



April 2024

# Fylde Borough Council Swimming Pools Public and Stakeholder Consultation Report

*Produced by Active Lancashire*



**Active  
Lancashire**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Active Lancashire were commissioned by Fylde Borough Council to undertake a public consultation to ascertain stakeholder perceptions of swimming provision in the Fylde area. This follows on from an initial report published in October 2023 that provided the council with an indicative understanding of facilities across the borough and a series of recommendations to consider. Two of these recommendations formed the foundation of this consultation; to engage the public, schools, community groups, and swimming pool providers to understand their views and the challenges being experienced across the borough. The consultation took place between January 2024 and March 2024 and involved a public survey, key stakeholder discussions with schools, swimming pool providers and a series of public consultation events based on responses to the survey. Some key areas of support were explored, including discussing if the existing Kirkham Rural Splash site should be refurbished, whether a new, purpose-built facility should be considered and the needs of specific groups including schools and young people. The findings highlight challenging current economic and societal circumstances which are having an impact on all stakeholders. Members of the public have reported a loss of local, affordable swimming opportunities across rural Fylde due to increased costs, travel time and availability of facilities. Schools, especially those within rural Fylde, are experiencing similar issues around increased costs of hiring swimming pools and the transport needed to reach these. Additional travel time and greater competition for facility access has limited swimming experience for young people within the curriculum and beyond it and has had wider effects on educational delivery. Swimming pool providers have shared a range of operational and strategic challenges, including increased operational costs (both labour and material), balancing business models and local needs, and other administrative challenges including planning and asset development. Finally, additional comments shared directly and through social media expressed similar concerns. Common themes derived from the analysis of this body of data informed the considerations below, which we have highlighted to guide the council in moving forward:

**Communication** – A dialogue between all stakeholders is key. Ensure any action taken, or being considered, is communicated effectively with local residents and organisations so they feel informed in the process and their needs are prioritised.

**Being clear on role and responsibilities** – Improving clarity on the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders in delivering swimming provision will help establish realistic perceptions and expectations of involved parties.

**Aspirations and plans** – Physical activity should be integrated into strategic planning to ensure Fylde Borough Council objectives can be achieved through the far-reaching benefits of improved health and wellbeing in residents.

**Provision and facility sustainability** – Creative planning and investment of funding are imperative to ensure swimming provision meets the needs of residents long-term and alleviates concerns around access disruption, especially for schools.

## **Adrian Leather** *CEO | Active Lancashire*

Active Lancashire recognises the key strategic contribution that Fylde Council makes to enabling sport and physical activity across the Borough through its facilities and provision in addition to supporting broader health, wealth, and wellbeing objectives through its leadership and coordination role. As a Charity leading Physical Activity, we are pleased to have been

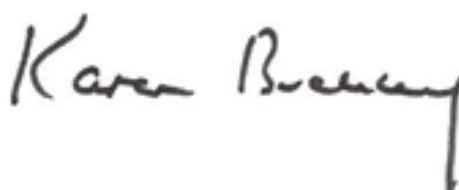
able to support Fylde Borough Council in undertaking this consultation to capture the voices of key stakeholders across the borough. We hope that this consultation will enable Fylde Borough Council to further develop its sport and leisure provision to ensure everyone across Fylde has access to opportunities including swimming.



## **Cllr Karen Buckley** *Council Leader | Fylde Borough Council*

Fylde Council are grateful to the team at Active Lancashire for coordinating a comprehensive consultation across the borough which has captured the voices of all those interested in swimming. The findings demonstrate the impact of the closure of Kirkham Rural Splash by the YMCA following Storm Arwen in 2021 and we are concerned to learn that there are some schools and residents struggling with the limited

availability of swimming provision. This valuable report, along with the support of key stakeholders, will help shape the council's future direction and strategy for sport and leisure, including swimming, and we will be launching a dedicated page on our website to detail the work already underway.



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We have received input on this consultation from a wide range of local stakeholders and would like to thank all of them for engaging in this process. Firstly, we would like to recognise the large number of residents from Fylde and the surrounding area who took the time to complete our online survey or attended the public consultations to share their views. We also appreciate Kirkham Town Council's provision of William Segar Hodgson Pavilion and Wesham Town Council's provision of their Community Centre as venues for these public consultations. We acknowledge the input from the following schools too, who also contributed via our survey or through further consultation:

AKS Lytham	Holy Family CE Primary School	Medlar with Wesham CE Primary School	St Josephs Primary School	Weeton Primary School	Weeton St Michaels Primary School
Ansdell Primary School	Kirkham and Wesham Primary School	Newton Bluecoat CE School	St Paul's Primary School	St Thomas CE Primary School	Treales CE Primary School
Clifton Primary School	Kirkham Grammar School	Pear Tree School	Strike Lane Primary School	Lytham Hall Park Primary School	Singleton VA Primary School
Freckleton CE Primary School	Kirkham St. Michaels CE Primary School	Ribby With Wrea CE Primary School	The Willows Primary School	Hodgson Academy	Linton School
Heyhouses CE Primary School	Our Lady Star of the Sea Primary School				

Similarly, we would also like to thank the following swimming providers for interviewing with us:

Dalmeny Spa and Hotel	Partingtons Holiday Parks	Ribby Hall Holiday Village	YMCA St Annes
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Finally, we would like to thank Fylde Borough Council and their officers for their input and support in the development of the consultation and the report, which we believe gives an accurate portrayal of swimming provision in the region.

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE CONSULTATION

Active Lancashire were commissioned by Fylde Borough Council to undertake a public and stakeholder consultation. This was in response to the clear public interest in swimming and leisure opportunities across the borough following the closure of Kirkham Rural Splash. An initial report was published in October 2023 (1) that provided the council with an indicative understanding of facilities across the borough and a basic understanding of the borough demographic, geographic, social, health and physical activity data. In addition to this, a series of recommendations were put forward for consideration. Two of these recommendations formed the foundation of this consultation to engage the public, schools, community groups and swimming pool providers, to understand their views and the challenges being experienced across the borough. The broader societal and economic landscape remains challenging for the region with ongoing rising costs, increasing pressure to ensure residents have opportunities to engage in physical activity and the impact these can have on communities across rural and coastal Fylde.

As part of Fylde Borough Council commitment to support sport and

leisure across the borough, a notice of motion was put forward to the Full Council meeting on 2 October 2023. It was resolved that:

“In the corporate and local plan this Council seeks to maintain or encourage public swim provision. I propose that this Council, as a matter of urgency, supports that position and in light of the recent announcement by the YMCA to permanently close Kirkham Baths looks at all practicable options to work with partners and stakeholders to support that provision, and such options to be considered by the External Scrutiny Committee.”

To aid understanding of existing sites across Fylde, figure 1 below outlines the known pools within Fylde and whether the site is managed by a commercial, charity or local authority. It should also be noted that Kirkham Rural Splash operational responsibilities was transferred to YMCA Fylde Coast in 2009 with the freehold being transferred to YMCA in 2011. The decision to close the site was made by YMCA with a Closure Event Announcement and Disposal Plan curated in summer of 2023.



Site Name	Post Code	Facility Sub Type	Access Type	Ownership Group	Year Built	Year Refurbished
DALMENY HOTEL AND LEISURE	FY8 1LX	Main/General	Registered Membership use & Pay and Play on request subject to availability	Commercial	1995	2005
SPORT AND LEISURE (RIBBY HALL VILLAGE)	PR4 2PR	Main/General	Registered Membership use & Pay and Play on request subject to availability	Commercial	2003	n/a
STANNES YMCA POOL & GYM	FY8 1SW	Main/General	Pay and Play and Registered Membership	Local Authority owned/ managed by Community Organisation	1987	2010
ST IVES HOTEL	FY8 1LS	Main/ General	Registered Membership use & Pay and Play on request subject to availability	Commercial	1970	n/a
THE GRAND HOTEL	FY8 1NB	Main/ General	Registered Membership use – facility advised pre-book only via membership pass	Commercial	2002	n/a
BLACKPOOL NEWTON HALL INDOOR BOWLS CLUB	FY3 0AX	Main/General	Residential only	Commercial	1900	2010
WINDY HARBOUR HOLIDAY PARK	FY6 8NB	Main/ General	Residential Only	Commercial	Unknown	n/a
NIVENS HEALTH CLUB	FY8 1LU	Learner/Teaching /Training	Residential only	Commercial	1994	n/a
SPORT AND LEISURE (RIBBY HALL VILLAGE)	PR4 2PR	Main/General	Residential only	Commercial	1994	2017

*Figure 1 – Known swimming pools across Fylde and operational responsibility*

Alongside the consultation, Fylde Borough Council have been successful in securing both Phase 1 and Phase 2 Sport England Swimming Pool Support Fund (SPSF). The phase 1 funding (£59,189) was secured in November 2023 and is to be used to offset additional operational costs for YMCA St Annes swimming pool. In March 2024, Fylde Borough Council secured a further £220,000 in capital funding as part of phase 2 SPSF to undertake vital work at YMCA St Annes by replacing the aging gas boilers with newer more efficient models and implementing photovoltaic solar panels. A condition of the funding is to assure Sport England that the St Annes swimming pool will remain open for at least a further 10 years. In addition to the

above funding that has been secured, Fylde Borough Council have invested significant officer resources and capacity throughout the consultation period including networking support, promoting the consultation, and supporting Active Lancashire in developing and delivering the consultation itself.

The consultation's purpose is to bring together different voices from the public and key stakeholders across the borough. This will enable the council to better understand key challenges being experienced across communities and determine what role they can play in addressing these. In addition, it will support the existing work already outlined in the report so far.

## CONSULTATION APPROACH

The approach to collating insight was split into three phases which have been outlined below:

### Public Survey

- Active Lancashire worked with Fylde Borough Council to design a survey that covered a broad range of themes including:
- Types of swimming activity the public engage in.
- Challenges to accessing swimming opportunities and what was important to the public when considering swimming provision.
- Understanding of how schools currently access swimming to meet curriculum requirements.
- Where the public are currently accessing swimming facilities.
- How the council may be able to support those who want to engage or re-engage with swimming.
- Past use of Kirkham Rural Splash as a facility prior to its closure.
- How individuals may get themselves to sport and leisure facilities.

This survey was shared with the public through a variety of platforms including:

- Social media channels of Active Lancashire, Fylde Borough Council and YMCA Fylde Coast Facebook Pages.
- Direct emails to YMCA Fylde Coast sport and leisure members.
- Leaflets in key public venues such as libraries, local leisure centres and information points.
- Taking advantage of public information screens.
- Public relations links with local newspapers and press associations.
- Local councillors and parishes.
- Key stakeholders directly, including but not limited to community groups, sport and leisure contacts, business networks.

The survey attracted 2,556 responses over a 3-week period in January 2024. Alongside the survey, comments from social media posts were captured, which gave the consultation an additional perspective on the views of local communities. Key insights from the survey and social media comments are explored at later stages within this report.

### Stakeholder Conversations

These conversations primarily involved swimming pool operators and schools from across the borough. The purpose of these conversations was to develop a rich understanding of the current challenges being faced by the stakeholders, their experiences to date, any future aspirations they may have and how the borough council may be able to help them. These were carried out throughout February and early March with the support of Fylde Borough Council. In total, 4 swimming pool operators were spoken with from both the third sector and private sector including hotels and holiday parks. During the full consultation period, 25 of the 36 schools located in Fylde (including primary, secondary and private schools) and 1 in Wyre provided their views via the survey, group conversations, and/or email communications. Therefore, the consultation had a 69% response rate from schools across Fylde. Each of the conversations had with either swimming pool operators or schools were unique but offered key areas of similarities that are explored further within this report.



### Public Consultation Events

Following the public survey and stakeholder conversations, 4 public consultation events were held at the end of February and early March. These events were held in Kirkham and Wesham, and this report would like to thank both town councils for their generosity in supporting these events through providing venues. The events were designed to offer members of the public an opportunity to explore topic areas in more detail through group conversations facilitated by Active Lancashire. Examples of topic areas covered included:

- Current facility usage compared to Kirkham Rural Splash when it was open.
- Market analysis with a focus on costs of using facilities.

- Exploring further what is important to members of the public about swimming.
- Exploring further how the council could support swimming and what the potential priorities should be.

Each of the phases above fed into each other ensuring a continuous cycle of learning and reflection was adopted, with regular constructive feedback between Active Lancashire and Fylde Borough Council.

### Other Sources of Insight:

Throughout the consultation process, Active Lancashire collated any additional comments and insight. These included letters and social media comments as a response to the social media campaign. These have been included as part of the consultation.



## FINDINGS

The findings from the consultation are broken down based on the approach taken to collate the relevant insight. The aim of this section is to provide a

clear overview of the views of those consulted throughout the consultation process.

## SURVEY FINDINGS

### Who responded to the survey?

The initial public consultation survey was launched in early January 2024 and was live for 3 weeks. In total, 2,556 responses were captured from a range of individuals as shown in figure 2 below. The consultation recognised many individuals fulfil multiple 'roles' and therefore were allowed to tick all

that applied to them. Despite this, most individuals either live and/ or work in Fylde with a smaller number of individuals responding as either teachers, councillors, business operators, workers in the health and wellbeing sector or individuals responding on behalf of someone else.

### Which of the following describes you? (tick all that apply)

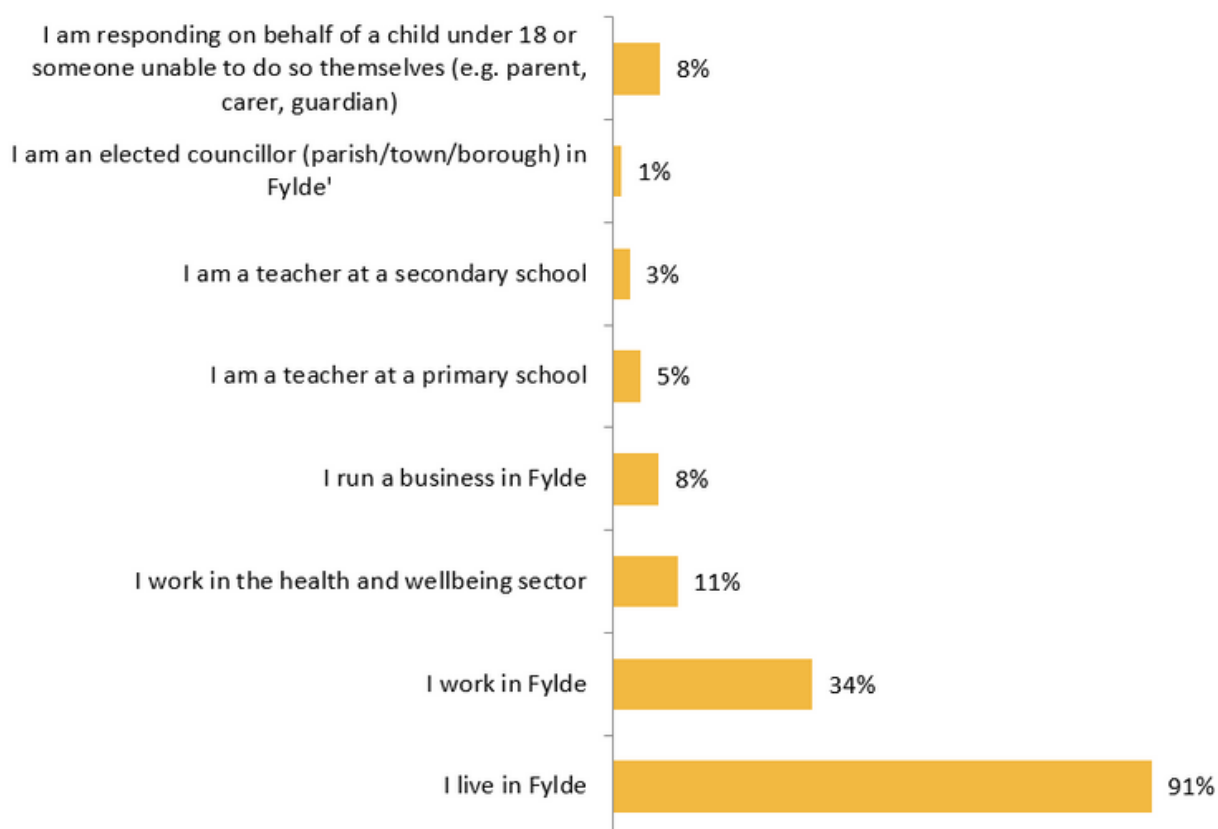
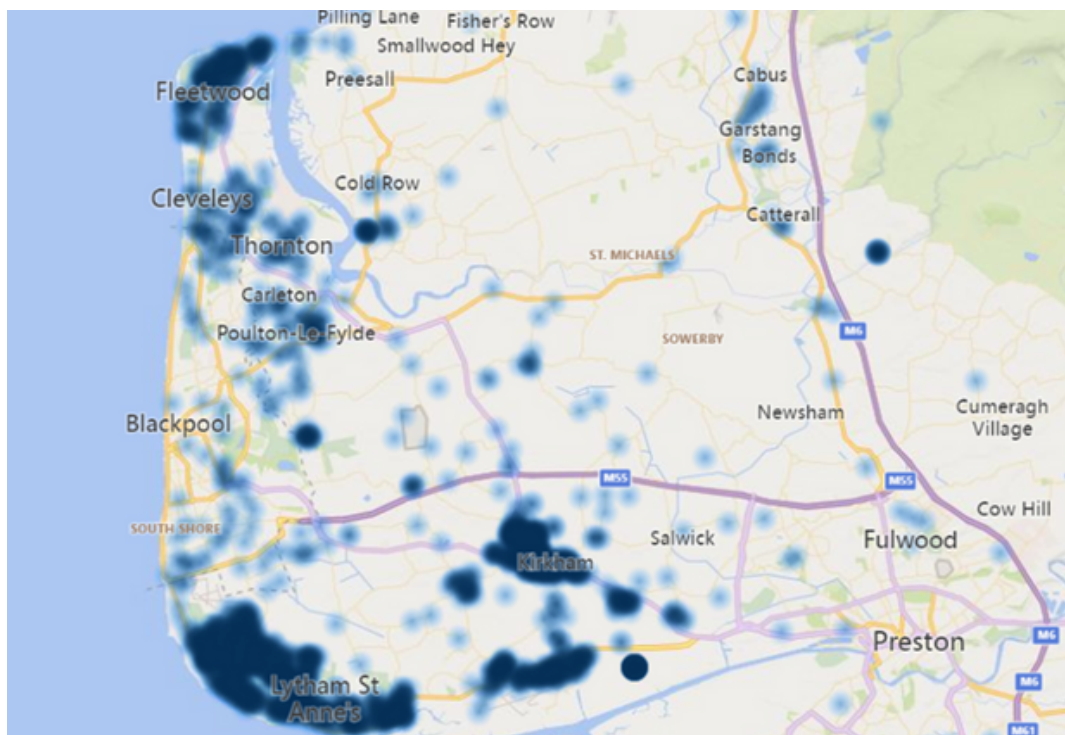


Figure 2 – Role(s) of the individual responding to the consultation survey.

To support the findings of figure 2, the geographic spread of respondents has been captured and shown below in figure 3. Whilst the darkest shaded areas are predominantly within the Fylde Borough Council boundaries, where 90% of people stated they lived,

a proportion of respondents also reside within Blackpool, Wyre, Preston, and South Ribble. This highlights the spread of those influenced and impacted by the sport and leisure offered within Fylde.



*Figure 3 - Geographical illustration of where respondents live.*

From an age perspective, the survey engaged with a broad spread of the population with 75% of respondents being between 25 and 64 years of age. The survey struggled to engage with those under 16s and over 75 years of age. It is however likely some of the under 16s feedback will have been collated with those of working age and captured via conversations with schools across the borough. It is recognised that a higher proportion of over 75s may have poorer access to digital media and feel less comfortable to complete surveys online. If timescales had allowed, paper copies of the survey could have been distributed to encourage greater engagement from this age group, but this was not feasible for this

consultation. The survey did however allow for those with more confidence using technology to respond on behalf of others.

The consultation also recognised the importance of engaging with those from ethnically diverse communities. Whilst the vast majority of those who responded to the survey would identify as white (97%), 3% of the respondents identified with other minority ethnic groups. To put this into perspective, the 2021 UK Census (2) reported that 96% of the Fylde population identify as white, suggesting the ethnicity representation within the survey was indicative of the area.

## CURRENT SWIMMING ACTIVITY

Being able to recognise the type of activity, locations and how frequently members of local communities engage with swimming is important. It can play a role in understanding the current market and where resources are currently being utilised across the borough. The findings show that most

swimming pool users engaging with our survey either swim weekly (34%) or occasionally (30%). This highlights two distinctive groups of users that the local authority needs to take into consideration. Figure 4 below shows the swimming frequency in more detail.

### On average, how often do you swim?

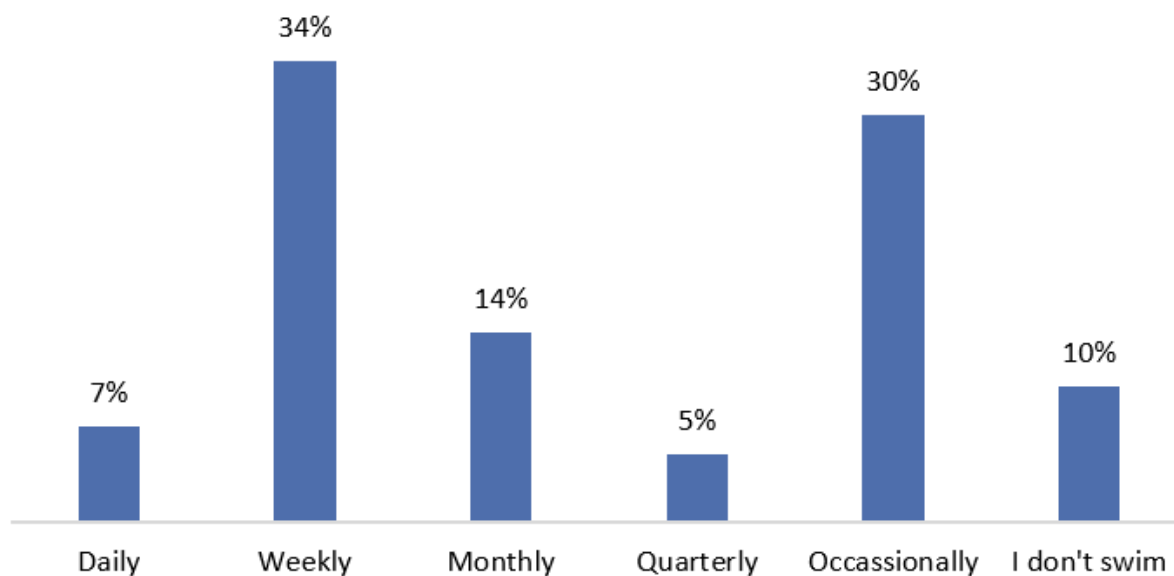


Figure 4 – Swimming frequency levels

Considering sport and leisure membership levels, those with a sport and leisure membership that includes pool access are more likely to swim daily, weekly, or monthly. Whilst those without any form of sport and leisure membership are more likely to swim occasionally or not at all. This is important when considering what the

needs are of those users and the amount of time and money they are willing to spend to access the facilities. This understanding has been considered when having further conversations with members of the public at later stages during the consultation.

Fylde has a range of swimming pool facilities; there is one operated by YMCA, with the building managed by Fylde Borough Council, and others in the private sector such as hotels and holiday parks. In addition to the pools within Fylde, other pools operated by YMCA across the coastal region were included in the consultation as it was recognised those with YMCA membership could access these sites too, regardless of where the individual lived. Figure 5 below shows the findings in more detail but most respondents typically either used St

Annes YMCA Pool and Gym, Ribby Hall Village or Fleetwood YMCA, although respondents were able to tick all that applied to them. It should be noted that those locations marked with an asterisk were not included in the original options but rather were identified through an 'other' category respondents could select from. What is clear is that most users engage with either a charity/ local authority led offer on the coast or in Wyre, or a private holiday park offer which is based in rural Fylde and situated close to the former Kirkham Rural Splash site.

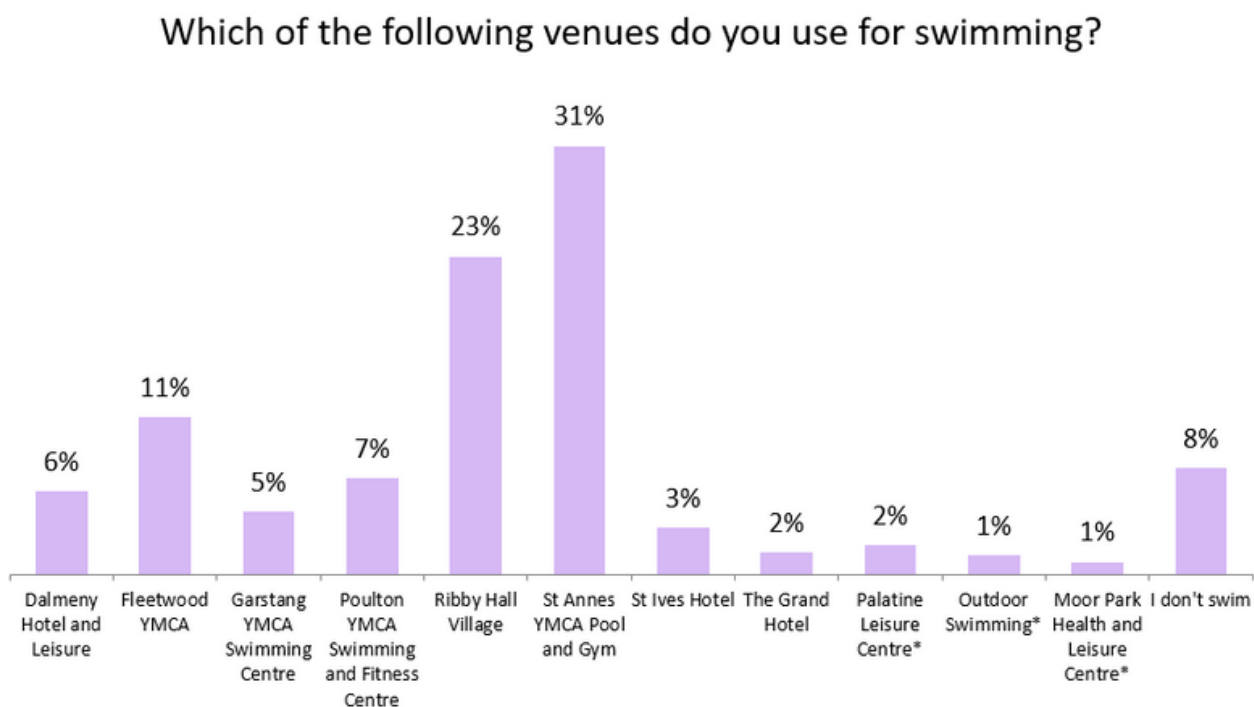


Figure 5 - Where respondents choose to go swimming.

## BARRIERS TO ENGAGING WITH SWIMMING FACILITIES

The consultation sought to better understand the challenges residents of Fylde face when engaging with swimming facilities. Figure 6 below highlights the range of barriers faced.

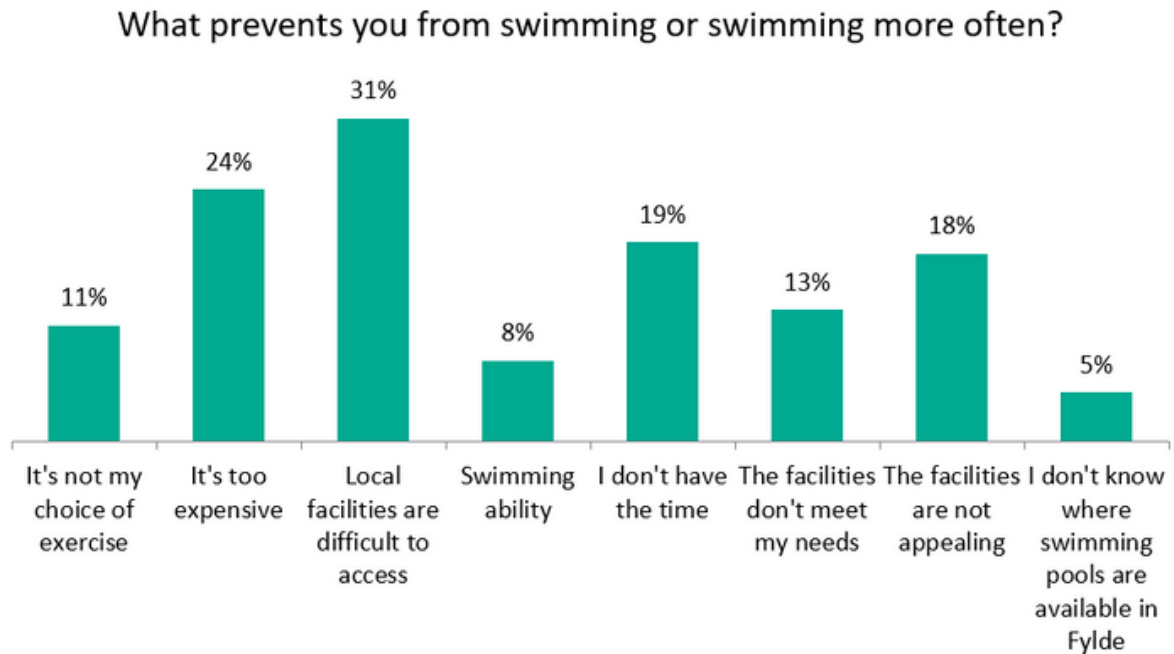


Figure 6 – What prevents members of the public from swimming more often?

Survey respondents could select multiple options which allowed the consultation to appreciate the range of challenges residents and site users face. The most common barrier was 'local facilities are difficult to access' and the activity being too expensive. Facility appearance, lack of time, facilities not meeting needs and not being their choice of exercise were other barriers selected by respondents but were not as prominent. Residents do appear to be aware where the facilities are, given the low proportion of respondents who selected this

option. In addition to the options listed within the question, respondents had a chance to provide further comment. Whilst a range of feedback was provided, the comments often expanded upon the options in the question and provided further insight into residents' experiences.

**“I go to the early morning adult public swimming sessions and find that three times a week (unless away from Fleetwood) fits in nicely with other leisure and hobby activities.”**

**“I love swimming. The parking situation at St. Annes needs improving but it doesn't stop me because there are no restrictions at 7am.”**

**“Now that Kirkham pool has closed Swimming pools are difficult to get to, particularly in the summer months, when they are around the St Annes pool is very busy. At these times the pool at Ribby is also usually unusable for swimming due to the amount of people in it.”**

**“The timetable for the St Anne's pool is so busy I find it difficult to find a time to go (especially if I want to combine it with the gym there).”**

Respondents to the survey were asked what type of transport they would most likely use to access a sport and leisure facility within Fylde. This was important given the urban and rural nature of Fylde and the different approaches members of the public might take. Respondents could select more than 1 mode of transport to indicate a range of preferred options. Most respondents (83%) indicated that a car would be a mode of transport they would use to access sport and leisure facilities. However, 54% of individuals also said they would adopt some form of active travel (walking and/or cycling),

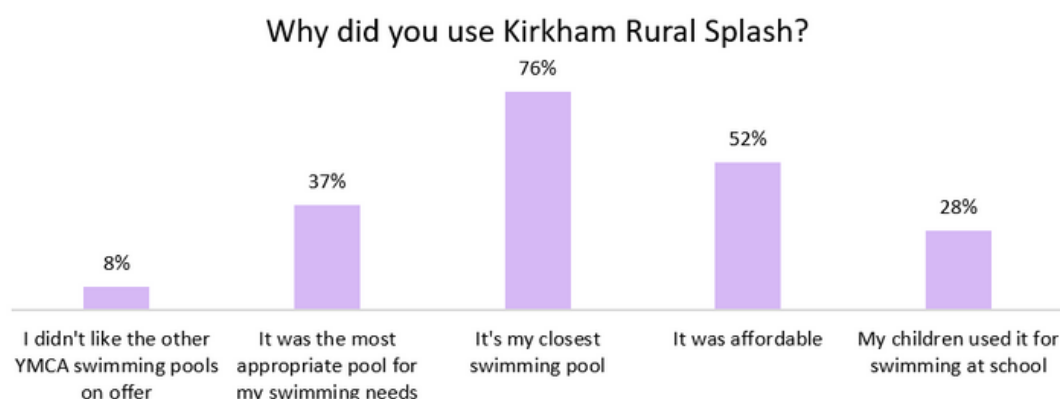
suggesting that if facilities are in appropriate locations, users may choose active travel over driving. Using a bus was selected 17% of the time, showing the continued importance of linking facilities with existing public transport routes. Given respondents felt that a range of transport options were right for them, Fylde Borough Council needs to consider how existing facilities and future developments can accommodate a range of transport options, by collaborating effectively with relevant authorities and transport networks.

## USAGE OF KIRKHAM RURAL SPLASH PRIOR TO CLOSURE

44% of survey respondents either used just the swimming pool or both the swimming pool and gym at Kirkham Rural Splash in the year prior to its closure. Given those individuals are no longer able to access the closed site, it was important to understand why they previously used the facility and where they go swimming now (if at all). This helps to identify what was

attractive to users whilst also building a picture of which facilities across the region are taking on the extra demand generated from the closure.

When asked about why they previously used the facility, a range of options were presented to the public, the findings of which are represented in figure 7 below.



*Figure 7 – Reasons why members of the public used Kirkham Rural Splash*

Respondents could select multiple options, allowing them to express a range of views, but by far the most prominent reason was for its locality in relation to the rural communities it served across the borough. In particular, the towns of Kirkham, Wesham, Newton with Scales, Wrea Green and Freckleton. Other reasons identified included affordability and that the pool was the most appropriate for their swimming needs. Given the site was formally operated by YMCA Fylde Coast, it is not surprising affordability is recognised given their organisational priority of ensuring services are affordable to maximise the benefits within local communities. The pool at Kirkham Rural Splash had varying depths. The deep end of the pool was 1.75 meters deep and the shallow end of the pool was 1 meter deep, allowing individuals to stand if they needed to,

which made it ideal for all swimming abilities and ages.

In addition, it had equipment to cater for those with disabilities (ramp and shallower steps into and out of the pool) and a pool viewing area for parents and carers. The findings also acknowledged the schools that used the site prior to its closure and the knock-on effect this had on schools and the communities they support. This closely aligns with the comments provided by members of the public in relation to this question. Comments often referred to it as being an important place for children and young people to learn how to swim, both in and outside of school. This was true for newer families to the area but also families who have lived in Kirkham for generations.



“My children also attended lessons after school.”

“Had swimming lessons there when younger but now Kirkham has nowhere for children to have them.”

Those who used to use Kirkham Rural Splash were asked which venue(s) they now (if at all) use for swimming. Figure 8 below outlines the key findings identified. Across the 8 pre-identified swimming facilities, most former Kirkham Rural Splash users have moved to either Ribby Hall Village or St Annes YMCA Pool and Gym. Given the geographical proximity Ribby Hall Village has to Kirkham, it is potentially unsurprising that those who can afford to access Ribby Hall Village have chosen to do so. However, facility location and affordability are both key deciding factors for people when choosing a venue as this report will discuss later. A range of other sites were selected with a broad geographical spread and operational model approach, including charity and privately operated with different

priorities. In addition to the pre-identified sites, a proportion of individuals no longer currently swim and a range of additional sites were identified through comments submitted by members of the public. These sites include Palatine Leisure Centre in Blackpool, Inn on the Prom in St Annes, Total Fitness in Preston, and Fulwood Leisure Centre. The most common of these were sites situated in Blackpool. Those who said they no longer swim often described distance and cost being a barrier to accessing facilities (approximately 10% of those who selected other/ I don't use any of the above).

### Which of the following venues do you now use to access swimming opportunities?

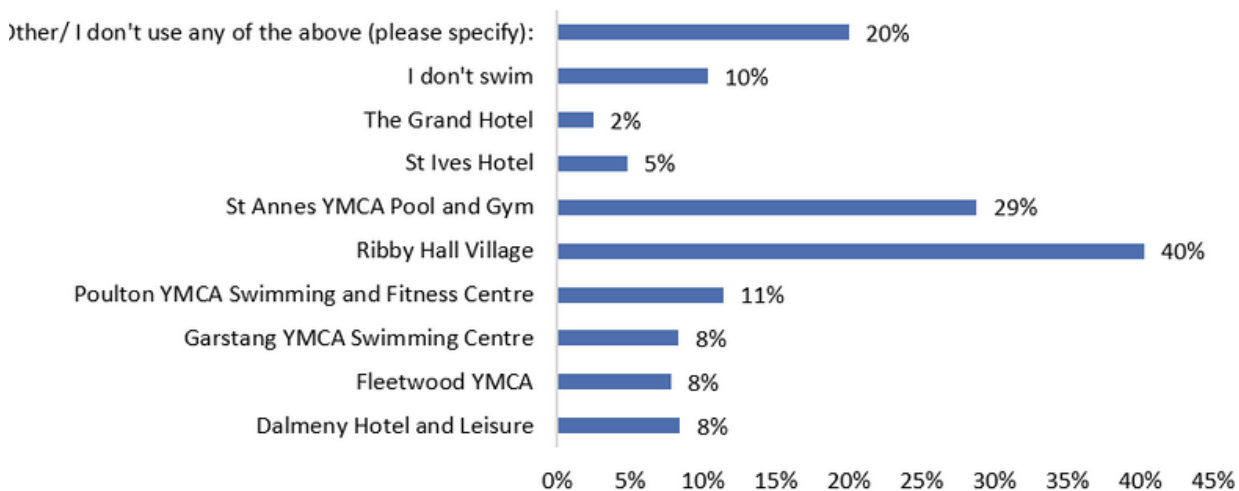


Figure 8 – Where previous Kirkham Rural Splash users now access swimming

## IMPACT ON SCHOOLS

In total, 22 different schools responded to the initial public consultation survey from across the borough and this includes primary, secondary, and special educational needs schools. 20 of these are based within Fylde Borough Council boundaries. Active Lancashire have been made aware of the following schools being moved from Kirkham Rural Splash to other YMCA sites. These are:

- Freckleton Church of England Primary School
- Fulwood St Peters
- Kirkham and Wesham Primary School
- Kirkham Grammar
- Kirkham St Michael's Church of England Primary School
- Newton Blue Coat Church of England Primary School
- St Marys Catholic Primary School
- Strike Lane Primary School
- Weeton Primary School

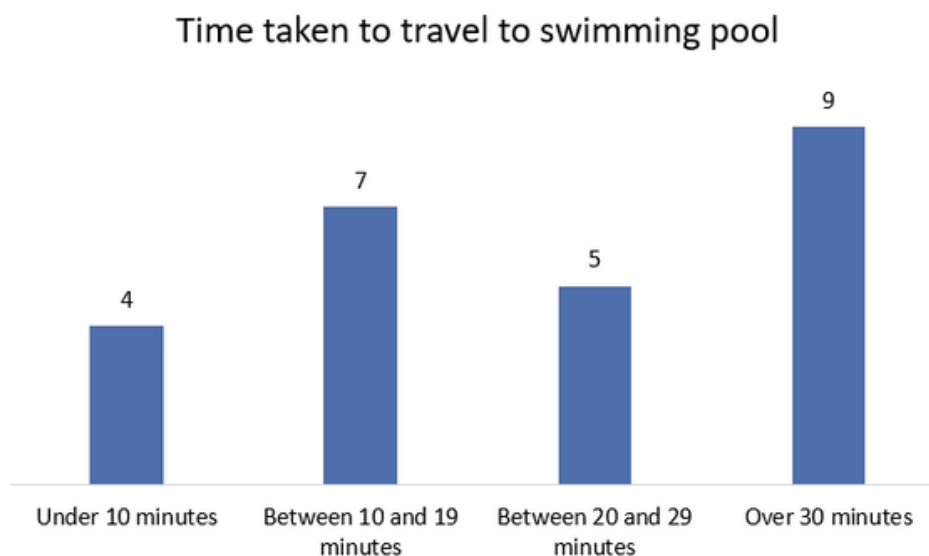
Active Lancashire are also aware of some schools in the area that moved away from YMCA provision prior to its closure due to it not being deemed suitable for their educational needs.

The following schools have been identified based on data collated through the survey to be using Ribby Hall Village:

- Linton School
- Ribby with Wrea
- The Willows Kirkham
- Weeton St Michaels Primary School
- Willows Catholic Primary

Further schools based in Fylde have been identified to be using St Annes YMCA Pool and Gym and this will be discussed later in this report. In addition, the impact of the closure will be discussed in both this section and later in this report within the section covering conversations with schools.

The time it takes for schools to transport its pupils to access swimming facilities varies. Figure 9 below sets out these findings in more detail with the number of schools noted against the time taken to reach the facility.



*Figure 9 – Time taken for schools to travel from their school to the swimming facility.*

This data on its own tells us that schools across Fylde have a broad experience travelling to swimming facilities. Whilst for some schools it is under 10 minutes from the school to the site, for others it is over 20 or 30 minutes each way. Whilst various academic and non-academic reports highlight time away from other curriculum subjects to be a concern and broader barriers to engaging with swimming, less is known about the average time away (3, 4, 5). Research undertaken by Swim England indicate on average schools allow 76 minutes for swimming lessons including travel, changing and the lessons itself (6).

The comments below highlight the broader impact of limited swimming facilities in rural Fylde. Schools that have had to change to another facility have experienced increased costs and travel time. This has a subsequent impact on the young people's education as the schools are forced to spend their budgets on these increased costs rather than other ways to support the educational needs.

**“We tried using the pool at St Anne’s but the travelling time was far too long, and the cost was over three times more because of coach hire. A massive difference. We could walk to Kirkham, now must pay for buses, it takes a whole morning away from learning for the children and has cost £1000s. Due to this no classes are swimming this year. It has failed a vast majority of the children of Kirkham. Not only do they lose out on curriculum swimming and lifesaving skills, but they also miss a proportion of curriculum time through unnecessary travelling of which the costs are horrendous. On top of this, when out of school, the children and their families are missing out on a valuable opportunity for affordable, indoor recreation (whilst learning the lifesaving skill of water safety) in their local area.”**

**“The children now set off from school at 10am and return to school at 12.40pm - this delays our dinner service and means staff do not get a sufficient dinner break. The time it takes to provide swimming lessons has now doubled with children leaving school at 10.15 to swim at 11am. They then return at approximately 12.30 pm and need to have lunch asap. They miss out on 1hrs teaching time and their outside lunchtime play.”**

**“It has meant that the children have less classroom time. When at Kirkham pool it was less than an hour now it’s half a day using St. Anne’s.”**

Further impact on schools will be discussed later in this report through the lens of conversations Active Lancashire held with individual and groups of schools.

## IMPORTANCE OF SWIMMING, COUNCIL SUPPORT AND PUBLIC VIEWS ON NEW FACILITY

This final section of the survey covers 3 broad areas. These are designed to recognise what elements of swimming are important to individuals, how the local population feel the council can best support swimming across Fylde and local views on any new facility, should this be a viable option for Fylde Borough Council.

A wide range of options were presented to members of the public concerning what is personally important to them

when it comes to swimming (figure 10). Whilst some topic areas were clearly more 'important' than others, it was noticeable to see the spread of themes that were important. It is also worth noting that members of the public could select multiple options to allow for flexibility depending on their current role(s) within the community (e.g. teacher, parents, carer, etc).

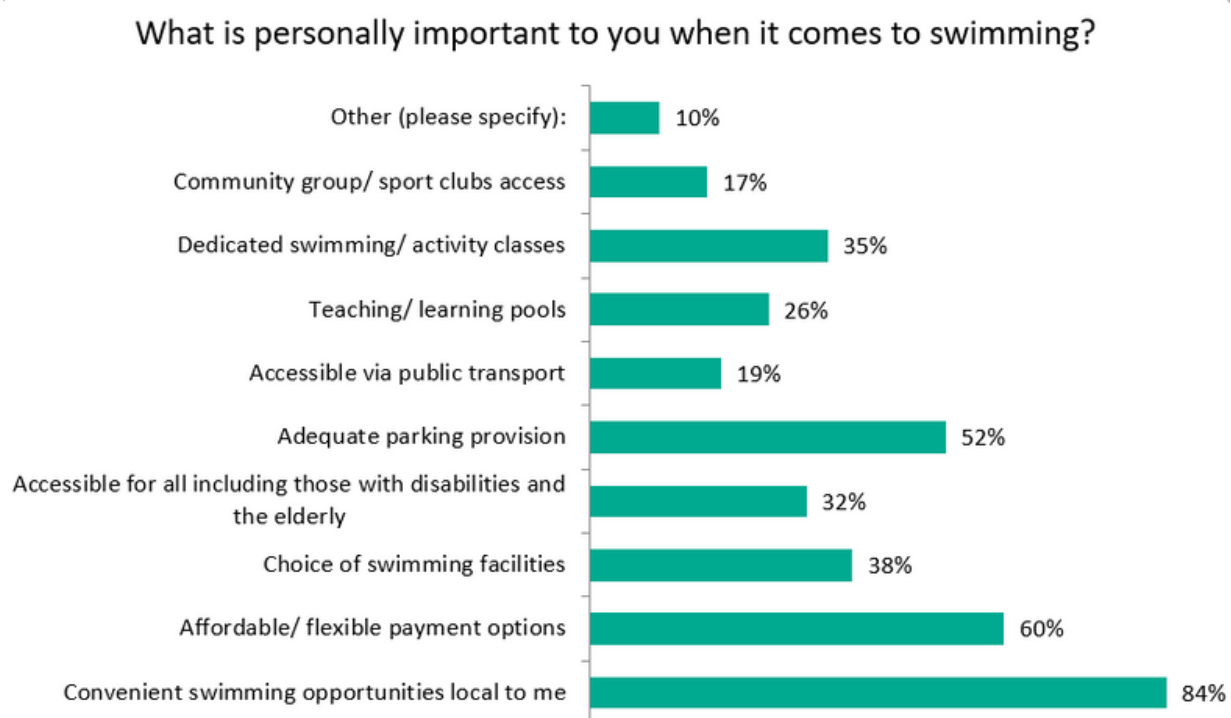


Figure 10 – What is personally important to members of the public when it comes to swimming.

Participants were able to select multiple options, but the most important themes identified by members of the public were:

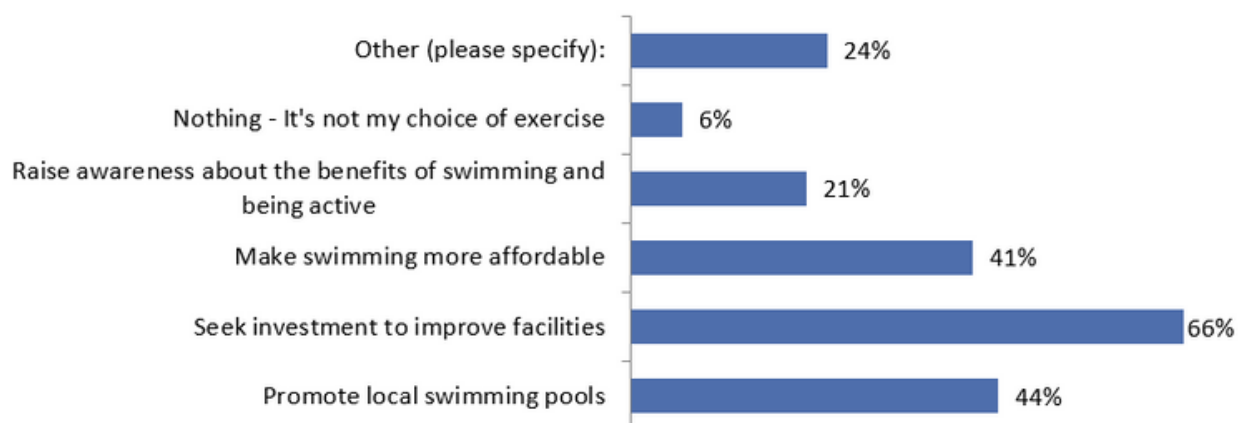
- Convenient swimming opportunities local to me
- Affordable/ flexible payment options
- Adequate parking provision
- Choice of swimming facilities
- Dedicated swimming/ activity classes
- Accessible for all including the disabled and the elderly

These options indicate that any facility needs to be able to offer these elements to ensure it is good value for money for those who use it. These 6 themes were presented to small groups of members of the community in the public consultation events held in February and early March. This was to narrow the list down and understand the reasoning why the themes above

are important. The findings of these conversations are explored later in the report. In addition to the above, additional themes were identified including improving existing facilities, cleanliness of facilities and increasing capacity across the borough.

Council support to encourage swimming could be implemented in a variety of ways including investment, promotion of facilities and benefits, and targeted support to specific stakeholders and groups. Members of the public were asked to consider these options and provide any other options they felt the council could do to support swimming across Fylde. Again, participants were able to tick all that applied to them. Figure 11 below presents the findings from the survey.

### What can Fylde Borough Council do to help support you to take up more swimming?



*Figure 11 – Public views on what Fylde Borough Council could do to help support individuals to take up more swimming.*

Again, members of the public could select multiple options to reflect a range of roles they may undertake in their local community. However, whilst there were a considerable number of comments (587) provided by members of the public, 3 themes were consistently selected. These were:

- Seeking investment to improve facilities
- Promoting local swimming pools
- Making swimming more affordable

Whilst raising awareness about the benefits of swimming and being active was not as common of a selection, it is still important to some and could be considered alongside other options the council may consider, such as promotion and exploring ways to make swimming more affordable. Considering the comments, some additional themes emerged including:

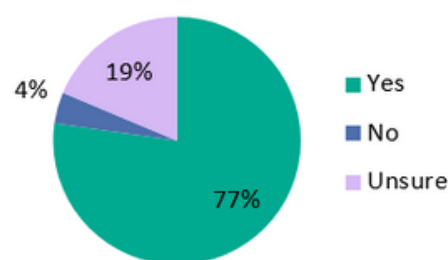
- Modernising facilities
- Reopening or replacing the Kirkham site

- Capacity for swimming and in particular swimming lessons

Whilst this report recognises the challenges investing in a new facility may present to Fylde Borough Council, it is important to consider the public views to understand and capture the inevitable broad set of reasons for this. Figure 12 below sets out the overall findings.

### With the closure of Kirkham Rural Splash, do you feel there is a need for a new sports facility in rural Fylde?

*Figure 12 – Do the public feel there is a need for a new sports facility within rural Fylde?*



The question was specifically worded to consider a broader sport and leisure site that would cover both wet and dry facilities. There are potentially benefits to having a multi-purpose site including long term sustainability, meeting a broad range of local and regional needs and the health and wellbeing benefits for local stakeholders including adults, children, elderly, schools, local clubs and groups and tourists. These benefits can have tangible broader impacts on life expectancy, household income, community, and educational benefits (7, 8, 9). Overwhelmingly members of the public felt there is now a need for a new sports facility in rural Fylde. It is worth noting some members of the public may always select 'yes' regardless of current facility availability but with 1,159 comments submitted in response to this question, a deeper

understanding as to why is possible. A range of themes emerged from these comments including:

- Reducing pressure on existing facilities.
- Travelling to the coast or neighbouring local authorities for affordable facilities is not always suitable.
- Ensuring young people and members of the community can access affordable leisure options.
- Local population across Fylde (rural Fylde in particular) is expected to grow over the coming years, with new housing developments that are either currently underway or expected to start construction.
- Ensuring new or improved facilities are linked across multiple sectors including health and wellbeing, education, and community services.

## STAKEHOLDER CONVERSATIONS

### Provider Interviews

We contacted a number of venues in the Fylde area who have swimming facilities to understand how they operate and what provision they provide to local residents. We had responses from one hotel, two holiday park operators and a leisure facility

### Dalmeny Spa and Hotel

This family-run hotel offers a 20m pool, jacuzzi spa pool and a small children's pool, which is available to all hotel guests and to local residents primarily through monthly memberships, although they do offer a pay per swim option too. They also open up their facility to an external swimming lesson provider 3 evenings per week, who run their sessions independently.

Those with gym memberships generally use the pool mornings and evenings, but also have access to aqua classes that run during the day. Outside of these times the pool tends to be quiet, but this can vary to some degree between peak/off-peak seasons where guest numbers range from 250-300, while membership varies between 1,500-2,000 users. These 2 groups are the hotel's main target audiences, so they therefore prioritise their needs by generally keeping an open pool with limited lane swimming, although they do rope off a section of the pool when classes are in session. This focus therefore limits the scope for offering the facilities out to schools or other large groups, although some arrangement could potentially be

provided. These providers attended a semi-structured interview with Active Lancashire staff to discuss topics including their facilities, operational challenges, current offer, and future plans.

offered at a cost if it would generate enough revenue to cover increased facility maintenance and energy overheads the hotel must cover. Similarly, the hotel itself has accessibility ramps but would need extra financial support to make their pool suitable for users with additional access needs. The hotel has reduced staffing costs by using CCTV to monitor the pool rather than a poolside lifeguard and has made the pool shallower to reduce risk to users. While this is appropriate for their current operations, this arrangement may limit the kinds of groups who could safely use the pool if they were in a position to open up additional access.

The hotel wants to expand the building to potentially accommodate a new spa area, including a pool, but has had difficulty navigating the council planning application process, which has been costly and has prevented any changes so far. They also suggested some strategic direction and incentives from local authorities may encourage businesses in the area to invest in upgrading swimming facilities for locals and tourists alike.

### **Ribby Hall Holiday Village**

This holiday village offers a spa hotel which includes dry facilities such as a gym and a coffee shop, as well as a leisure pool with slides, hot tubs, sauna, and steam rooms. These can be utilised on a pay per swim basis, but they also have a 25m adult pool which is available to on-site guests and those with memberships only. There are around 4,600 local membership holders (general membership cost of £65pm) and a high number of repeat guests given that the site includes both holiday rentals and privately-owned holiday homes, so holiday periods and weekends are generally very busy. As such, an online booking system is utilised to provide timed swimming slots for guests.

They offer a number of swimming activities in term time, including a triathlon club and swimming classes for children, as well as parent and toddler sessions which are offered at discounted rates and are very popular. This therefore means that even in term time there is limited time and space available to give access to school groups, although the provider is open to discussions on this. They are not

### **Partingtons Holiday Parks**

Partingtons own a number of holiday parks, 2 of which are based in Fylde and have pool facilities, namely Newton Hall and Windy Harbour. The facilities vary by site, but include additional features such as saunas, steam rooms and changing facilities. These are only available to guests staying on the park, not the general public, although in the past schools have had access at Newton Hall. These were however redirected to Moor Park and the current business focus is on ensuring the facilities are available to guests

actively looking to attract more pool users as their main concern is that it will affect the experience of existing membership holders; the facility is advertised as a premium health club and there are many older users who tend to use the pool when working people have left and it is quieter. They have however recently partnered with a GP referral scheme aiming to support those with health issues become more active and improve their nutrition, a project part-funded by the NHS.



throughout the season, which runs for the majority of the year.

The facilities cater to various groups of users, offering children's sessions, adult only sessions and lane swimming dependent on needs. The pools also have accessible changing rooms and entrances/exits. While rising utility costs were cited as an operational challenge, there are no plans to close these facilities and there has been refurbishment around the Newton Hall pool.



**YMCA St Annes**

This facility caters to a wide audience, including 15 local schools, the general public and clubs. They provide their own swimming classes and aqua-aerobics classes, pay per swim options and membership starts at £19 per month for pool access, rising to £27pm or £270py for those who also want to access all facilities including the on-site gym. It was noted that the gym wasn't used that much but the pool facilities have become busier since the closure of Kirkham Rural Splash. While there is some extra capacity to cater to

more people, the provider was conscious that this may have a negative impact on current users or create long waiting lists, so although they do run membership promotions (their preferred payment option), they are conscious to not over-subscribe. There are currently no schools on the waiting list despite 5 or 6 having moved across from Kirkham Rural Splash, but any free slots are booked up quickly. See figure 13 below for their 2023/24 timetable for school sessions:

2023 2024	AUTUMN TERM			SPRING TERM			SUMMER TERM		
	9-10	10-11	11-12	9-10	10-11	11-12	9-10	10-11	11-12
<b>MON</b>	Kirkham	Treales St Pauls	Strike Lane	Holy Family	St Pauls	Strike Lane	AKS	AKS	Strike Lane
<b>TUES</b>	AKS	AKS	AKS	Our Ladys	Mayfield		Mayfield	Lytham CofE	Clifton
<b>WED</b>	St Peters	Lytham CofE	Ansdell	Heyhouses	Heyhouses	Heyhouses	St Peters	Hall Park	Hall Park
<b>THURS</b>	Our Ladys	Our Ladys	St Thomas	Our Ladys	St Peters	Freckleton	St Thomas	Lytham CofE	Freckleton
<b>FRI</b>	AKS	AKS	AKS	St Thomas	Kirkham & Wesham	Kirkham St Michael	Holy Family	Kirkham & Wesham	Kirkham St Michael

*Figure 13 – School timetable for YMCA St Annes*

YMCA St Annes can use the pool in various configurations, such as utilising extra lane swimming or can access equipment that lets them offer swim sessions for those with disabilities. During school sessions, which are in place for 3 hours per week in term time, changing rooms are closed off to all other facility users to ensure appropriate safeguarding.

There is adequate parking around the area for customers to access the facility, but there are a number of operational challenges with the building itself for staff, who can face a range of issues on a daily basis. For example,

they have had problems starting the boilers in the morning which delays opening and condensation from the pool has been an ongoing problem. This has had a negative impact on the building, including damage to the roof, electrical systems, and mould in office spaces which has meant that staff do not feel they have access to a suitable staff room. As an older building it may well be more prone to certain issues and it has been suggested that the refurbishment carried out 10 years ago may even have increased the issues with condensation.

Although the YMCA has been operating this facility since 2009, the building is owned by Fylde Borough Council so any repairs or changes must be arranged through them. YMCA staff expressed concern that effective long-term solutions to the operational problems will require a great deal of additional investment, which they felt would be difficult to secure for the facility. It is however worth noting at this point that Fylde Borough Council secured phase 1 SPSF funding for this facility which has been used to alleviate operational costs and address the condensation problem by consulting with a specialist firm. Additionally phase 2 funding has also now been

allocated which will be used to renovate the building further. However, during this time dehumidifiers have been used to mitigate problems which has increased the facility running costs and in turn has meant an increase in costs for customers too. There are also additional pressures on the facility to support greater numbers of customers due to the closure of Kirkham Rural Splash, which staff believe is because there are no other local facilities that can meet the needs of the local population in terms of accessibility or suitability. YMCA have tender on this facility until 2025 but are unsure of how operations will function after this time.



## SCHOOL CONSULTATIONS

In addition to the survey questions targeted specifically at schools, we also contacted schools directly to discuss their experiences of accessing swimming provision in the area. We were able to attend an online sports association meeting with schools based in the Lytham and St Annes area to pose some questions directly to their representatives, while for schools based in and around Kirkham we collated email responses to the same questions.

### **Email Correspondence**

For those schools that moved their provision to Ribby Hall before Kirkham Rural Splash closed, there was not a direct impact on delivering their swimming curriculum and St Joseph's stated they did so because they felt the provision offered at Kirkham Rural Splash was unsatisfactory. However, Kirkham Willows mentioned a noticeable effect on children's swimming ability overall because they now have limited access to extra-curricular swimming due to high costs and high demand. As a greater number of children were failing to meet curriculum requirements, the school were able to use their Sports Premium funding to source a temporary 25m on-site pool to boost pupil's swimming experience time, but this funding may not be available in the future.

For those schools who have been unable to get an allocated place at Ribby Hall, delivering swimming is much more difficult and some were

without any provision for months while waiting to see if Kirkham Rural Splash would re-open. These schools have now moved to YMCA St Annes which can be over a 2-hour roundtrip in some cases, a substantially longer time than the swimming lessons themselves. This travel time also takes away from the rest of the school day, with schools describing how children have ended up eating their lunch in lessons to make up for time lost or missing out on Maths and English classes. Kirkham St Michael's condensed all students' swimming lessons into one year to catch up with requirements after covid, but also to avoid the disruptions caused by this the following year. There is also added pressure on the school faculty, who must allocate several staff to oversee pupils during travel and swimming lessons for this whole period.

Pear Tree school has their own 5m hydrotherapy pool, so can teach basic swimming on-site, but have been unable to access any other facilities for students who are able to swim longer distances due to lack of availability and time. This has been a major source of frustration and disappointment for parents at this school. Several other schools have also expressed similar attitudes from parents in relation to changes they have had to make to meet the swimming curriculum.

### **Sports Association Online Meeting**

None of the schools represented in this meeting had used Kirkham Rural Splash for their school swimming provision previously, opting to use St Anne's due to its closer proximity to these schools. They did not therefore have to make any major changes to their delivery but did note that due to many Kirkham schools now also using the facility, there was less flexibility in swimming timeslots, often schools were unable to pick times that suited them or could have them changed. They also noted that schools from Blackpool were enquiring about using the St Annes facility too due to some issue accessing their local facility, Palatine, suggesting demand will only increase. It is understood these schools will be unlikely to get priority over local schools, but it does show that across the region swimming provision is becoming harder to access for schools. Additionally, provision costs have increased for schools considerably in the past year, meaning financial as well

as physical barriers are increasing. The rest of the conversation focused less on the facilities themselves, but on the way swimming lessons were being provided. There appears to be a Lancashire County Council-led directive to encourage the schoolteachers themselves to guide the sessions using lesson plans developed for them to implement, with support from qualified swimming teachers at the YMCA. In a practical training session for teachers that was introducing this, the teachers in the meeting found this more manageable than expected, although there appeared to be some anxiety around this new form of delivery from others. There also seemed to be some resistance from the YMCA swim instructors on this new approach, so the YMCA will need to be more effectively integrated with this if there are to be coherent changes to the way school provision is delivered in the area.



## PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS

Following a public survey and a series of stakeholder conversations being held, the insight gathered fed into the development and delivery of a series of public consultation events. These events were held in Kirkham and Wesham (given the focus on rural Fylde within the council) but invitations were sent to residents across the Fylde borough. Following a review of those who responded to the public consultation survey, invites were sent out to individuals who swim regularly, those who don't currently swim, used to use Kirkham Rural Splash in the 12 months prior to its closure and also live within the boundaries of Fylde Borough Council. In total, 47 individuals attended the sessions that were designed to facilitate co-designing of ideas that can be considered by Fylde Borough Council. Those who attended represented a broad range of roles and experience from local communities including retirees, teachers and head teachers, swim teachers and leisure staff, parents, young people, and families who previously had or currently have sport and leisure membership. This section aims to highlight the key findings captured from these events which focused on 5 key questions. The themes explored in these workshops were:

- Exploring in more detail what is important to members of the public when it comes to swimming.
  - Exploring in more details ways the local council could support swimming across Fylde.
  - An opportunity for members of the public to comment on anything else they felt was important and has not been covered throughout the whole consultation process between January and March.
- How members of the public felt their current swimming facility compared to Kirkham Rural Splash when it was open**
- Across all the groups, swimming experience varied from those expressing concern for the poor condition of current facilities, such as the YMCA St Annes pool, whilst others with more disposable income were happy with the facilities available at other sites such as Ribby Hall Village and other hotel sites. Members of the public who use sites such as Ribby Hall Village were very transparent about the high costs they are having to pay but accept they are both able and willing to pay these increased costs. They reported that these facilities are much cleaner, offer higher quality of equipment and a much-improved customer service experience compared to Kirkham when it was open. Those who currently use sites such as St Annes express concern about the current state of facilities, cleanliness, equipment maintenance and are concerned about their long-term future. Examples specific to St Annes include roof maintenance, changing facilities being in a poor state, showers not working, electrical problems and
- How members of the public felt their current swimming facility compared to Kirkham Rural Splash when it was open? In particular, what could be learnt from existing sport and leisure facilities across the borough and surrounding areas.
  - What is a 'reasonable' amount to pay to be able to access swimming facilities in Kirkham/ Rural Fylde?

condensation issues. Members of the public also identified YMCA Poulton as being a better facility than St Annes but expressed concern that they were required to travel outside of the borough to access affordable swimming at an acceptable site. Some members of the public discussed about using hotels, but again costs were a factor in decisions and whether the sites had a suitable pool to meet their needs and those of tourists staying at hotels, creating capacity challenges to access the facility.

Members of the public acknowledged that Kirkham Rural Splash had a limited car park compared to other facilities across the borough. Despite this, it was frequently discussed that weekends, half terms and the summer period parking within Lytham and St Annes are particularly challenging with many local, regional, and national (during festivals and events) tourists visiting the area. This presents challenges to those who must travel by car to St Annes from rural Fylde and are unable to park their car locally. Many members of the public explained that street parking was more accessible within Kirkham given less tourists visit the area. Those who use sites such as Ribby Hall Village or Poulton highlighted adequate parking provision making the site more accessible by car. Public transport could be an alternative option for those who need to travel across Fylde to access swimming facilities, but many residents expressed concern about it being challenging to access regular buses to and from facilities at all times of the day and across the week. Examples given included bus stops away from the facilities and limited services throughout the day, such as one bus an hour for some routes across the borough.

Many residents noted existing facilities within and beyond the borough were often busy and found it challenging to book a time to access the pool. This was especially the case during normal working hours in term time at sites such as St Annes, due to schools accessing them, and during half term at tourist-focused sites such as Ribby Hall. When Kirkham Rural Splash was open, many residents described swimming as being easier to access and capacity being less of an issue, with the site serving a wide variety of groups and individuals. Many of these have now been forced to move to another site across the borough, adding further capacity challenges to existing sites.

When considering supporting infrastructure that adds greater value to swimming facilities, many residents commented on gyms, cafés, multi-purpose rooms, and other dry based activities such as climbing walls or courts. These were assets that were preferential at current sites being used compared to Kirkham Rural Splash when it was open. It was also noted that members of the public were realistic and maintained their priority was ensuring a suitable pool was established to serve rural Fylde with additional assets being seen as a 'bonus'. In addition, many residents commented on the 'odd' size of Kirkham Rural Splash swimming pool being 22 meters or locally known as 24 yards. This doesn't always make it ideal to meet the national curriculum requirement of ensuring young people can swim 25 meters competently. Other sites such as St Annes and Ribby Hall have a 25-meter pool but at sites like Poulton it is only 20 meters. Finally, it was noted that some schools have tried to approach Ribby Hall Village to use their pool for swimming lessons and

have been advised of no discounts for schools. For some schools, the rate charged by Ribby Hall Village is not sustainable. Active Lancashire have been made aware of at least 2 schools within Fylde that have been forced to spend up to £8,000 a year on a pop-up swimming pool for 2 weeks. This is to ensure they continue to meet national curriculum requirements and offer intensive lessons over a short period of time. When asked why they were not looking at using existing facilities, cost of travelling to these sites and securing time within the existing timetable was not possible or sustainable.

**What is a 'reasonable' amount to pay to be able to access swimming facilities in Kirkham/ Rural Fylde?**

Members of the public were asked what they felt was a 'reasonable' amount to pay to be able to access swimming facilities, which included their views on what they felt should be offered within these price expectations.

For just being able to access a basic swimming pool and appropriate changing facilities, members of the public felt that between £5 and £8 per swim (with no membership) was appropriate. However, if the facility was

of high quality and well maintained then there may be willingness to pay slightly more per swim. With regards to membership prices for a typical adult, members of the public felt between £30 and £40 a month was appropriate depending on the quality and type of facilities included in the price. For example, if the facility had a café, gym and some social spaces/ multi-purpose rooms, and other dry facilities then members may be prepared to pay a higher membership fee.

Members of the public recognised the need to ensure any facility is sustainable and would prefer to pay a fee that would enable long term sustainability than a fee that doesn't support the facility economically. It is also worth noting that consideration and support in the form of discounted rates to those on lower incomes, families, elderly, and those with disabilities. In addition, the council should consider working in partnership with other organisations such as local GP surgeries, NHS, sporting organisations and others to increase participation rates and potentially generate further income to support the operational costs of such a facility.



### **Exploring in more detail what is important to members of the public when it comes to swimming**

As discussed earlier in this report, a series of themes were presented to members of the public within the public consultation survey. From this, 6 key themes were identified as being the most important to members of the public when it comes to swimming.

These 6 were:

- Convenient swimming opportunities local to me
- Affordability/flexible payment options
- Choice of swimming facilities
- Adequate parking provision
- Accessibility for all, including those with disabilities and the elderly
- Dedicated swimming/activity classes

These 6 were presented to those who attended the public consultation events and were asked to consider which 3 are the most important and why. Across all the events, 3 themes emerged consistently as the most important. These were:

#### **Convenient swimming opportunities local to me:**

Many members of the public understood and recognised that whilst they would prefer a facility within central Kirkham to remain, it may not necessarily be practical or suitable to all. A consensus was reached across all groups that a facility may be needed within or near the Kirkham and Wesham area. A site that is well connected to existing road network and public transport is vital, with suggestions being made of AFC Fylde or similar site types with close connections to the motorway. Many members of the public felt that this

could attract a broader audience and tourists to help boost facility users and compete with neighbouring facilities. In addition, it would help to reduce some of the increased travel times being experienced by schools within the rural Fylde area and in turn benefit both schools financially and pupils' educational attainment and employability prospects.

#### **Affordability/flexible payment options:**

As discussed within the previous question regarding appropriate charges to access the facility, many members of the public felt those who can pay should and those who may need extra support should be offered more affordable rates or flexible payment options. Ideas discussed include monthly, every 3 months, annually and tiered options based on what individuals or groups would need access to (if a multi-purpose site).

#### **Accessibility for all, including those with disabilities and the elderly:**

Members of the public recognise this as being vital to ensuring any facility can cater for as many as possible within communities across Fylde. They felt the benefits would be amplified across other sectors including local health services, businesses, social services and individual and community groups' health and wellbeing. It was believed that classes and clubs would become established once the right equipment (e.g. ramps or hoists) and support (e.g. subsidies and/ or partnerships to deliver services) has been put in place.



### Exploring in more details ways the local council could support swimming across Fylde

- Understanding how the public feel Fylde Borough Council could better support swimming across the borough was initially explored through the survey. The public consultation events sought to explore this topic area further with a particular focus on:
- Seeking investment to improve facilities
- Promoting local pools
- Making swimming more affordable

A range of options were discussed including but not limited to:

- Subsidising school swimming costs to support those having to use PE and Sport Premium funding or other funding streams that are not sustainable in the long term.
- Consider converting the existing Kirkham Rural Splash site to another community-based site or exploring how it could become a commercial asset to the council.
- Consider undertaking a feasibility study on refurbishment and options to support this option includes a section 106 order.
- Developing and clearly communicating a sport/ leisure/ health and wellbeing strategy or approach that the council would use to support health and wellbeing across Fylde. Being clear on short, medium, and long-term aspirations for the borough.
- Many members of the public felt that local hotels were not always suitable for meeting the swimming needs of the local population as capacity to access facilities is limited, especially during busy tourism periods.

Besides the options above, most members of the public identified with one of two groups:

### Refurbishing the existing Kirkham Rural Splash site

so that rural Fylde has swimming opportunities.

Reasons for this approach include:

- a. It could offer a simple pool to serve local communities and schools to offer swimming opportunities.
- b. Many were querying how the estimated cost of £12 million and a 5+ year timescale to develop a new facility was established and did not believe it to be realistic given other developments across the borough and the challenges they have faced.
- c. Members of the public felt this approach could be a more affordable option for the council given the broader economic landscape being experienced by local authorities.

### Identifying a site and developing a purpose-built facility

that would cater for rural Fylde.

Reasons for this approach include:

- a. Offers a long-term, purpose-built facility that would cater for local and regional needs with potential commercial opportunities for Fylde Borough Council. These opportunities include residents, clubs and groups, tourists, swimming lessons and other sport competitions (assuming wet and dry site) and being able to compete with other established facilities across the borough.
- b. Provides long-term stability for local schools and young people across Fylde to learn to swim and meet national curriculum requirements. It also would reduce costs that are currently being experienced through increased travel and increased venue hire costs at some existing facilities.
- c. Whilst members of the public recognised the heritage associated with Kirkham Rural Splash, many of these heritage elements could be transferred to any new site. These include trophies, pictures, stories from those who previously used the site.

d. Some of those who attended the public consultation events expressed an interest in being part of a

**An opportunity for members of the public to comment on anything else they felt was important and has not been covered throughout the whole consultation process between January and March.**

This final topic area was included to allow members of the public to express views that haven't yet been captured throughout the consultation process, any concerns they may have and any further questions they have for the Fylde Borough Council.

A range of views were captured including:

- Communication with the public is very important with whatever decision(s) is/ are being made. Many members of the public feel like they are not being listened to or understand what the council's position is regarding swimming or indeed broader sport/ health and wellbeing matters.
- Ensure financial viability of any new or refurbished site so that local communities are not impacted in the same way in the future.
- Consider the number of children who are not learning to swim due to a lack of local pool and the strain on schools. Also consider the elderly population who can benefit from swimming and the subsequent broader benefits it can bring to other local and national services.
- Concerns regarding what work has currently taken place regarding the Kirkham facility and if this could be communicated with local communities.

stakeholder group to support the local council and ensuring any money spent is of good value.

- Some residents voiced concerns about how the £12 million and 5+ years' timeframe was reached with regards to any new site. If there is an opportunity for greater transparency it would be greatly appreciated even if it is via a dedicated stakeholder group(s).
- Some residents voiced concerns about the support offered by the council after a meeting that took place at Kirkham Community Centre in the Autumn of 2023. Active Lancashire understand there was a developer from Wrea Green (Libby Steale who ran the swimming lessons swimming clubs) and many other who were vocal about the closure of Kirkham Rural Splash, who put their names on a list because they wanted to be involved in further developments. However there appears to have been little follow-up on this which has had a negative impact on trust and belief in the local council. It has now come to light that the stated purpose of the list was to provide updates via the Fylde Borough Council newsletter as and when they were available so there has been a misunderstanding of its purpose. As such, it has been suggested that any group wishing to seek support should engage with Fylde Borough Council direct.

- Consider approaching housing developers for funding towards sport and leisure given the various housing developments either currently or due to be developed soon. Additionally, deprivation aspects need to be considered with lots of new homes but people working out of the area and not contributing to the local community.
- Many members of the public voiced concerns about the lack of opportunities for local young people within the area and asked how the council could better work alongside other organisations such as charities.

## OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE CONSULTATION

Throughout the consultation process, Active Lancashire received and collated some additional views in the form of letters, social media comments and views from key leaders across the borough. This section aims to summarise these views as part of the consultation findings.

Whilst many of the points raised from other contributions are similar and reflect the general experience of those who contributed to the consultation so far, some additional points were raised.

This includes a clear desire to ensure leisure provision is local and affordable to maximise the benefits to social, physical, and mental wellbeing.

In addition, views covered the negative impact of the closure of Kirkham Rural Splash on young people and schools. Finally, any refurbished or new site should be able to accommodate a range of needs including lessons, children and young people, adults, disabled and the elderly.



## STAKEHOLDER SUMMARY

Given the broad nature of the consultation and the variety of different stakeholders engaged with over the consultation period, this section aims to bring together some of the key themes from the perspectives of the key stakeholders. These views should be considered alongside the in-depth findings analysis that has been presented throughout this report and not in isolation as it is not possible to cover everything in a succinct manner.

### **Members of the public**

With over 2,500 responses to the survey and a further 47 individuals engaging with group discussions, some common themes have emerged which Fylde Borough Council should consider. Typically, individuals tend to swim either weekly, monthly, or occasionally depending on their reasons for swimming. For example, someone who is part of a club or engages with swimming to maintain or improve their health is more likely to swim weekly or monthly, whilst those who engage with swimming for fun are more likely to swim occasionally. Regardless of how often people swim though, facilities need to cater for their unique needs. Through the survey and speaking with members of the public, the majority of those who swim currently either use St Annes or Ribby Hall Village, with some users transferring to Palatine Leisure in Blackpool, Moor Park Health and Leisure in Blackpool, outdoor swimming, or other sites across the region.

There are some common barriers that members of the public appear to experience when engaging with or looking to engage with swimming. These include finding local facilities challenging to access, financial costs associated with swimming, travel time and facilities not being suitable to their needs (e.g. lack of changing facilities, pool type, specific accessibility needs such as ramps). Many of these barriers were addressed by Kirkham Rural Splash for those who used to use the site and many of these previous users have expressed views on benefits and concerns about other sites. In particular, accessibility to sites and parking, costs to users, capacity of facilities to meet local demands and being aware of how facilities can be used flexibly to meet local needs (e.g. multi-purpose rooms and flexible pool space to cater for lessons or open swimming).

Three key themes emerged as being important to the public including:

- Ensuring swimming opportunities are local.
- Ensuring swimming and leisure opportunities are affordable with flexible payment options (e.g. pay and play, memberships, tiered support).
- Ensuring there is accessibility for all, including those with disabilities and the elderly.

Potential council support was also explored initially through the survey and in more detail through the public consultation events. Three broad discussion themes emerged:

**Refurbishing the existing Kirkham site** to secure swimming opportunities for rural Fylde in the short term to ease pressures identified within the report across all stakeholders.

**Identifying a site and developing a new purpose-built facility** to cater for rural Fylde and surrounding areas. This was identified as a long-term option if Fylde Borough Council could secure appropriate investment. Benefits again could be experienced across sectors including economic and societal benefits. In addition, it could provide long term sustainability to the region with the potential to attract tourists, clubs, and community groups to compete with local competition across the borough.

**Range of additional support** including subsidising school swimming to support with increased costs, converting the existing Kirkham site to another community based or commercial asset, further exploring costs associated with refurbishing or developing a new site, clearly communicating the council's approach to sport, leisure, and health with the public alongside broader communication on topics associated with this.

### **Swimming Pool Providers**

Despite differences in the kinds of facilities providers operate, there is a consensus that most are running at or close to their desired capacity. YMCA St Annes stands out as differing from the other facilities in that it aims to cater to a wide variety of community groups and schools across the area,

whereas the others have a much more defined clientele based on their business models. Although some do provide access to outside groups, most are at least somewhat reluctant to open up additional access based on the potential negative impact it would have on their core audience of guests and local membership holders. However, most were open to having conversations with the council around this if there was potential for investment or new revenue streams. The fact that the YMCA are the only facility currently catering to the wider community, but are experiencing several operational issues, suggests a potential risk to accessible swimming provision in the area if they were to have to shut their facility as Kirkham Rural Splash did. Rising utility costs were cited by most providers as an operational issue and both Dalmeny and the YMCA mentioned the increasing costs of maintenance as infrastructure aged, but Dalmeny and Partingtons do have plans to develop aspects of their sites, although this is not specific to their swimming facilities necessarily.

### **Schools across Fylde**

Both the survey responses and the discussions we had directly with schools painted a similar picture of swimming provision in Fylde, with a lot of discussion around the impact of the closure of Kirkham Rural Splash. As would be expected, schools in the Kirkham district have faced the most challenges relating to the closure, with higher associated costs, greater travel times and more restrictive timetabling which impacts the school day for teachers and students. However, for those who did not use Kirkham Rural Splash originally, they have now also found it more difficult to arrange

swimming lessons at convenient times as there has been much greater demand on facilities in their vicinity. In particular, YMCA St Annes is heavily relied on by the majority of schools in the area, with 13 of the schools who responded to our survey using this facility, almost 3 times as many as at any other facility. This greater demand on facilities also extends outside of school time, so children's overall swimming ability has potentially reduced due to increased challenges in accessing swimming experience outside of the curriculum requirements, especially if they are from lower income households.

### **Other stakeholders including Businesses and Social Media**

Throughout the consultation process, Active Lancashire collated additional comments and concerns. Both the letter from the business and social media comments highlighted similar views and concerns already discussed in this report.



## CONSIDERATIONS FOR FYLDE BOROUGH COUNCIL

As a result of undertaking this consultation exercise some considerations have been developed based on the findings established throughout the process and are designed to support the council in its own next steps.

**Communication** – It has become clear throughout these consultations that there is a need for effective communication channels between decision-makers and local stakeholders, so they feel informed of developments and their needs are integrated within authority priorities. . In addition, any future activity that involves these key stakeholders needs to have in place a clear communication plan prior, during and post-activity to ensure time and resource is utilised effectively. There should be a drive to rebuild mutual trust and respect between the community and Fylde Borough Council, in collaboration with leisure providers where relevant, as this appears to have suffered due to uncertainties around issues such as the closure of Kirkham Rural Splash.

**Being clear on role and responsibilities** – There appears to be a lack of clarity about the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders involved in providing swimming provision. For example, what are the roles and responsibilities of the local council in facilitating local leisure provision? What are the obligations of leisure operators and associated swimming pool providers in operating facilities? What are the minimum

access requirements expected for local schools to be able to deliver their swimming curriculum? Clarity would potentially help establish actionable steps, as well as realistic perceptions and expectations of all stakeholders, including the general public.

**Aspirations and plans** – Fylde Borough Council's latest Local Plan (10) was adopted in December 2021, outlining their priorities on topics including economic prosperity, transport infrastructure, environment and climate, housing, early years and education, health and wellbeing, and communities and place. Physical activity is embedded to varying degrees across these themes, but Active Lancashire would like to emphasise the importance of this integration to ensure short, medium, and long-term strategic objectives for the council can be achieved through the far-reaching benefits of improved health and wellbeing in residents. Plans for changes or development to local swimming provision, such as any regarding Kirkham Rural Splash, should be shared in an appropriate format with key stakeholders to establish community buy-in and foster co-creation.

**Provision and facility sustainability** – The consultation highlighted concerns around future disruption to provision, particularly for schools, many of whom already face difficulties to meet curriculum requirements. These are

based around the heavy reliance on YMCA St Annes by many groups and individuals since the closure of Kirkham Rural Splash, which has suffered from operational issues and will undergo a tender process for an operator in 2025 which is when the current lease with the YMCA comes to an end.

Fylde Borough Council has taken steps to secure SPSF funding to support this facility, with funding

offered on the proviso that this facility will remain open for at least 10 years, should alleviate some of the immediate concerns for residents. However, creative planning and investment of funding by decision-makers is imperative to improving accessibility to swimming facilities and ensuring these adequately meet the needs of schools and local residents long-term.

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## APPENDICIES

### Appendix 1 – Additional Reading Material and Information to Consider

The below list are resources and reports Fylde Borough Council and any additional organisation involved in swimming provision should be made aware of. They provide further insight into national research and useful resources.

- Swim England are the national governing body for swimming in England and can provide guidance and support - <https://www.swimming.org/swimengland/>
- A Decade of Decline Swim England Report (September 2021) - <https://www.swimming.org/swimengland/decadeofdecline/>
- National curriculum in England: PE programmes of study - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-physical-education-programmes-of-study>
- ‘Don’t Put a Cap on Swimming’ Social Value Report from Swim England (2023) - <https://www.swimming.org/swimengland/value-swimming-research/>
- England Swims report produced by Swim England (2022) - <https://www.swimming.org/swimengland/england-swims-research-findings/>
- Guidance on managing and developing swimming facilities - <https://www.swimming.org/swimengland/managing-your-pool/>



