

## **Frequently asked questions – Revised Proposals Summer 2024**

### **Deal Leisure Centre**

#### **Why do we need a new leisure centre in Deal?**

Built and opened in 1987 by Dover District Council, Tides Leisure Centre is now in need of major investment to provide facilities to meet today's customer expectations, and to address concerns regarding an ageing building with deteriorating pool plant & equipment. Over recent years, politicians have been considering a range of options to complement existing leisure centre provision across the district and help plan for Tides future. The most recent report on Tides considered by DDC Cabinet is dated 29 July 2024 and can be accessed on the DDC website.

#### **Does the new Dover District Leisure Centre offer enough sports provision for the district?**

Dover District Leisure Centre has significantly improved indoor sports provision for the district and the success of this is reflected in their annual visitor figures building up to over 650,000 visits per annum across the past two years.

However, following recent strategic analysis of indoor water provision across the district that involved public consultation, we still need to increase the provision of lane swimming to address current and future demand, so it makes sense to consider a lane swimming pool in Deal. By doing this, we will be delivering a more comprehensive sports offer to the local community, including the provision of lifesaving skills through swim school programmes and increasing availability of facilities for all.

Flexible leisure pool use can be introduced on a seasonal basis using fun splash inflatables. It is also important that we consider suitable dry-side facilities for Deal residents, which will reduce some pressures at the Dover District Leisure Centre.

#### **What has happened so far?**

Work began on Tides proposals seven years ago. We commissioned a team of consultants to complete a feasibility study for the long-term replacement of Tides Leisure Centre. Their reports concluded that major investment in a new build facility would be more cost effective than refurbishing the existing centre. A new build would also deliver a transformation of the centre to better meet the current and future sporting needs of the community.

By February 2020, the project had developed to the point where Cabinet agreement was given to take forward plans for a new build wet-side and health & fitness centre. However, within weeks Covid struck, leisure centres were closed across the country and, given the level of uncertainty, the project was paused.

In July 2022, proposals to restart the project were agreed and formal public consultation took place. However, with the impact of the cost-of-living crisis and the war in Ukraine, project costs were escalating, threatening the viability of the project, leading to multiple option reviews as attempts were made to make the project more affordable. Following a change of Cabinet administration in 2023 a report was presented to Members in November setting out the challenges.

## **What has been happening on the project since November 2023?**

The project team has been undertaking detailed feasibility work into the Tides Project to consider the best options for delivering this project. Feasibility work presented to DDC's Cabinet in November 2023 indicated an overall project cost of around £27m with an approximate funding deficit of £9m on a new build replacement option.

Cabinet Members asked officers to explore three further options to see whether any provided a basis from which the project could move forward.

- a) A pool only option
- b) Improvements to potentially extend the life of the pool
- c) Review alternative funding models with external partners.

A summary of this work is set out in Appendix 4 of the Cabinet report. After further work the Project Team presented alternative project proposals to the Council's Cabinet on 29 July 2024. The new proposals have a reduced overall project cost and project deficit.

As a result, of these findings the Council's Cabinet have given approval for the project proposals to be developed further to RIBA Stage 2. See link for more details of 29 July Cabinet report [Tides Leisure Centre Cabinet Report 29 July 2024](#)

## **Did you consider other locations for a new build leisure centre?**

Twelve potential sites were reviewed, during the initial options appraisal work, against a range of criteria. The results of this investigation strongly supported the proposal of keeping the centre at the existing site. By developing it in the existing location, the four-court sports hall and indoor tennis centre can be retained.

## **Why not increase the number of pool lanes from five to six?**

The draft Indoor Sports Facility Strategy recognises a six-lane 25m pool would help to address future growing demand.

A five-lane pool provides a significant improvement to existing provision at Tides where there is currently no 25m lane swimming. It would complement existing district wide provision including Dover District Leisure Centre, which already offers a county standard competition pool, by providing lane swimming as well as an established focus on leisure swimming and family fun.

Cabinet Members have agreed that officers should test the project viability of adding another swim lane to potentially provide a six-lane 25m pool in the next stage of project development because this would address current and future growing need.

## **Why don't the new proposals include a fun pool and slide for children?**

Revised proposals exclude a fun pool with slide because the Council has been seeking to find an affordable solution that could be taken forward to prevent the pool from closing on a permanent basis. As revised proposals stand, there is still a minimum funding shortfall of £3m to deliver the project. Sadly, old and aged leisure pools are permanently closing across the country because they are notoriously high energy and labour cost buildings to operate that local authorities and/or other providers cannot sustain.

Cabinet Members have agreed that officers should further test the inclusion of leisure in the next stage of development to evidence the impact on project viability.

### **What about facilities for young people?**

Tides Leisure Centre is located in Victoria Park, it is a central hub of leisure, recreation and sport facilities for adults and young people. Surrounding facilities include outdoor tennis courts, a children's play area, paddle tennis, skate park, outdoor playing pitches and Kent County Council's Youth Hub.

In addition to the above the new lane pool will accommodate inflatable aqua family fun days suitable for children, families and young adults.

### **Will the Tides centre have to close while the work is being done?**

The leisure pool will have to close while the new build work is completed however, we intend to maintain as many dry-side facilities as possible. Alternative options are being explored, such as temporarily accommodating the gym in part of the sports hall or Indoor Tennis Centre, while the new build work is carried out. The Council and the site operator will work to ensure that disruption to users is minimised, as far as possible for the duration of the works.

### **What will happen to the indoor tennis centre and sports hall?**

The tennis centre and sports hall were built relatively recently (opening in 2005 and 2011 respectively). Both are in a good condition and will be retained as integral parts of the new leisure centre.

### **How much will it cost to build?**

We are currently developing the concept plans and considering funding options. The proposed forecast project budget is estimated at £19.2m.

### **Will Council Tax be going up to pay for it?**

The project will be paid for through a combination of Council reserves and borrowing, based on the improvement of the revenue performance of the facilities following completion. We are also working to identify other potential funding sources for the project.

### **How will the project be funded?**

The Council can access a range of borrowing at competitive rates through the Public Works Loan Board and this will be combined with a £4.4m contribution from the Council's earmarked reserves. The Council intends to use the improvement in the revenue performance of the site to help fund the loan repayments.

### **When will the new centre be built?**

We are still in the very early stages of developing proposals. These include a five-lane 25m pool, as well as new health & fitness stations, toning tables, multi activity and spin studios and a café area. Early indications are that the new centre could be completed by summer 2027.

### **Who will run the new leisure centre?**

Your Leisure are the managing operators of Tides Leisure Centre. Options for future management of the proposed new build facility are currently being explored, alongside the development of the building plans, to ensure that the highest quality of service is provided at the new Deal Leisure Centre.

### **Will the parking be free?**

Parking fees will be fully considered in line with the emerging Parking Strategy for Dover District. Current proposals include 150-175 vehicles, disabled spaces, drop-off facilities and EV charging points.

### **Will the new building be accessible?**

Yes. To ensure the new designs meet, as far as possible, the highest accessible design standards, the consultant team will:

- follow guidance for designing accessible leisure centres
- take account of feedback from accessible user groups
- apply lessons learnt from newly designed accessible leisure centres

The new swimming pool with health and fitness facilities, with changing rooms & toilets will all be accessible. There will be lifts between the two floors and parking for blue badge holders.

### **Will the new centre have publicly accessible Toilets?**

Design proposals will incorporate publicly accessible toilets and take a similar design approach to Dover District Leisure Centre, locating these before the controlled access areas.

### **How will the new centre be sustainable?**

As with many local authorities, Dover District Council has declared a climate and ecological emergency and made a pledge to become a net zero carbon emitter by 2030.

Leisure centres are high energy consumers with space heating and hot water loads higher than any other building type. A BREEAM Very Good rating is the minimum to be achieved.

Our approach to sustainability for the new Deal Leisure Centre will consider this high energy demand and carbon targets, building in some low energy design principles including:

- Compact form and orientation of the building
- Thermal zoning (warm, neutral and cool zones)
- Photovoltaics (solar electricity panels)
- Other renewable energy sources
- Efficient pool filtration
- Future proofing and flexibility of spaces

### **Will there be electric vehicle charging points?**

Yes, with the required provision to be developed to meet local and regulatory requirements.

### **What about Outdoor Play, Gym, and Teen Facilities?**

The intention to improve wider park facilities including the relocation & provision of a new Multi Use Games Area is currently outside the scope of work for Deal Leisure Centre proposals, however the project is being developed taking future potential work into consideration.

Improvements to outdoor park facilities can be funded in the longer term by exploring other potential budgets and possible external funding programmes.

**Will there be a Sauna & Steam Room in the new Leisure Centre?**

While this provision can be tested through this current phase of work, in order to be taken forward, it is essential that the additional cost sits within an affordable project budget.

**Will the new leisure centre include separate changing rooms for men and women?**

The project is still at the early concept stage and details such as changing room provision are yet to be determined. Further information about this will be available as the project moves forward to more detailed plans.

**What are the next steps?**

- Alliance Leisure Services are to be appointed and will start developing the Revised New Build Proposals to detailed feasibility RIBA Stage 2
- This will incorporate the additional requests from Cabinet Members including testing the project viability and impact of adding an extra lane to become a six-lane pool and adding leisure pool activities to proposals
- Continue to explore alternative funding sources to meet the project shortfall
- Explore and evaluate future management and operating options
- Engage with the cross-party Tides Project Advisory Group ahead of reporting back to Cabinet Members with findings potentially in December 2024.

**How can the public be kept informed of project progress?**

We will work with the local community and keep everybody up to date with project news. You can sign up to the Council's 'Keep Me Posted' online news bulletin. Project updates will be posted on the Council's social media channels to provide regular updates and Tides Leisure Centre itself will have an information board.