



Essex LDP Evaluation Workstream

Installation of a Pool Pod accessible lift at Basildon Sport Village swimming pool

October 2023



Project status:

The Pool Pod is operational.



LDP funding:

£31,100



Objectives:

To enable people who face barriers to participation to access swimming at Basildon Sport Village. The Pool Pod aims to increase levels of physical activity, reduce social isolation and 'normalise' the swimming experience for all users of the pool.



Consulted:

Richard Heard, Facilities Manager,
Basildon Council
Lyndsey Barrett, Sport for Confidence
James Dennis, General Manager, Basildon
Sports Village
Mystery shopper visit to BSV

The project

The project funded the installation of a user-operated Pool Pod Lift and Aqua Wheelchair to enable people who face barriers to participation in swimming to access the pool at Basildon Sporting Village (BSV). The current pool hoists at the BSV are cumbersome and difficult to use and require the assistance of a staff member to enable a person with a disability to enter the pool and this impacts negatively upon their dignity.

Since installation in early 2023, the Pool Pod has been operationally reliable and well used, although the number of users is not collected.

Sport for Confidence state that the Pool Pod is a "game changer" for them. More people with disabilities are now attending their classes, as the Pool Pod has reduced the number of carers that some people need to attend swimming sessions. The swimming programme at BSV is currently at capacity but once the new pool at Pitsea opens, Sport for Confidence plan to offer new activities that should further increase the use of the Pool Pod.

However, the impact of the Pool Pod extends beyond Sport for Confidence's classes and is widely used by older people, those worried about falling or those who can't use the pool steps. Staff have noticed higher numbers attending aqua aerobics classes since the installation of the Pool Pod – previously some attendees were uncertain about using the pool steps.



The aim of the pod is to stop reminding some people that they have a disability and that they must use our facilities at a different time from others. It's about inclusive access for all.

Richard Heard



The experience of a user

We asked a local resident to book and attend a swimming session at BSV and use the Pool Pod. As part of this task, our mystery shopper was asked to search out information on the Pool Pod prior to booking her session. They key points that she reported were:

- 1 Information on the Pool Pod is both limited and difficult to find on the BSV website and our mystery shopper was unable to find it. As an alternative, the mystery shopper called the BSV reception desk and was given all the information she needed about the Pool Pod.
- 2 On arrival, she was told that she was booked to swim in the deep end of the pool and the Pool Pod could not be used there due to a lack of fixings, and instead she should use the hoist. She refused and, as an alternative, staff moved her to a lane in the shallow end where she was able to use the Pool Pod.
- 3 Using the Pool Pod was easy with instructions clearly displayed and staff available to answer any questions or provide help if needed.
- 4 Overall, the mystery shopper rated the overall experience as "9 out of 10", commenting favourably on the attitude and knowledge of the staff she met and their willingness to sort out the problem with access.

We contacted BSV following the visit to ask why the Pool Pod could not be used at the deep end of the main pool and can confirm that bolts have now been installed at that point, to allow its use.

Key issues

- 1 Staff told us that it has taken some effort to get people to use the Pool Pod but once they do, they quickly become confident. Although a video on using the Pool Pod was shared on Facebook at its launch, BSV believe that more information would have been useful at launch. The comments of our user confirm this conclusion and suggests that there is an ongoing need for this information.
- 2 A major challenge with the Pool Pod is that it is shared between the main and learner pools, and it can take 15 minutes to move it between them. As the Pool Pod is heavily used, this can lead to disputes between users, and BSV can already see the benefit of installing another Pod:

"We want to introduce new sensory swimming sessions. However, as these will take place in the learning pool we will have to hope and pray that no-one wants to use the Pool Pod in the main pool." James Dennis

- 3 Since more people are attending swimming sessions with conditions that need support, this means that there are not enough specialist changing rooms to handle the demand at certain times:

"We have carers fighting with carers to access the specialist changing rooms. It can take 20 minutes to get someone into the water and if there are ten of them, the session is finished." Lyndsey Barrett

This problem occurs on a weekly basis and can only be solved by major structural alterations to the building.

NSMC comments

- 1** It is often relatively simple to add a piece of infrastructure (in this case the Pool Pod) to improve accessibility to users of a sports facility. However, it is more difficult, but just as important, to ensure that customers know that it is there and can see it in action before attending. A link to the Pool Pod commercial website, or the embedding of the promotional website shared on Facebook during launch, would be sufficient to show it in action on the website.
- 2** We note, and applaud, BSV's major investment in staff training around the Pool Pod and their willingness to rapidly deal with the problem that our user identified.
- 3** Longer term, the issue of changing facilities needs to be resolved. This is often typical of improvements to accessibility where freeing up a bottleneck in one area causes other issues to come to the fore.

**“ Pools are for everyone,
and we need to get
everyone into the pool.
Richard Heard**

