

CULTURE AND NEIGHBOURHOODS
SCRUTINY COMMISSION

**LEISURE CENTRE NEEDS
ASSESSMENT (LCNA), PHASE 3
PROPOSALS AND PUBLIC
CONSULTATION**

8 October 2026

FROM ANDREW BEDDOW

Lead director: Sean Atterbury

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All
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1. Summary

- 1.1 In January 2026, the Culture and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Commission considered the findings of the Leisure Centre Needs Assessment (LCNA), which brought together extensive primary and secondary research to understand the current and future leisure, sport, physical activity and wellbeing needs of Leicester residents. The assessment examined participation trends, facility performance, financial sustainability, asset condition, accessibility, demographic change, market demand, health inequalities and future investment requirements across the Active Leicester leisure estate.
- 1.2 The LCNA highlights that Active Leicester is a strong performing service that has achieved significant growth in participation, income generation, health and fitness membership and swimming participation over the last decade. The assessment also highlighted the important role the service plays in supporting physical activity, health improvement, community wellbeing and social inclusion across the city.
- 1.3 Although service performance remains strong, the assessment also identified several strategic challenges. These include an ageing leisure estate, growing maintenance liabilities, increasing utility costs, future capital investment requirements and the need to balance affordability and inclusion with financial sustainability.
- 1.4 The January 2026 report to Scrutiny advised that the LCNA would provide the evidence base for the next phase of leisure service planning and that any future proposals arising from the assessment would be subject to public consultation before decisions were taken.
- 1.5 Following further analysis of the evidence base, facility performance, catchment data, financial sustainability, asset condition and future investment opportunities Phase 3 proposals have been developed. The proposals have been developed from the evidence contained within the LCNA and subsequent analysis of facility performance, accessibility, asset condition, financial sustainability and future investment opportunities.

The consultation seeks views on how the Council should respond to these findings when planning the next phase in creating a sustainable network of leisure centre provision. Phase 3 consultation focuses on:

- Investment in Leicester Leys Leisure Centre as a strategic leisure, learning and wellbeing Facility.
- Consideration of the future role and viability of New Parks Leisure Centre within the wider council leisure centre network.

- 1.6 A public consultation commenced on 22 September 2026 and will run until 3 November 2026. Consultation is taking place before any decisions have been made and seeks views from residents, users, community organisations and stakeholders to help inform future recommendations.

2. Recommendations

2.1 The Culture and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Commission is asked to:

1. Note the findings of the Leisure Centre Needs Assessment and the evidence previously considered in January 2026 and the updated Leisure centre 25/26 performance data that has been included in this report.
2. Note the strategic challenges and opportunities identified through the assessment.
3. Note how the evidence base has informed the Phase 3 proposals.
4. Comment on the proposals relating to Leicester Leys Leisure Centre and New Parks Leisure Centre.
5. Comment on the approach to public consultation.
6. Note that consultation responses, equality considerations and any mitigation measures will be considered before recommendations are finalised.

3. Background and Context

- 3.1 Active Leicester is one of the largest in-house local authority leisure services in the East Midlands and currently operates seven leisure centres and specialist sports facilities across the city. The service delivers over two million visits annually and plays a significant role in supporting physical activity, health improvement, community wellbeing and social inclusion. In addition to its public health role, the service operates within an increasingly competitive leisure market and must maintain financial sustainability whilst continuing to provide affordable access for residents.
- 3.2 Over the last decade, Active Leicester has been guided through successive five-year plans focused on transformation, participation growth, operational efficiency and financial resilience. This approach has reshaped the service through investment in facilities, digital systems, service modernisation and improved commercial and social performance.
- 3.3 As a result, annual income has increased significantly, health and fitness memberships have grown, the Learn to Swim programme has become one of the largest local authority programmes in the region and usage has reached record levels.
- 3.4 Although these achievements demonstrate the success of the current operating model, they also highlight the importance of planning for the next phase of development. The Council's leisure estate is ageing, maintenance requirements continue to increase, and future financial pressures require the service to continue improving efficiency whilst protecting accessibility and affordability.
- 3.5 Recognising these challenges, Active Leicester undertook a comprehensive Leisure Centre Needs Assessment (LCNA) to provide a robust, evidence-based assessment of current and future leisure needs across the city. The assessment provides the foundation for the next phase of service development, informing future investment decisions, estate planning and the delivery of accessible and sustainable leisure services over the medium term.

Leisure Centre Needs Assessment Process

- 3.6 The LCNA was designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of leisure provision across Leicester and brought together a range of evidence sources to assess how effectively the current network meets the needs of residents both now and in the future.

The assessment included extensive secondary research examining:

- Facility performance.

- Usage trends.
- Catchment and accessibility analysis.
- Financial performance.
- Customer demographics.
- Benchmarking against other authorities.
- Asset condition and maintenance liabilities.
- Market demand and future growth opportunities.

3.7 Alongside the secondary research, a programme of primary research was undertaken through a resident engagement survey involving 1,636 participants. The survey examined resident perceptions, usage behaviour, satisfaction levels, travel patterns and barriers to participation amongst both users and non-users.

3.8 Following presentation of the LCNA findings in January 2026, further work was undertaken to analyse individual facility performance, catchment overlap, asset sustainability, investment opportunities and the role that leisure centres could play in supporting wider council priorities through co-location and integrated service delivery. This additional analysis has informed the development of the Phase 3 consultation proposals.

What the Evidence Tells Us - Overall Service Performance

3.9 The evidence demonstrates that Active Leicester continues to perform strongly. Participation, income generation and customer usage have grown significantly over recent years, and the service continues to deliver important outcomes in relation to health improvement, inclusion and community wellbeing. Income growth has been particularly significant, increasing by approximately 77% over a six-year period.

Financial Year	Active Leicester Gross Income
2018/19	£4.7m
2023/24	£7.4m
2024/25	£8.3m
2025/26	£8.7m

3.10 This growth has been driven by investment in health and fitness facilities, improvements in service delivery and expansion of the Learn to Swim programme. The service is budgeted to achieve £8.8 million in 26/27.

Inclusion and Customer Experience

3.11 The assessment found that Active Leicester remains a highly inclusive service, attracting participation across all age groups and communities. More than half of users identify as Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic, reflecting Leicester's diverse population. Customer satisfaction surveys recorded an overall score of 3.4 out of 5, providing a positive baseline for future monitoring.

3.12 Leisure centres were identified as important community assets supporting health, wellbeing, social interaction and opportunities for people to be physically active.

Financial Sustainability and Value for Money

3.13 Although the overall subsidy requirement of the service has reduced over recent years, the assessment identified significant variation in financial performance across the leisure estate. Differences in customer usage, operating costs, income generation and facility mix result in differing subsidy requirements between centres

Leisure Facility	25/26 actual subsidy
Aylestone Leisure Centre	£362k
Braunstone Leisure Centre	£165k
Cossington Street Sports Centre	£230k
Evington Leisure Centre	£0k
Leicester Leys Leisure Centre	£38k
New Parks Leisure Centre	£421k
Spence Street Sports Centre	£331k

Leisure Centre Key Performance Indicator Table

- 3.14 The LCNA KPI table highlighted disparities across centres and reinforce the need to review efficiency and long-term sustainability.

2025/26	New Parks	Braunstone	Aylestone	Leicester Leys	Cossington	Spence Street	Evington
Annual Facility Visits	66,297	357,610	227,198	276,293	238,405	226,642	263,502
Income	£411k	£2,206m	£1,169m	£1,495m	£896k	£845k	£1,440m
Facility Subsidy	£421k	£165k	£362k	£38k	£230k	£331k	0k
Total Members	895	5100	2862	2734	2297	2135	3670
Cost Per Visit	£6.35	£0.46	£1.59	£0.13	£0.96	£1.46	-£0.07

- 3.15 The assessment concluded that future investment decisions should consider community benefit alongside operational efficiency, long-term sustainability, and financial value for money.

Asset Condition and Future Investment Pressures

- 3.16 A key finding of the assessment relates to the age and condition of the Council's leisure estate. Leisure facilities have an average age of more than 40 years, and several centres have experienced service disruption or temporary closures in recent years linked to asset failures. These liabilities will require the Council to prioritise future investment and consider how limited capital resources can deliver the greatest benefit for residents

Condition surveys undertaken in March 2023 identified substantial future maintenance requirements.

Timescale	Planned Maintenance Requirement
Within 2 years	£14.2m
Years 3-10	£11.6m
Years 11-25	£24.5m

- 3.17 Maintenance and servicing costs have increased by approximately 50% over the last four years, and this trend is expected to continue. Rising utility costs and the need to improve

energy efficiency adds further pressure to the future affordability and sustainability of the estate.

Accessibility and Catchment Analysis

- 3.18 The assessment concluded that Leicester benefits from a generally well-distributed leisure centre network with strong city-wide accessibility. Approximately 50% of residents live within a 20-minute walk of a swimming pool and comparison with similar unitary authorities demonstrates that Leicester continues to provide an extensive level of swimming provision relative to its population.

Unitary City	Council Pools	Pool Space (sqm)	Population
Leicester	7	2,982	368,000
Nottingham	6	3,207	331,297
Coventry	6	2,656	345,300
Derby	1	1,610	261,136
Bradford	5	1,880	534,300
Leeds	13	5,574	792,525
Bristol	6	3,367	467,009

- 3.19 Although the council's leisure centre network provides good accessibility, the assessment also identified overlapping catchments in the west of the city involving Braunstone, Leicester Leys and New Parks Leisure Centres. This overlap contributes to duplication of provision and most importantly significant differences in facility performance.

Primary Research Findings

- 3.20 The resident engagement survey received responses from 1,636 residents and demonstrated strong levels of engagement with leisure services. Seventy-six per cent of respondents reported using a leisure facility at least once per week and 89% intended to continue using facilities during the next six months. Swimming and gym-based activities were consistently identified as the most valued aspects of the Council's leisure offer.
- 3.21 The research also demonstrated that residents are willing to travel to facilities that best meet their needs. Forty-three per cent of respondents lived within one mile of their preferred facility whilst one-third indicated they were willing to travel more than two miles to access their chosen centre. Braunstone and Leicester Leys were identified as frequent secondary choices for users, including residents living within the New Parks area.
- 3.22 Qualitative feedback highlighted strong appreciation for staff, swimming provision, fitness facilities, and the wider contribution that leisure centres make to health and wellbeing. Residents also identified areas for improvement, particularly relating to ageing facilities, changing accommodation, maintenance issues, capacity pressures, and affordability. Cost was identified as the most significant barrier to participation for non-users.

Western Ward and New Parks Analysis

- 3.23 Despite operational reviews aimed at improving efficiency, demand for the facility has remained low. The assessment identified New Parks Leisure Centre as the lowest-performing site within the Active Leicester portfolio when measured against utilisation, income generation and subsidy levels. The evidence shows that New Parks records by the lowest footfall in the entire leisure portfolio. Usage at New Parks is:

- 81% lower than Braunstone.

- 76% lower than Leicester Leys.
- Around one quarter of usage seen at most other centres.
- Income generation is substantially below every other centre.
- Despite being the least used facility, New Parks requires the highest subsidy across the Active Leicester Leisure Centres and requires more than 11 times the subsidy of Leicester Leys and more subsidy than Braunstone despite BLC accommodating over five times the number of visits.
- Every visit to New Parks requires a council subsidy of £6.35 which is nearly 14 times more expensive than Braunstone and over 6 times higher than most centres

Although these findings raise questions regarding the long-term sustainability of the facility, the Council recognises the importance of understanding the views of users, residents and stakeholders before considering any future recommendations.

New Parks LC - Catchment Overlap

- 3.24 Analysis of relevant leisure centre catchment areas demonstrates significant overlap between New Parks Leisure Centre and Braunstone Leisure Centre. Leicester Leys Leisure Centre also overlaps with the New Parks catchment. The Leisure Centre Catchment Map below shows the unique catchment of each of the Active Leicester Leisure Centres.



- 3.25 An analysis of the Active Leicester Card Holders at New Parks, which is 93.2% of the users does show significant findings. Many residents from the New Parks area (western ward) already access and use the facilities at Braunstone Leisure Centre and to a lesser extent at Leicester Leys.
- 3.26 The table below shows the number of distinct registered Active Leicester users who live in one of the three Western Ward MSOAs and have visited each Active Leicester leisure centre at least once since June 2025, either on a casual or membership basis.
- 3.27 These are individual user counts rather than total attendances. For example, a single resident who visits both Braunstone and New Parks is represented in both rows. This means that column totals will not equal the overall number of unique users. However, the final column “Active Leicester Wester Ward Total User” displays the total number of residents who visited each specific site.

Leisure Centre (LC)	Dane Hill – LC Users	Kirby Frith – LC Users	New Parks and Stokeswood – LC Users	Western Ward Total LC Users
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Braunstone	741	545	287	1573
New Parks	120	340	356	816
Leicester Leys	143	219	204	566
Aylestone	32	30	26	88
Spence Street	6	9	18	33
Evington	9	11	9	29
Cossington	8	5	12	25

- There are 2,343 distinct registered Active Leicester users from the Western Ward MSOAs who have been active across Active Leicester leisure centres since June 2025.
- Of these, 816 have visited New Parks Leisure Centre, which is 35% of the group. The number who exclusively use New Parks Leisure Centre is 409.
- The table also shows that 1,573 have visited Braunstone Leisure Centre and 566 have visited Leicester Leys.
- In total, 2,065 Western Ward MSOA users, or 88%, have visited at least one Active Leicester leisure centre other than New Parks.
- This shows that many registered Active Leicester users from the Western Ward MSOAs are already accessing other nearby centres, particularly Braunstone and Leicester Leys, while New Parks remains the exclusive Active Leicester site for 409 users from the Western Ward MSOAs.

3.28 The assessment indicates that New Parks Leisure Centre represents a significant proportion of overall leisure centre subsidy expenditure relative to its share of visits and income generation. In 2025/26 the facility accounted for approximately 7% of visits and 5% of leisure centre income whilst receiving approximately 28% of total leisure centre subsidy support

3.29 Although these findings raise questions regarding the long-term sustainability of the facility, the Council recognises the importance of understanding the views of users, residents and Clubs, schools and user groups before considering any future recommendations.

4. Strategic Challenges and Opportunities

4.1 The LCNA demonstrates that Active Leicester is performing strongly but faces a series of strategic challenges which will need to be addressed if the service is to remain sustainable and continue to meet future demands.

4.2 The most significant challenges relate to the cost and condition of ageing facilities, increasing maintenance liabilities, rising utility costs, ongoing revenue pressures and the requirement to continue improving efficiency whilst maintaining accessibility and affordability. The assessment also identified varying levels of utilisation and value for money across the network together with overlapping catchments in parts of the city.

4.3 Balanced against these challenges, the assessment identified a number of significant opportunities. These include continued growth in health and fitness participation, expansion of Learn to Swim programmes, latent demand for additional fitness provision within north-west Leicester and opportunities to strengthen links between leisure centres, public health services, libraries, neighbourhood services and wider community provision.

4.4 The Active Wellbeing Hub pilot, Sport England Place Expansion work and opportunities for co-location and integrated service delivery provide further opportunities to maximise the community value of leisure facilities whilst contributing towards wider Council priorities.

5. LCNA Review - Strategic Direction and Consultation Proposals

- 5.1 A key conclusion emerging from the LCNA is that future decisions regarding the leisure estate cannot be based solely on participation levels or facility usage. Future planning must also consider asset condition, long-term financial sustainability, accessibility, community impact, health outcomes and opportunities to integrate services.
- 5.2 The assessment identified an opportunity to evolve parts of the leisure network beyond traditional sport and fitness provision towards a broader model of leisure, health and wellbeing delivery. This would support greater integration between leisure services, public health, neighbourhood services, libraries and wider community provision.
- 5.3 The emerging strategic direction is therefore centred on maintaining a sustainable, accessible and affordable network of leisure and wellbeing facilities across the city.

Phase 3 Consultation Proposals

Proposal - Leicester Leys Leisure Centre Investment

- 5.4 The LCNA evidence identified Leicester Leys Leisure Centre as a strategically important facility within the future Active Leicester network. The centre continues to demonstrate strong performance, increasing usage, high levels of customer demand and significant potential for further growth despite relatively limited recent investment. The assessment also identified latent demand for additional fitness provision within north-west Leicester.
- 5.5 The Council is consulting on a proposal to invest in Leicester Leys Leisure Centre and develop the site as a major leisure, wellbeing and community hub. The proposal includes expanded health and fitness facilities, improvements to swimming and family leisure provision, co-location of Leicester Leys Library, development of an Active Wellbeing Hub and the creation of opportunities for wider neighbourhood and community services to operate from the site.
- 5.6 The proposal reflects a broader ambition to create a modern integrated facility capable of delivering leisure, health, wellbeing and community outcomes from a single location whilst supporting future growth and improving long-term sustainability.

Proposal 2 – Consider future of New Parks Leisure Centre

- 5.7 The LCNA identified a number of challenges relating to New Parks Leisure Centre, including comparatively high subsidy requirements, overlapping catchments, lower relative levels of utilisation and future maintenance liabilities when compared with other facilities in the network.
- 5.8 At the same time, the assessment recognised that New Parks Leisure Centre continues to provide an important facility for some residents and community groups. No decision has been made regarding the future of the centre.
- 5.9 The purpose of the consultation is therefore to understand how the facility is used, explore the potential impact of future changes, identify alternative options, consider mitigation measures and gather views from residents and stakeholders before future recommendations are developed.

6. Public Consultation and Next Steps

- 6.1 Public consultation commenced on 22 September 2026 and will run until 3 November 2026. The consultation has been developed to ensure residents and stakeholders have a meaningful opportunity to influence future recommendations before any decisions are made and while options remain under active consideration

- 6.2 The consultation has been developed in accordance with recognised consultation principles. Consultees have been provided with information explaining the background, evidence base, proposals and potential implications. Feedback received during the consultation period will be conscientiously considered before recommendations are developed.
- 6.3 The consultation seeks views regarding the Leicester Leys investment proposal, the future role of New Parks Leisure Centre and any alternative suggestions that may assist the Council in developing a sustainable and accessible leisure network for the future.
- 6.4 The Council has not made any decisions regarding either proposal. The purpose of the consultation is to seek views while options remain under active consideration. Consultation responses, alternative suggestions and evidence submitted by respondents will be conscientiously considered alongside financial, equality, accessibility and community impact information before any recommendations are developed.
- 6.5 Consultation feedback will be analysed alongside financial information, business case development, equality considerations and community impact assessments before any recommendations are presented to Members.

Next Steps

- 6.6 An Equality Impact Assessment has been prepared alongside the consultation proposals. The assessment identifies groups that may be affected by the proposals, including older people, disabled people, children and young people, low-income households and residents who rely on local leisure provision.
- 6.7 Consultation responses and further evidence gathering will help inform the ongoing assessment of impacts and any mitigation measures that may be required. Following completion of the consultation, responses will be reviewed and analysed alongside the Equality Impact Assessment.
- 6.8 A report will be presented to Executive setting out the consultation key findings following completion of the consultation in November.

8. Financial, legal, equalities, climate emergency and other implications

8.1 Financial Implications

As a report outlining the consultation underway and the options currently under consideration, there are no direct financial implications associated with this report.

If proposals are brought forward for a decision, then the financial implications of this will require full consideration. This will include the capital cost and financing of any investment proposals along with the revenue implications.

Stuart McAvoy – Head of Finance
28th September 2026

8.2 Legal Implications

Employment Implications:

This report is seeking to update Scrutiny on the ongoing public consultation regarding Phase 3 of the Council's Leisure Centre Needs Assessment.

There are no direct employment implications arising from this update report. However, further advice should be sought in respect of employment implications associated with any future proposals once consultation has concluded and recommendations are brought forward.

Suraiya Ziaullah, Senior Solicitor, Education & Employment

14 September 2026

The report seeks comments on the proposals relating to Leicester Leys and New Parks Leisure Centres and on the proposed approach to public consultation. The Council must ensure that the consultation process to be undertaken should be meaningful, fair and proportionate to the potential impact of the proposal.

The consultation process must comply with the “Gunning principles”: (1) it must take place when the proposal is still at a formative stage; (ii) sufficient reasons must be put forward for the proposal to allow for intelligent consideration and response; (iii) adequate time must be given for consideration and response; and (iv) the product of consultation must be conscientiously taken into account in making the decision.

The Council will also need to have due regard to its obligations under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 and consider the findings of the Equality Impact Assessment and consultation responses before determining any future proposals. Any future recommendations affecting leisure facilities may also require consideration of property, procurement, planning and contractual matters. Legal Services will continue to advise as proposals are developed.

Kevin Carter, Head of Law - Commercial, Property & Planning 18 September

8.3 **Equality Implications**

When making decisions, the Council must comply with the public sector equality duty (PSED) (Equality Act 2010) by paying due regard, when carrying out their functions, to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share a ‘protected characteristic’ and those who do not.

Protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

The report outlines the Phase 3 public consultation (22 September – 3 November 2026) regarding major investment at Leicester Leys Leisure Centre and options for the future role and viability of New Parks Leisure Centre. The consultation is designed to gather feedback from diverse user groups to understand potential impacts and identify necessary mitigations before recommendations are finalised.

An Equality Impact Assessment is being undertaken and will be kept under review as the proposals progress. The findings from the consultation should then be used to further inform the Equality Impact Assessment and in identifying any mitigating actions that are required to lessen or remove any disproportionate negative impact.

Equalities Officer, Surinder Singh, Ext 37 4148

Dated 10 September 2026

8.4 Climate Emergency implications

There are no significant direct climate emergency implications arising from this report, which seeks views on future leisure service proposals. However, the Leisure Centre Needs Assessment identifies rising energy costs and the need to improve the efficiency and sustainability of the leisure estate. Future investment proposals may provide opportunities to reduce carbon emissions, improve energy efficiency and support the Council's climate emergency objectives through the development of modern, sustainable facilities and it is therefore important that the climate implications and opportunities of all projects and work programmes are considered on a case-by-case basis.

Phil Ball, Sustainability Officer, Ext 372246
9th September 2026

9. Background information and other papers:

Summary of appendices:

- Appendix 1 Leisure Centre Needs Assessment Secondary Research
- Appendix 2 Leisure Centre Needs Assessment Primary Research