

Market Harborough Leisure Centre Indoor Sports Survey Results

Introduction

This survey was put together by Harborough LC Junior Badminton Club (and is supported by the four neighbourhood forums in Market Harborough). The club sought feedback on the current indoor sports facilities at Harborough Leisure Centre and on the proposal by Everyone Active to change the use of the existing sports hall to non-sporting activities.

The online survey took place during April/May 2025 and had 84 respondents, some representing local clubs.

This report presents the results of the survey.

Background

Harborough LC Junior Badminton Club is a community-based club run by volunteers and is affiliated with Badminton England. It has used the Leisure Centre sports hall for 10+ years as its base for our successful junior badminton sessions, which are attended by approximately 75 junior members.

Everyone Active, who operate the Leisure Centre on behalf of Harborough District Council, has recently requested the club move our junior badminton sessions into "The Arena" (previously the Dome) as they wish to use the existing sports hall for other activities. Everyone Active has so far not been clear about what their plan for the existing sports hall is, but it is clear this involves a change of use to something that is not a mixed-use sports hall.

The existing permanent sports hall at Harborough Leisure Centre was recently refurbished (in Nov 2024) and is now a very good quality mixed use sports hall that meets many of Sport England's guidelines (see references). It currently accommodates badminton, table tennis, pickleball, basketball, netball and many other sports and activities. It is especially suited to Badminton due to the newly painted blue walls, high ceiling, improved lighting and heating that does not affect the flight of badminton shuttles.

The Arena was built in 2024 as a semi-permanent replacement for the existing dome and has not been designed to meet Sport England's guidelines for sports halls. It currently accommodates netball, tennis and football, but has also been marked out for Badminton and Pickleball. The Arena is not well suited to badminton due to the light colour(s) used for the walls and ceiling, ambient lighting, blown air heating system and poorly positioned lighting. It currently has no direct access to toilets, changing and storage facilities.

The junior badminton club is therefore currently being asked to move from a very good, recently refurbished sports hall that meets Sport England guidelines, to a facility that does not and is not suited to badminton.

Aside from the suitability of The Arena for badminton, any decision to change the use of the only purpose-built public sports hall in Market Harborough from mixed use (primarily indoor sport) to other activities would represent an overall reduction in capacity for indoor sport (by approx. 30%) in Market Harborough and surrounding areas. Harborough District Council has a Built Sports Facility Strategy that was based on extensive consultation and states that existing sports hall capacity should be maintained. This strategy was written in 2020 before 1000+ more homes were built in Market

Harborough and the new local plan allocations of 1300+ new homes in the next 15 years. Many sports, including Badminton, have been growing in participation since the pandemic (see references) and therefore, unless there is compelling evidence to support it, it does not seem sensible to be reducing capacity for indoor sport in the area.

Clubs already block book the arena most weekday evenings and at weekends and if other clubs are asked to move from the existing sports hall into the arena, there will be little capacity remaining at peak times for casual bookings. The leisure centre is currently the only facility in Market Harborough that accept casual bookings for indoors sports like badminton, table tennis and pickleball.

References

HDC Built Sports Facility Strategy (2020) -

https://www.harborough.gov.uk/info/20012/leisure_sport_and_culture/299/built_sports_facility_strategy

Sport England Sports Hall Design Guidance - <https://sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/sports-halls-design-and-layouts-2012.pdf?VersionId=KyzONJCF57nztcDd36uQjUctReClT2g5>

Sport England Active Lives Survey - <https://www.sportengland.org/research-and-data/data/active-lives>

Harborough LC Junior Badminton Club - <https://www.harboroughlcjuniors.org.uk>

Executive Summary

The survey was informal and made available online via a web link and QR code that was shared with users and clubs via various means (email, Facebook, WhatsApp etc). There were 84 respondents to the survey, and it is therefore acknowledged that the sample size is relatively small, but it is thought to be reasonably representative of the users and clubs that currently use the Leisure Centre sports hall and/or Arena.

Given a lack of consultation, this survey was intended to gauge views from users and clubs about the current and future situation with regards to indoor sport in Market Harborough. It is not intended as replacement for a formal consultation, which should be undertaken by Harborough District Council and should inform an update to the Built Sports Facility Strategy (2020) before any decisions can be made about future provision of facilities.

Most of the survey respondents were from Market Harborough and surrounding villages, with some from further afield in Leicestershire and Northamptonshire. 37% of respondents stated they were responding on behalf of a club or organisation, with 63% not from, or responding on behalf of, a club. A range of clubs were represented, including Badminton, Pickleball, Tennis, Gymnastics and Kickboxing.

Sports Hall

The majority of respondents (92%) had used the sports hall in the past 6 months. Badminton was the most popular activity at 58%, followed by pickleball (23%), netball (5%), table tennis (4%) and basketball and roller skating (both 2%). Other activities, including dodgeball, gymnastics, karate, kickboxing and tennis) made up the remaining 5%.

Those respondents that said they had used the sports hall rated it as good quality, with an average quality rating of **8.3 out of 10**. Some of the common reasons for higher ratings were the high ceiling, consistent wall colour, improved lighting, good floor markings and proximity to facilities.

Some issues were raised with the sports hall. The main issues related to lighting (24%), flooring (17%), shared use of the space (13%), colour of the walls (11%), heating (11%) and line markings (7%). It is worth noting that some of the issues reported with lighting and colour of the walls may relate to the period prior to refurbishment of the sports hall, which included new lighting and repainting the walls a consistent blue colour.

Responses suggest that there is generally good availability (rated **3.8 out of 5**) of the sports hall, with perhaps some issues with booking.

Arena

Less than half of the respondents (45%) had used the Arena in the past 6 months. Tennis was the most popular activity at 33%, followed by pickleball (31%), badminton (18%), netball (10%) and football (8%).

Those respondents that said they had used the Arena rated it as poor quality, with an average quality rating of **4.4 out of 10**. Some of the common reasons for lower ratings were the roof/ceiling (too low/light), colour of the walls (consistency of colour and visual obstructions), poorly positioned and bright lighting, no direct access to changing/toilets, dirty/slippery floor, too many/confusing line markings, lack of proper storage, courts marked too close to walls and a surface that is unsuitable for tennis.

Some issues were raised with the Arena. The main issues related to flooring (20%), line markings (19%), lighting (15%), access to facilities (12%), heating (10%), colour of walls/ceiling (7%), shared use of the space (7%) and storage (6%). Other issues (4%) included issues relating to equipment.

Use of Other Facilities

Several other facilities were used by respondents for indoor sport. Welland Park Academy sports hall was mentioned the most (39%), followed by Meadowdale Primary sports hall (33%) and Robert Smyth Academy sports hall (20%). Other facilities mentioned (8%) included Lutterworth Leisure Centre, Desborough Leisure Centre and Leicester Grammar. This reveals a range of other facilities are also used for indoor sport in the area, though it is worth mentioning that many of those facilities are not open for casual booking and are largely used by clubs that are able to block book.

Capacity/Availability for Indoor Sport

The majority (57%) of respondents considered that current capacity/availability is not sufficient, whilst the remaining (43%) respondents considered that current capacity/availability is sufficient. No respondents considered that there was too much capacity/availability.

94% of respondents considered that there should be more capacity/availability for indoor sport in the future, with 6% considering that there should be the same capacity/availability in the future. No respondents thought that there should be less capacity/availability in the future.

Future of the Sports Hall

Almost all (99%) of respondents stated that they would be concerned if the main sports hall at Harborough Leisure Centre was no longer available for indoor sport. Similarly, the majority (98%) of respondents stated that they would be concerned if there was an overall reduction in capacity/availability for indoor sport in Market Harborough.

Only 1% of respondents stated that they would support any decision to use the main sports hall for other activities. Most respondents (86%) stated that they would not support any such decision, with 13% of respondents stating that they may support any such decision.

Some of the comments received on the future of the sports hall were:

“Unless an alternative hall of similar, or better, standard is made available then the hall should remain available for sports use.”

“The area needs a mixed sport main hall to recognised standards. This should be a 'given' in an area with Harborough's demographic. Most sports using the hall are long established mainstream activities and shouldn't be sacrificed for short term leisure 'trends' that tend to come and go.”

“It is a much needed and used hall for all ages within the community. It would be a huge loss.”

“Would be a real waste to not use this facility for Sport, particularly as considerable money and resources have been spent recently upgrading it.”

“It is already very difficult to book a badminton court in the evening. If the main sports hall closes and then everyone is forced to share one hall then it will be impossible! Rather than closing halls we need more capacity.”

“It should remain as a sports hall. The removal of badminton provision there has a knock on effect on other clubs using the arena. Harborough has many clubs and reducing the available indoor spaces is nonsensical.”

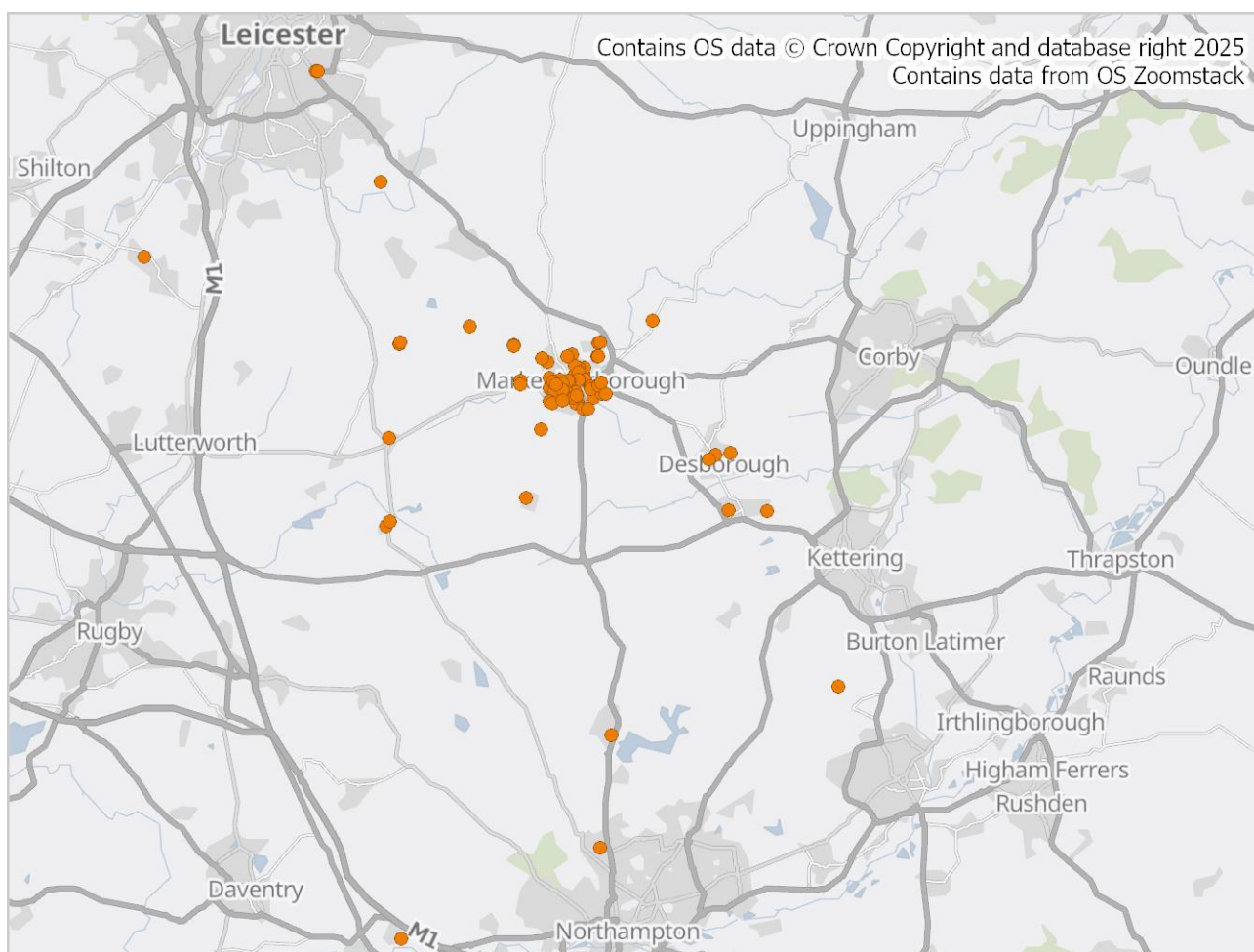
Survey Results

Postcode of Respondents

Survey respondents were asked for their postcode. The map in figure 1 below shows the spread of respondent's postcodes, with the majority (59%) coming from within Market Harborough town and the remainder (41%) from outside the town, including local villages and towns such as Desborough, Northampton and Leicester.

This suggests that most users were from Market Harborough and surrounding villages with some coming from further afield in Leicestershire/Northamptonshire.

Figure 1 - Map showing postcodes of survey respondents

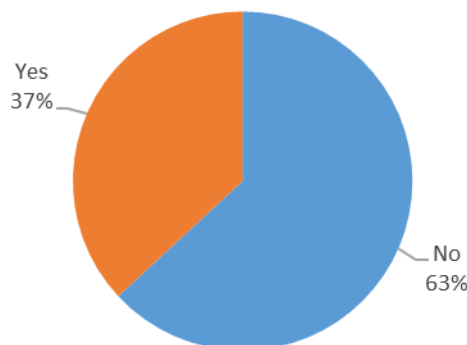


Responding on Behalf of a Club?

Respondents were asked whether they were responding on behalf of a club or organisation. The chart in figure 2 shows that 37% of respondents stated they were responding on behalf of a club or organisation (Yes), with 63% not from, or responding on behalf of, a club.

This reveals that both individual users and clubs were well represented in the survey.

Figure 2 - Chart showing percentage of respondents responding on behalf of a club or organisation



Club and Organisation Names

Those respondents that stated they were responding on behalf of a club or organisation were asked to provide the name of the club/organisation.

The clubs/organisations represented in the survey were:

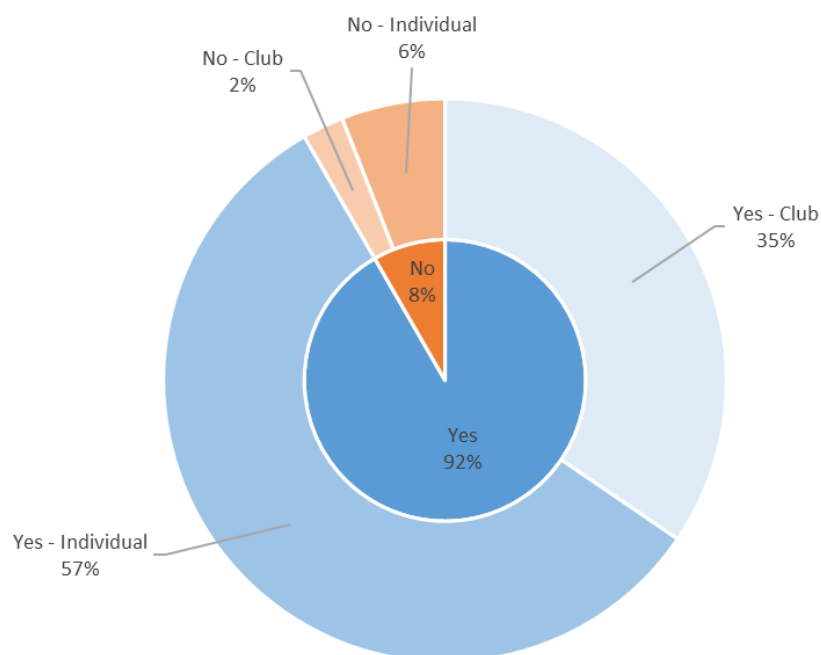
- Harborough LC Junior Badminton Club
- Harborough Feathers Badminton Club
- HIC Badminton Club
- Market Harborough Gymnastics
- Welland Park Tennis Club
- Pickleball Harborough
- Bcka Kickboxing

This suggests that users from a range of clubs were represented.

Sports Hall Use

Respondents were asked whether they, a family member or their club used the main sports hall at Market Harborough Leisure Centre in the past 6 months. The chart in figure 3 shows that 92% of respondents had used the sports hall in the past 6 months, (35% representing clubs and 57% as individuals). The remaining 8% had not used the sports hall in the past 6 months.

Figure 3 – Chart showing percentage of respondents that had used the leisure centre sports hall in the past 6 months



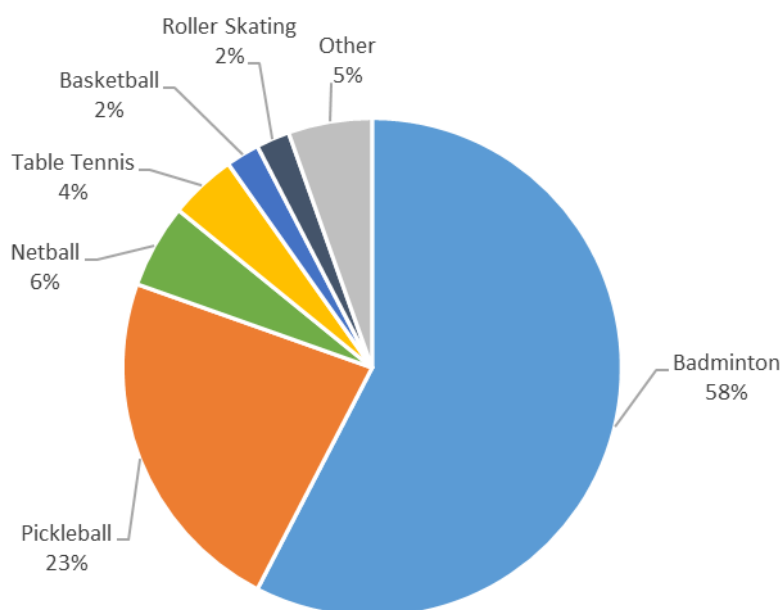
Sports Hall Activities

Those respondents that said they had used the sports hall in the past 6 months were asked what activities they, their family or club had taken part in in the sports hall. Note that multiple activities could be selected/entered for each response.

Figure 4 shows that, of the activities selected, badminton was the most popular activity at 58%, followed by pickleball (23%), netball (5%), table tennis (4%) and basketball and roller skating (both 2%). Other activities, including dodgeball, gymnastics, karate, kickboxing and tennis) made up the remaining 5%.

This reveals that the sports hall currently supports a wide range of activities, but mainly focusing on indoor sports, such as Badminton, Pickleball and Netball.

Figure 4 - Chart showing percentage of each sports hall activity



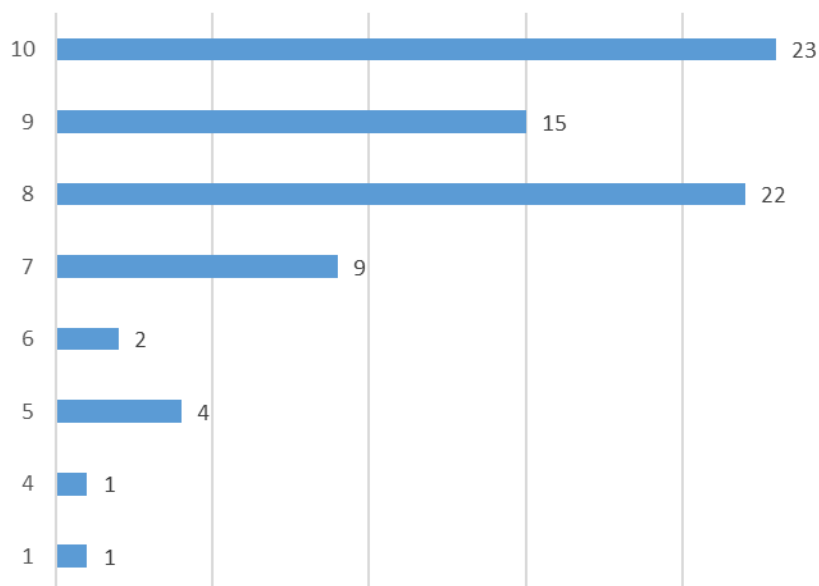
Sports Hall Quality

Those respondents that said they had used the sports hall in the past 6 months were asked how they rated the quality of the main sports hall (out of 10 where 1 = poor and 10 = excellent), including access to toilets, changing, equipment, and storage.

The average rating of the sports hall was **8.32** out of 10. The chart in figure 5 shows the total respondents for each score given.

This reveals that most respondents rate the quality of the sports hall as good to excellent.

Figure 5 - Chart showing total number of respondents for each sports hall quality score



Sports Hall Quality - Reasons

Those respondents that said they had used the sports hall in the past 6 months were asked for any specific reasons for their quality score.

Some of the common responses for higher ratings were:

- High ceiling.
- Consistent wall colour.
- Proximity to toilets and changing facilities.
- Improved lighting.
- Good floor markings.
- Good for badminton/pickleball.
- The space available.

Some of the common responses for lower scores were:

- The floor – hard and dirty/slippery in places.
- Lighting – not placed well.
- Cold in the winter.
- Quality of equipment.

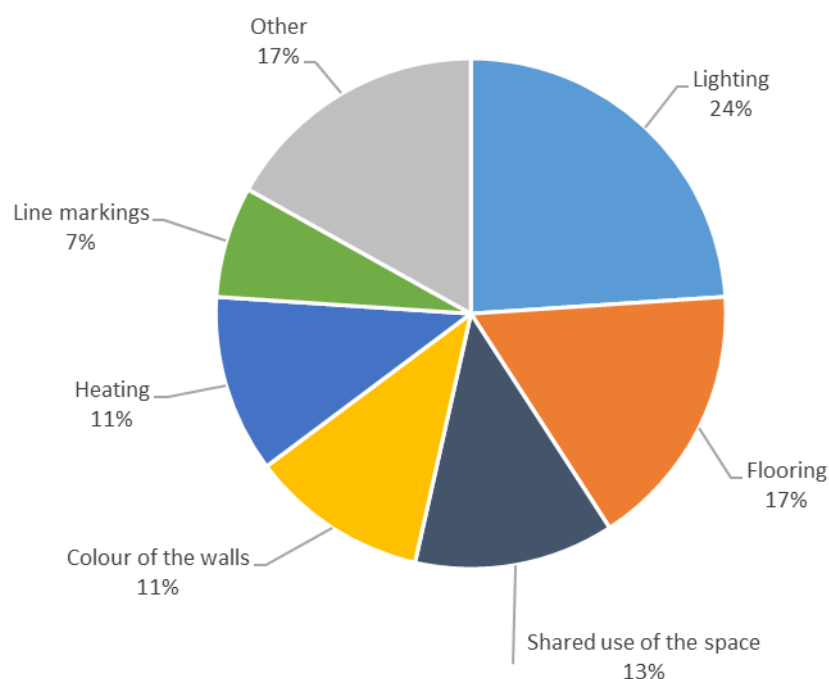
This suggests that users were generally happy with the quality of the sports hall, though some further improvements could be made, for example to the floor, lighting and heating.

Sports Hall Issues

Those respondents that said they had used the sports hall in the past 6 months were asked if they had experienced any specific issues with the sports hall. Figure 6 shows that a range of issues were reported and the main issues related to lighting (24%), flooring (17%), shared use of the space (13%), colour of the walls (11%), heating (11%) and line markings (7%). Other issues (17%) included issues relating to equipment, storage, facilities and double booking.

This suggests that where issues were reported, these were largely due to lighting, flooring and shared use of the space. It is worth noting that some of the issues reported with lighting and colour of the walls may relate to the period prior to refurbishment of the sports hall, which included new lighting and repainting the walls a consistent blue colour.

Figure 6 - Chart showing percentage of each issue raised with the sports hall



Sports Hall Issues - Specifics

Those respondents that said they had used the sports hall in the past 6 months were asked to expand on any specific issues with the sports hall.

Some of the common negative comments related to:

- Shared use of the space – e.g. noise from other activities/stray balls.
- Difficulty booking, double booking of courts and cancelled sessions.
- Hard/dirty/slippery floor.
- Equipment not being set up/taken down in time for the booked slot.
- Line markings (especially for Pickleball).

Some of the common positive comments related to:

- Improved lighting and wall colour since the refurbishment.

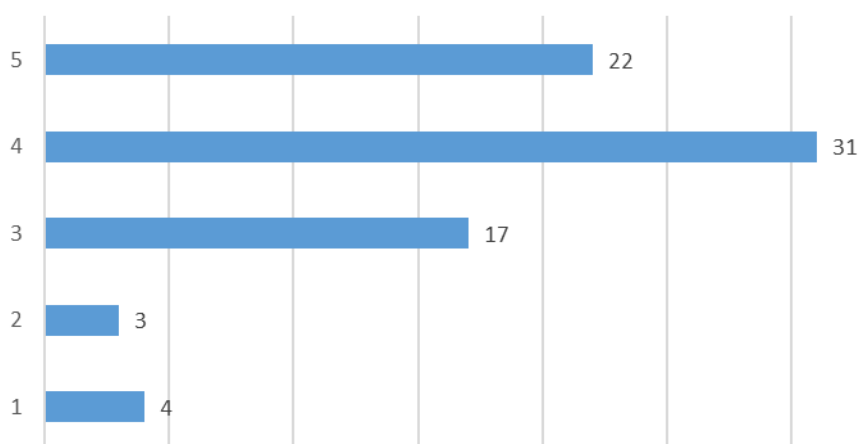
Sports Hall Availability

Those respondents that said they had used the sports hall in the past 6 months were asked how they rated the availability of the sports hall for booking (out of 5, where 1 = poor and 5 = good).

The average rating was **3.8** out of 5. The chart in figure 7 shows the total respondents for each rating given.

This suggests that there is generally good availability, with perhaps some issues with booking.

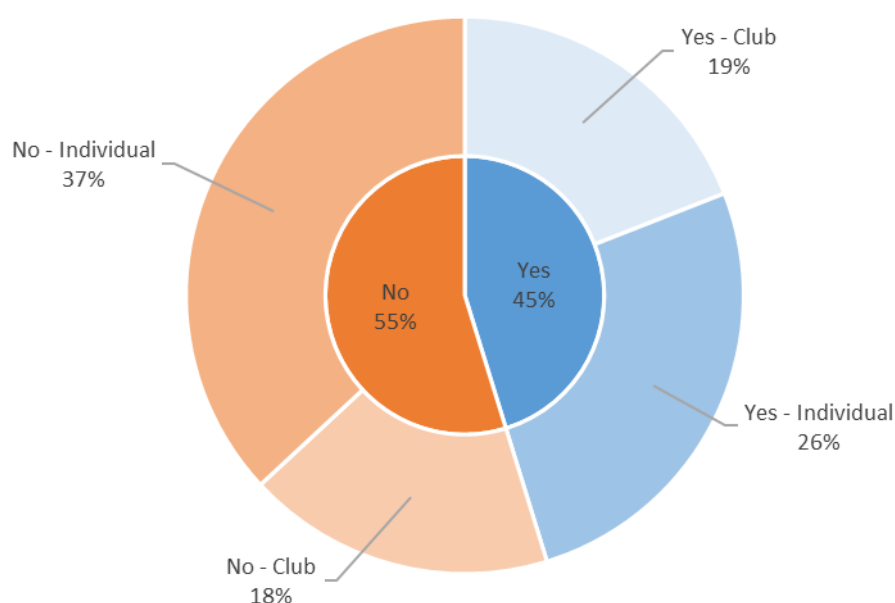
Figure 7 - Chart showing the number of respondents for each availability rating



Arena Use

Respondents were asked whether they, a family member or their club used Arena (formerly the Dome) at Market Harborough Leisure Centre in the past 6 months. The chart in figure 8 shows that 45% of respondents (19% representing clubs and 26% individuals) had used the Arena in the past 6 months and the remaining 55% had not.

Figure 8 - Chart showing percentage of respondents that had used the leisure centre Arena in the past 6 months



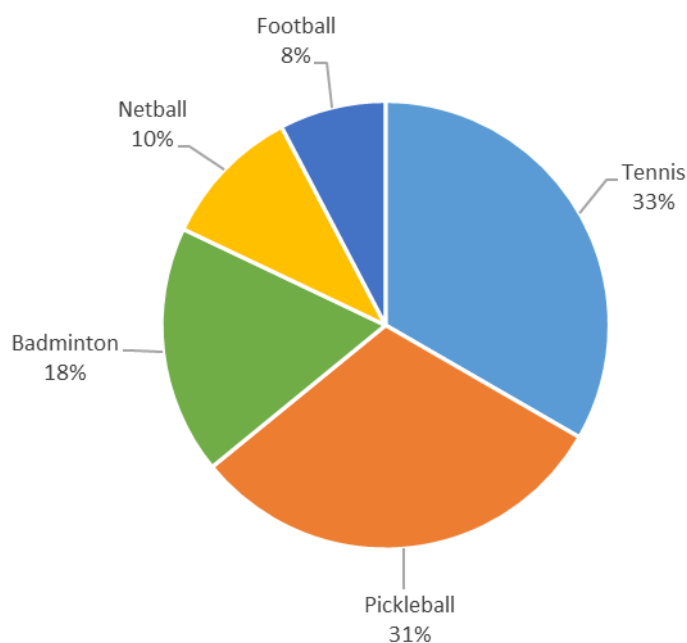
Arena Activities

Those respondents that said they had used the Arena in the past 6 months were asked what activities they, their family or club had taken part in in the Arena. Note that multiple activities could be selected/entered for each response.

Figure 9 shows that, of the activities selected, tennis was the most popular activity at 33%, followed by pickleball (31%), badminton (18%), netball (10%) and football (8%).

This reveals that the arena currently supports a smaller range of activities than the sports hall.

Figure 9 - Chart showing percentage of each Arena activity



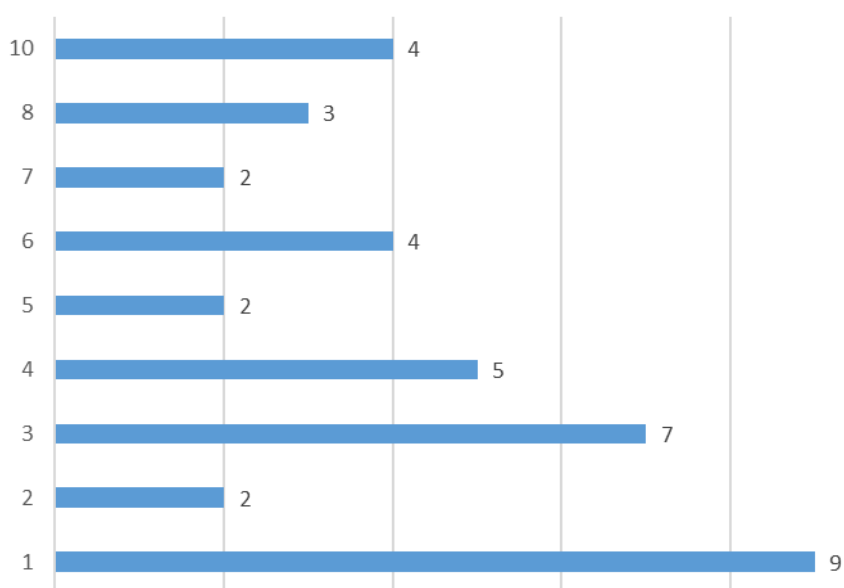
Arena Quality

Those respondents that said they had used the Arena in the past 6 months were asked how they rated the quality of the arena (out of 10, where 1 = poor and 10 = excellent), including access to toilets, changing, equipment, and storage.

The average rating of the Arena was **4.37** out of 10. The chart in figure 10 shows the total respondents for each score given and revealing a wide range of scores, but many rating the Arena quality as poor.

This suggests that users do not generally rate the Arena highly for quality, despite this being a new facility.

Figure 10 - Chart showing total number of respondents for each Arena quality score



Arena Quality - Reasons

Those respondents that said they had used the arena in the past 6 months were asked for any specific reasons for their quality score.

There were no reasons given for higher scores. However, some of the common responses for lower scores were:

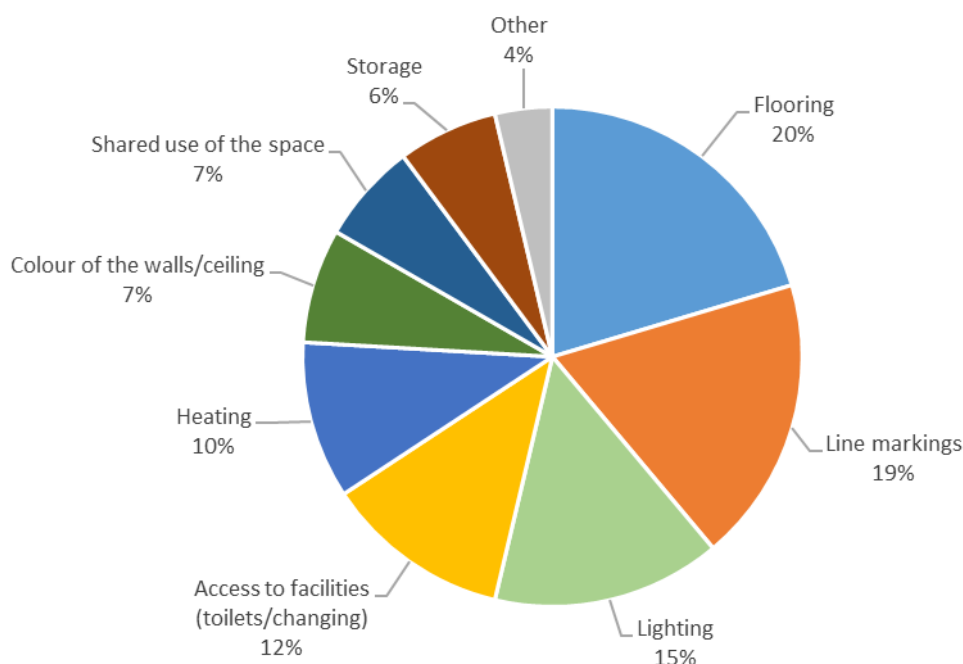
- Roof/ceiling too low/light.
- Colour of walls, consistency of colour and visual obstructions.
- Poorly positioned and bright lighting.
- No direct access to toilets/changing.
- Temporary building will not age well.
- Surface unsuitable for tennis.
- Dirty/slippery floor (including condensation issues).
- Too many/confusing line markings.
- Lack of proper storage
- Can be cold.
- Raised metal areas on floor a trip hazard.
- Space around courts inadequate/courts marked too close to walls.

Arena Issues

Those respondents that said they had used the arena in the past 6 months were asked if they had experienced any issues with the arena. Figure 11 shows that a range of issues were reported and the main issues related to flooring (20%), line markings (19%), lighting (15%), access to facilities (12%), heating (10%), colour of walls/ceiling (7%), shared use of the space (7%) and storage (6%). Other issues (4%) included issues relating to equipment.

This confirms some of the issues with the arena reported above and suggests that there are perhaps some fundamental design issues with regards to flooring, line markings and lighting.

Figure 11 - Chart showing percentage of each issue raised with the Arena



Arena Issues – Specifics

Those respondents that said they had used the arena in the past 6 months were asked to expand on any specific issues with the arena.

Some of the common negative comments related to:

- Wall/ceiling colours (too light) and changes/consistency of colour affecting ability to see badminton shuttles.
- Blown air heating will cause drift of badminton shuttles.
- Lighting causes glare.
- Court line markings too close to walls.
- Too many line markings making it confusing.
- Surface not suitable for tennis as balls do not bounce correctly.
- Floor is slippery and dangerous (especially due to condensation).
- Access to toilets.

Some of the common positive comments related to:

- Building is an excellent add on to other facilities to add capacity and not replace the sports hall.

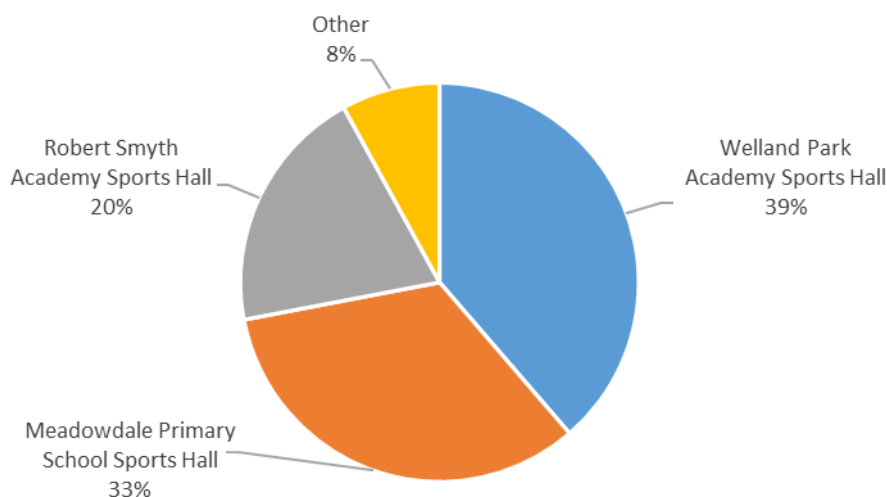
Use of Other Facilities

Respondents were asked whether they had used other indoor sports facilities in the past 6 months. The chart in figure 12 shows the percentage of other indoor sports facilities listed by respondents. Welland Park Academy sports hall was mentioned the most (39%), followed by Meadowdale Primary

sports hall (33%) and Robert Smyth Academy sports hall (20%). Other facilities mentioned (8%) included Lutterworth Leisure Centre, Desborough Leisure Centre and Leicester Grammar.

This reveals a range of other facilities are also used for indoor sport in the area, though it is worth mentioning that many of those facilities are not open for casual booking and are largely used by clubs that are able to block book.

Figure 12 - Chart showing percentage of other indoor sports facilities used.



Reasons for use of Other Facilities

Respondents were asked to provide any specific reasons for using the other facilities listed. Some of the reasons provided included:

- Clubs booking the facility for sessions.
- Able to schedule/block book.
- Price/better value.
- Availability of Harborough Leisure Centre / unable to book.
- For Welland Park Academy specifically:
 - Wall colour is good and lighting better (though not perfect).
 - Excellent/very good facility.
- For Meadowdale Primary School specifically:
 - Much better sports hall.
 - Good safe venue.
 - Better surface & lighting.

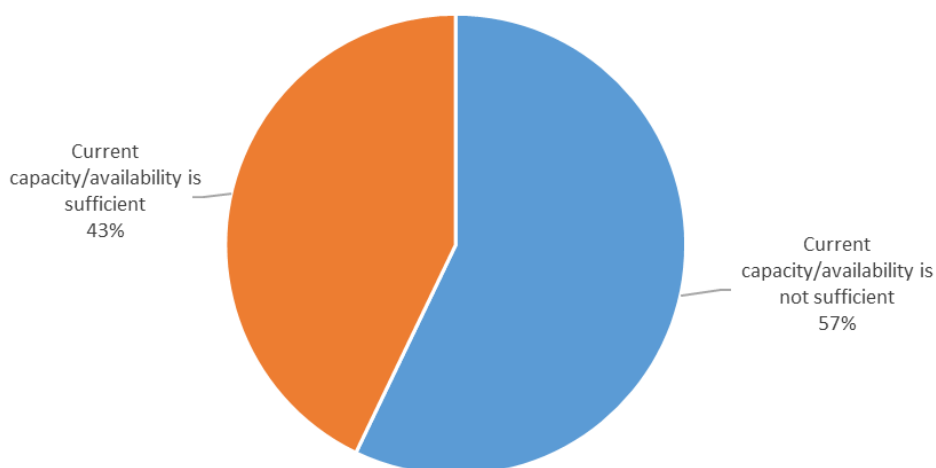
Current Capacity/Availability for Indoor Sport

Respondents were asked for their thoughts on current capacity/availability for indoor sports. It was possible to select one of the following three options:

- Current capacity/availability is sufficient.
- Current capacity/availability is not sufficient.
- There is currently too much capacity/availability.

The chart in figure 13 shows that the majority (57%) of respondents considered that current capacity/availability is not sufficient, whilst the remaining (43%) respondents considered that current capacity/availability is sufficient. No respondents considered that there was too much capacity/availability.

Figure 13 - Chart showing percentage of each capacity option selected



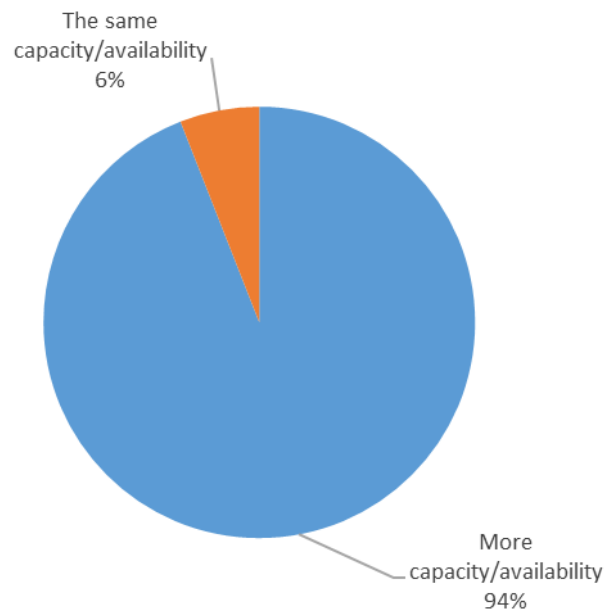
Future Capacity/Availability for Indoor Sport

Respondents were asked for their thoughts on whether there should be more, less or the same capacity/availability for indoor sport in the future (next 15 years). It was possible to select one of the following three options:

- More capacity/availability.
- The same capacity/availability.
- Less capacity/availability.

The chart in figure 14 shows that 94% of respondents considered that there should be more capacity/availability for indoor sport in the future, with 6% considering that there should be the same capacity/availability in the future. No respondents thought that there should be less capacity/availability in the future.

Figure 14 - Chart showing percentage of each future capacity option selected



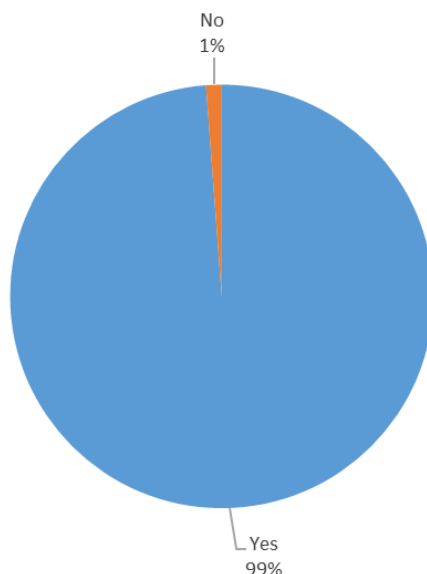
Concern over Sports Hall Availability for Indoor Sport

Respondents were asked If they would be concerned if the main sports hall at Harborough Leisure Centre was no longer available for indoor sport. They were asked to select one of the following options:

- Yes.
- No.
- Maybe.

The chart in figure 15 shows that almost all (99%) of respondents would be concerned if the main sports hall at Harborough Leisure Centre was no longer available for indoor sport. Only 1% were not concerned.

Figure 15 - Chart showing percentage of respondents that were concerned about availability of the sports hall



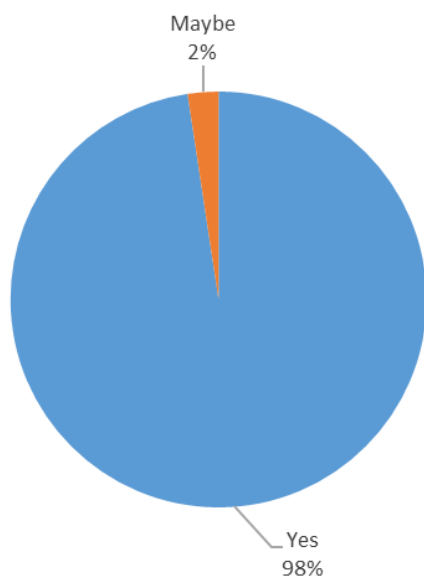
Concern over Overall Reduction in Capacity/Availability for Indoor Sport

Respondents were asked If they would be concerned if there was an overall reduction in capacity/availability for indoor sport in Market Harborough. They were asked to select one of the following options:

- Yes.
- No.
- Maybe.

The chart in figure 16 shows that the majority (98%) of respondents would be concerned if there was an overall reduction in capacity/availability for indoor sport in Market Harborough, whilst the remaining 2% stated they may be concerned. No respondents stated that they were no concerned about an overall reduction in capacity/availability.

Figure 16 - Chart showing percentage of respondents concerned about overall reduction in capacity/availability



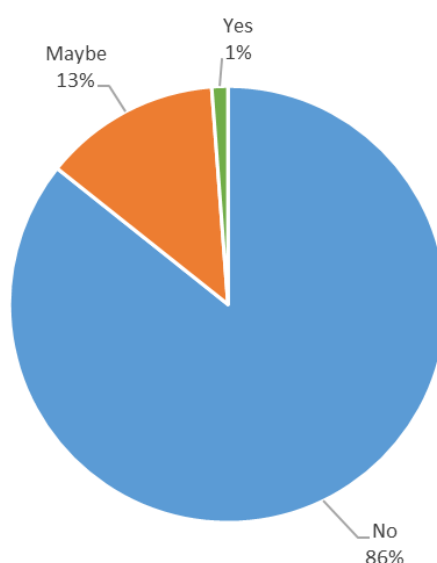
Support for Decision to use Sports Hall for Other Activities

Respondents were asked If they would support any decision to use the main sports hall in Market Harborough for other activities, meaning it would no longer be used as a mixed-use sports hall. They were asked to select one of the following options:

- Yes.
- No.
- Maybe.

The chart in figure 17 shows that only 1% of respondents would support any decision to use the main sports hall for other activities. Most respondents (86%) stated that they would not support any such decision, with 13% of respondents stating that they may support any such decision.

Figure 17 - Chart showing percentage of respondents that would support decision to use sports hall for other activities



Other Comments on the Future on the Sports Hall

Respondents were asked if they had any other comments on the future of the main sports hall at Harborough Leisure Centre.

Some of the comments are included below:

“Unless an alternative hall of similar, or better, standard is made available then the hall should remain available for sports use.”

“The area needs a mixed sport main hall to recognised standards. This should be a 'given' in an area with Harborough's demographic. Most sports using the hall are long established mainstream activities and shouldn't be sacrificed for short term leisure 'trends' that tend to come and go.”

“It is a much needed and used hall for all ages within the community. It would be a huge loss.”

“The main sports hall should in no way be considered for any other use. It has always been required and to take away would be travesty. With the huge expansion of the town the removal of this facility for badminton, pickleball and other indoor sports would be detrimental to the town. The arena is not a viable alternative to the main as highlighted by many members and clubs that use the facilities myself being one.”

“Would be a real waste to not use this facility for Sport, particularly as considerable money and resources have been spent recently upgrading it.”

“The main sports hall, after being recently refurbished is far more suitable for racket sports than the arena.”

“It is already very difficult to book a badminton court in the evening. If the main sports hall closes and then everyone is forced to share one hall then it will be impossible! Rather than closing halls we need more capacity.”

“It should remain as a sports hall. The removal of badminton provision there has a knock on effect on other clubs using the arena. Harborough has many clubs and reducing the available indoor spaces is nonsensical.”

“We need to encourage activity in the youth and adult population and removing facilities will do the opposite of that.”

“It should remain as an indoor sports hall offering the existing sports as we see a growth in indoor sports and it also provides a much needed facility for children and adults.”

“This is a sports centre, and that should be the priority. Harborough already has a soft play centre. I think the key decision makers when it came to the refurbishment focused on fitness and classes (which are very good), but weren't that interested in racket and team sports, and their importance to the local community. Very disappointing. Hopefully this survey makes a difference.”