Facility Case Study

Creating sporting opportunities in every community

XCEL LEISURE CENTRE

COVENTRY, WARWICKSHIRE

Status: Completed 2008
Client: Midlands Sports Centre for the Disabled Trust Ltd
Value: £8m

Hailed as the flagship project for the Canley Regeneration Scheme, the Xcel Leisure Centre has been designed with the needs of the local community in mind. The modern and vibrant centre works in close partnership with the neighbouring Westwood School and offers state-of-the-art facilities to local residents and employees of the near-by Westwood Business Park.

The Centre consists of a 25 m competition swimming pool, health suite, 4-court sports hall, 60 station fitness suite, exercise studio, crèche, café, outdoor netball courts and two multi-use games areas (MUGA).

An emphasis on connectivity promotes an inclusive experience for users of all abilities. The centre has a strong, simple, rational plan laid out over two floors and a bright structural feature articulates the main entrance. All facilities are then accessed off the combined reception and café area and a wide ‘spine’ corridor that runs through the centre of the building. The spine corridor also provides a simple delineation between the wet and dry facilities on the ground floor. This keeps circulation space to a minimum and facilitates users to find their way around the building and for centre staff to manage the centre.

Key social spaces have been located at the front of the building to establish a vibrant ‘shop window’. A double height atrium adjacent to the reception provides a visual link between floors and has an open feature staircase. At ground level there is a café bar with views out onto an outdoor terrace. On the first floor, a covered external terrace hosts summer community events.
10,000 users per week benefit from using the spacious, modern and accessible design features.

The simple rectangular building layout suited a very cost effective steel portal frame structure and this, combined with minimal circulation and plant space, enabled the building to be constructed for £1,600 / m².

The centre has a high percentage of users with disabilities and reflects best practice in inclusive design. It features some of the most modern access adaptations for people with a range of disabilities including innovations such as a moveable floor and independent access lift into the swimming pool for participants with mobility difficulties.

The external netball courts allow county standard competitions whilst also serving as a playground for the school. Similarly, the MUGAs host five-a-side leagues and are also used by school children during break times.

Usage of the centre has increased by an average of 150% over its predecessor with 500,000 users per annum. Fitness subscriptions have risen from 480 to 1,200 and children on the Learn to Swim programme from 900 to 2,400. The School Swim programme has increased from 6 to 28 schools. This has far exceeded expectations and the centre has established itself at the heart of the local community.

Sport England contributed £200,000 of funding to the project through their Community Investment initiative.
Accessible design

As a replacement for the old Midlands Sports Centre with its high number of disabled users, it was imperative the new centre would also facilitate a wider range of sports to increase participation of both the local community and specialist disabled groups. For maximum accessibility, the plan was simplified to a rectangular form. The corridor widths are oversized to allow wheelchair users to pass each other easily and all fire doors are on hold open devices to encourage the flow of users through the building. The main lift size was also increased beyond building regulation minimum requirements to accommodate two wheelchair users and also serve as an evacuation lift.

The dry changing includes accessible changing rooms for users with assistants as well as provision for ambulant users in the showers, toilets and main changing space. The wet change village includes oversized assisted accessible change areas that accommodate mobile hoists for disabled users allowing easy transfer to the pool. An independent accessible lift allows safe access into the pool using a mobile control unit.

The centre also has a moveable floor that runs along the length of the main pool to give a large area of adjustable shallow water. It also allows disabled groups to be slowly lowered into the water for lessons. Most moveable floors are not used in this way, but along with the smaller platform lift, provide valuable facilities that help cater for large numbers of disabled users.

The health suite allows easy access for disabled users with the sauna and steam rooms designed to accept wheelchairs and the sunken spa bath made accessible using a mobile hoist. The accessible fitness suite features 20 items of specialist fitness equipment.

It was the inclusion of these features that attracted the attention of the Rotary Disabled Games. Xcel hosted the organisation’s 28th event in October 2009 (opened by Nigel Murray, the returning British gold medallist in Boccia from the 2008 Beijing Paralympics) where 200 competitors took part in a range of paralympian sports. The new centre has continued hosting this event annually.
"...a fantastic example of a modern leisure facility that would provide so much opportunity to disabled and community participants for some years to come..."