

# Reopening Churchill Sports Centre

Written Statement to North Somerset Council by

Thornton Daryl Hirst

16 July 2021



I am presenting on behalf of the Churchill Sports Centre Working Group (known as Mendip Villages Fitness) and more widely on behalf of the communities in the Mendip Vale. I am also presenting this written statement as a local resident and parent of two young daughters for whom I can't get any swimming lessons, so they can't swim – a common theme across all local schools. Our aim is simple: to secure the long-term future for Churchill Sports Centre. This initiative has wide support including our local MP, three local district councillors, five parish councils and most importantly, the support of 1,900 members of the Mendip Villages community who responded to a survey we recently conducted.

Given:

- There is a critical shortage of sports and leisure facilities, particularly swimming pools
- North Somerset Council's policy framework which calls for innovative, ambitious approaches to secure sports and leisure facilities to reduce health and social costs,
- The existence, and buy-in, of local, profitable sports facility operators working in partnership with schools and communities
- The huge increase in local housing with corresponding funds flowing to the council
- The undeniable need to teach our children to swim
- The criticality of sporting centres to help the nation emerge from COVID-19, and
- The ultimate value for money argument in addressing health inequality,

There is a clear evidenced case to reopen Churchill Sports Centre as a priority

Accordingly, on behalf of the Mendip Villages community, we respectfully request North Somerset Council commit to take the actions and deliver the funding needed to reopen Churchill Sports Centre and secure its long-term future.

We understand that you and your senior colleagues will be discussing the future of the Sports Centre in the coming weeks and urge you to look favourably on ensuring that funding and resource are allocated to secure the future of this important community service.

## Detailed Arguments

The key arguments in favour of funding the reopening of Churchill Sports Centre follow:

1. **Nearly 1,900 residents responded to a survey** (conducted early in 2021). The response demonstrated overwhelming support (**98.29%**) for Churchill Sports Centre, with **97.23%** saying that the pool in particular must be kept open. Over **89%** said they would be very likely or likely to use the centre if it reopens, clearly making the business case for the centre.
2. **North Somerset Council's strategic aims** relating to health and wellbeing align entirely with the need to increase – not decrease - the provision of sports and leisure facilities. The Sports and Leisure facilities strategy states "access to quality sport and leisure facilities... is vital to ensuring that North Somerset residents enjoy the benefits of participation, which improve health and wellbeing (both physical and mental) as well as fostering a sense of community".

3. There is an **acute shortage of public swimming pools** in North Somerset. We have been contacted by numerous organisations and individuals who are desperate for swimming lessons. One swimming lesson provider has hundreds of children on their waiting list. North Somerset is a coastal county and Churchill village alone has 3 new attenuation ponds required to offset the local flood risk. Elderly residents say that swimming provides vital exercise to address chronic health conditions and they are unable to access any pool time locally.
4. **The huge increase in housing** across all villages in the Mendip Vale has resulted in significantly increased demand for leisure and health facilities. These cannot be accommodated by the remaining facilities in North Somerset. Significant s.106/CIL monies have accumulated and could be used.
5. **Our strong belief is that Churchill Sports Centre can be run profitably.** Our investigations suggest that the model operated by Kings Leisure Ltd in Cheddar, a wholly owned subsidiary of the Wessex Learning Trust, demonstrates that a partnership between a leisure operator, a school and the community, with the commitment and support of the local authority, can be very successful.
6. **Our campaign to reopen Churchill Sports Centre has the support of MPs, Parish Councils and District Councillors within the catchment.** John Penrose MP has expressed support saying that investment in Churchill Sports Centre addresses many of the critical government concerns regarding childhood obesity, pressures on the NHS and the post-Covid need for mental health and wellbeing provision.

#### Summary

We urge you to take a **holistic and long-term view of the return on investment** for the community – the benefits of greater sports provision, a reduction in health inequality and social isolation - not simply the short-term financial challenges.

Finally, we very much appreciate Council giving us the opportunity to have our voice heard.

Kind regards,

**Thornton Daryl Hirst**

Co-signed and supported by those overleaf:

**Churchill Sports Centre Working Group (Mendip Villages Fitness):**

- Bill Carruthers, on behalf of Churchill Parish Council
- Rowan Clarke, swim coach, parent of children in Churchill Primary and Churchill Academy
- Steve Bamber, swim coach
- Karin Haverson, DCllr
- Madi Hearn, Sports Instructor, resident of Winscombe
- Colonel. Thornton Daryl Hirst, Churchill resident and parent of Children at Wrington Primary School
- Ally Jones, Congresbury resident and parent of child at Churchill Academy
- Jan Lyons, Congresbury Resident
- Jill Maycock, leader of CSC Working Group, Churchill Resident
- Theo Michael, parent of children at Churchill Primary
- Jan Murray, on behalf of Churchill Parish Council
- Mimi Simpson, on behalf of Churchill Parish Council
- Lyne Stephens on behalf of Winscombe Parish Council
- Sally Wilcox, parent of children at Churchill Academy

**Parish Councils:**

- Banwell
- Churchill
- Congresbury
- Winscombe
- Wrington

**District Councillors:**

- Patrick Keating
- Karin Haverson
- Steve Hogg

**John Penrose MP**