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*Cycles of municipal indoor provision for sport recreation and leisure : The large leisure centre 1983-1993.*

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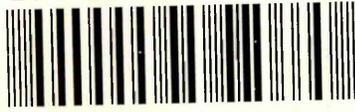
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**Cycles of municipal indoor provision**

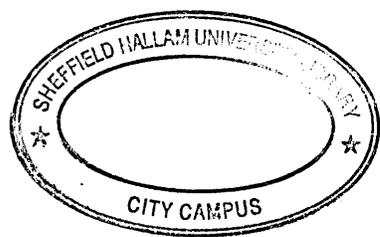
**for sport recreation and leisure**

**The large leisure centre 1983-1993**

Anthony George Power

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements of Sheffield Hallam University  
for the degree of Master of Philosophy

December 1997



## Abstract

This research investigates why many local authorities in Great Britain chose to build large leisure centres between 1983 and 1993. Despite the significant role that these buildings played in municipal leisure policy and spending, there is little in the way of a specific literature on the subject. A broader review of literature in the area of local government and public leisure policy and ideology highlights the reactive and permissive nature of much legislation governing leisure provision by local authorities.

This study explores municipal decision-making in a number of specific contexts. An historical analysis of the origins of public leisure policy and provision is used to develop a conceptual framework to guide the study and inform the selection of an appropriate methodology. The historical study also suggests parallels between recent developments in the field of leisure provision and the more distant past.

The study explored a range of qualitative research methods including the use of historical and administrative records, interviews with councillors and local government officers, and case studies of four local authorities in the North of England that had been involved in the development of large leisure centres. For administrative convenience, many of the data used in the study are drawn from the Yorkshire and Humberside Region, but the facilities chosen for investigation are typical of those built elsewhere in Great Britain after 1983.

The findings suggest that major investment in local authority leisure provision is a cyclical phenomenon and that the expansion in the provision of large leisure centres which took place between 1983 and 1993 shared many common features with previous periods of activity. The dynamics of the 1983 to 1993 cycle are explored, including a number of precipitating factors such as: local authorities' wish to match or exceed a similar provision by other municipalities and the availability of capital. The decision to build a large centre was legitimated by the formulation of an agenda of anticipated external benefits that the facility would deliver which included the provision of community and social welfare services. A number of weaknesses in the planning of the schemes was identified including a failure to undertake adequate feasibility studies or establish a system for monitoring whether the anticipated social and economic benefits forecast for the centres were being achieved.

The study concludes by identifying a number of issues that require further study and noting that there is evidence to suggest that another cycle of large leisure facility construction may be about to commence.

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The project could not have been carried out without the very kind co-operation and assistance of staff in the case study authorities who agreed to be interviewed and the archivists of these authorities and the Sports Council, Yorkshire and Humberside Region.

I could not have completed the study without the constant support and encouragement of my wife, Ruth, who has helped me rise above the personal problems that have coincided with the research.

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# Chapter One

## Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

The term 'leisure centre' was first used in the late 1960s by architects and managers of the first generation of multi-sports centres, such as George Torkildsen, to describe buildings that were essentially public sports centres, based on the design of school gymnasia, with a few added social facilities (Roberts, 1993). The opening of the first free-form swimming pools in the early 1970s marked the transition to a new form of provision and, by the mid 1980s, the large local authority leisure centre had become one of the most powerful and visible manifestations of municipal planning and enterprise, which, for a while, dominated the leisure policies of many of local authorities. For the financial year 1983-1984 local authority gross spending on built leisure facilities amounted to £279 millions of which £173 million was allocated to leisure centres (Audit Inspectorate, 1983).

People nowadays just will not be inspired by old fashioned or unsophisticated facilities. The most important building in a town now, the central place where everybody can meet to satisfy their needs for stimulation, excitement and fulfilment, is the leisure centre.

(Taylor, 1985, p.47)

Towns such as Barnsley, which had in 1987 promoted small scale provision such as the £1.1 million Dearnside recreation centre, shared by school and community, went on in 1989 to construct the £15.0 million Metrodome which offered four swimming areas, a restaurant, beauty salon, bars, and facilities for dance, indoor rock climbing and snooker (Barnsley M.B.C., 1990). Even rural areas such as Hambleton District Council in North Yorkshire, with a population of only 75,000, invested in provision of this kind; the £2.8 million Hambleton Centre in Northallerton, which opened in 1991, attracted 160,000 visitors in its first year of operation and was the single largest capital investment made by the authority between 1983 and 1993 (Hambleton District Council, 1993).

Tables 1.1 to 1.4 demonstrate the growth in local authority provision of facilities for indoor sport and recreation that took place between 1971 and 1993. Tables 1.1 and 1.2 illustrate a general trend in provision by local authorities. Tables 1.3 and 1.4 refer more specifically to the construction of large leisure centres as defined in section 1.2 of the study. Table 1.3 shows the national scale of investment

in, and distribution of, large centres for a single year. Table 1.4 lists the facilities constructed in the Yorkshire and Humberside Region over the complete research period. For administrative convenience, many of the illustrative examples and the case studies used in the thesis are drawn from the Yorkshire and Humberside Region, but, as Table 1.3 and section 3.5 of the study demonstrate, the construction of large leisure centres after 1983 was a national phenomenon and that local authorities in the Yorkshire and Humberside Region did not differ from those in other areas in respect of the provision of large leisure centres.

**Table 1.1 Local Authority provision for indoor sport and recreation in 1971 and 1989**

Number of facilities for indoor sport and recreation provided by local authorities	1971	1989
Swimming Pools	412	1200
Sports Halls	28	1216

Adapted from Audit Commission (1989) Sport for Whom?

**Table 1.2 Net revenue expenditure on combined 'wet and dry'\* facilities for sport and recreation by local authorities between 1981-1982 and 1988-1989 (£ millions) at 1988-1989 prices.**

1981-1982	1982-1983	1983-1984	1984-1985	1985-1986	1986-1987	1987-1988	1988-1989
70	81	80	86	92	128	162	183

Adapted from Audit Commission (1989) Sport for Whom?

\* Note. A 'wet and dry' centre is defined as one which includes a minimum of a swimming pool and a sports hall in the same development. A facility on this scale is likely to fall within the definition of the large leisure centre used in section 1.2 of the study.

Despite the significant scale of investment in large leisure centres and their central role in leisure provision at local level in the 1980s and early 1990s, it will be argued that the phenomenon of the large local authority leisure centre is not well understood and has been the subject of little research. The central aim of the study is to identify and analyse the factors that led to the provision of these large local authority leisure centres between 1983 and 1993.

**Table 1.3 Large leisure centres opened in Great Britain in 1989\***

<b>Name and Location</b>	<b>Capital cost</b>	<b>Political control**</b>
Bracknell: Coral Reef	£8.5 Millions	Conservative
Bristol: Easton Centre	3.2	Labour
Dartford: Water Park	5.7	Conservative
Doncaster: Dome	28.0	Labour
Dunbarton: Meadow Centre	5.7	Labour
Northallerton: Hambleton Centre	2.3	Conservative
Manchester: Gorton Tub	3.1	Labour
Milton Keynes: Leisure Centre	3.0	No overall control
Morecombe: Leisure Park	3.2	Conservative
Perth: Leisure Centre	6.5	No overall control
Tyne and Wear: Temple Park	5.1	Labour
Woking: Pool in the Park	6.2	No overall control

Note \* 1989 was randomly selected from the period covered by the study to offer an illustration of the scale of investment in and distribution of large centres across Great Britain.

Note \*\*. Political control in the year which the decision was made to build the facility.

**Sources:**

- Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management Information Unit
- Municipal Year books (1985-1989)
- Local Authority Leisure Services Department Information Units

**Table 1.4 Large leisure centres opened in the Yorkshire and Humberside region between 1983 and 1992**

<b>Name and Location</b>	<b>Opened</b>	<b>Capital cost</b>	<b>Political control*</b>
Abbey Centre. Selby	1992	£4.7 Millions	Conservative
Barbican. York	1991	11.8	Labour
Barnsley Metrodome	1989	15.0	Labour
Boothferry Centre. Goole	1987	3.0	Conservative
Cleethorpes Leisure Centre	1983	2.5	Conservative
Doncaster Dome	1989	28.0	Labour
Ennerdale Centre. Hull	1986	3.2	Labour
Hambleton Leisure Centre	1991	2.8	Conservative
Hillsborough Leisure Centre. Sheffield	1991	15.7	Labour
Leisureworld. Bridlington	1986	4.5	Conservative
Light Waves. Wakefield	1990	4.9	Labour
Ponds Forge. Sheffield	1991	52.0	Labour
Scunthorpe Leisure Centre	1984	3.4	Labour
Withernsea Pavillion	1989	2.2	Independent
Woodford Leisure Centre. Hull	1986	3.3	Labour

\*Note. Political control in the year in which the decision to build the facility was taken.

**Sources.**

- Municipal Yearbooks (1983-1992).
- Sports Council: Yorkshire and Humberside Region Information Centre.

**1.2 Definition of terms**

Throughout the study, the term ‘large local authority leisure centre’ will be used to denote buildings with a capital cost of more than £3 million (at 1993 prices) or, in the case of smaller authorities, where the centre was the single most costly capital scheme undertaken by the authority over the period of its construction. To an extent, the definition of a large centre as one costing more than £3 million is

arbitrary but the intention is to exclude smaller, neighbourhood or community recreation facilities which, it will be argued (in Chapter Three below) are the product of a different policy tradition (McIntosh and Charlton, 1985). The term 'local authority leisure centre' is taken to mean a facility provided and run directly for the use of the general public, by a District or Metropolitan District Council. Facilities planned and/or provided as joint ventures with commercial operators have been excluded from the study as it was felt that they were not typical of provision during the research period. However, this type of arrangement and the growth of devolved trust management is examined in the concluding chapter.

Within the professional and academic literature there is no single or simple definition of what constitutes a large leisure centre. All the facilities listed in Tables 1.3 and 1.4 provide sporting and recreational activities but many are more than sports centres. For example, the Gorton Tub in Manchester, which opened in 1989, sought to redefine the concept of the swimming pool by the use of sophisticated technology to create a 'water experience'. Other centres, such as The Barbican in York, which opened in 1991, were designed to allow a wide range of sports, arts and entertainments to take place in a single building. Many of the new centres, such as the Dome at Doncaster, completed in 1989, were promoted as focal points in their authority's economic regeneration strategies, to raise the image of a city or area and attract inward investment (Reid, 1990).

It is sufficient for the purposes of this study that the owners of facilities, namely local authorities, designate the building a 'public leisure centre', for it will be argued that a broadly similar rationale and set of expectations drove this wave of large scale leisure provision, irrespective of the design format adopted. Buildings whose primary purpose is to stage performances or exhibitions, such as civic theatres or art galleries, have been excluded from the study on the grounds that they represent a distinctive and different form and style of provision. In choosing the period 1983 to 1993 it is not suggested that the provision of large sport, recreation and leisure facilities played no part in the policies of local authorities before or after these dates; rather that the large centre became the dominant mode of provision during the period. The central aim of the study is to examine and analyse those factors that led to the construction of large leisure centres between 1983 and 1993 and, as such it is concerned primarily with what Henry (1993) terms the 'politics of leisure policy', that is, the social, historical and political issues

that underpin and shape decisions. The thesis deals with the design, construction and operational management of large centres only to the extent that these issues inform the central question, why were the centres built? Addressing this basic question is by no means a simple task, for although the large leisure centre is a common feature of public leisure provision, its significance as a key element in public leisure policy in the 1980s has not been the subject of systematic analysis or debate.

### 1.3 'A silent revolution'?

The impetus for the study arose initially from the author's experience as Senior Recreation Officer with the Hull City Council, between 1984 and 1988. During that period the authority opened two large leisure facilities, the Ennerdale and Woodford centres (see Table 1.4). Both were visited on numerous occasions by delegations of councillors and officers from other local authorities considering similar provision in their own area. During these visits and through routine professional contact with leisure services officers from other councils, the author formed the impression that many councillors and officers undertook the decision to build large leisure centres on what seemed limited evidence that the facility was a measured response designed to meet the needs and wants of their respective communities or that the centre they proposed building could be operated in a cost effective manner. For example, what passed as feasibility studies for these facilities seemed to consist of little more than gaining an impression of what was being provided elsewhere through a series of site visits. A key factor driving policy and investment appeared to be a wish by councillors and officers involved to follow a trend to meet or exceed what was becoming a norm in leisure provision. In this respect decisions to build appeared to have been made in a very different way from similar investment decisions made by private operators within the leisure industry.

In 1988 the author took up the post of Lecturer in Recreation Management at Sheffield Hallam University and decided to explore the large centre as an area of study and research. A preliminary search of literature revealed an apparent paradox. There were numerous references to technical, marketing and funding issues around the large centre phenomenon ( Pickering, 1990; Darbon, 1991) but there was an almost complete absence of analysis of the strategic significance of this style of provision. Trade and professional journals (such as *Leisure Management* and *Sport and Leisure*) routinely

included references to the large centre building programme, often in the form of reports noting the opening of a new facility, or more generally promoting this style of provision. For example:

Doncaster in South Yorkshire is the archetypal northern industrial town. Its traditional economic bases are in terminal decline. More than 20% of the population is out of work. But faced with a population obsessed with finding and keeping work, the Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council has come up with a grand and pioneering project for leisure and tourism. The £22 million it cost to build the complex (the Doncaster Dome) will not add a single penny to the rates, and when it comes to revenue costs the building can be expected to make a profit.

(Spring, 1986, p. 43)

A preliminary review of literature on leisure policy and planning such as those undertaken by Bennington and White (1986), Glyptis and Pack (1989) and White (1992) failed to reveal any analysis of the strategic significance of the large centre. These studies do comment on the growth in local authority spending on leisure services in the 1980s, illustrated in Table 1.2 above, arguing for example, that 'the case for leisure is the case for local government' (White, 1992, p. 48) and that 'leisure is a crucible for the major issues facing British society as a whole, and therefore local government over the next decade' (Bennington, 1986, p.1).

However, none of these general policy reviews deals with the strategic significance of the large centre despite their increasingly prominent role in the spending plans of local authorities (Audit Commission, 1989). For example the Jordans review of the leisure industry for 1990 notes an increase in the size and sophistication of municipal centres, but only in the context of them becoming possible targets for hostile bids under compulsory competitive tendering legislation (Jordans, 1990). Similarly, the Sports Council's 1988-1993 strategy document, 'Sport in the Community - Into the 90s', applauds the general increase in municipal indoor sports provision that had occurred over the previous five years but fails to comment on the emergence of the large leisure centre as the dominant mode of provision (Sports Council, 1988).

If the research question is clear and simple, namely how did these leisure centres come to be built, the method by which it may be addressed is not. There seems little in the way of a specific literature on the large centre, other than that of technical or marketing nature. Two factors, however, suggest a starting point for the analysis from which a research methodology might be forged. Firstly, municipal leisure facilities are a product of local government policy and activity at a particular stage in its development. Secondly, municipal leisure provision did not suddenly start in 1983 and as such there is a 'history' of

municipal leisure provision which may provide illuminating historical comparisons. In both these areas there is an extensive literature that will be used to ground the phenomenon of the large centre in a context that will allow the research question to be addressed and explored.

#### **1.4 Organisation of the study**

Chapter Two reviews a number of theoretical models of local government, municipal leisure policy and the ideologies that may have influenced the provision of large leisure centres during the research period. The chapter concludes by arguing the case for starting the research with a broad historical overview of the origins of municipal leisure policy.

The historical review developed in Chapter Three links the emergence of local government and particular forms of public recreation facility to the social conditions created by the process of industrialisation. The Baths and Wash-houses Act of 1846 and other permissive legislation governing the provision of indoor recreation services by local authorities are explored. A number of socio-economic factors and institutional frameworks that may have shaped the leisure policies of local authorities in the 1980s are examined. The chapter concludes by proposing the first of a number of conceptual frameworks which are reviewed and refined as the study proceeds.

The case for an open and flexible approach to research design and methodology is argued in Chapter Four. A model for the research process is developed which involves a 'step by step' approach to the study which is designed to allow an explanation to emerge, rather than proceeding from a rigid *a priori* hypothesis.

A number of historical case studies are developed in Chapter Five. Each of the studies is drawn from one of the key periods in the development of the built public recreation facility identified in Chapter Three.

Chapter Six reflects on the progress of the study and considers options for the next phase of the research. A model for an exploratory case study of a large leisure centre is developed and an ethical code of practice governing field-work is established. An analysis of the methods employed in the exploratory study helps formulate an agenda of issues and questions to be pursued in the next chapter.

Chapter Seven sets out case studies of four large leisure centres built after 1983. The studies are based on multiple sources of evidence which include archival material and interviews with councillors and senior local government officers.

A strategy for data analysis is discussed in Chapter Eight. A preliminary cross case analysis of factors leading to the provision of large leisure centres is undertaken and a model for integrating data collected during the various phases of the study is developed. The chapter concludes with a final revision of the conceptual framework which forms the basis for an analysis of the findings of the study.

Chapter Nine discusses the findings of the study, reviews the research project as a whole and makes a number of recommendations for further study in the area of municipal leisure policy and the provision of large leisure facilities.

## Chapter Two

### Theorising local government

#### 1.1 Introduction

An examination of different theoretical perspectives forces us to ask new questions...and provides access to competing explanations of the world of local politics.

(Stoker, 1985, p. 230)

The previous chapter concluded that there was little analytical or critical literature published on the large leisure centre. There is, however, an extensive literature on the theory and ideology of local government in general and on the municipal provision of leisure services in particular. This chapter will explore a number of theories of local government and municipal leisure provision. It concludes by arguing the case for starting the study with a broad historical review of the development of municipal provision for indoor sport and recreation.

#### 2.2 Theories of local government

Dunleavy (1980) suggests that local government in its representative, democratic form is a fairly recent phenomenon (in the modern era) and is the product of the growth of large industrial cities in the nineteenth century and the gradual extension of the franchise. He also argues that local government is not just a set of structures or system of administration but, rather, is a key element of the state and, as such, one that will be both influenced by and reflect wider values, notably the politics and ideology of central government. Stoker (1988) identifies four main theoretical models of local government: *localist*, *public choice*, *dualist*, and *social relations*. The *localist* model, or what Stewart (1983) terms the 'new official' ideology, is based on an orthodox concept of public administration, which has at its core the principle of accountability: that is, the elected members and their servants, the officers, pursue policy objectives that reflect the needs and wants of the represented. The *localist* model is essentially pluralist and accepts and values ideological diversity as a key element of the democratic process. The committee system is central to the model as a means of channelling and implementing the 'popular will'.

Councillors make policy in an open manner. Their officers, specialists and advisors, implement that policy in a fair and transparent manner. The localist model is first and foremost local, relatively autonomous and diverse. It has, as a central aim, the development of services within its remit. Critics of

the localist model, such as Boddy (1987), argue that it is naive and that, in reality, local government in general and the committee system in particular, encourages a narrow and even sectarian approach to policy development. Far from articulating the needs and wants of the represented, it is argued that councillors are often dominated by a professional elite of officers, in a system which is both bureaucratic and in effect a negation of democracy.

The *public choice* model is based on a critique of the traditional model of local government outlined above, and is associated with the work of authors such as Niskanen (1973) and Pirie (1981), who reflect the views of right wing organisations such as the Adam Smith Institute and the Institute of Economic Affairs. Their argument is as follows: the optimal mechanism for allocating resources and planning at local level is the operation of the market. The traditional administrative local government model is based around a form of competition between rival parties who 'bid up' the expectations of the electorate. Once in power, councillors hide the economic and fiscal consequences of their actions by deferring settlement of their spending programmes. Politicians and officers form bureaucratic alliances to further sectional interests and maximise committee and programme budgets. Under these conditions consumer preference is rarely taken into account and this leads eventually to an oversupply of inappropriate services.

Proponents of this model advocate the introduction of market relations into the planning and management of most municipal services through the use of market research, market testing, compulsory competitive tendering and audit benchmarking to construct public sector efficiency league tables. The aim of these measures is to break what is seen as the monopoly of supply held by local authorities in some areas of their operation, to lessen the power of public sector trades unions, and to improve the quality and efficiency of public services. Critics of the model, such as Beetham (1987), point out that provision of many public services by local authorities is due to a failure of the market mechanism and the need to protect those who have little or no market power. It is also argued that complex and pervasive social welfare services cannot be reduced to the status of a short run consumer preference model of behaviour.

The *dual state* model seeks to draw a distinction between social investment, where the role of central government is prominent and social consumption, undertaken primarily by local agencies, including local authorities (Cawson, 1982). Central government investment in forms of 'social overhead capital', such as roads and energy generation and distribution, provide a framework which allows for the reproduction of capital and ensures national economic viability. In contrast, local investment in goods such as personal social services and other social welfare services is designed to meet the needs of those who do not have the market power to purchase their requirements. Social consumption, a key *raison d'être* for the local state, is based on a concept of meeting basic needs and improving the quality of life, particularly for the disadvantaged. Cawson uses the dual state model to describe the tension that developed in the 1980s between a 'corporatist' centre concerned with concepts of efficiency and Labour local authorities wishing to maximise social investment. In the final analysis, it is argued that local social welfare programmes will always be constrained by the dominance of the corporatist centre.

The structure and ideology of both central and local government has arguably changed significantly since the dual state model was developed in the early 1980s. For example, the sharp distinction drawn between central and local investment and consumption functions is no longer clear, and much of what was regarded as social overhead capital has now been privatised. The role of the Labour local authorities as engines of consumption is also less evident, an outcome perhaps of their having been cowed by measures such as rate-capping, re-organisation, compulsory competitive tendering and the emergence of a 'new Labour' ideology based on notions of social inclusion rather than class struggle.

The final model of local government defines the local state in terms of its ability to manage *social relations*. The term is used in two ways. Cockburn (1997) defines the primary role of local authorities in terms of their securing the reproduction of human capital:

See local government, our old red brick town hall, for what it really is - a key part of the state in capitalist society, designed to maintain the cultural and political domination of the working class. Education, housing and other welfare services are delivered to provide a healthy and co-operative workforce for capitalist production.

(Cockburn, 1977, p. 41)

The term has also been used to describe the reactive stance adopted by Labour local authorities to the actions of the Conservative government in the 1980s. The urban left sought to develop an alternative ideology to that of free market libertarianism, based on equity, collectivism and the development and delivery of cheap or free services such as public transport, the arts and sport (Goodwin, 1986). This reactive application of the social relations model is similar to that advanced by the localist and consumptionist approaches described earlier, in that they all seek to define and develop services around the concept of social welfare provision as a basic right of citizenship and as a means of redressing socio-economic disadvantage. Both interpretations of the social relations model view local government in an instrumental manner, that is, there is a wider purpose or set of external benefits sought from the provision of services beyond that of meeting immediate need or expressed demand.

The four models outlined above demonstrate the complex and contentious nature of the debate on the meaning and purpose of local government. The issues raised by each of the models are of immediate importance to the study. For example, if one accepts the localist perspective then the provision of a large leisure centre should be preceded by gathering and evaluating evidence and the use of a planning mechanism that demonstrates that policy is a reflection of the needs, wants or aspirations of the represented. If, however, there is evidence that the 'decision to build' flowed from a largely bureaucratic process driven by an administrative or political elite pursuing personal or departmental motives, then the public choice model would perhaps provide a more compelling explanation. Concepts of social investment and social relations are, like the model of a responsive local authority, ideas that may direct actions and building programmes and, as such, should fall within the scope of this study. The models offer a useful ideological framework that will help to inform the selection of an appropriate research methodology and may form a useful benchmark against which empirical data gathered later in the study can be judged.

### **2.3 Leisure as a local authority service**

The last twenty years have seen leisure develop from a scattered uncoordinated, marginal service, into one which is now taken seriously by politicians and professionals alike. It has become a well managed service, aware of its social welfare origins, but also aware that it has to operate within a commercial climate.

(White, 1992, p. 12)

This chapter opened with a general overview of theories of local government and ideology for two reasons. Public leisure services are a product of the prevailing local authority structure and culture and, as such, a general analysis of local government and its relationship with the centre can provide a context for the study of leisure policy in general and the emergence of the large leisure centre in particular. In addition much of the work assessing and evaluating local public leisure policy has been concerned with questions of 'what' and 'how', but rarely with issues of 'why'. An administrative orientation has prevailed (Coalter, Long and Duffield, 1986). A number of studies, such as those by Clarke and Critcher (1985), Coalter, Long and Duffield (1986) and Henry (1993), have moved beyond the managerialist perspective to examine the evolution of policy and ideology, and the values and attitudes that underlie public leisure provision. The three studies listed above share a common approach to the analysis of leisure provision, in that they are grounded in an analysis of the social and economic circumstances of a particular period and its dominant ideology, which it is argued leads to particular forms of leisure policy formulation and practice. For example, these studies trace the evolution of capitalist economic formations and for each stage, such as the introduction of the factory system, they suggest a set of social relations linked to prevailing public leisure policies. In the example used above, this included early enabling legislation such as the Recreation Grounds Act 1852, and the philanthropic provision of libraries and public open spaces. The ideology underlying this stage in the development of public leisure policy is explored and presented as an explanatory model. Thus the leisure policy employed at state and local level in the mid-Victorian period is characterised as a struggle for social and economic control by the ruling class over the newly emerged working class using policies and forms of organisation designed to shape the behaviour of the urban masses through the promotion of 'rational' recreations that offered alternatives to older allegedly 'irrational' pursuits. This three stage neo-marxist approach to the analysis of the development of leisure policy is used by the authors listed above and others, such as Cunningham (1980), to describe and characterise key stages in the development of public leisure policy. It is not the central purpose of this chapter to mount a critical analysis of leisure theory but rather to highlight explanations of the development of leisure policy at municipal level and to find a way of using these ideas to inform the development of an appropriate research model, against which empirical evidence and causal models emerging during the study may be compared.

The example drawn from the mid-Victorian period introduces the concept of the use of leisure policy as a form of social control. This idea recurs in the literature mentioned above as a key factor shaping the development of leisure and social policy, as does the thesis that public leisure provision can deliver an agenda of external benefits, such as improved national health and fitness or a reduction in crime, which are of use to the state, particularly during times of rapid change or social stress. For example, it can be argued that this dimension of leisure ideology and policy underlay the leisure policy responses to the emergence of youth culture as a perceived threat to social order in the 1960s and the urban riots and rise in youth crime in the 1980s (Coghlan, 1990). Case studies of local authority leisure provision such as those offered by Coalter, Duffield and Long (1986) and Henry (1993) demonstrate that this instrumental approach to public provision is shared by many councillors and council leisure officers. The politics of leisure policy, particularly at local level, was however also shaped and sustained, at least until the 1980s, by a form of welfarism, that is, the provision of leisure services as an element of the welfare state. The growth of leisure as welfare provision is traced by Walvin (1978) and Bailey (1987). The ideology of social welfare through leisure provision is justified by reference to its being a right of citizenship that should be available cheaply or free of charge. The concept of subsidy as a 'guarantee of access' to services, symbolises the collectivist ideology underpinning social welfare provision. This concept of leisure as social welfare was not seriously challenged until the early 1980s, although Clarke and Critcher (1985) trace the development of the 'commodification' of leisure from the 1970s as local authorities made leisure investment a priority area for service growth. The rapid growth of the public leisure estate in the 1970s also coincided with the emergence of the leisure 'industry', the formation of unitary leisure services department within many local authorities, and the professionalisation of leisure management which it is argued may promote the emergence of a bureaucratic elite capable of pursuing its own agenda (Dunleavy, 1980).

The Conservative government, elected in 1979, developed a radical critique of the role and purpose of public services and challenged the collectivist, social welfare consensus that had held sway since the pre-1914 Liberal welfare reforms (Henry, 1993). The social choice model of local government described earlier in this chapter was applied to leisure services, primarily through the introduction of market testing and the application of compulsory competitive tendering to many elements of the public leisure

service. The result has not only been a change in the structure and organisation of public leisure services but also in the basic values underlying their provision. The social welfare ideology has been challenged or replaced by a view of leisure services as consumption goods, delivered by entrepreneurial managers more concerned to maximise revenue than with concepts of equity or personal and community development (Yule, 1997). Henry (1993) raises the issue of the role that public leisure services might play in post-industrial or 'post-fordist' society. Since the mid-1980s a number of local authorities such as Sheffield and Birmingham that formerly promoted leisure provision as a key element of their social welfare policy, have given higher priority to leisure as an aspect of their urban regeneration strategy, which it was hoped would lead to inward investment, wealth and job creation (Clarke, 1990).

#### **2.4 The relevance of leisure theory for the study of the large leisure centre**

This chapter has explored a number of explanations and models of local government and municipal leisure provision. Whilst this material provides valuable general contextualisation for the study, it contributes little to a more specific understanding of the large leisure centre built after 1983. It may be that the large centre is merely another expression of local leisure provision and as such will fit neatly into one of the models used earlier. The first step for the study should be to generate a significant body of empirical evidence on the large centre which can then be tested against general explanations of leisure policy. The lack of a specific literature on the construction of the large leisure centre after 1983 and more generally, on investment in public leisure facilities, will of necessity lead the study towards the use of primary data. Although this approach may pose problems in terms of data collection, it may result in the emergence of ideas and models that have a degree of independence from the more general analyses and explanations of leisure policy. For example, general reviews of the politics of leisure policy of the kind explored earlier, such as those by Clarke and Critcher (1985), Coalter, Duffield and Long (1986) and Henry (1993), characterise the mid to late Victorian period of public leisure policy in terms of its austere instrumentality and the dominance of an ideology based on social control and a wish to achieve externalities such as cleanliness and order amongst the working class.

The author's previous experience of managing and visiting public recreation facilities built between 1875 and 1910 and analysing their origins suggests that a more complex explanation of policy and

ideology might be required. There is evidence that the construction and management of large, late Victorian or Edwardian swimming pools did indeed reflect the ideology referred to above, with, for example, a strict segregation of users by class (the Beverley Road Baths in Hull had three classes of 'slipper' or individual baths). However, other influences also seem to have operated. Many swimming pools built between 1870 and 1910 are grand public buildings, furnished in a manner which must have astounded the working class users of the 'penny plunge'. The rational externalities listed above could surely have been achieved in a much cheaper manner. It is also clear that the uses to which these facilities were put went far beyond activities designed to promote cleanliness and healthy exercise. The archives of a number of facilities operating in the late Victorian period include photographs (see Plate 5.1 for a later example) showing the main pool boarded over and decorated for popular entertainments such as dancing and concerts. This example is used to suggest that, although a study of the general literature on the development of leisure policy is a useful starting point in the analysis of the large leisure centre, the models generated by these works are essentially generalisations that must be refined and focused through the collection and analysis of specific primary data relating to the emergence and provision of the large leisure centre.

The general studies of the development of leisure policy do, however, demonstrate the value of starting the research study with an historical overview of the context in which policies develop and of the ways which policy leads to particular forms of leisure provision. It is to this that we turn in the next chapter.

## Chapter Three

### The origins of municipal leisure policy

#### 3.1 Introduction

The practical requirements which underlie every historical judgement give to all history the quality of 'contemporary history', because, however remote in time events thus recounted may seem to be, the history in reality refers to present needs and present situations wherein those events vibrate.

(Croce, 1941, p.21)

This aim of this chapter is to review public leisure policy since 1846 with particular reference to those factors that have led local authorities to develop indoor facilities for sport and recreation. A number of recurring themes are explored, including a tendency by central government and intermediary bodies, such as the Sports Council, to promote provision for sport and recreation during times of social stress through the medium of permissive legislation, and a tension between central and local government over issues concerning the role, purpose and funding of sport and recreation services. In undertaking this review of the development of public leisure policy reference is made to a number of general studies of the development of public leisure policy, including those undertaken by Bailey (1979) and Coalter, Long and Duffield (1986). Given the apparent lack of a specific literature on the large centre, other sources are also explored. In particular, primary data which relate to leisure policy and facility provision, such as government White Papers, evidence given to committees of enquiry and the terms of key legislation are made use of. The chapter concludes with a preliminary conceptual framework or model which suggests a number of causal factors and relationships arising from the introductory analysis, and which may be used to inform the selection of an appropriate approach for the subsequent stages of the research.

#### 3.2 The impact of the industrial revolution on municipal leisure provision

Although the term 'leisure centre' was first used in the early 1970s (Roberts, 1993), local authorities in Great Britain have been directly involved in the provision of indoor facilities for sport, recreation and entertainment for almost one hundred and fifty years (Sayers, 1991). The emergence of a uniform system of local administration and the provision of a range of municipal services were linked directly to the process of industrialisation and urbanisation that dominated the British economy and society from the 1820s (Hobsbawm, 1973). By 1840 Britain may have been the 'workshop of the world', but its major

cities were in crisis. Dysentery, cholera and tuberculosis were endemic (Doyal, 1979). The squalid and dangerous conditions experienced by urban slum dwellers posed a threat to the newly emerged and powerful urban middle class, not only in terms of the spread of disease, but also from a perceived rise in crime, drunkenness and immorality (Treble, 1979).

Pressure groups such as the Charitable Organisation Society demanded that something must be done, if the integrity of society and the capitalist system of production was to be maintained (Engels, 1844). The government's response was to establish the Chadwick Sanitary Enquiry in 1842, which identified a link between poor housing and sanitation and the incidence of disease. It was uncommon for working class households to have access to facilities for heating water for bathing or washing clothes (Wilkins, 1984). A number of legislative measures designed to strengthen local administration and empower municipal authorities to provide services for the urban working class flowed from the Chadwick Report. The Baths and Wash-houses Act of 1846 was typical of these measures. The central purpose of the Act was clear:

Whereas it is desirable for the health comfort and welfare of the inhabitants of towns and populous districts to encourage the establishment of public baths and wash-houses and open bathing places.

(Baths and Wash-houses Act 1846, paragraph 1)

The Act was permissive in that it allowed, but did not require, boroughs and unions of parishes to appoint Commissioners to levy a rate or borrow funds to 'defray expenses arising from the provision of baths and wash-houses'. The terms of the Act allowed a borough to underwrite or subsidise the cost of provision, or to return any surplus to the general fund. The primary purpose of the Act seems to have been the promotion of hygiene rather than recreation. For example, the proportion of individual baths reserved for the 'labouring classes' was specified, as was the power to 'detain clothes brought for washing' if charges were not paid. From the 1850s onwards most facilities provided under the terms of the Act included an 'indoor plunge' (swimming) pool and swimming became a popular recreation (Davenport, 1948). For example, in Kingston upon Hull the first facilities to open under the terms of the Act in the early 1850s were three wash-houses (public laundries) with 'slipper' baths (individual hot and cold baths) but in 1867 the Trippet Street Baths also provided a 20 yard unheated swimming pool (Hull City Council, 1850-1867).

The first wave of municipal swimming baths was to become a testing ground for another middle class movement designed to control and shape the behaviour of the urban working classes and to divert them from their traditional recreations and entertainments that were ostensibly associated with drinking, gambling and absence from work (Thompson, 1967). The Amateur Swimming Association was formed in 1867 with the aim of organising competitive swimming along amateur principles. The battle between the amateurs, often 'university men', and the professionals, whose exhibitions and challenge races attracted large and enthusiastic audiences, was hard fought but by the 1890s the amateur ethos of regulated healthful recreation prevailed:

Thirteen years ago at an amateur meeting it was necessary to get a friend to take charge of your clothes while you raced. Prizes when won were often not forthcoming. The Amateur Swimming Association can now insist on the observance of order at meetings held under its laws.

(Badminton Library, 1897, p.188)

The work of the Amateur Swimming Association was reinforced by legislative measures designed to control those using swimming baths. The 1878 amendment of the Baths and Wash-houses Act allowed local authorities to pass bye-laws governing behaviour in swimming baths and to make 'offences against decency, criminal offences' (Baths and Wash-houses Act 1878, paragraphs 10 and 11). The many amendments to the Act suggest a tension between, on the one hand, the largely utilitarian aims of those that provided and promoted use of the facilities and, on the other, the general public whose demand for popular entertainments such as music, dancing and spectator sports grew from the 1880s onwards (Vamplew, 1985). The 1878 amendment to the Baths and Wash-houses Act also dealt with the issue of the uses to which pools could be put to during the winter, when they did not open to the public.

The council may keep the same closed, or may establish therein a gymnasium or such other means of healthful recreation - - - and may at any time allow any portion of the baths - - - to be used for holding Vestry meetings or other parochial purposes, provided always that no - - - swimming bath when closed may be used for music or dancing.

(Baths and Wash-houses Act 1878, paragraph 5)

The 1878 Act restated the permissive principle and moral imperatives underpinning public recreation provision, but also hints at the potential conflict between 'healthful' recreation and what were seen as

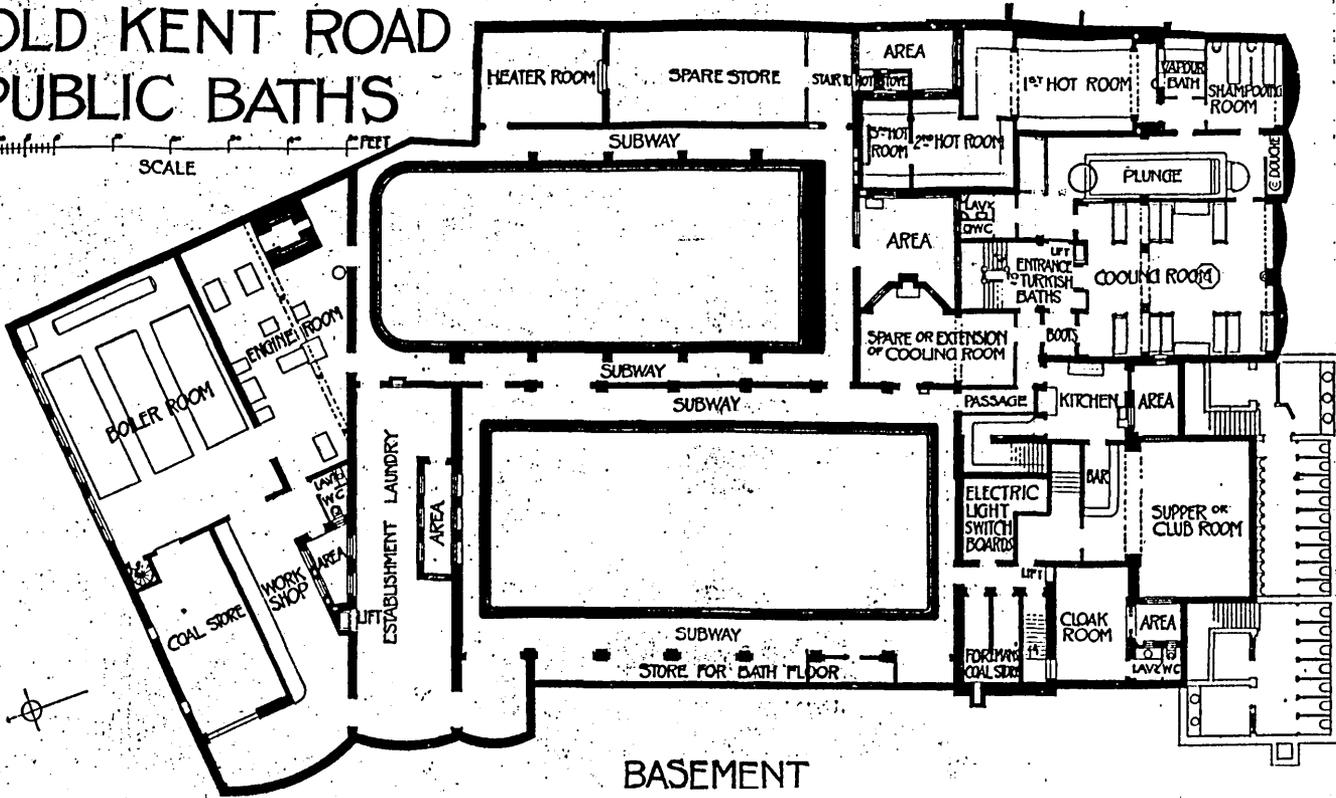
the morally dubious pastimes of music and dancing. The use of swimming baths for entertainment was to become a contentious issue in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods, requiring two further amendments to the Baths and Wash-houses Act. The 1896 amendment repealed the 1878 ban on music and dancing but imposed very stringent licensing conditions, making the premises subject to the conditions of the Disorderly Houses Act of 1751 (a piece of legislation designed to control brothels and unlicensed drinking houses). The 1899 amendment effectively prevented baths being used for 'casual' events by imposing a clause that prohibited taking money for admission on the day of a performance. Despite the restrictions listed above, the scale and complexity of swimming pools continued to increase. For example, Figure 3.1 below shows plans of the Old Kent Road Public Baths in London which opened in 1905 (Amateur Swimming Association, 1906). Many of the features associated with the original Baths and Wash-houses Act, such as individual or 'slipper' baths and the wash house (public laundry), are present but so too are facilities for leisure and entertainment such as turkish baths, a supper or club room and areas for artistes that suggest that the first class bath was covered in winter and used for performances. Swimming pools of the type described above, public parks, libraries and civic halls, formed the core of municipal recreation provision until the 1970s. For example, in 1971 there were 134 swimming pools in Yorkshire and Humberside of which only 26 had been built since 1945 (Sports Council, 1971). Legislation such as the Baths and Wash-houses Act of 1846 and its many subsequent amendments may have been permissive as opposed to mandatory but it seems to have been widely used by local authorities. By 1914 a national network of indoor recreation facilities, planned and controlled through a uniform system of a local government, was in place.

At local level the administration of the baths service took a number of forms but in most major cities a Baths and Wash-houses Committee serviced by designated officers was in place by the late 1880s (Cross, 1938). As the provision of council services for recreation grew, there was a tendency for a proliferation of committees dealing with specific matters such as parks, allotments, libraries and the arts. This fragmented approach continued until the formation of unitary leisure departments following the 1974 reorganisation of local government (Lloyd, 1985).

Figure 3.1 Plans of the Old Kent Road public baths built in 1905

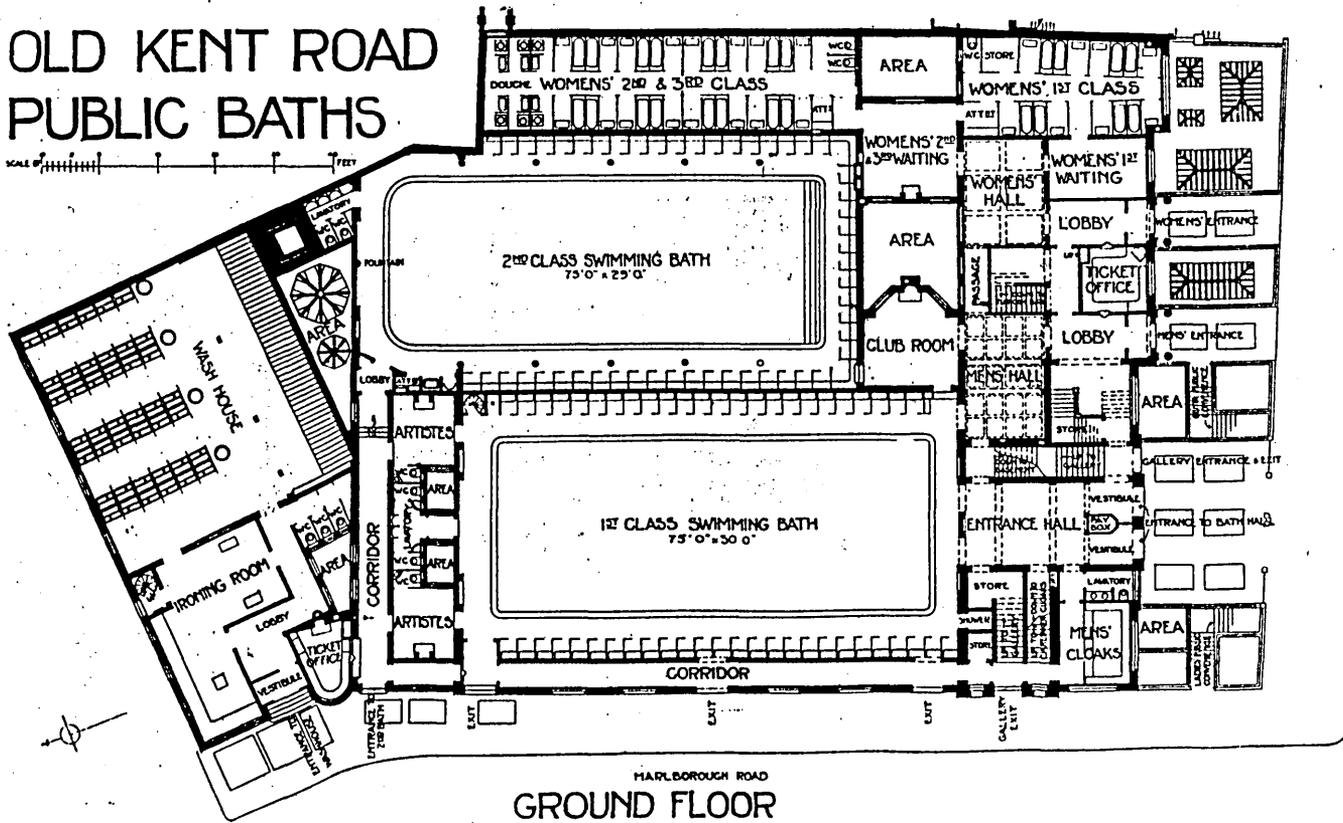
# OLD KENT ROAD PUBLIC BATHS

SCALE



# OLD KENT ROAD PUBLIC BATHS

SCALE



### 3.3 The aftermath of the Boer war

There are interesting parallels between the social crisis that followed the industrial revolution, which, as described earlier, led to the provision of facilities designed to promote 'healthful recreation', and measures which flowed from the perceived failure of the British army in the Boer War between 1899 and 1902, which raised fears as to whether the Empire could be defended. Over the course of the war, more British troops died of disease than at the hands of enemy forces (Warwick, 1980). The poor performance of the army strengthened the case of those that had argued since the 1880s that the British 'race' was entering a progressive and irreversible decline. For example between 1900 and 1903, 32% of recruits to the army from the London area were rejected on medical grounds and there was evidence, in the form of anthropometric surveys, that young men brought up in the large industrial cities were in every respect less fit and healthy than those from rural areas. The issue of national fitness was raised in the popular press, parliament and by propagandists such as Eugene Sandow, leading to the familiar call that 'something must be done' (Atkins, 1904). The government's response was to establish the Interdepartmental Committee on Physical Deterioration (hereafter, the Committee) in 1904 to examine the hypothesis that sections of the British populace were undergoing progressive physical deterioration that was transmitted from generation to generation.

The proceedings of the Committee provide an insight into bourgeois attitudes towards the life and leisure of ordinary people, and demonstrate that, even amongst liberal reformers such as Rowntree, there existed a view that the working class lacked moral purpose. The popular recreations of the day were seen not merely as trivial diversions but as potentially dangerous activities, inextricably linked with evils such as drinking, gambling and immorality. In her evidence to the Committee, Miss Eccles, a representative of a charitable organisation for girls, typified this view:

There is a vast deal more pleasure among the working classes than there once was - I mean pleasure that requires money wasted on it. The taint of the love of amusement has affected large sections of the population especially amusement in the form of cheap excitement.

(Interdepartmental Committee on Physical Deterioration 1904, paragraph 225)

The Committee found no sign of 'inherited retrogressive degeneracy' but rather, a mass of evidence that linked urban poverty and lifestyles with ill health and poor physique. As with the urban sanitation crisis

of the 1840s and Chadwick's study, the report of the Inter-departmental Committee led to calls for changes in legislation to improve the health and fitness of young men (and the domestic skills of young women).

The Interdepartmental Committee of 1904 is perhaps best remembered for its contribution to the introduction of school meals and the compulsory medical inspection of school children but many of its recommendations were concerned with promoting opportunities for 'healthful recreation'. In supporting the importance of physical recreation, the Committee made it clear that it favoured exercise that was formal, methodical and military in style, rather than recreational games. 'Drill' became the basis of physical education lessons which were incorporated into the curriculum of many state schools from 1906 (McIntosh, 1968).

The only direct reference made in the report to recreation provision by local authorities was direct and radical:

It should be the duty of municipalities to provide and maintain open spaces in relation to the density of population and that such places should include shelters fitted with Gymnastic apparatus and in the charge of competent instructors ... These to be paid for by insisting that part of the sum paid to the Local Authority by the Exchequer ... be devoted to Physical Education.

(Interdepartmental Committee on Physical Deterioration 1904, paragraph 379)

The recommendation was significant. The use of the term 'duty to provide' ran directly counter to the permissive principle of provision and would have made recreation a statutory function of local government for the first time. By the time the recommendation became statute, as a section of the Public Health Acts Amendment 1907, the 'duty to provide' had become the 'power to provide'. It has proved impossible to discover how many local authorities took advantage of the legislation to provide 'shelters with competent instructors'. However, the tone of the legislation is clear and reinforces the instrumental approach of earlier legislation. Provision for sport and recreation was encouraged, not as enjoyable end in itself but to achieve wider social objectives, in this case a better quality of recruit for the armed forces.

The next major pieces of legislation affecting local authority provision for recreation, the Public Health Act 1936 and the Physical Training and Recreation Act 1937, coincided with another period of social

tension and incipient national crisis. There were fears that the economy was about to re-enter depression, prompting calls by economists such as Keynes for a programme of public investment to stimulate demand (Dobb, 1963). A growing realisation by the Government of the day that war with Germany was likely fuelled the 'old' fear that a working class weakened by the hardships of the 'hungry thirties' would make poor recruits for the armed forces (Glynn and Oxborrow, 1976). The Acts allowed and encouraged but again did not require, local authorities to make provision for a wide range of recreational services, including some previously not within their remit. The list included:

Gymnasiums, playing fields, holiday camps or camping sites, or centres for the use of clubs societies and organisations having athletic, social or educational objects.

(Physical Training and Recreation Act 1937, paragraph 4)

The Acts not only permitted an extended range of local authority recreation provision but encouraged this through a scheme of grants and loans. The introduction of a direct funding relationship extended the purely permissive nature of earlier legislation and gave central government a degree of control over the scale and style of local authority recreational provision. There is evidence that local authorities made significant use of the power to borrow to finance new projects. A Board of Education report, Recreation and Physical Fitness (1937), records loans of £790,975 to local authorities in 1937 to assist with the construction of new swimming pools.

The 1937 Act also strengthened the role of the National Advisory Council for Physical Training and Recreation which had been established in 1936, and restated the purpose, as far as the government was concerned, of public policy and action in the area of sport and recreation:

Whose (The National Advisory Council) duty it shall be to investigate and advise His Majesty's Government with regard to matters relating to the maintenance and improvement of the physical well-being of the people by means of exercise and recreation.

(Physical Training and Recreation Act 1937, paragraph 1.1)

The National Advisory Council was succeeded by the Central Council for Recreative Physical Training (1937), the Sports Advisory Council (1965) and finally the Sports Council (1972) (McIntosh, 1979).

Given the central role played by these bodies in the formulation of leisure policy and their status as

intermediaries between central and local government, an overview of their contribution to the development of sport, recreation and leisure facilities is relevant to the study.

### **3.4 The Sports Council and local authorities: planned rationality?**

The 1960 Wolfenden report on sport and physical recreation, which contributed directly to the formation of the Sports Council, acknowledged the central role that sport could and should play in a rapidly changing society. In many respects, the report follows the approach of previous commissions, committees and legislation, as it identified a clear set of externalities that could flow from provision for sport, which would legitimate the state's involvement in the local provision of recreation services. Much of the report is taken up with a consideration of the so called 'youth question', the emergence of a relatively affluent 'teenage' culture which was seen by politicians and priests as a threat to order, morality and productivity.

It is widely held that a considerable proportion of delinquency among young people springs from a lack of opportunity, or lack of desire for suitable physical activity.

(Wolfenden, 1960, p. 6)

The report also highlighted what was seen by those giving evidence to the committee as a serious shortage of all types of facilities for sport and recreation and, whilst it acknowledged the valuable role that the voluntary and governing bodies of sport served, it stressed the central role of local authorities as the primary providers of certain types of sport and recreation venues for the general public. The report made particular reference to the need to expand the supply of facilities for indoor sport through the building of multi-sports centres. The theme of the shortage of facilities for public use was central to the debate in the 1960s and 1970s on the ways in which the perceived explosion in demand for recreation, resulting from increased leisure time, should be met:

There seems little doubt that levels of participation in recreation pursuits will rise dramatically during the next twenty years. There are very few people who would not agree with this statement.

(Burton, 1970, p. 21)

Despite attempts to quantify the actual and latent demand for recreation facilities through, for example, the use of demand models (Maw, 1974 ), the rationale for increased sport and recreation provision was argued primarily in terms of it being a basic right of citizenship, an aspect of life that a civilised society could not afford to ignore. Bernard Atha, the first Chairman of the Yorkshire and Humberside Sports Council, neatly summarised this view:

Technological developments, the shorter working week, increasing affluence, changing patterns of physical education in schools and many similar factors will lead to very heavy demands being made on facilities for sport and recreation. In the near future such facilities will be looked on, not as luxuries but as necessary adjuncts to life in an enlightened community. Many serious deficiencies already exist and these will grow graver and even more apparent as demand grows.

(Sports Council, Yorkshire and Humberside, 1967, p. 1)

Little empirical research was undertaken to support the 'broad brush' approach of Atha and others in positions of power and influence. In addition to Maw's demand model referred to above and work by Kavanagh (1970), the main pieces of research on multi-sport facilities were those undertaken by the Sports Council itself investigating the impact of new indoor recreation facilities. Studies undertaken in 1970 on the first generation of centres such as those at Harlow, Afan and Bracknell showed that they were well used and indeed, at times, could not cope with the demand for their services (Sports Council, 1970). The popularity of these early centres, each of which attracted more than two hundred and fifty thousand user visits per annum in their first years of operation (a product perhaps of their novelty value and limited competition), was used in early Sports Council strategy documents as evidence to justify the case for further provision of indoor multi-sport centres (Sports Council, 1973). Having established the case for provision, the Sports Council then set about institutionalising the form which it felt the expansion should take. Since 1970 the Sports Council has approached the question of 'what to provide and where' in a variety of ways, including the spheres of influence model (Sports Council, 1970), the settlement oriented model (Sports Council, 1979 ) and, more recently, the facilities planning model (Sports Council, 1991).

The early planning models offered a simple formula for provision that matched population to a notional hierarchy of facility provision. For example, it was recommended that each community of forty thousand people should be provided with access to an indoor sports hall. In addition it was envisaged that larger

conurbations would also provide major sub-regional facilities capable of staging major spectator events (Sports Council, Yorkshire and Humberside Region, 1970). The most recent facilities planning model offered by the Sports Council combines elements of the population-based model with a formula that attempts to quantify the demand for leisure facilities in a given area (Sports Council, 1991). All of these versions of the planning model offered local authorities a blueprint for developing indoor recreation facilities with a view to creating a uniform standard of services across communities, despite the permissive nature of the legislation.

Since the early 1970s the Sports Council has assessed applications for capital grant aid for facility development from local authorities against its current provision formula and the advice of the Sports Council Technical Unit. In theory, local authorities were (and are) free to make whatever form of provision they wished, but with grants of up to £50,000 available from the Sports Council in the 1970s and early 1980s many municipalities opted for a 'standard' approach (Sports Council, 1981). The increased variety of design and facility formats adopted between 1983 and 1993 suggests that the influence of the Sports Council on the style of provision may have diminished over this period.

The assumed putative need for large indoor sports centres was acknowledged in the early Sports Council planning documents. The role of these regional and national centres was to be at the apex of a hierarchy of a nation-wide network of sports and recreation centres. The need for these facilities was justified on the basis of providing major venues for spectator events and to meet the needs of elite competitors. In addition, it was assumed that many of these centres would be joint ventures between consortia of local authorities (Sports Council, Yorkshire and Humberside, 1970). It is not surprising, perhaps, that a body such as the Sports Council, whose *raison d'être* was the development of a traditional model of sport, should perceive the development of major facilities in terms of the needs of elite and national competition rather than subscribing to the notion of leisure facilities for the masses that came to dominate provision in the mid 1970s and 1980s.

The National Sports Centre at Crystal Palace in London opened in 1964 as a model for the proposed large centres. The Crystal Palace centre was designed to combine the roles of regional and national elite

centre with that of a general provider of sports facilities for the people of South London (in partnership with the Greater London Council ). This model for the large joint venture centre was not replicated elsewhere, which may indicate Local Authorities' reluctance to participate in collaborative schemes that involved the politically sensitive decision to invest ratepayers' money in facilities located outside their boundary.

As the Sports Council's role in leisure facilities planning and development is nominally advisory, it is difficult to measure its influence on the scale and style of municipal facilities which have been built. The reorganisation of local government in 1974 does, however, provide some evidence that factors other than the Sports Council's supply formulae drove a wave of facility building that occurred between 1973 and 1975. Following the recommendations of the Redcliffe-Maude report, the 1974 reorganisation of local government created larger units of local administration and led to the formation of specialist departments in each service area. Within a year of reorganisation, a number of district and metropolitan district councils in Yorkshire and Humberside, including Rotherham and Leeds, had created Leisure Services or Recreation and Amenity Departments (Municipal Yearbook, 1975). The new unitary departments combined service functions as diverse as allotments and crematoria with the administration of swimming baths, sports centres and playing fields.

The formation of these new directorates was viewed by some as a long overdue recognition of the growing importance of leisure in society and of the role that local authorities should play in its promotion (Veal, 1979). However, a number of Sports Council studies expressed the view that as long as leisure remained a permissive function, provision would suffer in the new district and metropolitan district councils:

The re-organisation of Local Government presents additional hazards to our long term aims, for in a difficult period when the new authorities are establishing themselves the needs of sport and recreation may be forgotten.

(Sports Council, Yorkshire and Humberside Region, 1973, p. 12)

There is evidence, as Table 3.1 demonstrates, that, far from leisure being forgotten, in fact local government reorganisation led to a surge in leisure investment mainly in the form of the construction of large multi-sport centres.

The building boom of the early 1970s more than doubled the number of medium and large public multi-sports centres in Yorkshire and Humberside (Sports Council, 1981). All of the centres listed above, with the exception of Herringthorpe, conform to a standardised approach to provision based on Sports Council specifications of the time. For example the so called ‘blind box’ style, which refers to the large slab-sided, windowless activity areas that became a ubiquitous symbol of 1970s leisure development (see Plate 3.1 for an example of this style of building). Most provided large and small rectangular swimming pools, a large sports hall, ancillary halls, multi-purpose rooms and limited social facilities, usually in the form of a cafeteria and bar.

**Table 3.1 Large\* sports or leisure centres opened between 1973 and 1974 in Yorkshire and Humberside**

<b>Name and Location</b>	<b>Date opened</b>	<b>Capital cost £</b>
Adwick Sports Centre: Doncaster.	1974	575,000
Batley Sports Centre.	1973	500,000
Concord Sports Centre (phase one): Sheffield.	1974	500,000
Grimsby Sports Centre.	1974	535,000
Haltemprice Sports Centre: Beverley.	1973	600,000
Herringthorpe Leisure Centre: Rotherham.	1973	750,000
Huddersfield Sports Centre.	1973	1,050,000
Maltby Sports Centre: Rotherham.	1973	500,000

**Source.** Sports Council: Yorkshire and Humberside Information Unit.

\*Note in the context of the period 1973 to 1974 ‘large’ is defined as a capital cost of £500,000 or greater.



**Plate 3.1**

**Photograph of Dewsbury Sports Centre**

**3.5 The first leisure centres**

The Herringthorpe Leisure Centre in Rotherham was the first free-form leisure pool to open in Great Britain (Rotherham M.D.C., 1974). Although the Herringthorpe complex included a number of 'blind box' features such as a large windowless sports and ancillary hall, the pool marked a radical departure from the norm, with its wave machine, slides, shallows, rocks and palm trees. Within three years, more than seven new leisure centres had opened across England and were being well used (Torkilsden, 1983). For example, the Crowtree Leisure Centre in Sunderland which opened in 1977 attracted more than one million users in its first twelve months of operation (Sunderland M.D.C., 1988).

Studies of the development of leisure policy, such as that undertaken by Coalter, Long and Duffield for the Sports Council in 1986, note the growth in public spending on leisure during the late 1960s and early 1970s but fail to link this to the development of the new leisure centres. The centres were, however, newsworthy and were widely reported for their novelty value and as expressions of municipal ostentation, as the following quotation from the Observer newspaper in 1976 demonstrates:

Get a wavemaker and shine Municipally! Dates can be picked off the palm trees of the new pool at Bletchley and they're expecting bananas at Swindon. Chlorinated air and vandals prematurely finished off the first banana crop at the Rotherham lagoon.

(Brock, 1976, p.11)

Table 3.1 offers evidence that the sudden expansion in the construction of sport and leisure centres building in the early 1970s may not have been entirely the product of rational policy-making based on the application of Sports Council formulae. Five of the eight centres were planned and built by urban or county borough councils which were abolished in 1974, their assets and liabilities being passed on to the new district or metropolitan district councils. Cox (1984) suggests that decisions about the location of such public facilities may be influenced by groups of councillors wishing to see new services located in the area which they represent. As many councillors from the old authorities went on to serve in the new structure, it is possible that the increase in provision around 1973 and 1974 may have been influenced by what Knox (1984) calls 'turf politics'.

However, the boom in the construction of large leisure centres around 1974 was short-lived. The deepening national and international economic crisis in 1974 led central government to put pressure on councils to restrain their spending plans in order to reduce the public sector borrowing requirement. In 1975 a government White Paper, 'Sport and Recreation', laid out a clear agenda for the future pattern of development:

It is, of course for local authorities to decide their own priorities in the area of environmental services..... It is, however, already clear that for some years to come Local Authorities may be obliged to spend less in total on a number of services including sport and recreation than in the recent past.

(Department of the Environment 1975, paragraph 7)

Whilst the White Paper acknowledged that some additional facilities might be required to meet the government's objective of making recreation 'part of the general fabric of the social services', the priorities henceforth were to be joint use with the education service, joint provision including co-operation between local authorities, and a better use of existing resources, by for example involving the voluntary sector. Although the White Paper does not make specific reference to the provision of large leisure facilities by local authorities, its tone and intention were clear, to direct them away from an expensive 'big building' strategy for leisure facilities back to policies which promoted 'healthful

recreation'. In the Yorkshire and Humberside region, the pace of provision of the new large leisure buildings slowed markedly and only schemes that were at the final planning stage, such as the Richard Dunn Centre in Bradford, went forward to completion in 1978.

In addition to government's wish to impose financial restraint on local government leisure spending, evidence was also emerging that the new sport and leisure centres, far from providing 'Sport for All' (the Sports Council's campaign slogan in the 1970s), were in reality attracting a high proportion of middle class users to engage in a narrow and allegedly elitist range of activities such as squash, badminton and tennis contrary to the assertions of many councillors and officers at the planning stage (Department of the Environment, 1977). As none of the new centres was profit-making, the leisure of the relatively affluent minority was being subsidised by the poorer non-participant majority through local taxation.

The Department of the Environment's 1977 paper, 'Recreation and Deprivation in Inner Urban Areas', was to have a powerful influence on leisure policy in the late 1970s, not least in the area of facility provision. The document does mention purpose built sport centres but only to note their high costs, elitism and lack of relevance to the life and leisure of the disadvantaged. The priorities laid out in the 1975 White Paper were restated. Providers were encouraged to make better use of existing resources through, for example, the sharing of education facilities or the conversion of buildings such as drill halls for sporting use. Capital and revenue costs were to be kept down by adopting a simple approach to facility provision and participation was to be extended with a view to breaking down the elitism that had allegedly existed. A decentralised community recreation strategy was put forward as the favoured alternative to the large multi-sport or leisure centre.

Pressure on local authorities by government and its agent, the Sports Council, to adopt a community focus in leisure policy was further strengthened by the urban riots of 1981. The immediate response of the government was, as in past periods of crisis, that 'something must be done'. An enquiry into the civil unrest, chaired by Lord Justice Scarman in 1981, concluded that a number of deep seated economic and social factors such as unemployment and racism combined to alienate sections of urban youth, and

that sport and recreation had a valuable role to play as a healthy diversion and a means of fostering a sense of community. A variety of initiatives was launched with major government financial support. The philosophy of many of these post-1981 schemes was to target groups such as young unemployed men in order to involve them in cheap or free local activities using an outreach approach (Jones and Lowe, 1983). This approach stands in sharp contrast to the policy ethos of the early 1970s, which was driven by a view that the new indoor leisure facilities could become a vehicle for social integration (Dower, 1973).

In areas where there was a shortage of indoor facilities for sport (such as the Toxteth district of Liverpool, the site of the first of the 1981 riots), this was met with generous government support, through a strategy of converting and refurbishing old buildings and initiatives such as the standardised approach to sports halls (SASH). SASH provided an authority wishing to build quickly and at relatively low cost, with a standardised design package (Sports Council, 1982). The sparse and functional SASH centres built in the 1980s stand in sharp contrast to the relatively lavish leisure centres that had dominated municipal provision less than ten years before. The interruption in the rate of construction of new large leisure centres lasted around five years. By 1981-1982 many local authorities, particularly in the recession-hit North of England were, once again, planning major capital investment in leisure projects.

### **3.6 1983 - 1993: 'The most important building in a town now ... is the leisure centre'**

The background to the cycle of activity of large leisure building that started around 1983 and ended around 1993 will be examined from two perspectives. Firstly, there is evidence to suggest that the expansion in the provision of large sports and leisure centres that took place between 1972 and 1976 had been arbitrarily halted by government restrictions on local authority spending. By the early 1980s many municipalities merely returned to a policy that they would have pursued in the mid to late 1970s, had sufficient capital been available to do so. The recession of 1979 to 1981 and the subsequent economic boom of the middle to late 1980s also raised important questions for local authorities faced with providing services and employment in a rapidly changing environment. Secondly, the large leisure facility will be examined in the context of the debate on the role that major public facilities might play

in meeting the needs of the new 'leisure society' and their role in the economic and social regeneration of communities blighted by recession and urban decay.

### **3.6.1 Unfinished business: the legacy of 1974**

Reference has been made elsewhere to the popularity of the first generation of leisure centres built in the early 1970s in terms of their ability to attract large user numbers and, although the power to provide remained permissive, it seems to have been a popular policy option for local authorities. A number of local authorities in Yorkshire and Humberside including Barnsley, Hull and York had laid plans to construct major leisure facilities in the 1970s, but were forced to postpone the projects due to central government restrictions on municipal capital spending. By the mid-1980s these and a number of other authorities felt able to return to their original strategy, but in a manner that reflected the more expansive style of that period. The interregnum in construction had allowed time for the leisure facility to develop from its original 'blind box' format into a more aesthetic but costly concept.

The election of a Conservative Government in 1979 can have done little to encourage municipalities to re-activate their plans. One of the cornerstones of 'Thatcherite' economic and social policy was a belief that, left unchecked, public spending had a 'natural tendency to increase' and that this would inhibit the growth of an enterprise culture (Smith, 1988). In fact, despite policy measures such as rate-capping, public sector spending grew by 7.5% in real terms between 1979 and 1984. Local authority spending on leisure in general, and on leisure centres in particular, grew rapidly over this period. For example during the financial year 1982-1983 local authority gross spending on built leisure facilities totalled £279 millions, of which £173 millions was allocated to leisure centres (Audit Inspectorate, 1983).

It has been suggested that some Labour authorities deliberately increased their spending as a strategy to frustrate the Government and to build a form of local socialism by extending access to cheap or free leisure services for the 'victims' of Thatcherism (Clarke, 1990; London Strategic Policy Unit, 1987). As Tables 1.3 and 1.4 demonstrate, however, all the main political parties found the large leisure centre an attractive policy option to pursue. Henry (1993) suggests that leisure policy in the 1980s cannot be

analysed and understood solely in terms of party allegiance, and Dunleavy (1980) notes a uniformity in the style of provision across authorities despite the permissive nature of legislation on leisure provision .

The case for renewed investment in the large multi-purpose centre was also pressed by the new 'profession' of leisure management through its representative bodies such as the Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management (formed in 1983) and leisure industry journals such as *Leisure Management* (first published in 1981). In a series of articles for *Leisure Management*, George Torkildsen, the then manager of Britain's first multi-purpose sports and leisure centre, the Harlow Sports Trust, traced the development of the multi-purpose recreation and leisure centre and used the term 'the movement' to describe the campaign for this type of provision (Torkildsen, 1983). In addition to a list of familiar externalities which it was argued the leisure centre could deliver, such as involving young people in constructive healthful recreation, he also advanced a strong case for the large centre as a vehicle to manage the transition to the 'new age' of leisure, and as a cost effective mode of provision.

A recognition by local authorities of the growing importance of leisure as a social priority resulted in its being given greater prominence than previously in capital and revenue budget planning (Audit Commission, 1989). For example, the 1988 revenue budget for Hull City Council reveals spending on leisure services to be £9.3 million, second only to housing. 36% of the leisure budget was allocated to running the authority's three large leisure centres and spending in real terms by the authority on indoor leisure provision rose by 111% between 1978 and 1988 (Hull City Council, 1988). Exploring the possible roles played by 'empire building' politicians or 'budget maximising' officials (Henry, 1993) in setting policy and promoting the provision of large leisure centres is of importance to this study.

Municipal pride is an intangible commodity but, as studies in other areas of local government have shown, it is one which may exert a powerful influence on policy making (Garbutt, 1985; Stoker, 1988).

### **3.6.2 Providing for the needs of a changing society: 'Harrow or Jarrow'?**

The recession of 1979 to 1982 was a complex phenomenon that involved more than a general reduction in economic activity and a cyclical increase in unemployment. Underlying the recession was a set of structural and technological changes that were to shape the social fabric of Britain in the 1980s and

1990s, making leisure policy and provision matters of central concern for Government, municipalities and the leisure industry. Changes in the economic environment, such as the recession and the impact of new technology, led to the emergence of theories and ideas about the role that leisure might play in people's lives, which exerted a powerful influence on leisure policy makers. As early as 1970 Toffler offered a wide-ranging analysis of a society transformed by technology, where a better use of leisure time and concepts such as the 'modular fun palace' could become part of the 'strategy for survival' during a time of turbulent change. The analysis of a 'world turned upside-down' was also developed by authors such as Handy (1980), Jones (1982) and Peters and Waterman (1982), whose central thesis was that the pattern of people's lives and leisure was determined primarily by the way in which work is organised. The traditional view of relative industrial stability, resulting in a pattern of predominantly full time, lifetime, employment was, it was argued, unlikely to survive the electronic revolution and a shift in the balance of power in world manufacturing towards Japan and the 'Pacific-rim' nations.

The implications of the changes referred to above on social and public leisure policy were explored by authors such as Sherman:

I think in the same way that we made leisure seem sinful and wicked in the 1700s and early 1800s, we should now say - look, leisure is an excellent thing, society doesn't now need everyone to work a full day's work.

(Sherman, 1987, p. 28)

The Sports Council's 1982 strategy also reflected this theme:

The unemployed need to participate in leisure and sport as much, or more than their employed compatriots, yet the evidence is that generally they do fewer things that cost money, which includes most sports.

(Sports Council, 1982, p. 7)

The move back towards the 1970s policy of public sector leisure investment was reinforced by a growing emphasis on the role that sport and leisure provision might play in boosting the local economy, in addition to its traditional social welfare role. The 1983 Sports Council's, Recreation Management conference, 'Finance and sport - accounting for the future', explored the mechanics of using 'planning

gain' agreements (exchanging development land for capital investment) as a method of circumventing central government restrictions on capital spending (Sports Council, 1983). Sport and recreation provision was also perceived by planners and administrators as an increasingly important element in local authority economic development plans. The 1986 Henley Centre study for the Sports Council reported:

The growth of sport as a leisure time activity has turned it into a major industry.... People are spending more of their income on sport as part of leisure.

(Sports Council, 1986, p.3)

The role of leisure investment acting as catalyst for a Keynesian multiplier effect was an important feature of the 1980s boom which was central to the economic and social regeneration strategies of cities such as Sheffield, Birmingham and Doncaster. The newly emerging profession of 'leisure consultancy' presented planning scenarios based on an assumption of long term growth in the demand for leisure products and the possibility of synergy between public and private sector leisure and retail development. A Royal Institute of British Architects seminar held in 1989 exemplified this approach, not least in its theme, 'Leisure 1990, the only growth market':

Local authorities understand that they must provide the right environment to entice the private sector to invest in partnership with them. Retail developers have begun to see how leisure can add value to commercial developments.

(Tibbot/RIBA, 1990, p. 6)

As Table 1.4 demonstrates, the 1980s cycle of leisure centre construction started slowly, but as the decade progressed the policy gained in popularity until an apparently abrupt cessation around 1993. The author is aware of only one large leisure centre in Yorkshire and Humberside planned after 1993 (the Ryedale District Council Leisure Pool). Once again, the literature is silent on why policy priorities seem to have changed so quickly and completely. It may be that, as with previous periods of municipal leisure expansion such as that which occurred between 1973 and 1975, central government intervened to discourage a form of provision of which it did not approve. There is some evidence to support this view. From the early 1980s the Conservative government indicated that it regarded some forms of municipal provision for leisure as wasteful and frivolous (paraphrased by the Colin Moynihan, the then Minister

for Sport in 1990, as leisure centre -'itis'). As early as 1983 the Department of the Environment voiced its concern in guidance notes to local authorities that the decision to build major leisure facilities was often based on scant evidence of demand or viability:

Feasibility studies in the form of market assessment and financial evaluation have not been a common feature of leisure centre planning.

(Department of the Environment, 1983, p. 55)

Since the 1970s, local authorities seem to have done little to produce evidence that large centres are a rational and efficient way to meet the leisure needs and wants of their people. A review of the literature on the management of major leisure facilities built between 1983 and 1993 identified only two follow-up studies that explored whether the performance targets or social benefits forecast at the planning stage had actually been realised (Amies and Davies, 1986; System Three, 1990). It has been suggested that a reluctance to quantify service outcomes is part of a public service culture which places emphasis on input measures such as capital spending, as evidence of commitment to social welfare provision (Common, 1992; O'Connell, 1994), as opposed to a concern with efficiency and cost effectiveness as evidenced by output measures of the kind proposed in the Quest initiative (English Sports Council, 1997a ).

This was soon to change. In 1988, 142 years after the passing of the first Baths and Wash-houses Act, municipal indoor leisure provision gained a statutory framework, not however in terms of a duty to provide services, but as a requirement to expose the management of major parts of the public leisure estate to market testing in the form of compulsory competitive tendering (CCT). In addition, indoor recreation facilities became required, as a function of the 'Citizens Charter', to publish selected performance data to allow for the construction of 'value for money' league tables.

At the time of writing few large leisure centres are under construction, but the pattern of applications to the National Lottery Sports Fund suggests that a number of local authorities are planning major capital schemes. Councils in Yorkshire and Humberside such as Calderdale, Kirklees and Harrogate have all

been granted lottery funding for leisure schemes that fall within the definition of 'large leisure facility' used in section 1.2 of the study (English Sports Council, 1997b)

### **3.7 Orienting ideas: Developing a conceptual framework**

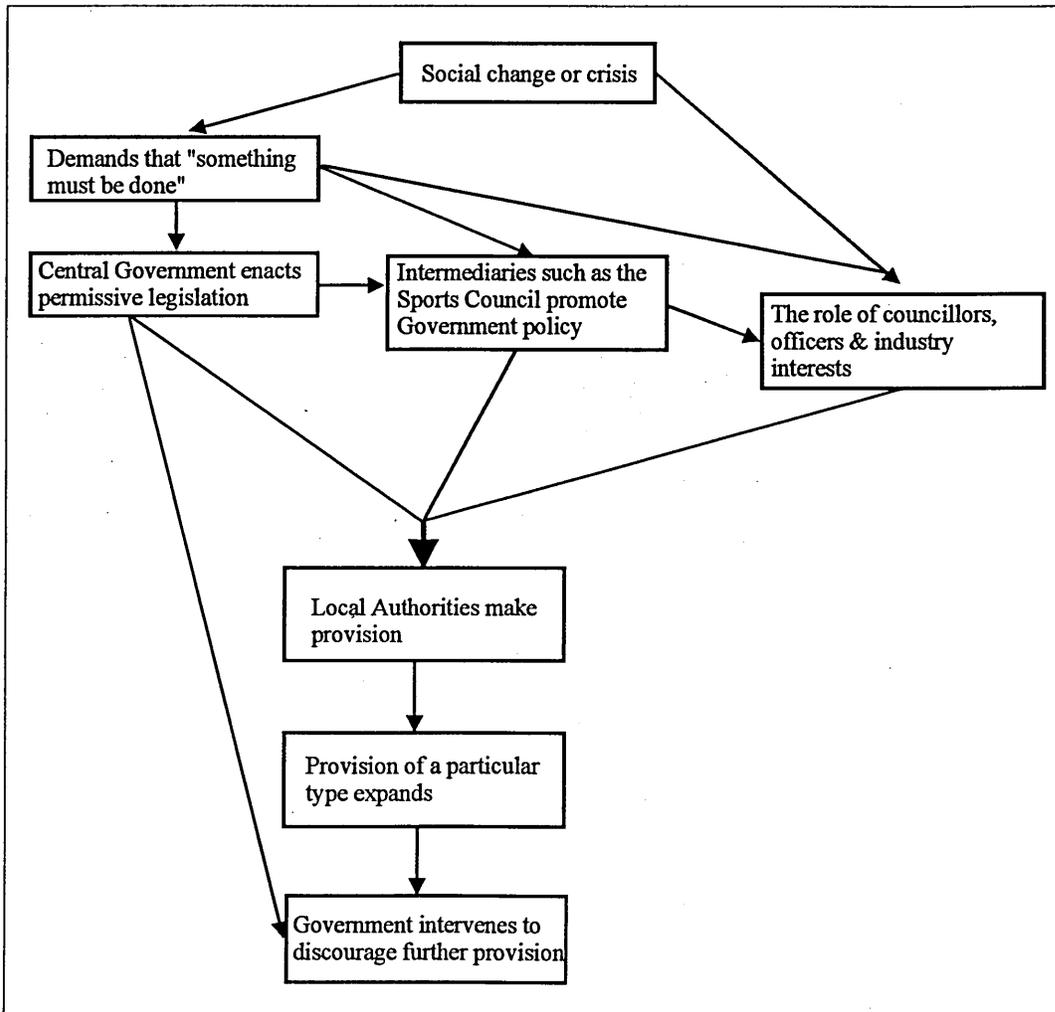
This brief historical overview of the development of the public indoor recreation facility has revealed a complex and at times confusing picture. A number of what Miles and Huberman (1994) term 'orienting ideas' have emerged which can be used to construct a preliminary conceptual framework or causal model, leading to a set of research questions which will guide the choice of a suitable research methodology.

A central feature of this chapter has been an analysis of the relationship between central government (the promoters of recreation provision), local government (the providers) and intermediaries such as the Sports Council. The interest of successive governments in promoting sport and recreation has been, at best, sporadic and driven by a wish to achieve specific external benefits during times of social stress, such as improved physical fitness or the maintenance of public order. Despite the permissive nature of recreation legislation, the extent of local authorities' involvement in the provision of indoor recreation facilities has, as Tables 1.1 to 1.4 demonstrate, been significant, but somewhat uneven over time.

The construction of recreational facilities appears to be a cyclical phenomenon, influenced by a number of explicit factors such as government and Sports Council policy. There seems, however, to have been no direct or causal link between the policies and actions of successive governments and the Sports Council, on the one hand, and the sudden expansion in the construction of large centres between 1983 and 1993, on the other. The lack of a significant literature on the strategic significance of the large centre means that little is known of the motivation of the providers. The sudden expansion of leisure facilities between 1973 and 1975 suggests that a number of less tangible factors such as the operation of local political agendas might have influenced the decision to build. Similarly, the recognition of leisure as a social and economic phenomenon from the 1970s onwards may also have influenced the move towards the construction of large leisure centres. The methodology for the study must take account of the possible importance of these implicit or informal factors as well as the more explicit policy-related issues which

have been explored in this chapter. Figure 3.2 below represents a preliminary conceptual framework for the study based on data from the first three chapters.

**Figure 3.2 A preliminary conceptual framework demonstrating the factors and relationships that may lead local authorities to build indoor sport and recreation facilities**



## Chapter Four

### Research design and methodology

#### 4.1 Introduction

Knowledge is a social and historical product. Unlike researchers in physics we must contend with institutions, structures, practices and conventions that people reproduce and transform.

(Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 4.)

In Chapter Two a brief history of municipal recreation provision was articulated which demonstrated that the decision to construct a large leisure centre is a complex phenomenon. Factors as diverse as government policy, changing attitudes to the concept of leisure and even perhaps the personal agendas of councillors and officers, may be relevant to the study. In exploring the research question it will be argued that this complexity and the lack of a specific literature suggests the need for a broad and flexible methodology, capable of being modified as insights into the research question become apparent. In the following section the relevance to the study of a number of research methods is considered and a working model to guide subsequent stages of the research is offered.

The preceding chapter was not based on any firm *a priori* hypothesis but arose from the theoretical review of local government and public leisure provision offered in Chapter Two supported by the idea that a broad historical overview of the emergence of the public sport and recreation facility could provide useful insights into how the contemporary phenomenon of the erection of the large leisure centre might be investigated. At first sight this approach may seem somewhat unsystematic, but can be justified on pragmatic and academic grounds. Given that the large leisure centre seems to be a complex and little studied phenomenon, a cautious approach is indicated, as there is a risk of the study being driven into a premature and rigid research design. Hakim (1987) suggests that historical methods and data can be useful research tools in their own right for studies of organisational policy, and to help organise the research question. Lytton Strachey uses a fishing analogy to describe this approach to social research:

He will row out over that great ocean of material, and lower down into it, a little bucket, which will bring up to the light of day some characteristic specimen from those far depths to be examined with a careful curiosity.

(Lytton Strachey, 1909, p. 6.)

In addition to providing a set of orienting ideas and a preliminary conceptual framework, the general overview of the development of policy and provision also helped clarify a number of key issues around the development of a suitable methodology. The decision to start the study with a historical review looking back as far as 1846, to the origins of and key moments in the development of leisure provision, helps ground the study in a political and social policy context, as opposed to say, a contemporary analysis of the economic impact or operational regimes of large centres. These issues are of course important, but arise from the decision to build. Giving the study a social policy emphasis also helps resolve a key research question, namely whether the approach is to be primarily quantitative or qualitative.

The focus of the research is not on the number, location or architectural style of the large centres, but on why they were built. As such, a purely quantitative approach does not seem to be appropriate, although Chapters One and Three do provide background data on these issues to give an idea of the scale of investment and distribution of these large centres.

Statistics are helpful, but they do not provide explanations. The complexity of leisure may be best maintained through a context that includes other dimensions besides traditional statistical calculations.

(Henderson, 1991, p. 28)

The lack of a quantitative foundation which could provide the seeming comfort of a 'result' need not rob the study of validity, if multiple sources of evidence are drawn on to construct what Yin (1989) describes as a 'chain of evidence'. The use of multiple sources of data, methods and analysis allows key issues from the conceptual framework to be subject to cross-verification, or what Denzin (1994) terms the 'triangulation' of data.

A search for meaning based on an interpretation of a complex social phenomenon is also likely to lead the study away from a narrowly positivist approach that seeks to establish precise causal models based on firm *a priori* hypotheses, or what Shipman (1988) terms 'covering laws'. In contrast, Chapter Three suggests that a patient exploration of the research question from a number of perspectives may allow an explanation (or a number of explanations) to emerge. Each perspective, method or stage of the study should be allowed to inform the next. For example, earlier chapters explored the relatively rich literature on the 'big issues' affecting the development of leisure policy, but failed to deal adequately with the local and personal agenda of providers. An alternative approach is needed in this area, the results of which can be used to address another facet of the research question.

In discovering theory one generates conceptual categories or their properties from evidence; then the evidence from which the category emerged is used to illustrate the concept.

(Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 23)

Rather than proceed from a fixed position that lays down a complete research strategy for the remainder of the study, a step by step approach is considered to be more appropriate as it will allow and encourage reflection at each stage and offers the possibility of modifying the conceptual framework and methods employed in the light of early findings and experience. The attraction of this approach is that during the early stages of the research, unexpected data may emerge which may point to the need to explore a new and unforeseen aspect of the phenomenon, or to use a method of enquiry that had not previously been envisaged. There are, however, problems inherent in this open approach in that the research process may lose its sense of purpose and cohesion and become instead a series of loosely connected investigations. There is no neat answer to this dilemma, other than to plan each stage of the research and carefully reflect after each element of the study to ensure that an approach designed to attain flexibility and breadth does not become a series of irrelevant excursions. A model to guide the research process is outlined below.

**Table 4.1 A model of the research process**

<p><b>Stage 1.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Introducing the 'problem' of the large leisure centre (Chapter One).</li><li>- A general review of literature and ideas on local government and public leisure provision (Chapter Two).</li><li>- An historical overview of the development of policies that have shaped municipal provision of facilities for sport, recreation and leisure (Chapter Three).</li><li>- Formulating 'orienting' ideas and the construction of a preliminary conceptual framework (Chapter Three).</li></ul> <p><b>Stage 2.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- An examination of issues around research design and the selection of an appropriate research methodology for the next stage of the study (Chapter Four).</li></ul> <p><b>Stage 3*.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Data collection, the next phase of the research.</li><li>- Reflection on issues and themes that have emerged.</li><li>- Revision of the conceptual framework.</li></ul> <p><b>Stage 4.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Discussion of findings and conclusion.</li></ul>
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Note\* The stages outlined at stage three can be repeated a number of times as part of the 'step by step' approach using a variety of research methods to explore the research question from a number of different perspectives. One implication of this approach is that, rather than the usual single chapter on research design and methodology offered at an early stage in the study, the issue of the selection of an appropriate methodology will recur throughout the study as part of the process of reflection on what has emerged at a given stage and what needs to be done next.

## 4.2 Developing a strategy for the next stage of the study

The central aim of the next stage of the research is to move from the general overview of policies and issues affecting leisure provision, towards a study of the large leisure centre in its local context. This entails an examination of the role of key players such as councillors who might promote or block provision. A number of methodological approaches is available. A postal survey of municipalities who have (and have not) provided large centres seems an attractive option, as a large sample of key respondents such as senior leisure officers and councillors could be asked to give their views on a range of issues relating to recreation provision and large leisure centre. This approach was used by the Sports Council (1993) to investigate how local authorities had responded to the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering for the management of sport and leisure facilities. The large scale survey can provide reliable data on 'what' and 'how' questions, but as Henderson (1991) points out, this approach is less useful in addressing the 'why' issues, which are at the heart of the research question for this study.

There is clearly a case for interviewing a range of key informants such as councillors and local authority leisure officers to seek their views on their local authority's 'decision to build'. The use of in-depth interviews could allow exploration of a range of relevant but potentially sensitive issues such as the role of personal agendas and possible competition between municipalities, in a way which a survey would not. Although the in-depth interview can produce a rich array of data and opinion, reliance on it to provide a single strand of evidence may lack validity, particularly where the phenomenon being studied is complex and requires multi-disciplinary analysis (Hyman, 1975). What is required is a composite method that allows and encourages the use of background contextual data, but one which can also draw on a range of evidence such as interviews.

The case study is an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident and in which multiple sources of evidence are used. Evidence for case studies can be drawn from a number of sources including documents, archival records, interviews and observation (Yin, 1984). The case study approach seems to be well suited to the study in that it allows an explanation to emerge from

a synthesis of evidence of various types and for data to be validated within and across each method employed. A case study may be of a single phenomenon of, say, a single large centre built between 1983 and 1993, or a multiple study of different types of centre built during different periods. The multiple study enables a wider range of data to be assembled and strengthens the possibility of validating a 'chain of evidence' by replicating patterns of events between cases and over time, using comparisons to highlight patterns of similarity and difference.

Earlier sections of the study demonstrated that the large centre was not an isolated phenomenon but rather should be seen as part of a tradition of provision, albeit with distinctive features. As such, a number of brief local case studies may be constructed to run in parallel with the chronology established in Chapter Three to link the development of national policy with local forms of provision. A series of historical cases may also be used as a pilot for contemporary studies in terms of working up an effective case study design, identifying sources of local data, rehearsing research interview techniques, and using the resulting material for comparative analysis to generate patterns or typologies.

#### **4.3 The role of the research diary**

The current chapter has argued the merits of a flexible methodology capable of modification at each phase of the research. In addition to the accumulation of routine records such as an index of literature references, a research diary has also been kept, to plan and schedule work associated with the study, but more importantly to record reflections on each stage of the research and to chart the evolution of a suitable methodology. For example, an unanticipated product of gathering data for Chapters One and Three was the discovery of rich sources of primary and local data on leisure provision and facilities. The diary was used to record information from these new sources and to develop a number of options for the next stage of the study, the series of historical case studies. The diary was thus not only a practical tool for scheduling work, but was also a valuable means of setting down and working through problems that arose during the course of the study as well as recording the rationale for operational decisions. For example, after each of the exploratory interviews (described in Chapter Six) the diary was used to record, reflect on and criticise the style

and effectiveness of the interviewing technique and to construct a remedial agenda of reading about interview techniques, and to test a variety of interview styles.



## Chapter Five

### Case studies of the development of municipal indoor recreation facilities

#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter is based on the analysis of historical case studies of sport and recreation facilities built between 1870 and 1974. A number of recurring themes associated with the planning and operation of these centres are identified which may prove to be of relevance to the research period of 1983 to 1993. The chapter ends with a brief discussion of the issues that need to be addressed in next section of the study and proposes a revised conceptual framework. Chapter Two traced the development of the large indoor recreation facility through a number of phases or cycles of growth, such as that which occurred in the late Victorian and Edwardian period and around 1974. The case studies chosen for exploration here coincide with each of these periods. The facilities chosen are typical examples of their period and follow the typology established in Chapter Three.

**Table 5.1 Case studies of municipal sport and recreation facilities constructed between 1870 and 1974**

1860-1875. First generation facilities	<b>Exemplar</b> - Corporation Bridge Baths, Sheffield, 1870
1880-1910. Provision in the grand style	<b>Exemplars</b> - East Hull baths, 1896 Beverley Road Baths Hull, 1905
1930-1939. Works for the relief of unemployment	<b>Exemplar</b> - Albert Avenue Baths, Hull, 1936
1972-1976. Local government re-organisation and the first leisure centres	<b>Exemplars</b> - Maltby Sports Centre, Rotherham, 1973 Herringthorpe Leisure Centre, Rotherham, 1974

#### 5.2 1860-1875: The first generation of municipal recreation facilities

##### Case study exemplar: Sheffield Corporation Bridge Baths

As Chapter Three demonstrated, the first facilities built under the terms of the 1846 Baths and Wash-houses Act were public laundries and individual or 'slipper' baths. From the late 1850s onwards many wash-houses also included a 'plunge' or swimming pool. In 1868 the Council of the Borough of

Sheffield resolved to investigate provision for swimming (it already operated a number of public laundries). A sub-committee of the Health Committee visited swimming pools in a number of industrial towns and cities and met councillors and officers involved in the provision and management of the facilities. The report of the sub-committee highlighted the progress made by other towns and cities (listed in Table 5.2) and urged that Sheffield should follow their example:

Your sub-committee fully believe that public baths in Sheffield, well arranged and conveniently located, could not fail in paying their annual cost, and that the only loss would be in the original outlay, which it is hoped by good management might be avoided.

(Borough of Sheffield, 1869, p. 421)

**Table 5.2 Selected performance figures for baths and wash-houses in a sample of large industrial cities in 1867 (Borough of Sheffield, Council Minutes, 1869)**

City	User visits	Income	Expenditure	Profit (loss)
Manchester	213,000	£4,413	£3,749	£664
Birmingham	191,000	£3,101	£3,000	£101
Liverpool	316,000	£7,005	£7,072	£ (67)

The Borough Surveyor for Sheffield was instructed to identify a suitable site for a 'plunge pool with associated slipper baths' and draw up estimates for the cost of constructing and running such a facility. Armed with the surveyor's capital and revenue estimates of £1,350 and £450 per annum respectively, the Health Committee recommended to the full council that the scheme should proceed immediately, stating as justification: 'There can be no reason to fear a loss on so small an outlay'. The Corporation Bridge Baths opened in 1870, its construction having run £880 over budget, and in its first month of operation it attracted 10,800 users. The revenue budget for the first three months of operation showed an operating profit of £27. The City Treasurer's reports on the facility for the period 1870-1873 show a small but increasing deficit on the revenue budget.

### **5.3 1880-1910: Provision in a grand style**

#### **Case study exemplars: East Hull Baths and Beverley Road Baths, Kingston upon Hull**

As in the Sheffield case, councillors for the City and County Borough of Kingston Upon Hull (hereafter Hull City Council) were quick to take advantage of the Baths and Wash-houses Act, and by 1890 had erected a small public swimming baths in addition to a number of public laundries and slipper baths. A study of the minutes of the council and its Baths and Wash-houses Committee between 1890 and 1912 suggests that questions relating to the location, construction and use of swimming pools were matters of considerable importance. For example, the minutes for 1891 report the debate on where the next swimming pool to be built should be sited. Councillors representing the rapidly expanding northern wards made a strong case for the facility to be located there, but in 1892 it was resolved that the pool should instead be built in East Hull, in Holderness Road, an area of densely packed slum housing near the docks. At the same meeting it was also resolved that the 'third bath' would be provided in one of the northern wards when funds allowed.

In the two years prior to the decision to build the baths in East Hull there is no record of any schedule of visits undertaken by councillors or reports by officers on matters relating to trends in provision.

Immediately following the decision to build, this situation changed and the responsible officer, the City Engineer, submitted a number of papers to the Baths and Wash-houses Committee based on visits to, and correspondence with, the managers of newly opened facilities in other cities, on questions such as the feasibility of installing electric lighting and innovations in the design of slipper baths. Between 1893 and 1894 councillors from the Baths and Wash-houses Committee made a number of visits to cities to inspect facilities on the recommendation of the City Engineer. A report following a visit to the Monument Road Baths in Birmingham in 1893 commented on the ornamental cast iron roof trusses which were said to have 'a very effective appearance'. Similar roof trusses were to be used in the construction of the East Hull Baths, perhaps not coincidentally.

The East Hull Baths opened in October 1898 at a final capital cost of £11,443 (£1,100 over budget) and six months late, which moved the Chairman of the Baths and Wash-houses Committee to comment:

We are compelled to open the East Hull Baths before the work is complete. The Council is losing money every day and has every reason to utilise the property in order to get a return on ratepayers' investment.

(Hull Daily Mail, 23rd September 1898, p. 2)

Despite these short term problems and even though when fully operational, the East Hull Baths never made a return on the 'ratepayers' investment', the Council resolved in 1902 to press on with its next, and most ambitious project, the Beverley Road Baths, which was to cost £29,200. Even allowing for the modest inflation which occurred between 1898 and 1905, the increase in the scale of investment seems to have signified a move towards a grander style of provision. The East Hull Baths, with their mahogany panelled entrance and mosaic floor, was by no means a spartan facility but the three- pool Beverley Road complex, comprising first and second class and ladies pools, was designed to be even more impressive. The imposing facade was raised an additional storey during construction at an extra cost of £500 and the first class slipper baths were furnished throughout in marble and teak and included a system of electric bells to summon an attendant.

The Beverley Road facility opened to the public in June 1905 and in its first month attracted 23,864 users, more than the combined total for both of the city's other pools. As was customary, the pools at Beverley Road were drained and covered from September to March and put to the other uses allowed by the Baths and Wash-houses Acts. Within six months of opening, a scale of charges for dances, meetings and bazaars was set. The ladies' swimming pool was leased to the Hull Gymnastic Club for the winter season. Plate 5.1 shows a swimming baths built around the same period as Beverley Road decorated for a dance.

During its first years of operation, attendance at events in the winter programme at Beverley Road suffered from the legal restrictions on the consumption of alcohol at social events and the ban on taking money at the door. These restrictions were eased in 1911 by the addition of a clause to the Kingston upon Hull Corporation Act which allowed the organisers of social events to apply for full drinks licences and to charge admission on the day of a performance. The change led to a dramatic increase in bookings and attendance (shown in Table 5.3), including some of the first cinematographic performances to be staged in the city.

**Table 5.3 Selected monthly attendance figures for Beverley Road swimming complex  
1909 to 1912**

<b>Year</b>	<b>July*</b>	<b>Jan**</b>
1909	20,697	1,275
1910	19,830	1,565
1911	22,343	1,198
1912	25,402	6,752

**Source:** City and County Borough of Kingston Upon Hull, Baths and Wash-houses Committee Minutes, 1909-1912.

Note \* Peak month for swimming related activities

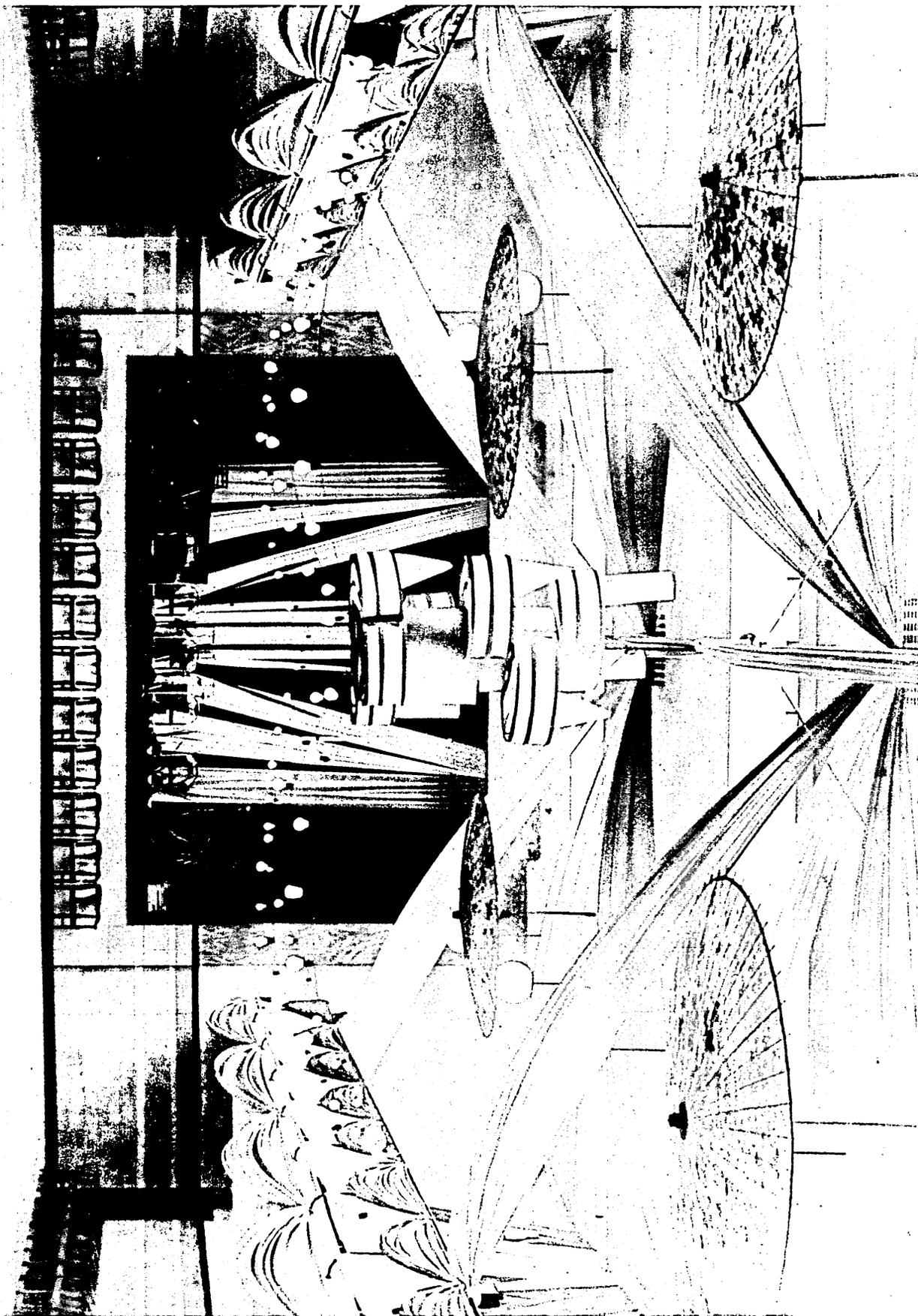
Note\*\* Peak month for non-swimming activities.

The minutes of the Hull Baths and Wash-houses Committee for the relevant period make no reference to the publication of the report of the Interdepartmental Committee on Physical Deterioration in 1904.

There is indirect evidence, however, of a policy change affecting the operation of the Beverley Road complex which may have flowed from the report. In 1904 the Hull Baths and Wash-houses Committee established a sub-committee to investigate opportunities for school children to swim and undertook a national survey which showed that many local authorities allowed children, accompanied by teachers, free or very cheap access to municipal baths. The adoption of free school swimming in Hull in 1906 was followed in 1907 by the free use for schools of the gymnasium (the boarded-over second class pool which was available from September to April ) which was equipped with vaulting horses, parallel bars and a piano for 'musical drill'. The gymnasium was run by a 'professional instructor', a retired army non-commissioned officer.

The opening of the Beverley Road facilities ended provision in the 'grand style'. In Hull there was little new provision of any kind until the late 1920s. The only significant extension to municipal recreation provision in Hull between 1905 and 1932 came via the acquisition of the Newington Water Works which were converted in 1908 to form a large outdoor swimming pool. In deciding to opt for more basic provision the Committee indicated that:

Plate 5.1  
Goole Municipal Baths decorated for a dance circa 1931



The high cost of providing additional indoor facilities cannot be borne at the moment and the City Engineer should investigate the use of reservoirs and drains\* for swimming during the summer months.

(Kingston upon Hull Baths and Wash-houses Committee, sub-committee, 1908, paragraph 8)

\* Note. The term 'drain' is used to describe open fresh water drainage channels which cross the City.

#### **5.4 1930-1939: 'Works for the relief of unemployment'**

##### **Case study exemplar: Albert Avenue Baths, Kingston Upon Hull**

Although the Albert Avenue Baths which opened in 1932 is a large indoor facility comprising two pools and slipper baths, it shares little in common with either the East Hull or Beverley Road facilities. The style of provision is stark and functional with little decoration and no ancillary facilities. Albert Avenue was essentially a 'government' scheme designed to give work and cheap recreation to the unemployed. In 1929 the Hull City Council was approached by the Unemployment Grants Committee (a government agency) 'inviting applications from local authorities'. The City Engineer was instructed to prepare and present plans for a new swimming bath 'as a work for the relief of unemployment'. In 1930 a sub-committee considered the draft plans but expressed concern at the estimated capital cost of £48,500. A subsequent full meeting of the Council resolved that 'The Baths and Wash-houses Committee put forward a less costly scheme'. In February 1931 a revised scheme, costed at £40,880, was approved and an application to the Unemployment Grants Committee for financial assistance was made. Grants and interest free loans covering nearly 70 percent of the capital cost of the project were awarded. In operation the pool was unremarkable save for the attention given to the needs of the unemployed who: 'by arrangement with the baths superintendent be admitted to the baths at a charge of one penny', a significant reduction on the standard charge for swimming in 1932 which was between two and five pence depending on age and the session attended (City and County Borough of Kingston Upon Hull Baths and Wash-houses Committee minutes 1932, p. 27).

In 1934 the City Engineer was asked to prepare an estimate for the cost of covering the main pool for other uses in the winter, but the idea was never taken up and Albert Avenue became the first of the City's pools to be open for swimming all year round (by the 1930s all the council's pools were heated).

In the 1930s the ethos at Albert Avenue seems to have centred on the promotion of 'healthful recreation' rather than fun, as the swimming clubs using the pool successfully petitioned for the removal of water slides in 1933 as they 'interfered with training and competition'.

### **5.5 1972-1976: Local government re-organisation and the first leisure centres**

#### **Case study exemplars: Maltby Sports Centre and Herringthorpe Leisure Centre, Rotherham**

In the early 1970s, as described in Chapter Three, the Sports Council feared that as provision for sport and recreation was not a statutory function for local authorities, it might be forgotten in the 1974 reorganisation of local government. There is evidence to suggest that, far from being forgotten, provision mainly in the form of multi-sport and leisure centres became a notable feature of the period between 1972 and 1976. A former Director of Amenities and Recreation for the Rotherham Metropolitan District Council (RMDC), interviewed in 1994, recalled the period immediately before reorganisation:

The wave of leisure building that took place at this time was largely the product of a desire to leave a tangible memorial to the old authority and a wish that available cash balances be spent on schemes that would directly benefit 'local' residents. This led some councils to sign contracts (to build new facilities) on the 28th March - the day before the new authorities took control.

(Former Director of Amenities and Recreation, RMDC, Interview 1994.)

An example of this approach may be seen in the planning and construction of the Maltby Sports Centre which opened in 1973 at a cost of £500,000. The large, three swimming pool centre was built by the former Maltby Urban District Council (serving a mining community situated between Rotherham and Doncaster), immediately before its incorporation into the new Rotherham Metropolitan District Council. With 14,066 residents, Maltby fell far below the 40,000 threshold of the prevailing Sports Council planning formula (Sports Council, 1968). Despite this, the Council, acting, as the centre's memorial tablet proclaims, 'on behalf of the citizens of Maltby', provided water space that would have met the needs of a small city. The former Maltby UDC may have provided capital from its reserves, but the ongoing subsidy required to sustain such a large facility has been borne since 1973 by the citizens of the new Rotherham council.

The 1972-1974 period also saw the emergence of a new style of facility, the leisure centre, the first

English example of which opened in Rotherham in 1973:

Come to 'Costa Del Rotherham' where waves gently lap the shore and bikini clad girls lie soaking up the sun. No - not some new Spanish resort but a Mediterranean style pleasure haven in the heart of Yorkshire.

(Sheffield Morning Telegraph, 11th March 1974, p.4.)

In the 1960s the planning and organisation of sport and recreation services in the County Borough of Rotherham were broadly similar to those of other large urban authorities. Five separate committees were involved in the task of service planning and delivery: Markets and Baths; Parks and Cemeteries; Libraries Museums and Arts; Allotments; and the Sport and Recreation Committee. Despite this fragmentation, the product of incremental growth between 1846 and 1974, a strategy emerged in the late 1960s to give priority to providing a 'multi-sports' centre. This approach reflected both the Sports Council's national policy of improving indoor sports provision and the regional study which had identified Rotherham as an area deficient in this type of facility (Sports Council, 1970). It was also argued that the old central baths in the town, built in the 1880s, were redundant as they were in poor repair and could no longer meet modern needs.

The initial proposal was for an orthodox 'blind box' facility which would include a rectangular pool, large sports hall and smaller sports areas, at an estimated capital cost of £300,000. By 1971, following the appointment of the leading firm of municipal architects, the Gillinson Barnet partnership, the project had been completely transformed in concept, with costs now estimated at £750,00. The Gillinson specification included:

A free form leisure pool, with a wave machine, underwater light and sound systems and a beach area with a soft synthetic finish to allow non swimmers to enjoy the pool environment and parents to relax while supervising their children. The Social unit will contain small activity areas on three levels and a bar with a suspended ceiling,, recessed light fittings and a carpeted floor. A restaurant will overlook the swimming pool.

(Gillinson, Barnet and Partners, 1972, p. 4)

The Gillinson Barnet partnership was active in promoting the new concept of the leisure facility via their 'leisure research unit' and presentations to municipalities wishing to follow the trend (Wallis, 1974). The case for the new style of provision was based on the partnership's analysis of the shortcomings of existing public indoor recreation facilities, and changes in customers' expectations of what constituted a desirable leisure experience. Peter Sargent, a member of the Gillinson partnership at the time, summarised this view in an article for the Municipal and Public Services Journal in 1973:

What a cold clinical place the modern swimming pool has become, devoid of fun and relaxation, yet all the statistical information available told us that over 90% of swimmers went to the pool for recreation not competition. We have learnt that the leisure public needs to be pampered, but once people become used to a leisure routine, then there are good returns, whether this is in the form of financial returns or social benefit.

(Sargent, 1973, p. 33)

Once open, Herringthorpe became a key element in the strategy used by the Gillinson Partnership to popularise the idea of the leisure centre through the promotion of visits by councillors and officers from authorities who were considering provision of their own sport and recreation facilities:

At the beginning we had an average, I think, of about four local authorities a week coming to see Herringthorpe. We involved the Chairman and Mayor. It was certainly good for civic prestige - it built up some very good relationships for the city.

(Former Director of Recreation and Amenities, Rotherham MDC. Interviewed in 1994)

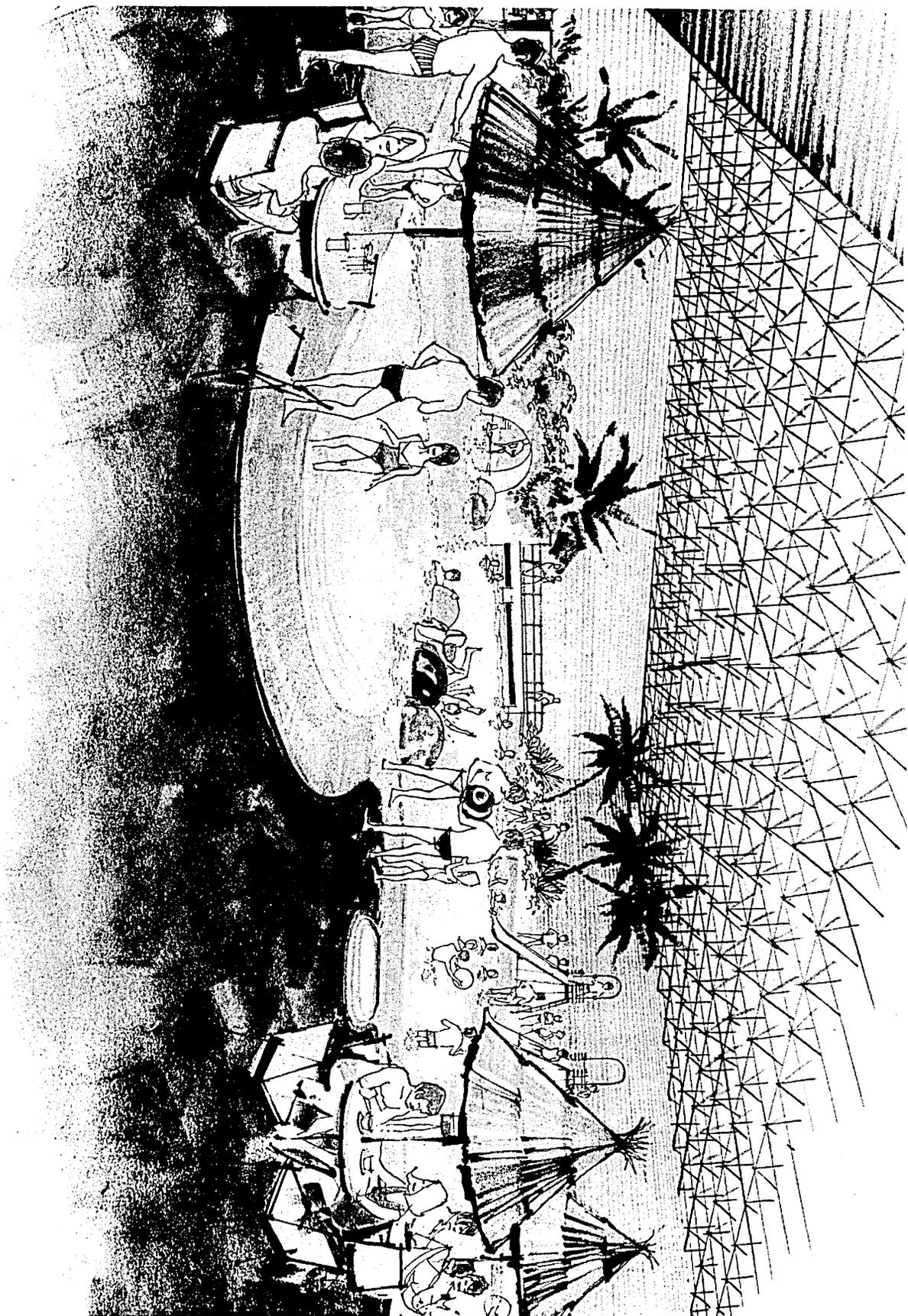
Interest in the new concept was not confined to the United Kingdom:

Parties of Sports Chiefs from Sweden and Belgium will visit Rotherham at the weekend to take a look at the town's £750,000 Herringthorpe Leisure Centre. The centre is the only one of its type in the country and has attracted world-wide publicity. A contingent from Holland were so impressed that they sent an architect to design a similar one for them. There's no two ways about it - Rotherham has something to be proud of.

(Sheffield Star, 7th February 1975, p. 6)

The case for the new leisure centres was strengthened by their relative popularity. For example the Herringthorpe centre, with a sphere of influence of more than fifteen miles, attracted between 500,000 and 600,00 user visits per annum for the first five years of its operation, in contrast to the old municipal baths in the town, which registered an average annual attendance of 109,000 between 1968 and 1972.

Figure 5.1 An artists impression of the leisure pool area, from the Gillinson Barnett prospectus.

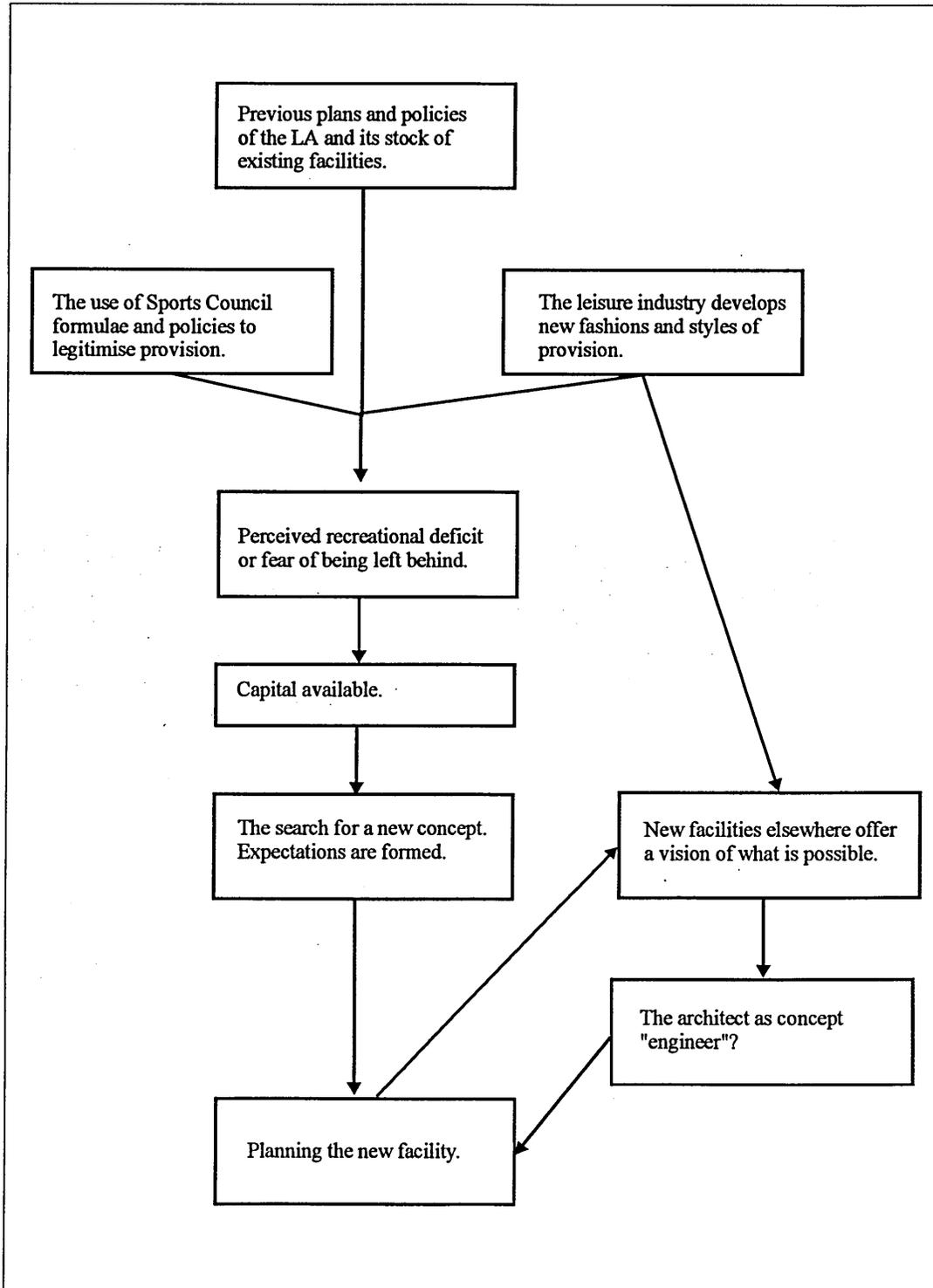


## 5.6 Discussion

The series of historical case studies presented here have served to identify a number of ideas and issues that can be carried forward to the next stage of the study. The studies confirm a central theme raised in Chapters Two and Three, namely that in times of social crisis, provision for sport and recreation may be the product of governments' wish that 'something must be done'. This was clearly the case with the Albert Avenue scheme in 1932, as a 'work for the relief of unemployment'. Similarly the measures to promote 'healthful recreation' undertaken at the Beverley Road complex from 1904 onwards may be linked to the aftermath of the Boer War and the publication of the report of the Interdepartmental Committee on Physical Deterioration.

The studies also suggest that municipal provision for sport and recreation is not merely a passive reflection of central government prompting, but rather that a range of other factors may influence the decision to build. The Sheffield study demonstrates that as early as 1870 local authorities had developed a distinctive planning system to match or exceed a norm in provision. This approach included the use of benchmarking surveys and visits to existing facilities. The East Hull and Beverley Road studies suggest that, although the initial impetus for the provision of the pools arose from the Baths and Wash-houses Act, other factors such as the operation of 'turf politics' and municipal pride may have influenced policy. Similarly, the Sports Council promoted an expansion of multi-sports centres in the 1970s. The form which that provision took at Maltby and Herringthorpe suggests that a range of factors other than Sports Council planning formulae, such as a wish to lead a new trend in provision and the promotional work of the 'leisure architect', influenced leisure policy in these cases. The role that these issues might have played after 1983 needs to be explored in the next stage of the study. The conceptual framework outlined in Chapter Three has been revised (as shown below) to take account of the themes emerging from these case studies and the notion that a parallel or 'informal' agenda of issues may influence the decision to build, in addition to the 'formal' policy based agenda discussed in Chapter Two.

Figure 5.2 Revised conceptual framework



## Chapter Six

### Approaching the next phase of the study

#### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter explores a number of options for the next phase of the study. A model for an exploratory study of a large leisure centre built in the 1980s is developed, tested and evaluated.

The rationale for a 'step by step' approach to the research design was discussed in Chapter Four in which each stage of the study will inform the next as new insights and questions arise. The general overview of the development of municipal leisure provision and the use of historical case studies have helped to clarify key issues around the research question, and to contextualise the phenomenon of the large centre. The aim of the next phase of the research is to move from a general and historical review of leisure policy and provision to a specific study of large leisure centres built between 1983 and 1993. Evidence emerging from Chapters Three and Five suggests that this part of the study should give weight to local as well as national issues, and to what has been termed the informal agenda, that is, questions such as the personal roles of providers and the influence of fashion on styles of provision.

There is a case for proceeding straight to a sample of in-depth interviews with councillors, officers, architects and other key informants to explore issues arising from preceding parts of the study. This approach would no doubt yield a rich array of opinion around the 'why' question, but would constitute only a single strand of evidence. A guiding principle of the study has been the use of multiple sources of evidence and data in order that emerging themes can be validated or 'triangulated' from a number of perspectives. For example, this has involved subjecting secondary data, in the form of general commentaries on the development of public leisure policy, to cross-verification using primary data gathered during archive research and interviews with key informants.

The Herringthorpe case study, the most recent of the historical series of case studies, drew on multiple sources of evidence including administrative records, media reports and an interview with a senior officer previously employed with the authority. The study started with desk research into the administrative records of the Rotherham Council, which helped to set in context decisions about this

facility in relation to the wider review of leisure policy and informed the design of interview questions. The interview, in turn, raised other unforeseen issues such as role of the leisure architect and pointed to the use of other channels of information such as a local history archive. Might not the same approach prove useful with a study of contemporary centres? To test the validity of this idea an exploratory study was undertaken on a typical large facility in the Yorkshire and Humberside region.

## **6.2 The exploratory study**

Moving from archive data and other material in the public domain such as annual reports and policy documents, to contemporary administrative records and interviews with councillors and officers, posed potential problems of access to sensitive or confidential material. A code of practice based on that used by Cochran (1983) and Flinders (1992) was adopted to reassure and protect interviewees and 'gatekeepers' of data, such as committee clerks. Each interviewee or respondent was given a written statement outlining the aims of the study and the code of practice governing the research (see Appendix A). Pseudonyms for authorities and facilities were used and where an interviewee might be recognised by their job title, this could (at the interviewee's request) be changed. Permission was sought to tape record interviews for purposes of accuracy. Following each interview a transcript was sent to the interviewee for comment and correction. Interview tapes, transcripts and other sensitive data such as confidential reports and computer disks were kept in a locked filing cabinet in the author's office, or at his home. Interviewees were offered a general summary of the findings of the research on completion of the study.

The facility to be used in the exploratory study, to be henceforth called by a pseudonym, the Castletown Nova Centre, was typical of those built after 1983 and was chosen for administrative convenience, as the author had previously worked in Castletown, but not for the local authority, and therefore knew a number of councillors and officers who had been involved in the planning of the centre. A model for the exploratory study (developed from that used in the Herringthorpe study) is set out below.

**Table 6.1 A model for an exploratory study of the Castletown Nova Leisure Centre**

<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Background research on Castletown, its local political structures and past leisure policies</li><li>2. Tracing the development and implementation of the Nova project through the administrative records of the authority</li><li>3. Formulation of an agenda of issues to be explored around the decision to build, which blends local material with that from previous elements of the study</li><li>4. Construction of an appropriate interview schedule</li><li>5. Interview with the former leader of the Castletown District Council</li><li>6. Reflection</li><li>7. Further desk research and modification of the interview methodology</li><li>8. Interview with the former Principal Recreation Officer of the Castletown District Council</li><li>9. Reflection on the outcomes of the exploratory study</li></ol>
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The background study of the city, the local authority and its past leisure policies drew on material from the council's own archives. The Herringthorpe study had also demonstrated the potential uses of press and other media reports as a secondary source of data and wherever they existed, accounts of 'key moments' in the official records (such as, for example, a debate in the council on the need to improve leisure facilities) were also studied via reports in the local and regional press.

A good deal of the material tracing the development of the Nova Centre was found in the council archives, in minutes of the meetings of the council, its committees and sub-committees. The minute books used in the compilation of the earlier, historical case studies had provided a detailed record not only of what decisions were taken but also why, through the inclusion of supporting documentation such as petitions, letters and a full record of debates. In contrast the contemporary minutes of Castletown council were far briefer and consisted primarily of a bare record of decisions taken. A full transcript of reports on the large centre project compiled by officers, consultants and architects was not routinely included in the minutes. An approach to the Director of Leisure Services for Castletown resulted in access to a number of these reports, but not those commissioned externally, nor any material relating to the financial performance of the centre. The issue of gaining access to key data is central to research on

administrative records (Scott, 1988). The problems experienced at Castletown were a cause for concern but, as the material was not in the public domain, the issue was beyond the author's control.

The desk research on the authority and issues emerging from earlier stages of the study led to the formulation of a number of questions, most of which concerned the evolution, implementation and perceived outcomes of leisure policy in the city. In keeping with the ethos of the study, an open and flexible approach was adopted to the interviews, to permit an appropriate technique to evolve from the experience of conducting the exploratory study rather than being inappropriately prematurely specific about methodological details.

To reduce interviewing to a set of techniques is....like reducing courtship to a formula.

(Dexter, 1970, p. 110)

Given the complex and potentially sensitive nature of some of the questions, it was felt that in-depth, face to face interviews would be more likely to gather reliable data, than, say, a structured postal or telephone survey. As Henderson (1992) points out, this form of interview technique can be expensive, time consuming, biased and inefficient, but this method also provides some of the richest data. Semi-structured interviews seemed appropriate for the exploratory study, as the desk research had already provided a set of issues to be put to interviewees, but it was also important to retain a degree of freedom to depart from the basic agenda if unforeseen questions arose during the interviews (see Appendix B for details of the interview agenda). The freedom to explore fruitful lines of enquiry which emerge during the course of an interview is one of the strengths of unstructured or semi-structured interviews.

The list of potential interviewees for the exploratory study was drawn from a list of officers and councillors who had been involved at a strategic level with planning and implementing the project from which a senior officer and councillor were chosen. Both had been closely associated with the development of the Centre, as Principal Recreation Officer and Leader of the Council respectively, but neither held that position currently (the officer had moved to employment in another authority and the former leader was now Deputy Leader of the Council). The use of former postholders was felt to be

useful to this type of study as they no longer have an immediate position to defend and may be able to offer a more dispassionate overview of events and their significance.

The first interview, with the former leader of the council, took place at his home and seemed to proceed well, taking around sixty five minutes to complete. A verbatim transcript of the interview was prepared and the results of both tape and text were analysed to determine whether the approach and its execution had been effective. The use of a semi-structured format seemed to work well in that it allowed discussion around some of the questions whilst preserving a directional framework (Spradley, 1979). An unanticipated benefit of this less formal approach arose during discussion of officers' reports and other commissioned work, to which the author had been unable to gain access. The interviewee was happy to loan the researcher his copies of these and other documents relating to the planning of the centre for later use in subsequent desk research.

However, subsequent analysis of the role played by the interviewer revealed a less satisfactory picture. There was a tendency for him to interrupt answers, and to end periods of silence prematurely and a general failure to follow up potentially useful lines of enquiry with clarifying questions became apparent. As Shipman (1988) points out, in conducting social research one must take account of interview skills as a key element in interview methodology. Following the first interview, the author rehearsed a number of interviews unrelated to the study to help develop better listening skills and a less intrusive style.

The second interview was undertaken three weeks after the first to allow for further desk research and interview rehearsal. At this stage no attempt was made to analyse the content of the interviews, other than to check whether their balance fairly reflected the aims of the study. For example, the style of the second interview seemed more sensitive than the first, but at times the author led, or did not prevent, excursions into matters concerning the day-to-day operation of the Nova Centre, which although interesting were not central to the study. As problems arose during the pilot study (and indeed throughout the research), they were noted in the research diary. Although no systematic content analysis of the interviews was undertaken at this stage, the need to devise a method for qualitative data analysis was noted and background reading undertaken.

### **6.3 The next phase of the study**

The exploratory study allowed a number of issues around research and methods to be explored and refined. The proposition was confirmed that the large leisure centre might profitably be investigated via case studies based on multiple sources of evidence including in-depth semi-structured interviews. The model shown in Table 5.1 seemed satisfactory in that it fitted the ethos of study by allowing and encouraging reflection and the 'step by step' approach. Despite a number of practical problems, access to data of sufficient quality was obtained and the interviews suggested that interviewees were indeed prepared to speak openly on a range of issues including those from the 'informal' agenda. Based on the relative success of this preliminary foray into the field the next phase of the study is based around the case studies of four large leisure centres built after 1983 (including the Nova Centre).

## Chapter Seven

### Case studies of large leisure centres built after 1983

#### 7.1 Introduction

Words, especially organised into incidents or stories, have a concrete, vivid meaningful flavour that often proves far more convincing to a reader..... than pages of summarised numbers.

(Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 1)

This chapter develops case study exemplars based on a study of four large leisure centres built after 1983. Each case traces the development of the project in its local context, set against the wider questions of leisure policy and practice examined earlier. A methodology similar to that described and tested in the previous chapter is used.

#### 7.2 Selecting the sample

As Yin (1989) suggests, a piece of research may be constructed around one case, and that the use of multiple cases does not necessarily validate a study in the way that a large sample might in a quantitative investigation. There are, however, a number of advantages to be had from the use of multiple case studies. Tables 1.3 and 1.4 demonstrated the spread of large centres across urban and rural areas controlled by all the main political parties. It would be difficult therefore to select one centre to typify those built after 1983. The use of a number of studies would also fit the step by step ethos of the research by allowing a theme or issue that emerges from one study to be given greater emphasis or critical scrutiny in the next as part of the process of triangulation. Although the case study method is not a quantitative research tool, the use of multiple cases allows what Miles and Huberman (1994) term 'pattern matching' across cases which may assist the process of qualitative data analysis. Four facilities were selected from those listed in Table 1.4, to reflect the different types of large centre built in urban, rural and urban 'fringe' locations and under various forms of political control, including one council where no single party held power. The 'Riton' leisure pool which is scheduled to open in 1997 falls outside the research period, but was included as it was felt that a study of a project in the planning and construction stage might bring fresh insights to the research.

The studies were carried out in sequence, that is, all the desk and associated research and interviews on one facility were completed before moving on to the next. This allowed for reflection, as prescribed in the methodological approach adopted, and for a modification of approach between studies if necessary, although in every interview the same basic agenda of questions was posed (see Appendix B). As Table 6.2. demonstrates, for each study, three interviews were undertaken. The interviewees were chosen to reflect the various stages of policy development and construction of a large centre. After a period of desk research on the locality, the local authority and the centre, the first interview in each case was with a senior leisure officer who had been involved with the project throughout its planning and development stages. In addition to pursuing the main agenda of questions that were put to every interviewee, this session was also used to clarify issues arising from the initial desk research, such as the sequence of events and the identity and actions of key participants. The next interview was at director or deputy director level with the officer responsible for leisure facilities policy development. The final interview in each series was with a senior politician who had been closely associated with the project. The use of a hierarchy of interviews allowed questions to be posed and clarified in a consistent manner and for issues to be checked within and across cases.

### **7.3 The presentation of the case studies**

Each of the four studies is presented in a similar format that reflects the research schedule described in the last chapter and the interview questions listed in Appendix B. A model for the presentation of the studies is shown in Table 7.1.

Each of the stages outlined above is illustrated with a number of quotations drawn from the interviews which are used to establish matters of fact such as whether a feasibility was undertaken, but more importantly to give the reader an insight into the attitudes, values and opinions of interviewees on key issues such as the role that civic pride might play in the decision to build.

**Table 7.1 A model for the presentation of the contemporary case studies**

1. Setting the project and the facility in context. The location, economic, social and political structure of the area.
2. The origins of and influences on the project, including:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Government or Sports Council policies</li> <li>- The past leisure policies of the authority</li> <li>- The personal agendas of local politicians and officers</li> <li>- The possible role of fashion and municipal pride</li> </ul>
3. The planning process, including reference to:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Any feasibility studies undertaken</li> <li>- Expectations held for the facility</li> <li>- Any evidence of strategic drift during the planning process</li> </ul>
4. Project outcomes, including:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Evidence that expectations have been realised (or not)</li> <li>- Other relevant performance data</li> <li>- The project in retrospect</li> </ul>

Where an issue was complex or contentious, such as whether the expectations held for the facility have been realised, a number of quotations is included to illustrate the range of views held.

**Table 7.2 The case study sample**

	<b>Study 1. Castletown Nova Leisure Centre*</b>	<b>Study 2. Bardsey Plaza Leisure Centre</b>	<b>Study 3. Dales Leisure Centre</b>	<b>Study 4. Riton Leisure Pool</b>
Centre opened	1991	1989	1991	1997
Capital cost	£11.8 million	£15 million	£2.8 million	£7 million
Political control**	Labour	Labour	Conservative	NOC***
Interview schedule	Leisure Services Client Officer  Director of Leisure Services  Leader of the Council	Former Principal Recreation Officer  Former Deputy Director of Leisure and Amenities  Chair Leisure and Amenities Committee	Leisure Services Contracts Manager  Leisure Services Officer  Chair Leisure Services Committee	Leisure Services Contracts Manager  Council Marketing Officer  Chair Leisure Services Committee

Note\*. In addition to the interviewees listed above, the exploratory study described in Chapter Five included interviews with a former Labour Leader of the Council and a former Principal Recreation

Officer for Castletown. Material from these interviews and other data gathered during the exploratory study has been used in the case notes.

Note\*\*. Denotes political control when the decision to build was taken.

Note\*\*\* No overall control. No single party had an overall majority. The Liberal Democrats were the largest single party and held the Chair of the Leisure Committee.

#### **7.4 Study 1: Castletown Nova Leisure Centre**

Castletown District Council is a densely populated city authority of 102,000 residents covering a mere 2,900 hectares. The historic core of the city, with more than 850 listed buildings, is a major tourism destination. Employment in transport and confectionery manufacture, once the economic foundation of the city, is in long term decline. The service sector, and science and technology, grew rapidly in the 1980s as a number of firms relocated here from London and the south-east. The relative diversity of the local economy and the growth of new industry has kept unemployment in Castletown below the national and regional average.

Party political control of the city council is finely balanced and shifted between Labour and Conservative three times between 1974 and 1985. When the decision to build the Castletown Nova Leisure Centre was made in 1987 Labour had a majority of six over Conservatives and Liberals in a council of 45 members. The planning process for the Leisure Centre can be traced back to 1972 when the old central baths were closed. The then Labour council responded in a manner that was, for the time, orthodox, by proposing that a replacement swimming baths be built, and that a second phase of the development should include 'dry' sports facilities. The case was supported by a local Sports Advisory Council survey and report that showed strong support amongst sports clubs for increased public indoor recreation provision. The scheme, costed at £356,000, was scheduled to start in 1973 or 1974.

In 1973, when work on the 'wet' part of the new centre was underway, the Conservatives took control of the council. The first meeting of the new council's Recreation Committee confirmed the Conservative intention to proceed with the 'dry' phase of the project but concern was expressed that the estimated cost for this part of the development had risen to £845,000. The swimming pool was completed in 1976, but, six months after it opened, the contract for phase 2 of the project was cancelled (incurring penalties and costs of £40,000) because of budget problems associated with the 'present financial climate'. It seems

likely that had central government not acted to limit municipal spending, the scheme would have become another example of the 1970s cycle of expansion. The City's Labour Party responded to the loss of the project by making provision of a multi-sports centre a manifesto commitment.

It is a disgrace that a city the size of Castletown has no multi-sports centre.

(Castletown Labour Party municipal election manifesto, 1979)

Leisure policy in Castletown had, by now, become a party political issue and subsequently the Labour Party raised the question of Castletown's lack of public indoor recreation facilities at every opportunity. In 1981 the Conservatives agreed to conduct a survey of sport and recreation facilities in the city and to present proposals for the development of such services. The subsequent report reiterated the key findings of earlier studies. Sports Council provision formulae demonstrated that the city had a serious shortage of 'dry' sports facilities and there was evidence of unmet need. A number of loosely costed policy options were listed, which ranged from the provision of a sports centre (estimated cost £0.75 to £1.0 million) to the organised use of territorial army drill halls for public recreation. The most tangible outcome of the report was the appointment of a Director of Leisure Services and the formation of a unitary Leisure Services Department. The director's first report to the Leisure Services Committee in 1984 was cautious and only developed options around the existing strategy of improving second and third tier provision at district and community level. The ruling Conservative group remained opposed to any large, central sport or leisure facility on the grounds of high capital and running costs. In 1986 Labour took control of the council and gave the matter of a leisure centre high priority.

There was a feeling that we wanted to set our mark on the city. The then Chairman of Leisure was really quite keen to have a physical manifestation of us being back in control and having achieved something.

(Leader of the Council, Interview 1993)

The incoming administration could simply have re-activated the 1974 plans for a multi-sports centre but a number of factors apparently operated to inflate the project. Since plans for the original scheme were laid, prevailing ideas within professional circles about the design concept of the large centre had moved on. In the programme of visits that were undertaken between 1986 and 1987 officers and members became aware of the latest developments such as the move away from the blind box format towards an

aesthetic, but more complex and costly design concept. Government restrictions on municipal capital spending made the option of a 'planning gain' strategy to fund the scheme attractive.

We intended to sell off some assets and use the capital receipts. Now that actually worked brilliantly. We expected something like £4.5 million but ended up getting £16. million. Capital for the scheme was not really a problem.

(Leader of the Council, Interview 1993)

It was now possible to go beyond the scope of the original plan for a large but essentially functional building and to create an extraordinary facility.

They (the Labour Party), wanted a major civic building and that is what they got.

(Leisure Services Client Officer, Interview 1993)

Given that capital was no longer a problem the council could have opted for a 'new style' leisure centre with a leisure pool and associated features. Two factors seem to have moved the format in a different direction. Since the 1950s, competitive swimming in Castletown had enjoyed popularity and success at international and Olympic level. The city had four pools, one of the only cities in the region to meet Sports Council standards. There was, therefore, no case for additional water space and the addition of a 'purely' fun facility might have been opposed by the influential swimming lobby. There is also evidence that the Director of Leisure and his senior officers promoted a facility concept which had not previously been part of the political or planning framework. Until 1987 the project had been described primarily in terms of making a contribution to the sporting and recreational life of the city, with no mention of a significant arts or entertainment dimension.

His (the Director of Leisure) personal interest was in the arts, so he was keen to see that aspect of the scheme proceed.

(Former Principal Recreation Officer, Interview 1993)

We got into the idea of what I call the 'good night out'. There was the theatre doing its thing and the arts centre, but there wasn't really a lot else and I had lots of people coming to see me about the lack of good arts venues. They complained about why should have they have to go to Sheffield or whatever and I thought that was really important. The classical music people were saying 'we don't really like going to the university and what are you going to do about it'? We took the members to a number of buildings, where with retractable seating, in a sports context, you could achieve flexibility of use. Now they loved that. They thought that was wonderful. I pointed out the shortcomings and said I would like to use those buildings as a point of departure rather than something to emulate.

(Director of Leisure Services, Interview 1993)

The director won his case and the project brief was amended to include provision for a flexible main auditorium seating 1,500 people and a single court sports hall. The centre was to be attached to the Nova Baths, the site of the proposed 1974 multi-sports centre. The leading leisure architects the JB Partnership were appointed to design and manage the implementation of the project. Consulting architects are usually employed at an earlier stage to 'engineer' the concept and carry out a feasibility study. In the case of the Nova centre, the architects seem to have worked closely to the brief and there is little gap between the Director of Leisure's concept and the facility plan. No formal feasibility study was undertaken by the architect or the authority, other than a schedule of visits by councillors and officers to facilities in other authorities.

Q. - At that particular stage (prior to a decision on what type of provision to make) was any type of marketing research carried out in the city to indicate whether there was demand for this type of facility?

A. - Absolutely none - no.

Q. - Was it ever discussed?

A. - No.

Q. - Why do you think that was?

A. - That is not the way local authorities make their decisions, because at the end of the day these decisions are political.

(Former Principal Recreation Officer, Interview 1993)

The Conservative opposition was not prepared to accept the project as a *fait accompli* and used any delay or problem associated with building work and news of a cost over-run to attack the scheme as an example of Labour profligacy. The question of expectations or externalities was clearly of importance in the acrimonious debate that spilled from the council chamber into the local media. The Labour case for the project was based on the idea of meeting the leisure needs of all Castletown's residents in a flexible and cost effective manner.

It was a three track approach. In addition to sport and entertainment we also wanted to encourage community use in the form of mothers' groups, pensioners' groups etc.

(Leader of the Council, Interview 1993)

Other than the objective of wanting the centre to have broad appeal, there seems (at the planning stage) to have been no wider agenda of externalities such as economic development or targeted social welfare provision.

Tourism comes second, a bad second. It (the centre) was built for people from Castletown.

(Former Leader of the Council, Interview 1993)

We don't need a flagship to prove that Castletown is a good place to invest in.

(Leader of the Council, Interview 1993)

To the best of my knowledge the question of providing recreation services for the disadvantaged in the hope of affecting such things as vandalism and crime was not discussed.

(Leisure Services Client Officer, Interview 1993)

The centre opened late and around £3.0 million over budget. Worse was to come and, after nine months of operation, the first manager of the facility left amidst allegations that the centre was not performing to plan or budget. As part of the run up to CCT, operational control of the facility was transferred from the Leisure Services Department to the council's Direct Services Organisation to give it 'sharper commercial focus' (Leader of the Council, Interview 1993).

The 'three centres in one' strategy catering for arts, sports and community use was a bold goal that had not been achieved elsewhere. Centres such as the Sands in Carlisle and the Lakeland in Cumbria had run an entertainments programme in their main sports hall, but were essentially traditional sports centres with an entertainments dimension. There was broad agreement amongst those interviewed that short term results have been disappointing.

We were losing significant amounts of money on the entertainments programme. The sports programme wasn't bringing in the type of money that was hoped for.

(Leisure Services Client Officer, Interview 1993)

The failure to achieve expected numbers and revenue in the short term was put down to management problems. By 1993-1994 the arts and entertainments programme was increasing in popularity but still losing money. As late as the start of the second year of operation, no systematic work had been undertaken to profile users, non users and their preferences. This issue is now being addressed as a CCT contractual requirement. There are, however, more fundamental issues that have not been resolved, at the time of writing.

The issue is that of triple use, it's not actually working. It works as an entertainment centre, there's no doubt about that..... the leisure side of things has not worked very well...we are not getting the punters through the door. Our evidence confirms national evidence that the (social class) As and Bs are much heavier users and we don't really get through to the vast bulk of the population.

(Leader of the Council, Interview 1993)

Retrospective views of the project produced an interesting range of opinion:

People are saying to me now that we have got more opportunities in this small city than in London. I think it was a good decision at the end of the day. As time goes on the public will come to love it more and more.

(Leisure Services Client Officer, Interview 1993)

Quite definitely no regrets - I wish we had done it earlier.

(Former Leader of the Council, Interview 1993)

I would have spent it (the capital sum) on a whole range of smaller schemes - more dual use and joint use provision, synthetic pitches, uprating play areas, improvements to parks - there are in fact a million and one things you could have spent the money on which would have had more overall benefit to the life of the city than one building.

(Former Principal Recreation Officer, Interview 1993)

Whether we should have done it in terms of the way we did it - the dual use - I'm very very doubtful. I think that's been a mistake.

(Leader of the Council, Interview 1993)

#### **7.4.1 Reflections on the first case study**

The first study has allowed a key research issue to be addressed, namely whether the case study method is an appropriate means of investigating the complex phenomenon of the contemporary leisure centre.

The approach adopted in case study one was built around a foundation of desk research on the

municipality, its past leisure policies and the genesis of the leisure centre project. This material provided invaluable underpinning for the interviews and allowed the interviewer to probe beyond the a basic agenda of what was done, and at what cost, to reach more difficult issues concerning the politics and outcomes of the project and the personal agendas of key players. The construction of a detailed ‘history’ of the project, based on administrative records, enabled the author to establish a common agenda across the interviews and to triangulate responses on key issues. The style of each of the interviews, however, was very different and it became clear that a standard format could neither be imposed nor anticipated. For example, the Director of Leisure Services seemed reluctant to go beyond the purely formal issues influencing provision, despite the use of supplementary and probing questions, whereas the Leader of the Council talked at length on the people as well as the politics involved in the Nova project. Rather than be concerned at these differences in style and content, the author resolved to accept the diversity and value the insights that each interviewee’s approach could offer. The case study method in the form used in Study One, does, on reflection seem to be well suited to the study but that does not mean that changes should not be made in subsequent studies, should the need arise. A measure of flexibility in the use of the interview schedule will clearly be essential, whilst maintaining the goal of gathering comparable data from each interviewee.

### 7.5 Study 2: Bardsey Plaza Leisure Centre

The Bardsey Metropolitan District Council serves 225,000 people in several communities over an area of 33,000 hectares. Bardsey is the largest town in the borough with a population of 103,000. The local economy was based on coal mining but since the late 1970s this sector has been in decline and in 1995 the last pit in the borough closed. The council’s 1986 development strategy forecast a ‘gloomy outlook’ for production industries but foresaw an ‘encouraging future’ for the service industries in general and a particularly strong growth in tourism over the period 1988 to 2001. Since the early 1980s a variety of schemes have been promoted to regenerate areas such as Bardsey, which have been blighted by the loss of traditional industry, including the European Community coal industry ‘Rechar’ project and the UK Government’s Single Regeneration Budget. Despite these measures, unemployment has remained above the national average. In 1993 the economic development unit of the council reported unemployment at 10.6% in the Bardsey travel to work area, compared to the national rate of 7.2%. By 1995 some areas



of the borough had a adult male unemployment rate of over 25%. In 1987, the year in which the decision to build the Plaza was taken, 59 of the 65 Council seats were held by Labour. The first mention of a 'district sports centre' for Bardsey appears in post war council minutes in 1975, a year after the metropolitan borough was created from 14 smaller urban, rural and town councils. A number of these authorities had built recreation facilities such as swimming pools and athletics stadia immediately prior to local government reorganisation in 1974. Bardsey had not, however, made such provision and councillors representing Bardsey wards pressed the case for a significant recreation facility for their area.

There was pressure to improve the sporting facilities. The local District Labour Party had what were called 'manifesto working parties' and through this, the amenities and recreation working party decided that their priority would be a multi-purpose sports centre (for Bardsey).

(Chair of Leisure and Amenities Committee, Interview 1995)

The case for a new centre in Bardsey was strengthened by reports from the City Engineer in 1975 that the Bardsey Baths, built in the 1880s, were in urgent need of major refurbishment or replacement. In 1975 the Sports Council had identified Bardsey as an area deficient in indoor sports provision and with a population of sufficient size to warrant a sub-regional centre with facilities for up to 1,200 spectators. Despite these strong push factors the scheme failed to proceed at that time, due to government curbs on capital spending described elsewhere in the study. In retrospect it seems likely that had the government not imposed a fresh agenda on local authorities through its papers 'Sport and Recreation' (1975) and 'Recreation and Deprivation' (1977) that the Bardsey scheme would have been part of the 1970s and not the 1980s cycle of provision.

Interest in the scheme was revived in 1980 by the direct intervention of the Leader of the Council who instructed the Director of Amenities to organise a visit for councillors to what was then the largest indoor recreation facility in the North of England, the Crowtree Leisure Centre in Sunderland.

In Bardsey we had an extremely strong council leader. If you like the description it would be that he was feudal. There wasn't too much consultation or discussion on this issue, what he wanted he got.

(Former Principal Recreation Officer, Interview 1995)

We visited Crowtree centre in Sunderland. Everyone that we took up from Bardsey said, 'this is a marvellous centre - we have got to have one of these'.

(Chair of Leisure and Amenities Committee, Interview 1995)

The visit was to prove a powerful catalyst and in 1980 a sub-committee of the Recreation and Amenities Committee was established with a brief to consider 'the location for a town centre recreational complex'. The resolution did not consider *whether* but *where* a facility was to be built, thus ruling out any form of feasibility study or public consultation on provision options. There is no record of any formal opposition to the project, but there was apparently heated discussion within the Labour group as to whether the scheme should be given priority at a time when municipal budgets were coming under pressure from the newly-elected Conservative government.

The argument centred on, and in my view with some justification, whether the money could be better spent on issues relating to housing, social services and education. However, we saw that in general that recreation facilities within the borough were declining.

(Former Principal Recreation Officer, Interview 1995)

The minutes of the sub-committee offer little insight into possible reasons for the strategic drift which moved the project from the original plan for a 'multi sports centre' (costing around £1.1 million at mid 1970s prices) to the final scheme costing £15 million in 1989. Unlike the Herringthorpe scheme which employed the services of external consultants to design the facility, the council's own architects managed the Plaza project and as such were working to a brief that envisaged a major project before they became involved. The interviews offer a number of possible explanations. Over one third of the capital required to build the Plaza was obtained in a 'planning gain' agreement with a national supermarket chain in exchange for a tract of development land near the centre of Bardsey. This 'windfall' gain may have encouraged a more ambitious approach to the project than if the impact of the whole capital sum had fallen on the ratepayers of Bardsey.

The biggest problem my colleagues had was the fear of being saddled with debt charges. If we could build the centre and cover most of the capital cost, that burden wasn't there and some of the opposition to the scheme would dissolve.

(Chair of Leisure and Amenities Committee, Interview 1995)

Analysis of earlier cycles of facility provision suggested that a wish to enhance municipal pride by providing a noteworthy building may have been a factor influencing the decision to build. There is some evidence that in the case of the Plaza this was linked to a perceived need to change the image of the borough as part of its strategy to attract inward investment.

It (Bardsey) has this music hall image it shares with Goole and Scunthorpe. A lot of councillors took offence and they decided they would try to do something about it. We had original plans to replace the old Bardsey Baths but these were inflated due to civic pride and the wish to match the Doncaster Dome.

(Former Principal Recreation Officer, Interview 1994)

It had a lot to do with city pride. It had a lot to do with the aspirations of a very charismatic person who was leader of the town council. It also had perspectives to do with the persona that Bardsey gave out to the rest of the United Kingdom - the image question. It was also part of the economic revival. The idea was certainly to attract industry to appeal to people to invest industry in Bardsey.

(Former Deputy Director of Leisure and Amenities, Interview 1995)

The minutes of the Plaza sub-committee advance a formal case for the project in terms of the need to replace the old Bardsey Baths and the concept of unmet recreational need (an outcome of the Sports Council's designation of Bardsey in 1975 and 1981 as an area of recreational deprivation).

The design of the Plaza combines elements of a traditional Sports Council multi-sports centre with a number of 'leisure' features. For example, the swimming area was designed to cater for the needs of both leisure and competitive swimmers by the inclusion of three separate pools in the main 'wet' area. Similarly the main 'dry' area, a two court, blind box sports hall, is typical of the 1970s sports centre design ethos, but ancillary services include a snooker area, a climbing room, a dance studio and a women's hairdressing salon. In addition to the usual fast food and vending services associated with a traditional sports centre, the Plaza also has a 50 cover restaurant.

No feasibility study for the project was undertaken, other than visits by councillors and officers to other facilities and a number of budget building exercises, once the outline decision to proceed had been taken. No alternatives to the large centre format such as a decentralised community recreation strategy were given formal consideration. The decision to build was taken within the Labour group and passed to the Leisure and Amenity Committee sub-committee for implementation. The lack of a feasibility study and

the virtual absence of party politics in Bardsey strips the formal record of the Plaza project of detailed reference to, and discussion of, any agenda of externalities that were expected of the facility. The interviews suggest, however, that a clear agenda for the Plaza was held by Councillors and Officers alike.

At that time there was a lot of youth unemployment. It is far better for young people to be in a sports centre doing something positive than to be out on the street. My philosophy as Chairman was that we were going to keep charges as low as possible because I wanted every child in Bardsey to learn to swim, enjoy themselves and get fit to promote health.

(Chair of Leisure and Amenities Committee, Interview 1995)

It was part of the inducement to get new industries to come, in having better facilities in the community to encourage those who manage these things, to relocate.

(Former Principal Recreation Officer, Interview 1995)

On all the predictions that we did at the time it was forecast that the centre would break even, in terms of its revenue costs.

(Former Deputy Director of Leisure and Amenities, Interview 1995)

Of the expectations listed above, the forecast of a break even budget is the most remarkable. National studies (Audit Commission, 1989) and Bardsey's own experience of running its other leisure facilities with a strong social welfare ethos suggest that it is extremely difficult to balance the revenue budget for a public recreation facility, whilst maintaining low prices, long opening hours and open access. There was an expectation that the Plaza could achieve break even through its secondary services, such as the bar, restaurant and hairdressing salon, generating significant profit that could be used to cross subsidise key parts of the programme such as swimming for young people, families and the unemployed.

It is not a central purpose of this study to attempt to quantify any gap between plan, expectation and performance, other than to ask interviewees for their view of that issue and for any evidence that the facility has met its planned objectives. The research has been conducted in and around leisure facilities dominated by a 'contract culture' where performance data are closely guarded secrets. Despite this, interviewees were prepared to talk in general terms about the two key elements of performance, usage and revenue.

In the first year it (the Plaza) was exceedingly well used and everybody was very pleased with the way things were going. Now that we have gone through that period and the novelty has worn off numbers are starting to decline. The dry side is doing exceptionally well but the wet side is starting to decline.

(Former Principal Recreation Officer, Interview 1995)

The decline in numbers, and its consequent effect on the revenue budget, may explain why interviewees were reluctant to comment on whether the forecast break even budget had been achieved.

Q - In reality has the Plaza broken even on its revenue budget?

A - It is difficult for me to comment on that. I am not quite sure of the figures.

(Chair of Leisure and Amenities Committee, Interview 1995)

All three interviewees agreed that the Plaza was planned on the assumption that if charges for use were kept to a bare minimum, then not only would the social welfare objectives of the facility be met, but income would be maximised over time through intensive use and a significant secondary spend. Equally there was a clear consensus that many of the social welfare objectives originally planned for the centre had not been achieved, due to pressure on local government from the centre, to reduce spending.

I think it all got very confused with competitive tendering and with other environmental and economic factors which started to eat away at the philosophical base on which the building was provided. Things became totally money oriented, totally focused on the bottom line.

(Former Deputy Director of Leisure and Amenities, Interview 1995)

We have had to make very hard choices. You know, we have to choose between home helps, teachers and financial support for the Plaza. That wasn't the situation in the mid 1980s.

(Chair Leisure and Amenities Committee, Interview 1995)

It was felt that the Plaza had made a contribution to forming a more positive image of Bardsey and had assisted in the process of economic regeneration. However, no attempt has been made by the management of the facility or the authority to quantify the economic or social impact of the Plaza, even at the level of calculating the number of visits to the facility from outside the borough and the associated revenue flow. Similarly, the authority has conducted no research on the impact of the Plaza on other parts of the recreation service in Bardsey. For example, it would have been interesting to know whether the Plaza created a multiplier effect to increase participation rates at other facilities, or conversely whether the Plaza had operated to draw users and resources away from other centres.

At the time of writing the council is undertaking a major capital investment programme in new features for the leisure pool to reverse the major decline in attendance by children and young people. A retrospective view of the project reveals an interesting range of opinion:

It certainly did something for the people of Bardsey. Local people when they came to see the building said, 'look - this is ours' and felt an overwhelming sense of pride.

(Former Deputy Director of Leisure and Amenities, Interview 1995)

I think on balance I would much rather have favoured a better spread of district and community facilities. By doing that we could have accommodated the needs of many more people.

(Former Principal Recreation Officer, Interview 1995)

### **7.6 Study 3: The Dales Leisure Centre**

The Harpur District Council is a predominantly rural authority covering 131,000 hectares but with a population of only 78,000. Amble, the largest town in the district, has 18,000 residents. There are three other market towns with a population of over 5,000. The market towns in the north and east of the district are popular with commuters to a nearby industrial area. Property prices in Amble are well above the regional average and the mid-1980s unemployment stood at around 5%, well below the national and regional average. Although only 13% of the population of working age is employed in agriculture and related industry, this sector is important in terms of wealth creation and its ability to contribute to the growth of the service sector. There is little manufacturing industry in the district but since the 1970s tourism has grown rapidly, assisted by the area's association with a popular television series. Between 1984 and 1987 employment in tourism grew by 66%.

When the decision to build the Dales Centre was made, the Conservatives were the largest single party on the council but did not have an absolute majority over independents and councillors representing no party or grouping. In practice, however, most 'independent' members tend to vote solidly with the Conservative group on all but matters of ward interest. In 1987, in a council of 50 members, the Labour and Liberal parties held only four seats.

Prior to 1987 the politics of leisure policy in Harpur District Council were dictated largely by its size. The three market towns are 13, 10 and 8 miles from Amble. Previous policy was based around the provision of second and third tier recreation facilities in each centre of population. Thus Amble and two of the market towns had small swimming pools and the third a community centre. This approach, an outcome of 'turf' politics, described elsewhere in the study, established a notional 'sharing out' of facilities across the district.

The planning cycle for the Dales Leisure Centre started in 1985 when it became clear that the old swimming pool in Amble was in such a poor state of repair that its future was in doubt. It would have been consistent with the council's previous policy of community based provision to replace the pool with a modern facility of conventional design to serve the local area of Amble. There was, however, a growing awareness that other municipalities were giving leisure policy and provision higher priority.

It seemed to be the way swimming was progressing. The leisure concept was growing in popularity.

(Chair of Leisure Services Committee, Interview 1994)

They (the council) made a conscious decision to invest in leisure.... I think because the councillors felt that they were being left behind by other places who were in front of us as a council.

(Leisure Services Officer, Interview 1994)

The growing importance of tourism for the local economy was to be a key factor in opening the planning process to the option of a large leisure facility.

The council's aims in providing the leisure pool were threefold. Firstly, to meet the needs of the local population. Secondly, to attract day visitors to the town and thirdly, and at the time this area was being heavily marketed as '-----' country, so the third aim was to attract tourists.

(Leisure Services Contract Manager, Interview 1994)

Given that the authority had no designated leisure officer until 1987, or experience of running a modern facility, the option of a large leisure pool was a bold and potentially risky one for a small rural local authority to consider. The first step in the decision making process was a schedule of visits to other centres to gather information. A group of up to twenty members and officers from Harpur council visited

six leisure facilities with the aim of checking the viability of existing projects, primarily in terms of their popularity and the associated revenue deficit required to run a large centre.

It (the question of viability) was of great concern to us. We have, as you know, a very widespread district and were doubtful whether it could be viable.

(Chair of Leisure Services Committee, Interview 1994)

It is difficult to judge what use the visits were in addressing the question of the viability of a centre in a rural setting, as five of the six visits were to facilities in urban locations. However, the project was clearly gathering momentum and in 1987 the leisure architects the JB Partnership were appointed to carry out a feasibility study. Although this feasibility study was primarily concerned with the proposal to build a leisure pool, the scheme concept envisaged a two stage development with a single court sports hall added to the 'wet' facility at a later date. Prior to their appointment, the architects had completed eight large leisure centres and had another nine under construction. The firm therefore had unrivalled access to planning and operational data but, in essence, were being employed to advise a client on whether they needed a large leisure facility, that they, as architects, had had an interest in designing. It is easy to see why during the course of the study the author has encountered a degree of scepticism as to the role the leisure architect might play as project 'boosters'. This had been a key factor in Bardsey's decision (Study 2) not to use a consultant architect.

The leader of the council was aware of the situation that was operating up and down the country - you pick things up. I mean we could have gone to a consulting architect, but what would we have fetched up with. Not a centre designed for the people of Bardsey, but one they adapted from another design.

(Chair of Leisure and Amenities Committee Bardsey Council, Interview 1994)

The feasibility study for the Dales Leisure Centre drew heavily on data published by the Sports Council on the usage patterns of the early leisure pools at a time when these facilities were few in number and possessed considerable novelty value (Sports Council, 1979). The research showed that leisure pools had a wide sphere of influence and were able to enlarge the market for swimming. Performance data drawn from other facilities designed by JB showed income recovery ratios, a public sector 'industry standard' of operational efficiency (Audit Commission, 1989), ranging from 40% to 82% (at a recovery rate of 100% a facility breaks even). The architects were asked to model the performance and budget of a centre

in Amble. The estimated attendance of 160,000 in the first year produced an operating deficit of £200,000, and a recovery ratio of 46%. The estimate was based on the assumption that no other facilities would be built within the centre's sphere of influence in the near future and that prices would not be significantly greater than those at the council's old pools. The model was subject to sensitivity analysis by the council's officers, who made minor adjustments but accepted the core logic of the architects' case, that a pool would attract a relatively large attendance for a rural location, but would require a significant level of subsidy.

Attitudes towards pricing, subsidy and leisure as part of social welfare provision in this relatively prosperous, Conservative area are interesting and, at times, contradictory.

It (the question of social welfare provision) figured in the debate, but we're a Conservative council and the prime motive was economic development and ensuring that we got usage and thereby income to reduce revenue costs. The social element came next.

(Leisure Services Officer, Interview 1994)

I think we never deluded ourselves that this development would pay for itself. The need to provide facilities for youth. Yes, that was a major factor in our thinking. It was very much with youth in mind that we went down this road.

(Chair of Leisure Services Committee, Interview 1994)

The feasibility study included consultation with sporting and community groups over their likely use of a leisure facility, but no attempt was made to sample or measure the attitudes and preferences of the general public whom, it was forecast, would be the main users of the new centre.

The project was to be funded from three sources. The council had built a sizeable reserve fund to ensure that 'any recreational scheme of district significance could be financed without resort to borrowing' (Leisure Services Committee minutes, 1985). A capital grant was received from Yorkshire and Humberside Tourist Board for the leisure pool. The dry sports facilities were to be paid for through a dual use agreement with the County Council and a Sports Council capital grant. This cautious approach to funding limited capital spending on the project to around £3.0 million but was designed to head off any internal or public criticism that the authority was loading itself with debt charges.

Given the previous community based approach to recreation, opposition to the project might have been expected from councillors and residents in parts of the authority furthest from Amble. However, local media and council records show no organised opposition to the scheme other than by local swimming clubs, who feared that they might not be able to use the leisure pool for training and competition.

Inevitably in a large authority like this you are going to get some parochialism. Whenever I hear the leisure pool mentioned in ----- (one of the market towns), it's mentioned in terms of 'well it's in Amble and it's miles away from here', but they still recognise its serving a great need and people do in fact travel from those areas (to use the facility).

(Leisure Services Officer, Interview 1994)

It may be that the relatively high level of car ownership in the area and the perceived novelty of the facility limited opposition (data produced by the Harpur District Council Economic Development Unit showed 74% of households had one or more motor cars in 1981 compared to a national figure of 52%). The progress from feasibility study to construction was unremarkable. The JB partnership was awarded the contract to design and manage the construction of the project. The building was finished on time and to budget. The leisure pool, the core of the facility, has features such as a wave maker, but also includes a 25 metre 'straight' to allow swimming training to take place. The key expectations held for the facility were that it would be genuinely popular with the people of Harpur, and would prove an attraction for visitors from neighbouring authorities and tourists. The feasibility study had predicted between 120,000 and 160,000 customer visits in the first year of operation. The actual attendance was 260,000 which, in turn, reduced the revenue deficit by around £20,000. It is difficult to explain why the consultant architect 'undersold' the project. Other studies undertaken by the firm in Yorkshire and Humberside to which the author has had access appear to have overestimated the likely attendance in year one of operation. It may be that the quality of management employed at the Dales centre and a relatively generous marketing budget stimulated the extra use, but these issues are beyond the scope of the study. It may also be that many of the additional 100,000 customers were tourists, but neither the management of the facility or the economic development section of the authority have undertaken studies to discover the extent to which the Dales centre has indeed proved to be the tourism attraction it was intended to be. Similarly, no effort seems to have been made to establish whether the facility is meeting the objective of engaging the

'hearts and minds' of the young people of the district and inducing them to take part in healthful recreation.

In common with all leisure facilities examined in the study, attendance figures declined in the second year of operation as the 'honeymoon' effect wore off. By the start of year three the 'dry' phase of the scheme was complete and running as a dual use centre. At the time of writing usage has stabilised, but the Dales centre is likely to suffer from the opening of the Riton Leisure Pool (Study 4) which is 23 miles away from Amble, but only 11 and 15 miles from two of the market towns. The crucial assumption in the feasibility study, that no new facilities would intrude into the Dales catchment area, proved to be flawed.

The Dales case study shows an interesting pattern of coincidence with that of the Barsdey Plaza. The dominance of one political party ensured a degree of consensus that the scheme was in the general interests of the municipality and that this feeling overcame any parochialism.

In general here it's been a political consensus that the leisure centre is a good thing. Politically our members are very pleased with how it's turned out.

(Leisure Services Officer, Interview 1994)

The authority attempted to conduct a systematic feasibility study, but the study reveals a number of flaws in its design. Despite this, the Dales centre seems to have performed well in the short term. This factor no doubt influenced interviewees' retrospective views of the project, which were that the scheme had been well conceived and executed.

We get occasional comments referring to 'that white elephant', but what I say is that if you have a white elephant that's used by 200,000 people it must be a fairly popular white elephant.

(Chair Leisure Services Committee, Interview 1994)

### 7.7 Study 4: Riton Leisure Pool

The Riton District Council area lies immediately to the north of Castletown (Study 1) and shares a boundary with Harpur District Council (Study 3) in the west. The authority covers nearly 600 square miles (160,000 hectares) but in 1991 had a population of only 90,000. The district is made up of three distinct areas. The majority of the northern part of the district lies within a National Park and is very sparsely populated. The administrative headquarters of the authority are situated in the central area, in Darton, the largest town (population 17,200). There are three other market towns in the central area, each with populations of between 5,000 and 9,000. The southern part of the district which adjoins Castletown has seen a rapid growth of population over the last ten years, as three small villages expanded to become commuter towns.

The economies of the three areas are also quite distinct. The north, once a typical hill farming area, has become increasingly dependent on tourism, whereas the central area has a more mixed economy.

Agriculture and associated industries which formerly dominated the work and life of the community are still important, but the main growth in economic activity has come from tourism related development.

The central district has a handful of major visitor attractions and is developing a tourism infrastructure.

The southern area, which is situated around the Castletown ring road, has become a focal point for investment in office parks, light industry, retail and leisure development. Riton prospered in the 1980s as tourism, 'out of town' shopping and leisure activities expanded. In 1991 the overall unemployment rate in Riton was 5% (compared to the national figure 7.6%). Female unemployment stood at 3.8%.

Until the late 1970s Riton District Council was dominated by the Conservatives and councillors representing no party. The growth of the commuter towns in the south of the district in the 1980s led to an increase in support for the Liberal Democrats, who became the largest single party in 1988.

As in the case of Harpur District Council (Study 3), the role of the council as a direct provider of leisure facilities prior to the leisure pool project had been limited. One of the market towns in the central area had a dual use sports centre and modern swimming pool. Darton ( the largest town) had a small modernised pool but no 'dry' facilities. The growth of population in the southern area during the 1980s led to pressure by councillors representing southern wards for better leisure provision for their area. The

rugby club in Castletown had been forced to leave its stadium, which did not meet current safety standards . In 1991 the club moved to a 'greenfield' site in the southern part of Riton to a new purpose built stadium and sports centre it had developed jointly with Riton council. With the addition of the Stadium Sports Centre, the authority had achieved a notional parity of facilities across its main centres of population, but it was still felt that Riton was deficient in sport and leisure facilities, particularly in the southern part of the district.

It really is a question of need. We have recreation facilities, swimming pools in other parts of the local authority and we reckon that in the southern part we were short of this type of facility and our residents, children, school children had either to travel to Castletown or other parts of the authority if they wanted to swim.

(Chair of Leisure Services Committee, Interview 1994)

The case for a 'wet' facility in southern Riton was strengthened by Castletown's introduction of higher charges for non-residents using its leisure services. This measure had a direct effect on the residents of the southern commuter towns who tended to travel into Castletown to use leisure facilities rather than to Darton or the market towns in the central area of Riton. The population of the southern commuter towns met the Sports Council's planning formula threshold for a small swimming pool. It would have been consistent with the authority's approach to district based provision, outlined in its 1990 leisure strategy, to have built a conventional 25 metre swimming pool, perhaps as an addition to the Stadium Sports Centre. A facility of this type would have cost around £1.5 million (at 1993 prices). The Riton District Council opted instead for a £6.0 million leisure pool with 'state of the art' features including a 'lagoon' wave pool, 'lazy river ride', spa and ancillary pool with an adjustable floor.

The study has explored a number of possible explanations for 'strategic drift', including a wish to use leisure as a tool to assist the economic development plans of the authority or to enhance the image of an area to promote tourism. In the case of Riton neither of these factors seems to have been of significance.

Q. - So it [the facility] isn't linked to the economic development strategy of the authority?

A. - Only loosely. Not with any degree of significance. No not really.

(Head of Marketing, Interview 1994)

Its difficult to answer that really [the role the new centre might play in the development of tourism] because the facility is on the southern edge of the authority and Riton's tourism is built on the green concept that the rural areas to the north represent.

(Chair Leisure Services Committee. Interview 1994)

The study has also suggested that factors such as fashion, a capital 'windfall' and a wish to enhance civic prestige may also influence the decision to build. There is evidence that these factors operated in Riton between 1991 and 1993.

Elected members in Riton were aware of the development of leisure swimming facilities in nearby authorities which led them to ask the question, 'why do we have no similar facility in Riton'?

(Leisure Services Contract Manager, Interview 1994)

People aren't interested in just going to an old fashioned rectangular facility. ... People want something different now, they want a more leisured facility and this will be attractive to young people, in fact all sorts of people, families and other types of people.

(Chair of Leisure Services Committee, Interview 1994)

In 1991 the Riton District Council sold its entire council housing stock to a housing association and the capital sum from the sale was distributed amongst the council's spending committees. The Leisure Services Committee's share of the proceeds was around £8.0 million. The committee drew up a list of spending options that far exceeded the capital available, including a sports centre for the central area and a leisure pool in the south. It was resolved 'that before any scheme proceeds, consultants be employed to conduct a feasibility study to ensure that there is a demand for these schemes' and that 'schemes must be based on public consultation' (Leisure Services Committee, 1991). As far as can be determined from the minutes and interviews, the only feasibility study carried out was that by the JB Partnership for the leisure pool project. It appears that no public consultation on any of the options open to the council was undertaken.

Q. - Did the initiative to provide a leisure pool come from the community?

A. - In so far as it came from members, yes. The members see themselves as the touchstone of people's desires and aspirations.

(Head of Marketing, Interview 1994)

In 1993 the Local Government Review published draft proposals for the reorganisation of local government. A number of new unitary authorities were to be created which would involve the re-

drawing of municipal boundaries. Riton and Castletown were both affected by the proposals. Castletown would become a unitary authority and take over the administration of the southern part of Riton, including the Stadium Sports Centre, the site of the proposed leisure pool. The Leisure Services Committee was faced with two options: to delay the project until the outcome of the review was known and then locate the facility inside the new Riton boundary; or to proceed in the knowledge that the leisure pool might have to be ceded to Castletown on the formation of the new authority. The committee resolved to proceed with the scheme on the stadium site.

We identified there was a need for this type of facility in the southern part of the authority and we intended to proceed.

(Chair of Leisure Services Committee, Interview 1994)

It is possible, however, to interpret the decision in a different way. Councillors representing wards in the southern commuter towns would be required to stand for re-election to the new 'Greater Castletown' authority after reorganisation. This group of councillors, most of whom are Liberal Democrats, would join other members of their party already serving on the council and inevitably there would be a struggle for key seats and positions within the new structure.

Some councillors representing southern Riton council wards wished to leave a tangible reminder of the old authority and hoped to enhance their standing in the new unitary authority

(Leisure Services Contracts Manager, Interview 1994)

If the interpretation outlined above is credible, interesting parallels with the 1974 reorganisation of local government are raised. The proposed facility may have fitted the leisure needs of the 'old' Riton council, but no account was taken of its relevance to the new Castletown unitary authority.

Whichever view of the decision is correct, there seems to have been little opposition to the proposal to proceed to the stage of a feasibility study, which was to be carried out by the JB Partnership. The lack of opposition may be explained by the Leisure Services Committee's 1992 resolution that the proposed facility should have a 'net zero effect on the council's revenue budget' (i.e. that the operation of the facility would require no subsidy). As with the Bardsey Plaza (Study Two), the resolution to proceed on the expectation of a break even budget is remarkable as there are very few examples of large leisure

facilities that run without significant subsidy. The idea arose perhaps from a visit undertaken by members and officers as part of the feasibility process to a commercially run leisure pool on Tyneside. The interviews reveal an attitude to the new development that suggests that whatever was resolved in committee, social welfare expectations were held for the centre which would almost certainly require subsidy.

We want this (the leisure pool) to be very attractive to young people and clearly that might have an effect on crime and vandalism.

(Chair of Leisure Services Committee, Interview 1994)

There is a potential for them (young people) to get up to mischief in the back street areas. What we are doing is giving them something fit and healthy to do that's worthwhile and wholesome.

(Head of Marketing, Interview 1994)

The feasibility study carried out by the JB Partnership examined the broader market for leisure swimming and drew heavily on the experience of projects completed elsewhere by the partnership, including a number visited by the members. The tone of all the studies examined by the author during this study is reminiscent of that undertaken by the Gillinson Partnership in the 1970s for the Herringthorpe centre. Traditional facilities are described as 'institutional'. The modern customer is portrayed as demanding a leisure experience that is 'charismatic', 'thrilling', and 'vibrant'. In addition to a 'concept engineering' role, the study did model the performance of the proposed facility and produced a median estimate of demand of around 350,000 user visits which, given the relatively modest charges proposed, would result in an annual deficit of between £200,000 and £300,000.

The officers and members were clearly unsettled by the report, perhaps by the prospect of the need to subsidise what they hoped would be a self financing initiative. There is also evidence that they had less than complete confidence in their consultants.

Q. - You chose the JB partnership for their expertise?

A. - Yes that's true, their expertise - their marketing expertise as well! They're very adept at pitching themselves in the right spot. But that was recognised and I don't think anyone was fooled by that.

(Head of Marketing, Interview 1994)

Before proceeding with the project the council decided to verify JB's figures and employed the management team from one of the facilities that they had visited (also designed by the JB partnership) to do so. The verification study led to a report that contained a good deal of what seems sound advice on programming and staffing a modern leisure facility. On the key issue of viability, however, the report's authors base their analysis almost entirely on the assumption that the Riton pool will perform in a similar manner to their own, despite differences in the nature of the communities served and the divergent expectations held for the respective facilities. The report did confirm the need for subsidy, but offered the following view: 'The project is likely to be of considerable economic benefit and will greatly enhance the quality of life of Riton residents and can act as a symbol of local pride for the entire district'.

By 1994 the break even objective for the project had changed to acknowledge that, like others of its type, the facility would require significant revenue support.

When we have taken all the different data and research into account we fixed on a figure for subsidy of round about £350,000 a year. We are fairly confident we can achieve that, but having said that we have put confidence limits upon it and we have up to £500,000 a year as an upper limit that we would not be surprised about.

(Head of Marketing, Interview 1994)

The JB Partnership were awarded the contract to design and implement the project. As the facility is not complete at the time of writing, it is not possible to offer a retrospective view of the centre in action.

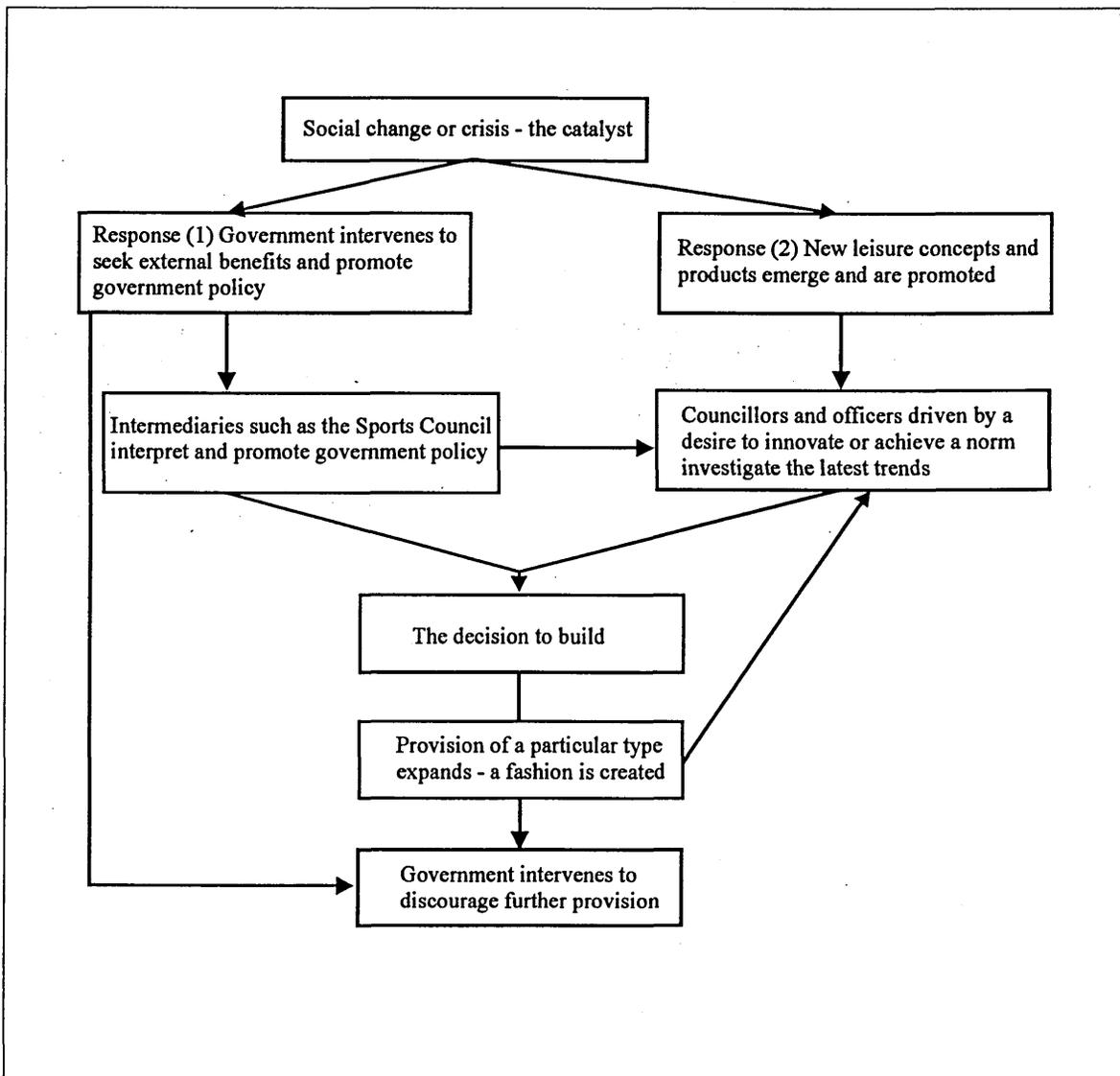
Civic leaders from Riton met to leave their mark on a £6.0 million swimming pool. Councillor - - - Chairman of Riton District Council unveiled a commemorative plaque to mark work on the project by the authority which will it will have to hand over to the new Castletown 'supercouncil' on April 1st. 'The leisure pool will be a fabulous facility for all the family. It's a credit to the designers, the JB Partnership and an exciting leisure facility provided by the foresight of the Riton District Council'.

(Castletown Evening Press, 1996)

The reorganised and much reduced Riton council has revived the plan for a sports centre in Darton, but a lack of funds has forced the authority to conclude that 'the central sports hall is now viewed as a lottery project' (Leisure Services Committee, 1995).

The four case studies have provided a rich account of the events surrounding the planning of the centres and have raised a number of new issues that may be significant. These issues are incorporated into a revised conceptual framework shown below, but detailed analysis of the content of the case studies is not undertaken at this point pending the formulation of a general strategy for data analysis.

**Figure 7.1 A revised conceptual framework for the study incorporating issues to emerge from the case studies of large leisure centres built after 1983**



## Chapter Eight

### Developing a strategy for data analysis

#### 8.1 Introduction

The study has so far used a range of research tools with the aim of creating a 'logical chain of evidence' (Yin, 1989). This concept is founded on a view of the construction of the large leisure centre as a complex social phenomenon that is best studied from a number of linked perspectives, each of which can contribute to the analysis. Each of these elements of the study has contributed in some way towards the formation of the 'chain of evidence' and has suggested a fresh line of enquiry for the next stage of the research. This chapter will discuss problems associated with integrating the evidence and ideas from the different phases of the study and will establish a model for data analysis.

#### 8.2 Data Reduction

According to Miles and Huberman (1994) the analysis of qualitative data consists of three concurrent 'flows of activity': data reduction; data display; and conclusion drawing with verification. Data reduction is the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying and abstracting data gathered in field notes or transcripts, and as such has been part of the research process from its inception. For example, throughout the investigation decisions have been made about 'what to study', and interesting data on such topics as the operational management of large centres, or the history of urban parks, has been put aside as it was felt to be not directly relevant to the research question. The use of simple conceptual frameworks from an early stage of the study has helped to identify and isolate what were felt to be key issues and to illustrate possible relationships between these issues. In keeping with the flexible ethos guiding the study, conceptual frameworks were revised and redrawn after each stage of the research to accommodate new ideas and generate possible explanations. As each chapter was written and re-written in draft form, data reduction also occurred as material was reviewed, critically analysed and often discarded. The data reduction process aims to whittle away what is not relevant to the research question, to identify recurring patterns and themes, and to establish a coherent framework for presenting what remains, as evidence.

There is a danger that the process of selecting 'relevant' evidence could also be used to filter out contradictory data that might make the study more difficult, or challenge the authors' previously held views on the research question. There is no neat or easy answer to this fundamental research issue, other than to show the 'method of working' at each stage to demonstrate to the reader that the research question has been diligently examined from a variety of perspectives and that every effort has been made to validate evidence. Henderson (1991) suggests the use of 'key informants' who are well versed in aspects of the research question but who are not formally connected in any way with the study. Using key informants as 'research collaborators' not only allows key concepts to be tested, but provides a degree of safeguard against bias. Some use has been made of this method during the early stages of the research by making a conscious effort to discuss the progress of the study at each of its stages in development, with academic colleagues, and leisure managers. At a later stage in the research data from a number of confirmatory or 'expert' interviews were also used.

The purpose of data reduction is not only to select relevant material but also to organise it in a meaningful manner and as such the processes of reduction and display occur simultaneously. The use of multiple sources of evidence makes sense in terms of addressing the research question, but generates a mass of data. A simple approach was used to organise the historical and archive data which involved highlighting sections in fieldwork notes and annotating them with a code based on the headings used in the conceptual frameworks, to indicate their relevance to a particular aspect of the study. A similar themed approach was used with interview transcripts. After the highlighting and 'issue coding' process outlined above, potentially interesting sections were 'cut and pasted' to establish patterns of similarity (or dissimilarity) on key issues. For example, each of the fourteen interviewees was asked to what extent prevailing Sports Council policies had influenced their local authority's decision to build. Looking at the range of responses to this single question within and across interview sets allowed a preliminary judgement or inference to be made, that Sports Council policy was at most a background influence or what will be termed a 'legitimizing motive', rather than a major factor.

### 8.3 Data Display

The use of case studies may be regarded as a form of data display in itself, in the sense that the format allows complex data to be assembled and presented in a coherent manner. The method used in the contemporary case series mixes archive and other written data with key interview quotations. The aim once more is to identify patterns over time, to trace links between key events, personalities and actions and to allow different forms of data to be used to support the chain of evidence. The use of multiple cases, each presented in a similar manner, allows data on key conceptual issues to be displayed in tabular form.

Table 8.1 below shows a cross-case analysis of issues emerging from the case notes. Against each of the criteria listed in the left hand column, the facility is judged on the evidence available. In some cases the criteria can be judged as a matter of 'fact'. For example, the formal identification of the need to replace an ageing facility can be traced and confirmed through engineers' and surveyors' reports held in archives, as well as in interview responses. In other areas, such as the role of municipal pride, or a wish to follow fashion, evidence was largely inferred from interview responses and a judgement made on the basis of the pattern of responses across an interview set. If all the interviewees in one case study expressed a particular view, that was regarded as significant, but wherever possible, additional evidence from minutes, records or media reports was also sought to validate the position. Where there was insufficient evidence to come to judgement on an issue, such as for example the role that architects might play in 'selling' a lavish design concept to a local authority, this has not been included in the table, but will be approached later in the study.

**Table 8.1 A cross case analysis of issues arising from the contemporary case studies**

<b>Issues drawn from the conceptual frameworks</b>	<b>Study 1: Bardsey Plaza</b>	<b>Study 2: Castle'tn Nova</b>	<b>Study 3: Dales Centre</b>	<b>Study 4: Riton Pool</b>
<b>Background influences</b>				
The need to replace an old facility.	√*	√	√	x*
Area meets Sports Council definition of need or deprivation.	√	√	√	√
Evidence of municipal pride / prestige and a wish to 'follow fashion'.	√	√	√	√
Evidence of 'strategic drift' from initial proposal.	√	√	x	√
Capital 'windfall'.	√	√	x	√
Political consensus that the project is desirable.	√	x	√	√
<b>Externalities and expectations held for the facility.</b>				
Economic development.	√	x	√	x
Tourism promotion.	√	x	√	x
Improve image of the area.	√	x	x	x
Social welfare expectations such as reduction in crime, vandalism or health promotion.	√	?**	√	√
Revenue break even.	√	x	x	√
<b>The planning process.</b>				
Appoint consultant architect.	x	√	√	√
Carry out a feasibility study that includes local studies, public consultation and an appraisal of alternative formats.	x	x	x	x
Undertake a programme of visits to other facilities.	√	√	√	√
Carry out study of performance of similar facilities elsewhere.	√	√	√	√
<b>Outcomes</b>				
Are Externalities and expectations listed above (other than revenue and gross attendance figures) being monitored.	x	x	x	x

Note\* √ signifies that the issue was confirmed or is felt to have played a significant role. x signifies the reverse.

Note\*\* Opinion was divided between the interviewees, three of whom held that the facility was primarily for 'general public use', and two who suggested that in addition to this objective it was

expected that the facility would offer activities to meet the needs of 'target' groups such as the unemployed, single parents and community groups.

#### **8.4 Drawing conclusions and verification**

It is tempting to regard the contents of Table 8.1 as 'the answer' to the research question and to present it as such. The study has, however, been built around the view that a phenomenon such as the decision to build a leisure centre can only be analysed and understood in the wider context and culture from which the decision emerged and in which it operates. Generating an explanation will thus be a synthesis of elements from the different parts of the study. Each stage of the research has contributed to an understanding of the research question in its own right, but has also been used to shape the next element of the study. Figure 8.1 offers a working model for this process. Each step in the research included the construction of a conceptual framework which was used to illustrate the possible causal relationship between key variables and as a form of 'summary' of findings to be handed on to the next phase of the research. A final conceptual framework which incorporates and integrates those which preceded it could fit well with the model illustrated below and may be useful tool for generating an explanation. The final revision of the framework takes account of wider historical, social and political factors, in addition to data drawn directly from a study of the large centre in its contemporary environment. Figures 8.1 and 8.2 the final conceptual framework and the material on which they are based, will form the basis for the next stage of the study, a discussion of the findings of the research.

**Figure 8.1 A model for integrating evidence from the various elements of the study and generating 'an explanation' of the research question**

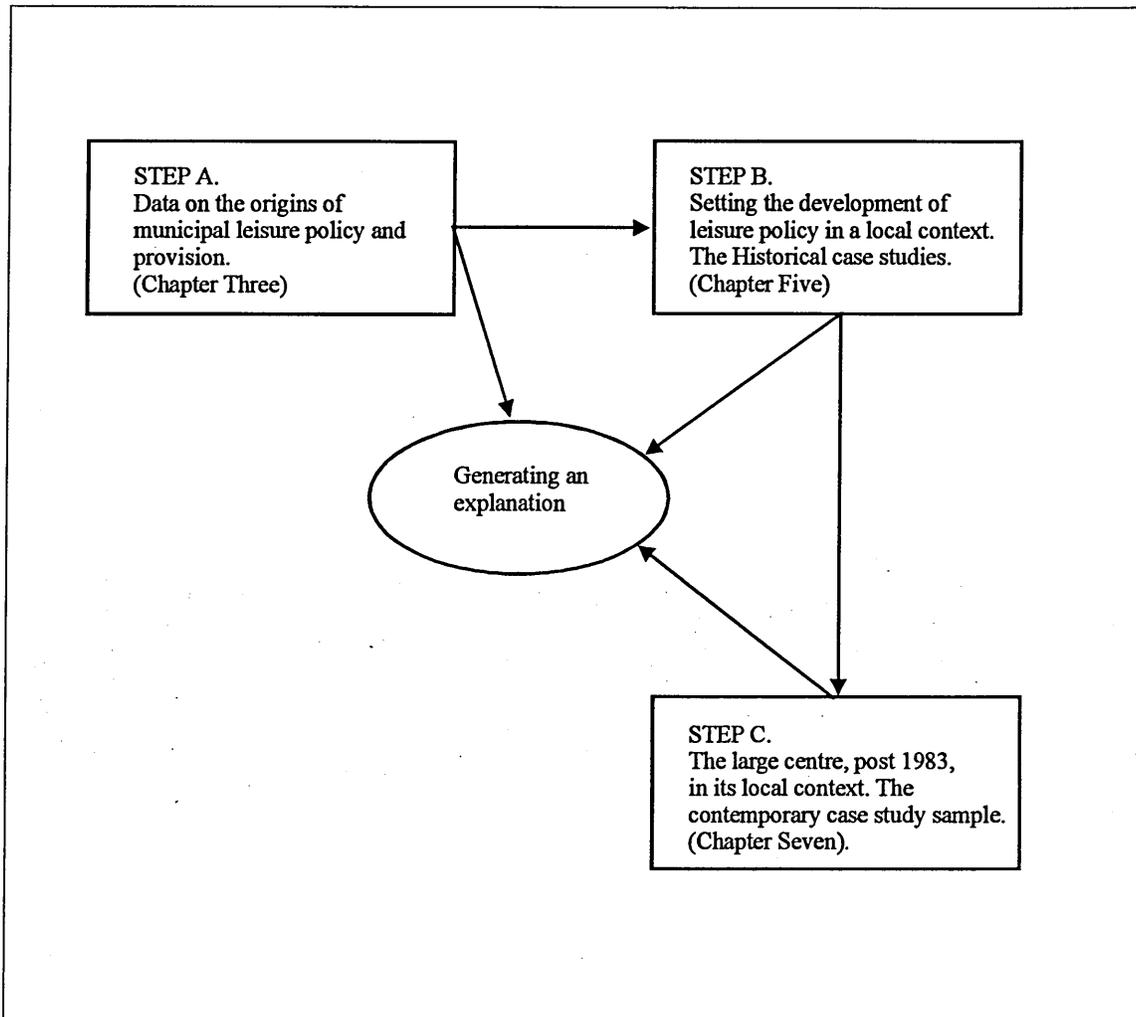
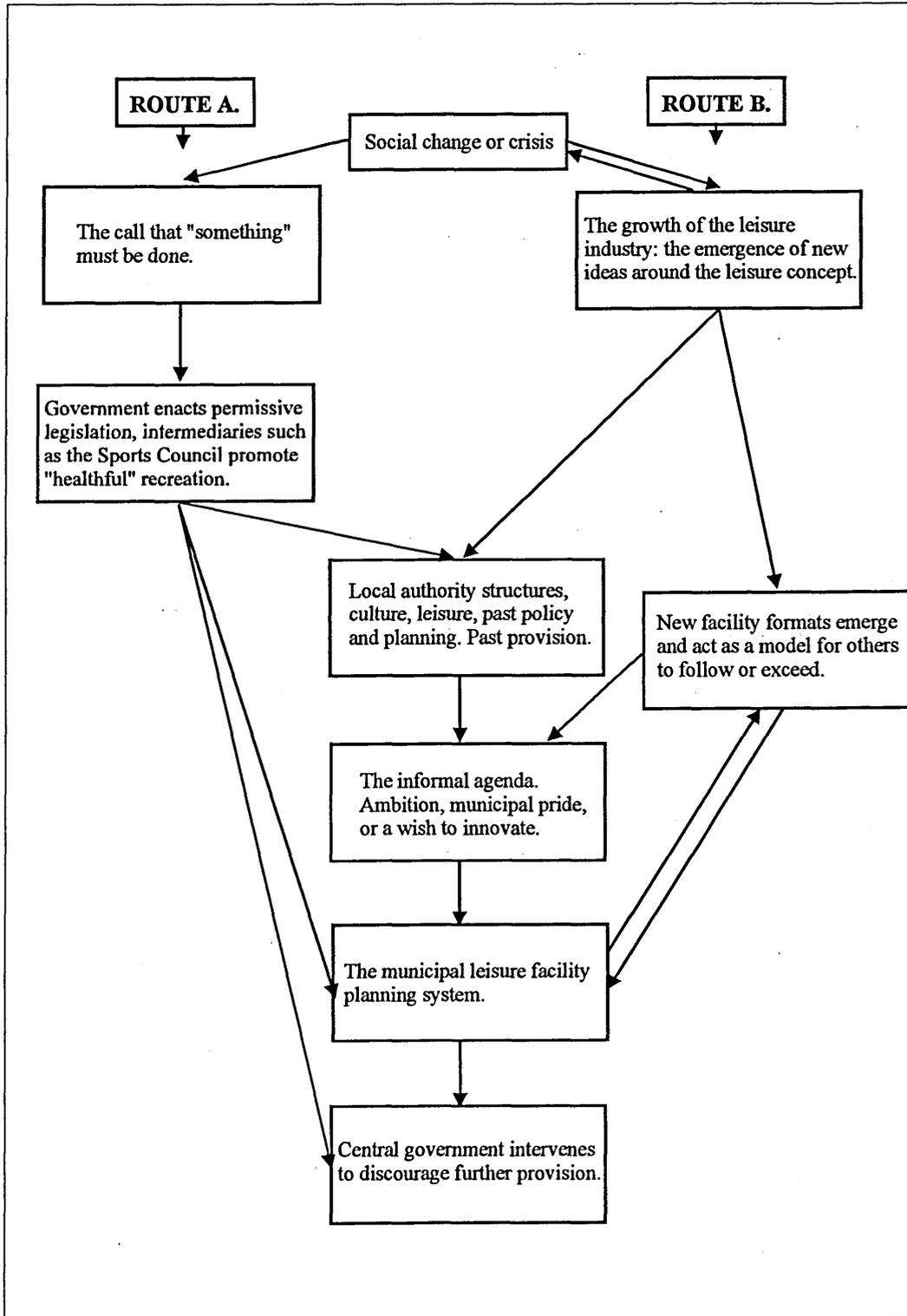


Figure 8.2 A final conceptual framework synthesised from those used elsewhere in the study



### Review and discussion of findings

#### 9.1 Introduction

A critical analysis of the methods employed for each stage of this research has been a recurrent theme within the study. This chapter opens with reflections on the research process before moving on to discuss the underpinning and specific factors that led to the development of large leisure centres between 1983 and 1993. Data from 'expert' or confirmatory interviews are used to clarify a number of issues that are central to the study. The chapter concludes with recommendations for further research in the area of the leisure policy and the large leisure centre.

#### 9.2 Reflections on the research process

Chapter One suggested that the emergence of the large leisure centre between 1983 and 1993 had been a 'silent revolution' in the sense that there seemed to be no specific literature on the subject, other than that of a technical nature. Further study revealed an extensive literature on the politics of local government and leisure policy that had a direct bearing on the research. In addition, a variety of relevant and accessible primary data on the large centre were available. The central problems for the study have been to construct a model for the research that brought together evidence from a range of disparate sources and disciplines and to maintain a clear focus on the research question. The use of historical data provided a suitable underpinning for the study and helped provide a sense of perspective, linking themes between the various dimensions of the research. The use of case studies based on multiple sources of evidence also proved valuable, as it allowed the historical, political and cultural dimensions of the large centre to be studied in a way that helped build a 'chain of evidence' and allowed an explanation to emerge gradually as each stage of the study developed, rather than proceed from a more rigid positivist model based on *a priori* hypotheses.

During the preliminary stages of the research the author discussed the feasibility of the study with a number of informants such as senior Sports Council officers. Their view was that, although the area of study was valid and interesting, the sensitive 'political' nature of the issues involved would make it

difficult to gather meaningful data, particularly in the form of in-depth face to face interviews.

Fortunately this proved not to be the case, as most interviewees were willing to describe and discuss in a frank and open manner their involvement in, and views on, planning their large leisure centre. The status of the author as a former colleague of some of the interviewees may help explain this openness, but this familiarity and the author's previous experience as a manager of large leisure centres also posed dangers for the research in terms of possible bias. Chapter One outlined the impetus for the study which arose from the author's experience of planning and managing large public leisure centres and the impression that many large centre projects were founded on scant evidence of demand or viability. The completion of each stage of the research was followed by a period for reflection, discussion and debate with colleagues and the research supervisory team. This process served a number of purposes, including those of challenging the narrowly impressionistic view held by the author at the start of the study and to reinforce the need to generate explanations, supported by relevant literature and empirical evidence. The development of a number of conceptual frameworks leading towards the formulation of a relatively complex explanatory model suggests that the study has gone significantly beyond the original orienting ideas and that no single factor has dominated the thinking of the author.

### **9.3 Underpinning factors: 'The legacy of 1846'**

Figure 8.2 represents the final revision of a conceptual framework for the study and, as such, offers a structure for introducing and analysing the findings of the research. The study has identified a number of events, themes and issues that have operated over time to involve local authorities in leisure provision and helped shape their policy responses, including those which have been apparently influential during the research period. Since the first Baths and Wash-houses Act of 1846, governments have approached the question of provision for sport and recreation in a somewhat contradictory manner. During times of crisis, unrest or rapid social change such as the 1840s and the 1930s, government policy has often included measures to encourage the construction of facilities for 'healthful recreation', yet legislation designed to achieve this has been largely founded on granting local authorities permissive powers to make whatever provision for sport, recreation and leisure they wished and felt they could afford. When local authorities have chosen to use their permissive powers to go beyond basic provision, as for example happened in the mid- 1970s and after 1983, central government has been quick to introduce measures to

discourage further expansion. Given central government's seeming concern to promote aspects of sport and recreation, one might have expected to find forms of direct involvement, either through central provision or the imposition of a statutory framework of minimum standards on local authorities. Bailey (1979) suggests the reluctance to make sport and recreation a statutory function was a product of the *laissez faire* ideology that dominated late nineteenth century policymaking. It is interesting to note, however, that at no stage during the Edwardian Liberal welfare reforms, or the introduction of a 'welfare state' by the post-war Labour government, was it proposed to treat provision for sport and recreation in the same manner as other social welfare services such as education, housing, social insurance or health care. A few elements of local leisure provision such as public libraries, allotments and parts of the youth service have been accorded statutory status, but the majority, including sport and leisure, the key growth area since the 1970s, have not. It may be that successive governments have formed the view that they had no need to intervene directly in this aspect of social policy, as the construction of sporting and recreational facilities were popular measures that could be accomplished without a statutory framework, through a combination of government exhortation, local demand and municipal initiative.

It was not the central purpose of this study to examine the case for a statutory framework for leisure services; rather, it has been to assess the effects of the absence of such a framework on the provision of large leisure centres constructed between 1983 and 1993. The legacy of the permissive 'tradition' in leisure legislation has been a cyclical pattern of provision and a distinctive planning system. Figure 8.2 suggests that there are two routes leading to provision. One flows from social and political crisis, and governments' resolve that, 'something must be done'. The study has demonstrated that this route (Route A in Figure 8.2), which is associated with permissive legislation such as the Physical Training and Recreation Act of 1937, results in forms of provision that are utilitarian. The other route (Route B), is the product of rapid social change, a growth in demand for recreation and leisure as an end itself, and as a form of municipal enterprise. As figure 8.2 demonstrates, the routes are not discrete and mutually exclusive and, once a cycle of activity is in train, both approaches share common features. Table 9.1 illustrates the cycles described in the study and indicates against each, which of the routes outlined above best describes the period of expansion.

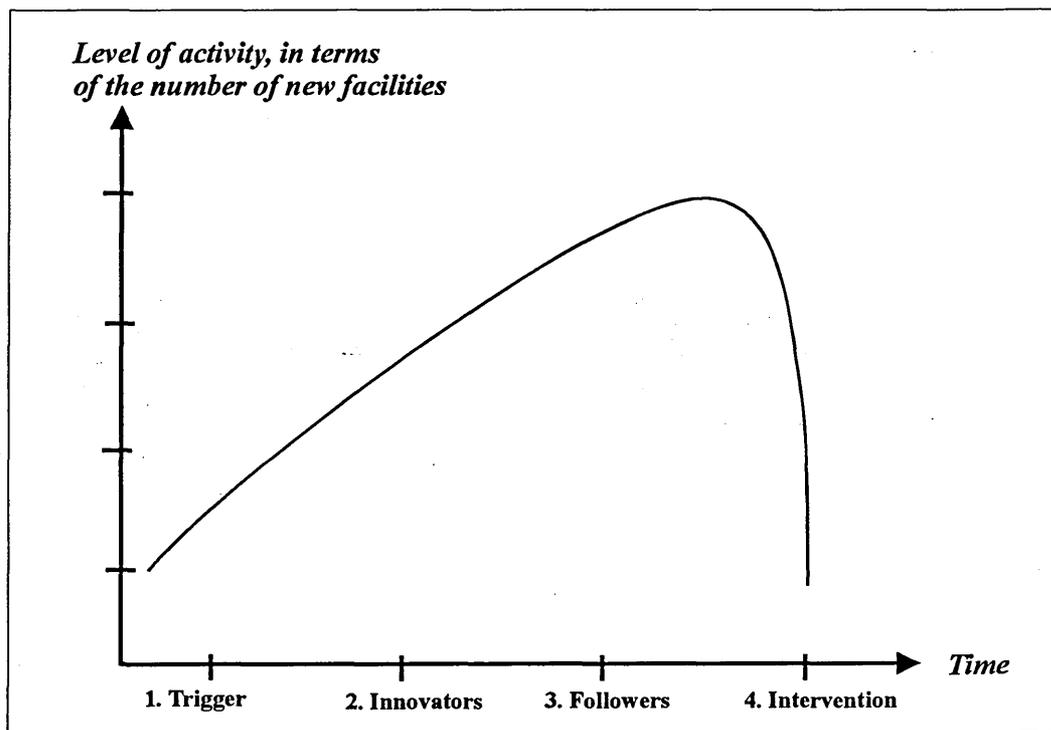
**Table 9.1 Cycles in the provision of municipal indoor provision for sport and leisure 1860-1993**

Cycle dates (approx.)	Factors leading to the start of the cycle	Dominant mode of provision.	Factors ending the cycle
1860-1880 Route A	Government's wish to improve public health	Public laundries, slipper baths, unheated plunge.	Municipalities start to build large swimming baths as centres for sport, recreation and entertainment.
1880-1910 Route B	Local authorities wish to meet or exceed a norm in provision. Civic pride.	The large swimming complex with ancillary sporting, recreational and entertainment facilities.	The aftermath of the Boer War. The return to an emphasis on the need for 'healthful recreation'.
1929-1939 Route A	Government provides public works and 'healthful recreation' for the unemployed.	Large but spartan swimming pools.	The outbreak of war.
1973-1975 Route B	Local government reorganisation. The availability of capital. A desire to leave a 'monument' to the old authority. The growth of the 'leisure concept'	The large multi-sport centre. The first leisure centres.	Government restrictions on local authority capital spending.
1981-1983 Route A	Civil unrest. Government's wish to provide a 'healthful recreation' for disaffected youth.	Small, standardised, sports centres, Community centres and adapted buildings.	Local authorities desire to return to the 1973-1975 policy of large centre construction.
1983-1993 Route B	'Windfall' capital receipts. New facility formats. The use of leisure investment to achieve economic and social externalities. Civic pride	The large leisure centre.	The introduction of Compulsory Competitive Tendering.

## 9.4 The dynamics of the facility provision cycle

The three route A cycles listed above, which includes the 1983 to 1993 period, share a number of common features. In each case the cycle was driven by municipal initiative rather than central government prompting or legislation, and moved through the phases outlined in Figure 9.1 below.

**Figure 9.1 Diagrammatic representation of the key stages in the cycles of municipal leisure provision which occurred between 1880 and 1910, 1973 and 1975 and 1983 and 1993**



**9.5 How the decision to build was made I: Trigger Factors** Chapter Three identified a number of possible triggers for the 1983 to 1993 cycle of leisure centre construction. In none of the contemporary cases studied was any single causal factor identified, but in each, a number of events, policies and influences combined to make the case for constructing a large centre. The most obvious trigger in two of the contemporary case authorities (Bardsey and Castletown) was a wish to complete schemes that had been planned in the mid -1970s, but each was cancelled due to government intervention limiting local

authority capital spending. These authorities merely returned to their original strategy as soon as capital became available and the concept of the large leisure centre was fashionable once again.

The concept of the 'need' for or 'shortage' of facilities was a factor in all the cases in the study and formed a powerful legitimating influence, particularly in the early stages of the project when support for the scheme was being mustered. 'Need' and 'shortage' were interpreted in different ways. In the Bardsey and Castletown cases, use was made of the prevailing Sports Council provision formula which indicated the need for a first tier centre in each area. In the two other authorities, 'need' and 'shortage' were argued mainly by reference to patterns of provision that were developing in other localities and no significant use was made of Sports Council planning formulae. As a condition of receiving grant aid from the Sports Council, each of the projects met the Technical Unit for Sport (a division of the Sports Council) specification for leisure centres, but the role which the Council played was essentially a reactive one of offering general support for projects that were a product of local initiative, rather than promoting a national strategy. Perhaps, as with central governments' attitude to statutory leisure provision, the Sports Council sensed that such was the level of interest amongst local authorities in the concept of the large centre, that these major capital schemes would proceed irrespective of their prompting or intervention.

Two of the authorities in the study (the Bardsey and Dales councils) based their case for a large leisure centre around a perceived need to replace an existing recreation facility. It may be that these older centres could not be refurbished in an economic manner, as claimed at the time but there is no evidence that either authority examined this option by, for example, including visits on their tours of inspection to local authorities such as Kingston Upon Hull, Birmingham or the London Borough of Greenwich where ageing recreation facilities had been successfully refurbished at less than half the cost of a new centre.

All the authorities in the study used the argument of wishing to achieve an agenda of wider social and economic benefits or externalities to justify the construction of a large centre. Common features of the agenda included a wish to provide better services for the 'the general public', which it was hoped would improve the well-being and health of the community, and a desire to engage young people in a range of

'healthy' sporting and recreational activities which might divert them from anti-social behaviour. The provision of public, subsidised facilities organised around the objective of 'something for everyone' seems close to the 'localist' or social welfare model of municipal administration, described elsewhere (Stewart, 1983). None of the case facilities made provision for the unemployed a legitimating issue, although in operation, three of the four centres (the fourth is not open at the time of writing) offered targeted discounts to social benefit claimants. The use of leisure services as a social control mechanism, or form of 'soft policing' to divert, channel and organise young people, provides an interesting parallel with the mid-Victorian 'rational' recreation movement and fits one interpretation of the 'social relations model' of local government described in Chapter Two (Cockburn, 1977). In the cases of the Bardsey Plaza, and to a lesser extent the Dales Centre, the construction of a flagship leisure facility was also justified in terms of its potential to contribute to wealth creation, employment and the formation of a more positive image of the area.

The final trigger factor that influenced all the authorities in the sample was a belief that if they did not follow a rapidly growing trend in provision, they would be 'left behind', with a resulting loss of prestige for the authority, or criticism by electors that their council was failing to provide services that were becoming the norm in other local authorities. The availability of one-off 'windfall' capital sums from the disposal of assets offered local authorities the means to enter a relatively costly field of provision without significant recourse to borrowing, which might have provoked opposition, or a need to reduce spending in other service areas.

There is no evidence from any of the studies that the policy of building large centres formed part of a strategy of resistance to Conservative Government policies. The two Labour authorities in the sample argued the case for their large centre primarily in terms of recreation as a form of social welfare provision or a right of citizenship. In three of the four authorities studied, leisure policy and the large centre project were matters on which there was a broad political consensus. In Castletown, however, the three main political parties developed distinctive leisure policies. Liberal Democrat opposition to the Nova Centre project was partly based around a wish to develop services at community level, but 'turf' issues also influenced its stance, as the new centre was to be sited in a part of the city where the party

had no representation on the council. The Conservatives on Castletown Council opposed the scheme solely on the grounds of cost.

#### **9.6 How the decision to build was made II: The role of ‘innovators’ and ‘followers’**

None of the local authorities included in the contemporary case study sample can be defined as ‘innovators’, in the sense that they did not lead, but rather followed, a trend in provision established by other municipalities. The inclusion in Chapter Five of material on the Herringthorpe Leisure Centre, the first of its kind in Britain, does however provide useful data on how cycles of provision start. There is evidence that Rotherham wished to lead the country in an emerging area of municipal provision, thereby promoting a more positive image of the town. To achieve that end the council employed the services of a leading firm of municipal architects to ‘engineer’ a new concept, the leisure centre. The Herringthorpe Centre aroused widespread interest amongst local authorities and became the model for a number of other centres that were constructed in the 1973 to 1975 cycle of provision. In contrast, no single local authority or facility seems to have started the 1983 to 1993 cycle. In the Yorkshire and Humberside region, the Hexthorpe (pseudonym) Borough Council was one of the first to open a large centre in 1984. An interview with the Director of Leisure Services for the authority provides an interesting parallel between the motivation and objectives of the Rotherham and Hexthorpe councils:

Civic pride and a wish to enhance the image of the town were definitely factors. Members had paid visits to other leisure centres such as Herringthorpe and Crowtree and were impressed at their general impact and popularity and wished to see a similar project go ahead in Hexthorpe.

(Director of Leisure Services, Hexthorpe Borough Council, Interview 1994)

As with Herringthorpe in an earlier cycle of provision, Hexthorpe offered a focal point for other local authorities to visit as part of their large centre planning process:

There were quite a number (of visits from other authorities). I can’t remember the exact details, but I do know that Barnsley paid a visit prior to embarking on the Metrodome scheme.

(Director of Leisure Services, Hexthorpe Borough Council, Interview 1994)

The use of visits by councillors and officers to existing facilities was a key element in the planning process for facilities as far back as the 1860s and was a notable feature of the 1983 to 1993 cycle of

expansion. As a planning and promotional tool 'the visit' has been used in a number of ways. For example, the Chair of Bardsey Council used the visit by members and officers from his authority to the Crowtree Centre to generate enthusiasm for the project amongst sceptical fellow councillors, whereas the Director of Leisure Services for Castletown arranged a programme of visits with a view to promoting a new art and entertainment concept to his elected members. Other than the use of visits, there seems to have been no uniform approach to the process of planning centres, either in the form of feasibility studies, including an appraisal of the proposed capital investment, or, undertaking marketing research to establish the likely level of demand for a new centre. As early as 1983 the Department of the Environment published guidance notes for local authorities considering leisure centre development which stressed the need for rigorous financial evaluation of investment options at the decision making stage. Other than a number of budget forecasting exercises, most of which took place after the decision to build had been made, there is little evidence emerging from the study of opportunity costing, or attempts to calculate the lifetime cost of the building set against alternative leisure strategies. Any estimates of usage, and thereby, revenue, were constructed from data gathered on visits to and correspondence with the managers of new centres, which were going through a 'honeymoon' period of inflated demand. If one accepts the view outlined by Stewart (1983) of local authorities as rational bodies whose primary concern is the delivery of appropriate services, it is difficult to interpret and explain the apparent reluctance of local authorities to undertake relatively simple planning and evaluation procedures, that by the 1980s were well established in the commercial sector of the leisure industry (Rounce, 1988) and were developing in the public sector (Mackie, 1993). It may be that, as in the case of the Riton pool, the elected members genuinely felt themselves to be the 'touchstones of people's desires and aspirations' and as such, they had no need of more formal planning techniques, but it may also be that these projects were driven by less rational objectives, which are explored below.

Two of the authorities in the sample argued that they had conducted a feasibility study prior to construction and that this had formed part of the their contract with the consulting architect employed to oversee the design and construction of the new centre. The role which leisure architects may have played in promoting the 1983 to 1993 cycle of expansion is an important issue for the study, but one which it has been difficult to explore in a satisfactory manner. Many of the interviewees made indirect

reference to the propensity of consulting architects to 'talk up' the case for and the scale of projects. Indeed as far back as 1974 during the Herringthorpe scheme, there was evidence of 'strategic drift', that is, an inflation of the project between its conception by the local authority and its execution by the consulting architect. The suggestion that architects might operate to create demand for a new concept where none existed was raised during one of the 'expert' interviews with a Senior Partner of one of the leading firms of architects specialising in leisure development during the research period:

The local government environment is a complex one for the architect to operate in and factors such as municipal prestige may influence decisions, but any firm of leisure architects that designed and promoted buildings that did not work would be unlikely to receive fresh commissions. One of the architect's key tasks is to develop new concepts and communicate these to potential clients, who will always be the final arbiter of what is commissioned.

( ---- Senior Partner, Leisure Architectural Consultancy)

This view of the role of the specialist architect was put to another of the 'expert' interviewees, a former Principal Leisure Officer with a local authority in Yorkshire and Humberside who had overseen his council's large centre building programme in the 1980s and is currently Deputy Director of Leisure Services with the Esting (pseudonym) District Council in the South East of England, and a senior member of the Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management.

That's absolute bullshit! My experience as a leisure professional and talking to other people, was that many aspects of the expansion were industry led. It was industry led on the basis that there were some very fat contracts to be had. That is because local authorities had picked up on this as an area to expand.

Q - So are you saying that local authorities were willing 'victims'?

A - These companies and their 'hangers on' were selling a range of services to largely willing local authorities. They went to local authorities and said: 'we are the experts and can provide anything you want'. What they would say is: 'look at the one we've built here. If you want one of those, we can provide that for you'.

(Deputy Director of Leisure Services for Esting District Council, Interview 1996)

The issue of whether leisure architects and consultants shape or respond to demand is clearly a complex one that requires further study. It is somewhat easier to assess the role of the architect as consultant, carrying out a 'feasibility study' for a client. In both cases where this occurred the study was based around data gathered from centres recently designed by the architect. Neither study included an

appraisal of alternative facility options such as community or neighbourhood provision, or market analysis including the possibility of a limited product life-cycle for the proposed centre. Any quantitative data used in the studies were drawn primarily from new centres that were then experiencing little direct competition. It is difficult to see therefore what use these studies were to local authorities wishing to assess schemes that were amongst the largest single projects in their capital programmes. It may be that feasibility studies of the type described above have a largely symbolic or confirmatory role, as the local authorities for whom they were conducted had already taken a decision in principle to proceed. They certainly do not appear to constitute dispassionate cost-benefit appraisals of the schemes in question as would be expected in the commercial sector of the leisure industry.

The issue of civic pride, which has emerged as a significant influence on the pattern of leisure provision at various stages during the study, is linked to both the structure and style of local government. The term has no precise or single meaning and may be used to describe a range of personal or corporate attitudes and actions. The 'committee system' of municipal administration, based around a notional division of power between elected policy makers and professional advisors, seems a model of 'localist' rationality. In operation, the system, particularly in an area of permissive provision such as leisure, may more closely resemble the 'public choice' model of local government described in Chapter Two, in which officers and members may combine to form bureaucratic alliances to further sectional interests which can result in an oversupply of inappropriate services. Leisure may be a permissive local government function, but a large and noteworthy leisure facility provides a very tangible manifestation of councillors' commitment to providing 'their' community with the latest and best in an area of life associated with freedom and fun. In short, for the ambitious politician, a leisure centre represents a more visible and lasting monument to their actions and achievements than, say an innovation in the field of refuse disposal or environmental health.

A key concern at the outset of the study was that any informal agenda influencing leisure policy might be inaccessible. In practice interviewees, both officers and councillors, were remarkably frank about the extent to which the personal agendas of leading councillors, and to a lesser extent officers, influenced the course of leisure policy and the large leisure centre project in their areas. This issue was raised with

one of the 'expert' interviewees. Speaking of his time as a senior officer with a large local authority in Yorkshire and Humberside, he recalled:

It certainly wasn't officer led. The influence came from a small caucus of very determined politicians and I would say the people that surrounded them.

(Deputy Director of Esting District Council, Interview 1996)

This view which is similar to that expressed by a number of the interviewees, suggests that at times the large centre project almost reached the level of a personal mission:

The Leader of the Council had a vision [for a large leisure centre]. It wasn't a vision that he had just developed, it was one that he had had for many years.

(Former Deputy Director of Recreation and Amenities, Bardsey MDC, Interview 1995)

The emergence of the 'leisure professional' in local government from the 1970s onwards has been cited as a factor that has influenced the direction of municipal leisure policy (Henry, 1993). It was clearly of importance to the study to assess the influence of officers and to determine the extent to which they or the elected members shaped leisure policy. There is no evidence emerging from the study that officers initiated the move to large leisure centre construction. For example, the Bardsey and Dales councils only employed senior leisure officers after the decision to build had been made and it was realised that professional support was needed to implement the schemes:

I had in fact built facilities elsewhere and I think they wanted that sort of expertise. The Leader of the Council knew the sort of people he wanted on board to actually start to develop facilities.

(Former Deputy Director of Leisure and Amenities Bardsey MDC. Interview 1995)

However as the above quotation suggests, many ambitious leisure officers in the mid-1980s realised that their prospects of advancement could well depend on developing expertise around the planning and management of large centres, which by then were dominating the leisure policies of many local authorities. This may also explain the apparently seamless consensus between members and officers on the policy of large centre construction. In none of the case authorities was there any evidence of papers, reports or briefings from the officers outlining alternative policy options to the large centre, or

counselling caution as the scale of project grew beyond the original concept. It seems that the expansionist culture of the decade was shared by members and officers alike.

Although officers may not have been the prime movers in the post 1983 cycle of construction, at times their influence was considerable. For example, the Director of Leisure Services for the Castletown Council was able to persuade his members to adopt a completely new format for the Nova centre. In general, once a project was agreed in principle and capital committed, the role of the professional officer became more prominent as the scheme took shape. However, even at the planning and construction stage the members continued to maintain a close interest in the development and in two cases they set up a sub-committee of the Leisure Services or Policy and Resources Committee to retain direct control over negotiations with the consulting architect over quite minor contract variations.

### **9.7 The large leisure centre in action**

It was not the purpose of this study to measure and analyse the operational performance or socio-economic impact of large leisure centres on their respective communities. These important issues, which form a logical extension of this study, require further research. One aspect of the performance of large centres is relevant as it offers an additional insight into the motivation of the providers. Chapter Three advanced the view that there had been very few follow-up studies of the leisure centre in action and concluded that local authorities were more concerned with the quantity of inputs, rather than service outcomes (Common, 1992; O'Connell, 1994). This view is confirmed by the research, as at no stage did any of the local authorities in the study attempt to measure whether the anticipated agenda of externalities held for their centre was being delivered or not. For example, one of the planning objectives for the Dales Centre was that of attracting a significant number of day visitors and 'short-break' tourists to the area. Two years after the centre opened, no attempt had been made by the manager of the facility or the economic development unit of the authority to measure the number or pattern of visits to the centre by non-residents. Similarly, the case for a large centre in Bardsey was argued partly in terms of its potential to generate wealth and employment in the Borough by attracting visitors from a regional catchment area. It was also hoped that the Plaza Centre would contribute to forming a better image of the area and encourage firms to relocate to the area. Whilst the interviewees felt that these objectives had

been achieved to some extent, none was able to produce any evidence to support this view, even in the form of basic surveys of visitors using the facility.

Neither had any of the authorities in the study had attempted to measure whether the wider social welfare objectives, such as involving young people in 'healthy recreation', were being achieved. It may be that the apparent lack of interest in monitoring and measuring outcomes is indicative of a pragmatic approach to planning which uses the agenda of anticipated external benefits as a tactic to secure approval and funding for the scheme. It may, however, also be a by-product of what the study has termed 'civic pride', in the sense that the provision of a noteworthy facility has a largely symbolic significance in that, once the building was constructed, the 'mission' was accomplished.

### **9.8 The end of one cycle and the start of the next?**

The Local Government Act of 1988 introduced compulsory competitive tendering (CCT) into the management of leisure services. The legislation did not become operative until the early 1990s, to allow local authorities time to prepare contract specifications and undertake the tendering process. An extension of CCT to the management of facilities such as leisure centres raised the possibility of newly opened or nearly completed 'flagship' centres losing their operating contract to a commercial operator. As the study did not seek to collect data from local authorities that were planning a large centre development, but abandoned their project in the early 1990s, there is no direct evidence to support this view, but the author has been unable to discover any other reason for the sudden decline in investment in large leisure centres which occurred after 1993. The study does offer indirect evidence to support this view. All the authorities in the study, including the Conservative Dales District Council, expressed a strong preference for 'running their own services in house' and held fears that if commercial contractors were to win the tendering process that a loss of control over policy and standards of service delivery might result. With the exception of the Riton Leisure Pool, no large leisure centres were constructed between 1993 and 1997 in the Yorkshire and Humberside region.

There are currently signs that another 'Route B' cycle of large leisure facility construction is about to start. A number of trigger factors outlined in figure 8.2 and discussed earlier in this chapter are

operating to promote development. As with past cycles of expansion, the catalysts are the emergence of new facility concepts and the availability of capital funding. An example of a style of development that could become fashionable in the late 1990s may be seen in the Alfred McAlpine Stadium in Huddersfield. This facility represents a departure from 1980s leisure development practice in that it relies on partnerships to lever funding from sources such as the Single Regeneration Budget and the European Economic Community. The facility, which opened in 1995, provided the model for the South Leeds Stadium which opened in 1996 and has been visited by a number of local authorities considering similar development. The introduction of the Lottery Sports Fund offers local authorities the possibility of 'windfall' capital funding. At the time of writing a number of local authorities in Yorkshire and Humberside, including Harrogate and Kirklees, have been awarded grants of over £3 million to replace old or to extend modern facilities (English Sports Council (b), 1997). Rotherham Council has established a working party of officers to carry out preparatory work on an application to the National Lottery Sports Fund to refurbish and extend the Herringthorpe Leisure Centre (Rotherham MDC, 1997).

### **9.9 Conclusions and recommendations for further research**

The study has examined the evolution and implementation of policies that have resulted in the provision of indoor facilities for sport, recreation and leisure by local authorities between 1846 and 1993. The key factor determining the level and style of provision has been the relationship between central and local government. Central government has granted local authorities permissive powers to build facilities designed to promote 'healthful' recreation. From time to time local authorities have used their powers to go beyond basic provision to construct large and complex facilities. An explanatory model identifying factors leading to a utilitarian or more expansive cycle of construction has been developed based on the findings of this exploratory study.

The cycle of large leisure centre construction which took place between 1983 and 1993 appears to have been a product of local government initiative rather than central government pressure and, as such, shared a number of common features with previous periods of expansion that were locally driven. A complex agenda of motives leading the local authorities in the study to build a large leisure centre was identified. The personal role of influential councillors seeking to join a rapidly growing trend in

provision was an important factor driving the cycle of construction. No rigorous approach to assessing the need for or the viability of schemes was observed in any of the local authorities studied. An agenda of anticipated social welfare or economic benefits was used to win support for the project. There was no evidence that any of the authorities in the study was monitoring whether or not these external benefits had been achieved, which once these facilities were opened, lends support to the notion that political motives for these developments are more influential than quantitative cost-benefit evidence of the return on investment or the matching of provision to identified need.

The study has raised more questions than it has answered and this should lead to further research in a number of areas. The proposition that leisure architects and other leisure industry interests operated to shape demand for large leisure centres in the 1980s was not resolved by the study. The research could produce no evidence on the issue of whether the anticipated external benefits that were used to legitimate provision were being realised. This issue will form part of the feedback offered to local authorities co-operating in the study and it may be that further joint research could be conducted to address this question. The research does raise a number of questions for local authorities currently considering whether to embark on lottery funded projects. It was not a purpose of the study to build a model of good practice for the provision of leisure facilities, but the findings of the research do suggest that a fresh approach to planning for the leisure needs of communities by local authorities is required.

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## **Appendix A.**

### **Specimen letter to interviewees outlining the ethical code of practice governing the research.**

Dear ---,

#### **Research project on large leisure centres built between 1983 and 1993.**

Further to our recent telephone conversation, thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of the research project. The study aims to investigate large leisure centres built between 1983 and 1993 with a view to establishing why they were built and what can be learnt from their development that might inform future leisure policy. Around 16 councillors and leisure officers from four local authorities in Yorkshire and Humberside are to be interviewed

The research and the schedule of interviews is governed by an ethical code of practice which is outlined below. I look forward to meeting on --- at --- and estimate that the interview will take between 60 and 90 minutes to complete.

When the research is completed I will provide you with a summary of its main findings and would be happy to meet you to explore any issues emerging from the study that you may wish to explore in greater depth.

Yours sincerely,

Anthony Power.

Senior Lecturer in Leisure Management.

**Code of practice governing the research project on the  
development of large leisure centres built between 1983 and 1993.**

1. The author of the study will, at all times behave in an open and honest manner when collecting data and conducting interviews.
2. Any data offered to, or acquired by the author that is not in the public domain, will be regarded as confidential and will not be used in an attributable form without prior written permission.
3. The identity of cities and large leisure facilities included in the study will be disguised by the use of pseudonyms. Interviewees will be referred to by their title only. Should an interviewee wish, their title may be altered to preserve anonymity.
4. Following an interview, a detailed transcript will be prepared and sent to the interviewee within three weeks, in an envelope marked 'confidential'. Any amendments or deletions requested by the interviewee will be incorporated into an amended transcript of the interview.
5. All research interview tapes and transcripts, computer disks and other data relating to the research that is not in the public domain, will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the authors office, or at his home.
6. The completed research may be published in a number of forms including a research degree, conference papers and journal articles or as a book.
7. Any queries regarding this code of conduct or the conduct of the research project should be directed to:

Prof. C. Gratton,  
Head of Research - School of Leisure and Food Management,  
Sheffield Hallam University,  
Sheffield S1. 4BD.

## **Appendix B.**

### **Exploratory study Castletown District Council. interview agenda.**

#### **1.1: Interview aims.**

To explore through the medium of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with senior local government officers and councillors, why local authorities opted to build large leisure centres between 1983 and 1993.

To test whether 'key players' in field of local government leisure services are prepared to be interviewed and talk openly on a range of issues associated with public leisure policy and the provision of large leisure centres.

#### **1.2: The interviewees.**

A former Leader of Castletown District Council.

A former Principal Recreation Officer for Castletown District Council.

#### **1.3: Format for the interviewees.**

Prior to each interview, the interviewee was sent a letter outlining the aims of the research and the code of practice governing data collection (see appendix B).

At the start of each interview the aims of the research and the key points in the ethical code of practice were summarised..

Prior to the start of the interview the main and back-up tape recorders were checked.

A framework for the interview is outlined below. The schedule of questions is only a guide or 'minimum agenda' and if the need arose, questions were asked 'out of order'. Similarly if a response opened a potentially interesting line of enquiry that was not part of the main schedule, it was pursued with supplementary questions.

#### **1.4: Interview Schedule.**

Explanation of the purpose of the research (see above).

Use of 'ice-breakers' to relax the interviewee and establish rapport. Establish the interviewees history with the authority and their role in council and leisure policy-making.

Ask the interviewee to describe how the project came about and the role that they played in its inception. This open question should lead to a number of supplementary questions which might include:

- The role played by the Sports Council in promoting provision.
- The 'politics' of the authority (inter-party and intra-party).
- The politics of leisure policy and the role of leading individuals (councillors and officers).

Move on to a more detailed agenda of questions around the planning of the project which should include the following:

- Factors influencing the choice of format.
- The use of specialists such as consultants or architects.
- Whether a feasibility study was undertaken and what consultation there was with the community?
- Funding the project.

Probe the issue of the expectations that were held for the project i.e. the promotion of 'healthful recreation', or the prevention of crime. Did the authority have a wider agenda for the facility such as economic regeneration or tourism promotion? Was the project linked with a wish to enhance the image of the area? To what extent was the project driven by a wish to match or exceed the provision of other municipalities?

Ask the interviewee to describe the operation of the facility and ask them to make a judgement as to whether the expectations held for the project have been realised. Probe the issue of whether outcomes are being monitored?

Conclude the interview by asking the interviewee for a retrospective view of the project and offer them the opportunity to raise any issues that have not been dealt with.