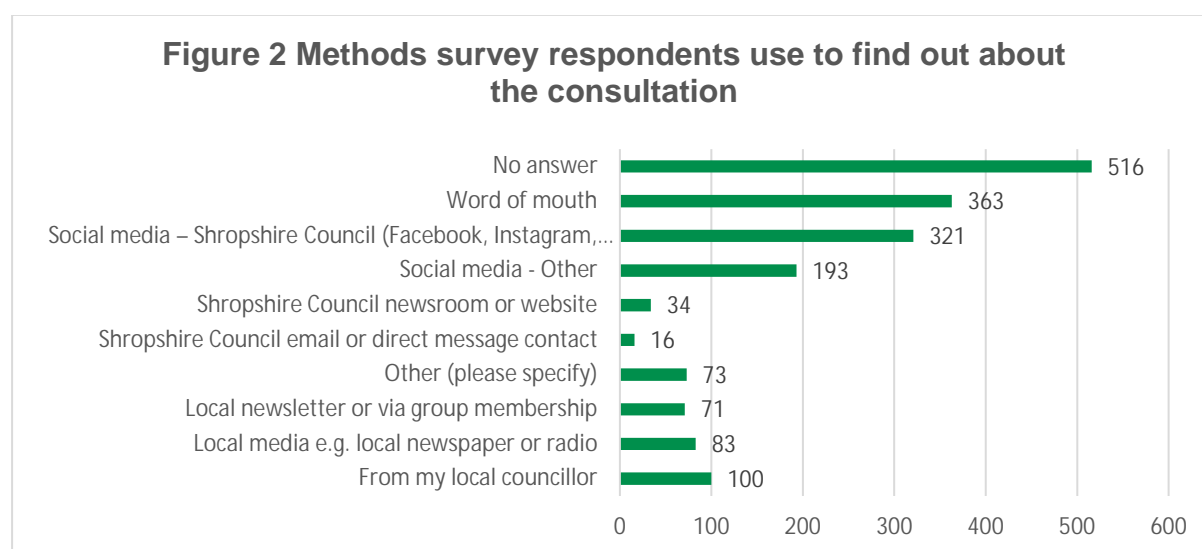
1. Introduction and Methodology
2. Respondent Demographics
3. Views on Consultation Options
4. Written Consultation Responses
5. Leisure Centre Use
6. Options Impact and Suggestions
7. Summary and Conclusion

2 Respondent Demographics

There were 1,770 responses to the online consultation survey and 49 written consultation responses. A small proportion of the consultation respondents may have submitted an online survey and a written consultation response but there were 1,819 responses in total. The online survey requested information on the way people were responding to the consultation, whether representing themselves as an individual or submitting a response on behalf of a local group or organisation. Figure 1 displays the response. 96% of respondents were individuals and 4% were group or organisation responses. Groups and organisations were given the opportunity to be identified. The last section of the report includes a list of all the group and organisational respondents who took the time to participate in the consultation. There were multiple representatives from some of the groups and organisations.



Survey respondents were asked how they had news of the consultation (Figure 2). Not all respondents completed the question, but the most common communication methods were word of mouth (20.5%) and Shropshire Council's social media (18.1%). Social media would have been top if the two social media categories were combined (Shropshire Council's social media and other social media totalled 29%).



Many survey respondents highlighted that they found out about the consultation through other methods. 71 people added a comment, and these have been summarised below in Table 1. The main method highlighted by 39 of the survey respondents was that they had received news about the consultation through membership of a local group or club using Much Wenlock Leisure Centre. A few commented that although they had been asked to select one main option, they had received news of the consultation through many of the options listed and that it had been well promoted locally.

Table 1 Other ways survey respondents found the consultation

Theme	Count	%
Leisure centre	7	10%
Groups / clubs that use the facility	39	55%
Family / friends	6	8%
Social Media	7	10%
All of the above (wasn't able to choose this option)	7	10%
Total	71	100%

The series of demographic questions included within the survey illustrated that there were significantly more female survey respondents compared to males. Shropshire Council often receives more responses from females compared to males but the difference in numbers is more weighted than usual for this survey. National research suggests that females are much more likely to complete surveys on behalf of others within their households, particularly when a consultation's impact may affect other family members including children. Figure 3 shows that 68% of respondents were female, 29% male, 3% preferred not to say and the remainder (less than 1% were non-binary or preferred to self-describe).

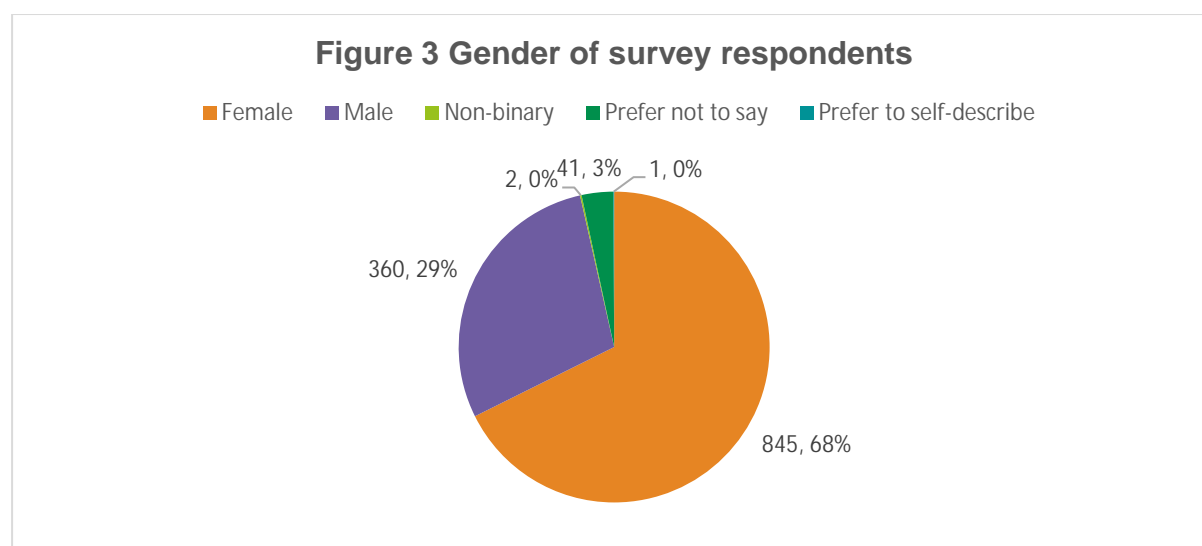
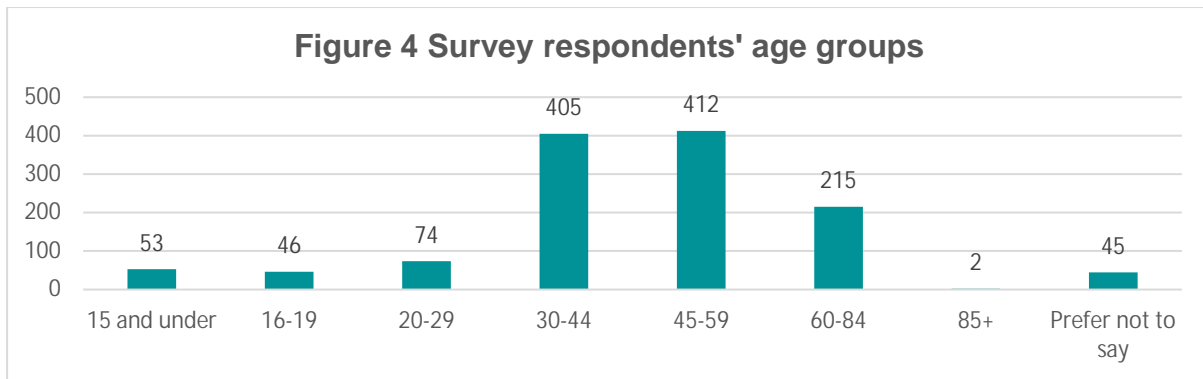


Figure 4 illustrates the age groups of the survey sample. More responses were from adults aged 30 to 59 (46.2%) compared to those under the age of 30 (9.8%) and those 60 or older (12.3%). 2.5% preferred not to say and more did not respond to the question.



For many areas of service, it is important to seek comments and survey responses from people with a range of mobility needs and accessibility requirements. The respondent sample needs to represent the wider population, and this is particularly important when considering access to, and provision of, leisure services and facilities. As Figure 5 shows, 11% of the survey respondents have a long-standing illness or disability that limits their daily activity. This means that the comments made will reflect a range of different needs. To understand this further survey respondents were asked any types of impairment they may have.

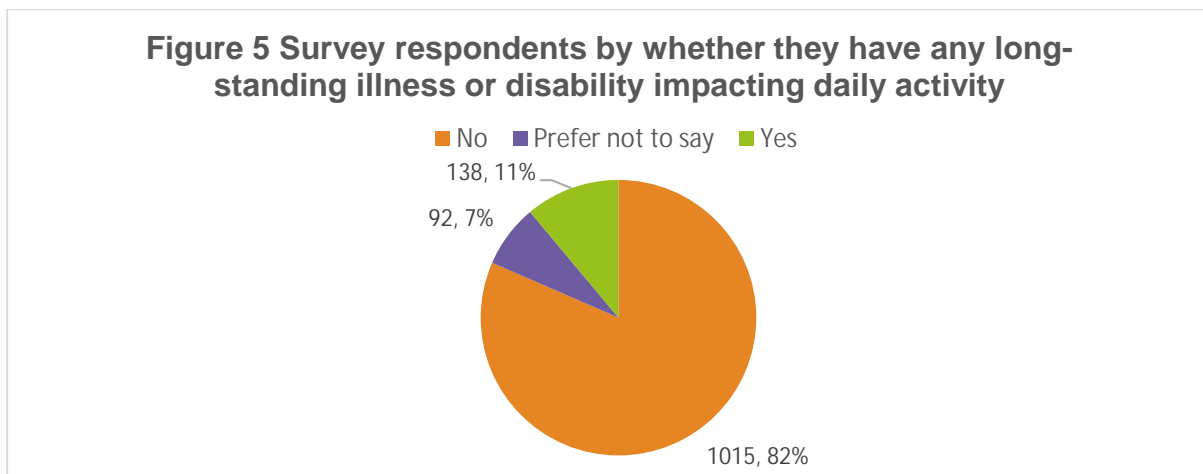
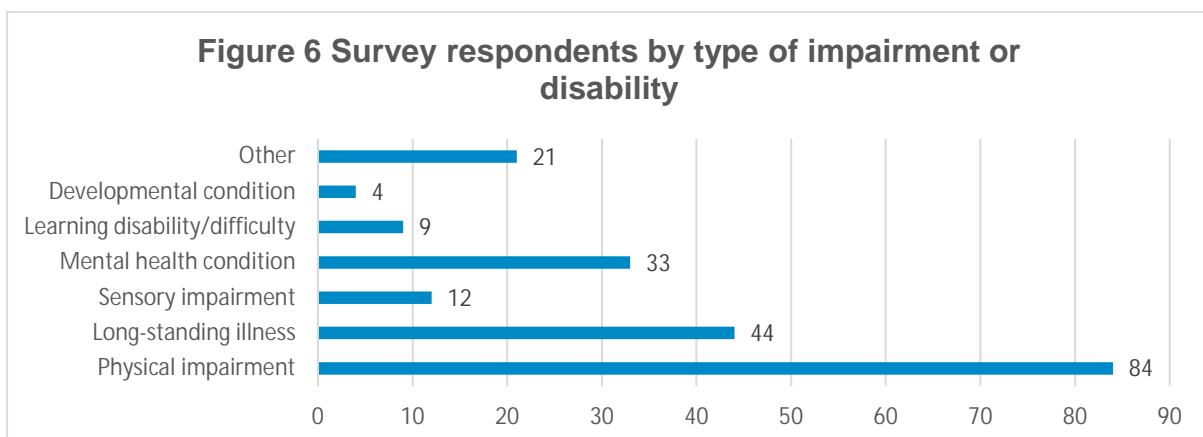
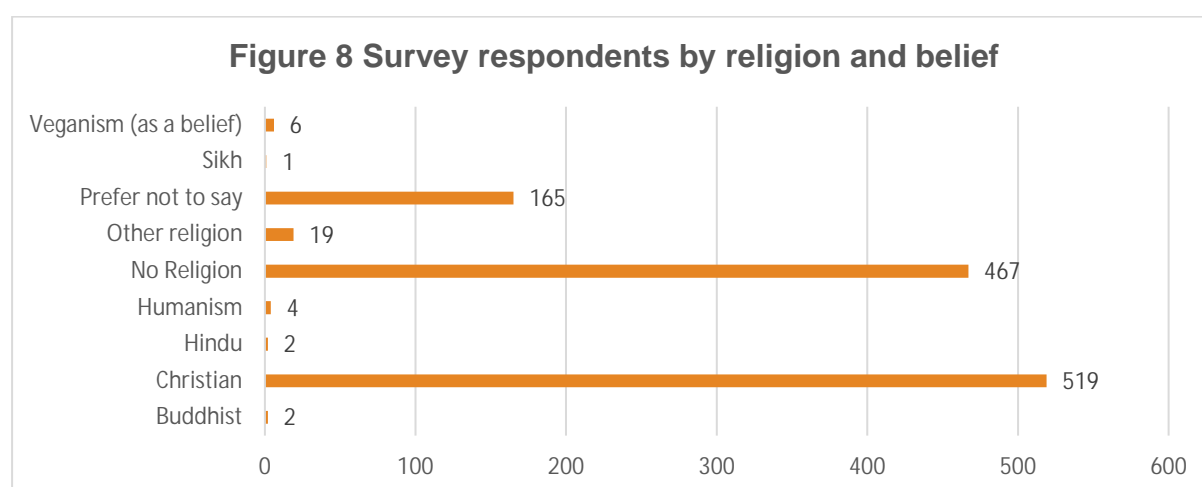
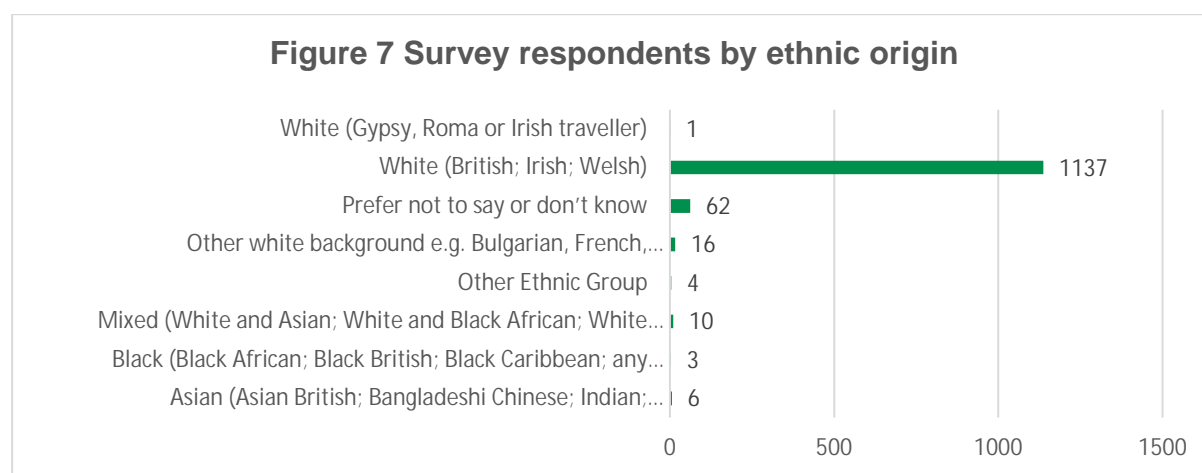


Figure 6 shows that there are representatives of each type of impairment listed. It is reassuring to know that the news of the consultation reached a large number of people but also that people with different characteristics and who may have different leisure facility needs were given the opportunity to participate in the research.



The survey asked for ethnic origin, again to see if people of all backgrounds had had the opportunity to comment. Figure 7 below shows that the response was predominantly from people with White British, Irish or Welsh background (64.2%) but there were representatives of other ethnic backgrounds included within the survey sample (2.3%).

Religion and belief were also included to better understand the characteristics of the survey sample and Figure 8 displays the response. Most people represented hold Christian beliefs (29.3% of all respondents) or no religion (26.4%). There was at least one representative of each religion or belief listed (585 people didn't say).



Previous Shropshire Council led leisure surveys and consultations have highlighted service issues, needs or requests related to gender and/or sexual orientation such as requests for service provision to meet a range of needs when designing or providing changing rooms, toilets and other similar facilities or activities/provisions within leisure centres. To gather a little more information for this consultation, a question was included for sexual orientation. Figure 9 has the results.

Figure 9 Survey respondents by sexual orientation

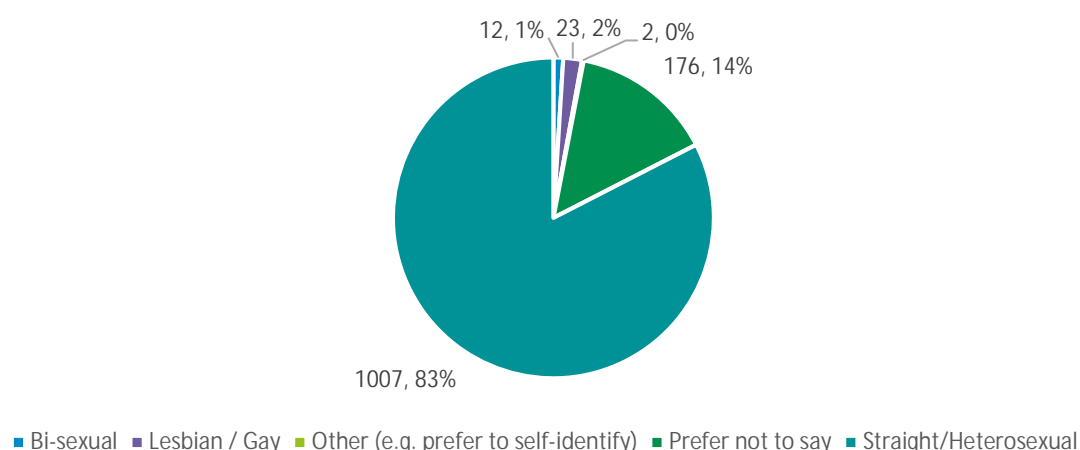
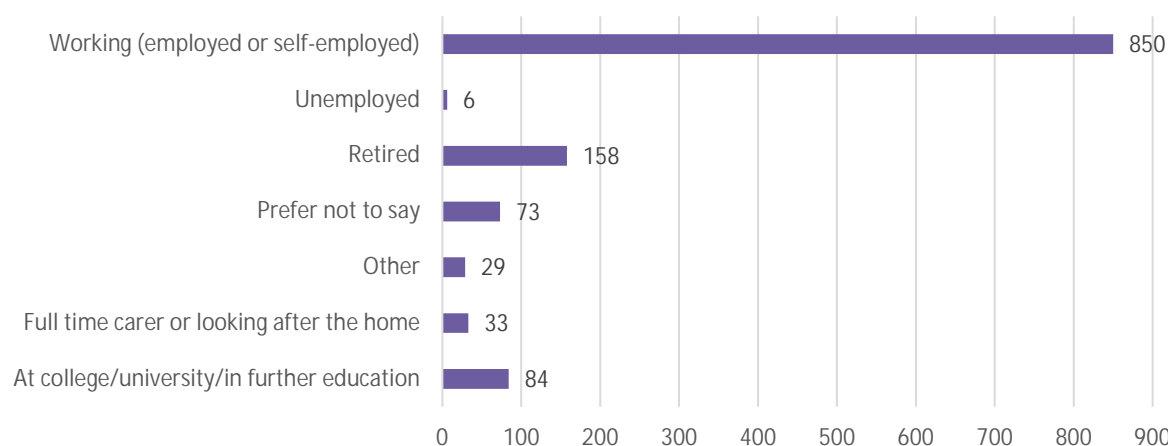


Figure 10 shows that, due to the good response rate achieved, the survey sample has representatives of people with different daily occupations or employment types. 48% of the respondent sample are in employment and 8.9% are retired. 4.7% are in education of some type and 1.9% of respondents are carers or look after the home. Some selected other (1.6%) and a proportion preferred not to say (4.1%) or didn't respond to the question (30.3%).

Figure 10 Survey respondents by employment or education



The last question included within the consultation survey to understand the characteristics of the respondent sample was postcode. This is valuable information, particularly when the responses of a community are so important. The map below shows that there was a good spread of responses across the area with a concentration around Much Wenlock, as would be expected, but also good representation from Shrewsbury and elsewhere in Shropshire. Other responses were from just over the county borders to the East and South East. The results suggest that the communities likely to be most impacted by any future changes at Much Wenlock Leisure Centre were included within the respondent sample and it is encouraging to know that the views of the community are represented along with those in the near vicinity.

Map 1 Approximate location of respondents



The next section of the report covers the views of the consultation survey respondents in relation to the two consultation options that were presented. These options were designed to suggest two ways forward for the future of Much Wenlock Leisure Centre.



3 Views on Consultation Options

Shropshire Council presented 2 options through the Much Wenlock Leisure Centre Consultation in order to seek public opinion. The options were as follows:

Option 1: Shropshire Council ceases operating Much Wenlock Leisure Centre for community use. This could result in the reduction of community use of the centre when operations become the responsibility of William Brookes School. Savings would be achieved.

Option 2: Do nothing. No savings achieved. Additional savings would need to be found elsewhere.

For transparency, the consultation included information to communicate that the council's recommended option is Option 1.

The feedback received through the consultation responses was very clear. There was very little community support for option 1. Of the 1,819 responses in total, **112 people supported option 1 (6%)**. The results were as follows:

- Written consultation responses: 34 of the 49 responses (69%) set out clear objections for both options and the remainder (31%) included support for option 2.
- Survey consultation responses: Of the 1770 responses 6% selected option 1, 78% selected option 2 and 15% did not give an answer (and may not have supported either option). **Please note:** There were many comments highlighting **disappointment in the two options presented and a desire for a way to select different options or neither option**. Some commented they felt they were being forced to select one of 2 options they didn't agree with.

Figure 11 below displays the feedback received through the survey. To check views two follow up questions were asked, which read 'Overall, how satisfied are you with the option that you prefer?' and 'Tell us more about why you prefer this option'. The latter was an open comment box allowing any feedback on the options.

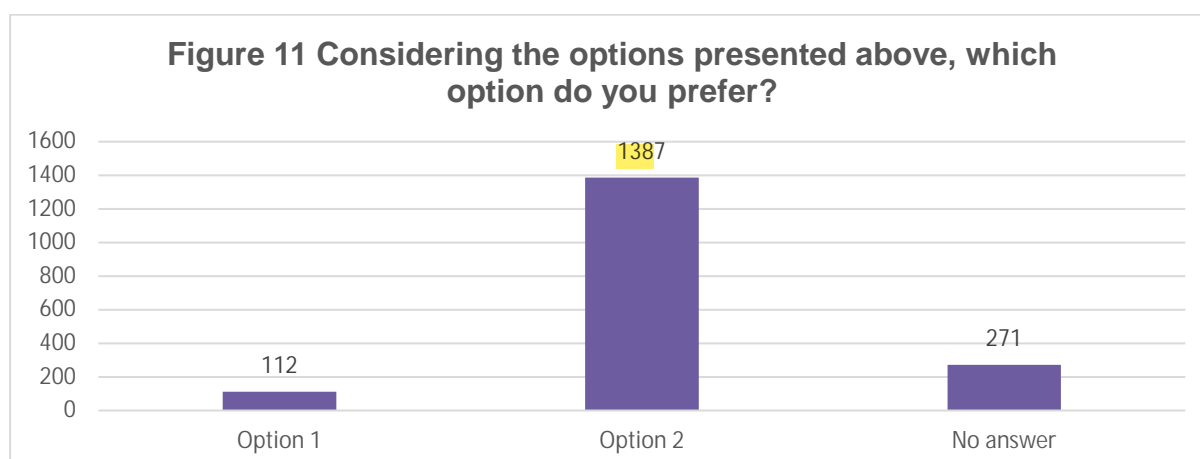


Figure 4 displays the feedback from the consultation survey when asked about levels of satisfaction with the option chosen. 67% of people were very satisfied or satisfied with the option they chose and 7% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. To explore this further the results are presented by option in Table 1.

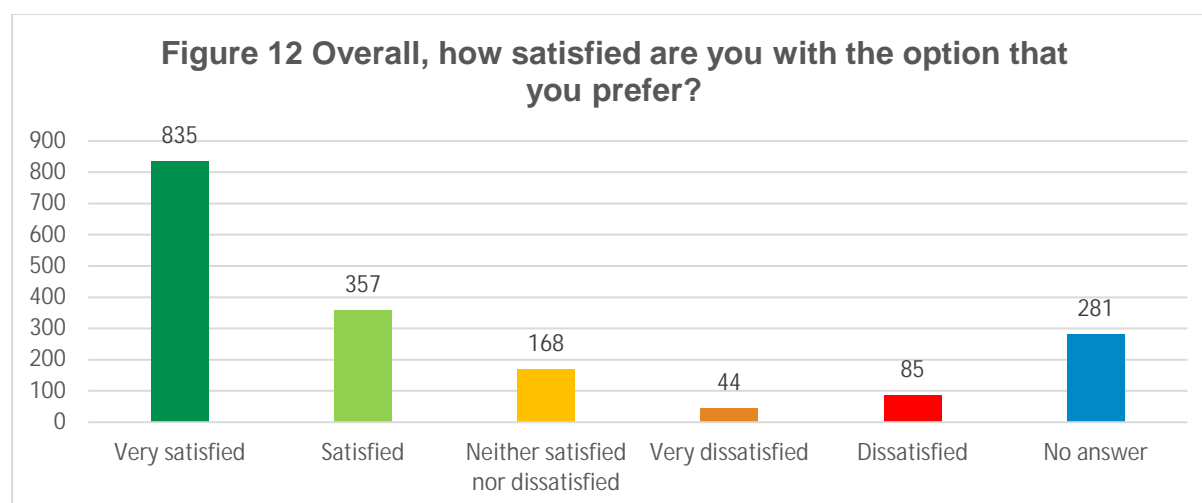


Table 2 Levels of satisfaction by option (survey respondents only)

	Option 1	Option 2	No option selected	Total
Very satisfied	31	804	0	835
Satisfied	25	332	0	357
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	25	142	1	168
Dissatisfied	15	69	1	85
Very dissatisfied	14	29	1	44
No response	2	11	268	281
Total	112	1387	271	1770

Satisfaction with option 1 was very mixed as Table 2 shows, whilst slightly more were satisfied or very satisfied with their choice (56 people), a significant proportion were also unsure (29 people). Comparing this to option 2 (do nothing) shows that 1,136 people were very satisfied or satisfied with that choice, and 98 people were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

The comments people made help to explain this further. There were 1,040 comments in total. Each comment has been read and categorised into themes. Some people included more than one theme within their comment. Table 3 displays how many times each theme was mentioned within the 1,040 comments and example comments are also included to help to highlight the type of comments made and how people felt about the consultation options set out. **Top themes included how important Much Wenlock Leisure Centre is for the community (30%), how important the centre and its facilities are for health and wellbeing (13%), and concerns about the potential impact on, and loss of, local clubs.** Many of the clubs responded to the consultation and a list is included within the last section of this report. Comments from written consultation responses are covered in the next section of the report (section 4).

Table 3 Comments on the consultation options (survey responses)

Theme	Count	%
Important community asset/ facility for the local area	433	30%
Management by the school will restrict access to the wider community	56	4%
Supports health and wellbeing for young people and families	189	13%
Supports health and wellbeing for all including older/ vulnerable people	178	12%
Facility required as a venue for local clubs/ concern clubs may close	189	13%
No alternative facility locally/ within travelling distance	79	5%
Could introduce more facilities/ improve use of the centre	20	1%
Facility needs to be better managed/ maintained	89	6%
Negative comments about Shropshire Council/ financial management/ Shrewsbury focus	96	7%
General negative comments on the survey/ not providing enough options	47	3%
Consider alternative funding opportunities/ savings elsewhere	48	3%
Other	23	2%
Total	1447	100%

Example comments – Consultation Options

- “I play netball for Wenlock Lightning Netball Club on a weekly basis at the leisure centre and I have done for the past eight years. I am now sixteen and my netball remains an important and valuable part of my lifestyle and healthy living. Not only that, the friends I have made at this session are for life. I look forward to seeing them all, even my coaches! We have just such a beautiful community there and I’d be extremely upset if future children cannot attend this club and will have to go elsewhere. There are not many local clubs either and it would force attendees to travel miles to get their netball fix!”
- “I have swimming lessons. I like learning to swim. I don't want to stop.”
- “This pool is used by hundreds of young swimmers, all striving to represent their county in competitive sport. To take away this resource is abominable. The centre is badly run and so much more could be done to increase the amount of income that is generated. There are too many staff when not needed and there is a lack of diligence when it comes to taking money from members of the public when there are swimming sessions. Get smarter and it needn't be such an issue!”
- “Much Wenlock Leisure Centre provides an important resource for the community. Removing it benefits nobody. The alleged savings won't put money back into the Much Wenlock community, they'll simply be reallocated closer to Shrewsbury. This is an unfair use of funds.”
- “It's important that communities have access to subsidised health and fitness facilities, especially in rural communities.”
- “The area around William Brookes is rural and transportation links to other facilities in Shropshire are woefully inadequate. Bridgnorth and Shrewsbury are the next closest sites. With no evening bus services and no service on Sunday and Bank Holidays the availability of these is severely limited unless you have your own transportation.”
- “I swim on a weekly basis with my friend. I live alone and it's pretty much the only time I see anyone. If this is removed, I lose a) my means of keeping fit and b) my chance of reducing the loneliness that I feel.”
- “Closing the facility would prevent access to leisure facilities for people with limited access to transport especially as the bus service is so poor. It will have negative impact

on health and wellbeing in the community which is far more important than a financial saving.”

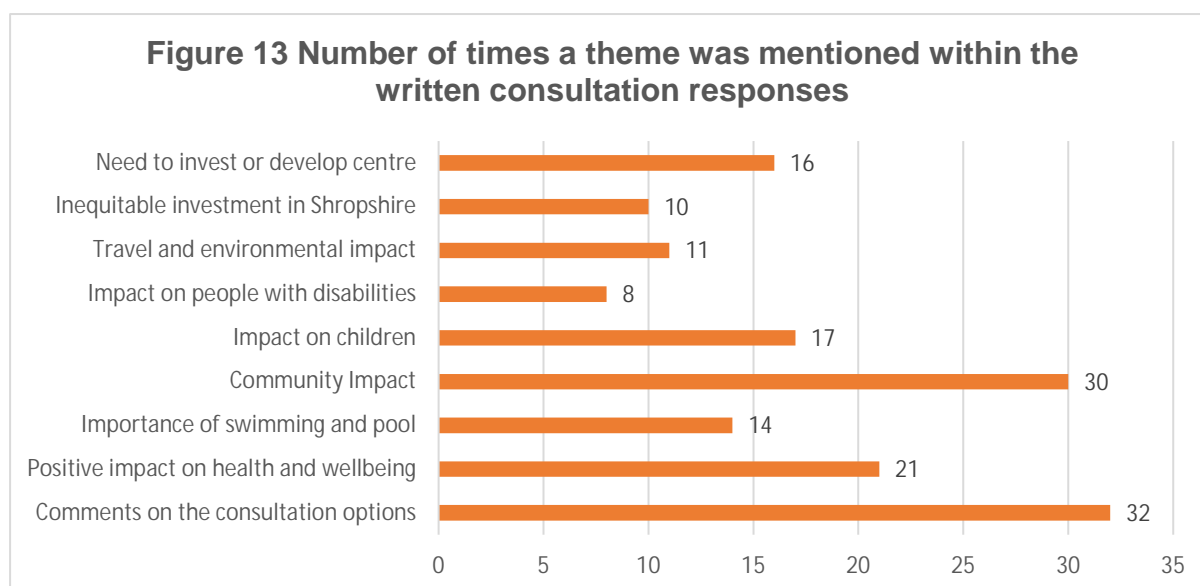
- “This is a place that provides essential lifesaving skills by allowing children as young as 2 to learn to swim. It’s a place where my brother and I worked over 10 years ago as a swim teacher and lifeguard and the job opportunities it gives to young adults wanting to provide for themselves and start earning is also wonderful.”
- “The Leisure Centre provides an excellent opportunity for people to use the pool. This provides low impact exercise, which is very important for more elderly people who may not be physically capable of undertaking more strenuous activities. I’m sure that it saves the council the expense of providing physiotherapy.”
- “If option 1 goes ahead this will likely mean the end of a number of community sports clubs currently based in Much Wenlock including Northgate swimming club and Edge Gymnastics as well as Wenlock Lightning Netball. Other netball clubs have long waiting lists and girls have to ‘trial’ first before being considered. Wenlock Lightning is the only netball club we are aware of that is open to everyone and caters for all abilities. Anyone is welcome to attend training even if they don’t want to play in a league.”
- “It would have been good to have a third option where there may have been some compromises.
- “There are very limited facilities in the locality as it is and option 1 could well lead to further erosion of facilities provision hence option 2 is the only acceptable option. The centre needs better management/ leadership associated with a suitable maintenance programme rather than neglect for years and then trying to put things right in one intervention.”
- “This option [2] allows a community hub to stay open that we spend a minimum of 15 hours a week at supporting our children at their Northgate swimming training, netball club and other events such as Galas. My eldest is a Regional Swimmer and my middle child is a county swimmer with hopes to become a professional swimmer and represent GB in the Olympics. Swimming in a pool that is so culturally significant to the Olympics has had a huge impact on their goals for their future. Closing the centre means their aspirations and dreams are already halted and limited by a council I thought understood their residents and the young people they support needs. Both my son and daughter train with Northgate swimming club and between them they are in the pool for 12 hours a week. The club and the centre offer them a place of friendship, community, wellbeing and a positive healthy lifestyle. They are learning skills on how to commit, be driven in their approach, work as a team and aim for goals....I cannot imagine the negative impact this will have on their mental health and happiness if the centre and pool closed. I am a very worried parent. I spend 4 evenings a week there and the centre is thriving. My children love seeing their mates attend other clubs too such as athletics, netball, fencing. With society changing the centre offers a place that children, young people and adults can meet and participate in activities that support their fitness, wellbeing and health. I wonder what will happen to all those children and young people who commit so much time to their sports clubs at this centre? More time on social media, declining mental health, poor physical health, feelings of isolation - surely this will cost more in the long term. I just don’t understand the logic of closing the centre when it is vital to this community and has only been open for a few years!!!”
- “To withdraw funding is morally and fundamentally wrong. The savings are not correct as there are a lot of indirect costs that will remain. There is also a substantial amount to pay back as the withdrawal is prior to the 20-year agreement in place. Without council support or capital investment to improve and separate the leisure facility from WB school the chances of finding a body to take over the running of the facility is very slim. Option 2 is the only provided that will keep a much needed facility open in the area.”

4 Written Consultation Responses

The 49 written consultation responses took the form of 41 emails and 8 letters. There were a mix of short objections to the consultation, expressing fear of losing the leisure centre, and much longer considered responses setting out the impact of the consultation proposal with supporting evidence. As described in section 3 of the report, 34 of the 49 responses (69%) set out clear objections and the remainder (31%) included support for option 2.

It is important to take a closer look at the written responses, to draw out the themes commonly mentioned and give a flavour of the feedback received. It is not possible to do justice to all of the information received, some of the documents provided were detailed and considerable effort had been taken to prepare them. All responses have been read and considered in full. This section of the report summarises the responses and uses extracts of longer paragraphs of text to illustrate the key messages.

Figure 13 below illustrates how many times a theme was mentioned within the 49 written consultation responses. The top theme relates to comments on the consultation options followed by the negative impact the closure of the leisure centre would have on the community. Other common themes covered include the importance of the leisure centre for individual and community health and wellbeing and concerns that loss of the centre would have a particularly detrimental impact on children. The need to invest in the centre to make improvements and increase use was also mentioned frequently.



Example comments for each of the themes are included under each heading below. It should be noted that 4 of the consultation responses from local clubs and groups were the same response under different group names. These have been counted as multiple responses but since the text was the same, it is only included once within the example comments/extracts.

Comments on the consultation options

32 of the 49 written consultation responses included comments linked to the consultation options. Some expressed preference for option 2, some expressed concerns that additional options had not been covered, and a few proposed alternative options.

- "I would like to express my disapproval at Shropshire councils plans to close Much Wenlock leisure centre."
- "As for the two options it's ridiculous, completely and utterly ridiculous."
- "My concerns about the Much Wenlock Leisure Centre Survey are that it feels very, very leading. Option 2 - 'do nothing' suggests that this isn't a genuine option. It is very loaded and this creates a survey which isn't fair or objective... The questions aren't clear enough to make a coherent & clear choice in line with your beliefs. Because of this the responses most certainly will not be accurate of public opinion."
- "The MW Leisure Centre must be retained as a community asset, funded & maintained to a good standard by the council."
- "It's key we keep this facility for all round community use, times for public use at the moment for the pool are available but as a user and live locally, some people living locally are totally unaware of public use of pool and gym."
- "I strongly believe that the leisure centre should remain open and supported by Shropshire council."
- "I would urge Shropshire Council to consider some means by which Much Wenlock Leisure Centre can remain open to the public alongside the school, and the legacy of its Olympian history can continue to be honoured."
- "On behalf of the GB Olympians Association, this letter is to underline our strong support for the continued operation of Much Wenlock Leisure Centre, a facility of both historical significance and vital importance to the health and wellbeing of the community.... The GB Olympians Associations strongly urge Shropshire Council to explore all possible means to ensure that Much Wenlock Leisure Centre remains open to the public alongside the school, safeguarding both its historical significance and its vital role in community health."
- "I strongly believe that the council should maintain the LC in Much Wenlock and so choose option 2. There is a clause with Sport England about financial payback of some of the swimming pool monies that needs checking carefully."
- "I choose Option 2. Please don't stop community use!"
- "I am in full support of option 2."
- "In response to the above I would like to record my opinion: 2 Do nothing."
- "We believe there are 2 further options that could be explored and consulted upon: i. Invest the funds to make it a viable school and community resource, whilst ensuring safeguarding provisions are met for the school, as they have done at Bridgnorth Endowed Leisure Centre. Would make it financially sustainable and ensure better return on investment. ii. Shropshire Council directly sub contract or work with a partnership to deliver the on site management for example via the Shropshire Community Leisure Trust."
- "Wenlock Warriors Football Club is a regular user of Much Wenlock Leisure Centre. Our Committee have considered both the options presented as part of the consultation. The Club would like the following to be carefully considered by Shropshire Council before making any decisions on the future of the centre. 1. Lack of options fully explored. We believe there are 2 further options that could be explored and consulted upon: I. Invest the funds to make it a viable school and community resource, whilst ensuring safeguarding provisions are met for the school, as they have done at Bridgnorth Endowed Leisure Centre. Would make it financially sustainable and ensure better return on investment. II. Shropshire Council directly sub contract or work with a partnership to

deliver the on site management for example via the Shropshire Community Leisure Trust.”

- “I am writing to provide feedback on the ongoing consultation regarding the future of Much Wenlock Leisure Centre. As a representative of the community and a frequent user of the centre, I would like to express my concerns and suggestions regarding the proposed options. Option 1: Withdrawing Council Funding - The council's preferred option to withdraw funding for the leisure centre and transfer operations to William Brookes School is concerning. This unverified and uncertain change could significantly reduce community access to the centre, negatively impacting residents and competitive athletes who rely on it for recreational and fitness activities. Additionally, the reduction in community use may lead to increased travel to other facilities, contributing to climate change. The council owe a great deal to the pool following years of neglect and mismanagement. Option 2: Do Nothing - While maintaining the status quo would avoid immediate disruption, it does not address the financial challenges faced by the council. However, it is essential to consider alternative solutions that balance financial sustainability with community needs.”
- “I do speak with some knowledge of the Wenlock experience and I therefore urge you as a Council to consider your actions most carefully. To all intents and purposes this looks like a poor process driven by financial constraints without taking into account the wellbeing and proudness of the people of Wenlock.....this ill-judged consultation does nothing at all to endear the people of Wenlock to a council reducing services, increasing council Tax and generally offering a poor service. Please do not keep blaming it all on your Adult Social care commitments... I have first-hand experience of them through my Brother, they frequently fail to meet their statutory requirements and are really driven to get the full amount of money out of him as quickly as they can. Without offering a caring service.”
- “I am writing to express my strong opposition to Shropshire Council's proposal to cease operating Much Wenlock Leisure Centre and withdraw the associated subsidy for community use, under Option 1. This facility is integral to both the local and wider community's health, well-being and social cohesion. Its closure would have significant adverse effects that outweigh the proposed financial savings.....I strongly recommend that the council reconsiders & adopts alternatives under Option 2, to include: Explores alternative funding and management options; implements a managed hours system to maintain access for both school and community users; improves maintenance and facility management to address existing concerns.... I urge Shropshire Council to reconsider this proposal. Much Wenlock Leisure Centre is a vital community asset that supports health, fitness, local clubs, economic activity, and heritage-linked sporting events.”
- “Can Shropshire Council afford to ignore this heritage and be remembered as the local authority who closed Olympian history to the general public? A decision by Shropshire Council to close MWLC to the public would be a detrimental step against principles and heritage maintained over generations in Shropshire which promote community cohesion and healthy living through physical and mental activity.”

Impact on health and wellbeing

The written consultation responses covered the impact any loss of service or access would have on health and wellbeing. 21 of the 49 responses covered this topic.

- “Swimming is such an easy, fun and accessible way for people to keep fit and healthy. With massive numbers of people currently facing an obesity, diabetes crisis, taking away this facility would be a crime and contribute to this crisis. Therefore, all the money saved you will have to reinvest in treating very poorly people! In addition to the physical health benefits of swimming, the mental health benefits must be considered.....you would be limiting peoples opportunities to look after their mental health and socialise. And,

therefore, will be paying more in the long term....Although the savings in the short term look good, in the long term it will cost you more and have catastrophic consequences for the health (both physically and mentally) of the people who use the facility."

- "As I am just retiring, it had been my intention to at last have the time to use these facilities myself! So my disappointment is for all our community. Doctors now prescribe use of leisure facilities as a remedy to many ills rather than medication for a very good reason too. Not everyone is enthusiastic about this & are even less likely to follow through with this suggestion if they have to travel further in their own vehicles or public transport."
- "The closure will doubtless have a detrimental effect on the health and wellbeing of many people who like myself use the facilities to manage long term health conditions. As well as the impact on local clubs and the communities they serve. Has the council factored in the impact on the health of individuals and knock on effects on NHS etc."
- "I understand the centre needs a lot of work done on it, but does this outweigh the cost of people's health and wellbeing?My husband and I use the facility every day, we walk there have a swim early morning which is beneficial to us as we have both retired, we know that there are a lot of people using this for early morning swims..."
- "The importance of sport for both physical and mental health is widely recognised, more than ever for the current generation of children and young people. I believe that over 3000 people a week use the leisure centre, so the loss of these facilities in Much Wenlock would have a huge negative impact on these children and adults alike."
- "Much Wenlock Leisure Centre plays a crucial role in promoting youth sports in the community. It provides a safe and supportive environment for young people to engage in various sports activities, fostering their physical and mental well-being. The centre's facilities and programs encourage youth participation in sports, helping to develop their skills, teamwork, and discipline. The unavailability of the centre would deprive young people of these valuable opportunities, potentially leading to a decline in youth sports participation and overall community health. The leisure centre also plays a vital role in promoting mental health within the community. Regular physical activity has been shown to reduce stress, anxiety, and depression, and the centre provides a welcoming space for individuals to engage in exercise and social interaction..."
- "Regular training and playing netball at both leisure and competition levels promotes physical and mental health in line with Shropshire Council's 'Healthy Active Lives' ethos. Besides providing access to physical activity, the Club offers a safe space for the girls to socialise. Additionally, they learn life skills they will take with them into adulthood such as cooperation, determination, honesty, integrity, resilience, and self-discipline. The positive impact of Wenlock Lightning Netball Club on girls and young women is surely a shining example of Shropshire Council's Health & Well Being Strategy 2022-27: 'Working with and building strong and vibrant communities. We will work with our communities to engage and find out what matters, reduce inequalities, promote prevention, increase access to social support and influence positive health behaviours'. If the proposed closure of Much Wenlock Leisure Centre was implemented, the significantly negative effect on our current members and on any future recruits who would be left without reasonable access to a netball club, would be in direct contradiction to the Council's own strategic priorities. This begs the question, why is such an option even considered?"
- "Leisure centres are more than just facilities; they are vital community hubs that promote physical and mental well-being, foster social connections and provide opportunities for individuals of all ages and abilities to engage in healthy activities. Closing this facility would disproportionately affect vulnerable groups, including children, older adults, and those with disabilities, who rely on the centre for exercise, rehabilitation, and social engagement."
- "I am very saddened to read that Shropshire Council intends to remove Community use of the Leisure centre. I swim each week with The Friendly Bus Group along with other elderly people who benefit from the use of the pool either swimming to stay healthy or for

health benefits walking through the water (two of our group are disabled). This enables us to maintain good health and be less of a drain on social care and the NHS. I use the pool during the holidays with my grandchildren who also benefit from the excellent exercise swimming provides. There are many other children who use it too at this time as well as children using the sports facilities. To remove this service from this semi-rural community, where there are few alternatives could result in poor health of the swimming elderly and children with little exercise. Please reconsider, after all this leisure centre was built at William Brookes school for use by the community. Even increasing the price by a small amount would be acceptable.”

- “Currently the NHS is overwhelmed, and obesity is a national problem. Research has proved that the importance of maintaining the physical activity does not stop when a young person leaves school. It needs to be sustained in order to live a long, healthy, and happy life. For example, swimming exercises the whole body, but it does require somewhere accessible and safe for people to swim such as the pool at the Leisure Centre. From my own experience when visiting during Wenlock Olympian Games, it is obvious that the whole campus has a wealth of facilities and the capacity to serve the leisure needs of individuals, clubs, and the wider neighbourhood. Its closure would be damaging to a community extending well beyond the boundary of the town itself.”

Importance of swimming and the pool

Many people commented more generally about the value of the Much Wenlock Leisure Centre but 14 of the 49 written consultation responses drew attention to the importance of swimming and having access to a pool. Extracts are included below:

- “Much Wenlock pool is amazing. We travel from Telford to use it due to its depth. Both my boys are swimmers and learning to dive and have benefited tremendously from having access to the depth of this pool.”
- “This is used frequently by Northgate swimming club and is of great importance.”
- “Northgate Swimming Club is over 40 years old and have been based at Much Wenlock since it opened. We support 150 people to swim every week and have very much been able to grow thanks to the centre in Much Wenlock. Our swimmers compete at a county, regional and national level. We have 9 regional swimmers and 44 who are county level swimmers. This number has grown by some 50% over the last 12 months alone.... In addition to this, the club, entirely run by volunteers, supports people to gain new skills, confidence and experience which can provide them with opportunities for the future in terms of employment. The value added is huge. Many of our swimmers have gone on to become lifeguards at other facilities.”
- “Northgate (Bridgnorth) Swimming Club: Registered Charity 1149690, a 50-year-old club with 150 members and nearly 40 volunteers, relies heavily on Much Wenlock Leisure Centre. The club trains up to nine times a week at the centre, providing essential swimming lessons and training for both young people and adults. Not having access to the centre would have a devastating impact on the club's operations, the community it serves and the opportunities provided to children and adults in the sport.”
- “I don't do any other sports - swimming is my sport. There were 44 of us in the County Competition for Shropshire at the weekend. It would be sad if Northgate lost its pool.”
- “Bridgnorth pool doesn't have enough space for all of Northgate's lessons and we can't dive there - which is really important when we train for competitions. The other pools are too far away for us to travel to.”
- “I use the pool during the holidays with my grandchildren who also benefit from the excellent exercise swimming provides. There are many other children who use it too at this time as well as children using the sports facilities.”

Community Impact

- “The centres use for the public is a vital part of the community.”
- “Any reduction in facilities will have an adverse social and economic impact on a rural community.”
- “The change in arrangement for this facility would be a disaster for local triathlon athletes. Telford Tri base their training there even hold a race once a year there. The club produces National level and regional champions of all age groups and backgrounds - taking kids who have a dream and through hard work and fun let them dream. In the West Midlands Telford Tri this year has produced a number of age group champions with the older ones moving up to the regional academy. Before we found a home there, we were bouncing from one pool to another - we would then lose our race. This would undo everything the club has worked so hard for.”
- “The Much Wenlock Leisure Centre is a vital community asset that promotes health, well-being, and social cohesion. I urge the council to consider the negative impacts of ceasing community use and explore alternative solutions that preserve this valuable resource for future generations.....It is important to highlight that Much Wenlock Leisure Centre holds significant historical value as it is closely tied to the Olympic heritage of Much Wenlock. The town is renowned for its connection to the modern Olympic Games, with Dr. William Penny Brookes founding the Wenlock Olympian Games in 1850. The leisure centre serves as a living legacy of this rich heritage, promoting physical activity and community spirit in the same vein as the original Olympian ideals.”
- “....My wife and I are proud to have contributed to the success of sport in and around Wenlock when we started the Wenlock ladies hockey club playing on the new Redgra area, this club went from strength to strength. There was also a husband and Wife Team that used the sports facility to promote Fencing as a sport. This was exemplified by three of the members fencing for England and our own [name removed] fencing for Great Britain in the World Championships in Italy and reaching the quarter finals. [She] went on to win the Public School fencing Championship for Ellesmere College, under the direction of her Wenlock Coaches.”
- “The loss of the hall at William Brookes will have a significant impact on the availability of indoor cricket facilities in the County, and most specifically in South Shropshire. Overall the facility caters for around 30% of our total, available, indoor facilities for cricket in the county.”
- “The loss of this centre will erode pathways for elite talent development, as young athletes may be discouraged by the logistical and financial challenges of training further afield.... These facilities are widely used by schools, clubs, and the general public. Removing them would create a significant gap in local recreational and fitness opportunities..... The closure would have a detrimental effect on local organisations, with a negative impact on youth within the surrounding rural areas, such as Northgate Swimming Club, Wenlock Olympians Athletics Club, and potentially dilute the counties sporting heritage through the Wenlock Olympian Society, all of which rely on the centre's facilities... Much Wenlock's sporting history & heritage, directly influencing the birth of the modern Olympic Games through the work of Dr Penny Brookes, is internationally significant.....Closing the leisure centre would be a disservice to this legacy, reducing the town's ability to support current and future athletes, maybe even Olympians!”
- “We use this centre and have done for the past 7 years on a Thursday night for walking football and always have 16 plus people taking parts of all capabilities and male and female. To close the centre would impact greatly on those who turn up as also about socialising and there is nowhere else close for everyone to go. I believe this is a wrong decision and saving should be made elsewhere, very selfish of all involved.”
- “The leisure centre is a valuable asset to the community and our young people. It's integral to the transition of young people to the secondary school, to the lives & vibrancy of our local community and indeed the mental health & physical wellbeing of the

individuals who make up our community.....The leisure centre provides multiple opportunities to engage in a variety of sports, games and swimming, including but not limited to fencing, which we are absolutely lucky to have such a high standard club available in our small town, taking several members to British youth championships and beyond. It's naive to think that removing this will have no consequences and is devaluing the opportunities that happen here. The leisure centre has also been a hub for several community events and annual festivals which make our town stand out and ensure the sustainability of our community."

- "Shropshire Council now has the opportunity to demonstrate the veracity of their commitment by investing in, rather than closing to the public, a safe, affordable, and accessible amenity which influences positive health behaviours. MWLC is an essential service for the immediate communities of Much Wenlock and Broseley and for the wider neighbourhood, as a centre for healthy leisure activities and community engagement.... There is a sufficiently high demand for MWLC's facilities to warrant it continuing to serve its extensive catchment area. A recent survey has revealed that, besides the annual Wenlock Olympian Games arts festival and sports meeting, throughout the year, at least 8 sports clubs with circa 750 club members regularly use the facilities, not only weekly but on a number of days per week alongside the many families using the swimming pool...."
- "Much Wenlock has gained international recognition as the birthplace of the Olympian Games, established by local doctor William Penny Brookes in 1850. His vision was to encourage ordinary people to take responsibility for their own physical and mental health through participation in sport and the arts. This philosophy went on to inspire the revival of the modern Olympic Games, securing Much Wenlock's unique place in history....has led to Royal visits by HM Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip, GB Olympians President HRH Princess Anne and IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch. Furthermore, the London 2012 Olympic Games mascot was named "Wenlock" and the Olympic Torch Relay passed through the town, leading to significant national and international publicity..."
- "The Leisure Centre is a vital part of the Community for its wellbeing not to mention the benefits for the school pupils. I would strongly support keeping the Leisure Centre open for the local community and it should not be forgotten the links with the Wenlock Olympic Games held each year in July."

Impact on children

17 of the written consultation responses expressed concern that the consultation proposals would lead to a negative impact on children and young people. Example comments included:

- "I was only relating to my grandchildren last week that as a child I was taken to an outdoor swimming pool on the site that is the William Brookes school now by my junior school in Broseley! They were horrified at the thought of how cold that must have been - & they were right to be!! 😞 so what a long way this facility has come with the new, modern facility that has been provided for Much Wenlock & district during the construction of the new school."
- "I truly believe that there are not enough out of school hours facilities as it is & they will be forced to hang around the streets & find their own amusement - & we all know that never ends well."
- "I have 2 kids who both love swimming and swim competitively for Northgate. It has given both of them such confidence and a large group of friends. Aside from the obvious health benefits that Northgate have given my kids it has also given them a real drive to push themselves. I can't think of another sport or environment where older kids mix so well with younger ones which is ideal as the older one's love being role models and helping the

younger ones with their training and giving advice at galas and the younger one's love having the chance to impress them. Option 2 is the only way to keep this brilliant team and wonderful coaches (who give their time up) together. Please don't close the pool and end this team."

- "We would suggest that *the potential negative impact on young people is high, and the new Shrewsbury Leisure Centre is not a viable mitigating factor or viable alternative....there are no viable public transport options from Bridgnorth to Shrewsbury for young people late in the evening.* The net effect is that fewer children would be able to swim if the centre were to cease operating with the negative impact on their physical health, sense of wellbeing and belonging high.....Whilst we welcome the addition of the new Shrewsbury pool to allow a local base for Shropshire County competitions. It is not though a viable alternative for families whose children swim as often as nine times a week, and there simply will not be enough capacity within the new Shrewsbury development to accommodate all groups. All of these issues are compounded by the fact that the "window" in the day when children are free to swim is so small anyway."
- "I'm a teacher and it's *very important that children engage in physical activities.* My 12 year old niece plays netball there and it's a huge part of her social, physical and mental wellbeing."
- "Mitigating factors to reduce the proposed negative impact on young people are not viable, and the impact on them is understated. *The potential negative impact on young people is high, and the new Shrewsbury Leisure Centre is not a viable mitigating factor or alternative.*"
- "... I am part of the Northgate Swimming Club community and I personally train at Much Wenlock Leisure Centre 4 Times a week and a total of 7 1/2 hours per week. I am 12 years old. This club has allowed me to get exercise, make new friends and finally achieve 12 County times this year. I have only been at this club for 3 years and I would like to make that number increase."

Impact on people with disabilities

8 of the 49 written consultation responses highlighted concerns that there would be a negative impact on people with disabilities who rely on the facilities provided at Much Wenlock Leisure Centre. Examples include:

- "*I support 3 adults living with Autism to access the facilities on a weekly basis to attend and take part in Walking Football. This is 1 of the few times they have the opportunity to interact as a team with their peers. It really is an important part of them feeling connected to their peers.*"
- "A number of our *children have Special Educational Needs (SEN). A journey of this length with any frequency would be very challenging for them.*"
- "...my Brother [name removed] swims at Wenlock on a regular basis. [name removed] suffers on the autism scale and struggles with reading and writing, but through his love of both swimming and horse riding he took part in the para Olympic Games (pre Stoke Mandeville) and won a bronze medal in the Brussels games."

Travel and environmental impact

Travel concerns were expressed widely throughout the consultation and also featured within the responses from survey respondents (11 mentions). Example comments from the 49 written consultation responses are shown below:

- “If it were to close, access to other facilities would only possible by driving which is worse environmentally and reduces access to exercise for those without access to car and families with lower incomes who struggle to fund transport.”
- “The nearest facilities (public or private) would then involve a trip to Shrewsbury, Telford or Bridgnorth. For those dependant on public transport this is not practical. This will increase use of private vehicles and potential increase GHG and particulate emissions by increase journeys to neighbouring towns.”
- “The Impact Assessment is based on an assumption that the Centre only serves Much Wenlock. This is not correct. Many of our members travel from the wider Bridgnorth area (including as far as the Ditton Priors, the Brown Clee and Billingsley). Many members currently travel from Bridgnorth to Much Wenlock – a journey that is 8 miles and take around 14 minutes. Bridgnorth to central Shrewsbury is 22 and takes at least 40 minutes on a good run. Almost 3 times as much! The distances calculated (in the Cabinet paper) outlining the distance to alternative provision if Much Wenlock were to close, assumes a starting point of Much Wenlock. Many of the users have already travelled in excess of 8 miles just to get to Much Wenlock. Families will not be willing to do this, and many will not be able to do it due to work or the high cost of fuel. There will be considerable negative impact on the environment if Much Wenlock were to close.”
- “There are people who use this who don't have transport and can't get anywhere else until the buses start running...”
- “Shrewsbury leisure facilities are not easily accessible to non-drivers (young & old)!”
- “Its closure would force community members to consider travel to alternative facilities, leading to increased personal costs, adding to the cost-of-living pressures. This would likely result in a decline in regular exercise participation..... The proposed closure of Much Wenlock Leisure Centre would force residents to consider travelling to alternative leisure facilities, increasing personal costs.... road damage... environmental impact....”

Inequitable investment in Shropshire

A strong theme throughout many of the survey responses was a concern that Much Wenlock is not being treated equitably when compared to other communities and locations in Shropshire. This concern was also expressed within 10 of the 49 written consultation responses.

- “I am very disappointed to hear about the proposal to close the leisure centre for public use. Much Wenlock and the surrounding villages have very little in the way of public amenities.”
- “I am saddened by the lack of investment in both Much Wenlock and Bridgnorth.”
- “I'm struggling to see how anybody can think that closing the Much Wenlock swimming pool while spending so much money on swimming pools in Shrewsbury can be classed as a good idea.”
- “At the same time as proposing to withdraw £280k from Much Wenlock leisure centre, Shropshire Council are developing the very same facility in Whitchurch at a cost of £14million in addition to the redevelopment of the Quarry pool and the development of a brand new facility, also in Shrewsbury. Also costing millions. It seems incredulous to then even be considering proposing a withdrawal of funding from the very same facility in Much Wenlock - at the same time!”
- “Why would Shropshire Council choose to withdraw their funding yet is happy to spend £14m on a new swimming pool and fitness centre in Whitchurch and £28m on the Sports Village leisure centre at Shrewsbury? How can this be considered a fair distribution of funds when such a decision would cause the closure of many established and thriving community clubs, and the devastating loss of leisure and sporting facilities to the town and wider neighbouring community. Government plans for housing in Buildwas and

Bridgnorth either side of Much Wenlock will see significant population growth with an even greater need for good community resources at the Leisure Centre.”

- *“...withdrawing funds from Much Wenlock, and the east of the region, demonstrates potential discrimination and inequitable distribution of funds away from rural communities...Much Wenlock Leisure Centre is one of the few competition-level sporting venues in the eastern part of Shropshire, particularly in athletics and swimming. Its closure would further concentrate high-quality sporting facilities in the western areas of the county, leaving a significant gap for athletes, clubs, and competitive events in the east, leading to a potential loss of talent from the wider, rural communities surrounding Much Wenlock and Bridgnorth.”*
- *“Residents of Much Wenlock & surrounding villages pay local & central taxes & are entitled to expect to be able to enjoy the same leisure facilities as residents of Shrewsbury.”*

Invest in or develop the centre

One of the themes that was repeated strongly within the consultation responses was the need to invest in Much Wenlock Leisure Centre rather than make savings. Many pointed out that a lack of investment had caused problems and allowed the centre to fall into a state of disrepair. This was a theme mentioned 14 times within the 49 responses.

- *“If it was open more often to the public for their use and more things were on offer, it needs to be run as a business and encourage people to use it.”*
- *“We have observed this over a number of years, and its current state appears to now be cited as a justification for the Council to remove their funding. Many members have told us that they would use the centre more if the experience was better – there are recurrent issues with broken showers, toilets that won’t lock, debris in the pool. A building of this age should not require such extensive repairs and maintenance – its needs far more than a similar neighbouring site which is over 40 years old. This must be an indicator of a lack of repairs and maintenance thus far. The site seems to have suffered as a result of challenging relationships between partners and risks now being to the detriment of the community..... There are missed opportunities for income generation for the Centre. Each primary school has ring fenced funds for sport (and in particular swimming) – we believe this is to be around £7000 for some schools. However, we are of the understanding that 7 primary schools currently use the swimming pool, bringing over 300 swimmers, for free as they are part of the Education Trust. Many people we have spoken to have said they would use the centre more if it was open during the daytime, and during key holidays (such as Christmas) and was in a better state of repair.”*
- *“The centre has been left to dilapidate in an appalling state of disrepair. For this reason, the centre has become an unappealing facility. The solution: carry out the necessary repairs to the showers, toilets, floors, doors, lockers and cubicles, and the business will follow. The business model of leaving the centre to ruin and then complaining it's not making money, is ludicrous.....I propose exploring the following alternatives: Capital Investment: The council could invest into the centre to improve the facilities, making it more appealing for custom. Upgrading the facilities could attract more users, increase revenue, and ensure the centre's long-term sustainability. Partnerships: Form partnerships with local businesses and organisations, for example The 3-18 Education Trust, or Halo, to share the financial burden and enhance the centre's offerings. Community Management: Engage local community groups to manage the centre, ensuring continued access while reducing operational costs. Fundraising: Initiate fundraising campaigns to generate additional revenue and support the centre's operations.”*

- *"... There has been a lack of maintenance and proactive repairs since the fanfare of the London 2012 Games, when Much Wenlock was heralded internationally as the birthplace of the modern Olympics. How can Shropshire Council have allowed this to happen to such a modern building only 13 years old, and then use its neglect as justification for withdrawing funds?"*
- *"In recognition of Much Wenlock's historical importance, Sport England supported the new build with a grant of £273,000 on the condition that the Leisure Centre remained open for 20 years. Has the council budgeted for the refund which will be required?"*
- *"It also shows the lack of control exercised by your leisure management team in letting the premises fall into disrepair despite constant reminders. It also shows a lack of interest that there is no advertising of in term time activities during public hours. No initiative taken. The large grant you received has all but been exhausted ,and to say there is a small amount to pay back , belittles the substantial value of the grant you received in the first place....The ambience of the place is totally wrong, there is no meet and greet, all they are interested in is taking your money without good repartee."*
- *"In my view Shropshire Council have not invested enough in the building as it was built in 2010 and not much has changed. For example the showers are not working, there is only one machine that works in the small gym I could go on!!!"*
- *"You should be working on opening it for more hours not continually trying to reduce services."*
- *"The clubs confirm that for adult use the facility is inadequate and needs refurbishment, which of course will incur cost. As well, the hall currently provides 4 net lanes, because of the need to facilitate a new fire escape, this will reduce the provision to 2 lanes. This unfortunately greatly restricts use and the usefulness of the facility....In terms of a way forward, notwithstanding the issues raise above, we, ECB/SCB, have no funds to invest in the facility - either capital or revenue. What we can offer (subject to improvements and available lanes) is regular use. This will of course provide essential income to support the running of the facility."*
- *"...The consultation offered by Shropshire Council is not a balanced one, insofar as it is only considering how to address the unitary authority's budget difficulties. Instead of closure, the focus should be on exploring sustainable solutions, such as partnerships, community-led initiatives, or grants, to maintain and enhance the facility. The local community's current and future interests must be considered, and alternative options must be fully explored before making a decision that would strip Much Wenlock and the surrounding area of such an essential resource....Lessons must be learned from the litany of mistakes and shortcomings, many of which are long standing and widely acknowledged, that have resulted in an underperforming facility. The experience gained must be used positively to develop a sustainable and secure future that maximises commercial opportunities for the benefit of the academy and the community. Successful models for operating joint facilities exist throughout the country; there is no shortage of inspiration. We all need to approach this situation with ambition to find a solution that benefits the whole community."*
- *"I recognise that the leisure centre is currently underperforming but to remove it is not the response needed. A performance review should be completed and the council should work with all stakeholders to improve the situation, and turn the situation around. The leisure centre may be underperforming but this does not determine its value and should be supported to change the outcome and thrive as we, the community, know it can. We would argue the issue has been an absence of an adequately experienced management team has compounded profitability issues and organisation so believe this should be an option to prevent option one ever being pursued."*

For of the written consultation responses provided information on use of Much Wenlock Leisure Centre to assist those using the consultation feedback for decision making. The data on community use is presented below and it is accepted that this

may be a slight underreporting of use because there may be other clubs and groups not listed.

Community Use Data – Written Responses

Club	No. people	Frequency of use / event	Hours Spent at Centre	Number of Volunteers	Number of Staff
Northgate Swimming Club	150	9 times per week, weekly	16 hrs per week	34	0
	150	Twice yearly	50 hrs		
Edge Gymnastics – Hall Hire	180	7 hrs per week, weekly	7 hrs per week	10	8
	60	Weekly during school holidays	7 hrs per week		
Wenlock Olympian Games – various facility hire	700	Live Arts Festival	Various frequency depending on events	7	0
	325	Live Arts Sports			
	1400	Live Arts Festival (audience)			
Wenlock Lightning – facility hire	100	Weekly	1 hour	4	0
	84	Annual			
	70	Weekly during season			
5 A -Side Social Group	17	Weekly	1 hour	1	0
Wenlock Warriors	33	Weekly	1 hour	8	0
Wenlock Olympians Athletic Club	32	2 sessions per week	6 hours	5	0
TaekwonDo Gradings	30	4 times per year	5 hours	0	2
Ace Camps	60	School holidays	-	-	-

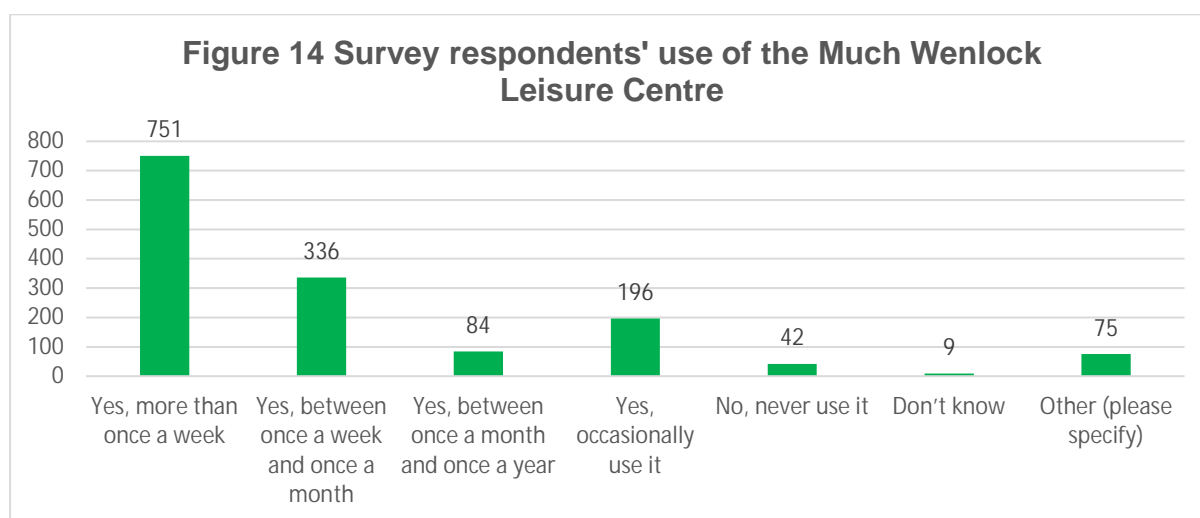
NOTE: Data provided by Northgate Swimming Club, Wenlock Warriors FC, Ace Camps Ltd and Wenlock Lightning Netball Club.

The information recreated within this report aims to fairly represent the 49 written consultation responses provided. Every effort has been made to remove personal information to ensure individuals cannot be identified through the information provided within this report. However, the personal accounts and stories provided are very important. They show how members of the community feel about Much Wenlock Leisure Centre, how they have responded to the consultation proposals and the impact they consider any potential loss of community use could have on individuals and the wider community. Shropshire Council is grateful to all those who took the time to email or write letters and share their views and participate in the consultation.

The next section of the report looks more closely at centre use data gathered through the online survey.

5 Leisure Centre Use

The emails and letters received in response to the consultation helped to highlight how people currently use the Much Wenlock Leisure Centre and the data provided by respondents is helpful. To add to this, data was also collected using the consultation online survey. Figure 14 displays the frequency of use by those members of the public who completed the survey. 751 of the 1770 respondents (42.4%) use the centre more than once a week and 336 (19%) use the centre between weekly and monthly. This suggests frequent use by a large proportion of the survey respondents. Only 42 people of the 1770 (2.4%) never use the centre.



75 survey respondents provided an 'other' answer. These have been categorised into the themes shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4 Other comments about centre use (survey responses)

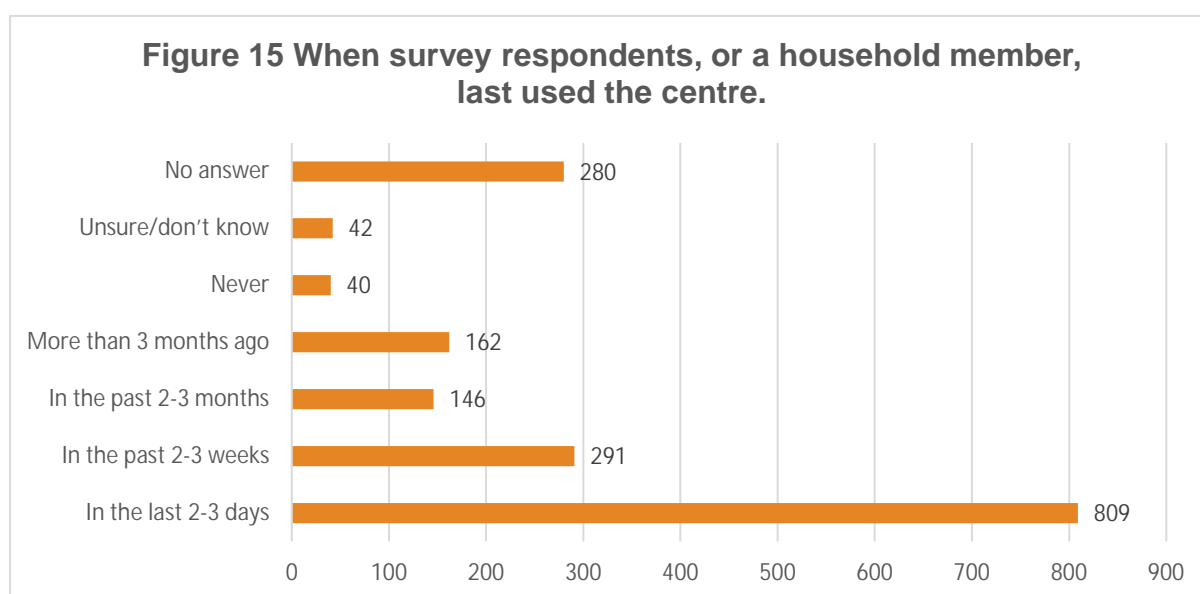
Theme	Count	%
Very frequent use (daily to minimum 3 times a week)	9	12%
Once or twice a week	16	21%
Used to visit centre regularly but not currently	12	16%
School holidays or occasional use e.g. events	7	9%
Plan to use more soon/ recently moved to area	10	13%
Opening hours limited/need additional community use	7	9%
Other	14	19%
Total	75	100%

Example Comments – Other comments on centre use

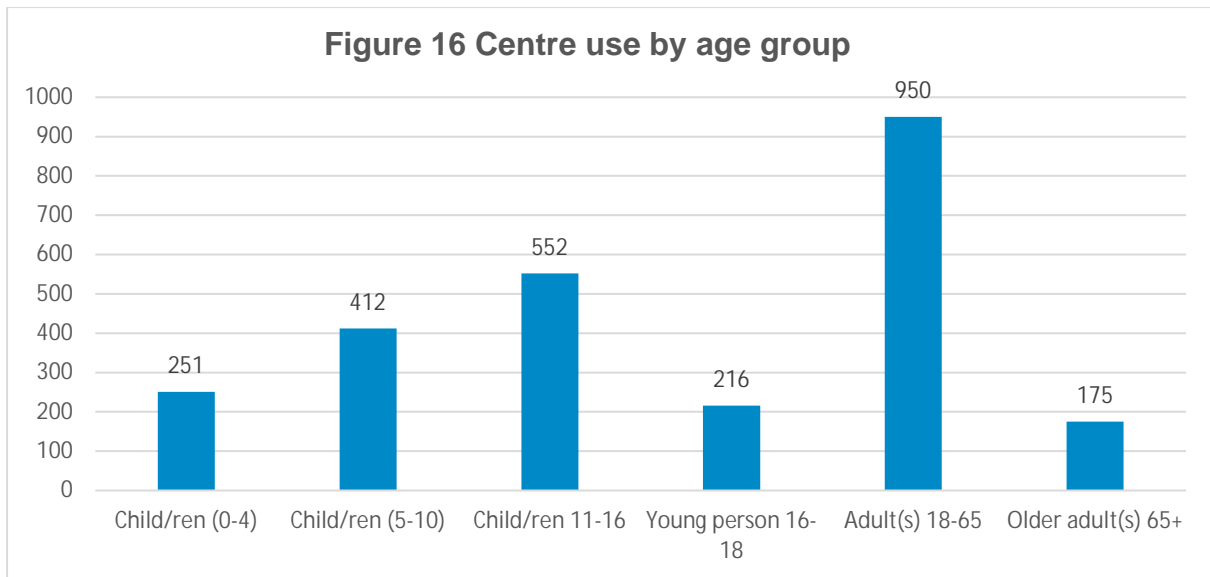
- "3 sometimes more a week just for myself then my children use it too."
- "Once a week all year, twice a week from spring to autumn."
- "I play football every Tuesday."
- "For swimming blocks and in children's holidays."
- "Used for swimming lessons and holiday clubs (great for family who need childcare during school holidays)."

- *“Have just started to after being made aware that this was open to the public.”*
- *“I am a paying member but am currently unable to use the facility. I expect to return to using it in the near future.”*
- *“I would use it much more if open to the public more hours, including open swim sessions in the evenings.”*
- *“No, because there's not really much on for me and it's all on day when at work.”*
- *“I stay in Much Wenlock often and use the gym when I am there. I have no transport in the evenings to get to other towns or gyms. My older relation who lives in Wenlock also uses the pool to assist with medical conditions (Parkinson's disease) and also for their general health and wellbeing. Also, no travel options to go elsewhere.”*
- *“Never use it due to the poor quality of changing facilities and cold showers etc - the pool itself is good and the other facilities are never used by the public except the gym hall. There is a dance studio etc that could be marketed and used by Pilates / yoga groups who instead use the local halls.”*

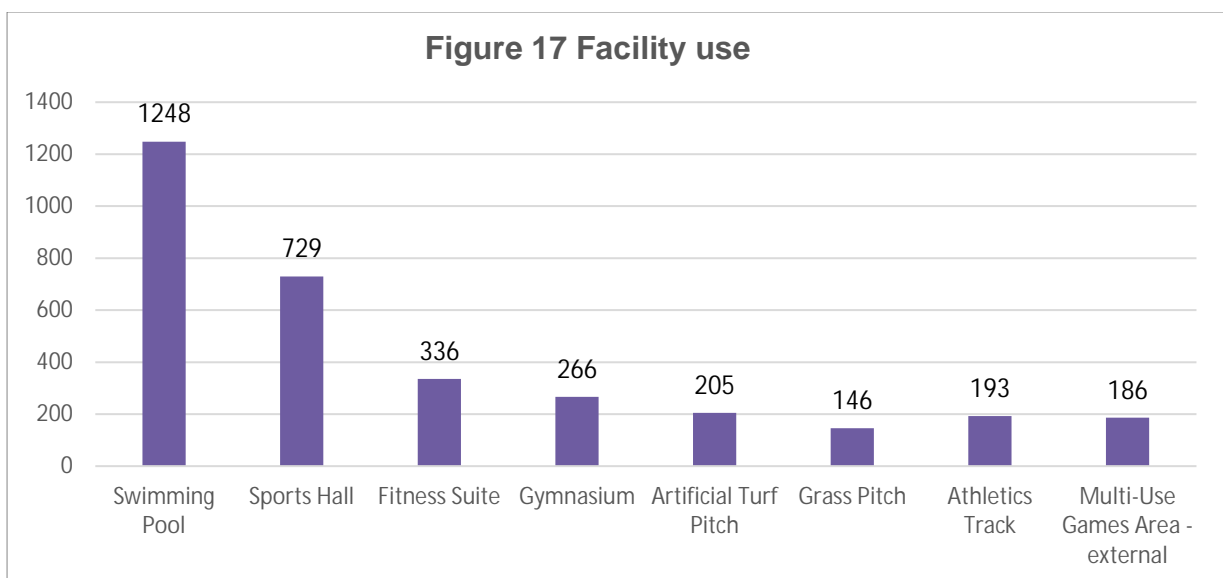
The survey asked ‘When was the last time you or a member of your household used the centre?’ The results are shown in Figure 15. 46% of those who completed the survey had either used the centre themselves or had a household member do so within the last 2-3 days. This supports previous information to suggest that the survey respondents are regular visitors to the Much Wenlock Leisure Centre.



The survey respondents provided information to show that Much Wenlock Leisure Centre is attended by a wide range of different age groups, this is despite a few suggesting that the opening times for community use could be extended. Figure 16 shows that 960 of the 1770 survey respondents have an adult (18-65) member of the household using the centre, and 175 an older adult (65+). Of the 1770 responses, there are 251 with a very young child (0-4) using the centre. There are high proportions of use by children and this will also reflect the school use (964 of the 1770 responses have a child aged 5-10 or 16-18 using the centre).



In addition to respondent use of the centre and age groups it is helpful to understand which facilities at the centre are commonly used. Figure 17 displays results when people were asked about household facility use. 71% of the households responding to the survey use the swimming pool, 41% use the sports hall and use of the other facilities is less common (19% for the fitness suite and 15% for the gymnasium). The least used facility was the grass pitch (used by 8% of the responding households).



Rather than focus on current use of the Much Wenlock Leisure Centre, the next section of the report considers what the impact of closure could be on the local community and consultation survey respondents.

6 Options Impact and Suggestions

The consultation survey explored the impact of any potential closure of Much Wenlock Leisure Centre should financial savings be necessary (option 1 within the options presented). Many of the comments presented within the written consultation responses (explored in section 4 of the report) also covered impact but the survey was designed to determine any possible alternative provision and this was not highlighted within written responses (these suggested a lack of any alternative provision and concerns that travel to Shrewsbury was not practical or affordable). Figure 18 below confirms the suggestions made within the written consultation responses that only a small proportion of people would find an alternative location for leisure activities. 214 of the 1770 respondents (12%) felt they could go to another location (1,022 did not, 58%). The remainder did not know or did not feel they would be impacted.

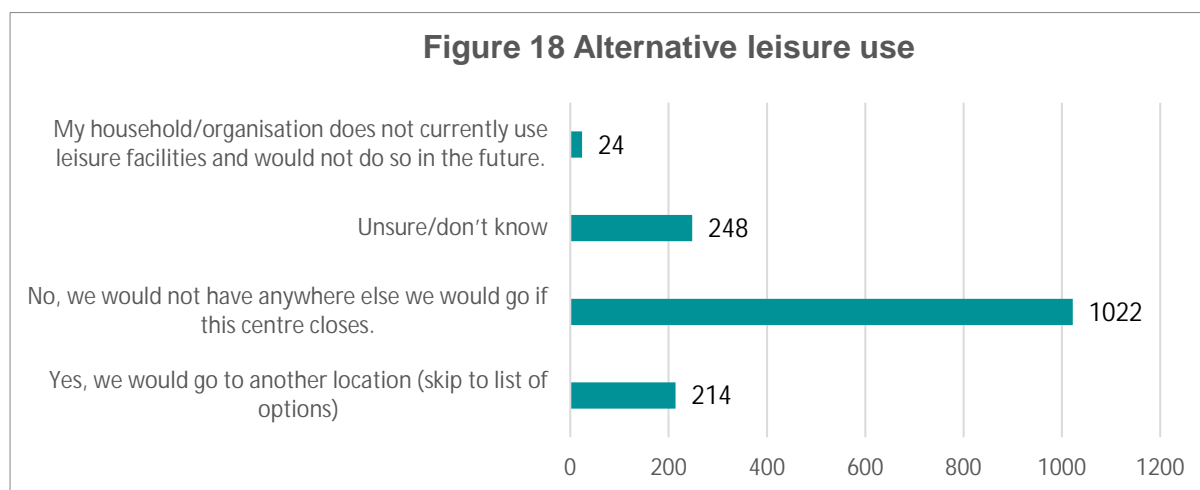
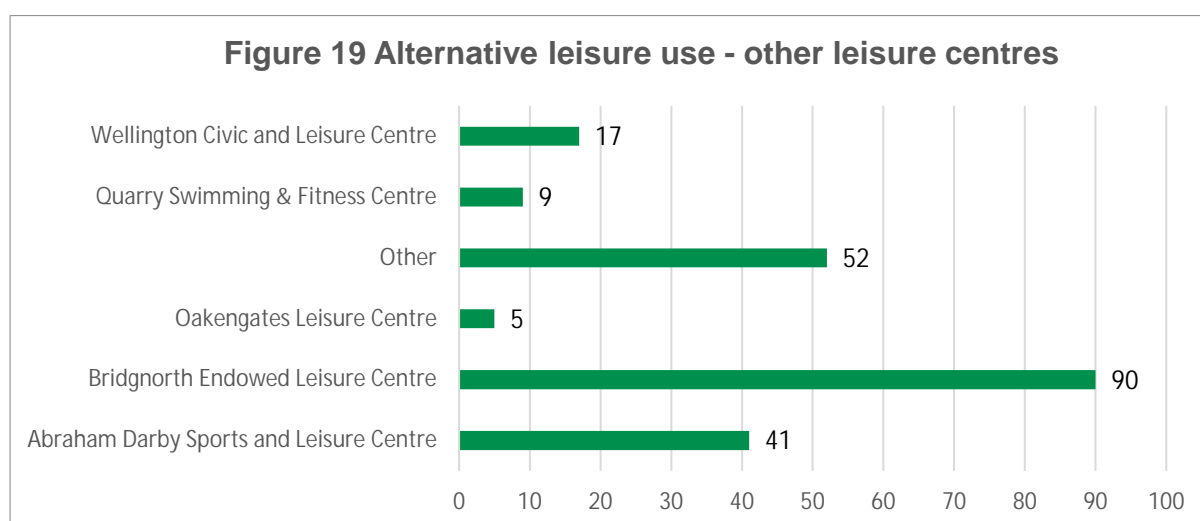


Figure 19 illustrates that, of those able to find an alternative leisure centre, 90 would travel to use Bridgnorth Endowed Leisure Centre, 41 would use Abraham Darby Sports and Leisure Centre and 52 listed an 'other' option. Smaller numbers selected centres at Wellington, Shrewsbury (Quarry) and Oakengates.



The consultation survey was also used to explore how survey respondents would be affected by the proposed options. Figure 20 below illustrates the likely impact with 1,008 of the survey respondents saying they would be personally affected by option 1 (57%) and 144 affected by option 2 (8%). 1,039 respondents have family or friends who would be affected by option 1 (59%) and 136 have family or friends affected by option 2 (8%). 686 (39%) of survey respondents are part of a group or organisation that would be affected by option 1 and 101 would be affected by option 2 (6%).

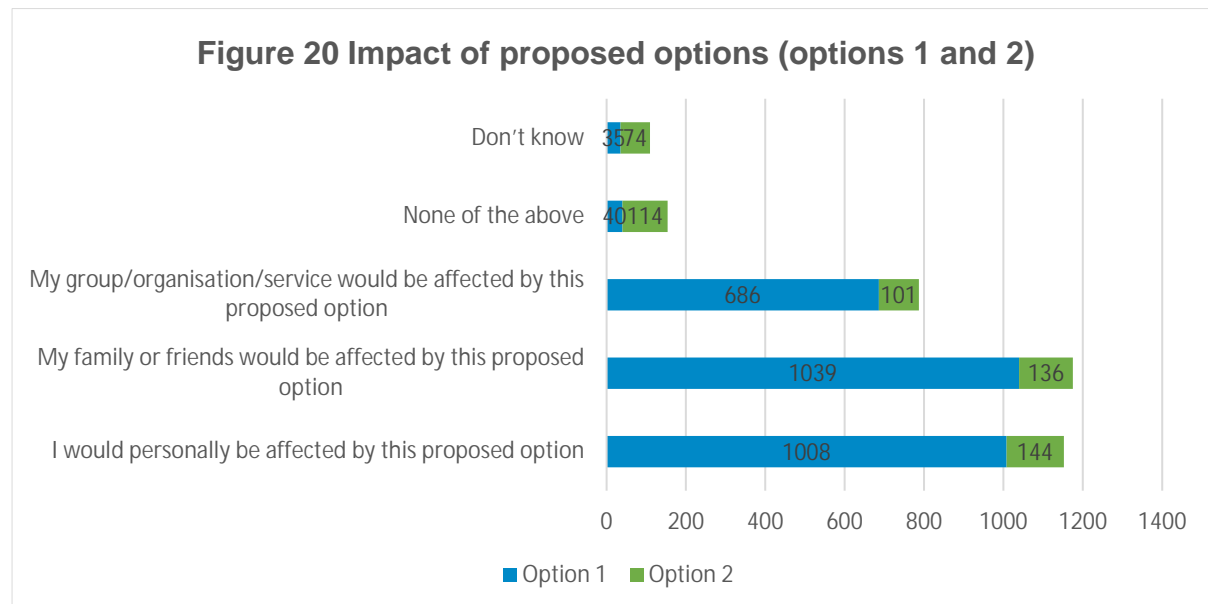
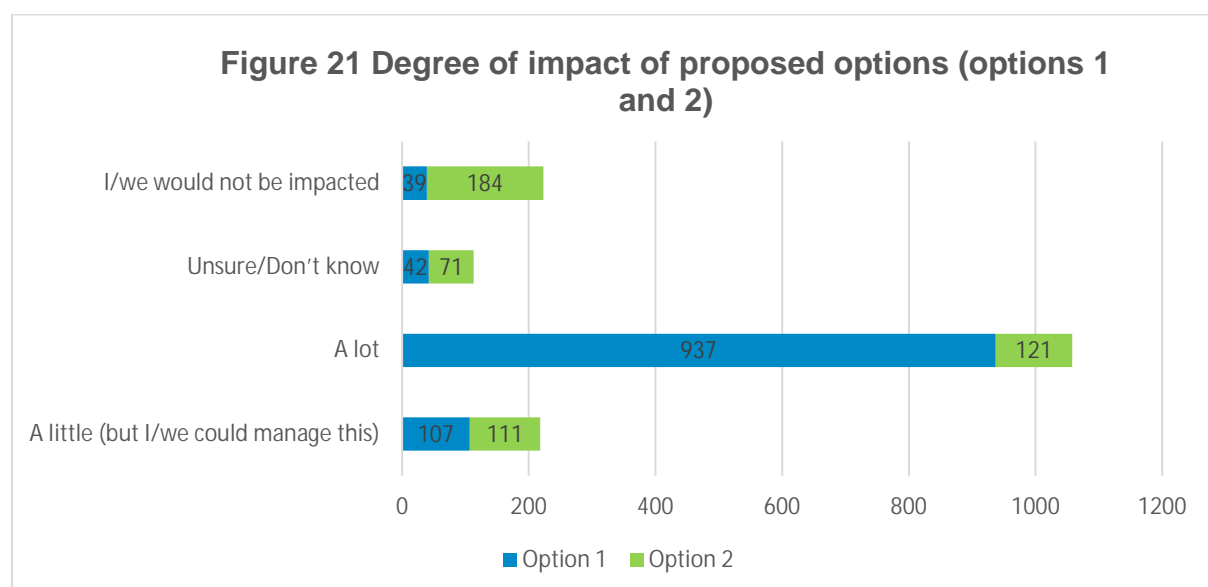


Figure 21 is used to show the degree of impact of the proposed options. Most respondents highlighted that they would be impacted a lot by option 1 (53%). There were significantly less concerns in relation to option 2.



To explore the issue of impact further, an open comment question was included to gather feedback. It read 'If you will be impacted as an individual or have concerns about the impact on others, please explain any concerns you have.' There were 571

separate comments, and many covered more than one key theme or message. Table 5 summarises the feedback received. The most commonly mentioned theme within the comments was the impact the options (particularly option 1) would have upon health and wellbeing by reducing access to exercise opportunities. The second most commonly mentioned theme was the loss of local clubs (e.g. swimming, netball gymnastics, triathlon etc.). Other top themes included lack of accessible alternative leisure facilities, the negative impact on the community and the impact on mental health.

Table 5 Comments describing impact of the proposed options

Theme	Count	%
Negative impact of removal of a community hub/ facility for the local area	85	10%
Negative impact on physical wellbeing/ ability to exercise/ rehabilitation	220	27%
Negative impact on mental wellbeing	75	9%
Potential closure of clubs, organised activities and groups	152	19%
Increase in social isolation/ removal of social space/ meeting friends	45	6%
Unable to access alternative leisure facility (e.g. transport, rurality)	98	12%
Financial impact (e.g. cost of travel, loss of jobs, economic impact)	40	5%
Impact on local sporting events (e.g. Wenlock Olympic Games)	6	1%
Criticism of Shropshire Council	12	1%
Criticism of the consultation/ proposed options	10	1%
No other comparable facility/ no availability at other centres	66	8%
Other	7	1%
Total	816	100%

The example comments below are helpful in understanding the feedback to a greater extent. There were a significant number of comments from children and young people expressing concern.

Example comments – Impact

- *“My swimming teacher is nice. She has taught me to swim. I don't want to not go swimming anymore. Please don't close it.”*
- *“Both my daughters aged 4 and 6 have swimming lessons at Much Wenlock. Waiting lists for swimming lessons at our next nearest pool in Bridgnorth were 18 months. Learning to swim is a vital necessity for the safety of children and needs to be accessible to all. I am willing to pay more for the lessons to help cover the council's costs, cost is not the issue. It is the lack of availability of swimming lessons elsewhere that makes Much Wenlock Leisure Centre so important for us.”*
- *“We want to keep the leisure centre for reasons stated above, plus it's a safe space for young people to relax and let off steam too! What else do any of us have around here?”*
- *“We are one of the few centres in Shropshire that provide fencing instruction to 8-15 year olds. There is little capacity elsewhere to take up this slack.”*
- *“The potential negative impact on young people is high, and the new Shrewsbury Leisure Centre is not a viable mitigating factor or viable alternative for the following reasons: The Impact Assessment is based on an assumption that the Centre only serves Much Wenlock. This is not correct. Many of our members travel from the wider Bridgnorth area (including as far as the Ditton Priors, the Brown Clee and Billingsley). Using the new*

Shrewsbury Pool would not be practicable. The distance is a major factor as well as the fact that the local clubs would be using the facilities as well. Swimming lessons are currently over-subscribed at both Much Wenlock and Bridgnorth and the proposal would exacerbate this further.”

- “I can barely afford to live let alone add extra fuel costs onto clubs for my children, a lot of children in the town will suffer now and in the future if it closes.”
- “Our family will be impacted as we will not have local access to services. I have concerns many families and individuals will be in the same situation with no access to extracurricular clubs or activities leading to isolation and antisocial behaviour especially in young teens. The swimming pool is also the only one local with a hoist to assist in people getting access if they have mobility problems which would have a detrimental effect on health and wellbeing.”
- “I would honestly cry if this is shut, I love this place with a passion it's a place for young and old people to connect it would also stop a lot of people having the only socialisation they may get in a week I'm a strong and proud user of this facility and it is a key part of Much Wenlock.”
- “The "assessment" appears very subjective and arbitrary with little substance on how the conclusions have been reached. The leisure centre is used by people from a wide area and is a key hub for physical exercise and the social benefits this delivers.”
- “As well as the impact on me as an individual, I am deeply concerned about the impact on both Wenlock Olympian Society and the members of The Friendly Bus who use the swimming pool on a weekly basis.”
- “Many people at the centre will lose jobs. there will be no availability for clubs to use the facilities. people who use the gym/ pool for improvement in their lifestyle won't have the availability to do that anymore.”
- “Much Wenlock has a large elderly population, keeping fit is very important to their health.”

The next question within the online survey read ‘The previous question asked you to consider any concerns you may have about the impact of proposed changes. Is there anything else you don't like about the draft proposals?’ There were 395 comments made. Each was read, considered and categorised. Many of the comments covered multiple themes and these are shown in Table 6.

Table 6 Comments explaining what people dislike about the proposed options

Theme	Count	%
Criticism of the consultation/ lack of alternative options/ clarity	105	21%
Leisure centre needs improved management and marketing	38	8%
Leisure centre needs investment/ improvements	35	7%
Public access to the centre should be maintained/ increased	26	5%
Need to continue to have a community facility for the local area	84	17%
Potential closure of clubs, organised activities and groups	27	6%
Negative impact on health and wellbeing	67	14%
Need to support and invest in rural areas/ not just focus on towns (Shrewsbury)	50	10%
Criticism of Shropshire Council	24	5%
Dislike option 1	13	3%
Loss of jobs	5	1%
Other	16	3%
Total	490	100%

A key theme within the comments was that there should be an alternative option or compromise rather than “run into the ground” (used to describe option 2) or “give it to the school and lose community access” (used to summarise option 1). As Table 6 shows, other top themes included general criticism of the consultation options, the importance of having a community facility for the local area, the negative impact any loss of service will have on the health and wellbeing of the community and concerns that Shropshire Council is not investing in communities outside of Shrewsbury.

Example comments – What respondents dislike about the proposed options

- *“There are so few options considered. There is no recognition of the impact that poor relationships between council/ centre and school/ trust have had on the current provision. Were they better, then the facilities might be better maintained, respected by users and so the building not in the sorry state it is now. If it were nicer, more people would use it.”*
- *“Close it or give it back to Much Wenlock school are not really two options. The community of Shropshire then has not control. The academy trust is overseeing a failing school. A lot of money was invested when the school and its facilities were built. They were intended to be for Shropshire. Talk to the community - there are other options e.g. look at options suggested on LoveBridgnorth.”*
- *“I don’t like how there are no other options..... it’s either close or run into the ground.... Where are the ideas on how to create more money making opportunities.? How can it be saved?”*
- *“There is not enough information available, we need to know if the school can take over the facility and maintain public use before we are able to comment in an educated manner.”*
- *“Option 1 has no figures to support any financial benefit. You could save £100 a year but the impact on children could cause the council increased costs elsewhere. The government’s adding VAT to school fees has a huge impact on this. Access to these pools could be reduced or come at increased costs to the community. This reduces swimming pool availability further.”*
- *“It is written with a bias towards option 1, where this option has had very little thought or investigation. Most proposals have an option for capital expenditure, this doesn’t, why?? The centre has suffered from a lack of investment and programme of maintenance, this is why it is running a deficit! If the centre were managed better and looked after, it would be a different financial picture.”*
- *“There has been no consideration of running the leisure centre properly with times and uses that maximise its use. More competitive prices and usable times would increase uptake. It needs a good clean and some competent management.”*
- *“The proposals are focussed on savings, rather than on how to increase revenue. It is like not putting the heating on when you are idle at home, rather than going out to chop wood or get a job to afford the cost of fuel. if the academy owns the facility. then consideration of breach of covenants should be investigated, together with loss of amenity which was paid for by residents / precept. If the school / academy assumes control of the facility, then they should buy it and maintain it.”*
- *“The equalities impact assessment is weak. The lack of accessible alternative facilities has not been considered. The options exclude any assessment of improving usage through better marketing etc.”*
- *“Yes, there is a suggestion I can just travel to Shrewsbury instead and this is not feasible or fair.”*

- *“There’s an obesity crisis and you’re wanting to remove a community resource that helps people lose weight and get fit.”*
- *“Should Edge Gymnastics not be able to continue to hire the hall and gymnasium, I will be massively impacted as this is my livelihood. Edge Gymnastics is a business and provides work for around 10 coaches in total. It would also impact upon the 200+ children aged 4-16yrs that attend Edge Gymnastics classes every week.”*
- *“Clubs like the netball club for children, badminton club for adults offer people with neurodiversity a chance to shine and feel included regardless of their hidden disability, sport clubs are great for people's self-esteem their mental health and their physical health all of which alleviates the strain on the NHS. This proposal is so short sighted taking away this facility for community use will drastically effect the area of Shropshire, people won't be willing to travel miles to find another netball, badminton, taekwondo, fencing or gymnastics clubs they will simply stop going which is a travesty.”*
- *“I don’t like the draft proposals as they will remove the centre from community use and is just another cost cutting exercise for Shropshire Council so they can spend all the money in Shrewsbury.”*
- *“I don’t like the lack of options you have included. Surely there are more - for example to invest and improve the centre so more people use it? To invest in the team on site so it’s a more welcoming place to be rather than it feeling like the staff can’t wait for you to leave. Another option is to extend opening hours so I could attend the gym while my children are at school/ nursery.”*
- *“Stop spending money on Shrewsbury with things that don't need doing. There are other places that exist in Shropshire.”*
- *“It seems to me that this is another example of cutting services anywhere apart from Shrewsbury. Would the proposal have been drafted if the leisure centre happened to be situated in our county town?”*
- *“Savings can be found elsewhere rather than cutting access to facilities that promote, health wellbeing and support mental health / lifestyle.”*

Although there are some dominant themes within the feedback, some of the less commonly mentioned themes also need to be considered including concerns relating to a lack of investment in the leisure centre, concerns about the way the centre has been managed, concerns about the significant impact on the clubs and groups using the centre, and the economic impact of the potential loss of community use, including loss of jobs.

The next question asked survey respondents if there was anything they like within the consultation proposals. There were 329 comments in response a small number included multiple themes, and these are shown in Table 7.

Table 7 Comments explaining what people like about the proposed options

Theme	Count	%
No/nothing	221	64%
Option 2	59	17%
Shropshire Council maintaining involvement	5	1%
Saving money	7	2%
Find alternative funding/saving sources	11	3%
Other	42	12%
Total	345	100%

As Table 7 suggests, there was little positive feedback for the consultation proposals. 64% of the comments suggested that there is nothing to like about the options presented. There were very few comments with slightly more positive feedback but a few examples are included below.

Example comments – What respondents like about the proposed options

- *“If William Brookes took it over and the community use wasn't reduced, then I would have no issues with that.”*
- *“Maybe the school trust could run it more efficiently, but if they haven't got the funds then it's not possible.”*
- *“Option 2 gives the centre a fighting chance.”*
- *“Doing nothing is best for the community.”*
- *“Option 2 would be acceptable. Option 1 doesn't have any benefits at all.”*
- *“Saving money for all council services.”*
- *“I understand the need to economise and seek to save money.”*
- *“I'm always happy to see the council trying to save money especially as it wasted so many millions buying Shrewsbury shopping centre a disastrous decision!”*
- *“Your transparency.”*

Anticipating that the two options presented within the consultation are not comfortable due to being based on the need to make savings, Shropshire Council was keen to ask the community for any alternative suggestions that would help make savings whilst minimising any negative impact. A question was included within the online survey which read ‘Do you have any alternative suggestions or ideas for achieving the required savings?’ There were 494 comments in response to the question. Each of these were considered and categorised, some of the comments included more than one message or theme. The summarised results are shown in Table 8. The top suggestion with 27% of the comments was to find savings elsewhere followed by improvements in the current management and marketing of the centre (19%).

Table 8 Alternative suggestions for achieving savings

Theme	Count	%
Increase/ change opening hours/ remove access for the school	68	11%
Offer a wider range of classes/ services/ revenue generating/ increase charge for use	83	13%
Private management company/ link to another organisation	43	7%
Community/ charity ownership	17	3%
Fundraising, grants, private investment, investment from other public sector organisation(s) e.g. NHS	44	7%
Review other council expenditure e.g. staff costs, sell other facilities/ Improved financial management	168	27%
Community involvement to develop a solution	16	3%
Investment in the centre/ maintenance and quality of facilities to increase use	46	7%
Improve current management and marketing	119	19%
Other	21	3%
Total	625	100%

Other commonly mentioned themes included increasing the leisure offer to generate income and making changes to opening hours and focusing more on community use rather than restricting use for the school within school hours. Many people suggested they would be happy to pay more to ensure the sustainability of the leisure centre as long as the centre was well maintained and clean. The example comments below help to illustrate the feedback received.

Example comments – Alternative suggestions

- *“Maybe to increase the charges for the use of the facility.”*
- *“I don’t think the leisure adequately advertises; I didn’t even know it existed until my daughter started school there. Codsall leisure centre actively encourages students to be members of the centre. I do think it could be better run and therefore make more money.”*
- *“Sponsorships, fundraisers, bake sales, sponsored runs.”*
- *“I believe, we should think outside the box more on this. It could be hired out as an event space. Use the hall for kids birthday parties. Maximize the facilities that we have and maximize the return, there is poor management involved and poor decisions being made. Lazy attitude.”*
- *“Get the income that’s possible from primary schools who use the pool - we believe they get it for free as they are part of the same trust, despite the funds being ring fenced for swimming. Do the capital works to extend opening hours and so footfall and income? Use capital funds to improve the facilities (cleaning, repairs and maintenance) so the site offers facilities that you and we would be happy to use. If it’s a nicer environment, people would use it more. We often find urine on the floor, broken locks on doors, leaking toilets, showers that don’t work, staff sat on their phones, staff not answering the phone, staff not sure how to respond when there is an issue - it took 3 people several minutes to find a plaster the other day!!!! In comparison the spend here is minimal compared to those in social care but is essential if you are to deliver on your preventative duties under the Health and Care Act. Review your high cost placements in adult social care - use block contracts to lower price. Work with supported accommodation developers to develop more local options.”*
- *“We pay for this service, using the pool isn’t free and neither are swimming lessons, so there must be an income from this? There has clearly been little investment in the site for years, (pool had new filter the other year at great cost) showers are cold and don’t work toilets are not clean and stink! Pee all over them and haven’t been cleaned properly in years. So, make it nicer to use and more people will go thus bringing in more cash, I do know folks who have changed pools due to the changing rooms.”*
- *“Get smarter - ensure you have optimal staffing and ensure the centre is run efficiently - including making sure people who use the centre pay for the time they are there.”*
- *“The site should be better managed. I have to chase the staff to tell me what I owe for swimming lessons and if we are booked in to the next block. There is no communication from the management. There are so many missed opportunities to generate money for the leisure centre if only a better management system was in place. It is run by children that are not qualified to be carrying this on their shoulders. Where is a proper site manager to run this facility properly?”*
- *“Community interest company to be created.”*
- *“Could we host sporting events for county or national sports? Much Wenlock is the birth place of the modern Olympics.”*
- *“Instead of spending so much on town centre facilities, reduce the spending there, and use the money to keep more rural facilities open.”*

- *“Don’t spend huge sums on a new riverside park in Shrewsbury. There already is a beautiful park in Shrewsbury. Again, focusing on people who live in town at the expense of people who live in villages and hamlets.”*
- *“Reduce spending elsewhere on not so necessary things or look at selling other council assets that would not affect Wenlock residents.”*

The last question within the online survey allowed respondents to add any other comments. There were 220 responses. Many of the responses to this question were long and it was clear that considerable time and effort had been made by many respondents to provide a thorough, considered response. Table 9 displays the results and it is clear that there were a wide range of issues raised including comments highlighting the value of the leisure centre to the wider community and to clubs, comments expressing dissatisfaction with Shropshire Council and lack of support for rural communities, comments highlighting the importance of leisure centres to influence health and wellbeing and concerns that the centre has been allowed to deteriorate and requires capital investment.

Table 9 Other comments

Theme	Count	%
Impact on children and young people	19	5%
Health and wellbeing benefits of centre	38	10%
Value to wider community and clubs	69	19%
Swimming pool inadequately heated	3	1%
Facilities not maintained e.g. toilets, changing rooms, showers, gym	17	5%
Centre allowed to deteriorate, requires capital investment	38	10%
Poorly run centre (e.g. comments about staffing)	30	8%
Short term decision making - implications for future	13	4%
Concern won't listen/decision already made/lack of options	18	5%
Lack of swim sessions at times children can use centre/ poorly planned programme	7	2%
Increase use and public awareness of centre	20	5%
Travel concerns - no alternatives	12	3%
Criticism of Shropshire Council and budget decisions/ inequity	41	11%
Other	41	11%
Total	366	100%

Example comments – Other comments

- *“To think about the joy that elements of the facility provide for younger children.”*
- *“The whole community relies on the facilities at the leisure centre to keep children adults and the elderly fit and engaged in physical activity. It would be a travesty if this was to be lost.”*
- *“By closing the facility, it will cause a negative impact on the health (mental and physical) of the local residents. These will not just be short term but far reaching. It is short-sighted and detrimental to the environment to expect residents of this town and outlying rural villages to travel long distances to use already oversubscribed facilities in Shrewsbury or Bridgnorth.”*

- *“Somehow make the leisure centre more commercial. Raise public awareness of the centre.”*
- *“It would be just terrible if it closed! Surely there is a way to keep it open for the community. We were told when it was being built it was for everyone. Feels like we’ve been let down.”*
- *“Closing or restricting access to the public of a venue so closing linked with the Olympic Movement would be seen as dismissing the vision of William Penny Brookes of the importance of inspiring the modern Olympic Games, and for his promotion of physical education and personal betterment.”*
- *“I have used the facilities at the William Brookes school for over 40 years which I can walk to daily as can most of the people of Wenlock. Now after the building of a new school with added modern facilities, we did not have before, it seems at odds with the ethos of the day that we should take more exercise, walk rather than drive and use community facilities, that the Council are proposing to pull the plug on the whole wonderful set up at the school.”*
- *“If the leisure centre was run by my professional staff or by people above the age of 16 then this would be a much more appealing facility for people to use. People aren’t using it enough as the staff make people feel uncomfortable or aren’t doing their jobs properly.”*
- *“You have allowed the leisure centre to fall into a state of deterioration. The facilities are poorly run and communication from the staff is largely non-existent, it is not a welcoming environment for customers. The swimming pool changing rooms and toilets are beyond filthy and the pool is invariably cold, although it does appear warm in comparison to the swimming pool showers which have been freezing - genuinely freezing - for the past 18 months. My daughter uses both the pool and sports hall once a week, on more than one occasion we have had to withdraw her from her swimming lesson due to the temperature of the pool being too cold - this should simply not be happening. We previously used the pool at weekends and during school holidays, however this has again ceased over the past 18 months due to the temperature and cleanliness of the pool and changing facilities. You would have far more customers, and thereby greater revenue, if you took more care and made it a welcoming facility that people wanted to use.”*
- *“SC leisure services have mis-managed the MW leisure Centre. The school and the management have allowed serious and repeated vandalism, which I do not believe has been caused by adult gym users. The gym and pool facilities have been allowed to run down therefore they do not seem to be attractive to outside paying users. The gym is always dirty there are no checks on how it is managed on a day to day basis. Many do not even know that there is a gym available in MW, it is not advertised in the town. It is more than disappointing.”*
- *“Improve supervision of students using, or accessing, the centres facilities during school hours which are outside of Shropshire Councils management and public opening hours. It has been observed when attending the centre that there appear to be ongoing issues regarding the use of the centre by students during school hours, including misuse of facilities and inadequate supervision by school staff. During visits to the centre, visible damage has been observed, including: Broken or damaged toilet doors; Changing room doors in poor condition; Showers with visible signs of neglect or disrepair; Stairwell walls with scuffs, dents, and other, more significant damage. Additionally, observations and communications, suggest that the quality of maintenance work carried out at the centre has been inconsistent, with potentially, insufficient oversight of tradespeople responsible for repairs. Rather than closing the facility, the council should focus on improving maintenance standards and enhancing supervision during school-use hours to prevent further deterioration.”*

- *“Please do not take our leisure centre away from us. Council money can be wasted, so please look elsewhere to make savings and see this is a priority for the community of Much Wenlock.”*
- *“If the centre closes the council would need to pay back £280000.00 back to Sport England. Use this money to refurbish the leisure centre and hand it to someone like Halo to run (a local charity).”*
- *“I feel that a complete review is required to understand how the centre is running at a loss. As a Much Wenlock resident I feel that what the centre has to offer could be better promoted. The impact of closing the centre for those that use it currently and in the future needs properly assessing including the cost of support services for those whose health declines because of the closure both mentally and physically.”*
- *“The Wenlock area is set to grow - with developments in Buildwas and Tasley. The other centre in Bridgnorth is always full. Shrewsbury is too far away and too expensive. Shropshire council has a massive bias towards Shrewsbury and appears to neglect its villages. Our health clearly doesn't matter. You probably need to adjust all of our strategies and plans such as your health and well-being plan to make sure that those priorities “apply except in Much Wenlock”.*
- *“This area is getting less and less for their council tax payments, especially if you live rurally as we do. We have no street lighting to fund and awful lanes that are not maintained, so where do our funds go? And now no sports facility in a heavily featured Olympic connection.”*
- *“I think I've said enough! You tax us and make us pay but unless you live in Shrewsbury the council have no real regard for other communities! Some of these questions posed are written in an unfair/ trip you up loins of manner! We choose options 2! To keep our local facilities”*
- *“Have you considered any options between 'closing the centre' and 'do nothing'?”*
- *“There should have been more options. It feels like the council have already made their mind up without really investigating how it could be an improved.”*
- *“I'm sure this survey is probably a pointless exercise as you've made it clear what option you want, so I'm sure that will happen anyway. But on the off chance it makes any difference I've voiced my concerns and disgust at having a community service taken away yet again.”*
- *“This is a very thoughtless consultation. It would be an easy win for Shropshire council but with massive impact on families and communities. Perhaps a better proposal could be put forward with more detail and more considerate options.”*

The example comments help to show the strength of feeling within the local community in response to the consultation. It is important to read example of comments to better understand the way people have expressed their concerns and disappointment. The final question repeated many of the themes that had been highlighted elsewhere within the feedback but it was helpful because it allowed people to comment in an open way and express the issues of most importance to them.

The next, and final, section of this report summarises the feedback received through the consultation from both the survey respondents and those who wrote letters and emailed to share their views.

7 Summary and Conclusion

This report on the Much Wenlock Leisure Consultation provides a comprehensive overview of the feedback received from the community regarding the proposed changes to the Much Wenlock Leisure Centre. The consultation was conducted by Shropshire Council between 11th December 2024 and 5th February 2025 to explore options for the future of the leisure centre, which included either ceasing community use or maintaining the status quo.

Key themes within the feedback from the 1770 survey responses and 49 written consultation responses included:

Community Concerns: A significant portion of the feedback highlighted the importance of the leisure centre as a community facility. Many respondents spoke about their personal connections to the centre, years of use and the positive difference the leisure centre had made in their lives. Others spoke more generally about community value and the way the centre generates benefits for social cohesion and reduces isolation.

Impact on Clubs and Groups: The potential closure of the leisure centre would affect various local clubs and groups that rely on the facility for their activities. This includes sports clubs, swimming lessons, and other community groups. The list below includes those who took the time to respond to the consultation but others were also mentioned within some of the comments.

Impact on children and young people: Although many adults highlighted concerns about the impact on children, there were also many responses from children and young people to the online survey (and a few emails). Children and young people tended to write about the benefits they obtain from being involved in sport and clubs including confidence, making friends and social connections and the opportunity to learn skills and compete.

Impact on Health and Wellbeing: The leisure centre is seen as a vital resource for promoting physical and mental health. Many respondents emphasized the negative impact that the closure of the centre would have on their health and wellbeing. Comments suggested that the financial savings are short-sighted and will increase other costs over time as health and wellbeing impacts become evident.

Economic Impact: In addition to comments about the social and health impacts of the consultation options, there were also some comments about the economic impact. Many felt that loss of community facilities would make the area a less attractive place to live, work and bring up families and there were comments focused on the job losses that would result from service reductions or leisure centre loss.

Lack of alternative provision: A common theme throughout the feedback was that other leisure centres will not be accessible to many due to distance, lack of available transport or as a result of cost concerns. Many commented that they would not be in a position to access an alternative leisure centre if community use of the Much Wenlock Leisure Centre is lost.

Criticism of Consultation Options: Respondents criticized the limited options presented in the consultation, with many suggesting that more alternatives should have been considered. Neither option was popular with the community and many expressed that their choice of option 2 was not necessarily that they supported that option but because it was the only way of retaining community use of the centre. Many people expressed the view that option 2 would see the centre “run into the ground”.

Suggestions for Investment and Improvement: Respondents provided numerous suggestions for improving the management and marketing of the leisure centre to increase its usage and revenue. These included better maintenance, extended opening hours, and more community involvement. There were also some comments to suggest Shropshire Council had not managed the centre well and that this had led to longer-term decline. There were some comments suggesting that a lack of experienced staff was an issue (it should be noted that a few comments also praised staff and that the concerns were not targeted at any particular members of staff but more the strategic operation and staffing decisions at the centre). There was a call from the community to consider other options to maintain and improve the leisure centre including capital investment, searching for funding, using volunteers, considering private or charity management and exploring options to partner with other organisations.

Criticism of Shropshire Council decision making: A strong theme within the consultation responses was criticism of Shropshire Council for investing in other leisure provision in Shrewsbury or other locations whilst suggesting savings in Much Wenlock. Many people expressed the concern that the leisure centre is one of the few public services they have access to and questioned the value of their council tax for the community.

Conclusion

The Much Wenlock Leisure Consultation report reveals a strong community attachment to the leisure centre and significant concerns about its potential closure. The feedback underscores the importance of the centre for the health, wellbeing, and social cohesion of the local community. The consultation also highlighted the need for Shropshire Council to consider alternative options and improvements to ensure the sustainability of the leisure centre.

It is clear that any decision regarding the future of the Much Wenlock Leisure Centre will be challenging, due to the opposition to the consultation options and the strength of community feeling within the responses received. Shropshire Council's Cabinet will be asked to consider the results of the consultation in March 2025. Any decision made will be communicated widely so that those who participated in the consultation are aware of the outcome.

Many thanks are extended to all those who took the time to prepare responses and share their views. Particular thanks are extended to the community groups, clubs and organisations listed below, many of whom submitted consultation response documents.

With thanks to the following clubs, groups and organisations:

- 1st Much Wenlock Scout Group
- Ace Camps Ltd
- Bridgnorth Town Council
- Broseley Youth Sports
- Edge Gymnastics
- Energize Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin
- Friendly Bus
- GB Olympians
- Holy Trinity, Much Wenlock
- Inclusive Walking Football
- Jonathan Edwards CBE
- Kelly's Gymnastics Group
- Much Wenlock Community First Responders
- Much Wenlock Cricket Club
- Much Wenlock Fencing Club
- Much Wenlock Town Council
- Northgate Swimming Clubs
- Positive Steps Shropshire
- Priorslee Cricket Club
- Shrewsbury Amateur Swimming Club
- Shropshire County Fencing Union
- Shropshire Cricket Board
- Shropshire Playing Fields Association
- Shropshire Swimming
- Sporting Bridgnorth
- Telford Tri
- Wellington Amateur Swimming Club
- Wenlock Lightning Netball Club
- Wenlock Olympian Society
- Wenlock Warriors FC

February 2025

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Shropshire Council Lead Department: Leisure Services, Place



Shropshire Council
Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment (ESHIA)
Stage One Screening Record 2025

A. Summary Sheet on Accountability and Actions

Name of proposed service change
Management arrangements at Much Wenlock Leisure Centre

Name of the officer carrying out the screening
Peter Davis Leisure Services Manager – Culture, Leisure and Tourism

Decision, review, and monitoring

Decision	Yes	No
Initial (Stage One) ESHIA Only?	X	
Proceed to Stage Two Full ESHIA or HIA (part two) Report?		X

If completion of a Stage One screening assessment is an appropriate and proportionate action at this stage, please use the boxes above, and complete both part A and part B of this template. If a Full or Stage Two report is required, please move on to full report stage once you have completed this initial screening assessment as a record of the considerations which you have given to this matter.

Actions to mitigate likely negative impact or enhance positive impact of the service change in terms of equality and social inclusion considerations
<p>This is a follow up ESHIA carried out after the eight-week period of public consultation approved by Cabinet.</p> <p>Ahead of consultation, the likely impact had been assessed as low to medium negative across all nine Protected Characteristic groupings as set out in the Equality Act 2010, as all current users of the centre will potentially be affected by the service change. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women – all ages • Men – all ages • Babies, children and young people • People with disabilities, whether physical disabilities, sensory or mobility disabilities, mental health, or disabilities including neurodiverse conditions and Crohn's disease • People in older age groups • People undergoing gender reassignment • People of different religions and faiths

The particular groupings for whom this was considered to potentially be medium negative, rather than the low negative that would be likely to result from any service reduction, are children of school age, who currently use the pool and other facilities; people in the groupings of gender reassignment and pregnancy and maternity; people with disabilities, including children of school age and older people; and people in low income households and/or those who have difficulty accessing private or public transport to travel to facilities that are further afield. This final grouping is within the additional category that we use in Shropshire, where we seek to consider social inclusion factors.

The Council also seeks to take due regard of the needs of people and households that we may consider to be vulnerable by virtue of their circumstances, including young people leaving care, and households on low incomes or in fuel poverty.

Travel and transport access emerged as a key issue for respondents, this corroborates the need to ensure consideration of financial challenges for households and individuals as well as availability of public transport.

Additionally, safeguarding concerns had been considered as likely to be expressed by respondents, as this has been the case with Shrewsbury Sports Village consultation and will need to continue to be factored into efforts to ensure that the facilities present as a safe environment for all.

The overall impacts are now considered to be medium negative across the nine groupings and for the additional categories that we seek to have due regard to in Shropshire, i.e. social inclusion, veterans and serving members of the armed forces and their families, and young people leaving care.

The eight-week public consultation period has enabled assessment of a depth of responses from stakeholders and members of the public.

The consultation drew responses across groupings and demographics, and so reflects considerations about the circumstances in which people may find themselves, including challenges of access to services and facilities in a large and rural county. It does need to be articulated that social inclusion is not a statutory grouping for which to have 'due regard'. Neither are socio- economic considerations, albeit these may yet come into force in secondary legislation. Government guidance (November 2023) is clear that decisions may still be taken where a negative equality impact has been identified, provided that due consideration has been given and that mitigation efforts are being made, and that there will be ongoing engagement with groupings affected.

To mitigate the potential negative impact on some groups who will prefer Shropshire Council to continue to operate the facility or might face barriers to accessing alternative facilities if community use were to cease, the following actions are proposed:

- Continue to engage with the existing service users and stakeholders and seek their feedback about the impact of the proposed changes.

- Continue to engage with existing service users and stakeholders and seek their views on alternative suggestions or ideas for meeting the savings target as outlined in the MTFS.
- Provide clear and timely information and communication about the service change and address any concerns or queries that may arise.
- Liaise with William Brookes Academy Trust and 3-18 Education Trust, to consider all alternative operating models to enable community use to continue beyond the notice period.

Actions to mitigate likely negative impact or enhance positive impact of the service change in terms of health and wellbeing considerations

As a “joint use” centre, the school/academy has exclusive use of the facility during school hours. Outside school hours and during school holidays it is available for community use. During the school term the centre is available for community use for 56.25 hours each week. This availability varies during school holidays according to demand. This has then meant that health and wellbeing benefits have been there not only for school children, for whom exercise is a known factor in promoting health and wellbeing, but also a range of people across the community as well.

Additionally, swimming is a life skill for children to learn, and a form of exercise that may be accessed by people of all ages, as well as being a low impact exercise that is of benefit for those recovering from an illness or injury. It therefore has positive benefits for people in the grouping of Age and Disability, and any reduction in access to somewhere where they may swim or learn to swim will therefore present as a negative.

Views about the likely impact of changes in provision have now been quantified to some extent through this period of public consultation as well as through analysis of existing data in relation to these groupings of consideration. A further grouping of consideration, for whom there is likely to be a negative impact that will require mitigation, are those in need of quiet times such as people with neurodiverse conditions, and dedicated slots, such as for women.

Concerns about loneliness and isolation have emerged from the consultation with, for example, older respondents saying that swimming is the only exercise and interaction that they have. Additionally, they may not be as likely to travel further afield due to a range of circumstances. Other responses refer to the confidence and skills gained for young and older people from being in a club or as an individual using other facilities at the Centre.

Changes in provision will also create a likely impact in relation to the following strategic goals and policies for Shropshire Council regarding Healthy People, as these goals will take longer to achieve:

The Shropshire Plan - Healthy people We'll tackle inequalities, including rural inequalities, and poverty in all its forms, providing early support and interventions that reduce risk and enable children, young people, adults, and families to achieve their full potential and enjoy life. We'll support Shropshire residents to take responsibility for their own health and wellbeing, choosing healthy lifestyles and preventing ill-health, reducing the need for long-term or hospital care.

Actions to review and monitor the impact of the service change in terms of equality, social inclusion, and health considerations

There will be a 12-month notice period to enable William Brookes Academy Trust and their parent trust, 3-18 Education Trust, to consider alternative service provision. Their stated position is for community use of the facility to continue.

Future service provision could be on a 'lettings only' basis for some elements of the facility – swimming pool, sports hall, multi-use games area, outdoor pitches – should the school/trust decide to operate the centre directly.

The Academy Trust could undertake a procurement process to engage a third-party operator. However, this could require a tapered funding agreement with Shropshire Council, for which no funds have been identified.

The 3-18 Education Trust currently engages a third-party operator to manage a joint-use centre within their portfolio of schools. This would enable a 'step-in' arrangement for the operator to manage community use at Much Wenlock. This would also likely require a funding contribution from Shropshire Council but would enable a different operating model to be implemented prior to the end of the 12-month notice period.

Shropshire Council will support the William Brookes Academy during the process of identifying alternative service provision options. This will include consideration of options to source capital funding to deliver improvements to the facility to increase its long term viability.

This will give opportunity to address some of the consultation feedback in relation to the management, maintenance and condition of the facilities, which are regarded as having an adverse impact on its appeal.

Another consideration to review is whether primary school children are indeed able to access other swimming centres, which may or may not be at capacity.

It should also be noted as a mitigation action that, whilst the Shrewsbury Sports Village transformation of leisure facilities is not due to go live until 2027 (subject to further approvals), were Much Wenlock to close following the withdrawal of revenue funding, this won't take place for 12 months, due to the year's notice that must be given to the school after Cabinet consideration of the consultation outcome.

The council must continue to be mindful of changes in government guidance, around usage of what may be regarded as community assets, or around legislative changes to bring in socio-economic considerations as part of the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Associated ESHIAs

- Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sport Strategy – Updated 2024
- Indoor Leisure Facilities Strategy 2020-2038
- Vibrant Shropshire Cultural Strategy 2021-2031
- Shrewsbury Sports Village Transformation (Cabinet report 2024)

Actions to mitigate likely negative impact, enhance positive impact, and review and monitor the overall impacts with regard to climate change impacts and with regard to economic and societal impacts

Climate change

The service change is likely to have a negative impact on climate change if Shropshire Council ceasing to operate and withdrawing revenue support results in the facility closing to the community.

Serving notice to the 3-18 Education Trust and withdrawal of management services at Much Wenlock Leisure Centre is likely to result in reduction in community use. Those attending swimming lessons and utilising the swimming pool are therefore likely to travel further afield to access similar facilities, resulting in a probable increase in vehicle emissions by private users.

Up to 300 children will need to be transported to alternative facilities to access swimming lessons. 7 primary schools will also be obliged to use swimming pools elsewhere to fulfil Key Stage 2 requirements. This additional transport requirement will result in increased carbon emissions as well as costs to be accrued.

The closest alternative leisure facilities with swimming pools are at Madeley (7.1 miles), Bridgnorth (8.7 miles), Oakengates (10.2 miles), Wellington (11.1 miles) and Shrewsbury (13.8 miles).

Socio-economic impacts

Economic:

Ahead of the consultation, it was anticipated that the service change is likely to have a low negative impact on the local economy. Shropshire Council currently contract 4.1 FTE staff to operate the centre. However, if the centre closes to community use, or a lettings only operating model is adopted by William Brookes Academy Trust, compulsory redundancies will be required.

A further socio-economic impact brought up in consultation responses was that “Many felt that loss of community facilities would make the area a less attractive place to live, work and bring up families”. There were also comments focused on job losses that would result from service reductions or leisure centre loss.

Societal/wider community:

The service change is likely to have a low to medium negative impact on the wider community if the centre is not available for community use. In 2023/24 there were 72,849 individual visits to the centre; 90% of these visits were from within 10 miles. In 2022/23 there were 102,597 individual visits; the swimming pool was closed for 3 months during 2023/24 which explains the reduction in visits last year.

Specific user groups this will affect include:

- Women – all ages
- Men – all ages
- Children and young people
- People with disabilities, whether physical disabilities, sensory or mobility disabilities, mental health, or disabilities including neurodiverse conditions and Crohn’s disease
- People in older age groups
- People of different religions and faiths

Scrutiny at Stage One screening stage.

People involved	Signatures	Date
Lead officer for the proposed service change Grant Wilson Infrastructure, Contracts and Compliance Manager – Culture, Leisure and Tourism		24 th February 2025
Officer carrying out the screening. Peter Davis Leisure Services Manager – Culture, Leisure and Tourism		
Any other internal service area support*		
Any external support** Mrs Lois Dale Performance and Research Specialist: Rurality and Equalities		24 th February 2025

Phillip Northfield
Public Health Development
Officer

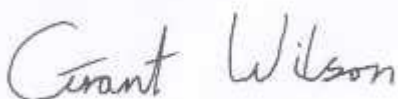



24th February 2025

**This refers to other officers within the service area*

***This refers to support external to the service but within the Council, e.g., the Performance and Research Specialist for Rurality and Equalities, Public Health colleagues, the Feedback and Insight Team, performance data specialists, Climate Change specialists, etc.*

Sign off at Stage One screening stage.

Name	Signatures	Date
Lead officer's name Grant Wilson Infrastructure, Contracts and Compliance Manager – Culture, Leisure and Tourism		24 th February 2024
Officer carrying out the screening. Peter Davis Leisure Services Manager – Culture, Leisure and Tourism		

**This may either be the Head of Service or the lead officer*

B. Detailed Screening Assessment

Aims of the service change and description
<p>Shropshire Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy requires changes to leisure provision to create financial savings.</p> <p>The Council's financial challenges require consideration of priorities for spend, including reviewing all service areas that are non-statutory, and exploring ways in which to deliver services in a more financially sustainable manner.</p> <p>The proposal to cease operating Much Wenlock Leisure Centre and withdraw revenue support will support the Council's Healthy Organisation priority.</p> <p>Approval was sought from Cabinet on 20th November 2024 to conduct public consultation.</p> <p>The Much Wenlock Leisure Centre is a joint-use facility located at William Brookes School. The facility is operated by Shropshire Council for community use, but it is</p>

held on a 125-year lease by William Brookes Academy Trust, which is part of the 3-18 Education Trust.

William Brookes School was rebuilt in 2010. The new campus included a leisure centre with the following facilities:

- Swimming pool (25m x 12.5m)
- Multi-purpose sports hall with four courts
- 20-station fitness suite
- Gymnasium
- Artificial turf pitch
- 200m athletics track, 100m straight and long jump pit
- Multi-Use Games area

Some areas of the centre are in poor condition, do not meet customer expectations and have contributed to reduced usage and income generation. The Academy is responsible for the repairs and maintenance of the centre and procuring utility suppliers. Shropshire Council engages a specialist contractor to maintain the swimming pool plant. Costs for repairs, maintenance and utility supply are split evenly between Shropshire Council and the Academy.

Shropshire Council currently employs 4.1 FTE staff at the centre who would be subject to compulsory redundancy if service provision changes or the centre closes because of the Council serving notice to the academy.

Performance indicators for Much Wenlock Leisure Centre show the following usage of the facility:

- Number of visits 2023/24 – 72,849 (swimming pool closed for 3 months due to filter replacement), 2022/23 – 102,597.
- 300 children attending swimming lessons.
- 7 primary schools use the swimming pool.
- 73 leisure centre members pay by direct debit.
- 90% of visits are made from within 10 miles
- 70% of visits are related to the swimming pool; 11% to the sports hall; 6% to the fitness suite.

The total population within a 10-mile radius is approximately 200,000. The catchment area for Much Wenlock town covers the town itself and stretches westwards towards Church Stretton and eastwards towards Broseley. The closest alternative leisure facilities to Much Wenlock are:-

- Abraham Darby Sports and Leisure Centre – 7.1 miles
- Bridgnorth Endowed Leisure Centre – 8.7 miles
- Oakengates Leisure Centre – 10.2 miles
- Wellington Civic and Leisure Centre – 11.1 miles
- Quarry Swimming & Fitness Centre, Shrewsbury 13.8 miles.

Critical to the Council's proposal to serve notice on withdrawing subsidy and management from this site rather than other leisure facilities elsewhere in the county is that it is a facility owned by the school through a 125-year lease from the Council. It is therefore not an asset for which the Council has responsibility for repair, maintenance and ongoing investment during this lease term. Consequently, the Council cannot easily make changes or justify investment to support the revenue or long-term success of a facility over which it has no direct control.

This is a unique arrangement and is not replicated in other Shropshire leisure facilities where the council either operates its own facility or contracts others to do so on its behalf.

Intended audiences and target groups for the service change

All current users of the centre will potentially be affected by the service change, these include:

- Women – all ages
- Men – all ages
- Babies, children and young people
- People with disabilities, whether physical disabilities, sensory or mobility disabilities, mental health, or disabilities including neurodiverse conditions and Crohn's disease
- People in older age groups
- People undergoing gender reassignment
- People of different religions and faiths

As a joint-use centre, the facility is integral to William Brookes School and as such is utilised by their students during school terms. The Senior Management Team at the school/academy have been involved in discussions. Withdrawing the management service and funding will result in the school/academy taking on full responsibility for the centre and associated operating costs. This could affect the availability of facilities for education use.

Evidence used for screening of the service change

Much Wenlock Leisure Centre is a relatively modern wet and dry joint-use leisure centre. Constructed as part of the 'Building Schools for the Future' programme, with £1,008,000 funding from Sport England, it was completed in 2010. As a joint-use centre, the school/academy has exclusive use of the facility during school hours. Outside school hours and during school holidays it is available for community use. During the school term the centre is available for community use for 56.25 hours each week. This availability varies during school holidays according to demand.

The facility mix is:

- Swimming pool (25m x 12.5m)

- Multi-purpose sports hall (33m x 18m) with four courts
- 20-station fitness suite
- Gymnasium (15m x 10.5m)
- Associated Changing Rooms
- Artificial turf pitch - (63m x 102m not floodlit)
- Grass pitches (not floodlit)
- 200m athletics track, 100m straight and long jump pit (not floodlit)
- Multi Use Games Area (floodlit tarmac)

Some areas of the centre are in poor condition, do not meet customer expectations and have contributed to reduced usage and income generation. Issues include:

- Changing rooms are in poor condition e.g. damaged lockers, ceiling tiles damaged, damaged electrical accessories/sockets, etc.
- Redecoration is required throughout, and tiles are missing/damaged.
- Swimming pool changing room floor needs replacing.
- Swimming pool showers are ineffective and need replacing.
- Fitness suite equipment is old and in poor condition.
- First floor pool viewing gallery flooring needs replacing.
- Athletics track needs resurfacing to bring up to standard
- Multi-Use Games Area used for tennis/netball needs upgrading.
- Vinyl surfacing needs replacement or upgrading in dry changing.
- Ageing pool plant room requires investment.

The school/academy is responsible for the repair and maintenance of the centre and procuring utility suppliers. Shropshire Council engages a specialist contractor to maintain the swimming pool plant. Costs for repairs, maintenance and utility supply are split evenly between Shropshire Council and the Academy.

The annual operating budget for 2023/24 is £280,040. Savings identified in the MTFS for Leisure Services included this annual operating subsidy.

The provision of community use at Much Wenlock Leisure Centre is expensive and the facility requires a high degree of capital investment to enable that expense to be reduced. This is not a Shropshire Council owned facility, and it is unlikely that the Education Trust which owns the school will prioritise this investment. It is therefore not possible for the Council to continue to operate or support the service financially.

Providing community use of leisure facilities is a non-statutory service and the Council's priority must now be to maintain statutory (mandatory) services such as social care, highways maintenance and waste services, which are essential services for keeping residents safe.

Specific consultation and engagement with intended audiences and target groups for the service change

After Cabinet approved the proposal to undertake public consultation (Cabinet – 20th November 2024), consultation commenced at the beginning of December and run for an 8-week period, extended to take account of the Christmas and New Year break.

The target audience for the consultation was considered to primarily be current facility users to gauge the potential impact of community use reduction or cessation. This led to inclusion of questions about which other facilities they would be likely to use as alternatives, and questions about any disabilities they may have, to help identify current usage by people in this grouping and any practical challenges being experienced including physical accessibility.







Other consultees included:







- William Brookes Academy Trust – officers & trustees
- 3-18 Education Trust – officers & trustees
- Much Wenlock Town Council
- Shropshire Council local members
- Sports clubs – swimming, cricket, Wenlock Olympians

Initial equality impact assessment by grouping (Initial health impact assessment is included below this table)

Please rate the impact that you perceive the service change is likely to have on a group, through stating this in the relevant column.

Please state if it is anticipated to be neutral (no impact) and add any extra notes that you think might be helpful for readers.




Protected Characteristic groupings and other groupings locally identified in Shropshire	High negative impact <i>Stage Two ESHIA required</i>	High positive impact <i>Stage One ESHIA required</i>	Medium positive or negative impact <i>Stage One ESHIA required</i>	Low positive, negative, or neutral impact (please specify) <i>Stage One ESHIA required.</i>
<u>Age</u> (Please include children, young people, young people leaving care, people of working age, older people. Some people may belong to more than one group e.g., a child or young person for whom there are safeguarding concerns e.g., an older person with a disability)			 medium negative	
<u>Disability</u> (please include cancer; HIV/AIDS; learning disabilities; mental health conditions and syndromes; multiple sclerosis; neurodiverse conditions such as autism; hidden disabilities such as Crohn's disease; physical and/or sensory disabilities or impairments)			 medium negative	
<u>Gender re-assignment</u> (please include associated aspects: safety, caring responsibility, potential for bullying and harassment)			 medium negative	
<u>Marriage and Civil Partnership</u> (please include associated aspects: caring responsibility, potential for bullying and harassment)				
<u>Pregnancy and Maternity</u> (please include associated aspects: safety, caring responsibility, potential for bullying and harassment)			 medium negative	
<u>Race</u> (please include ethnicity, nationality, culture, language, Gypsy, Roma, Traveller)				


<u>Religion or Belief</u> (please include Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Nonconformists; Rastafarianism; Shinto, Sikhism, Taoism, Veganism, Zoroastrianism, and any others)			 Medium negative	
<u>Sex</u> (please include associated aspects: safety, caring responsibility, potential for bullying and harassment)				
<u>Sexual Orientation</u> (please include associated aspects: safety; caring responsibility; potential for bullying and harassment)				
<u>Other: Social Inclusion</u> (please include families and friends with caring responsibilities; households in poverty or on low incomes; people for whom there are safeguarding concerns; people you consider to be vulnerable; people with health inequalities; refugees and asylum seekers; rural communities)			 medium negative	
<u>Other: Veterans and serving members of the armed forces and their families</u>				
<u>Other: Young people leaving care</u>				

Initial health and wellbeing impact assessment by category

Please rate the impact that you perceive the service change is likely to have with regard to health and wellbeing, through stating this in the relevant column.

Please state if it is anticipated to be neutral (no impact) and add any extra notes that you think might be helpful for readers.

Health and wellbeing: individuals and communities in Shropshire	High negative impact <i>Part Two HIA required</i>	High positive impact	Medium positive or negative impact	Low positive negative or neutral impact (please specify)
<p>Will the proposal have a <i>direct impact</i> on an individual's health, mental health and wellbeing?</p> <p>For example, would it cause ill health, affecting social inclusion, independence and participation?</p> <p>.</p>			 medium negative	
<p>Will the proposal <i>indirectly impact</i> an individual's ability to improve their own health and wellbeing?</p> <p>For example, will it affect their ability to be physically active, choose healthy food, reduce drinking and smoking?</p> <p>.</p>			 medium negative	
<p>Will the policy have a <i>direct impact</i> on the community - social, economic and environmental living conditions that would impact health?</p> <p>For example, would it affect housing, transport, child development, education, employment opportunities, availability of green space or climate change mitigation?</p> <p>.</p>				 Low negative

<p>Will there be a likely change in <i>demand</i> for or access to health and social care services?</p> <p>For example: Primary Care, Hospital Care, Community Services, Mental Health, Local Authority services including Social Services?</p>			 <p>Medium negative</p>	
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Report ends.

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