



Report to Communities & Localism Select Committee

Date:	5 October 2022
Title:	Chilterns Lifestyle Centre – Update on the First Six Months
Cabinet Member(s):	Cllr Clive Harriss
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Recommendations:	The Committee are recommended to note the content of this report.

1. Background

- 1.1 The completion and opening of the Chilterns Lifestyle Centre in December 2021 marked a major milestone in the redevelopment of the former Chiltern Pools site in Amersham. Since then, the old leisure centre and nursery/community centre buildings have been demolished, and construction of the Lifestyle Centre's new car park is well underway. The first area of the car park, including access to blue badge parking, is now open; the remaining works, including the remainder of the car park and the new children's playground, are due for completion by the end of 2022.
- 1.2 Over the coming months, there will also be some ongoing work required from the construction company (BAM) to address snagging and defect issues across the site and rectify any operational issues that impact on the site functioning fully as required.
- 1.3 The focus of this report is to update the Committee with information on the interest and use by the public across the whole offer at the Lifestyle Centre, which includes the leisure facilities operated by Everyone Active, Amersham Library, Amersham Community Centre and the Lindfield Pre-School Nursery.

2. Chilterns Lifestyle Centre – Leisure

- 2.1 The Chilterns Lifestyle Centre opened to the public on 6 December and proved to be immensely popular and incredibly well used from the outset. There were 10,000 visits in the first week of opening alone, with 37,000 attendances and 200 new members during December. It is perhaps worth noting that at this point in December and through January/February 2022 we saw the widespread impact of the Omicron variant of Covid-19; this saw some continuing caution from the public, and affected staffing levels across the site with a knock-on effect on the centre's activity programme, compounded by a very difficult period in the recruitment market. Despite these challenges, January 2022 (always a positive month for people thinking about a more active healthy start to the New Year) saw 72,000 attendances and 887 new members joining the centre.
- 2.2 The Everyone Active team focused on filling vacancies using the normal methods as well as going beyond what would have previously been required to fill roles, such as 'refer a friend' initiatives and salary reviews; they also introduced a regular pattern of overnight deep cleaning taking place by specialist companies, to support the daily programme of cleaning by the onsite team.
- 2.3 The Council has in place a strong and positive partnership with Everyone Active and we have continued to work closely with the team as the focus has shifted to developing and driving forward the programmes of use for the new facilities. The Everyone Active team have also fully engaged with our county's Active Partnership, Leap, for example to ensure the Live Well Stay Well rehabilitation and wellness sessions are an important part of the centre's offer going forward. The centre has also appointed a Sports Activities and Community Development Manager, whose outreach role is focused on building links within local communities to engage residents in activity that will improve their health and wellbeing.
- 2.4 In terms of performance monitoring, the categories within the original contract documentation included customer perspective, internal business process, continuous improvement and financial position. All of these were originally framed pre-Covid and therefore the areas around continuous improvement and financial position have required some recalibration to become meaningful. We have retained an open book model of financial monitoring as we make a graduated return to management fee income being received by the Council from this contract from 2022/23 onwards. This position is reflected in the current MTFP. The strong early performance by the Chilterns Lifestyle Centre, particularly in health and fitness memberships and swim programmes, is contributing positively to the overall performance of the contract (which also includes Chesham and Chalfont leisure centres).

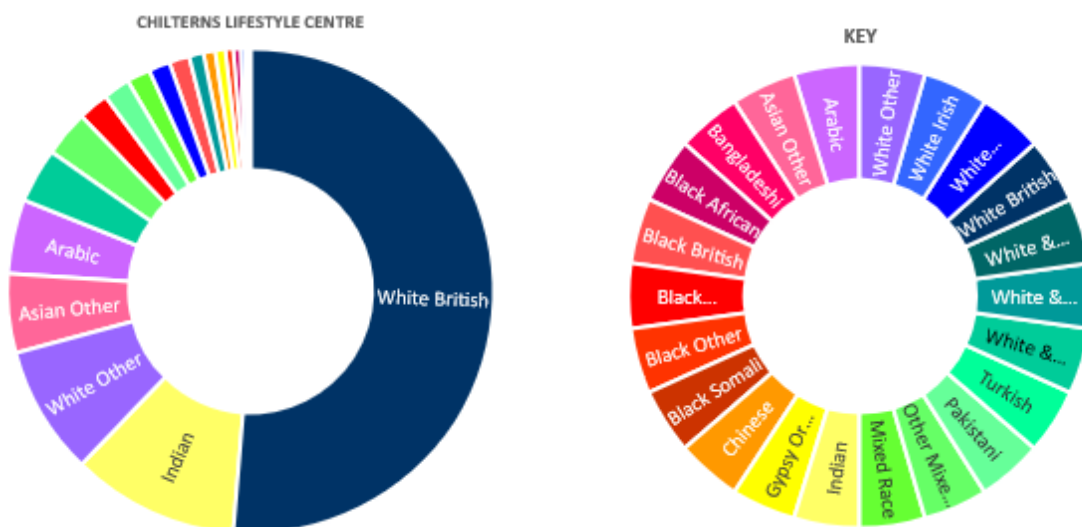
2.5 Headline Impacts

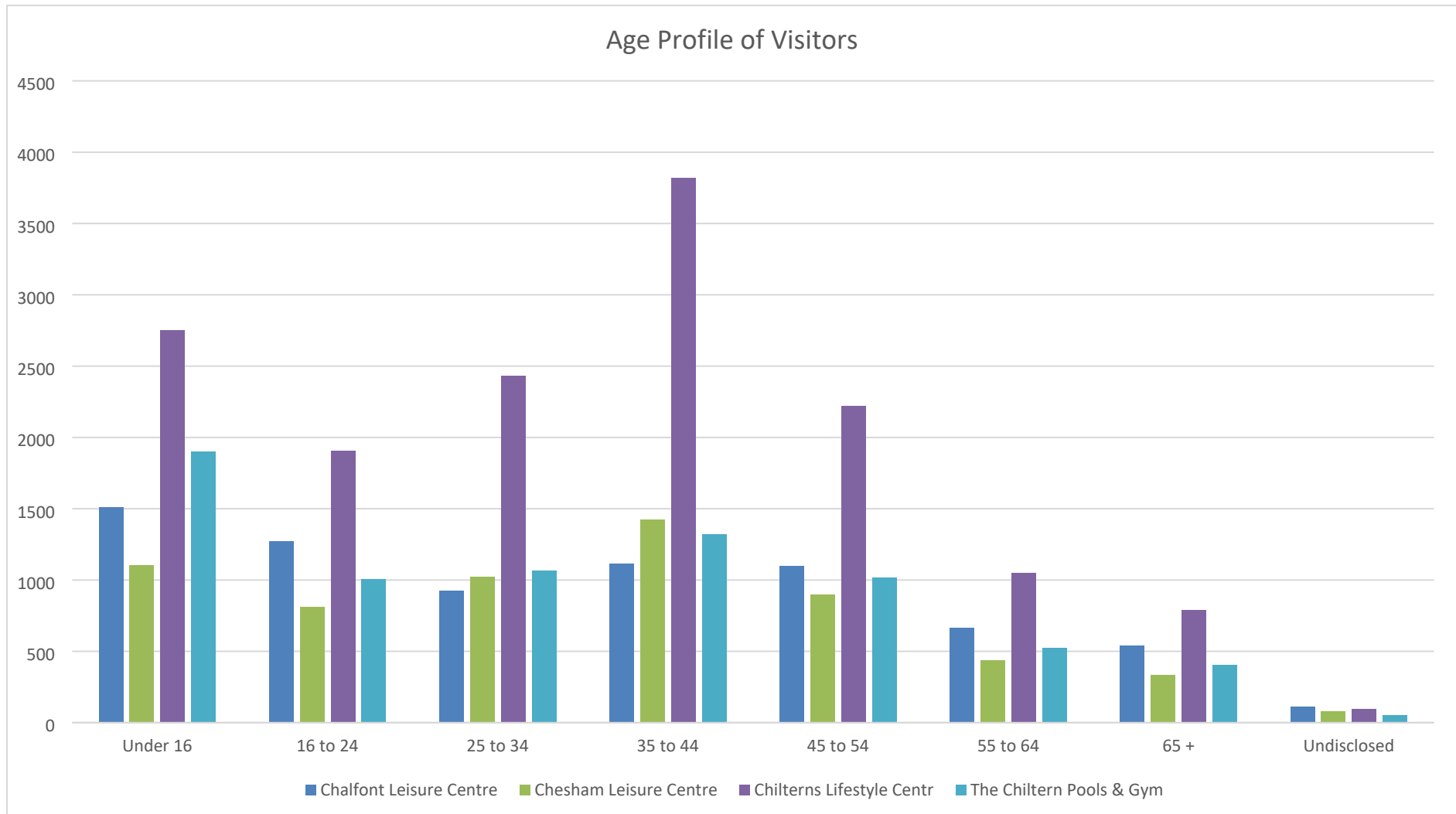
Highlighted below is key data around attendance and engagement in the centre over its first six months.

- **Number of total members (old and new)**
1,391 to 3,809 fitness members, 913 to 1,454 swim learners.
- **Number of new members joined since opening**
3,230 fitness sales.
- **Number of customers/visitors through the door since opening**
559,510 (including June)
- **Heatmap showing where visitors are coming from** - the catchment area shows that the site is a destination facility.



- The chart below shows the ethnicity of the customers that have used the facilities:





The graph above shows the age profile of the people that have attended across the three sites within the contract (Chiltern Pools has been included to further illustrate the positive impact of the Lifestyle Centre); all these users have been captured using membership cards and booking systems.

- **Most popular activities/areas of the leisure centre**

Soft play has been a huge hit (we've been shortlisted for a 'Soft Play of the Year' award) as well as fitness growth.

- **Successful new events that have taken place**

Amersham Swim Club were able to host their first 'Open Meet' on 26/27 March due to the quality of the new facilities; positive feedback was received from clubs across the region.

- **New groups/clubs that have started using the facilities**

Raans Gymnastics (four days a week), Genesis Martial Arts (weekly) and a new dance school.

- **Benefits to the local community**

Created the equivalent of 28 new full-time jobs. There is a wide demographic mix that visit the facility. Attendance is four times greater than the old Chiltern Pools site (excluding stakeholders) and is growing.

- **Focus for the next six months?**

Continue to develop the group exercise programme, including use of the terrace for bootcamp classes. Launch of a pool inflatable. Community programmes such as Chair Based Exercise, Walking Netball/Football, Pickleball, and accommodating and supporting Headway in introducing activities for those with brain injuries. Launch of climbing membership.

New Initiatives

2.6 Everyone Active launched a new membership in May to support Ukrainian Refugees within our local communities; 41 have registered at the centre. The free memberships are for a 12-month period and allow access to the following:

- 0-10 years – swimming pool, soft play.
- 11-15 years – junior gym, swimming pool.
- 16 years and over – gym, swimming pool and group exercise classes.

2.7 Support with free membership to those with Parkinson's and their carers – 40 registered at the centre.

2.8 Everyone Active also recently launched a complimentary membership scheme for cared for children/care-experienced young people.

2.9 Now in its sixth year, Everyone Active's Sporting Champions scheme will provide more than 1,000 up and coming athletes in the UK with free access to its 200+ leisure facilities across the country. Talented athletes in Buckinghamshire have been

given the opportunity to gain much-needed support as part of a sports talent development programme, including:

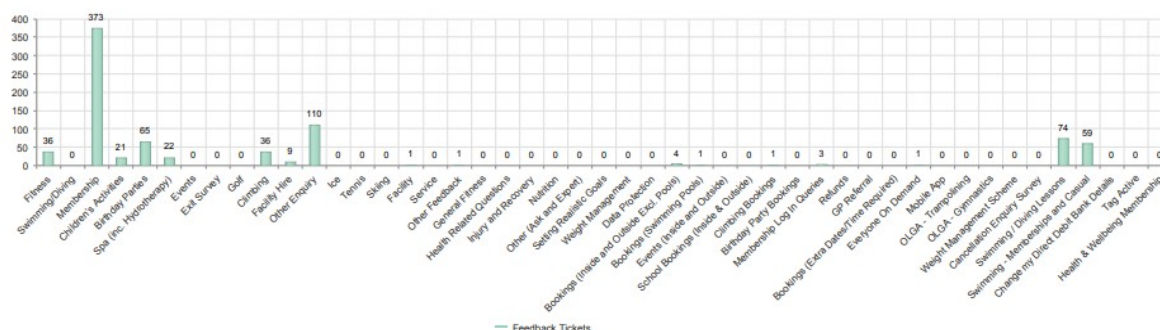
Athlete	Discipline	Home Site
Ava Gifford-Moore	Golf	Chalfont Leisure Centre
Daniella Hoyland	Swimming	
Olivia Lee	Golf	
Eleanor Martin	Lacrosse and Netball	
Max McGarvie	Running – Middle Distance	
Luke McGarvie	Swimming and Hockey	
Nicola Conner	Triathlon, Running	Chilterns Lifestyle Centre
George Bancroft	Athletics Long Jump/400M	Chesham Leisure Centre
Lucy Newman	Alpine Ski Racing	
Sam Trigg-Petrovic	Athletics	

Alongside free access to Everyone Active’s centres, Sporting Champions will also get the chance to receive valuable mentoring and guidance from some of the UK’s most influential sports stars.

Site Challenges and Customer Comments

2.10 Significant effort and work continues to go into maintaining standards on the site; customer comments directly to Everyone Active are logged and tracked. We have seen a drop in negative comments about cleaning between April and May when additional deep cleans began. The volume of comments up to the end of May was as follows:

Category



Most concerns are raised with the team on site and resolved quickly, but some do come directly through to the Council or relevant Councillors. Most often these have been in relation to disabled parking, changes to the timetable/programme and cleaning. In the first six months, we have dealt with fewer than 25 follow-up complaints.

3. Amersham Library – The New Library Experience

- 3.1 One simple but powerful design choice has had a really big impact for the library team. The new library has a sliding transparent front wall which opens onto a thoroughfare – the Street – which is regularly busy with local people. This means people who may never have visited the old library can now see clearly inside to a space that looks friendly and inviting. It is now a space that people feel comfortable in, feel it's easy to walk into casually, and is helped by being surrounded by other services that they may already use.
- 3.2 Many people feel libraries are not meant for them. Some may be hesitant to enter if they feel like they don't understand the rules; others may have a sense that it is a 'members only' space where they wouldn't be welcome. By dispelling any sense of mystery or exclusivity, the team and the actual space have managed to get rid of a huge barrier to entry. People now come and use the library who would never have considered joining otherwise. This is the biggest asset of our new library and it is reflected daily in the conversations with people while registering as new members.
- 3.3 Combined with the ready passing footfall, this has led to a massive increase in usage of our library in stark contrast to the national backdrop of reduced activity following the pandemic.
- 3.4 The Chilterns Lifestyle Centre is a really positive environment for the staff to work in and the library team are enjoying having the other partners on site which is giving some really interesting opportunities for collaboration. The shared facility model, which is working so well here, is one that should be pursued again wherever the opportunity arises.

Changing Demographics

- 3.5 Staff at the library all agree that they now seem to be serving a far younger audience than ever before, with an 18% increase in membership of children. We have also seen a significant increase in usage from teenagers and young adults, with a 16% increase in membership from this age group. Whereas it was previously very difficult to get these groups into the library at all, the team saw their study facilities at maximum capacity all day every day throughout the exam period, with queues in the morning and students waiting on café tables outside to grab spots as soon as they became available. Book collections aimed at young people, such as graphic novels and teen fiction, see more use than ever before. The strong view of the library team is that being situated next to the gym and leisure facilities has given an unprecedented level of exposure to this audience.



Library Statistics

3.6 As a comparison period, December 2018 to July 2019 is used as the most recent equivalent period pre-pandemic. Comparisons with 2020-21 would yield an even starker contrast due to reduced activity through the pandemic.

- **New borrowers registered** (i.e. people joining for first time)

1,438 (vs 451 new borrowers from same period 2018-19 – an increase of 219%).

The number of users being re-registered also increased in this period by 92%, demonstrating that existing borrowers were returning to the library, including those who had not used the service for a significant amount of time.

- **Visitors since opening**

59,742 (vs 41,504 in same period 2018-19 – an increase of 44%).

This is now the **second busiest** library in Buckinghamshire; up from **fifth busiest** library in 2018-19.

- **Percentage of stock on loan June 2022**

43.02% (26.33% in June 2018)

A more focused selection of higher-quality stock, attractively presented, means each bit of shelf space sees much greater use.

Customer Feedback and Quotes

"We never used the old library & now use it every week after swimming lessons because it's so convenient 😊."

"Lovely space, the library should be a pleasure to visit now."

"I absolutely love the cubby holes with the flashy lights. They are so cosy!"

"I love everything. So much to love. It's amazing."

"Wonderful setup & helpful staff. We are delighted!!!"

"There is really good change in display, collection & presentation of books on shelves since last month. Really good job done. Makes you want to read more types of books. Thanks for the library team's efforts."

4. Lindfield Pre-School Nursery

4.1 Lindfield Nursery operates from its new bespoke designed space on the first floor; it is a thriving vibrant space that the children and staff clearly love being in. Having their own dedicated areas enables children's work to remain out on view, creative material to be easily accessible and for staff to be able to focus on working with each

child, rather than having to spend time each day setting up and clearing everything away as they had to do previously.

- 4.2 Each session is full (a capacity use level was set at 50 as part of the planning conditions) and they have a waiting list as parents value the quality of the whole offer that can now be provided.
- 4.3 The Nursery Team have built a good relationship with the leisure centre and library teams and continue to work closely with us.

5. Amersham Community Centre

- 5.1 Amersham Community Association have made a relatively smooth transition to their new home in the Lifestyle Centre. They have seen a number of their groups return but still have some with a more cautious membership who have been meeting by Zoom, and are planning to come back into the programme from September 2022. The opening of the first phase of the car park providing closer access to the centre will also help with this.
- 5.2 The Community Association's range of local groups brings a wider demographic of people into the site, including those who otherwise may not have visited. Regular groups include Age Concern lunch club, Gardening Association, Photographic Society, short-mat bowls, U3A, Bridge Club, Tai-Chi as well as local drama groups, functions and parties – although the latter have so far been slower to return. The Association anticipate levels of attendance this year 2022/23 of 39,400; previously (pre-Covid) levels had been at around 54,600.
- 5.3 This is being seen now as a positive move for the Association, albeit that it may take a little longer to fully realise the potential that the new site and facility can offer.

6. Next steps and review

- 6.1 The focus for the coming months is to ensure the site can operate to its full expected design potential, with a comprehensive programme of activities that continues to expand to reach and encourage residents to be active for the first time. Alongside this, close monitoring of the impact of rising energy costs remains key for both the Council and Everyone Active, to manage and reduce consumption and mitigate costs as much as practically possible.