

WILLIAMSTOWN SWIMMING AND LIFESAVING CLUB REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT

Member Information Session - Question & Answer

Could you please explain the rationale for losing the pool, including information from an Engineer's Report? What is the current status of the pool and why can't it remain?

The swimming pool is nearing the end of its life. Technical audits show the pool is suffering from significant settlement, causing leaking. The concrete is in poor condition with signs of corrosion. Ongoing maintenance issues such as tiles falling off also continue to impact pool operations.

The project will see over 50% of the building volume redeveloped, the whole site is required to comply with the National Construction Code and Disability Act. To achieve this, the pool would require major modifications due to it having a raised edge and stair only entry without a ramp.

How many quotes in the past five years have been obtained specifically for the cost of building a new pool, with dates included? Can prices be shared?

In 2019, as part of the initial concept sketches designed for advocacy purposes, a \$3m estimate was provided for a new indoor pool. Key omissions from this were plant requirements, an entry ramp and perimeter circulation space.

In 2022, following a feasibility study into the suitability of a 4-lane or 6-lane pool, a cost estimate of \$7.5m was received, including a new plant, which is required due to the poor condition of the existing pool. An estimate of \$10m was received for an indoor pool which incorporated an upstairs function space.

In 2023 a range of staging options were investigated for the overall site including an indoor 4-lane pool. Costs ranged from \$28m - \$32m.

Have different options for the pool been considered and relevant quotes obtained? (I.E. an indoor pool, heated outdoor pool, quote just to refurbish)

Only costs for an indoor pool have been obtained. An outdoor pool was not investigated due to the outcomes of a Cost Benefit Analysis Report completed during the project scoping process. To minimize losses to the club or a potential operator, this facility would need to run all year round like an indoor learn to swim centre. It is cost prohibitive to heat an outdoor pool all year round and a pool only operating for six months of the year would increase the loss to the club or a potential operator.

In order to accurately identify the costs for refurbishment, further destructive testing is required and given the other significant upgrade and compliance issues with the pool, refurbishment costs have not been assessed in detail.

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Has a phased approach to the Club's redevelopment been considered to prevent removal of the pool? I.E. Keep the pool and site intact and not build over it, so fresh funding streams could be achieved to refurbish / rebuild the pool at a later date?

Yes, a phased approach was considered and discussed, however it was ruled out by the Project Reference Group, following confirmation by the State Government that no further funding would be available at this site. From Council's perspective, given the pool does not align with priorities within Council's Aquatic Strategy, no further funding will be available as a contribution towards the pool.

The project states that it will revitalize the foreshore precinct, align with the heritage values of the area and deliver the essential life saving components required for the Club to thrive in this location for many years to come. How is the destruction of local heritage infrastructure aligning with Council's heritage values?

A comprehensive assessment of sites heritage features and values has been undertaken as part of the work on the project thus far, and in consultation with Council's Heritage officer it is considered that the retention of the existing club hall in its entirety, whilst preserving strategic views, is an appropriate redevelopment response.

When was the decision to scrap the pool reached?

The decision to finalise a concept plan without a pool was reached in mid-2023, following approval by the Project Reference Group, due to the cost of the pool not being able to be delivered within the available budget. Council worked closely with the Club's Technical Advisory Committee to understand the requirements which form core life saving infrastructure, in line with Life Saving Victoria's development guidelines.

How was the decision reached?

A range of cost assessments were developed as part of the concept options and the inclusion of a pool was cost prohibitive. The Project Reference Group was the key body steering the development of this project and all stakeholders (State Government, Life Saving Victoria, Hobsons Bay City Council and Williamstown Swimming and Lifesaving Club) supported the development of a concept without a pool to enable the redevelopment process to be delivered within the available budget.

The core function of a lifesaving club is to provide a safe beach environment for the community through water safety education and provision of appropriately trained, rescue ready, volunteer patrollers. As a minimum, the Project Reference Group was charged with delivery of a redeveloped lifesaving facility that met these obligations, within budget. With the cost of construction, materials and professional fees only increasing, the urgency to keep the project moving to ensure the Club received the best value facility within the available budget also played a part in moving the process along to the public consultation phase.

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Were experts in the field consulted and if so, could members be provided with any reports?

Technical reports on the pool were developed as part of the Hobsons Bay Aquatic Strategy. A copy of these reports are attached.

The plans submitted for comment are elaborate and seem rather extravagant in the view of the apparent financial constraints. Is the decision to scrap the pool purely a financial decision?

The delivery of the pool is not possible within the available project budget. The concept design currently on public exhibition shows a building design consistent with core lifesaving facility buildings constructed to modern day standards.

The proposed redevelopment of core life saving club functional areas is primarily based on the minimum requirements as described in Life Saving Victoria's 'Life Saving Facility of the Future 2021'. This document describes the Core Design Principles for a Life Saving Club as:

- Prevent aquatic related death and injury across Victoria
- Meet service delivery obligations whilst minimizing environmental impact
- Support emergency management outcomes for the Victorian community
- Sustain volunteer lifesaving
- A safe environment for all members

The document includes the following as recommended functional spaces of any life saving club redevelopment as:

- Patrol tower / observation room
- Patrol support room
- First aid room (public access)
- Change rooms
- Emergency response motor room
- Emergency response equipment storage area
- Education, training, junior activities and sport storage area
- Training rooms
- Active training / fitness room (optional)
- Kitchen
- Club administration room
- Foyer or entry room

Considerable consultation has been undertaken with the club over the course of the preliminary design phase, The outcome of this process was a detailed understanding of the clubs current and future operational and functional area needs culminating in the concept design on exhibition which complies with Life Saving Victoria's recommended

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requirements, the clubs specific operational requirements and its anticipated community and club requirements. We are of the opinion that the proposed redevelopment is not extravagant and will bring the WSLSC into alignment with other recently redeveloped facilities of a similar scale.

In addition, the raising of the site in accordance with Melbourne Waters future sea level rise requirements has added complexity to site access for pedestrians and vehicles which have been addressed as succinctly and economically as possible the current design.

How much has been spent so far on consultancy and design?

Canvas Projects was appointed via a procurement process at the Council Meeting on 9 August 2022. The cost for their services, including the sub-consultant team is \$1.2m. Approximately 25% of this design budget has been spent to date.

Design fees that are approximately 10% of the total budget is consistent with capital works projects of this size and scale in a public setting.

When will the pool close?

The pool will close with the establishment of construction onsite. At this stage, this is scheduled to occur following the 2024/25 summer period.

How long will the facility be closed for?

It is anticipated that the project will take approximately 18-months to complete, subject to a range of construction factors.

Can members be assured that funds earmarked for the WSLSC redevelopment are being allocated to just that and not spread across other Council projects that it has been lumped in with?

Yes. With State Government funding agreements over \$100k, there is a financial acquittal process where audited statements need to be provided, documenting how funding has been spent on the project.

How much were Ward Councillors involved in the draft plans and was any contact made with constituents?

Councillors have been briefed on four occasions since the State Government's funding announcement in 2021. Engagement on the concept design process to date has been with the WSLSC Board and Club representatives nominated by the Board. The public exhibition period currently underway is open for eight weeks, rather than a typical period of four weeks.

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The commitment of only \$3m from Council is completely inadequate. When will we see cost plans to find out exactly which parts the Council are paying for and how much the Club is subsidizing Council by taking time and effort to raise State Government money for things that Council should provide?

Hobsons Bay City Council's \$3m funding towards this project has been endorsed by Council, through its Capital Works Program, consistent with endorsed strategies (Sports Facility Needs Analysis). The contribution of \$3m is to the overall project, not specific to certain elements of the project. The funding agreement between Council and the State Government does not specify what element of the project is being funded by each party. It identifies the project summary and the total funding pool to deliver the project.

Why were the funds from the State Government sat on for so long? Did Hobsons Bay City Council receive interest on these funds? Or have they been spent elsewhere?

Funding from the State Government is received as milestone payments throughout the delivery of the project. The State Government holds the funding, which is released to Council periodically as milestones are completed. No interest can be received on the funding. All funds (as received) are only being spent on this project.

Does the Club/Council recognize its responsibility to both taxpayers and the broader community, implicit in accepting the \$11.3m funding commitment?

Yes it does, which is why Council, in conjunction with the key project stakeholders continue to progress design development of the project. Council is committed to delivering a successful project within the allocated budget of \$14.3m.

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Can members receive a copy of the original application for funding through the State Government? In particular, I'm interested in the community benefit section of that application. If a copy of the application is not available, maybe the committee could advise of the community benefit considered by the State Government.

A funding application was not submitted as part of the funding commitment by the State Government. A funding agreement was developed following the funding commitment between Council and the State Government, through the Department of Justice.

From a Department of Justice perspective, the community benefit items which take priority relating to the project are:

- Improved health and safety for club volunteers and the public.
- Improved amenities at Victoria's beaches.
- A decrease in the risk of drowning (both fatal and non-fatal) by ensuring the retention and attraction of volunteers.
- A decrease in the risk of drowning (both fatal and non-fatal) by ensuring the delivery of critical localized education programs such as 'nippers'.
- An increased opportunity to use life saving facilities for other community purposes, increasing community presence and involvement in club activities.

Have further avenues of funding been explored to try and keep the pool as a viable option for the future of the Club, in light of increases in building costs post-COVID and since funding was first granted by State Government and Council?

Council continues to monitor available funding programs to supplement works onsite, however in the scale of the overall project, these funding opportunities will only be minor. An example of a current funding stream available relates to the Changing Places toilet.

Why was the Club not allowed to brief its members on the reasons for the pool being removed? Why was the Club not able to talk to their members at all? Why is Council putting restrictions on what the Club can say to its members?

The project process undertaken is consistent with how Council approaches major capital works projects. In this instance, there are a range of stakeholders and the Club has been represented by its Board and technical advisory group.

The Project Reference Group has worked through relevant background information so that the draft concept plans could be developed, which could give the wider membership and community an opportunity to then provide feedback.

Typically, these projects are on public exhibition for a four-week period, however noting the size of the membership and scale of the project, this public exhibition period has been extended to eight weeks.

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Is there some meeting space or administration space earmarked for use or occupation by Council staff?

No, there is no space that will be occupied by Council staff for administration purposes. Any Council use of the site will be required to go through the usual Club booking processes.

The office spaces shown in the plans are for WSLSC admin and for Ambulance Victoria. The Club currently has no office or meeting space (other than the hall which is often in use) to complete the considerable amount of administrative, managerial and training tasks required to run the Club. Ambulance Victoria currently have a corner of the hall cordoned off for their use.

I would like to know why we are losing our grassed area out the front of the hall?

There has been significant feedback to date in relation to the front grassed area, which has been valuable in the information gathering phase. At the conclusion of the public exhibition period, this is something that will be reviewed in consultation with the Project Reference Group.

Why are the full plans prepared by the architect not released to the members? They have done some amazing work and beautiful concept drawings, yet the plan issued for public comment did not even show these details. When will we be able to show off the whole concept plan as developed by the architect?

The plans on public exhibition are high level and conceptual in their nature. They are primarily utilised to receive feedback from members and the community. Following the completion of the public exhibition period, plans will be reviewed in consultation with the Project Reference Group with more detailed plans presented to Council for approval.

What are the precise plans for the refurbishment of the existing club building? Eg new roof, new underfloor ventilation, new cladding where it is rotten, interior mold / rotten damage fixed, completely repainted, kitchen revamped, new rooms where the toilets are removed etc.?

The existing hall is being fully retained and upgraded. The back of house areas within the footprint of the hall are proposed to be refurbished which include the kitchen, storage and amenity areas. The full scope of the refurbishment is to be confirmed during the future stages of design and documentation, however there is an allowance to address issues with deteriorated external building fabric.

Can you advise of the configuration of the public toilets onsite, if they are male/female/unisex/gender neutral/accessible?

There will be:

- two gender neutral toilets
- one family toilet
- one gender neutral accessible toilet
- one changing places toilet with a shower
- two gender neutral showers
- one gender neutral accessible shower

In summary, there will be 5 x toilets and 4 x showers incorporating a range of configurations. These public toilets will be accessible to the community and visitors to the foreshore. They are separate from the club managed change rooms and toilets.

There is a disconnect between the plans released for the Club and the foreshore plans. It seems the pathway from the café around the carpark on the beach side has been ignored. Where will people put their gear when they are in the water? Where will people sit to enjoy looking at the beach? Where will the shade be? What becomes of the palm trees that have a significant effect of the amenity of the area which the current club building does?

The connection between the WSLSC project and external foreshore areas is still being worked through. The palm tree adjacent to the swimming pool will need to be removed. All trees being removed as part of the project are being replaced. There are landscape plans available as part of the community consultation package which can be viewed on Participate Hobsons Bay. Any new vegetation and trees will be considered in conjunction with maintaining site lines to the beach and water.

Due to the extra height requirements from Melbourne Water, can you explain the thinking behind the café and toilet area and how this relates to the surrounds? Can you talk through how this area would work, where would people queue, where would tables be, would people with a disability have to navigate busy café areas to get to the toilets?

The plans on public exhibition show that the required level of change between the kiosk and adjacent promenade and esplanade will be addressed with a series of landscape terraces with access via stairs and ramps.

There is a large covered open space adjacent to the kiosk server zone where people will queue and potentially sit. It is also anticipated that the existing promenade, currently used for seating and waiting will continue to be used this way.

The accessible ramp has been located to the side of the kiosk server and gathering zone to mitigate congestion to this area.

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Can you explain how the design response to people who swim and snorkel from the Crystals steps daily? There is a long distance to the public toilets and it seems no access to bubblers or seating for them.

Public toilets have been located at the most prominent location, adjacent to the beach. Club change rooms and amenities have been located at the midway point between the beach and the Crystals steps.

Options to address open air showers, washdown and drinking facilities are being explored to the promenade to the southwest car park side of the redevelopment in response to stakeholder feedback.