

# Scrutiny committee report



Report of head of economy leisure and property

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To: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: 18 December 2014

## Abbey Meadows outdoor pool - review of 2014 season

### RECOMMENDATION

That the committee considers the report on the 2014 season for the Abbey Meadows outdoor pool.

### PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. The report outlines the performance of the outdoor pool and associated interactive water feature and kiosk situated in Abbey Meadow, Abingdon, during the 2014 season.

### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

2. The review of the outdoor pool helps ensure the Vale of White Horse District Council is achieving its strategic objectives in the following area:
  - excellent delivery of key services: deliver high performing services with particular emphasis on ensuring good quality sports and leisure provision.

### BACKGROUND

3. The pool opened to the public on Saturday 24 May 2014 and closed to the public on Sunday 31 August 2014. The pool was managed by Soll (Vale) (referred to within the report as Soll) in accordance with the Abbey Meadow outdoor pool management contract, which was in its final year.

4. As the contract with Soll has now ended and the staff who managed the facility are no longer employed by Soll, they were not available to input into the writing of this report or to be present at this meeting. Therefore, the report is based solely on the experience of officers who were involved directly with the delivery of the service through Soll.
5. The preparation works for the 2014 season began after quite significant flooding had subsided. The main problem to be tackled was the build up of algae on the water feature, which looked unattractive but was not a health hazard, and unfortunately this proved to be a continual problem throughout the season. In addition, the council carried out further repairs to the pool promenade and minor works to the pool, snack kiosk and water feature, all of which were completed in time for the opening. Soll commissioned the normal pre-opening works required to prepare the facilities for opening.
6. The major pre-season project for officers was co-ordinating the painting of the external facades of the pool building with the Friends of Abbey Meadows Outdoor Pool. This resulted in considerable practical input from the leisure team and improvements to the appearance of the building. The cost of materials for these works was some £550.
7. Abingdon Town Council provided revenue funding towards the opening and running of the facility for the 2014 season in accordance with its agreement with the Vale Council. However, this agreement also ceased at the end of the season. The facility is included within the new joint leisure management contract with Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL).

## **MONITORING**

8. Due to the seasonal nature of the facility and its dependence on good weather, officers monitored the contract on a weekly basis. Each visit was unannounced and followed a detailed check list, which was completed by a monitoring officer during each visit. Areas that required immediate improvement were notified to Soll before the officer left the site and a full report detailing all findings was issued to Soll within two days of the inspection.
9. This report was issued to Soll's general manager of the facility, who was then accountable for distributing that information to the appropriate senior officers within Soll. On the same basis, the monitoring officer reported back on any exceptional items or areas where previously identified items had not been rectified, and these matters were then taken up by the facilities development (leisure) officer with the appropriate Soll counterpart.
10. Whilst there are always issues to deal with, there was co-operation between both Soll and the Vale Council to achieve the desired outcomes.

## **OPERATIONAL OVERVIEW**

11. Any routine issues were dealt with by Soll staff or in conjunction with the appropriate Vale Council officers.
  12. A number of repairs took place throughout the season carried out by Soll and the Vale Council, and these included:
    - operational failures on the newly refurbished water feature
    - refurbishment works to the safety surface of the water feature
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- tiling works to showers
- concrete works
- manhole cover levelling
- painting to externals of building.

The cost of these works was over £16,000

13. The areas that caused most work related to the continual growth of algae in the main pool due to the continuing deterioration of the tank surface, which allowed spores to grow and cause large patches of staining on the pool tank. Although these patches looked unsightly, they were not a health hazard.
14. Accidents were minimal in number and severity, and most of them arose from injuries sustained outside of the pool compound, with customers coming to the pool for assistance.
15. Soll had difficulties at the start of the contract with dirty changing rooms, especially first thing in the mornings. This matter was eventually resolved. However, as the season progressed and user numbers were at maximum, there were further adverse comments regarding cleanliness. These were due primarily to the pressure of large numbers of customers going through the changing rooms in a very short space of time, making it impossible or very difficult for staff to clean while customers were still present.
16. Soll's advertising of the facility was limited and late in its delivery, and comprised of leafleting and posters around the Abingdon area. The Soll, Friends group and Vale Council's websites also contained all of the relevant information for the pool.
17. Throughout the season and especially during the hottest evenings, there was some unauthorised use of the facility arising from people climbing over the two metre high perimeter fence, which resulted in minor damage and inconvenience. Where appropriate, the police were called and crime numbers were obtained.

## **USER INFORMATION**

18. The weather this season was generally hot and dry, with July and August proving to be very hot. On this basis, we would have expected significantly larger numbers of attendances for the year. However, despite consistently good weather, especially when the children were on holiday from school, it is disappointing that attendances this year were recorded as lower than in 2013.
  19. Officers challenged Soll over the validity of its user figures for August 2014, as officers considered that the actual figures did not fully reflect the numbers evidenced on their routine visits and so was under representing the true figures. Soll was unable to provide any revised figures; however, officers are reasonably confident that attendances were higher than demonstrated by the attendance figures provided.
  20. Soll continued with its free swimming initiative for all children under the age of 16, which it introduced in 2011. By enrolling onto a registration scheme, children could swim as often as they wanted at the pool throughout the season for free.
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21. Appendix 1 attached to this report provides a comparison of user groups over the last three years (see Table A) and the monthly breakdown of figures for the 2014 season (see Table B). It is clear that, until the schools broke up in July, attendances were low and that once families go away on holiday then usage of the facility declines, despite the good weather. Anecdotal feedback from the site manager was that there were only a few occasions this season when there was a queue or waiting list to gain entry.

## FINANCIAL INFORMATION

22. Abingdon Town Council contributed £44,702.82 towards the revenue costs of operating the pool for the 2014 season. The balance of the expenditure was provided by the Vale Council either in the form of officer time or expenditure budgets.

	2012/13 actual	2013/14 actual	2014/15 estimates
Repairs and maintenance to land and buildings	1,307	4,099	9,111
Repairs and maintenance to fixtures and fittings	0	0	7,621
Electricity	0	0	0
Water rates	0	0	0
Grounds maintenance services	3,027	3,117	3,250
Premises insurances	133	170	180
Leisure facilities management contract	32,440	30,720	30,720
Staff costs	6,000	6,500	4,000
Support services	2,000	2,191	2,200
Capital works	0	11,500	0
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>44,907</b>	<b>58,297</b>	<b>57,082</b>
Other reimbursements	-2,665	0	0
Reimbursements - Town Council	-40,272	-45,350	-44,702
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>-42,937</b>	<b>-45,350</b>	<b>-44,702</b>
<b>Net Expenditure</b>	<b>1,970</b>	<b>12,947</b>	<b>12,380</b>

## CONCLUSION

23. Although the weather over the summer was consistently good, the user figures were lower than we would have anticipated. Soll encouraged junior visitors to the pool with the continuation of the free swimming offer again this season.

24. Soll responded to the demands placed upon it by both the Vale Council, the town council and customers in a positive way. There was a period early in the season where a number of comments were received from customers regarding the cleanliness of the changing rooms, which were sometimes difficult to address during peak periods. The issues relating to the algae persisted and although the algae looked unattractive it did not compromise the water quality, which remained excellent, or public health.

25. The committee is asked to note the performance of Abbey Meadows outdoor pool and associated interactive water feature and kiosk during the 2014 season.

## APPENDIX 1

TABLE A

Season comparisons of user groups

	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>
Adult swim	2510	3940	2218
Junior swim	2357	850	952
Concessions	537	598	760
U16 - Free swim	2,810	5,699	6,741
Inflatable sessions	691	0	0
Access to Leisure Pass	8	41	1
Season pass	321	292	383
<b>TOTAL SWIM</b>	<b>9,234</b>	<b>11,420</b>	<b>11,055</b>

TABLE B

Monthly attendances for 2014 season

	<b>Adult</b>	<b>Junior</b>	<b>Concession</b>	<b>Access to Leisure Pass</b>	<b>Under 16's</b>	<b>Season pass</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>May</b>	69	11	53	0	85	2	<b>220</b>
<b>June</b>	452	222	281	0	271	110	<b>1336</b>
<b>July</b>	1331	580	312	0	5554	96	<b>7873</b>
<b>Aug</b>	366	139	114	1	831	175	<b>1626</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2218</b>	<b>952</b>	<b>760</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6741</b>	<b>383</b>	<b>11055</b>

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