

## **Exploring the role of sports facilities in their local communities**

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Sporting venues, such as cricket pitches, gyms and swimming pools, are crucial for recreation and exercise to take place, providing essential facilities to improve people's mental and physical health. However, these spaces can also be used for community events. Sports facilities come in a wide range of shapes and sizes, each contributing a different amount of space, meaning their uses can vary. I will be looking at these spaces, which will include parks, leisure centres and football stadia and the various ways in which they benefit their local areas, including how each can be used.

Firstly, I will be exploring parks and the experiences and opportunities they can provide. Positioned across the country they all differ in focus:

### **Preston Park**

Preston Park in Brighton,<sup>[1]</sup> lives its life with a combination of aims. The south of the park focuses on sports, containing areas for activities including tennis, basketball and cycling, with a play area alongside, providing a range of athletic experiences for adults and children. However, the rest of the Park is used for everyday gatherings and small businesses such as sport clubs and personal trainers to help the local economy thrive; this includes Fitnesshub Plus<sup>[2]</sup>. Fitnesshub Plus offers classes, gym memberships and personal training to its customers, using its cardio and resistance machines, weights and indoor astro track. One customer described their services as:

*"By far the best place to get a personal trainer in Brighton!"* <sup>[2]</sup>

Whilst the park thrives on its own daily, everything alters dramatically once a year, when it becomes home to people from all over the world. Since 1996 the park has become the central site of the annual 'Brighton and Hove Pride Festival'.<sup>[3]</sup> The main park includes a Community Market and Village<sup>[4]</sup>; In this area people can sell items as well as advertise groups and create art. Many people include colouring, creating badges and face painting within their stalls.

With a different theme named each year, the event's central site, based at the Park, is open for three days and plays host to an array of performances while food and drink are provided by local vendors. Despite the introduction of entrance tickets in 2011, 'Pride' remains to bring together the whole of Brighton and Hove along with those that travel from beyond the county for the celebrations. More vendors line the streets outside the park to sell goods such as rainbow flags, lei (Hawaii's flower necklace) and bracelets. The event continues throughout the day and into the evening, together with parties across the city, but Preston Park remains the true heart of the festival. This festival allows those who are LGBTIQ+ to celebrate who they really are helping improve their mental health, as 'they are more likely to experience problems like' low self esteem and anxiety.<sup>[5]</sup>

### **Beach House Grounds**

Moving on from this is another a home for an LGBTIQ+ Pride, but one still very much still in its youth. The Beach House Grounds in Worthing began hosting the festival in 2018 arranged by volunteers in the events industry who believed that the Brighton Pride had become too commercialised and wanted something more wholesome. “The main event almost reached capacity. 4,000 people bought tickets, smashing organisers’ expectations of 1,000”<sup>[6]</sup> in the first year as Worthing’s pride focuses more on family and provides performers from within the area.

In 2020 the festival was passed over to the company that had provided security for it in the years before, the festival now spans “a full nine days with a series of art, culture, sport, music and film events celebrating the great diversity of the LGBT community”.<sup>[7]</sup>

### Worthing Leisure Centre

Leisure Centres continue this theme, providing more than the ‘Leisure’ they refer to. South Downs Leisure run seven centres in Adur and Worthing<sup>[8]</sup>, including two swimming pools and five other generic leisure centres. One of their main centres, Worthing Leisure Centre, provides a creche for its users together with other parents in its area; it’s facility also incorporates soft play, an ‘environment which helps children engage and react to stimuli such as different textures, materials and colours. This includes stimulating their sense of balance (vestibular) and increases the awareness of their emotions, body and surroundings (proprioception). In turn, this helps children broaden their development skills, supporting them for their independence in later life’.<sup>[9]</sup>

In March, 2019, the centre ran a Silent Disco<sup>[10]</sup> providing three separate channels for those attending included Drum & Bass, 80’s Music and Club Dance Hits. As well as this, a complementary Bucks Fizz or Orange Juice was available on entrance along with Bar Service and Hot Food available all night.

### King Alfred Leisure Centre

The King Alfred Leisure Centre in Hove<sup>[14]</sup> provides also a greater range of activities than sport. Even though the space is commonly known for its swimming pool, the centre also has a Ballroom Suite that is also hired out for community events as well as being used for classes. The hall contains space for 270 people, has two licensed bars, a sprung floor for dancing, along with a stage. This space can be used for parties, conferences, and award ceremonies, presenting an area for families, friends and businesses to come together to celebrate various achievements. Using the room for ballroom dancing alone ‘can improve self-esteem, lower stress levels, increase sense of purpose, and promote a positive outlook on life’.<sup>[15]</sup>

December of 2020, in the midst of a pandemic, King Alfred was still up and in business providing space for events for companies such as GYSO (Get Your Skates On) Roller Discos for their Christmas Parties. These parties provided “a LIVE DJ playing all the Christmas classics, organising skating activities that are fun for the whole family!”<sup>[16]</sup> There was originally only going to be one, but the first was so popular that GYSO booked another.

I would also like to consider stadia, which themselves come in a range of sizes, from small ones in the local village to large ones that host premierships teams such as Brighton and Hove Albion Football Club<sup>[16]</sup>. In addition to these there are stadia designed for national teams such as England's Wembley Stadium<sup>[17]</sup> situated in the North West of London.

#### Sussex County Football Association Ltd.

Small stadia such as Sussex County Football Association Ltd.'s home which is commonly known as simply Culver Road<sup>[18]</sup>, contains a football pitch, bar, offices and meeting rooms. Everything within the Stadium is hired out to the public apart from the offices enabling the stadium to be used for community events such as charity nights, quiz nights, parties and award ceremonies.

Some of the stadium's charity events do, however, use everything that is provided by the stadium. Each year Sussex County FA have two charity matches against BLAGSS (Brighton Lesbian and Gay Sports Society)<sup>[19]</sup> to "unite fans, players, communities, grassroots teams, professional clubs and the football authorities to ensure the sport continues to work towards being more inclusive."<sup>[18]</sup>

#### AMEX Stadium

Where some stadia use their grounds for charity work, others try to help improve their area through business. Brighton and Hove Albion's AMEX (American Express) Stadium allows businesses to advertise on the LED ribbon, on their pitch-side boards within the stadium, as well as their matchday programmes, presenting their name to a larger audience. The stadium also provides a space for awards evenings, wedding days, conferences, exhibitions and parties in their upper levels.

Early September 2020, AMEX also ran a free entry job fair<sup>[19]</sup>. This included 26-36 companies recruiting that day so as to increase the employment rates in the area. The site is disabled friendly, due to the nature of the stadium's everyday use, avoiding division between attendees.

#### Wembley Stadium

I would now like to turn my attention from one large stadium to another which is almost three times its size. Wembley Stadium, London,<sup>[17]</sup> is designed for more than just football. It also plays host to a variety of other sports such as American Football, rugby and boxing, allowing more culture to be brought into people's lives. Music concerts are also a big part of Wembley<sup>[20]</sup> life. Wembley was one of eleven locations to host Live Earth in 2007. "The concerts brought together more than 150 musical acts in eleven locations around the world which were broadcast to a mass global audience through televisions, radio, and streamed via the Internet". Presenters such as Alan Carr, Ricky Gervais and Gerard Butler kept attendees entertained between performances of such artists as Snow Patrol, Kasabian and

Madonna.<sup>[21]</sup> The event's viewer figures ranged from 900,000 during the day to 4.5 million for the highlights show.<sup>[21]</sup>

Sporting facilities provide many opportunities for their local communities. These spaces can be used to gather with loved ones, help to improve fitness or focus on world issues. Each of the areas are adaptable and can be used in many different ways by different people, whilst providing a space that they can simply enjoy. Whether the space is small or large, each can be used for different events and where a small figure may seem small for a large event host (such as Wembley), it may seem huge to another host like the Sussex FA's football stadium. There are varying sizes of success in the events world and not all come with huge amounts of money or space. Whether they are seen as just a space in which to play sports outdoors or indoors, these sporting facilities truly do offer more than their names suggest.

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