

**SPECIAL CABINET  
11 AUGUST 2023**

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**DOLPHIN CENTRE POOL REPAIRS**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member – Councillor Matthew Roche  
Heath and Housing Portfolio**

**Responsible Director – Dave Winstanley  
Group Director of Services**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. To consider extending the Dolphin Centre Pool Project to undertake additional works.

**Summary**

2. The Dolphin Centre provides an excellent range of health and wellbeing activities as well as a key leisure and social venue in the town centre. The centre's popular swimming pool is currently undergoing structural repairs. This is part of an ongoing programme of work to ensure the building, which is more than 40 years old, continues to be fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.
3. As the role of town centres continue to change with greater emphasis on leisure and social activities, the contribution the Dolphin Centre makes to the town centre will continue to increase. There are strong links to the Council Plan objectives and all the Council's portfolios, particularly Health and Economy.
4. The Dolphin Centre Pool is currently closed as part of an approved programme of works to address condition issues within the building, which is now over 40 years old.
5. The removal of the tiles in the main pool identified the source of the issues and informed further detailed investigation works in other areas where deterioration was previously evident but not thought to require works in the near future. With the greater understanding of the issues, it has highlighted the need for further work more urgently than anticipated.
6. Work continues to progress with the main pool project. The area identified as requiring work to be undertaken more urgently is the area fronting the changing facilities and the toddler pool area.

7. There is an opportunity to consider extending the project to secure both operational and financial benefits. The main report explores the benefits and disbenefits of the following options:
  - (a) Option 1 – Complete the works originally identified and then commence a new project within 18 months to 2 years to address the area fronting the changing rooms and the toddler pool.
  - (b) Option 2 – Accelerate the repairs and undertake them as an extension to the current project.
8. On balance it is considered the benefits of Option 2 outweighs the other option and the disbenefits identified. It would be advantageous from a financial, operational and customer perspective. However, this requires approval of additional funds.
9. There is a provision in the Scheme of Delegation for Cabinet 'to sanction additional spending on Capital above the approved budget on urgent items or where there will be a cost benefit'. Therefore, the purpose of the Cabinet report would be to sanction spend above the approved budget on the grounds that it is urgent to secure the cost benefits identified in Option 2.
10. In taking forward the works in this area it is proposed that the works are split into two phases. The initial funding approved in this report to cover the area fronting the changing facilities, whilst feasibility is completed on options for the toddler pool area and the repairs to a retaining wall. These elements would be developed and brought to a future scheduled meeting of Cabinet and Council for consideration.

### **Recommendations**

11. It is recommended that Cabinet:-
  - (a) Agree to vary the Capital Budget for 2023/24 by £490K to accelerate the repairs and undertake them as an extension to the current project.
  - (b) Release £490K of capital funding to accelerate repairs to the Dolphin Centre as identified in this report.

### **Reason**

12. To accelerate the works required to the Dolphin Centre to secure the benefits identified in the report.

**Dave Winstanley**  
**Group Director of Services**

### **Background Papers**

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

S17 Crime and Disorder	The content of this report will not impact on crime and disorder.
Health and Well Being	The Dolphin Centre is the Council's key facility in providing opportunities for residents to participate in an active and healthy lifestyle.
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	There are ongoing M&E programmes in parallel to this project that seek to have a positive impact on carbon reduction as a result of installing modern and efficient mechanical and electrical plant and equipment.
Diversity	No individual is adversely affected as a result of this report.
Wards Affected	Park East
Groups Affected	No group will be adversely affected as a result of this report.
Budget and Policy Framework	There is no impact on the Council's budget or policy framework.
Key Decision	This is a key decision.
Urgent Decision	This is an urgent decision.
Council Plan	The Dolphin Centre contributes to a number of the priorities in the Council Plan.
Efficiency	This report seeks to accelerate works to avoid increased costs and risk of undertaking the works at a later date.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers.

## MAIN REPORT

### Background

13. The Dolphin Centre provides an excellent range of health and wellbeing activities as well as a key leisure and social venue in the town centre. The centre's popular swimming pool is currently undergoing structural repairs. This is part of an ongoing programme of work to ensure the building, which is more than 40 years old, continues to be fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.
14. As the role of town centres continue to change with greater emphasis on leisure and social activities, the contribution the Dolphin Centre makes to the town centre will continue to increase. Its town centre location contributes significantly to the town centre footfall and vice versa. There are strong links to the Council Plan objectives and all the Council's portfolios, particularly Health and Economy.
15. The current works on the Dolphin Centre Pool are part of an approved programme of works to address condition issues within the building, which is now over 40 years old.

16. The pool closed in January and is not planned to re-open until mid-late October. During the closure period, the diving pool and training pool are still being used by the public, swimming clubs, school and private lessons on a programme basis. This current project has an approved budget of £950K.
17. This project includes:
  - (a) Repair to the beams below the pool, where they were showing signs of deterioration that were visible and identified as needing immediate repair.
  - (b) Removal of pool tiles, architectural screed and repairs to waterproofing/concrete and followed by introduction of new waterproofing layer, hi-specification screed and retiling (with epoxy grout) to prevent further ingress of water into the substructure.
  - (c) Infilling existing viewing portal to prevent further deterioration.
  - (d) Removal of on pool side diving platforms
  - (e) Repairs to pool channels
  - (f) Replacement of pool furniture
18. The removal of the tiles in the main pool has identified the source of issues and informed further detailed investigation works in other areas where deterioration was previously evident. With the greater understanding of the issues, it has highlighted the need for further work more urgently than anticipated in certain areas.
19. This further investigation has recently been completed and identified areas where deterioration is worse and will continue to progress unless treated. A timescale has been placed on when these works should be considered by structural consultants.
20. The areas have been prioritised in terms of urgency; plan attached at **Appendix 1**. The building is now over 40 years old and as such will require ongoing maintenance. There will be a need for further investment in the fabric of the building in the future when considering the next stages of repairs and maintenance plan.

### **Extension of the current project**

21. The investigation has identified that Area A (area in front of changing facilities) needs work carrying out in the next 2 years, which would necessitate pool closures and restrictions similar to those that are in place now. These restrictions would need to be reintroduced at the latest in about 18 months' time to ensure the works are undertaken within 2 years. There is also some further investigation work being undertaken on a retaining wall which has to be concluded.
22. Work continues to progress with the main pool project. However, there is an opportunity to consider extending the project to secure both operational and financial benefits. However, an urgent decision is required imminently to secure the identified benefits. The options are considered later in this report.

23. An assessment has been undertaken into the benefits and disbenefits of extending the current project to address the issues in Area A.

**Option 1 - Complete the works originally identified and then commence a new project within 18 months to 2 years.**

24. Benefits:

- (a) Pool will be able to reopen in mid/late October 2023.
- (b) Positive news for customers.
- (c) The monitoring by structural engineers could extend the timeframe beyond 2 years, but the advice is that work is going to be required to be completed within 2 years.

25. Dis-benefits:

- (a) The costs will increase over the 18-month period. There will have been additional deterioration that will increase the work required and the current high construction inflation levels will impact, with both labour and material costs still increasing.
- (b) Areas of the pool will need to close again, relatively soon after re-opening, potentially in around 18 months' time.
- (c) There is a risk that conditions could deteriorate quicker and accelerate the need for works bringing the closure date forward. This would be dictated by structural engineering monitoring.
- (d) Remobilising a contract could be a longer impact when compared to a continuation.
- (e) There could be a loss of customer confidence in the swimming offer availability in the long term if there are multiple closures.
- (f) Increased disruption over a longer period.
- (g) Potential revenue pressures associated with closures.

**Option 2 - Accelerate the repairs and undertake them as an extension to the current project.**

26. Benefits:

- (a) Extend current contracts, skills and arrangements as a continuation of the current project will save on preliminary work and re-mobilisation work and costs
- (b) Avoidance of further deterioration and risk.
- (c) Avoidance of further construction inflation

- (d) The above points will save up to 2 to 3 months of additional pool closure compared to option 1 and based on best estimates at this point in time could save cost increases arising from construction inflation and lost income of up to £200K.
- (e) Continue the arrangement with existing pool closure that are familiar to customers.
- (f) Communications will be clearer than having to close again in a short period of time and provide certainty for customers.
- (g) Potential to accelerate some of the approved M&E Phase 3 work while the pool is closed.
- (h) The staffing levels have been managed to reflect the closure. Staffing would need to be increased for the reopening then reconsidered when the pool closes for a further period.
- (i) Saving of structural engineering monitoring costs in Area A over the 18-month period.

27. Dis-benefits:

- (a) A further extension of the closure period, to the end of January 2024 would increase the overall closure period by 3 months. This is caveated with the fact that the investigation of concrete under the tiles is only possible once work has commenced to remove the tiles.
- (b) Customer offer restricted for a further period risking customer loyalty.
- (c) Gym membership could suffer as a number of members use the pools, but access to other pools would be retained.

28. The challenge with Area A is that it is the exit from the changing rooms and these will be inaccessible while this work is taking place. There will be the opportunity to continue to operate the diving and training pool using alternative changing facilities and temporary access points.

29. Area A includes the toddler pool area. As part of considerations options are being investigated on the feasibility of removing the paddling facility and bringing it up to deck level, with various water features; this aligns with the way new facilities are being developed. The benefit of doing this will be revenue savings going forward as there will be reduced pool lifeguard requirements.

30. An urgent decision is required to secure the benefits identified in Option 2. If Members are minded to approve Option 2 then it is recommended that:

- (a) Area A is separated into two phases as shown in **Appendix 2**.
- (b) Funding for Phase 2a is approved and the structural repairs to Area A excluding the Toddler Area be progressed to secure benefits identified in the report.

(c) A further report be brought to Cabinet and Council to consider Phase 2b works, this would include the repairs for this area and options for the toddler pool area that are still being developed. The outcome of the retaining wall investigation would be included in this report.

31. It is anticipated that Phase 2a could commence in parallel with the current project saving time and be completed by early January 2024, provided there aren't any unexpected findings when the tiling is stripped from the areas. Phase 2b would also be run in parallel but would not be completed by early January, work would continue behind appropriate screening to enable the main pool and the majority of the facilities to re-open.

### **Finance and Governance**

32. The circumstances identified during the latter stages of the project have instigated further work to be undertaken to understand the costs and work associated with the more urgent phases of work in other areas of the Dolphin Centre.

33. There are clear benefits in extending the current project. However, this requires approval of additional funds, not currently within the approved capital programme. The usual process for approval of additional funding would be a Cabinet and possibly Council report depending on the amount of funding. The Cabinet and Council cycles (including recess) dictates that the earliest decision could be made by Cabinet or Council would be 28 September 2023. A decision in September would not enable the opportunity of any potential benefits identified in Option 2 as the current contract would be substantially complete. To follow the Cabinet and Council schedule above would result in the project extension not commencing until November and completion around April/May 2024. Therefore, a decision needs to be considered urgently if the benefits of extending the current project are going to be secured. There is a provision in the Scheme of Delegation for Cabinet 'to sanction additional spending on Capital above the approved budget on urgent items or where there will be a cost benefit'.

34. The costs for Phase 2a are estimated to be £490K which includes a 30% contingency allowance. The works will be funded through prudential borrowing, with annual repayments estimated to be circa. £26K per year at current rates over 30 years. This borrowing will be funded from within existing Dolphin Centre budgets from efficiencies and business opportunities in operations and new mechanical and electrical installations.

35. The costs for the additional work as part of Phase 2b and the retaining wall will be subject to a future Cabinet and Council report.

36. It is not anticipated that there will be any addition financial pressure on the Dolphin Centre revenue account as a result of the extended closure as a result of savings on operational costs while some facilities have been closed.

**APPENDIX 1**

Area	Description of Area	Assessment
A	Changing entrance, Toddler Pool, walkways	This area will need to be addressed in the next 2 years maximum and will need to be monitored.
B	Main pool walkways – small area between main pool and diving pool	These areas will require work within 5 years and will be monitored going forward.
C	Training Pool	
D	Diving pool	
E	Main Pool walkway (not in current project)	Requires no work to be undertaken.





