

Leisure centres



Terrorism threat to leisure centres

- It is unlikely that terrorist actors would have the intent to conduct an attack against leisure centres in the UK.¹ Previous terrorist attacks in the UK have demonstrated the intent of terrorist actors to conduct mass-casualty, high-profile attacks in proximity to major sites. Leisure centres are unlikely to be attractive targets for terrorist actors in the UK.
- It is highly likely that any terrorist attack conducted against a leisure centre in the UK would be conducted by an individual or small cell using a low sophistication methodology. E.g., Bladed or Blunt Force Weapons, Vehicle as a Weapon, or Fire as a Weapon.
- There is a realistic possibility that terrorist actors in the UK could have the capability to conduct a high-sophistication attack at a leisure centre in the UK. E.g., Improvised Explosive Devices (IED), Person Borne Improvised Explosive Devices (PBIED), or Firearms attack. The complicated nature of plotting a high-sophistication terrorist attack makes it highly likely that there would be greater opportunity for UK police and security services to disrupt potential attacks.
- The assessments in this report were made using the PHIA Probability Yardstick, for further information please see the Assessment Methodology [section below](#).

Location based threats to leisure centres in the UK

- It is likely that there would be an increased terrorism threat to leisure centres in major cities and those in proximity to iconic sites and/or major transport hubs. There is a realistic possibility that leisure centres located in proximity to iconic sites and/or busy public spaces could be impacted by a Marauding Terrorist Attack in proximity to their site.
- There is a realistic possibility that terrorist actors in the UK could seek to conduct an attack against leisure centres that are located in smaller towns and cities due to the lack of other suitable targets in the nearby area compared to more urban environments.

Previous terrorist incidents related to leisure centres in the UK and overseas

- Individuals have previously demonstrated the intent and capability to conduct attacks at leisure centre sites in the UK, including:
 - **2023 Northern Ireland**; Two individuals conducted a Firearms attack against a senior police officer after he had been coaching at a sports centre in County Tyrone. A notice was later found declaring that the New IRA were behind the attack.²
 - **2023 Cheltenham**; Although not designated as terrorism, an individual was sentenced to life imprisonment for conducting a “politically motivated attack” against a GCHQ employee outside a leisure centre. The individual conducted a Bladed Weapons attack against the victim outside, and in the reception area of, a leisure centre. The victim was wounded and rushed to hospital for treatment in intensive care.³
- Terrorist actors have previously demonstrated the intent and capability to conduct attacks against leisure centres and associated sites globally, including:
 - **2023 Canada**; An individual was sentenced to life imprisonment for conducting a Bladed Weapons attack against a massage parlour. The individual reportedly used a machete to target women at the facility. During the sentencing, the judge reportedly deemed the attack to be an act of terrorism motivated by the online “incel” subculture. There was one fatality.⁴
 - **2021 USA**; An individual conducted a Marauding Firearms Attack against two massage parlours and an aromatherapy spa. There were eight fatalities and one other was injured.⁵

Other potential threats to leisure centres in the UK

- There is a realistic possibility that there could be a heightened threat to leisure centres during peak opening hours, such as evenings, weekends, school holidays, etc.
- There is a realistic possibility that the threat posed to leisure centres in the UK could be heightened by the presence of high-profile individuals, politicians, celebrities etc. E.g., an Extreme Right-Wing terrorist could conduct an attack against a controversial pro-immigration politician at their local leisure centre having carried out online hostile reconnaissance against the individual.
- Whilst there has not yet been a designated incident of terrorism related to incel violence in the UK, due to the nature of the sector and the large number of women present at leisure centres throughout the UK, there is a realistic possibility that individuals affiliated with extreme incel ideology could seek to conduct violent attacks against leisure centres in the long term.
- There is a realistic possibility that staff employed at leisure centres could pose an Insider Threat to leisure centres in the UK. E.g., staff employed at leisure centres in the UK could allow terrorist actors to access toxic chemical substances used at swimming pool facilities in order to facilitate an attack.

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- There is a realistic possibility that individuals plotting to conduct a terrorist attack could use gyms linked to leisure centres in order to plot or engage in attack planning. Gyms have previously been used by individuals associated with terrorism-related activity, including:
 - **2022 Australia**; Media reporting suggests an investigation uncovered alleged links between Legacy Boxing Gym and individuals associated with an Extreme Right-Wing ideology. Photos released as part of the investigation picture members of the gym performing a Nazi salute while surrounded by Nazi Hakenkreuz and SS flags amongst other far-right symbolism.⁶
 - **2018 UK**; Members of the proscribed terrorist group, National Action, allegedly converted a warehouse in Howley into a training camp for an “imminent race war”.⁷
 - **2017 UK**; In CCTV footage obtained by The Times, the perpetrators of the 2017 London Bridge attack were seen together outside a gym in Ilford, east London. Khuram Butt, the alleged ringleader of the attack, can later be seen entering the gym.⁸

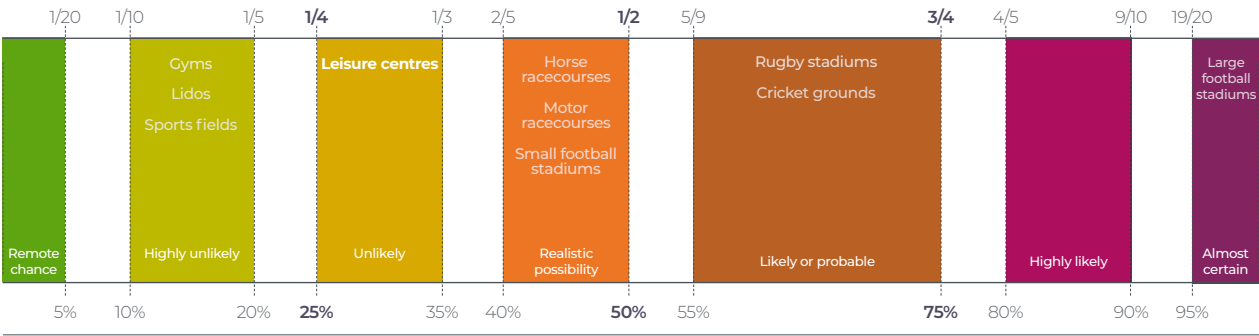
Threat visualisation

The diagram below outlines the intent of terrorist actors in the UK to conduct attacks against leisure centres within the arts, culture and entertainment sector.

Terrorist intent can be defined as the desire and/or determination of an individual to conduct an attack against any given site.

The intent of terrorist actors to conduct an attack against the arts, culture and entertainment sector in the UK is subject to change based on the assessments outlined in this report.

Note: The terrorism threat to any given site is not based solely on intent, but also the capability of terrorist actors in the UK as outlined in this report. Terrorism threat is also mitigated by the UK’s countrywide terrorism risk mitigation infrastructure including both public and private security and safety capabilities.



Assessment Methodology

The assessments made in this report have been made using the Professional Head of Intelligence’s “Probability Yardstick” (above). The Probability Yardstick is a standardised instrument used to provide a professional standard for intelligence assessment.

- **Almost certain:** An event has a greater than 90% chance of occurring.
- **Highly likely:** An event has a 76% to 90% chance of occurring.
- **Likely:** An event has a 55% to 75% chance of occurring.
- **Realistic possibility:** An event has a 40% to 54% chance of occurring.
- **Unlikely:** An event has a 25% to 39% chance of occurring.
- **Highly unlikely:** An event has an 10% to 24% chance of occurring.
- **Remote chance:** An event has a less than 10% chance of occurring.

Time spans

- **Short Term:** 0–6 Months.
- **In the next 12 months.**
- **Medium Term:** 12 months–5 Years.
- **Long Term:** 5+ Years.

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Bibliography

1. Leisure Centre is defined within this report as a publicly accessible building containing different facilities for leisure activities, such as a sports hall, a swimming pool, a gym, sports fields, a café, etc.
2. Man charged with attempted murder of senior Northern Ireland police detective; UK News - Sky News
Senior officer shot by masked men in 'barbaric' attack as he coached youth sports team; UK News - Sky News
John Caldwell: Two arrested over attempted murder of senior Northern Ireland police detective; UK News - Sky News
PSNI detective says they know who pulled trigger in John Caldwell murder attempt; UTV - ITV News
John Caldwell: Three charged with terror offence over attempted murder of senior Northern Ireland police detective; UK News - Sky News
3. Joshua Bowles: Former GCHQ worker jailed for life after trying to murder US spy; UK News - Sky News
4. Canada police say machete killing was 'incel' terror attack; Canada - The Guardian
Canadian man sentenced to life in prison for 'incel'-motivated murder; Toronto - The Guardian
Short for involuntary celibate; a member of a group of people online who are unable to find sexual partners despite wanting them, a subsection of whom openly express hostility towards women. (There have currently been no incel-related terrorist attacks in the UK. However, the increasing number of self-identifying incels within the UK could be illustrative of the possible threat posed by such actors in the long term.)
5. Atlanta spa shootings: Georgia man pleads guilty - BBC News;
'She could have been your mother': anti-Asian racism a year after Atlanta spa shootings;
Atlanta spa shootings - The Guardian
6. Inside the Melbourne boxing gym with a neo-Nazi underbelly - (theage.com.au)
7. WATCH: Step inside gym in Howley used by alleged terror group to prepare for 'race war' - Warrington Guardian
8. London attack: CCTV video shows terrorists laughing while planning atrocity at Ilford gym - The Independent

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