

[front page](#)

[news](#)

[back issues](#)

[comment](#)

[letters](#)

[advertise](#)

[subscribe](#)

[about us](#)

[contact us](#)

[back page](#)

It takes a village

Mildly piqued by a reference to the Hertfordshire Sports Village in the last issue of *The Leisure Review*, Nick Brooking explains what the facility has to offer and why it has been a forward-looking enterprise from the outset.

As director of sport at the University of Hertfordshire, I read your article about the coaching seminar held here recently at Hertfordshire Sports Village with interest and no little trepidation given the sub-heading reference to “looking to the past”.

I was naturally relieved to find the article contained all positive comments about both the event and the venue but the observations as to whether ‘village’ was an appropriate title for our venue got me reflecting upon why we chose that name in the first place some 11 years ago and the inference that we “looked backwards” gives little credit to the marketing that was done then and since to make “the Village” such an exemplary facility (as, to be fair, the article did also highlight) even nine years after opening.

I recall that the first thing we did was to insist (following some fierce debate, of course) that we were not called the University of Hertfordshire Sports Centre or named after a ‘famous’ person, sporting or otherwise. We also rejected the usual (and the unusual) trendy and obscure suggestions thrown at us by luvvies (sorry, I mean branding experts) as “modern” and “futuristic” on the grounds that they were also potentially confusing and, in some cases, open to ridicule.

While the campus development and the sports facilities were still a concept our philosophy and business plan was always about providing excellent facilities and services for the broader community as well as for the university students and staff. We had seen the challenge we would face of getting people outside the university to recognise that we were for everyone as, while we could not ever be described as an ivory tower, there certainly were very real and deliberate barriers to public access on the existing campus. The new campus, of which we are a key part, was intended to be different but at that time few people within the university seemed to have grasped the extent of things that needed to be thought about and set in place to achieve managed and positive public access.

So why are we named Hertfordshire Sports Village? First, we knew we could have a significant impact beyond the immediate locality so it made sense to say where we are, promote the county and recognise the university’s name in the title. Part of our strategy is to attract events that will help put the university (and the county) on the map and of course attract people who may be our future students; national youth age group championships and events have been a regular feature for this reason.

It is interesting to note that since we stuck out for the name and opened we have been packed ever since. It is not insignificant that our publicly accessible bus service was rebranded from UniversityBus to UNO and our conference business from UH Hospitality to Conference Hertfordshire, resulting in increased revenues.

Second, we were always going to be a sports venue, definitely not a “leisure centre” as described by in The Leisure Review article. That would have conjured images to many of bingo, cinema, bowling, nightclub, eating and drinking as the main activities; all great leisure activities but not what we were offering.

We were going to provide for high-quality sports so the building, equipment and staffing had to be fit for that purpose. How many sports venues have we all been to where the mediocre player seems to have been the target? Why shouldn’t we provide high standards that meet the needs of the elite player but

“We knew we could have a significant impact beyond the immediate locality so it made sense to say where we are, promote the county and recognise the university’s name in the title.”

The Leisure Review is supported by:



The Leisure Review is written, designed and published by:

tlr.comms
TLR Communications Limited

can also be used by the ordinary recreational participant and the youngsters who may well be suitably inspired to become tomorrow's elite? Surroundings as well as coaches can inspire and, rightly or wrongly, we put resource priority into function and quality of the inside rather than 'iconic architecture' on the outside of the building.

Finally we had a good range of facilities on offer: indoor and outdoor sports, 1,600 en suite bedrooms, a pub to one side and restaurant on other. It is big enough to have what you would need for most events but not so big as to be anonymous and impersonal.

In conclusion, we are more than a 'park' or 'centre'; we are not 'complex' and we are more accessible and more friendly than a 'city' or 'town'. We are a community of hundreds and sometimes thousands of people – a village in fact by definition – but a forward-looking village that features regularly on Sky TV with Super League and international netball, Arsenal Ladies football, Saracens rugby and various Olympic; other world -class athletes as well as students, staff and the local community among our thousands of regular users.

We have not even traded on the SV in the logo representing the Olympic flame. Now we would probably be slaughtered by LOCOG for the suggestion but that was part of the brand discussion in 2001 well before we won the Games bid. A good example of a forward-looking facility even then.

**You can find the Hertfordshire Sports Village online at
www.hertssportsvillage.co.uk**

The Leisure Review, June 2012

© Copyright of all material on this site is retained by *The Leisure Review* or the individual contributors where stated. Contact *The Leisure Review* for details.