

Aquatic Leisure Facility Development Strategy



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INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The City of Sydney Aquatic Facilities Development Strategy was commissioned by Council in October 2004. This report presents the findings of the study and the recommendations for the future development and operation of aquatic facilities in the City.

In particular, the report provides a framework to guide the long term development and management of its existing aquatic facilities and the provision of new facilities over the coming years.

1.2 THE NEED FOR AN AQUATIC STRATEGY

Some of the key issues that have created the need for an Aquatic Strategy are:

- € The City of Sydney has experienced and will continue to experience significant population growth over the next 10-15 years. Recreational and community facilities will be key infrastructure requirements in meeting future community needs.
- € There is a significant workforce in the Council area, with this being higher and expected to remain higher than the resident population. Although no specific research dated is available, it can be expected that this workforce generates a demand for passive and recreation activities, particularly before work, during lunch breaks and after work. However elements of this demand vary between seasons and are quite weak in summer holiday times when many workers are on leave;
- € The Prince Alfred Park Pool is at the “crossroads” wherein it is nearing the end of its economic life. This thus presents an opportunity to assess the future of this facility;
- € The southern area of Council (in the former City of South Sydney) will experience significant population growth over the coming years, with the Green Square urban renewal project being of particular note. The area is currently deficient in aquatic and other recreational facilities to service the needs of the new community, although there are extensive parklands and golfing facilities nearby;
- € Previous studies have indicated that an opportunity exists to provide an aquatic leisure facility as a focus for community in the southern part of the City with the possible integration of such a facility with community rooms, childcare, multipurpose spaces, and

- € The northern area of the City of Sydney is well provided for in terms of existing and proposed aquatic facilities with each neighboring facility being 1.5 - 2.0km from each other. There is currently four existing pools and one currently under construction. The Sydney University Aquatic Centre is also a facility that draws patronage within the LGA.

The strategy will test and assess the feasibility of specific future directions in particular, the future of Prince Alfred Park Pool and the need for additional aquatic facilities in the southern area of the Council.

1.3 THE STUDY TEAM

A team from five disciplines has undertaken the study and the preparation of this report. These companies and their disciplines are HM Leisure Planning Pty Ltd., recreation planning; Prior + Cheney, architecture, Geoff Ninnes Fong and Associates Pty Ltd, aquatics engineering, VOS Group Pty Ltd., consulting engineers, and Currie and Brown, quantity surveyors.

1.4 THE STUDY WORK PROGRAM

The program of research undertaken in the course of preparing the Aquatic Development Strategy is detailed in Appendix D of the Background Research. The findings of the research are reported in Background Research section of this volume.

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THE CITY OF SYDNEY AQUATIC FACILITIES DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

A recommended policy and design framework for the future development of aquatic facilities in the City of Sydney has been developed by the research findings arising from this study in particular existing asset review, regional facility review, performance and catchment analyses, and the demographic and leisure trend implications.

The Strategy provides:

- € a set of Objectives for the facilities
- € a recommended hierarchy for the venues across the City as a basis for future development and programming, and
- € possible recommended development proposals for each venue for future design development;

2.2 AQUATIC FACILITY OBJECTIVES

The following objectives are proposed for the aquatic and associated facilities in the City of Sydney:

1. To develop a set of outdoor and indoor aquatic and related facilities which meet recreational, training, competition, learn to swim, health and general fitness needs of residents of the City and surrounding areas, the City workforce and visitors to the City
2. To ensure that the aquatic and related facilities and programs provided at City of Sydney venues are accessible to people regardless of their physical and financial abilities, age, gender and cultural background
3. To provide facilities and programs at standards which are appropriate to and which reflect the differing needs and skills of the community
4. To develop a mix of facilities which support multi-use and which are flexible in their ability to meet community needs
5. To ensure that all facilities and programs provided are professionally managed, have use flexibility and are responsive to any changing needs in the community

6. To develop a mix of facilities and programs which achieve a strong, sustainable financial performance
7. To ensure that the facilities will meet all Australian disability access, ecologically sustainable design and building code standards.

These objectives will be achieved by:

1. **Developing a hierarchical of complementary indoor and outdoor venues**

The recommended hierarchical levels of the facilities is:

- § “Local”, this category covers essentially no more than one or two suburbs of the City of Sydney
- § “Sub-municipal”, this being a substantial sector of the City of Sydney
- § “Municipal”, this being the entire City of Sydney
- § “Sub Regional “ - this being a substantial sector of the City of Sydney as well as parts of adjoining Council areas;
- § “Regional”, this being the entire City of Sydney and some or all of the surrounding Councils areas.

It is recommended that facilities at the State or national *competition* level not be developed. These are generally competitive in nature and require extensive support infrastructure. A lack of State or national facilities does not mean, however, that *programs* of State or national importance cannot be offered through the venues.

It is further recommended that there be some “nesting” of hierarchies at several of the venues. This means that some venues will serve *several different market levels* at the same time. Design, management and programming *will need to recognise and be responsive to this*.

2. **Developing different but complementary programs** at each of the City’s aquatic leisure venues.

2.3 THE COMPONENTS OF THE PROVISION MIX

2.3.1 The Overall Provision Mix

The recommended components of the system of pools are:

1. Outdoor pools in parkland settings in the north (Andrew “Boy” Charlton Pool), central (Prince Alfred Park) south (Victoria Park).
2. An outdoor all year pool in a parkland setting (Victoria Park)
3. Indoor all year aquatic leisure/health centres in the north-east of the City (Cook and Phillip Park Pool), north-west (Ian Thorpe Aquatic Centre, Ultimo), and
4. An indoor/outdoor centre in the south (Southern Local Government Area), to be provided in association with indoor and outdoor community recreation, sporting, and amenity spaces.

2.3.2 The Recommended Initiatives and Hierarchical Position of Each Venue

The recommended provision focus and hierarchical position of each venue is described below.

1. Andrew “Boy” Charlton Pool

Facility Mix:

- € 1 X 50m outdoor pool
- € 1x Learners/babies pool
- € Change rooms
- € Multi purpose space
- € Cafe

Hierarchical position:

The facility should continue to serve as a *local to sub-municipal* pool for inner city residents, and as a regional venue and tourist destination for those seeking the particular experience and ambience offered by the venue.

Possible Future Directions:

Further development of the Andrew “Boy” Charlton Pool is largely precluded by limited parking, the lack of further site capacity, the impact of any development on the ambience of the existing facility and the sensitive setting. Recent suggestions that the pool be seasonally or partially enclosed should not be pursued as this would be detrimental to the site’s ambience and amenity.

Recent extensive redevelopment works means that no further changes are recommended as a result of the present study.

2. Ian Thorpe Aquatic Centre, Ultimo (under construction):

Facilities:

The facilities being developed at the Ian Thorpe Aquatic Centre are:

- € 1 x Olympic pool
- € 1 x Hydrotherapy pool
- € 1 x Leisure pool
- € Sauna and spa as part of leisure pool
- € Cafe with outdoor seating deck
- € Gym and program room
- € Provision for sports medicine clinic
- € Parking for 99 cars

Hierarchical position:

It is recommended that the Ian Thorpe Aquatic Centre has a primarily sub-municipal focus with an extra-municipal market which reaches into Leichhardt, Marrickville and potentially, Canada Bay particularly areas that have direct access to the light railway corridor. The facility should be managed and programmed to service the needs of residents, students and the sub-municipal workforce.

3. Victoria Park Pool:

Facility Mix

- € 50m outdoor pool
- € Toddlers pool
- € Gym
- € Change rooms
- € Café/Kiosk
- € Creche/ Child minding area
- € Parking -20cars

Hierarchical position:

Victoria Park pool is a venue serving a nested local, sub-municipal, municipal and regional market. This is predominantly targeted at adults due to the facility mix, location, accessibility and nearby / passing markets (university students, city workforce, apartment residents).

Possible Future Directions:

Current works underway include a new toddlers pool, and state of the art filtration system/ plant room which will increase energy efficiency.

Further development of fitness gym facilities should be planned to strengthen the complementary role with the lap focus of the pool.

4. Cook and Phillip Park Aquatic Centre:

Facility Mix:

- § Indoor 50m pool
- § Leisure wave pool with river rapid facility
- § Hydrotherapy pool
- § Change rooms
- § Dry sports hall (Basketball)
- § Café/ kiosk
- § Parking – 300 cars

Hierarchical position:

The lap swimming, health and fitness and indoor sports focus of Cook and Phillip Park Pool mean that it will retain a predominantly municipal and sub-regional focus. The location of the centre also means that it will play an important regional role for eastern suburbs residents and a major role in meeting the recreation and health needs of City workers and tourists.

Possible Future Directions:

Works are currently being documented and programmed to address waterproofing and roof structure issues.

From a programming and use perspective, a review of the centre indicates that the leisure water components have been over-provided . These facilities require major staffing and supervision inputs, are under-used for much of the year and do not function well within the mix of opportunities provided and demanded by users. Further, use patterns suggest that the environment offered by the indoor facilities do not attract high levels of social use.

It is therefore recommended that consideration be given to extending the capacity of the learn to swim and aqua health markets by reducing the provision of the water play elements. This would entail removal of the river rapid facility and provision of a spa and program pool.

Further, it is recommended that additional dry health and fitness programs, sports medicine facilities and dry program rooms should also be provided through the redevelopment of the existing outdoor area adjacent to the indoor sports court.

Redevelopment initiatives will be contained within the existing building footprint due to the underground location and the cost and disruption which would be incurred with works to increase to the overall space available.

5. Prince Alfred Park Pool:

Existing Facility Mix:

- § Outdoor 55 yard pool
- § Toddlers Pool
- § Change rooms
- § Kiosk

Hierarchical position:

The most effective focus of the Prince Alfred Park pool will be to continue its low key role as a *local* venue. This reflects the parkland setting, the projected increase in the residential population of the Waterloo, Redfern and Surry Hills areas, the lower economic status of some parts of the catchment area and the *different* characteristics of the other City of Sydney aquatic facilities. It should continue to function as an outdoor summer pool and water play park in an informal parkland/ social setting targeted at Surry Hills, Redfern and Waterloo residents. In an upgraded form, the pool could also attract use by students from nearby institutions, backpackers, and residents from wider eastern suburbs areas as well. Use would be low intensity and at a comparatively low-cost to users.

Possible Future Directions:

The Technical Report by Nines Fong Partners highlights that the facility is old and requires extensive upgrade to remain viable.

Subject to further design development and feasibility assessment the upgrade of Prince Alfred Park Pool can be approached in several ways. These are:

Facilities Replacement:

This option would entail the simple replacement of the existing assets with modern equivalents. The toilet and change facilities could be rebuilt in keeping with modern standards and a steel-based insert could be applied to the 50 metre pool to renew it. A new water treatment plant would also be required plus heating if desired. As part of this renewal, some additional water play, social, café and outdoor lawn areas could be provided. The abandoned ice skating facilities would be removed.

This approach offers the least-cost solution. However, except for the water play and café elements, it would be unlikely to diversify or extend the markets served or to strengthen the financial performance of the venue.

Removal of the former ice skating facilities (ice making plant) would reduce the existing area of the pool facility and return additional area to parkland.

Facilities Redevelopment:

The need to replace the existing facilities offers the opportunity to substantially redevelop and refocus the opportunities provided in the Park. This would enhance the capacity, market diversity and financial viability of the venue without dramatically changing its focus. Such a strategy is recommended ahead of the simple replacement of the existing facilities.

Redevelopment could be undertaken in association with the implementation of the new park masterplan presently being prepared and the removal of the remainder of the former ice skating rink.

A venue *redevelopment* program could be used to redefine the mix and balance of facilities, the configuration and the location of the aquatic facilities in the Park. At the same time, however, the footprint of the venue *could be substantially reduced* from that presently occupied so that land could be returned to the Park.

Two possible optional strategies : Option 1 entails the development of a 25 metre pool and Option 2 shows a 50 metre pool. Option 2 would requires a larger site. An approximate sequence of development stages and components recommended for further design and feasibility assessment are:

1. Construction of a new entry, cafe, change, control and administration facilities building adjacent to Chalmers Street to allow a greater connection of the facility to car parking areas and provision of a street address. The cafe would serve both the controlled pool compound to the south and the wider park to the north. Other facilities in the building would include a small (100m²) multi- purpose room for use in association with the pools for holiday play program activities, social events, community meetings, teaching and group use in cooler weather and

change/toilets (including disabled facilities)with access from within and outside the pool compound

2. There could be the opportunity to provide co-location of administration and facilities for the tennis court centre.
3. Possible provision of interactive water play facilities both *within* and *outside* the pool compound. The internal section would offer sprinklers, sprays, rivulets, mini water slides etc. If feasible components *outside* the pool compound would be splash pads but no *pools* and would be used at no cost. Dry play facilities could also be provided.
4. Within the pool compound, the existing 50 metre pool would be replaced with *either* a new 50 metre or 25 metre pool. Whichever option is adopted, a pool access ramp would need to be provided.
5. A 25 metre pool option is recommended in that it would provide a local ,low cost facility and reflects the fact that every other aquatic venue operated by the City has a 50 metre pool. A 50 metre pool is not warranted given the community desire and the market opportunity to retain a strong local, community focus at Prince Alfred Park.
6. Additional aquatic facilities to be provided in association with the 25 or 50 metre main pool include a smaller pool for summer learn to swim programs ;

Regardless of whether a 25 metre or 50 metre main pool was provided, it is strongly recommended that the Prince Alfred Park pool be located on the, Chalmers Street sector of the Park. This will provide better access and visibility from Chalmers Street.

6. Southern Local Government Area:

Background:

The southern Local Government Area offers the Council the unique opportunity to develop a substantial wet and dry recreational facility unencumbered by existing provision. From a leisure, recreation and sporting perspective, the opportunity exists to develop facilities, programs and services which truly reflect emerging leisure and community trends and needs in modern society.

The *Background Research* volume of this report provided a detailed analysis of the projected population growth of the City of Sydney, an analysis of the condition of and markets served by the City's existing aquatic facilities and an assessment of wider regional aquatic facilities provision. In the light of this research, the key market focus which has been identified for the Southern Local Government area venue will be on meeting aquatic, recreation, sports and health and fitness needs of *the community living south of Cleveland Street*.

As demonstrated by the catchment analyses, this sector of the City is presently not serviced in terms of aquatic/health and fitness facilities, except for the ageing hydrotherapy pool at the former South Sydney Hospital. A new venue could also offer specialist opportunities to niche markets from across the wider City and adjoining municipalities. This would substantially strengthen the financial viability of the development.

Hierarchical position:

A new wet and dry recreation facility to service the community south of Cleveland Street has the opportunity to meet a number of hierarchical levels. . These include:

- € Hydrotherapy Pool and associated health facilities to service the growing health and rehabilitation market on a *municipal* and *regional* level.
- € Dry health and fitness facilities would be more likely to service a sub-municipal market given existing provision in the wider region. The indoor pools and any outdoor water play facilities would service a predominantly *local* and *sub-municipal* market.

It should be noted, however, that the paucity of aquatics provision to the east, south and immediate west of Green Square, almost certainly means that the development would also serve a *sub-regional* market reaching into Randwick, Botany Bay and Marrickville at the very least. The water play facilities would be more *sub-municipal* in nature although they could also attract significant *municipal* and wider use.

Site assessments:

Council currently owns a number of properties in the Green Square area that may have potential to locate a wet and dry recreation facility. These are:

- € The former Royal South Sydney Hospital in Joynton Road, Zetland
- € The former South Sydney Council administration buildings in Joynton Road, Zetland (opposite the hospital), and
- € The Parks and Properties Department depot at 956-960 Bourke Street, Zetland.

Before a final site is determined further detailed feasibility assessment and site master plan development will need to be carried out .

Facilities and Development Proposals:

The Southern Area Leisure Centre will function as a hub within a broader community precinct.

The Leisure Centre should be developed as an integral part of the significant sub-municipal open space area proposed for the Green Square renewal area. An essential component of the development will be a hydrotherapy pool and community medical/health centre to replace those which still operate from the former Royal South Sydney Hospital. A requirement of the sale of the former hospital to the then South Sydney City Council was that these facilities would be replaced within 500 metres of the existing location. A range of other aquatic, health and fitness, social, community and retail facilities could also be provided.

The potential mix of components for further feasibility assessment are:

- € 25 metre, 8 lane *indoor* lap pool
- € 25/or 50 metre, 8 lane *outdoor* lap pool
- € Hydrotherapy pool (see initial development guidelines in Appendix 1)
- € Program pool
- € Multi-purpose program and activity room(s)
- € Café with indoor/outdoor and user/community access
- € Spa/Sauna
- € Indoor *and* outdoor water play
- € Indoor *and* outdoor non-aquatic play equipment
- € Creche
- € Toilet/change, including special family and small group change rooms.
- € Carparking provision

Although the proposed facility mix list was developed - independently from the Green Square Section 94 Plan, the mix of facilities has many similarities to that proposed in the Plan. The key differences which warrant highlighting are:

- € the proposal to build a 25 metre rather than 50 metre main pool, given that the City will have two indoor and three outdoor 50 metre pools by the time the Southern Area venue is built. This “downgrades” the emphasis on competitive use and squad training and re-emphasises a focus on *community*
- € the proposal to build an *outdoor* 25 metre as well as the indoor facility so as to effectively meet all types of lap swimming and club markets
- € the provision of health suites so that specialist services can be delivered on site by professionals (eg: physiotherapy)
- € the provision of spa and sauna facilities to meet the needs of non-swimmers provision of family/specialist change facilities so that families, users with helpers and people with disabilities can effectively use the venue, and
- € the provision of indoor and outdoor *non-aquatic* play equipment.

Each of the additional components strengthens the diversity of activities which can be pursued, the market sectors reached and the range of targeted services which can be offered to the community in general and to special needs groups in the community.

Well-defined physical links between the community facilities must be provided in the overall master planning of the precinct. Car parking requirements will also need to be taken into account.

Indicative Components and Site Relationships

Indicative design parameters are provided in Appendices of the Background Research report. High visibility of the pools, café and gymnasium from the street frontage and entrances should be provided for so the venue is inviting to, and interactive with passing traffic, whether vehicular or pedestrian.

The pool hall should be located to the north to allow the penetration of northern sun to aid with passive heating of this space. Any outdoor play area and the café plaza are also located to take advantage of the sun's position. The café should be sited so it is visible to pedestrian traffic using the open space corridor, as well as optimising the convenience in service pool areas (indoor and outdoor), the foyer and plaza space.

The central, internal circulation space should be accessed via both entrances provides direct access to the dry sports facility, possible creche, café, change rooms, gymnasium and programmed exercise spaces, health consultancy and administration offices.

2.4 FURTHER PLANNING ISSUES

Achieving the most effective outcomes from the recommended development proposals and hierarchical mix will require action on several other important issues. These are:

1. Using the *programming* and *servicing* of uses to ensure that a diversity of activities is provided
2. Use *scheduling* to ensure a balance between uses and equity of access
3. City-wide *marketing* of the different roles to be fulfilled by the various venues
4. The use of *design* to separate conflicting and sensitive uses, and
5. *Staging* of development.

With regard programming it is well recognised that the provision of recreation and health facilities is merely the *starting point* in providing a complete leisure service. If good facilities are not matched by even better and specifically-targeted *programs* and high standard support *services*, customers will either not visit or they will use other venues. . Programming must therefore be used to emphasise the differences between these pools.

Services include things such as information, provision of equipment and towels, newsletters and staff contact with clients.

The *marketing* of aquatic leisure facilities needs to be considered particularly to highlight the different strengths of different venues to maximise use and increase participation rates rather than compete with each other.

Niche marketing (or programming) opportunities aimed at people of different skills, ages or abilities can be obtained by leisure centre managers through data collection on client characteristics and demands.

Finally, with regard to development *staging*, it warrants noting that the initiatives proposed for each of the Council venues can be staged. This offers the advantages of allowing an earlier commencement than finances might otherwise have permitted, of meeting key needs earlier and of permitting the monitoring of the outcomes of the initial developments. All too often, modern aquatic leisure venues have been developed as a complete “package” only for it to be found that changes need to be made within several years. By comparison, a staged development program means that changes can be made to subsequent initiatives if they are warranted.

2.5 CONCLUSION

This Strategy provides a framework for the future upgrading and development of the existing and planned aquatic leisure facilities in the City of Sydney. This includes a set of objectives to guide future initiatives, a recommended components mix and details on the way in which these components should be developed at the existing

pools –and in particular, at the ageing Prince Alfred Park pool and the proposed new venue in Southern Local Government Area.

The development recommendations for the Prince Alfred Park pool are designed to retain the local focus of the venue.

The Southern Local Government area proposal envisages a major new multi-use venue designed to fill a significant gap in the aquatics, health and fitness and leisure opportunities in the southern part of the City. This venue should have a focus on general and specialist community health and fitness delivered through a mix of aquatic and dry facilities; indoor and outdoor lap, social and learn to swim programs; dry fitness opportunities; multi-use meeting and program facilities; and a range of café, social and community spaces. Such a venue will make a major contribution to the leisure and health opportunities in the southern part of the City, to niche markets across the wider City and to residents of surrounding Councils.