



11 June 2021

Levelling up Fund – Newcastle Outer West Leisure Services

I am writing to express my fullest and priority support for Newcastle City Council's application for funding to develop a new Leisure Centre and Pool in the Outer West of Newcastle.

The current West Denton swimming pool has remained closed since the first national lockdown last March. Unfortunately, with the devastating financial impact of the pandemic on the leisure sector, and the fact that the existing pool is a 60-year-old facility with outdated plant and heating systems, its current operators have sadly concluded that it is now unsustainable and will not reopen.

It is clear from the community's reaction to this news that residents are distraught at losing their local pool. That so many members of the public have been able to access these facilities over the years has been of enormous benefit to the health and wellbeing of residents in West Denton, Blucher, Chapel House, Chapel Park, Lemington, Newburn, Newbiggin Hall, Throckley, Walbottle, North Walbottle and Westerhope. It was well-used by the community, had swimming clubs based at the pool and offered lessons to local schools. With close proximity to the River Tyne, access to swimming and swimming lessons is regularly one of the key asks conveyed to me by school children in the area.

With this closure, a large section of residents in a part of Newcastle already suffering from significant health inequalities will have no access to a local pool and leisure centre. According to the 2019 Indices of Deprivation the neighbourhood in which the pool is located is in the top 10% of neighbourhoods in the country for health deprivation challenges, and much of the surrounding area has similar issues. Combined with the overall decline in physical activity during the lockdowns of the last 15 months, I am deeply concerned that this closure will only result in poorer health outcomes for these communities.

One of the Government's key priorities for this Parliament, set out in the Queen's Speech last month, is for us to emerge from the pandemic as a healthier country. To truly make this a reality, I believe it is essential that residents in communities like the Outer West of Newcastle have access to modern, high-quality sports and leisure facilities.





This bid therefore proposes a new £22m leisure development in the Outer West. It would play a vital role in facilitating long-term healthy behaviours- we know from Swim England's research, for example, that being active in the water helps people's physical and mental health, improves community cohesion, and reduces pressure on the NHS. It would also reduce unnecessary journeys to other facilities, thereby reducing pollution and increasing accessibility.

Not only would the new facility improve health and wellbeing outcomes, but it would also act as an anchor in the local community, attracting more residents to nearby services including the Outer West Library and playing an important part in rejuvenating the local area.

I have worked closely with Newcastle City Council to bring forward this bid. It has my wholehearted support and I believe it should be given priority when allocating funding from the Levelling up Fund. It has the potential to be transformational for residents in the Outer West of Newcastle and support the levelling up of health outcomes, one of the most glaring examples of inequality in this country.

I have every hope that the Government will support this bid and this golden opportunity to level up communities in the Outer West of Newcastle.

Best wishes

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Catherine".

Catherine McKinnell MP