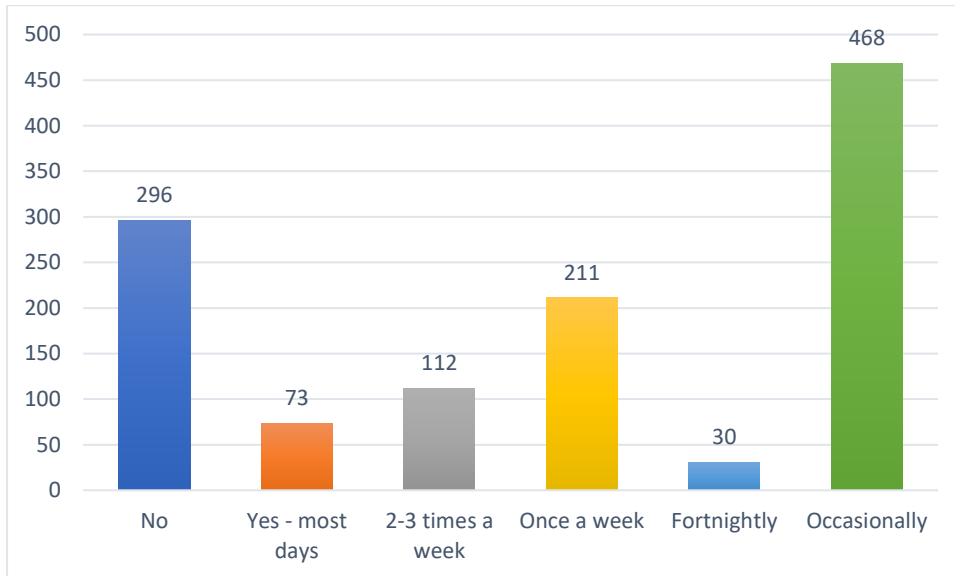


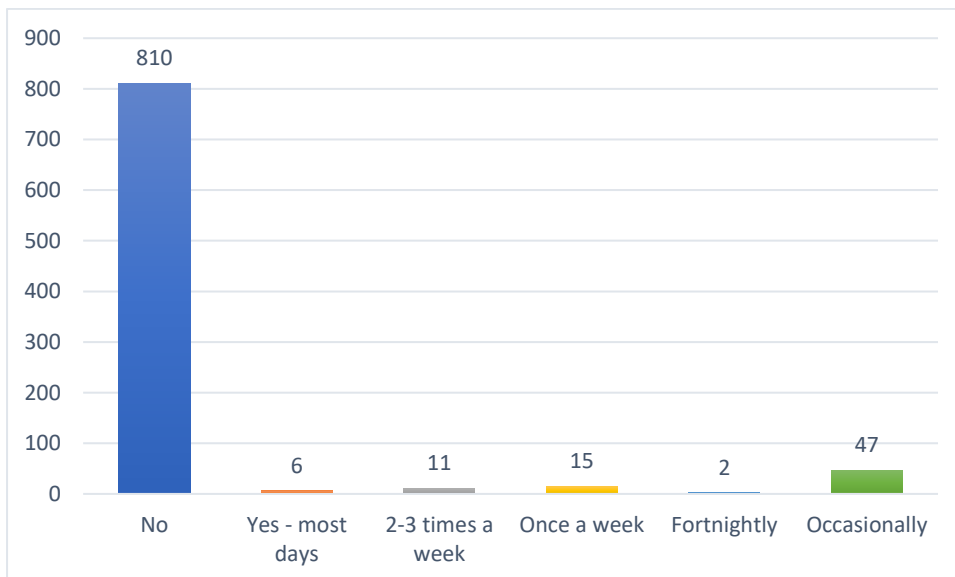
Soft play at North Herts Leisure Centre

1191 Responses 02:00 Average time to complete Closed Status

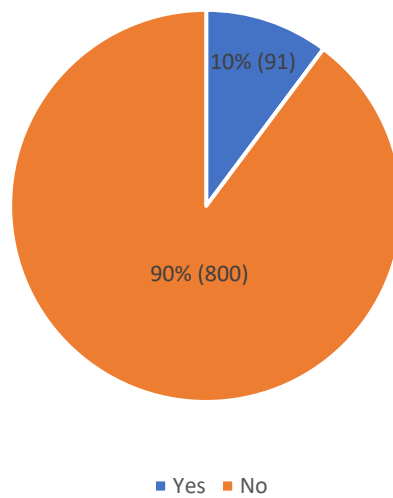
1. Do you currently use North Herts Leisure Centre (Baldock Road, Letchworth)?



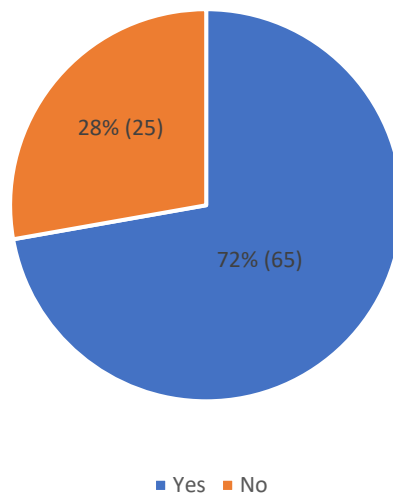
2. Do you use the squash courts at North Herts Leisure Centre?



3. Do you use the changing rooms located in the squash court area?



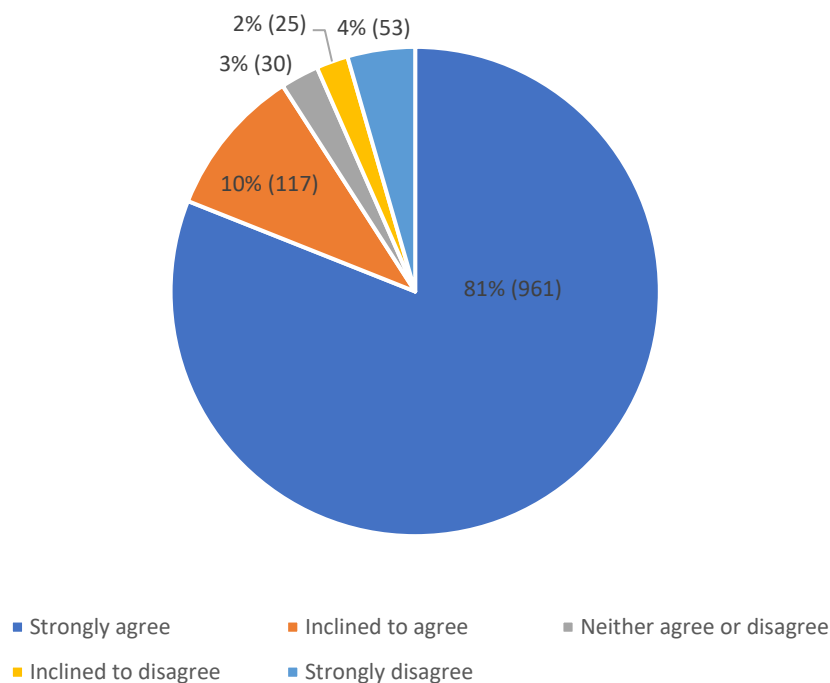
4. If yes, would you be happy to use alternative changing facilities in the leisure centre?



5. If no, please tell us why:

Open responses can be found in a separate appendix.

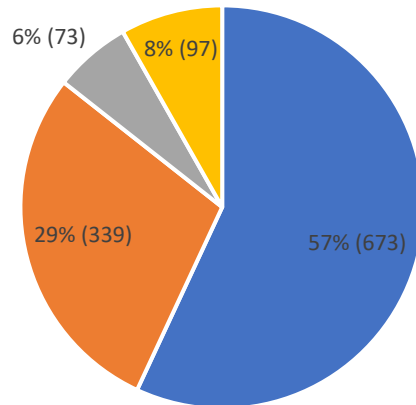
6. Please indicate if you agree or disagree with the following statement: The proposal to convert two squash courts and changing area into a soft play facility will be a positive addition to the facilities at North Herts Leisure Centre.



Please indicate if you agree or disagree with the following statement: The proposal to convert two squash courts and changing area into a soft play facility will be a positive addition to the facilities at North Herts Leisure Centre.	Percentage	Total respondents
Strongly agree	81%	961
Inclined to agree	10%	117
Neither agree or disagree	3%	30
Inclined to disagree	2%	25
Strongly disagree	4%	53

7. Please tell us why you disagree or strongly disagree:
Open responses can be found in a separate appendix.

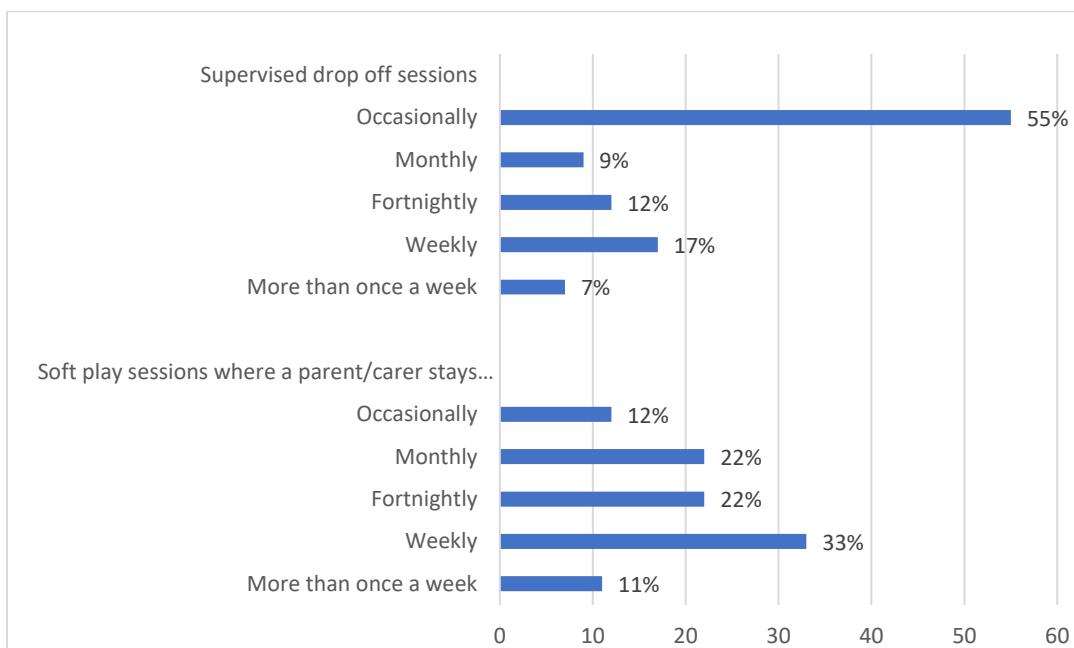
8. Do you visit soft play facilities?



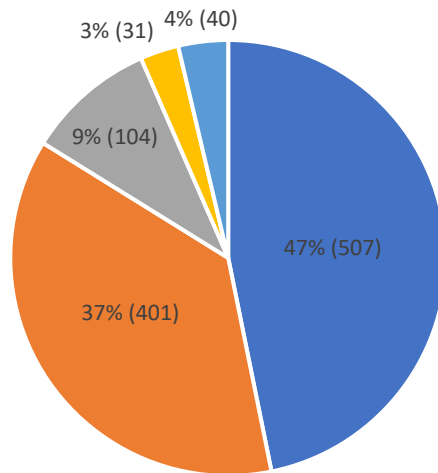
- Yes, regularly
- Yes, occasionally
- No, but would be interested in the future
- I do not have young children so no need to visit soft play facilities

Do you visit soft play facilities?	Percentage	Total respondents
Yes, regularly	57%	673
Yes, occasionally	29%	339
No, but would be interested in the future	6%	73
I do not have young children so no need to visit soft play facilities	8%	97

9. Please indicate how often you think your family would use the following services:



10. We are considering hosting soft play party packages with catering included. Please indicate how likely or unlikely you would be to consider this as a future option for a child's party:



■ Very likely ■ Quite likely ■ Neither likely nor unlikely ■ Quite unlikely ■ Very unlikely

We are considering hosting soft play party packages with catering included. Please indicate how likely or unlikely you would be to consider this as a future option for a child's party:	Percentage	Total respondents
Very likely	47%	507
Quite likely	37%	401
Neither likely nor unlikely	9%	104
Quite unlikely	3%	31
Very unlikely	4%	40

North Herts Council soft play survey August 2022 – open ended responses.

Q5 – Please indicate why you wouldn't be happy to use alternative changing facilities on site– (22 responses):

Floor is often wet in swimming changing rooms and very busy. Showers terrible.

The Squash change rooms have been closed off for about 6 months and we've had to use the Member's change room which is too small and crowded, the showers run stop and then when restarted they run cold!

too busy

The swimming pool changing rooms are too crowded

Needs more room than you have to change children.

If you mean the members changing rooms then no if you closed them I wouldn't like to use the public swimming changing rooms, I would be happy to use members changing rooms in a different area though.

These are part of what I pay for

They are too far away as squash partner disabled

Too busy / too far

because they are good changing rooms.

I am disabled and sometimes use a wheelchair user. Those changing rooms are quiet and quite private. I use when disabled ones are all occupied, often by able bodied people "doing a quick change" I assume the two disabled changing rooms will go as well. The disabled changing and shower facilities in the swimming pool changing rooms are not ideal plus very public. The disabled shower and changing room in the members area, is frequently occupied and unavailable. If you can provide additional private wheelchair and disabled changing/shower facilities then I will use them. I find my catheter and incontinence appliances embarrassing and no one else really needs/wants to see them!

They are further away from the courts, smaller and in a Members area. They are crowded at times I wish to use them. The swim changing area has a wet floor, and I am unable to shower and keep an eye on my bag and valuables.

I appreciate the existing facilities proximity to the squash courts and that they are rarely crowded

These changing rooms are near the squash courts. They need a lot of work done to them. They are in dreadful condition and should not be passed as changing rooms by health checks. They have been in terrible condition for a very long while. Squash has been neglected sadly, and this is why you are losing squash players - not because demand isn't there.

(Other than that we are already required to do this), it sometimes feels a little inappropriate to have a shower in the swimming area completely naked when younger people are around.

The changing rooms are further away. The squash changing rooms are much more convenient

No

Keeping changing facilities near to the squash courts is fundamental.

The members changing rooms are a clean calm adult only environment which change the overall experience of the visit.

The other changing rooms on that level are always full of children getting changed for swimming.

Squash court changing rooms are spacious with large lockers, though not always clean I prefer this changing room. Members changing rooms are very hot, cramped and small lockers

though with non coin operated locking an improvement. Non members changing area is too busy with kids and left dirty most of the time

Shortage of changing Facilities. Also it is not unknown to have changing places out of action and then no other places to go. Also if there is an event like roller skating where do the team change. So by all means adapt some of the squash courts but leave changing facilities intact. By the way the water Temperature cannot be adjusted and is for me too hot

Q7 – Why do you disagree with the soft play proposal – (70 responses):

Less squash courts means less provision for team nights / competition in the future. Once there gone, there gone. Squash provision is poor at a state level locally. Soft play is everywhere. Less courts means less people playing squash because the courts are busy at certain times. So to quote 18% usage is not the full picture. At peak times with 2 courts will mean access will be less.

Although this may be commercially attractive to NHC & SLL, this would change the site dedicated to sport and fitness to a Children's play/party venue with an even longer queues at reception.

I'm not convinced there is sufficient demand for this facility that justifies financial outlay.

There are soft play areas around Letchworth. Also why get rid of squash courts and a changing area?

Rubbish idea

no one would use soft play

Young people need space to play squash. I used to play every week until I hurt myself. So replacing squash courts by soft play areas is not acceptable. Part of the sports hall can be sectioned for that purpose at certain times. We need a room for table tennis. So I would support that.

I think before introducing soft play, re think of expanding and adding more variety of gym equipment. The gym is small for the price we pay and have to wait for machines. There needs to be more to choose from and more room. Its like sardines in a can

There are enough soft play areas and facilities for children in Herts

Given the poor standards currently at the leisure centre the upkeep and cleanliness would be terrible/ disgusting.

The council doesn't seem to have any money for doing important things, like cutting hedges that are growing over roads-especially over lanes.

There are already plenty of soft play facilities in the county and kids should be encouraged to play outdoors

2 Soft plays available in Hitchin. Limited squash facilities in the area

I disagree because it will prompt and invite low lives and encourage anti social behaviour which we have more than enough of in this town

what a waste of an active leisure facility for adults. If converting to anything why not consider pickleball courts. There are already plenty of facilities for children.

There are other children's facilities around but very few squash courts

It takes the facilities away from restricted disabled users

I enjoy bringing my two children regularly to swim at this venue and I fear that making a soft play area will bring too much disruption . Changing rooms and toilet facilities are already too busy at certain times and parking can also be difficult . As long as provisions are made for this disruption to the rest of the facilities it should not be a problem .

Where are you supposed to then play squash if it's taken away. I don't want to travel to another centre for it.

Car park is already full and to many uncontrolled children in the corridors

Plenty of other soft plays around, space should be used for something else if squash is no longer popular.

The staff struggle to keep changing rooms clean wiv out adding more responsibility

Already lots of things for children to do. Money could be better spent elsewhere

The money should be spent improving the facilities already at the centre. It's tired and old and the changing rooms for the pool are disgusting

As a family we regularly use the swimming for childrens lessons. I recently looked around the gym to understand what facilities you have. I was surprised to see how quite the gym was and how few classes you have compared to gyms I previously was a member of. The Dry changing facilities are a huge selling point and I urge you not to remove these. Using a squash course as a fully equipped dedicated spin studio would be a huge benefit to the gym with regular spin classes during the day. Introducing a soft play would create a lot of noise which would impact your wellness classes where a calmer environment is advantageous. Crossing over of adult spaces and child spaces could potentially cause health and safety issues as well as dividing your specialist wellness focus to Children's entertainment. You would also need to take in to consideration the impact that the soft play may have North Hertfordshire soft play business. Some are small and independent with high overheads and small profit margins.

Already so many soft plays in the area

Parking already difficult

I enjoy playing squash

It's a leisure centre. You should be adding sports facilities, not taking them away.

there are enough soft play areas in the local region.

Soft play would exacerbate the parking issues already around the leisure centre especially at the weekend. Where would the additional parking for such a facility go? Leaving the existing car park with this increased capacity would mean that it is really difficult to come and exercise.

Parking is already a problem.

You are taking something primarily used by adults and converting it to become for kids. If there are people who gain regular enjoyment from the squash courts, I don't think that should be taken away from them. I have seen no marketing to get more people into the squash courts, only this suggesting we replace them. If this was a soft play facility that also catered to adults I could see it being fairer. Adult soft play is in high demand.

Why not do something for us oldies for a change? You charge us enough for our monthly payment to you, What might WE expect you to do for WE who have paid our Taxes, WORKED and earned OUR way to bring up OUR children.....let the young pay for their OWN soft play!

Because Council Funds could cover something more suitable for a better cross section of, including the older folk!

Although soft play at the leisure centre is a nice idea I believe that some of the empty units in the town could be made into soft play areas for kids and attract more people to the town centre

Too Many soft play in area already

Leisure centres are about sport facilities not soft play. Soft play is not a good use of space, time and money for the community as it does not benefit everyone only children.

There are enough provisions for children, the squash courts are valuable and not many elsewhere

Q9 - there is no option to say 'never' - the form forces me to say 'occasionally', so your survey results to this question are completely invalid as they force respondents to say that they will use a soft play area at least occasionally. You are removing squash courts, on the pretext of poor court utilisation. However poor utilisation is as a result of your courts being significantly more expensive than other local private facilities. The people who play 3-4 times a week are forced to play elsewhere because of the cost. If you had sensible pricing players would flood back, and there is a demand. You also make zero effort to market your squash facilities - if

you did the usage would increase. You treat the squash courts like 'Field of Dreams' - build it and people will play - but they need active marketing like you do for gym and swimming. There should be 'squash only' monthly memberships available and dozens would sign up to this if you offered it. The squash changing rooms and nearby toilets are in a disgusting condition, which is a big turn off for squash players and a big reason they play elsewhere. You have taken a decision to build a soft play area without attempting to build squash numbers post-covid.

I'm a squash player and having only 2 courts would make booking harder

Softball activities are for children to have fun and should not replace sporting and fitness opportunities for adults, ever

The limited space the squash courts will provide will not provide a suitable area for 2 indoor soft play areas. The artist impression is madness. There is no way you can fit 7 tables and soft play equipment on a squash court. If people want to go to a soft play centre there is a fantastic facility in Hitchin. Due to lack of space yours won't get close to this level. Once people have been to space 2 play they will be unlikely to come to yours. You would have spends tens of thousands of pounds of tax payers money on a 'white elephant' If you spent a fraction of this money on actually attracting people to play squash then you would improve the health of the local area. It is a Leisure Centre not a soft play centre. There is no promotion of squash in the club or externally. You could be running junior coaching, hosting competitions, linking up with local schools. Squash has been promoted as the healthiest sport possible. I'm my opinion you should be promoting it and increasing numbers not decreasing them.

The squash are used art the weekends and for squash leagues you will lost members if you lose the courts

I want to play squash more and reducing the facilities will make that harder and more expensive

I think losing another two squash courts will stop me from coming to the leisure centre, as I only really use the courts and I am a member because it is easy to get a court. This will not be the case if two more courts are lost.

There have been recently significant improvements made to the courts, but there is a lack of promoting squash at the leisure centre. Investing into conversion therefore seems to be somewhat misguided step that does not consider the option of promoting squash and offering more competitive pricing on squash bookings or squash only membership that would lead to increased utilization of courts. Removing courts will limit access to this sport for young people who are unlikely to be members of any private club and will hence have only a limited opportunity to get into squash.

Squash needs to be encouraged, perhaps with a price reduction as an incentive - maybe a 'squash only' membership option would help.

Please see my previous response re expensiveness and possible 'squash only' membership. I would however be happy for one of the four squash courts to be converted to soft play, to encourage kiddies who may in time begin to play squash or racketball. This latter sport should also be encouraged among adult users, as it is a much easier game to master as an alternative to the ruggedness of squash.d

Want to be able to play squash! If you re-invested in improving the squash courts, there would be more people playing in them.

The squash courts at the leisure centre are a fantastic facility and a rare asset to public leisure centres these days. The courts are in good condition and provide an amenity to the local community. There are empty buildings locally that could be used by SSL if they want to develop a soft play business that would not negatively impact the other facilities they provide.

Squash courts here would be used a lot more if a few things were sorted out. Changing rooms, marketing, pricing being a few. QUESTION 9 BELOW DOES NOT ALLOW ME TO SAY "NEVER" SO THIS IS NOT A FAIR QUESTIONNAIRE.

The question below is very leading and will not provide reliable data - I occasionally use soft play facilities, but do not see the need for them to be provided at the leisure centre, and will not use them. This option is not catered for in the question below. There are very few squash

courts in the area already and are sometimes difficult to book up at peak times. The council should be encouraging people to undertake a wide range of sporting activity, not reducing this. Any reduction in sporting capacity will have an impact on the health and well being of the local population. The council does not need to be providing more soft play facilities in the local area - these can (and are) provided by the private sector.

Many reasons why i strongly disagree. Facilities are not currently maintained to a good standard. Some disgusting changing facilities. Adding an extra facility seems crazy when current facilities cannot be maintained to a good standard. Squash is a sport that has a demand from a variety of people for all ages. This should be something a leisure centre encourages. Lifelong participation in physical activity. Players will have not re-joined post COVID and this should actively marketed to improve this figure. Although courts have improved more people will want to play in the winter because of the nature of an indoor sport. Unfortunately, despite some improvements the courts were still very cold last winter so proper squash cannot be played on them. This should be addressed which would increase the appeal. Unfortunately there is a legacy of really uncared for not fit for purpose courts and this still exists with graffiti not being cleaned for months/years. Squash courts are unlikely to be rebuilt so when they are lost they tend to be lost. Some work should be done to try and save them first. The leagues are great and should be more actively advertised to all membership. Not just on that initial tour. Courts should also be cared for, cleaned and kept at appropriate temperatures to attract more able players. There are excellent well established leagues. Unfortunately players have been lost because of the reasons i have mentioned but that doesn't mean this cannot be fixed. The Sunday evening club night is also the best one i've been to and a huge selling point. This would be impossible to work with only 2 courts. Please do not go out of your way to destroy squash. look after the courts and numbers will come back and utilisation increase. Apart from this question, some questions in this survey are incredibly leading. Supporting responses can therefore not be taken as valid. e.g Q7 i would use the service never but have had to answer occasionally.

We need to encourage sport in this country to avoid obesity. Stop closing sports facilities for money

Squash courts have been closed in Stevenage and Hitchin in recent years, and it can sometimes be difficult to get courts at peak times (I appreciate that they may not be as busy during non peak times, but surely this is true for other areas of the leisure centre as well). The leisure centre should focus on providing sporting facilities to improve the health and fitness of residents, not providing additional soft play areas.

Booking squash courts at peak times can be difficult already. I strongly disagree with the statement that reducing the number of courts by half "should not have a negative impact on existing users'. It absolutely will.

I disagree

Squash is an up and coming sport m, need more facilities not less,

Letchworth squash club is an established club providing a sports facility for the community, and enters teams in the herts and beds squash leagues. To destroy this removes a fantastic facility for local squash players. Surely there is room in letchworth for both squash courts and soft play, why does it have to be one or the other???

Why remove squash courts when they are in use by many members? Perhaps we wrongly assume the local council supports health and well-being of individuals in the local area.

Not enough parking to accommodate noise and fried food smell is off putting in a gym

It is removing an option to generate real health and fitness for existing players and more importantly for potential new players.

I currently pay £460 per year to play squash at the facility. I work full time so can only play at peak times. If you take away 50% of the booking slots it will be impossible to play. Would you then reimburse me 50% of my membership fee?

I am 41 and was diagnosed with high blood pressure two years ago. I am making changes to my lifestyle to be healthier and in the last four months I have started to play squash at North Herts Leisure Centre (NHLC) 2-3 times a week. It is a brilliant sport to motivate you to get fit

and stay that way and I have found I am getting fitter and healthier as a result. The UK has an obesity epidemic and our government is introducing laws to ban the promotion of food high in salt, fat and sugar in shops to try and control how fat people are getting. The cost of obesity to the nation's purse is enormous. I firmly believe a leisure centre, particularly one operated on behalf of the public sector, should be investing in facilities that improve adult health and wellbeing, not removing them. If you convert courts one and two at NHLC into soft play areas that will be a permanent change. You cannot change them back to squash courts in future. A soft play area may be a good solution for SLL and may meet a genuine need in the community, but it should not come at the expense of permanently depleting the excellent squash facilities on offer at NHLC. One benefit of having four squash courts is the informal squash 'club' at NHLC which occupies all four courts on Sunday from 6-8pm which I attend each week. This means that 10-16 players can attend, playing short games and swapping opponents with rests in between. It is a great way to meet people, to motivate yourself to improve and play against lots of opponents of varying ability. If the number of courts available is halved, this will no longer be possible. I would find that a big loss personally. I am sure there are other people who are in a similar position to me who would benefit from taking up squash and using the facilities at NHLC. Squash is a game that people can and do play into their 70s and the squash courts should be seen as a way to offer people a way to maintain their health throughout their life. NHLC is also a place where young people can learn the sport without having to join a private club. Money will be a factor in your decisions about what to do with the courts at NHLC. I read on the Comet website (<https://www.thecomet.net/news/local-council/soft-play-plans-lethworth-9162476>) the squash courts are currently under-used at 18% occupancy. I note that this is equivalent to 42% occupancy if you only count realistic hours for most working people's bookings i.e. after 6pm on weekdays and at weekends. But squash bookings and income for SLL could be so much higher if energy went into marketing the NHLC squash courts. There is currently no marketing at all. The centre should have a squash only membership, which currently it does not have. I only use the leisure centre for squash and would definitely sign up to a squash only membership - for example at £25 a month. I estimate the squash courts at NHLC bring in around £12-13k a year based on occupancy of 18%. This could easily be doubled or even tripled if SLL were to do the following: Market its squash facilities (e.g. promotional emails and literature to users; price promotions; bonus for introducing a friend; a junior squash membership offer and price plan; work with England Squash to promote the facilities; Introduce a squash only membership of £25 a month; reduce squash court pricing to be more competitive with alternative facilities in the area (eg Muddy Lane Racquet Centre, Biggleswade etc) - at least to £10 for 45 minutes. Squash only membership of £25 per person per month would introduce the possibility of more guaranteed consistent income for the centre, with these figures topped up by bookings from occasional players. The bottom line so far as I can see is that SLL has some brilliant squash facilities on hand but has not attempted to do anything with them. They are an untapped resource and could both generate significantly more income for SLL and play a much greater role in offering the community health benefits.

Not sure if this will increase your revenue for the investment. Also it will be messy and loud with uncontrolled kids (more the lack of parenting sometimes) and put off some members to use centre at times. I feel they should bring the child creche back so mothers and grandparents can come back to the centre which is good for membership and mums mental health. Also the cafe may be used more after exercise when mums can meet up there. This also may be more affordable for families. I also worry that unless there will be more cleaning staff, the new planned play area will soon end up unhygienic and dirty.

See above. Decrease in changing facilities is a retrograde step

As a life long squash player (66 years old), I feel that the game deserves promotion, not extinction! What you are proposing is pandering to the idle masses who could do with getting off thier "X Box" and get healthier! PROMOTE THE GAME, DON'T DESTROY IT!

There are lots of other soft play options available privately but very few squash courts / sports facilities.

The centre should continue to offer sports facilities, not children's play facilities. Instead the centre should make more of an effort to promote squash, provide cleaner courts and showers, at a price which is not significantly higher than other local squash clubs. I was there playing this morning (Sat 20th August), all courts were in use and people waiting to come on after, so at busy periods all the courts are needed, obviously they won't have full use during daytimes when people are at work but this shouldn't reflect on reducing capacity when they are needed. It would be great if SLL can continue to support squash.
