

Detailed analysis and review of new leisure facility as proposed by Exeter Active

1 January 2016

1. Introduction

1.1 Exeter City Council propose to redevelop a coach park in the City centre as a state of the art leisure and fitness centre. It will comprise a competition standard 25m, eight lane pool alongside a four lane training pool and a confidence pool. The centre will include a fitness and health suites, studio space, a crèche and soft play area.

1.2 The Council have asked for comment on these proposals and the following observations are based on experience gained by a swimming club based in Exeter with a full time appointed Swimming Coach.

2. What should Exeter be looking for with a brand new, state of the art pool & leisure centre?

2.1 Is there need for a 50m pool in Exeter or will 25m suffice? Geographically there is a case for a 50m pool for the nearest 50m pool to Exeter is Kelly College (34 miles) but this has limited availability. Plymouth (45 miles) is currently used by Exeter swimmers with Millfield (58 miles), Bristol (78 miles) and Bath (89 miles) other 50m pools in the south west. The latest population figures have Exeter with 125,000 and 500,000 in the Exeter & Heart of Devon area. This is unlikely to justify the provision of say 1000m² of waterspace in the main pool plus another 250m² for a teaching pool i.e. 1250m² in total which on its own would be nearly sufficient for Exeter using the A.S.A. ratio of 11m² of water per 1,000 head of population¹. The cost of a 50m x 8 lane pool with other leisure facilities would be about £30million based on a similar proposal in the East Midlands but this might be stretching the purse strings a little too far.

All things considered the new facility should have a 50m main pool.

2.2 There are 9 publicly available swimming pools within 10 miles of Exeter of which 6 are 25m pools² (only 3 are in Exeter itself). From an analysis of the facilities offered it is apparent that none meet A.S.A Level 2 competition³ standard i.e. capable of staging national, regional and county competitions. It is incomprehensible that the county town of Devon does not have a pool to meet this Level 2 requirement nor does it appear to have the ambition to achieve this, based on the information issued for Exeter Active.

2.3 The minimum specification for the main pool in the new facility should therefore be for Level 2 i.e. 25m x 8 lanes of minimum 17m width, with electronic timing and sufficient space at the pool side to accommodate officials, competitors and lifeguards. The spectator accommodation should

be a minimum of 250⁴ and the competitor accommodation at poolside also 250⁴. It follows that all the associated ancillary accommodation should also be capable of taking these numbers. *The proposed layouts for Exeter Active presented to the public go nowhere near meeting the criteria for Level 2.*

2.4 So as a replacement for the Pyramids where do the proposed Exeter Active swimming facilities lie? In discussion with the competition organiser of a smallish swimming club in the Midlands, the minimum spectator accommodation for Level 3 competitions needs to be 200. If the new facility staged league swims then the competitor poolside capacity needs to be at least 8 teams x 30 competitors = 240. *The proposed layouts for Exeter Active presented to the public go nowhere near meeting the criteria for Level 3.*

2.5 Exeter at the present time and with the proposed Exeter Active would be limited to staging A.S.A. Level 4 competitions. This is the lowest level recorded for Exeter in the A.S.A competition records.

2.6 Both pools in the Exeter Active proposal are described as having moveable floors. This has the implication of possible use for water polo and synchronised swimming as well as allowing settings for competitive swimming and teaching. In a teaching area there is need for parental presence particularly for the novice swimmers. There is no indication of any spectator seating in the training / learner pool area.

2.7 With regard to the fitness suite and other such facilities, the space available will be dictated by the site area and the spectator space deemed necessary. There is no indication on the plans of a first aid room at any level within the building. Plant rooms are not marked, so it is presumed that the blank areas on the bottom left hand corner of the plans are for this purpose. Incidentally most chlorine based water purification systems disappeared 20 years or more ago.

2.8 Exeter City Council have a budget of £26million for Exeter Active This is comparable to a much larger 50m x 8 lane pool with teaching pool and associated fitness suites etc. that is proposed to be built in the East Midlands.

3. The background checks that should have been carried out

3.1 The proposed construction of a sports complex, such as Exeter Active, implies that research and assessment into the need for such a facility has been carried out. With regard to the swimming element this should have covered:

- a) An assessment of the population within say 40 minutes travel time of the proposed site (say 20 miles radius). This would give an indication of the potential swimming population that might use the facility.
- b) The requirements of existing clubs or groups and any potential organisation needing water space with regard to numbers involved, time required and special needs of, for example swimming teaching, leisure and competitive swimming clubs, water polo, synchronised swimming, triathlon and sub aqua organisations together with mother and baby, disability groups etc.
- c) A full appraisal of existing swimming facilities within the City boundaries and adjoining areas. This should differentiate between public pools and private pools, their opening times and whether access is available for individuals or only organisations such as a swimming club or disability group. From this the water space available in the City can be calculated so from numbers deduced from 3.1a) and 3.1b) and the need for an additional facility can be assessed.
- d) The need for a “state of the art” aquatic / fitness centre within the City’s “leisure offer” in attracting potential incoming business to the City.
- e) Whether any such development should be wholly City Council based or a joint venture, for example with Exeter University.

It is not known whether such an analysis has been undertaken and published.

4. Conclusions

4.1. The Council have the site and funding for a 25m pool and a health / fitness centre. The present proposal does not, however, meet the City’s needs.

4.2 The proposal as presented to the public describes a 25m competition standard pool, a teaching pool, a confidence pool, health / fitness facilities, studio spaces, crèche, soft play area and café. The details provided for the main swimming pool do not qualify it for competitions higher than A.S.A Level 4, the restriction being in accommodation for spectators and competitors..

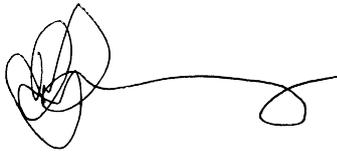
4.3 Exeter needs a 25m pool capable of holding A.S.A. Level 2 competitions e.g. this would allow County short course championships to be held. There is no current swimming facility in the City

capable of achieving this level. A Level 2 pool would be a positive addition to the City Council's "active" policy.

4.4 Exeter City Council have indicated that a planning application is to be submitted early in 2016 with approval in Spring 2016 and an opening date in 2018. This schedule implies that the relevant drawings and specifications are complete or very close to completion. The changes needed to the design to achieve Level 2, such as increased spectator and competitor accommodation, will inevitably affect this programme.

5. References entering the heading in a search engine will bring up the relevant document.

1. *Swimming Pools – Design Guidance Note, footnote 18 on page 10* - Sport England
2. *Poolfinder* - entering the post code EX1 1ER brings up the following publicly available 25m pools in Exeter Pyramids and Riverside (Middlemoor is not listed); there are a further three 25m pools within 10 miles of Exeter; note St Lukes is a 25 yard pool.
3. *A.S.A. Open Meet Licensing Criteria* - Amateur Swimming Association
- 4... *Swimming Pools – Design Guidance Note, Table 8 on page 48* - Sport England



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Chairman

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