

CASE STUDY:

Accessibility Review of The Cath Thom Leisure Centre



Hyndburn
Leisure

Overview



In November 2025, members of the Accessibility Advocate Group were invited to take part in a guided tour of the new Cath Thom Leisure Centre in Clayton-le-Moors. The purpose of the visit was to provide detailed feedback on accessibility, focusing on the welcome experience, external environment and internal facilities.

The visit offered valuable insight into how the centre is performing from an accessibility perspective, highlighting both strengths and opportunities for further improvement.

“The venue looks impressive from the outside, and the welcome inside matches that first impression.”

First Impressions & Arrival Experience

From the outset, the centre demonstrated a strong commitment to accessibility and ease of access.

Visitors reported a positive journey experience, with digital navigation tools successfully recognising and directing users to the facility. On arrival, the building was well-lit, clearly signposted and visually welcoming.

The car park was highlighted as a key strength:

- Spacious layout with large parking bays
- Ample accessible parking provision
- Safe one-way traffic system
- Designated drop-off zone

One participant noted: ***"I was impressed before even arriving – Google Maps recognised the building and directed me straight there."***

While overall feedback was very positive, some users suggested that additional accessible parking along the side of the building would further enhance accessibility for those with mobility needs.

External Accessibility

The external environment supports a wide range of users, including pedestrians, wheelchair users and cyclists.

Key features include:

- Covered cycle storage
- Safe and easy access to the running track
- Rest areas with seating
- Clear, readable signage

The centre also supports inclusive community activity, with organisations such as Wheels 4 All using the track to provide cycling opportunities for people with differing abilities.

A minor accessibility issue was identified regarding a narrowed pavement caused by the positioning of an electricity box. This presents an opportunity for improvement to ensure fully inclusive access routes.



Inclusive Facilities & Design

The internal layout of the building reflects a strong commitment to inclusive design.

Highlights include:

- Clear signage with icons and braille
- Spacious, accessible changing and shower facilities
- Flexible and accessible café seating
- Community room with direct external access to prevent disruption

The swimming pool was particularly well received, offering multiple accessible entry options:

- A double hoist system enabling carers to support users in the water
- Graduated steps with handrails for independent access

One user shared:

"I felt less disabled – I could enter the pool the same way as others."

This feedback highlights the importance of inclusive design in promoting dignity and independence.

Staff & Service Experience

Staff were described as welcoming, knowledgeable and well-trained, with strong foundations in safeguarding, first aid and customer care.

There is also clear investment in workforce development, including a new apprenticeship programme.

Gym staff were noted for their willingness to adapt activities and provide personalised support, ensuring users with different needs can still participate.

Customer Experience & Feedback

Overall, the group had a highly positive experience and praised the centre's inclusive approach.

"The venue looks impressive from the outside, and the welcome inside matches that first impression."

"We had a lovely couple of hours and on the whole we love the new building and everything you have to offer."

The café and social spaces were also highlighted as welcoming and accessible, with flexible layouts to accommodate wheelchair users.



Opportunities for Improvement

The visit also identified several opportunities to further enhance accessibility:

- Clearer distinction between reception and café areas
- Availability of building maps online to support pre-visit planning
- Improvements to external pavement access
- Increased provision of seated and inclusive exercise classes
- Enhanced visibility of emergency evacuation procedures
- Consideration of additional accessibility training for staff

The importance of pre-visit information was particularly emphasised: ***“Planning a visit in advance would make a big difference for people with anxiety or additional needs.”***

Conclusion

The Cath Thom Leisure Centre demonstrates a strong commitment to accessibility, with clear evidence of inclusive design and collaboration with disabled users throughout its development. A group member commented ***“It’s evident you have worked in partnership with disabled people in your planning.”***

The facility provides a welcoming, safe and inclusive environment that supports independence, participation and community engagement.

By continuing to act on user feedback and build on existing strengths, the centre is well positioned to become a leading example of accessible leisure provision in the community.

