GREATER BENDIGO AQUATIC FACILITIES STRATEGY

Providing sustainable aquatic recreation facilities to the residents of Greater Bendigo

August, 2010
Introduction

There is little doubt that swimming is one of the most popular leisure activities in Greater Bendigo – last year around 115,000 visits were made to Greater Bendigo’s 13 pools. In fact, Greater Bendigo boasts the largest number of pools of any municipality in the state. Our aquatic facilities are valued as a social meeting and gathering place. Importantly they also support health and wellbeing outcomes for the community both in terms of fitness and rehabilitation.

Although overall attendances at pools remain solid, a closer look revealed a trend of declining attendance. Concerned by this trend, Council commenced a comprehensive review of facilities with a strong focus on achieving a sustainable approach to the provision of aquatic facilities that:

- more effectively meets the needs of the community,
- attracts a greater level of use, and
- provides higher quality and diverse aquatic facilities to the community.

The review included a comprehensive operational and technical review of facilities and a feasibility study which included the analysis of trends in aquatic leisure participation and facility design. The Indoor Aquatic Centre Feasibility Study considered what aquatic facilities were required to service Bendigo and whether a second indoor aquatic centre was needed.

A range of community consultation activities were also undertaken, including:

- Workshops involving various sectors of the community including aquatic groups, the health sector, sporting groups, the education sector, Council officers and community groups.
- A survey of 365 people currently making use of the City’s public swimming pools.
- Informal community discussion sessions.
- One-on-one discussion meetings with stakeholder organisations.

The key findings of this review are that:

- Many of our existing aquatic facilities are in poor condition and do not meet current community needs, as a result of an overall decline in patronage. It is estimated that an $8 million injection of funds is required to support capital works to bring the existing 13 pools up to standard. Of particular concern is the condition of Long Gully pool which will ultimately require replacement within a three year period;
- Existing facilities do not meet the changing needs of the Greater Bendigo community. In particular there is demand for warm water program space with a focus on health and rehabilitation;
- Bendigo is the fastest growing municipality in Victoria, and we need to meet demand for facilities in key growth centres including to the South: Kangaroo Flat, Golden Square, and Big Hill and to the North; Epsom, Ascot, Huntly, White Hills and Jackass Flat; and
- There is a clear and identifiable need for additional indoor aquatic facilities and opportunities in Greater Bendigo.
Based on the findings of this review, this strategy was developed to assist us to meet our growing municipality’s needs and demands for water-based recreation now and into the future.

It contains the following key actions:-

**Short term (1 - 3 years)**

- Provide a high quality Indoor Leisure Aquatic Centre to be located in Browning Street Kangaroo Flat. This pool will service the Kangaroo Flat, Golden Square and Big Hill communities allowing for the closure of existing pools which are both within a 3 km proximity of the new facility.
- Work a proposed Long Gully Community Recreation Taskforce to determine opportunities to improve recreation and leisure opportunities for the community.
- Explore opportunities to partner with La Trobe University to redevelop and expand the University Sports Centre to create a facility for education, training, rehabilitation and supporting high-level sport.
- Possible linkage with Brennan Park outdoor pool and the University Sports Centre with the possibility of joint management.
- Due to its limited ability to meet community needs and poor condition close the Long Gully Swimming Pool.

**Medium/Long term (5 - 7 years)**

- Replace White Hills Swimming Pool with a modern water play facility elsewhere within the Botanical Gardens in accordance with the adopted Botanical Gardens Master Plan.
- Reassess the need for additional aquatic leisure facilities to support the eastern parts of Bendigo, particularly Strathfieldsaye.
- Develop a plan for the future of Peter Krenz Leisure Centre in view of Bendigo’s population growth.
- Possible additional aquatic leisure facilities to support the northern growth corridor of Epsom, Ascot, Huntly, White Hills and Jackass Flat.
Guiding Principles

In developing this strategy the following principles guided the decision making of Council:

**A Sustainable Municipal Wide Strategy for Aquatic Provision**
Council will seek to achieve a sustainable approach to aquatic provision which focuses upon providing a fewer number of facilities of a higher quality, which more effectively meet the needs of the community, attract a greater level of use, are more closely connected to existing services and facilities – particularly in relation to how they are managed, are readily accessible and offer a diversity of aquatic experiences.

**Health and Wellbeing**
Council’s aquatic centres will play a key role in actively supporting and encouraging residents to have healthy lifestyles through improved facility design, appropriate locations, accessibility and fee structures.

**Access and Inclusion**
Council’s aquatic facilities will be developed, managed and promoted to ensure safe, equitable, quality access for all the community. Connections to walking and cycling pathways and public transport routes are considered to be an access priority.

**Community Hub**
Council will actively develop its aquatic facilities as integrated and multifunctional venues which provide a centre for community activity and can be used for a range of purposes.

**Partnerships**
Council will be open to and actively pursue opportunities to partner in the provision of aquatic facilities and opportunities.

**Ecological Sustainability**
Council’s aquatic facilities will be ecologically sustainable and incorporate energy saving, waste minimisation, and water saving and re-use elements.

**Quality**
Decisions with regard to the aquatic facilities will seek to ensure that high quality facilities and user experiences are achieved.

**Scale**
The aquatic facilities will be managed so sites are not overdeveloped and the facilities and site are kept at a scale appropriate for surrounding land uses.
Technical Audit and Operational Assessment

A Technical Audit and Operational Assessment was undertaken to understand the current condition of aquatic assets, costs involved with their maintenance and the extent of investment required to upgrade these facilities to appropriate standards.

Particularly consideration was given to meeting public health requirements and general safety standards, as well as the importance of presenting an attractive venue that supported leisure and recreation activities.

A set of criteria was developed to evaluate each of the pools. This included considering pool condition, site requirements, maintenance needs, attendance, operating costs, amenities and proximity to population. Where pools were identified as being deficient a cost basis was undertaken to estimate repair/upgrade costs.

What were the key findings?

- This review determined that the net operating cost to City of Greater Bendigo for the provision of aquatic facilities has progressively increased in recent years, rising from a net cost of $550,394 in 2005/06 to $688,472 in 2009/10.
- It is estimated that approximately $8 million is required over the next few years to improve current facilities to a point where they will be able to continue operating safely and effectively.
- In comparison with many other similar municipalities, Greater Bendigo residents have less opportunity to access indoor pools or to access pools outside of summer months.
- Swimming is one of the most popular leisure activities in Bendigo and nationally, swimming has the highest level of participation for organised sport in Australia.
- The review revealed that declining patronage at pools could be attributed to a number of factors the need to close facilities for major maintenance and repair works, and that many still required significant works to meet basic public health standards.
- The review noted that rural facilities have experienced little change in attendances over the same period.
Indoor Aquatic Leisure Centre Feasibility Study

The feasibility study was carried out by an independent recreational planner – Gary Henshall and Associates and examined the viability of developing a second indoor aquatic leisure centre in Bendigo. It considered:

- A description of the aquatic, aquatic leisure and health and fitness opportunities available in the urban areas of Greater Bendigo, and an analysis of the gaps in provision.
- A review of plans and studies previously completed by Council and the community, which are relevant to the current and future provision of aquatic leisure opportunities in the urban areas of Bendigo.
- An analysis of:
  - the demographic characteristics of the Bendigo community,
  - participation in sport and recreation at a state and national level, and
  - leisure and aquatic trends.

This study was also informed by an extensive community consultation process which involved participation from a broad range of sectors including the swimming community, education sector, recreation and leisure industry and health sector.

What did the community tell us?

The community thought a new Indoor Aquatic Leisure Centre should:

- Be fully accessible for families and people of all abilities;
- Have sufficient car parking, and be close to public transport with walking and cycling options;
- Be multi use in nature and incorporate dry facilities for health and fitness purposes such as gym, health and fitness classes, community activities and multipurpose meeting spaces;
- Be located in an attractive precinct with good connection between the indoor and outdoor environment with doors that open up to outdoor picnic / social spaces;
- Be designed with strong environmental sustainability principles;
- Have water play opportunities for toddlers, children and teenagers;
- Be located near other services such as health providers, community services and facilities;
- Have seating for spectators, particularly for swimming competitions;
- Have complimentary health and wellness services such as physiotherapy and massage;
- Have a cafe which encourages interaction and provides a community meeting point;
- Have child-minding facilities.

What are the key findings?

The information gathered through the consultation process identified a wide range of views, opportunities and issues in relation to aquatic, leisure and health and fitness facilities in Greater Bendigo and particularly in relation to the need for a second indoor aquatic leisure facility. The key conclusions and implications which can be drawn from consultation are:
1. There is a clear and identifiable need for additional indoor aquatic facilities and opportunities in Greater Bendigo.

2. There is particular demand for warm water program space with a focus on health and rehabilitation.

3. There is clear evidence to support the development of an indoor aquatic leisure facility which is multifunctional in nature, has the ability to be used year round and provide for a range of community needs.

4. A new indoor aquatic leisure facility should be of a moderate scale and a satellite model should be applied to the provision of aquatic leisure opportunities rather than a one stop shop approach.

5. A new indoor aquatic leisure facility should be located in the south of the urban areas of Bendigo.

6. The significant duplication of outdoor aquatic facilities and the poor condition of a number of the aquatic facilities in the urban areas of Bendigo needs to be addressed, and action taken to provide a diversity of quality outdoor aquatic leisure opportunities for the community.

7. The anticipated growth in demand for aquatic leisure opportunities over the next twenty years will need to be addressed in the medium to long term.
Strategy Actions

The strategy considers the following:

(a) **A new Indoor Aquatic Leisure Centre on the site of the existing Kangaroo Flat Leisure Centre in the Browning Street Reserve, Kangaroo Flat.**

A site analysis was undertaken at a number of locations against a series of criteria which have been identified as core components for selecting a site. The Browning Street Reserve in Kangaroo Flat was the site that scored highest against the criteria - particularly in:

- Available land space
- Council owned or managed land
- Proximity to main roads
- Proximity to public transport
- Proximity to walking and cycling pathways
- Populated area
- An already existing dry facility that can be integrated into an aquatic facility

Proposed Concept Plan of the Indoor Aquatic Centre

The facility needs to be well designed and pleasant to look at, with landscaping and an interesting entry to the centre to maximise visibility from the Calder Highway. It will include best practice standards of accessibility and environmental sustainability.
Some features of the new facility include:

- 25 metre indoor pool with 8 lanes
- 15m x 15m warm water exercise pool designed to support rehabilitation programs
- A leisure pool with water play, beach entry and splash pads
- Tiered spectator seating
- Gymnasium
- Multipurpose space with sprung timber floor or shock absorbing surface
- Professional suites and child-minding facilities
- Connection to outdoor parkland
- Modern café and reception areas

The development of this facility would take place within a three year time frame.

_Elevated perspective of the proposed Indoor Aquatic Centre._

(b) In the short term continue to pursue a partnership with La Trobe University to redevelop and expand the University Sports Centre to create a facility that is focused upon education, training, rehabilitation and supporting high-level sport.

The Brennan Park outdoor pool should be part of these discussions as there is an opportunity to create physical links with the University Sports Centre and the possibility of joint management of the two sites.
(c) In the medium term acknowledge the need for additional aquatic leisure facilities to support the northern growth corridor of Epsom, Ascot, Huntly, White Hills and Jackass Flat.

This analysis acknowledges the proposed replacement of White Hills Swimming Pool with a modern water play facility elsewhere within the Botanical Gardens in accordance with the adopted Bendigo Botanic Gardens Master Plan.

(d) In the medium term re-assess the need for additional aquatic leisure facilities to support the eastern parts of Bendigo, particularly Strathfieldsaye.

(e) In the medium term develop a plan for the Peter Krenz Leisure Centre in the context of where the most significant population growth is occurring in Bendigo, and the location of the Centre in the far north western corner of the urban area.

(f) Given their poor condition, low patronage, limited ability to meet community needs, proximity to each other and the proposed new facility, close Kangaroo Flat and Golden Square Pools. Pool closures will be managed within the timeframe for construction of the new Indoor Aquatic Leisure Centre.

Given the close proximity of both these facilities to Recreational Sporting Reserves, the City will consult with the community to plan for land-based recreation alternatives at the reserves.
(g) **Within the timeframe for construction of the new Indoor Aquatic Leisure Centre, close Long Gully Pool due to its poor condition, low patronage levels and limited ability to meet community needs.**

Long Gully Pool provides important social leisure opportunities, so in closing the current facility it is proposed to provide the Long Gully Community with alternative leisure facilities.

This will be partly achieved through the completion of the Long Gully Community Centre where construction is underway. In addition, the City will consult and plan with the community to redevelop the current site with new facilities that are valued by Long Gully residents. For example, a development could include water play facilities, play space or picnic and barbeque facilities.
Delivering the strategy

The community will be invited to provide comment on the proposed strategy within a three week period.

The City has $350,000 allocated in the current budget to commence detailed design documentation for a new Indoor Aquatic Leisure Centre, and if funding is secured, the Centre could be complete by early 2013.

Preliminary estimates indicate the facility could cost in the order of $16M to complete.

The facility will be funded partly within Council’s budget, with Council seeking a financial contribution from state and federal government.

During the design phase of the new Indoor Aquatic Leisure Centre, the City will undertake necessary planning and consultation with the community regarding the Long Gully, Golden Square and Kangaroo Flat swimming pools.
APPENDIX 1 – PLAN OF THE EXISTING SITE
APPENDIX 2 – GROUND LEVEL PERSPECTIVE OF NEW INDOOR AQUATIC CENTRE
APPENDIX 3 – HIGH LEVEL VIEW OF NEW INDOOR AQUATIC CENTRE