

ITEM 6. PRINCE ALFRED PARK POOL – SEASON EXTENSION**FILE NO: S100640.006****SUMMARY**

Prince Alfred Park Pool is a heated outdoor 50 metre pool with toddler splash deck, café, shaded bleacher seating and change rooms located in a park setting. It reopened to the public in May 2013 after an extensive redevelopment.

Prior to its upgrade, the pool ran as a seasonal operation from 1 October to 31 March each year and was not heated. In accordance with an earlier resolution of Council, from the date of reopening in May 2013, the pool operated as a year-round facility on a two-year trial basis.

In April 2015, Council resolved to extend the trial for a further two years in order to gain a more complete understanding of the social, environmental and financial impacts.

Season Extension – Trial Period Findings

The high level findings and observations from the trial period are as follows:

- The average annual pool attendance for 2015 and 2016 was 173,561 visits compared to 45,000 visits during the last year of seasonal operation in 2007/08. The average off-season pool attendance (May to August, inclusive) was 29,656 visits with the lowest monthly pool attendance being 5,954 visits in July.
- A like-for-like comparison with the City's other aquatic leisure facilities which operate all year is difficult because they have gyms and other fitness programs operating in them.
- Operating costs and utility usage on a per visit basis is comparable with the City's other outdoor aquatic facility at Victoria Park Pool which operates over the winter period.
- Keeping the facility open over the winter period has a significant impact (45 per cent increase) on the energy-related greenhouse gas emissions of the centre (measured in tonnes of CO₂) and the potable water use of the centre (28 per cent). However, these figures represent less than one per cent of the City's overall organisational emissions and the City's overall organisational potable water use.
- Aquatic leisure facilities are highly valued by the community and are more than just places to swim. They contribute to improved levels of physical and mental health, and the building of strong social networks and relationships, which generally contribute to enhanced community wellbeing. Aquatic leisure facilities now form part of the social fabric of communities and have become an essential part of many Australian lifestyles.

On the basis of the trial extension findings and observations, it is recommended that the operation of the Prince Alfred Park Pool as a year-round outdoor aquatic facility be implemented on a permanent basis.

RECOMMENDATION

It is resolved that Council:

- (A) approve the extension of the Prince Alfred Park Pool season to all year operation;
and
- (B) note that the ongoing operation, including season length of the Prince Alfred Park Pool, will be subject to further review during the development of the City's proposed Aquatic Leisure Facilities Strategy which is scheduled for completion in 2018/19.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Resolution of Council – 27 April 2015

BACKGROUND

1. The City's three outdoor aquatic leisure facilities are managed under a contract with Belgravia Leisure (Belgravia) which commenced on 1 February 2012. The facilities include:
 - (a) Andrew (Boy) Charlton Pool;
 - (b) Prince Alfred Park Pool; and
 - (c) Victoria Park Pool.
2. On 29 February 2016, Council resolved to appoint Belgravia to also manage the City's two indoor aquatic leisure facilities:
 - (a) Cook + Phillip Park Aquatic & Fitness Centre; and
 - (b) Ian Thorpe Aquatic Centre.
3. Prior to redevelopment, Prince Alfred Park Pool was an unheated pool and operated on a six-month seasonal basis from 1 October to 31 March each year.
4. Under the contract, Belgravia was required to operate Prince Alfred Park Pool for an extended eight-month season from 1 September to 30 April each year. This aligned with the operation of the City's other seasonal outdoor aquatic leisure facility, Andrew (Boy) Charlton Pool.
5. On 5 December 2011, prior to project completion and in response to community requests, Council resolved to operate the facility year-round on a trial two-year basis from reopening. It reopened to the public as a heated facility on 13 May 2013 after extensive redevelopment.
6. At the end of the trial period, Council resolved on 27 April 2015 to extend the trial for an additional two years to gain a more complete understanding of the social, environmental and financial impacts of the extended season.

SUMMARY OF TRIAL

7. The trial period covers the four-month winter period (May to August, inclusive) for calendar years 2015 and 2016. Analysis of the data from Prince Alfred Park Pool indicates:
 - (a) average annual attendance of 173,561 compared with 45,000 visits prior to the closure of the facility for redevelopment in 2008;
 - (b) average winter period attendance of 29,656 visits, with the lowest monthly attendance of 5,954 visits in July;
 - (c) busiest times Monday to Friday were 6am to 8am, 12pm to 3.30pm and 5pm to 6.30pm, with the busiest days being Thursday through Monday;
 - (d) the user profile over the trial period was:
 - (i) squad training in several lanes each morning attracting an average of 270 swimmers per week which is the largest user group;

- (ii) multi-visit pass holders accounting for 49 per cent of total attendances;
 - (iii) memberships accounting for 19 per cent of attendances; and
 - (iv) casual entry (adult, student, pensioner, child and families) accounting for 29 per cent;
- (e) the learn-to-swim program has experienced significant growth with 14,052 attendances recorded in 2016, accounting for eight per cent of total attendances. The community's response to the learn-to-swim program has been positive since its inception in 2013. The program currently attracts more than 200 children in summer and 100 children during part of the traditional off-season from April to June;
- (f) community groups using the facility during the winter period included Performance by 3, Different Strokes Swimming, CAN TOO, Little Heroes, College of Sport & Fitness, Bondi Fit, STG Multi-sports, and VLAD Swim; and
- (g) the Whisk & Paddle Café provides a valuable meeting place allowing social interaction amongst user groups and park users. It continues to operate throughout the winter months while the facility is open.

KEY IMPLICATIONS

Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030 Vision

8. *Sustainable Sydney 2030* is a vision for the sustainable development of the city to 2030 and beyond. It includes 10 strategic directions to guide the future of the city, as well as 10 targets against which to measure progress. Extending the opening hours for Prince Alfred Park Pool will support the following strategic directions and objectives:
- (a) Direction 5 - A lively and engaging city centre;
 - (b) Direction 6 – Vibrant local communities and economies;
 - (i) Objective 6.3 - Provide a rich layer of accessible community level social infrastructure, services and programs across the city; and
 - (ii) Objective 6.4 – Develop and support local economies and employment.
9. These objectives must be balanced against the increased environmental footprint as outlined further in this report.

Open Space, Sport and Recreation Needs Study

10. The City's *Open Space, Sports and Recreation Needs Study 2016* provides an overview of supply and demand for sport and recreational facilities with recommendations to enhance opportunities, in particular:
- (a) Strategic Direction 3 – Improve the provision and diversity of sport and recreational facilities.
11. The City of Sydney's *Social Sustainability Discussion Paper* (March 2016) highlights the importance of indoor and outdoor sport facilities to act as a catalyst for building and growing social capital.

Organisational Impact

12. The provision of aquatic leisure facilities is Council's largest frontline service to the community. The management and maintenance of aquatic leisure facilities forms part of the City's core business activities and is supported with resourcing from the following business units:
 - (a) City Greening and Leisure for ongoing contract management;
 - (b) City Projects and Property for building maintenance and utilities;
 - (c) Security and Emergency Management for security services; and
 - (d) Health and Building for microbiological water testing.

Risk

13. Outdoor aquatic leisure facilities are exposed to seasonal weather conditions which increase deterioration in building fabric and materials that require significant ongoing maintenance. In an eight-month operation these maintenance works would be completed during the period while the facility is closed to the public. A change to full-year operation at Prince Alfred Park Pool may require the periodic closure of the facility for one-to-two weeks while maintenance is undertaken. This work would be programmed in winter to minimise impacts on facility users.
14. The facility is scheduled to close from 13 July to 1 August 2017 to undertake essential repairs to the internal wall lane markers. These works require the total emptying of the pool. Facility users will be given advance notice of the closure period.

Social / Cultural / Community

15. The City's investment in aquatic leisure facilities demonstrates they are highly valued community facilities providing health benefits to people from infancy right through to their older years. As our population continues to age, aquatic leisure facilities can help in maintaining and improving health outcomes. These health benefits are gained through swimming, exercise, leisure water activities and a wide range of aquatic programs. Allied to this, these facilities have formed a core of busy and diverse social hubs where people have formed lifelong friendships.
16. Being involved and engaged in local activities and groups helps to build a more resilient, safe and thriving community. Aquatic leisure facilities can become a meeting place for the community that foster social interactions and cater for diverse communities.
17. The proposed inner city high school to be located on the site of the intensive language centre in the south west corner of Prince Alfred Park will have a population of 1,200 students and is expected to be a regular user of the facility.
18. People who are physically and socially active are mentally and physically healthier. The ability to be part of fun, inclusive and active leisure helps people through their various life stages.
19. The trial period has demonstrated good community support over the winter period with an average attendance of 29,656. Reverting back to an eight-month operation would displace users who come to the facility for lap swimming, squad training, learn-to-swim programs and social interaction.

20. If there is no season extension the largest user group, squad programs, would be significantly impacted due to limited capacity to accommodate additional lane hire at any of the other City aquatic leisure facilities during peak times.

Environmental

21. The winter trial period at Prince Alfred Park Pool has resulted in additional energy and water consumption, particularly as it is a heated outdoor pool. The additional energy and water usage is outlined in the following table:

	8-month operation (2-year avg)	12-month operation (2-year avg)	Difference between 8-month and 12-month operation (2-year average)		
			Emissions or water	% increase from 8-month operation	As a % of whole of City organisational footprint
Greenhouse emission	439 t CO ₂ -e	797 t CO ₂ -e	358 t CO ₂ -e	45%	0.9%
Water consumption	10,087 kL	14,065 kL	3,978 kL	28%	0.9%

22. The table above illustrates that keeping the facility open over the winter period has a significant impact (45 per cent increase in greenhouse emissions and 28 percent in water) on the energy use of the facility (in Tonnes of CO₂). However, this is only a small impact as a percentage of the City's total organisational footprint, which is also shown in the table.
23. Due to higher attendance figures for the same period, Prince Alfred Park Pool generates less CO₂ per visit (12.1kg) than Victoria Park Pool (16.3kg).
24. Average water usage for winter 2015 and 2016 was approximately 13 litres per visit, which is comparable to the operation of Victoria Park Pool which averages 14 litres per visit. When compared to Sydney Water Best Practice Guidelines for Water Management in Aquatic Leisure Centres (2011), Prince Alfred Park Pool usage is in the 'best practice' rating of <20 L/patron for single use centres and Victoria Park Pool is in the 'good' rating of 10-25 L/patron for mixed use centres.
25. The capacity of the existing heating system at Prince Alfred Park Pool is sufficient to maintain the 50-metre pool temperature at 26.5 degrees Celsius over the winter period. The toddler splash pad is decommissioned for the winter period, which is consistent with the operation of Victoria Park Pool.
26. Pool blankets are also used nightly to assist in minimising heat loss.
27. There is a level of uncertainty about the future pricing of energy, both electricity and gas. Prince Alfred Park Pool is a significant consumer of both electricity and gas, especially for pool heating. Careful management will be required to ensure that the impact of any increase in energy prices is minimised, and the Environmental Action Strategy 2016-2021 targets for the City's operations are achieved.

Economic

28. The net cost (excluding depreciation) of operating the City's five aquatic leisure facilities in 2015/16 was \$4.3M. There were 1.8M visits in 2015/16 that cost Council \$2.31 per visit.
29. The net cost (excluding depreciation) of the extended 12-month operation at Prince Alfred Park Pool was approximately \$287,800 per year, which due to its popularity equates to \$9.70 per visit. This compares with Victoria Park Pool with a cost of \$275,485 or \$15.19 per visit.
30. There are fixed costs of operation (e.g. utilities, property maintenance, contract management, overheads) over winter regardless of whether the facility is open or closed. These are estimated at \$218,100.
31. Belgravia's payment to Council would also increase by an estimated \$65,000 per year. The net annual saving to Council (excluding depreciation) of reverting to an eight-month operation is estimated to be \$134,700.
32. Prince Alfred Park Pool contributes to local economies and jobs through the pool and café operations. Seasonal facilities traditionally cannot offer ongoing employment and as a result experience a higher turnover of staff. This can potentially lead to a lack of continuity in key staff positions and additional costs in recruitment and training. Belgravia's workforce strategy for the City's contract can offset this by deploying staff to other City facilities where positions are available.
33. Opportunity costs associated with closing the facility are difficult to quantify, particularly the loss of membership sales as customers may not perceive value in purchasing memberships for a seasonal facility. The City has introduced the 360 membership that allows customers to move between the three outdoor facilities (360 Active) or all five facilities (360 Pro). Any reduction in the opening hours would reduce the value of membership.
34. Multi-visit passes and memberships accounted for 47 per cent of annual visits. This percentage increased to 68 per cent over the winter months which indicates the value placed on the winter opening for members of the City's aquatic leisure facilities.
35. The operation of the Whisk & Paddle Café aligns with the opening of the facility which is currently all year, with reduced hours during the period May to August. Should the operation revert to an eight-month season it is likely the café would cease to trade at all over the winter period. Any closure would also affect amenity offered to pedestrian traffic and park users over this period.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

36. There are sufficient funds in the City's 2016/17 and draft 2017/18 operational budgets to continue Prince Alfred Park Pool as a 12-month operation.

CRITICAL DATES / TIME FRAMES

37. If the season length is to revert to an eight-month operation, Belgravia will require a minimum of 21 days notification. This will allow customer notification, redeployment of staff, winter decommissioning of plant and programming of off-season maintenance.

OPTIONS

38. Options available for Council to consider for the operation of Prince Alfred Park Pool are:
- (a) Extend the season to a 12-month operation subject to the Aquatic Leisure Facilities Strategy scheduled for completion in 2018/19 which will re-assess the season length taking into consideration the opening of the Gunyama Park Aquatic and Recreation Centre. **This is the recommended option.** It demonstrates increased customer service and acknowledges the well documented contribution that aquatic leisure facilities make to improved levels of physical health and mental well-being, and the building of strong social networks and relationships, which generally contribute to enhancing community wellbeing.
 - (b) Revert to an eight-month season from 1 September to 30 April, which is consistent with Andrew (Boy) Charlton Pool. **This is not recommended** as it would have significant impact on community groups and program delivery related to learn-to-swim, squads and schools, in particular the large number of squad swimmers that continue to use the facility during the winter months.
 - (c) Reduce the number of operating days and/or hours per week for the period May to August, inclusive. **This is not recommended** as it would reduce visits by 4,000 to 8,800 with no significant reduction in overall operating costs.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

39. The trial season extension at Prince Alfred Park Pool has been promoted on both the City's and Belgravia's website. There has been no community consultation regarding possible changes to the current 12-month operation.

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