Ararat Rural City Council

Feasibility Study for Ararat Outdoor Swimming and Associated Facilities in the Ararat Township

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1

The Feasibility Study

1.1 Introduction

This report has been prepared to provide the Ararat Rural City with advice and direction on the future development of aquatic and related leisure facilities in Ararat township. In particular, it seeks to provide Council with guidance as to the future of the Ararat Solar Olympic Pool, located between Alexandra Oval and the Ararat Alexandra Gardens.

The study was initiated in the light of the findings of a 2000 review of the technical condition of the Ararat Solar Olympic Pool which was undertaken by David Powick and Associates. This study, which is reviewed in further detail in the following section, indicated that:

> The service and support buildings associated with the Ararat Solar Olympic Pool are in a very poor condition and have a life of around one year
>
> The 50 metre pool and toddler pool have a life of 5 –15 years, and
>
> The pool plant has a life of only 5 years.

Since the 2000 report was completed, the toddler pool has closed due to technical malfunctions. Although the main pool, its plant and the service buildings are still functioning, one or another element of these could fail at any time (as has occurred at a number of other venues around the country), leaving the community without its outdoor pool.

In the light of the findings of the technical review, Council initiated the present study as a means of determining the best path forward for aquatic facilities in Ararat over the coming years. As such, the Brief for the present study indicated that the Ararat Rural City was seeking clear and concise answers to the following questions:

1. What are the specific community needs for an outdoor pool in Ararat?
2. Are those needs sufficient to guarantee the continued financial *viability* of such a facility or what would be the extent of the annual cost to Council?
3. Are the David Powick and Associates assessment of the aquatic facilities (regarding facilities replacement needs) and the conclusions of the Recreation and Open Space Strategy (regarding the consolidation of Council recreation initiatives in Ararat) valid and if so, what strategies might Council pursue to address the short life span of the outdoor facilities?
4. If there is sufficient support to justify the continued provision of an outdoor pool in Ararat, would it be best to:
   - Retain and redevelop the existing facility
   - Upgrade the existing facility and add other leisure, social and non-aquatic facilities to create a multi-purpose venue and thereby enhance its role and viability
   - Construct a new outdoor pool at the Ararat Rural City Recreation and Aquatic Centre, or
   - Built a new facility (either as a pool only or with other multi-purpose facilities) at another site?

   If the *second last* option –construction of a new outdoor pool at the Ararat Rural

City Recreation and Aquatic Centre -- was determined to be the most appropriate, an assessment would need to be made of the capacity of that Centre to accommodate a 50 metre outdoor pool *or a shorter* pool there.

If the *last* option was determined to be most appropriate, an assessment would need to be made of which alternate sites, if any, are available and if any of these are appropriate and what facilities should be provided at such a site.

5. What would be the capital cost of the preferred initiative, what would be the operational costs and what would be the 'bottom line' cost to Council?
6. In the light of 1. – 5., what course of action should Council pursue?

To answer these questions in a meaningful manner, a wide-ranging program of research was undertaken and in the light of this, a number of alternate action strategies were developed and evaluated with both Council officers and with Councillors. The findings of the research together with the recommendations for action are presented in the following Chapters.

Chapter 2 presents a review of several key influences on aquatic demand across the Ararat Rural City and in particular, the Ararat township. These are the demographic characteristics of the community and recent trends in aquatic facilities provision and use. The implications of this material to market support for an outdoor aquatic centre and potential locations for a venue are identified

Chapter 3 presents an overview of recent Council reports of relevance to future aquatics provision in Ararat, the most important of these being the technical assessment of pools undertaken by David Powick and Associates in 2000, the municipal recreation plan prepared by @leisure in 2002/3 and Council's corporate plans.

The focus of Chapter 4 is on community aquatic needs in Ararat. These were identified through a series of interviews and public meetings, surveys of users of the outdoor and indoor pools and submissions from the community. The key output of this chapter is the listing of the desired mix of facilities and services which it is recommended should be considered for provision as part of an aquatics redevelopment project in Ararat.

In the light of the conclusions presented in Chapter 4, Chapter 5 provides an assessment of a number of sites which were considered as the focus for future aquatics development. The Chapter draws on planning work undertaken for Council by the planning and engineering firm, GH&D, particularly with reference to future urban growth projections and directions in Ararat.

Chapter 6 of the report presents a set of design stages and capital costings for the development initiatives which are recommended to Council. This is accompanied by a suggested implementation program and a 15 year financial plan for the operation of the Stage I works which are recommended in this report.

Before moving on to Chapters 2 to 6, the following paragraphs provide a brief overview of the present provision of aquatic facilities in the Rural City and of the benefits of aquatics to the community.

1.2 Aquatic and Related Indoor Leisure/sports Facilities in Ararat Rural City

Ararat Rural City presently has four venues which provide aquatic facilities. These are:

1.2.1 Ararat Solar Olympic Pool complex

This centre has a solar-heated, outdoor, summer-only 50 metre, 6 lane pool (50m. x 13.5m.); an outdoor summer-only 6.5 metre by 6.5 metre toddler's pool; extensive lawn areas with some shade areas; and brick change, kiosk, administration building. The complex was opened in 1958.

The complex is in an attractive setting, adjoining the Ararat Alexandra Gardens. The sloping lawns allow excellent viewing of the pool and, together with the 50 metre pool length, make the facility popular for swimming club and school programs, swim carnivals and lap swimmers.

As indicated in the introduction to this Chapter, the David Powick and Associates technical review conducted in 2000[1], found major technical deficiencies with the facility with these specifically

Ararat Solar Olympic Pool. The toddler's pool is in the elevated, shaded area at the right rear.

relating to the short projected life of the buildings, pools and plant. An extensive list of 'backlog' works was identified, these being needed to bring the centre "up to a minimum level of appointment commensurate with current standards". Readers are referred to this report for full details.

In addition to replacing the buildings, pools and plant in the short to medium term and the extensive list of essential technical works, the Powick review identified a number of other possible improvements to undertake at the Ararat Solar Olympic Pool complex. These were:

- Infilling the deep end of the pool to reduce water depth (from diving depth of 3m.), to decrease turn-over period and to increase safety
- Providing additional wind screen planting
- Pool retiling
- 'Permanent' pool heating via eg: gas-fired boilers
- Conversion of long sides of the 50 metre pool to wet deck
- Repainting 50 metre pool floor
- Add further pool water wall outlets
- Provide barbeques
- Upgrade concourse
- Improve outdoor furniture.

Overall, the Ararat Solar Olympic Pool complex was rated as the poorest in the municipality by the David Powick and Associates review.

[1] David Powick and Associates Pty Ltd., Rural City of Ararat, Aquatic Facilities Technical Audit, Report on Findings, Dec. 2000. See also Royal Life Saving Society Australia: Swimming Pool Safety Assessment and Safety Improvement Plan for the Ararat YMCA –Indoor, (2001) and Swimming Pool Safety Assessment and Safety Improvement Plan for the Ararat Outdoor Pool (2001); Signage Audit. Ararat YMCA, (2002); Signage Audit Ararat Outdoor Swimming Pool (2002)

From a user perspective, the centre suffers from poor vehicular access and parking, the narrow and potentially unsafe pedestrian railway underpass, the very limited mix of facilities and use activities, extremely poor support facilities, poor access for the aged and disabled, and seasonality of use.

In addition to the technical deficiencies, site inspections and the community consultations conducted as part of the present Study indicate that the Solar Olympic Pool suffers from:

Poor and potentially dangerous access by both pedestrians/cyclists and drivers due to the narrow, poorly-lit rail underpass, unlit gravel roadway from Lowe Street, access paths through the Gardens

Poor parking provision and no separation of pedestrians and vehicles

Extremely bad building placement particularly with regard to access from the entrance to the pool, for pool supervision, and access to the women's toilet and change facilities

A seriously constrained site due to its positioning between the Alexandra Gardens, the railway lines and Alexandra Oval and due to site topography. This means that the site has a limited capacity to accommodate further facilities without considerable earthworks being undertaken

A lack of aquatic and other facilities suitable for or attractive to older residents, people seeking secondary health programs or people with disabilities, and

Very limited attractions other than the pools and lawns for users.

These limitations make Ararat Solar Olympic Pool a very outdated asset. Significantly, the limitations *were –whether consciously or unconsciously-- a major reason behind the construction of the indoor centre nearly 15 years ago*. The need for the present study has been "brought to a head" by the technical condition of the outdoor pool and the fact that the indoor pool is incapable of meeting a number of the needs met by the outdoor pool.

1.2.2 Ararat Rural City Recreation and Aquatic Centre

This venue offers a heated indoor 25 metre pool and water play pool in association with indoor sports courts, gymnastics, dry health and fitness, aerobics/multi-purpose rooms, squash, multi-purpose spaces using former squash courts, change, cafe, administration area.

The indoor pool hall at Ararat Rural City Recreation and Aquatic Centre. Site constraints have meant that the facility plant room extends onto the nature strip of the adjoining street (foreground).

The 25 metre pool was opened in 1992 and the water play pool was added more recently. The

David Powick and Associates technical review found this venue to be in quite good condition and equal 'best' (with Lake Bolac) of Ararat Rural City's aquatic venues. Yet, quite a list of technical needs was identified.

From a user perspective, the Ararat Rural City Recreation and Aquatic Centre pool suffers from shallow water depths which essentially preclude competitive or serious training use, inadequate water space, a limited capacity to provide dry support programs and activities, outdated access and management service areas, poor parking and unsafe access due to the highway location. Key elements of the overall complex are ageing and were not purpose-designed while the overall size of the site essentially excludes the possibility of any further additions.

1.2.3 Willaura Pool

The Willaura outdoor 25 metre pool was built in 1966 and is not heated. There is also a small hexagonal toddler's pool. The pool is set in an open grassed, lawn area. The change rooms were reported to be in "poor" condition and unroofed.

As with the Ararat Solar Olympic Pool complex, the David Powick and Associates technical review identified a considerable list of backlog and upgrading works which needed to be initiated at the Willaura pool. Many of these works were undertaken during 2004 when $107,672 was spent on the following initiatives:

Pool hydraulics upgrade

Dismantling and removal of existing pump set frame and motor in pump room

Pool filtration plant upgrade, including supply and install backwash holding tank & replace filter media.

Although these were necessary works, they have added nothing to the user experience and the venue presents as a very traditional outdoor pool with limited shade. Apart from swimming activities, very little by way of other recreation opportunities is offered.

Willaura Pool.

1.2.4 Lake Bolac Pool

The Lake Bolac pool complex was built in 1979 and was rated as equal best in the municipality by the David Powick and Associates review. The venue has been built in association with a community centre and offers an attractive lawn setting with a solar heated, outdoor 25 metre and a shaded toddler's pool. Change and kiosk facilities are modern and attractive.

The David Powick and Associates review identified a relatively small list of essential works to be undertaken at the venue.

Lake Bolac Pool.

1.2.5 Overview

Overall, the David Powick and Associates review did not paint a bright picture of either the Willaura or Ararat Solar Olympic Pools. However, works undertaken at Willaura have extended its life but the poor condition of the Solar Olympic Pool is such that spending money on it would be wasteful and it must be considered to be both at the end of its useful life. By comparison, the indoor pool at the Ararat Rural City Recreation and Aquatic Centre and the outdoor Lake Bolac pool were deemed to be in far better condition, albeit with the need for some remedial works at both.

Of interest is the conclusion in the David Powick and Associates report that

> "None of the existing outdoor pools are deemed to be suitable for enclosure for both technical and planning points of view. Considerable expenditure for both major pool and building refurbishment would be required… particularly at Ararat Solar Olympic Pool and Willaura…
>
> Enclosed pools require increased flow rates and filtration capacity. In all cases the existing filtration plants (and pool pipework) would require replacement or significant augmentation… All current plant and dangerous goods regulations would have to be followed…
>
> Pool edge treatments would also require upgrading… Existing buildings would require significant modification to entry, control and kiosk areas as well as to change rooms…
>
> The existing buildings at Olympic would require total reconstruction…"

These conclusions clearly indicate a need for urgent action at the Ararat Solar Olympic pool if the opportunities offered to the community are to be retained.

The benefits offered by aquatics facilities (as discussed below) mean that a case can be put for the retention of the facilities. However, the fact that Ararat Rural City presently has four aquatic venues, the outdated nature of two of them and the fact that three of the four are outdoors, means that the benefits are restricted to a narrow cross-section of the community. Opportunities to add to and change the facilities, programs and services offered at the outdoor venues must be pursued if they are to attract wider use and more effectively meet community needs.

1.3 The Benefits of Aquatics to the Community

Extensive research over recent decades has shown that people participate in leisure and recreation because of the *benefits* they gain from that participation. These benefits are wide-ranging and include a number of psychological outcomes --such as feelings of achievement, acceptance and well-being-- as well as the benefits of developing and demonstrating leadership skills, of challenge, risk, excitement, rest, improved health and well-being, contemplation and family togetherness.

The benefits which the community derives from aquatics have been found to be greater than for many other recreation pursuits. This is because aquatics can be pursued:

By people of every age

By people at every level of ability

Socially, at low competitive levels or at elite international competition levels

Alone, in formal and informal groups or in teams, and

At all times of the day, week and year if appropriate facilities are provided.

Research has shown that aquatics activities are of profound value to people with disabilities, those undergoing a wide range of rehabilitation programs to overcome injuries caused by accidents and *other* sports, and people suffering from asthma and arthritis, as well as a wide range of other ailments. Significantly, aquatics activities have been found to have very low injury rates compared with many other sports (eg: a 2% pa. Injury rate compared with as much as 50% for ball sports), and many other sports use aquatics programs to overcome the injuries which those activities generate.

Well-planned aquatic leisure provision also delivers other, wider benefits. These include:

S*ocial* benefits including improved community well-being and cohesion, reduced vandalism and enhanced community heath

E*conomic* benefits, through job creation, the purchase of goods and services, and a healthier, more productive workforce, and

Environmental benefits through the optimum use of energy, land and financial resources, the protection of natural areas and enhanced urban amenity.

Finally, recent research has shown that aquatics and related programs can act as *stepping stones* to achieving other positive personal and social benefits. Recent examples include triathletes using aquatics as part of their training regime, women using aquatic leisure centres to get fit and lose weight before moving back into the workforce, and users building up social contacts with members of the wider community through participation in group activities. These benefits reach well beyond pure 'leisure'.

In the light of the above, it is evident that aquatics facilities are of major personal and social value to the community and that they also have positive economic and environmental outcomes. These values and benefits generally far outweigh those of most other recreation activities. As a consequence, a strong case can be put that Council should give a higher priority to the delivery of high quality aquatic facilities for its community than to many other recreational activities.

The loss of the existing aquatic assets would seriously disadvantage the community. Yet, to retain them at their current standard should be seen as an inadequate response as the existing resources are not sufficient to deliver all the benefits which could be provided and which are needed in the community. To gain the full benefits that aquatics facilities offer, far wider actions which reflect the changing nature and needs of the community will be needed.

2

Factors Impacting on Future Aquatics Provision

2.1 Introduction

This Chapter presents a review of several key influences on aquatic demand across Ararat Rural City and in particular, the Ararat township. These are the demographic characteristics of the community and recent trends in aquatic facilities provision and use. The implications of this material to market support for an outdoor aquatic centre and potential locations for a venue are identified.

2.2 The Demographics of Ararat Rural City and Ararat Urban Area

The demographics of a community provides a useful *guide* to the types of aquatic leisure facilities, programs and services might be needed and to the scale of the markets available to support those facilities.

This section reviews some of the key characteristics of the demographics of Ararat Rural City and of Ararat township and assesses the implications of these to aquatics need and provision. The characteristics reviewed are population size and projected future growth, age distribution, cultural background, household make-up, work industry and occupation, community health and car ownership. The data is drawn from the June 2003 report, Long Term Strategic Planning, prepared for the Ararat Rural City by Clark Phillips Pty Ltd. Data prepared by the Victorian Department of Infrastructure has also been used.

2.2.1 Population Size and Projected Future Growth

At the 2001 Census, Ararat Rural City had a population of 11,101. This constituted a fall of 864 residents, or 7.2 percent, from the 1996 Census total of 11,965 residents. Long term projections prepared by the Victorian Department of Infrastructure in 2000, project a long term continuing decline in the Council population with figures for 2021 suggesting the total will have fallen to little more than 10,200 residents.

Of those who left the municipality between 1996 and 2001, nearly two-thirds moved to larger regional cities in western Victoria, the most important being Ballarat (35% of departures), Geelong (15%), and Bendigo and Mildura (6% each).

Of the total Ararat Rural City population, 7,009 lived in the Ararat urban area. This area thus accounted for 63.5 percent of the total municipal population.

The total of 7,009 residents in urban Ararat in 2001 was 119 (or 1.7%), higher than the 6,890 residents living there in 1996. However, pre-amalgamation data suggests that this figure is well below the town population of the early 1990s and even lower than that of the 1980s.

Within the Ararat urban area, the greatest growth rates over the 1996-2001 period were recorded:

South of Elizabeth Street: 70 people or +2.5%
In Ararat North (Hospital precinct) 56 people or +1.7%
In Ararat North (Aradale precinct) 51 people or +1.6%
In Ararat South (Railway to Banfield St) 32 people 1.6%, and
West of Brewster Rd, 21 people or + 1.5%.

The rural townships of Willaura and Lake Bolac, where the Council's two other outdoor pools are based, experienced population declines of 15 people (1.0%) and 13 people (or 1.3%) respectively

over the 1996-2001 period.

2.2.2 Age Distribution

Table 2.1 records the age distribution of the Ararat Rural City population, of Ararat township and of rural Victoria at the 2001 Census.

Age Group	Ararat Rural City No.	Ararat Rural City %	Rural Victoria	Metro. Melbourne
0 – 4	651	5.9	6.7	6.5
5 - 17	2,064	18.6	20.3	18.2
18 – 24	642	5.8	7.9	9.5
25 – 34	1,211	10.9	12.2	15.0
35 – 49	2,476	22.4	22.1	22.4
50 – 59	1,535	13.9	12.1	11.6
60 – 69	1,143	10.3	8.3	7.6
70 – 84	1,138	10.3	8.8	7.7
85 and over	216	2.0	1.7	1.5
Total	11,076	100	100	100

Table 2.1: The age distribution of Ararat Rural City, regional Victoria and metropolitan Melbourne, 2001 census

Overall, the data in Table 2.1 indicate that with one small exception, the proportion of the Ararat Rural City population in age groups up to 34 years was smaller than that for regional Victoria as a whole and for metropolitan Melbourne. The 35-49 years group had the same percentage and in all age groups over 50 years had a greater percentage of the population than did regional Victoria and for metropolitan Melbourne. The differences were most marked amongst very young children, young adults and the oldest age groups.

These data indicate that the Ararat Rural City has an aged population, with this being verified by the fact that the median age of Ararat Rural City population was 41.0 years in 2001 compared with a Victorian median of 35.8 years. The Victorian Department of Infrastructure projections through to 2021 indicate that this ageing is expected to intensify.

2.2.3 Cultural Background

Victorian Department of Infrastructure data show that in 2001, Ararat Rural City has a community with a diverse cultural background. Thus, 73 percent were born in English-speaking countries compared with 77.7 percent for the State as a whole. The most important non-English speaking countries of origin were Italy (2.4%), Vietnam (1.7%) and Greece (1.7%). Some 18.1 percent of residents came from other countries compared with only 14.5 percent for the rest of the State.

However, it would appear that there is a fair degree of cultural assimilation of non-English speaking residents as a total of 1.4 percent of the population spoke a language other than English at home compared with 4.9 percent for Victoria as a whole.

2.2.4 Household Make-up

The average number of residents in Ararat Rural City households in 2001 was 2.4 compared with 2.6 people across the State.

Of the 4,566 households in the municipality in 2001, 36 percent were couples with dependent children, 43.5 percent were couples without dependent children, 8.6 percent were lone parents, and 11.5 percent were lone person households –compared with 9.8 percent across Victoria. To a great extent these characteristics reflects the older age structure of the population when compared with the State as a whole.

In terms of housing style, just on 80 percent were separate dwellings (5 percent up on the State average). Some 42 percent of homes were fully owned, 28 percent were being purchased and 23

percent were being rented. There were no significant differences between these data and the Victoria-wide pattern of home ownership and rental.

2.2.5 Employment Industry and Occupation

The largest employment industry in Ararat Rural City was the agricultural sector, this accounting for 22.4 percent of all jobs –and 43.4 percent in rural areas-- compared with an average of 11.2 percent for regional Victoria. Agriculture was followed by retail trade with 14.4 percent of all jobs (but 18.1 percent in Ararat township), health and community services (12.6%) and manufacturing (11.4%).

2.2.6 Community Health

Health status data indicate that the Grampians-Pyrenees Sub-region, which includes Ararat Rural City, has a high registered health burden for both males and females with males having high recorded rates of cardiovascular disease, cancer, injuries, mental disorders, diabetes and asthma. Women registered high rates in each of the above areas as well as for mental disorders.

2.2.7 Car Ownership

The 2001 Census indicated that 8.1 percent of the private dwellings in Ararat Rural City did not own a car, compared with 7.7 percent across the State as a whole.

2.2.8 Implications

The foregoing data have some important indications for both the current and future provision of aquatic and related facilities in Ararat Rural City. These include: that:

- The population of Ararat Rural City is small, at best static and possibly, in a continuing decline. The population is well below that which is generally accepted as the requirement for the break-even operation of an outdoor swimming pool, especially when some of the market will be using the indoor venue instead.

  With regard to more local population change, growth is occurring in Ararat township but the population resident there is still below that of 20 years ago. As such, the balance in the distribution of the population of Ararat Rural City will be increasingly focused on Ararat –which now has 64 percent of the total-- and any new provision should be made there rather than elsewhere in the municipality
- The population of the municipality is ageing and has a growing percentage aged 55 years and over. This is the age group which presently makes little use of aquatic leisure facilities. Thus, if an upgraded or new venue is to achieve a level of return which ensures that the operations are sustainable, *it must contain* facilities and programs of relevance to the older members of the community. Conversely, the declining younger age groups –which make the greatest use of aquatic leisure facilities-- will need to be encouraged to make even greater use of what is provided than they do they at present. More directed marketing and more diverse programming will be needed to achieve this
- The cultural mix of the community suggests that some additional efforts may need to be made to generate interest in and use of aquatic leisure facilities by some residents from non-English speaking backgrounds. It is known that these groups generally have a lesser interest in these facilities than do Australian-born residents. This can be achieved through direct contact with community leaders and through targeted programming
- The high proportion of lone parent and lone person households in the Council area suggests that specially priced and structured programs and support services may be needed if these groups are to be encouraged to use an aquatic leisure facility.

As both categories have many more women than men and as they generally occupy two very different age groups (mothers with children and widows), different programming initiatives will be needed

- The dominance of agriculture and retailing amongst employment categories in Ararat Rural City suggests that significant seasonal and year-to-year variations in income can be expected. Hence, there will be varying capacities to pay for leisure opportunities. This will need to be reflected in the pricing structures and levels which are applied
- The high rates of recorded health problems in the community lends strong support to the provision of health-related aquatic leisure facilities, programs and services given the major health benefits which they are known to deliver, and
- The high percentage of households without cars suggests that action to assist families in this position to reach the facilities which are provided would be beneficial.

2.3 Current Pool Performance and the Implications

It was concluded above that the population of Ararat Rural City is small, at best static and possibly, in a continuing decline. It was also noted that the population is well below that which is generally accepted as the requirement for the break-even operation of an outdoor swimming pool, especially when some of the market will be using the indoor venue instead. Further comment on this is warranted.

The statement on the financial performance of the outdoor pool for season 2003-2004 is provided in the report on the 50th Annual General Meeting of the Ararat YMCA Inc. The results are summarised below:

Item		Notes
Income:	$93,238	Includes a grant of $51,507
Expenditure:	$51,721	Does not include capital depreciation
Profit/loss:	$41,517	

It is evident that without the operational grant of $51,507, the outdoor pool would have incurred an operating loss of $9,990. This suggests that, depending on the fees charged and who the users were (eg: students vs children vs adults), somewhere between 3,000 and 10,000 *additional* visits per annum would be needed to break even. With an average attendance of 9,869 visits pa. over the past three seasons (2002/03 – 2004/05), it is unlikely that this could be easily achieved in the current leisure environment

However, it warrants noting that a non-subsidy operational loss of around $10,000 –or $1.14 per user-- is *extremely low* by outdoor pool standards. Recent data collected at a range of venues across Australian suggests that subsidies from $100,000 to $300,000 per annum or between $3 and $8 per user are far more common. Further, an attendance total averaging just under 10,000 visits from what is essentially the Ararat township population of 7,000 people means that the visits rate is 1.4 visits per head per annum. This is a reasonable rate given the narrow array of opportunities available and is substantially up on the performance of a number of other outdoor pools in rural Victoria and metro Melbourne.

Finally, and as is noted in Chapter 5 of this report, the performance of an aquatic facility should not be judged on financial grounds alone. From the initial early 1950s boom in public pool provision through to the early 1990s, there was never an expectation that outdoor public pools should make profits and certainly, the two Ararat venues were not designed or programmed to achieve this. Where there has come to be an expectation of profits in more recent times, quite different assets have had to be provided to achieve that goal.

With regard to the **Ararat Rural City Recreation and Aquatic Centre**, the following performance

figures were achieved in 2004:

Item		Notes
Income:	$595,004	Includes "Grants and Contributions" of $173,200
Expenditure:	$594,233	Does not include capital depreciation
Profit/loss:	$771	

As with the outdoor pool, the Centre would have recorded an operational loss of $173,329 were it not for the grant/contribution of $173,200. On the basis of the current income per user, offsetting this operational loss would have required an additional 59,000 visits, an increase of 29 percent on the current figures. It is improbable that this could be achieved as the current attendance rate is extremely high by national standards while the subsidy per visit is extremely low. To illustrate, with a total Council population of 11,101 in 2001 and recorded visits of 202,470 in 2004, the visit rate is equal to 18.24 pa. per head of the total Ararat Rural City population. The highest known rate in metro Melbourne is around 12 visits per head at Aquarena in Doncaster while the average metro rate is around 4-6 visits per head pa. Further, with 202,000 visits pa., the subsidy is only $0.86 per visit when subsidies of $3.00 to $5.00 are common.

As such, while the operations of both pools are subsidized, community use rates are quite high by comparison with other venues and the cost to the community is low. To be equitable, if the performance of the pools is to be judged on the basis of their financial performance, then the same measure must be applied to other aspects of leisure and non-leisure provision by Council.

Despite their strong market performance, it would obviously be advantageous if any new, additional or upgraded provision could reduce the operating subsidies presently paid by Council. This will best be achieved by ensuring that what is provided can attract wider markets *and* higher visit rates from all market sectors and allow, over the longer term, for all aquatics provision to be integrated at one venue.

The foregoing implications have been taken into consideration when assessing the appropriate mix of facilities, programs and services which warrant provision at any redeveloped aquatic leisure centre in Ararat Rural City.

2.4 Recent Trends in Recreation and Aquatic Facilities Provision and Use

2.4.1 General Leisure and Recreation Trends

There have been quite dramatic changes in the leisure and recreation interests of the community over recent years *and* in the types of leisure and recreation opportunities available to the community. These changes have been driven by:

- Higher education levels
- Changed work and business hours
- Greater community affluence
- A willingness to pay for high quality experiences (and for the higher standard facilities needed to deliver these)
- Greater travel and experiencing of alternate life styles and opportunities
- Insurance and litigation issues
- The changed cultural mix of the community
- Greater expectations of quality and professional service
- A greater awareness of the benefits of recreational involvement, and
- The ageing of the population, as discussed in the previous section.

Although not all of these factors will have a strong bearing on recreation interests and demands in

Ararat, many will and as such they cannot be ignored.

From a recreation and leisure perspective, the broad social, economic and attitudinal changes noted above have led to the following changes in community recreation activities and behaviour. All have identifiable implications to the nature of the facilities, programs/activities and support services provided through any new aquatic/leisure facilities in Ararat. The trend is listed in column 1 with some of the possible leisure provision implications in column 2.

Trend	Implications
A trend toward participation in non-competitive and passive activities rather than traditional formal sports	Ensure a capacity to provide active, non-competitive and social opportunities
A search for more flexibility and diversity in leisure pursuits rather than a commitment to a small number of activities. Diversity is reflect-ed in a number of changes, these ranging from an increasingly elite level to a basic and casual participation level for many activities	Provide a wider range of *managed* recreation activities and opportunities at different skill levels which are capable of meeting different needs in the community
Dramatic falls in a number of traditional team and small group sports – including tennis and lawn bowls-- with a recent exception of junior soccer and Australian Rules Football	Improved promotion of the benefits of team sports plus the provision of opportunities for non-team, informal team and short term involvement
Significant increases in non-competitive but active pursuits such as cycling, walking, travel and swimming	Provision of opportunities for these activities and promotion of come-and-try programs
Greater support for and more involvement in informal, community-focused activities including community days, carnivals, festivals, music concerts and markets	Provision of more community days, carnivals, festivals, music concerts and markets using existing venues
Participation in recreation activities across a wider period of the day and week with a major move to week day evening sports *participation* and weekend involvement with non-sporting pursuits and spectating	Extended hours of operation of venues; improved lighting and programming for evening involvement; enhanced spectator facilities and services
Continuing growth in home-based leisure entertainment	Provision of locally-based introductory activities to strengthen home-based capacities amongst older residents and those confined to their homes
A search for more personalised leisure venues and services, as evidenced by the use of personal trainers, 'boutique' health and fitness providers, personal training and fitness videos and home gyms	Greater provision of opportunities and resources for these activities
A significant growth in concern for the protection and well-being of the natural environment as both a recreational and political activity	Enhanced protection of bushland and other natural areas for recreational use with some provision near town centres to allow ready access
Acquisition and use of a wide range of recreational equipment. This ranges from computers and video/DVD equipment to SCUBA gear, boats, hang gliders and aircraft, off road vehicles, metal detectors etc	Establishing of an equipment pool for some activities

Trend	Implications
Provision and use of a wide diversity of culturally and socially-focused recreation opportunities including restaurants, bookshops, amusement parlours, music outlets (recorded and live), hotels, theatres and galleries	Assistance with assessing the feasibility, establishing and promotion of commercial opportunities
Increased focus on risk management and escalating public liability premiums as a major concern for land managers, Clubs and groups. Rising costs may limit the range of recreational activities available to the community in the future and lead to higher costs of participation	Enhanced input to risk management programs and assistance in overcoming the constraining impacts of insurance on local recreation activities
A growing trend for families to share recreational activities or to pursue related activities at one venue rather than pursuing a wide range of *different* activities.	Provision of integrated venues capable to support a mix of uses and users

Not all the above changes have implications for any proposed new or replacement aquatic leisure facilities in Ararat township, although a number do.

The trends and changes suggest that any new or replacement aquatic facilities should:

Add to the mix of recreation opportunities available

Be provided at a high standard at each of the facility, management and programming level with attention being given to targeted, personalised service

Have some facility and program focus on informal and formal recreation opportunities which is suitable to and attractive to a wide range of ages; which offer interesting user experiences and which deliver long term personal and community *outcomes*

Have a strong family focus

Focus on integrated provision of opportunities to optimise family and social outcomes and investment returns

Use any new provision as both a destination in its own right but also a base for wider recreation programs, including those provided by others, and

Be programmed for different types of users and uses at differing times of the day and week.

In preparing the recommendations of the present report, the broad leisure trends reviewed above and appropriate responses to them have been taken into consideration in determining the mix of facilities to provide. It will also be essential that the promotion of any new or replacement facilities take these issues into consideration.

2.4.2 Some Key Aquatic Trends

In addition to the broad recreation trends outlined above, a number of specific trends have emerged in the field of aquatics provision. Key trends are listed below with a brief response regarding the situation in Ararat Rural City provided in italics:

1. The growing recognition of the strong links between aquatics and personal and community and personal health. This has led to a growing focus on healthy living and well-being programs and actions which ensure that aquatic leisure facilities are accessible to all residents regardless of their skills or physical abilities.

   Although Ararat and the wider Ararat Rural City benefit significantly from having both an indoor pool and leisure centre and three outdoor pools, there are still significant gaps in aquatic opportunities, the most obvious being health and therapy-related facilities and programs.

2. A significant diversification in the mix of aquatic facilities and an increase in the number of different pools provided at aquatic centres in response to different market needs. For instance, there has been an increase in specialist pools for learn to swim, water safety for children, rehabilitation and therapy, self-programmed health activities, school programs, squads, youth activities and unstructured family activities.

   Although Ararat and the wider Ararat Rural City have a limited diversity of aquatic facilities with the greatest focus being on outdoor summer social, lap and school program opportunities

3. The growing provision of health focused program pools to cater for a wide range of health, sports injury and special needs uses. These are increasingly being provided with ramp, step and hoist access facilities.

   Aquatic facilities in Ararat and the wider Ararat Rural City do not have these opportunities.

4. The near-mandatory provision of support facilities and services for parents and families, the aged and people with a range of abilities. All recently built aquatic complexes are now providing child care facilities and family/disabled change rooms with the first of these now being mandatory in most States. As noted above, increasing numbers of pools are also being provided with ramp, step and hoist access facilities.

   These facilities do not exist at Ararat Rural City's three outdoor pools and there is limited availability at the Ararat Rural City Recreation and Aquatic Centre

5. Modern aquatic complexes (whether co-located or separate) are expected to cater for a range of different market sectors. These include learn to swim for children *and* adults; school and TAFE programs; remedial, water familiarization and survival programs; club teaching, training, competitions and carnivals; summer holiday programs; recreation activities; personal health/lap swimming activities; rehabilitation and physiotherapy activities; healthy living programs for older residents, and a number of related social activities and events. Further, the need to separate users on the basis of age, gender, cultural background and sensitivities, and ability has emerged as an issue of major importance. It has thus come to be realized that the traditional one or two pools of a standard size cannot accommodate the demand for these activities *or* provided them in a very effective manner.

   In response, there has been:

   a. a marked increase in the number of separate and different types of pools in a complex and in the number and mix of related support facilities (gyms, saunas, program rooms, specialists health provider offices) has increased significantly over recent years
   b. An increased provision of all-year venues
   c. Increasing differentiation between what is offered at different venues when there is more than one in a municipality, and
   d. Increasing attempts to place individual facilities within the district and/or regional hierarchy in order to avoid unproductive duplication of provision.

   The diversity of pool types in Ararat Rural City is limited while specialist support facilities have not been provided. With the exception of the ability of the outdoor pool in Ararat to accommodate carnivals with large groups of participants, there is little difference in the programming or market capacities this pool and the two other outdoor pools in the municipality. There is no apparent hierarchy of provision or programming either within the municipality or between facilities in Ararat Rural City and other Councils.

6. A growing percentage of the population is pursuing swimming as a recreation activity and there is an increasing number of participants *of all ages*. This reflects the aquatics-health link; the greater availability of improved, heated and all-year indoor facilities; the continuing position of swimming as a school curriculum activity, and the continuing international successes of Australian swimmers.

   The availability of both indoor and outdoor pools meets many health needs in the community. However, the lack of a more specialized warm water pool limits programs for rehabilitees, the aged, people with disabilities or those with other health needs.

7. In response to items 1. to 6., there has been a significant increase in the number of indoor aquatic venues throughout Australia over the past two decades so that the community has greater choice and a greater awareness of standards and services. Venues which do not reflect these improvements will not attract the markets they need to be viable.

   Continuing facility and program additions and improvements need to be made to the aquatics opportunities in Ararat Rural City if they are to keep up with changing community needs.

8. The 'packaging' of programs and services to make pools attractive to a range of groups in the community. These groups include in particular, public and private health providers, seniors in the community, schools and swimming clubs.

   Significant opportunities exist for more and broader greater of Ararat Rural City's aquatic facilities and for these programs to be targeted at different groups in the community.

9. Concerns over skin cancer have led to indoor pools being favoured over or in addition to outdoor facilities.

10. Virtually no pool-only developments have occurred in the past two decades due to their assessed poor operational viability. Pool-only venues which were built in the past have progressively had a mix of other facilities added to them to strengthen their performance and market capacity.

    New aquatic facilities are now almost universally provided in association with a widening range of other dry sporting, health (physiotherapy, massage, dieticians), fitness, quality food services and social facilities. This co-location reflects several factors: the user benefits gained from co-use programming; wider client use of additional services and facilities; major capital cost savings in the shared provision of toilet, change, cafe/food, parking and other support services, and the capacity to cross-subsidise costly aquatic programs with other more lucrative dry health, fitness and social uses.

    The failure to provide any new facilities or programming opportunities at the outdoor pools across Ararat Rural City has seriously reduced the ability of these venues to attract the community, particularly as the needs of the community have changed.

11. Virtually no new 50 metre pools, whether indoor or outdoor, have been built outside the metropolitan areas or major regional centres in Australia in the past 15 years except for where they will support State, national or international competitions and carnivals. This is due to capital and operational costs, lower use flexibility and the fact that where 50 metre pools are provided, other pools still need to be provided to ensure that community needs are effectively meet.

    Further, many of Australia's 50 metre pools were built following the country's

successes at the Melbourne Olympics of 1956. Since then, the international aquatics federation, FINA, has instituted 25 metre 'short course' regulations and world championships and the need for 50 metre pools has become far less important.

If Ararat township did not have an outdoor pool, it would be very difficult to justify its provision, given the comparatively narrow market these pools serve. Providing a 50 metre outdoor would be even more difficult to justify. That said, as the Ararat Rural City already has two 25 metre pools (at Lake Bolac and Willaura), it would be difficult to justify providing a third unless it offered opportunities not available at either Lake Bolac or Willaura. The existing 50 metre pool has a strong history of community involvement in its development and meets school, club and other competitive needs which cannot be effectively met by the other pools. As such, seeking to remove it or to replace it with a 25 metre facility could be expected to generate a significant degree of existence in the community unless the replacement pool supported the same types of use as the existing pool.

Ararat township is also in the main population centre of the municipality and it could be argued that if the two smaller towns in Ararat Rural City have outdoor pools, so should Ararat. It should also be noted that apart from cost, it is not so much the provision of a 50 metre outdoor pool in Ararat which is the issue, it is the historic failure to provide a mix of aquatic and dry support facilities which would help offset pool operating losses.

12. Over recent years, a number of the more modern facilities have been developed as indoor *and* outdoor venues. This has taken two main forms: first, provision of both indoor and outdoor pools (or water *features* rather than *pools*) in order to meet the assessed mix of community needs and second, through the construction of pools which can be opened up in summer and enclosed in winter (as at Inverell).

    The opportunity to achieve the integrated provision of indoor and outdoor aquatic facilities exists in Ararat and this is detailed in chapters 5 and 6 of this report.

13. The provision of indoor/outdoor venues through the use of removable fabric enclosures have generally been a failure. This is because of the cost and difficulty of removing the covers, the ease with which covers can be damaged, and because of the generally poor use conditions under the enclosure (noise, humidity, temperatures).

    This strategy will not be recommended in this report.

14. At an increasing number of aquatic centres, indoor and outdoor *non-pool* aquatic areas are being developed as toddler water play areas. These provide, for example, matting-based water play areas and user-operated sprays and sprinklers set on what is essentially a large shower base.

    As with indoor and outdoor pools, the opportunity to achieve this also exists in Ararat.

15. There is an increasing provision of diverse *non*-aquatic areas. Indoor and outdoor venues are providing beach volleyball, picnic lawn areas, dry play facilities and multi-purpose rooms for teaching, group change and indoor activities in poorer weather. The latter spaces are also used for meetings, art shows, workshops, occasional care etc and are supported by existing amenities and services.

    Such provision should be pursued in Ararat township.

16. Because of the increased 'supply' of aquatic leisure venues in metropolitan areas, more people 'shop around' to try out different venues (especially with children, friends) while others seek a venue which best fits their specific aquatic and other needs (eg: health). Research undertaken on behalf of Sport and Recreation Victoria during the 1970s, 80s and 90s found that the proportion of users who visited only one centre dropped from 97 percent to around 85 percent as a result of

this changed use behaviour. Other research has shown that alternately, users will select one venue as a 'home' base and then make use of numerous other venues for more specialist services. Thus, only quality and different opportunities and quality staff will attract and retain a growing proportion of users.

Travel distances in the Ararat Rural City mean that this situation is less likely to apply to pools provided in Ararat. However, rather than meaning that Council and management can be complacent and believe it has a captive market, it means that the one or two venues provided in the town will have to be of a sufficient quality and provide a sufficient diversity to attract that market share which would otherwise 'shop around'. Further, the standard of provision and programming should also be sufficient to attract users from well beyond the area currently served by the outdoor and indoor pools.

17. In keeping with 16., there is now a major growth in specialist 'boutique' health and fitness centres. These are often no larger than a single shop, have restricted memberships and offer totally personalised service.

    The small size of the Ararat Rural City and Ararat township populations means that few such venues exist in the region. This means that there is some potential to make this form of provision one element of any redevelopment. However, care would need to be taken to not over-*emphasise this.*

18. Aquatics venues are increasingly being designed with the capacity to allow staged additions which can accommodate emerging and changing needs in the community. The industry has evolved so rapidly that venues which were considered to be industry leaders 10 years ago are now seen as outdated. Unless changes can be made and new opportunities added, they will remain that way.

    This is a critical issue which must not be overlooked in proposals for future aquatic developments in Ararat Rural City. The failure to make very long term planning decisions is, unfortunately, reflected in the inability to further develop the Ararat Indoor Leisure Centre.

19. Despite the high expectations of the 1990s, there is less than a handful of pools which have been built and operated under BOO or BOOT schemes ("BOO" refers to the situation where a commercial developer **b**uilds, **o**wns and **o**perates a venue with some form of initial Council input. BOOT refers to **b**uild, **o**wn, **o**perate and eventually, the **t**ransfer of ownership to Council). Most of developments which were initiated in this way never reached fruition while most of the few which did, since reverted to Council operation. This highlights the point that large scale aquatic leisure venues should not be seen as commercial ventures: rather, they are a community service and require Council operational subsidies.

    A range of funding strategies exist and all should be carefully reviewed by Council. As indicated above, it is highly unlikely that a BOO or BOOT scheme will be one of these. That said, representatives of the Ararat YMCA have indicated that a capital contribution could be made by that organisation in return for a long term management contract.

2.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the demographic analysis and the emerging aquatic and leisure trends have significant implications for future aquatics provision in Ararat Rural City. A number of the demographic characteristics impose quite significant limitations on the capacity of Ararat township to support outdoor and indoor aquatic facilities although, as the analysis of the operating subsidy levels shows, these are low by comparison with many other aquatic venues and when compared with the subsidies provided to many other forms of recreation provision, including outdoor sports. In the analysis of the financial performance of the proposed new outdoor venue (see section 6.6), *the same level of subsidy* has been provided for and it is evident that with this subsidy (apart from long term asset replacement allocations), the venue performs as well as, if not better than, it does at present.

In addition to the demographic factors, the leisure and aquatic trends establish several stringent *design* and *facility* requirements for any new aquatic leisure centre (eg: meeting market need, co-location of facilities, disability access, rigorous programming). These should not be overlooked as to do so could threaten the long-term success and viability of any development initiative. As a consequence, all have been given detailed consideration and have been used as one checklist of the components which have been included in the design options presented later in this report.

3

Recent Planning Studies in Ararat Rural City Council

3.1 Introduction

This Chapter presents an overview of recent Council reports of relevance to future aquatics provision in Ararat. These reports are:

Council Plan, 2004 - 2008
Healthy Communities Plan, 2005 - 2008
Disability Access and Inclusion Plan
Ararat Residential Land Use Strategy
Recreation and Open Space Strategies, and
Community Satisfaction Survey.

3.2 Council Plan 2004-2008

Council's Vision as stated in the Council Plan is

> To enhance the quality of life for present and future generations.

The Plan sets out a Mission Statement, Values, the Council planning model and a set of strategies by which Council will achieve action on Service Delivery, Governance/Advocacy, Infrastructure Services, Community Building and Culture, Economic Development, Tourism, Social and Recreation, and Environment and Sustainability.

While the Council Mission Statement and Values are understandably broad, the redevelopment of the aquatic and associated leisure facilities in Ararat township would contribute to achieving these.

3.3 Healthy Communities Plan, 2005 - 2008

The Healthy Communities Plan, 2005 – 2008, provides a review of demographic and health issues in the municipality and the wider Grampians Pyrenees Area. It highlights "priority health issues for Ararat", defines partnership opportunities for improving community health and provides a detailed community health plan.

Some of the key points noted in the review of the health status of residents of the Grampians Pyrenees Area are:

- Overall, both males and females have very poor health standards. Males rank 73rd and females 75th out of the 78 Victorian Councils.
- Females have the highest Victorian rates with regard to health problems, the top ranked health problems being diabetes, heart disease, stroke, dementia, chronic obstructive disease, cancers, osteoarthritis, road traffic accidents and depression
- Life expectancy is two years lower than for Victoria as a whole and for indigenous males, 8 – 18 years shorter
- Males have a higher rate of alcohol abuse and dependency than the average State population (score of 4 vs State level of 3)
- Teenage alcohol abuse, smoking and use of marijuana are significant issues
- Asthma amongst males rates higher than the Victorian average as a problem

Suicide rates are significantly higher for both males and females, and

There is a high incidence of mental health disorders in the 14-24 years age group.

In the light of the above and other data, the Healthy Communities Plan identified a number of priorities health issues for Ararat Rural City. These are detailed on pages 14 – 18 of the Plan and have been grouped under three broad headings:

Improving physical health

Strengthening social connectedness and mental wellbeing, and

Building organisational capacity and partnership development.

It is evident that carefully targeted programming and marketing of activities at Ararat Rural City's aquatic venues would make a major contribution to addressing these issues. The rewriting of the management agreement for the venues which has been recommended in the separate management report which was undertaken as part of the present study should seek to ensure that such targeted programming occurs as a core element of the service provided through the aquatic venues.

Chapter 4 of the Healthy Communities Plan, 2005 – 2008 addresses the issue of working in partnerships to improve community health and wellbeing in some depth. While a wide range of agencies which deliver direct health services are listed, the chapter has a serious oversight in that none of Ararat Rural City's sporting groups –or agencies such as the YMCA which manages all of Council's aquatic venues—are mentioned. The role of these groups in helping avoid health problems must be given full acknowledgement and an integral role in any future health plans.

Chapter 5 of the Healthy Communities Plan, 2005 – 2008 details the Ararat Rural City Healthy Communities Plan. This provides an array of recommended actions covering each of the three action areas listed above (ie: Improving physical health, Strengthening social connectedness and mental wellbeing, and Building organisational capacity and partnerships). The initiatives which are recommended are excellent yet recreational activities as a means of achieving health improvements are mentioned less than ten times with the role of the YMCA and the need for an aquatic facilities strategy being two of these. Given the breadth of the beneficial outcomes of recreation participation outlined in Chapter 1 this is something of a disappointment.

This concern aside, there are ways by which the YMCA as the manager of the City's aquatic venues and the venues themselves can make a major contribution to enhancing community health in Ararat Rural City and the wider regional community. As noted with regard to Chapter 4 above, it is thus proposed that Council should encourage the YMCA management group to work through each Goal Area of the Healthy Communities Plan and ask "How can the YMCA manage and program each of the City's aquatic venues in order to contribute to achieving this health and community wellbeing outcome?" This will ensure that the facilities make the contribution which has been overlooked by the Plan.

3.4 Disability Access and Inclusion Plan

This Plan provides a framework and recommendations for the implementation of Council's Disability Access and Inclusion Policy. The Plan provides a set of recommended actions relating to built environments, Council services, governance, information and training, leadership and advocacy and other issues.

With regard to built environments, the Plan identified a number of areas of essential Council action (paths, buildings, overhanging branches etc). On sport and recreation, the Plan proposes that Council should "adopt a pro-active role in advocating for better access to sport ands recreation facilities for people with disabilities" and "establish a strong working relationship between the Council and the regional AAA worker". Such initiatives are very important with regard to Council's aquatic facilities.

Other recommendations which are relevant to the present study are those which address

provision of advice on disability issues, parking, employment, staff training, partnerships and advocacy.

As with the Healthy Communities Plan, it is suggested that Council officers and those responsible for the management of Council's aquatic venues should review each recommendation of the Disability Access and Inclusion Plan and ask the question, "How can the physical redevelopment, management and programming of these assets further the implementation of these recommendations?". Specific actions should then be built around the solutions which are identified.

3.5 Ararat Residential Land Use Strategy

The Ararat Residential Land Use Strategy was prepared by GHD in July 2005. The report notes that "by actively encouraging redevelopment of existing larger lots (within the Ararat township)… it is anticipated that up to half the supply required (for the next 30 years) could be found within the existing urban area… " Further, the report notes that as there are no greenfield areas which are completely free of constraints of one form or another, "a preferred staging of development has not been determined…" and that "the market is best placed to determine the staging and timing of development. This strategy therefore identifies options and not preferences".

The areas most conducive to future growth which are identified were:

> West of Oliver Gully Reservoir
>
> To the east, adjacent to Green Hill Lake "provided transport and connectivity issues to the CBD can be overcome, and
>
> Areas to the north of the town, adjacent to Cemetery Creek and Chalambar Golf Course, although fragmented land holdings and the absence of sewerage were seen as constraints.

Several optional rural living areas were also identified to the north of Ararat township and to the south of the racecourse.

The size of Ararat township means that wherever a new aquatic leisure facility is located in the town, access will not be difficult for residents. Significantly, however, the Residential Land Use Strategy sees greater future residential opportunities to the north of the township than to the south and over time this will lead to some rebalancing of the pattern of settlement in Ararat. As such, in the longer term, a pool site in the north will be more central to the community.

3.6 Ararat Rural City Recreation and Open Space Strategies

The Recreation and Open Space Strategies were prepared for Council by @leisure in 2003. The *Strategies* sought to:

> "Identify the diversity and quality of recreation/leisure in Ararat Rural City
>
> Report on gaps and opportunities in the provision of recreation and leisure based on needs and expectations in the community
>
> Provide a policy framework to enable Council to respond to all recreation and leisure needs, and
>
> Define Council's role in providing recreation and leisure facilities and activities and present strategies for local and regional partnering arrangements.

Many of the conclusions and recommendations of the Recreation and Open Space Strategies have direct relevance to the future redevelopment of aquatic facilities in the Council area. With regard to "Council's Role and Resourcing of Leisure" (vol. 3, *Strategies and Actions*, pp. 5-6), it was recommended that Council:

Should strengthen its focus on "planning, marketing and information dissemination" so as to ensure that existing resources are used more widely and more effectively and so as to use these resources as one means of attracting new residents

Make a more conscious connection between planning and funding provision and who is to be targeted so as to achieve more appropriate and predictable outcomes

Should strive to increase its population as "this is fundamental to retaining the range and quality of recreation resources" which presently exist

Develop a better understanding of costs, how and where resources are being allocated and what benefit is required and desired. It was argued that "a greater emphasis on resourcing viable and sustainable opportunities can result from planning and a better understanding of lifecycle costs and benefits. Life cycle costs need to be estimated and cyclic maintenance planned and adequately resourced" (p. 5)

Section 4 of the Strategies and Actions volume presented a set of recommendations for action. Again, a number of these are directly relevant to future aquatics provision in the municipality. These are listed below with notes in italics indicating the relationship to the present study:

Goal 1: Council's Roles and Resources

1.5: Clarify Council's role and the role of community committees and land management agencies

Council's relationship with the YMCA of Ararat and the expectations which has of the YMCA in managing the Indoor Leisure Centre is poorly defined. This has been reviewed as part of the present study and is reviewed in the Appendices and in a separate accompanying report

1.6: Increase participation in key localities where services are already provided

There is a need for a far greater input to promoting the services and benefits available through the Council's aquatic facilities

Goal 2: Recreation Planning

2.5 Monitor the effectiveness of current service provision against changes in demand

At present, there is limited and generally poor data on the use of Council's aquatic facilities. Data should be collected on a regular basis with regard to user demographic characteristics, origins, reasons for use, frequency of use, activities pursued, benefits sought and gained, needs met and not met. This data should also be used to determine who is <u>not</u> using the opportunities which are provided

2.6: Designate recreation and leisure facilities as key hubs for programs, initiatives and policy implementation

Aquatic leisure facilities have a greater capacity to play this role than most recreation assets but they have not been exploited for these purposes to any extent by Council

Goal 3: Participation

3.1 Balance the focus on facilities with more support for programs, and matching needs with opportunities

There has been quite limited programming of Council's outdoor pools while the facilities have had few changes made to them since they were built to better match what is provided with community needs. It could be said that some elements of the venues function <u>contrary</u> to community needs

3.2 Provide more accessible and inclusive opportunities

Nine wide-ranging initiatives are listed under this heading and it is evident that few have been applied in any consistent manner at Council's aquatic venues

3.3 Encourage greater participation from older adults

Limited action has been initiated to date on this strategy at Council's aquatic facilities. The outdoor venues are severely constrained in their capacity to support meaningful action

3.4 Improve access to activities and facilities enjoyed but not used

Swimming opportunities are listed as one resource to encourage wider use of

3.5 Promote the benefits of recreation and an active lifestyle to residents

Little by way of action has been initiated on this strategy with regard to Council's aquatic facilities

Goal 4: Infrastructure

4.1 Implement a clear plan for sports facilities and their development

4.1.2 Decommission Centenary Park and investigate suitable residential development for part of this site

4.1.3 Establish a long term tenure over Gordon Street Reserve for sport and support its development

As detailed in later Chapters of the present report, these recommendations should be rejected. Centenary Park is the only sports ground in Ararat township capable of supporting two or more playing fields. Such a level of provision is now seen as essential to full club development and the provision of quality playing and training areas. It also allows shared use of facilities, buildings are parking. As a result, the venue should be retained. The Gordon Street Reserve is not owned by Council, is poorly located, and is surrounded by industrial land uses. The proposals for this site would thus be far more appropriately developed at Centenary Park.

4.2 Increase the utilization and cost effectiveness of provision of swimming pools

Specific initiatives recommended under this strategy were:

- Undertake a full feasibility study to address swimming and the associated facilities in Ararat township
- Review the current agreement between the YMCA and Council
- Assist the YMCA to undertake periodic reviews of use and costs
- Encourage swimming participation through signage, better information and marketing

The first three of these initiatives have been addressed through the present study.

Goal 5: Information, Communication and Marketing

5.1 Collect, better manage and disseminate information on infrastructure, providers and recreation opportunities

5.2 Develop key information products for residents

5.4 Encourage greater dialogue between Council, committees of management, sports and with schools to enhance cooperation and sharing of resources

These actions need to be applied to Council's aquatic facilities as well as all other venues.

With the exception of the responses to initiatives 4.1.2 and 4.1.3 above, pursuit of the recommendations of the Recreation and Open Space Strategy will contribute a great deal to the

effective development, management, programming and promotion of the Council's aquatic facilities.

In addition to the specific action recommendations, the *Recreation and Open Space Strategy's* "Strategy and Actions" volume presented a set of "overarching principles" to underpin recreation service provision in keeping with Council's Corporate Plan. These are:

- Further investment in recreation will be financially sustainable
- Develop multi-use, co-managed facilities with reduced Council subsidies
- Recognise, respect and support the specific needs of individual communities
- Encourage community participation, development, co-operation and leadership
- Support sustainability and diversity in development and management
- Develop partnerships between Council and the community
- Uphold the principles of fairness and equity of opportunity
- Improve quality of life and contribute to an individual's sense of worth and fulfillment
- Facilitate recreation and play as fundamental needs of people of all ages and as essential for the health and wellbeing of all residents
- Encourage physical activity that provides personal, social and economic benefits to the community
- Enhance diversity in recreation settings and opportunities
- Provide services to people who experience social disadvantage through an inclusive and responsive organizational culture, opportunities targeting specific needs, and removing barriers to access
- Subsidise provision of opportunities to participate at the foundation level, not necessarily the cost of use
- Use design to provide specific benefits and requirements
- Protect the qualities of the natural environment
- Ensure the assessment of liability and risk is included in all planning and management processes.

Overall, these are laudable principles and in general they have been used to assist the process of assessing the development proposals put to Council in the final sections of this report.

That said, great care must be taken in applying the early principles relating to financial sustainability and subsidies*. Taken literally, these could condemn many community recreation initiative to failure and would certainly mean that many of the remaining principles could not be achieved*. "Sustainability" should not be read as "profit-making" while subsidising various services in the interest of general community wellbeing is at the heart of the purpose of local government. Similarly, only subsidizing "provision of opportunities to participate at the foundation level" could be severely detrimental to most recreation activities in the community if the term "foundation" was narrowly interpreted.

In summary, it would seem that if recreation and leisure are to make a significant contribution to the wellbeing of a community, opportunities to participate at a range of levels and skills should be provided and *subsidised*. There is ample evidence to indicate that where this does not occur, participants aspiring to higher performance standards –and this does not have to be elite performance-- simply leave the local area.

3.7 Community Satisfaction Survey, 2005

The 2005 Ararat Rural City Council Annual Community Satisfaction Survey was undertaken by Newton Wayman Chong. The survey provides an assessment of "head of household" resident views on satisfaction with a range of Council services.

The 2005 results show that community satisfaction with recreation facilities is rated amongst the top three service areas, the others being health and human services and the appearance of public areas. However, the indexed mean of 71 recorded for recreation facilities was a drop from 75 in 2004 which had been reached after a number of years of improvements following a rating of 70 in the first year of surveys, 1998. Despite this fall, the community firmly placed recreation facilities in the "sustain high performance" box in an importance-performance analysis. Only 14 percent of residents recorded a "needs improvement" rating for recreation facilities in 2005.

Unfortunately, the Community Satisfaction Survey did not rate the performance of individual components of the recreation facilities provided in the City. Nor did it rate recreation *programs* or recreation *services*. However, Chart 13 of the report provides a record of other comments regarding improvement needs and this is informative. The highest rating of the results were:

Better maintenance of sporting fields, grounds and buildings including pools		36%
More better sporting complexes including pools	32%	
More support/funding needed for recreational/sporting facilities	10%	
More facilities/activities for young people/teenagers		4%
More better recreational activities/programs		2%
More better events/festivals		2%
Pool closed. Should be open more months a year		2%
Poor planning/location of sporting facilities include. Pools	2%	

These views represent the views of a small number of residents who were surveyed. Yet they suggest that there is scope for action on the maintenance, management and programming of Council's recreation facilities –and it's pools—so that they better meet community needs.

3.8 Conclusions

The foregoing documents provide a substantial level of justification for and some guidance as to the specifics of enhanced aquatics provision in Ararat Rural City.

It is evident that upgraded and diversified aquatic leisure facilities will contribute to achieving Council's Vision to "enhance the quality of life for present and future generations". Similarly, such initiatives could, if well planned, make a major contribution to achieving Council's Healthy Communities Plan. The overall poor health of the Council and wider regional population provides a strong justification for such action.

Council's Disability Access and Inclusion Policy has implications to the design of future community facilities and to the provision of support facilities, staffing and programs. Again, initiatives at the existing and any new aquatic facilities provide the opportunity to further this policy.

The residential land use strategy, while rather general in its conclusions, suggests that future urban growth in Ararat will bring a greater balance between the south and north of the township. As such, a central location for new pool provision initiatives would ensure optimal access for the community.

The conclusions and recommendations of the Recreation and Open Space Strategies have direct relevance to the future redevelopment of aquatic facilities in the Council area. The Strategies provide a set of principles to help guide aquatic planning and provision decisions. As indicated in the review in section 3.6, they also provide guidance as to the management, programming, needs

monitoring and promotion of new and upgraded facilities. Finally, the Recreation and Open Space Strategies have provided a set of principles to guide recreation provision decisions – principles which have been used as a key to action decisions in this report.

The final study reviewed, the 2005 Community Satisfaction Survey, showed a high level of satisfaction with "recreation facilities" in the Council area. However, apart from a small number of comments regarding the need for improved maintenance and better facilities, the survey has provided little guidance on aquatic issues.

Overall, the reports reviewed as part of this study provide some useful guidance to planning, programming and management issues which can be usefully applied to aquatic facilities in Ararat Rural City Council. As appropriate, a number of the issues have been taken into consideration in the development of the optional futures for aquatics which are presented in the following chapters. They should also be reviewed in some detail by the management of the facilities – regardless of any action Council may take as a result of this report—so that the operation and programming of the facilities are better aligned with the broader directions and objectives which Council and its community wish to pursue and achieve.

4

Aquatic Needs in Ararat Rural City

4.1 Introduction

In developing any new leisure and recreation facilities, activities, programs and support services, it is critical that the views of the community are taken into consideration. This Chapter reports on the aquatic needs which were identified through a program of consultations with the Ararat and district community. The needs identified have then been reviewed and evaluated in the light of:

- The Council recreation strategy and other policies reviewed in the previous chapter
- The leisure trends and demographic data presented in Chapter 2, and
- The review of the present condition of the Ararat aquatic and leisure facilities and the benefits review presented in Chapter 1

as a key input to the formulation of the development options which are detailed in the Chapter 5 following and the designs and costings presented in Chapter 6.

4.2 The Consultation Stages

The program of consultations undertaken with the community entailed:

- Interviews with key groups which use the existing outdoor and indoor aquatic facilities in Ararat
- Interviews with Council's Chief Executive Officer and other senior officers responsible for various aspects of aquatics and recreation provision in the City and for wider Council services
- Interviews with staff and Board members of the YMCA of Ararat which manages the indoor and outdoor pools. A separate report on the management of the venues, prepared by C Leisure Pty Ltd., has been provided to Council
- Press releases calling for community input to the aquatics review
- An open public meeting
- Review meetings with the project reference group, and
- A survey of a sample of users of both aquatic facilities.

Given the small numbers included in some of the above consultations, the results have been grouped where appropriate.

4.3 Interviews

The issues identified through the individual interviews conducted under the three dot points above have been arranged under a set of headings and are presented below:

The Need for Aquatic Facilities:

If the outdoor pool was closed, the indoor pool could not cope with the demand and nor could the rural pools

Could Council service the community by running buses to the other rural pools in summer?

Will there be sufficient demand for an outdoor pool as the population continues to age?

Upgrading the outdoor pool will not deliver benefits commensurate with the cost. Council should have closed the pool down

Use does not reflect need: better marketing of the pools and what they offer is needed

It would be difficult to close the outdoor pool as the indoor pool has serious use limitations

The outdoor pool provides a totally different and freer environment for young people

Building a modern 50 metre outdoor pool would allow an agreement with Swim Victoria regarding State Country Championships

The indoor pool has a stronger adult focus than the outdoor pool and this would be extended with better marketing

The Ararat community worked very hard to develop the existing outdoor pool and would be very disappointed if that work was lost through the pool being closed or replaced with a 25 metre pool

The nearest 50 metre pools are in Horsham, Dimboola and Ballarat

The outdoor 50 metre pool is only used for competitive purposes by the secondary school and swim club. This amounts to no more than 3 carnivals a year

From the schools' perspective, having two different pools (indoor and outdoor/warm and cold) allows better development of swimming competencies. The outdoor pool is far better for "open water" and "deep water" programs and is very good for safety programs and training. By comparison, the indoor pool is excellent for stroke techniques and junior teaching.

Use of the indoor pool for junior school programs is constrained by the lack of spectator and competitor areas

Council used to allow free school use of the outdoor pool. Charging prices has put schools off

The outdoor pool has "contributed a lot" to the Ararat community and should not be lost

The existing 50 metre pool does not comply for competitions and should be replaced by a modern 50 metre facility.

Siting and Design:

Consideration may warrant being given to a joint development with new football support facilities or in association with the redevelopment of the existing pavilion or in the area presently occupied by tennis

Parking is a major problem at the existing outdoor pool. It could be alleviated if the entrance was moved to the opposite side. However, this could cause conflict with Alexandra Oval users

The existing pool could be redeveloped with new, relocatable change/toilet and management facilities used while money is "got together" for a new pool

A staged upgrading of the existing facilities might be more achieveable than attempting to build a totally new venue

If a new site was developed, the existing outdoor pool site could be used for a soundshell in the Gardens

Consideration should be given to developing an outdoor pool at the Indoor Leisure Centre. This could be achieved by using the road reserve and buying

the former hotel. An Ararat by-pass road is likely within the next 25 years so the highway location will not be a problem. The ball sports court space could be used to accommodate a new pool

Consideration should be given to a greenfields site eg: Centenary Park. However, good access for users will be important

Council should "start again" on for example, Alexandra Oval or Centenary Park

Traffic and parking at the indoor leisure centre are major problems, especially when basketball games are on

Any new or redeveloped facility should have comfortable seating and an area for a café, coffee etc for parents

Whatever Council develops must consolidate its investment, support multi-use and have the capacity to meet needs

Staging of any development will be important

Key locational principles which must be addressed are location, access, parking, visibility (so as to control vandalism), staff supervision of use and increased use

Only two of the four squash courts are needed at the indoor centre and this could free up space for other uses

The plant and support facilities are the major priority for action at the outdoor pool

The outdoor pool has only six lanes and this hampers club and school use

Access to the outdoor pool is unsafe

Consideration might warrant being given to a pool which can be covered in winter and be open air over summer

Centenary Park has drainage issues and is seen as being more of a long term "reserve"

Other facilities which should be considered in association with a redeveloped pool are a hydrotherapy pool, youth facilities and an aged care day centre

A warm water/hydro pool would allow a number of hospital and community health programs to be expanded. However, the demand does not appear to be great at present. Aged health and strength programs could be developed further as water therapy and aquaerobics are growing markets. Continued provision of health programs by the YMCA in Ararat is important for community health. It should continue to liaise with and work with health providers in this process

A larger gym and activities area for health and ageing clients would be useful for the district Health Service.

Costs and Standards:

Although a lot of money is spent on recreation in Ararat Rural City, older assets have been neglected; things attract more use if good standards are maintained

The community has high standards and these will need to be met

While capital costs can generally be met, to often the Council has not put adequate amounts into maintenance

Greater risk management issues these days demands higher maintenance standards

Although Ararat is a well-off community, Council does not have a strong ability to develop major capital works

Council's recently-established infrastructure reserve should be used to pay for any redevelopment program

The Ararat YMCA would be able to consider making a financial contribution to any aquatics redevelopment in Ararat in exchange for longer term management agreements covering the City's pools

Council has spent far too little on the outdoor pool: money needed for its upgrading has been "siphoned off" almost, it seems at times, on purpose.

Management:

The integration of the management of all Council pools has generated cost savings and improved services

The management of indoor and outdoor pools in Ararat is far better than it was in the past

A lot more opportunities exist to improve and diversify the programming and activities available at the pools

Bringing the indoor and outdoor pools together would achieve staff economies and better management, staff training, promotion, program coordination

There is a continuing need to educate the community re facilities sharing at the indoor pool in order to optimize pool use

Pool blankets used to be applied at the pool but are no longer. They should be reintroduced

The swimming club does a lot of work at the pool.

4.3.1 Interviews Overview

It is evident that there is strong community sentiment and history associated with the existing 50 metre outdoor pool but at the same time, there is a view that the facility has reached the end of its life and does not need to be replaced. It is also evident that a number of inherent constraints associated with the indoor pool mean that the outdoor facility plays an important complementary role in meeting community needs. Significantly –and this is supported by survey data reported later in this Chapter—the interviews have indicated that the outdoor pool meets the needs of *different groups* in the community to the indoor pool and meets needs *which the indoor pool cannot meet*. If more comprehensively serviced and programmed, this role could be greatly strengthened.

The interviews indicated some strong support for the retention of a 50 metre as opposed to a 25 metre pool although apart from school and club programs, a strong *demand* or *need* for a 50 metre facility was not identified. That said, there are few 50 metre pools in the region and Ararat Rural City *already has three pools of lesser lengths*. Developing a fourth facility of less than 50 metres would lose the unique attributes which the Ararat Solar Olympic Pool offers. *In the light of this, it is the view of the consulting team that if possible, the existing outdoor pool should be replaced with a new 50 metre outdoor pool. If however, this is not possible from a financial perspective, a 25 metre pool can be designed to meet all the needs currently met by a 50 metre pool. It will not, however, be a unique venue within the City.*

The issues listed above under "siting and design" are quite varied and propose a number of different locations for consideration. These have all been reviewed and as deemed appropriate, are discussed in the following Chapter. Several of the proposals have been rejected as impractical and these have been discussed with Council and officers in the course of preparing this study. The site and design issues identified through the interviews also stressed a need for any replacement pool to offer a greater diversity of opportunities than is offered at present (including health and non-aquatic opportunities) and, as one interviewee noted, to consider "location, access, parking, visibility (and) staff supervision".

The issues identified in relation to facility costs and standards stressed a need to provide quality venues and to ensure that what is provided is well maintained. The discussion of management stressed the need for far greater management and programming inputs to ensure that the optimum array of activities were provided to the community. It also highlighted the benefits which can flow from integrated provision.

4.4 The Public Meeting

The public meeting was opened by Mayor, Cr Paul Hooper and some 32 people signed the register of attendance.

The meeting commenced with a presentation covering the purpose and scope of the study and outlining a number of development directions in which aquatics provision is heading.

The discussion which followed was structured around a number of questions and the following paragraphs summarise these and the responses to them. All responses are from individuals unless a response is followed by a number in a bracket. This number indicates the number of respondents. *It is stressed that the responses reflect the views of meeting participants and that they not necessarily the views of either the planning team or anyone associated with Ararat Rural City.*

Question 1: Have you used the Ararat pools in the past 12 months?

- 35% of the attendees indicated that they had used the **outdoor** pool
- 35% of the attendees indicated that they had used the **indoor** pool
- 30% had used both pools
- 30% had not used any pools

Question 2: What did you use the outdoor and indoor pools for?

Outdoor pool uses:
- School Sports
- Social (teenagers)
- Lap Swimming
- Fitness/exercise
- Cool off on a hot day
- Competition Swimming
- Learn to Swim
- Indoor pool does not support good competition swimming (depth, no room for participants, spectators)

Indoor pool uses:
- Laps
- Because outdoor pool is closed
- Exercise
- Hydrotherapy
- Water aerobics
- Learn to swim
- Training
- Rehabilitation
- Multi use of other associated facilities
- No diving!

Question 3: Why is a 50 metre outdoor pool needed?

- Need the depth range which is permitted by the greater length
- Competition swimming (but 8 lanes ideally is required)

- Three schools use the outdoor for school sports
- Swim Club annual carnival
- Cold water 50 metre pool is needed for programs which accustom users to cold water especially compared with the more benign conditions at the indoor pool
- High skill level and exercise development

Question 4: Are any other pools used?
- Melbourne Sports and Aquatic Centre
- Eaglehawk YMCA
- Geelong: Slide, beach entry
- Mildura: Waves
- Warrnambool x 2
- Monash Aquatic Centre

Question 5: Other Needs to be met/opportunities to provide
- Café's
- Good car parking
- Improved change/toilets
- Water play facilities/wave pool
- Relocation of skate facilities

Question 6: Suggested locations?
- Link with other sports facilities
- South of the highway. Most Schools are to the south
- Alexandra Park: in association with tennis, trees etc
- High School site adjacent to the tennis courts
- At a prominent site to attract the tourist market
- Greenhill Lake
- Former Brucks factory

Other Issues

A range of wider issues was discussed by the meeting including:

- Whether a 25 m. pool would be a satisfactory replacement for the 50 m. pool
- The types of repair/replacement pools available
- The cost of various pool repair and replacement options
- The possible mix of pool facilities and associated facilities
- Access and parking needs at the existing pool
- The opportunities for a long term plan for a new venue to replace *all* existing indoor and outdoor facilities
- The need for a strong focus on promoting and programming Council pools
- The need to provide for people who do not *presently* swim and for those who *cannot* swim, and
- The important health benefits offered by aquatics.

4.4.1 Public Meeting Overview

The high pool use reported by participants at the public meeting (Question 1) indicates that the attendees were predominantly aquatics users rather than a cross-section of the general Ararat community. This is because Australian Bureau of Statistics data show that between 12 and 20 percent of any community generally uses aquatics facilities, not 40-60 percent as the meeting figures suggest.

The Question 2 responses show that while there was some overlap of the uses of the indoor and outdoor pools, the indoor venue supported a far stronger mix of health and wellbeing activities while the outdoor pool had a focus on laps, school use and social activities. These differences are supported by the surveys of pool users reported in later paragraphs. They suggest quite

strongly that *the two pools meet different needs for different markets*, a conclusion which is supported by the surveys of users of the two pools, as reported in later paragraphs.

The reasons given under Question 3 for supporting a 50 metre pool are quite valid, *except that* all the needs listed can be met by an appropriately designed 25 metre facility. Further, the market volumes generated by the users and uses for which a 50 metre pool is preferred, cannot be considered sufficient to warrant provision of such a pool. That said, a 50 metre pool generally serves long distance swimmers, training, squads, clubs and competitive uses more effectively than a 25 metre pool.

The cited need to accustom swimmers to cold water compared with the "more benign conditions" at an indoor pool is of interest and obviously has some validity. However, while it may better equip those *willing* to learn or train in cold water, it *deters many more* who would otherwise gain some of the same as well as other, wider benefits from swimming. Further, if special programs are needed to provide this experience, the City would still have outdoor facilities in Willaura and Lake Bolac which could cater for this need.

The small list of other pools used which are cited in Question 4 and their distance from Ararat suggests that the use is more connected with holidays and some competitive swimming activities. It also suggests that the Ararat pools are the only realistic opportunities available to the local community and that if they were not provided locally, residents would make little use of aquatic facilities.

The needs recorded in response to Question 5 clearly reflect several of the major deficiencies which have already been identified at the outdoor pool.

The siting suggestions listed in Question 6 have been reviewed and all options but the first have shortcomings which make them impractical. Siting public facilities at a **school** raises issues of ownership, shared management, legal liability and funding and does not guarantee greater use from the *one* school which gains the advantage, or from other schools. It has been found in fact, that schools providing a site for a public pool often expect to pay no or cheaper fees in exchange for providing the site.

Whether a new facility was **north or south** of the highway in Ararat is unlikely to encourage or discourage a school from running an aquatics program. The *lack* of a pool in town would.

As the following Chapter shows, there is insufficient space at **Alexandra Park** and there are limited use synergies with tennis or other sports pursued on the site.

Greenhill Lake is well out of town and as such would suffer a significant access disadvantage. While **tourists** may "top up" the use of a community pool, they are not the primary clients to be served and there is little evidence of any significant use being made of public swimming pools by them.

The former **Brucks** factory would have to be purchased and the existing buildings would be expensive to demolish or restructure. They are also reported to have asbestos in them.

Finally, **linking** aquatic facilities with other sports facilities is now a common strategy in modern aquatic leisure venues and this strategy has already been successfully applied by Council at the indoor leisure centre. It should also be pursued at any new or replacement venue.

4.5 The Pool User Surveys

Users of both the Ararat Solar Olympic Pool and the indoor leisure centre were surveyed as part of the present Study. Outdoor pool users were surveyed in January and February of 2005 and indoor users during February-March, 2005. A total of 109 outdoor pool users and 78 indoor pool users visiting alone or as members of a group were interviewed. Total outdoor pool group membership was 515 people, or an average of 5 per group and the indoor interviews covered 285 people at an average of 4.1 per group.

The results from both surveys are presented and compared in the following paragraphs.

4.5.1 The Pool Users

Use of the indoor and outdoor pools was dominated by females with these users outnumbering males two-to-one at both venues. This is obviously very different from the 51:49 percent ratio across the community as a whole and suggests that what is offered at both venues is not as attractive to men as to women.

In terms of the age of users, Table 4.1 below compares the distribution of the Ararat Rural City population with that of users interviewed at the indoor and outdoor pools. It is acknowledged that the sample sizes at the pools means that there will be a level of inaccuracy in the data collected, yet they do indicate the general distribution of users.

Table 4.1 indicates very clearly that there are significant sectors of the Ararat Rural City population who are not users of the pools or whose use is well below their proportion of the population. For instance, no outdoor pool users came from four of the oldest age groups in the community and no indoor pool users were recorded in the 20-24 years or the over 80s groups.

Further, the Table indicates that some age groups make very poor use of both pools when compared with their proportion of the population, these generally being the older age groups and for the indoor pool, adults in their 20s. These are coloured red in the Table. By comparison, others make far greater use of the pools than their proportion of the population. These groups, coloured green in the Table, are teenagers, young adults and people in their 30s with regard to the outdoor pool and people in their 30s and early 40s at the indoor pool.

Finally, it is evident that the indoor pool attracts users from across a wider range of age groups than does the outdoor pool.

Age Group (1)	Percent of Ararat Rural City Population	Percent of Outdoor Pool Users	Percent of Indoor Pool Users
10-14 years	7.5	**18.4**	4.6
15-19 years	5.6	**28.4**	6.1
20-24 years	4.3	**7.3**	0.0
25-29 years	4.9	4.6	3.0
30-34 years	6.0	**10.1**	**10.6**
35-39 years	7.01	**16.5**	**28.8**
40-44 years	7.5	6.4	**21.2**
45-49 years	7.8	7.3	6.1
50-54 years	7.4	3.7	6.1
55-59 years	6.4	1.8	3.0
60-64 years	5.6	0.9	3.0
65-69 years	4.7	0.0	3.0
70-74 years	4.6	0.9	1.5
75-79 years	3.6	0.0	3.0
80-84 years	2.1	0.0	0.0
85 years or over	2.0	0.0	0.0

Table 4.1: The age distribution of the Ararat Rural City Council population and of indoor and outdoor pool users, Ararat

(1) Children under 10 were not interviewed

The results in Table 4.1 are very disappointing given the importance of aquatics to community health, the quality of the recreational experiences which can be delivered and the investment Council has in the facilities. They indicate that at both venues, a great deal more needs to be done to provide facilities and programs which are relevant and attractive to wider age groups in the community. As the community has indicated in response to later survey questions, it is almost certain that a great deal more also needs to be done to promote and market the venues, to provide higher standard support facilities and to assist the community in accessing them. The

facilities can be criticised for not achieving as much as they should: but when they are not modernized, resourced or programmed to their capacity, such an outcome is not surprising.

4.5.2 The Origin of Pool Users

Users of both Ararat township pools were asked where they lived. Some 91 percent of the outdoor pool users lived in Ararat even though only the township contained only 63 percent of the City population at the 2001 Census. Two users came from Buangor and one each from Elmhurst, Moyston, Stawell, St Arnaud, Armstrong and Warrnambool. This highly restricted catchment again reflects the poor attractive powder of what is offered at the outdoor pool and almost certainly, the poor accessibility of the key user groups living outside Ararat township.

By comparison with the outdoor pool, the indoor pool attracted 63.6 percent of its users from Ararat township –the same as the town's proportion of the City population—with other users coming from some distance. In alphabetical order these origins were (with numbers over one and towns/districts outside Ararat Rural City in brackets):

Armstrong
Beaufort (Pyr Shire)
Crowlands (Pyr Shire)
Elmhurst
Glenpatrick (Pyr Shire)
Lake Bolac (3)
Moyston
Norval (?)
Rhymney
Stawell (4) (N Gramps Shire)
Streatham (3)
Tatyoon (5)
Westmere

Somewhat surprisingly, no users were recorded as coming from Willaura. Only 7 users from outside the City were interviewed. These data suggest that while the indoor pool is serving a larger catchment than the outdoor pool, it does not have a strong drawing power.

4.5.3 Frequency of Pool Use

Table 4.2 presents the survey results covering frequency of pool use.

Frequency	Outdoor Pool %	Indoor Pool %
Virtually every day	15	12
3-4 times a week	20	14
1-2 times a week	19	35
Several times a fortnight	8	5
Fortnightly	10	6
Once or twice only	13	12
Once	15	17

Table 4.2: Frequency of pool use, indoor and outdoor pools, Ararat

The data in Table 4.2 show that more outdoor pool users visited on a very regular basis than did indoor pool users and that virtually double the percentage of indoor users made 1-2 visits per week. Roughly equal percentages visited each venue in each of the less frequent visit categories. These data almost certainly reflect the differing availability and markets of the two venues with the outdoor pool catering for younger people seeking a social outlet over summer while the indoor venue caters more for regular, all year program users.

If the outdoor pool visit rate figures are extrapolated to the number of *individual* people making visits to the pool, the total is very small. To illustrate, if users who claim they visit every day actually do so, they account for approximately 140 visits each. If 1,000 different people used the pool and 15 percent (or 150 people) visited daily, then 140 visits by 150 people would generate 21,000 visits –double the averaged recent attendance. By extrapolation across each visit rate category, the data suggest that apart from school users, the outdoor pool presently only attracts somewhere between 350 and 500 different people from the Ararat community. This is very low, being no more than 4.5 to 6.5 percent of the town population. A similar analysis for the indoor pool suggests that it could be attracting somewhere around 2,200 different users, or around 20 percent of the total City population.

These differences highlight the fact that the facilities and programs which would attract far wider use rates to the outdoor pool are simply not provided and that the pool is essentially unchanged from how it was when originally built in the early 1960s. Thus, while the "performance" of the outdoor pool is very poor, dramatic change could be achieved if a wide range of other facilities and programs were provided in association with it. This is clearly evidenced by the experience of the indoor pool where hundreds of thousands of visits are generated by all year provision of a wide range of facilities, settings and *staffed* programs and activities. Were similar resources applied to the outdoor pool (albeit at *3.5 times* the level of subsidy) –or were the two venues brought together-- a similar outcome could undoubtedly be achieved.

4.5.4 Who the Outdoor Pool is Visited With

Asked who they visited the outdoor pool with, the vast majority of respondents –over 80 percent at each venue-- indicated that they went with family, friends or both. Some ten percent visited both as part of swim club activities.

4.5.5 Reasons for Visiting

Responses to a question on why the two venues were visited elicited quite different results. These are shown in Table 4.3 below:

Reason for Visit	Outdoor Pool %	Indoor Pool %
Social activities/fun	54	37
Sunbathing	13	0
Lessons	0	78
Swimming laps	12	24
Training/coaching	6	6
Health and fitness activities	10	27
Other	6	4

Table 4.3: Reasons for visiting indoor and outdoor pools, Ararat

The very different roles played by the two venues is evident from these results. Outdoor pool use is focused heavily on social activities while indoor use is dominated by lessons and health related programs and activities. As with the frequency of visits data, however, it is evident that the different uses very clearly reflect the facilities and programs provision which has been made at the two venues.

4.5.6 Visiting Other Pools

Some 59 percent of outdoor pool user and 55 percent of indoor pool users indicated that they visited other pools, although few other pools were listed. The most popular amongst outdoor pool users was the indoor pool (which attracted 18 percent of respondents) and the reverse applied to indoor users (with 27 % going to the outdoor pool). As such, the two pools provide a complementary service. The Ballarat and Horsham pools attracted 3 percent each of outdoor

pool users while the Lake Bolac and Stawell pools (both 10%) are the main additional venues visited by users of the indoor pool.

These results again highlight the differing roles of the two venues: users of the outdoor pools go to the indoor pool to use services not available at the outdoor venue while (the low use of) other outdoor venues clearly occurs while on trips, holidays or club events. By comparison, the majority of indoor pool users use the outdoor pool *which is nearest to them* or because they offer facilities not available at either of the Ararat pools eg: water slides, birthday parties, birthday club.

4.5.7 Future Action by Council

Question 7 of both user surveys stated *"Ararat Rural City Council wants to know how it can best meet community swimming needs in the future".* It then explained that the outdoor pool is in very poor condition and may need to be replaced. Several options for the future were listed and respondents were asked to indicate which they supported. The options and the response rates are recorded below:

Future Action Option	Outdoor Pool Response	Indoor Pool Response
If possible, keep the outdoor pool and upgrade it, and add new things to it to make it more attractive	83	46
If space permits, build a new *indoor* 50 metre pool at the Ararat Leisure Centre and close the outdoor pool	4	20
If space permits, build a new *outdoor* 50 metre pool at the Ararat Leisure Centre and close the outdoor pool	15	11
Build a new 50 metre pool somewhere else in Ararat and close the existing outdoor pool	4	3
Close the outdoor pool down and do not build a replacement pool at all	0	6

Table 4.4: Responses to action options for the outdoor pool, Ararat

These results show a clear preference by users of both pools for the retention of the existing venue with both an upgrading of the pool and the addition of a range of new attractions –although support was far lower amongst indoor pool users. Indoor pool users also gave quite strong support to adding an indoor 50 metre pool to the indoor leisure centre while users of both pools gave weak support to adding a 50 metre outdoor pool to the indoor centre. Support for building a new outdoor pool elsewhere in Ararat and for closing the outdoor pool and not replacing it was very weak.

4.5.8 Improvements for the Outdoor Pool

Asked what improvements they would like to see at the both pool, users listed a wide range of initiatives, with some gaining very strong support. The key items are recorded below with the percentage of responses recorded in brackets.

Outdoor Pool User Suggestions (%)	Indoor Pool User Suggestions (%)
Amenities/facilities upgrade (31)	Diving pool (11)
Water slide (28)	Shade improvements (9)
Diving board (23)	Toilet/change upgrade 8)
Activities/programs (8)	Water slides (8)
Promotion/marketing (7)	New toddler pool and play areas (6)
Shade (5)	Social areas (4)
Children's facilities (5)	Disabled /pram access (3)
Seating, storage (5)	Hot pool water (2)
Warm showers (3)	Food/kiosk upgrade (2)
Better ground maintenance (2)	Parking (2)

Table 4.5: Suggested improvements to the outdoor and indoor pools, Ararat

There is a considerable degree of agreement between users interviewed at the outdoor and

indoor pool regarding what should be done at the outdoor pool. Significantly, however, users put a far greater priority on improving the amenities and facilities.

4.5.9 Sites for a New Pool

Respondents to both the indoor and outdoor pool users survey were asked "If you think a new pool should be built somewhere else in Ararat, where do you suggest?" In both instances, the existing site or in association with the indoor pool were given the greatest and roughly equal support. Other suggestions included near schools, Kokoda Park, the former Technical School Ovals, near the skate park, on the Alexandra Gardens, and near the town centre (eg: Target car park). With the exception of the last site, all of these suggestions have been evaluated in detail and are reported on in the following chapter.

4.5.10 Other Action Suggestions

Respondents to both surveys were given the opportunity to list other ideas and suggestions for action. Many of these essentially repeated the issues raised previously while others listed what are essentially management and programming issues which should be reviewed and acted on as appropriate by the YMCA. Suggestions from both surveys which have not been raised previously are reported below.

> An outdoor pool not only just open during summer maybe half yearly.
>
> Clean it more often
>
> Do programs that encourage young people to visit pool
>
> Encourage the schools to have activity afternoons (for fun) at the outdoor pool in the first weeks of Term 1.
>
> Family change room.
>
> Keep pool hours consistent we have come to the pool several times to find it closed when it is advertised as open.
>
> Reduce family membership prices, encourage more families to use the outdoor pool.
>
> Slightly less restrictions on the children (jumping) into deeper pool
>
> Have a road near pedestrian underpass leading to pool so you do not have to drive around footy oval to get to the pool.
>
> In summer maybe some days of later closing in the evenings
>
> Whilst the swimming club activities are very strong I think there is opportunity to grab more recreational swimmers/sunbathers thru recreation/entertainment.
>
> More flexible swimming lessons (re levels and times) for those living in rural areas (Streatham, Westmere and Lake Bolac.)
>
> Increase public awareness of benefits of swimming and water activities. It takes a few visits before people adopt swimming as a recreation
>
> a changeroom just for parents to change children only.

4.6 Consultations: Overview

The program of consultations with the Ararat Rural City community has been broad and has involved users of the existing aquatic and dry leisure facilities, Councillors, Council officers, YMCA professionals and members of the YMCA board, teachers, health providers and a number of members of the general community.

The consultations have identified a range of issues in relation to the future of aquatic facilities in Ararat township. It is evident that there is some strong support for the replacement of the outdoor pool –although there is contention as to whether there is a justifiable *need* for a replacement and what *size* of pool should be built as a replacement.

The consultations have identified a range of issues with regard to who the existing indoor and outdoor pools are and are not serving and this has highlighted the fact that neither pool has the capacity to meet all the needs which exist in the Ararat Rural City community. As a number of interviewees indicated, bringing the indoor and outdoor facilities together, adding a range of new facilities to them and taking a far strong marketing, promotional and programming approach would achieve a great deal.

In the following Chapter, many of the consultations findings are taken further through the development of a recommended facilities provision mix and an assessment of a range of siting options and strategies.

5
Recommended Provision Mix and Siting Options for Aquatic Facilities in Ararat

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapters of this report have identified a range of factors impacting on the form of any future aquatics provision in Ararat and the views of a cross-section of the Ararat community. That material indicated that the replacement of the outdoor Ararat Solar Olympic Pool with a similar facility will add little to the leisure and recreation opportunities available to the Ararat and wider Council community. In fact, the needs identified will require a wider provision mix.

This chapter assesses the range of development opportunities which might be pursued by Ararat Rural City Council and the sites at which action might be taken.

Given the planning principles which were developed in Chapter 3, the various options for action on aquatic facilities in the City should be viewed in the context of:

- Which strategy will best contribute to achieving good planning and design principles
- Whether there is a need for a 50 metre outdoor pool in Ararat Rural City
- Whether there are alternate outdoor venues which the community could use if the outdoor pool was closed
- If the outdoor pool was retained at its present site, whether there are opportunities for co-locating other recreation opportunities to that site in keeping with the principles
- The relationship between outdoor pools in Ararat and other Council pools, and
- Whether it may be more appropriate to co-locate the pool at a *new* site with other recreation and community services or where other facilities can be added to it.

Deciding whether to retain, upgrade or replace the outdoor pool must also be assessed in terms of the types of need which are currently met, the opportunities which would be lost if it was not upgraded or replaced, and what other needs might have a higher priority for Council resources.

5.2 Planning Principles and the Recommended Mix of Facilities

The planning team which prepared this report has undertaken a detailed review of the material presented in the previous chapters, and in particular, of the benefits of leisure (Chapter 1), demographics (Chapter 2), leisure and aquatic provision trends (Chapter 2), past planning reports (Chapter 3) and the community and professional consultations (Chapter 4).

This review has led to the identification of first, a set of planning and design principles and second, a recommended mix of components which should be considered to *replace* the outdoor pool or be provided in association with a replacement pool. The principles are listed in column 1 of Table 5.1 and a commentary on each component is provided in column 2.

5.2.1 Planning and Design Principles

The future of the outdoor pool in Ararat cannot be determined in isolation from the indoor leisure centre, from other public pools in Ararat Rural City or from the wider, regional provision of pools. This is largely because the small markets available to support facilities in Ararat, across the wider Rural City and across the region mean that duplication will threaten the financial viability of what has already been provided. Further, duplication would significantly reduce the chances of obtaining government funding assistance for new provision.

In addition, the approach to modern leisure facilities planning, together with Council's recently-adopted Recreation Plan and Council's corporate policy directions highlight the need to pursue a more structured and integrated approach to the provision of community resources.

With regard to aquatic and other leisure facilities, decisions regarding *what* is provided and *where* it is provided have been guided by a number of key principles. These are listed with a brief explanation below:

Co-ordination: Provision across different facilities must be coordinated so as to avoid duplication and inappropriate development timing and to achieve the most effective use of Council and community resources

Enhanced operational and financial viability: Provision initiatives should also seek to achieve stronger operational and financial performance by extending venue markets, by achieving better use of staff and community skills, and by capturing new markets

Provision integration: Wherever possible, practical and appropriate, new facilities should be brought together so as to reduce the cost of services such as parking, utilities connections, management etc and to encourage cross-use and shared use of facilities

Flexibility: What is provided should not be fixed in the uses which can be made of it. Rather, it should have the capacity to be used for other activities and by other groups in the community as needs change

Diversity of opportunity: Provision must meet the needs of as wide a cross-section of the community as possible

Quality: Facilities and programs must be of an appropriate standard if they are to deliver the optimum experiences and benefits to the community

Multiple use: What is provided must have the capacity to meet more than one major use *at the same time*

Equity of access: People of all abilities should have the same ease of access to the facilities and programs which are offered

Safety of access and use: Users of the facilities must be assured of safe travel to and access to the venue, and

Shared resourcing: Opportunities for involving other providers and agencies should be explored and encouraged.

5.2.2 The Recommended Mix of Facilities

Modern aquatic leisure venue include a range of facilities so they can accommodate a mix of well-structured and targeted activities and operate at their financial optimum. The list of facilities recommended for provision as part of the replacement of the outdoor pool in Ararat is listed in Table 5.1. The list has been structured to complement the facilities already provided at the indoor leisure centre**. It should be noted that a., b. and c. of the Table are alternatives.**

While the scale of the Ararat market might be considered insufficient to justify a new 50 metre outdoor pool, the discussion in Chapter 4 indicates that it offers opportunities not available elsewhere in Ararat Rural City and as such warrants serious consideration. The capital cost is greater than that of a 25 metre outdoor pool, but as indicated in Chapter 6, it is not a disproportionately greater cost in the overall total package of costs. And as illustrated by the existing outdoor pool, the operational subsidy of a 50 metre pool is quite small, and in fact, less than one-third of that of the indoor leisure centre. However, if Council determines that it cannot afford or justify a 50 metre pool or the additional cost of building it, it can rest assured that all the needs met by the 50 metre facility can also be met by a professionally-designed 25 metre pool.

The key uses for which 50 metre pools are favoured are long distance lap swimming and competitions. It is accepted that long distance swimmers have to turn twice as often in a 25 metre pool but the number of such swimmers in Ararat could not be used in isolation to justify provision of a 50 metre pool. One of the other major complaints of long distance swimmers, *other* swimmers, can be addressed by better use scheduling. Competition swimmers can compete at

the international level in 25 metre pools so the shorter length is not an issue. What *is* important, however, is having the right depth, starting blocks, touch pads, marshalling areas, sufficient change and storage space, spectator areas and areas for those organizing events and recording results.

Component	Commentary
a. A 50 metre outdoor competition pool	Such a facility would meet the needs of swim club members, committed lap swimmers and senior school needs. The emphasis is on "competition" as the indoor pool at the Ararat Rural City Recreation and Aquatic Centre cannot support competitive use The level of demand to justify a 50 metre pool has not been sufficiently demonstrated to make this scale of pool "mandatory". The higher capital cost will also be a deterrent OR
b. A 50 metre outdoor pool with capacity to enclose 25 metres over winter	This is an alternative to a. which offers the capacity to have a summer outdoor pool and an all year 25 metre competition and training pool. While offering greater provision flexibility, the need for a 50 metre pool has not been sufficiently demonstrated while a winter competition pool would be certain to attract market share away from the existing indoor pool OR
c. A 25 metre outdoor competition pool with perhaps, some competitive diving capacity	This is an alternative to a. and b. Provided the 25 metre pool was supported with spectator and club/group chance and marshalling areas, this would meet all the summer school, competition and carnival needs which have been identified
d. Water play park within *and* outside pool compound	Water play is an important tool in water familiarisation for young children. It also provides a further important use dimension which helps to attract families to aquatic venues. The suggested provision of some water play outside the pool compound is both a tool to attract the community to the venue and a reflection of the fact that not all members of the community can afford to pay to visit an aquatic centre on a frequent basis
e. Informal outdoor dry activity areas/sports eg: beach volleyball	One of the greatest shortcomings of the existing outdoor pool is that apart from swimming and informal socializing, there is nothing to attract or retain young people. These and other age-related facilities should be provided and, at times programmed, in the pool compound
f. Spectator seating and shade to the equivalent of that at the existing pool	If the needs met by the existing outdoor pool are to be met by a new facility –and this should be a primary objective— then a shaded spectator
g. Indoor warm water program pool of say 15-20 metres by 4 lanes with ramp, hoist, steps	The need for facilities to provide health and wellbeing programs for older residents and rehabilitation programs is growing in all Australian communities. Such facilities can also provide learn to swim opportunities for all ages. In some new venues, warm water program pools are being provided ahead of other aquatic facilities because of the level of assessed need
h. 2-3 multi-use program rooms eg: 1 of 50 sq. m., two of 100 sq. m.	The effective use of aquatic facilities is greatly enhanced by multi-use program rooms. These allow a wide range of support activities and programs to be offered. With an outdoor-only pool they permit all year use of elements of the venue
i. Specialist consulting room	Consulting rooms allow a range of specialist services to be provided in association with aquatic and dry health and fitness facilities and programs

Table 5.1: The recommended mix of facility components to replace the Ararat Solar Olympic Pool

5.3 Optional Action Strategies for the Outdoor Pool

In the light of the above, Table 5.2 presents a number of optional strategies for the future development or replacement of the outdoor Solar Olympic Pool in Ararat and assesses the strengths and weaknesses of each. The options are discussed below. *It should be noted that government funding would almost certainly not be available for capital works designed to replace the outdoor pool.*

5.3.1 Close the outdoor pool and do not replace it

This option should be considered given the capital cost of a replacement (as indicated in the following Chapter), the level of use which the facility generates and the fact that there are alternate ways to meet the needs currently provided for by the venue. These latter strategies include adding outdoor water features at the indoor leisure centre and providing a community bus service to take lap swimmers, club users and schools to the pools in Lake Bolac, Willaura or even Ballarat.

However, it is the view of the planning team that this option is unlikely to be deemed acceptable on the following grounds:

a. The Ararat Rural City Recreation and Aquatic Centre pool does not have the capacity to offer the same programs as the outdoor as shallow water depths limit starting dives for races, there is a lack of spectator areas and there are limited marshalling and change facilities

b. There is already a lack of outdoor social areas at the indoor centre and there is limited space to provide more

c. A community desire for the outdoor setting offered by the outdoor pool

d. The distance to other pools in Ararat Rural City, to other 50 metre pools outside the City and the cost of busing people there

e. The inability of other pools in Ararat Rural City to fulfill the role played by the Ararat Solar Olympic Pool due to shorter lengths and limited support facilities

f. The likely political and negative community response to losing a community asset which many helped to build and continue to use,

g. Some desire to retain the capacity to offer cold water familiarization programs, and

h. The fact that Council has deemed it to be appropriate to continue with a program of remedial works at the Willaura pool, costing over $100,000 in 2004, despite its age and even lower attendance figures.

It must also be acknowledged that if improvements were made to the indoor aquatic facilities, some of the needs which the outdoor pool presently meets could be accommodated there. The possible scope of these improvements is outlined in section 5.5.

5.3.2 Retain the 50 metre outdoor pool at the existing site and upgrade or replace it

As Table 5.2 indicates, this option has a number of positive aspects, the most significant being that the site is attractive and well known and that the existing pool tank would be very suitable for inserting a Myrtha-style replacement pool.

The Myrtha pool is an Italian design. It consists of stainless steel sheets which are plastic/ polymer-coated, are pre-fabricated and are bolted and plastic-welded together inside the old pool tank. The old tank provides a support frame and actually strengthens as it dries out and as chlorine percolates out of the concrete. New pipework is installed in the space between the old pool tank and the insert and is thus readily accessible. The old pipework is then abandoned.

Despite the strengths of this option, there are some shortcomings these being predominantly site related. The most significant of these –as with *all* subsequent options—are:

The capital cost of replacement (with the replacement of the change and support

facilities being as great as the pool replacement).

Perpetuation of the existing site deficiencies

The site cannot easily accommodate other new facilities, programs and services. To a great extent, any new development would be compromised by the shortcomings of the late 1950s-early 1960s planning of the original pool

The existing outdoor pool market would not be strengthened or extended, and

Council would continue to be committed to operating two aquatics complexes

5.3.3 Replace the 50 metre pool at the existing site with a 25 metre outdoor pool

This option has several strengths, the most important of which are the capital and operational cost savings which would be achieved. Although it would be argued that such a strategy will lose the only 50 metre pool in Ararat Rural City, having such a facility cannot be justified by the level of the market which needs a 50 metre pool. Further, FINA, the international body governing swimming, sanctions 25 metre or "short course" championships and as such, a 50 metre pool is not essential for competition purposes. Provided appropriate spectating, change and marshalling areas were provided, a 25 metre pool could meet all club, school and carnival needs.

However, replacing the 50 metre pool with a 25 metre pool alone at the existing site would not strengthen or extend the existing outdoor pool market and Council would continue to be committed to operating two aquatics complexes.

5.3.4 Replace the outdoor 50 metre outdoor pool with a 25 metre outdoor pool outdoor pool and provide a mix of other aquatic and dry facilities

This option has considerable attraction in that it would allow all existing uses to continue while providing a mix of new facilities for new users. These new facilities could include for instance, dry health, fitness and social facilities, café/kiosk facilities opening onto the botanic gardens and indoor warm water program/therapy and play facilities.

The major deficiencies with this option lie in the capital cost, the constraints imposed by the site and the need to continue to operate two aquatics complexes.

5.3.5 Relocate the outdoor pool to a new site and provide a 50 metre or 25 metre outdoor pool and augment this with a mix of other indoor and outdoor aquatic and dry health and fitness and community facilities

As the information in Table 5.2 indicates, this option is attractive in that it offers the ability to develop modern aquatic facilities and a range of associated other aquatic and dry sporting, social, educational, health, community and possibly, commercial, facilities on an unconstrained site. Further, the constraints imposed by the old site would be avoided totally.

Although a 50 metre pool is seen as desirable by many in the community, as discussed in 3., this is not necessary as a 25 metre pool can meet all needs and at a substantially lower cost.

The greatest strength of this option is that it would allow the addition of a potentially very diverse range of other facilities and programs over time and the progressive relocation of the existing indoor leisure centre.

The latter capacity is important given the deficiencies associated with the existing site (safety, access, no capacity to expand, aged design) and the fact that the infrastructure there is beginning to age (see discussion on p. 5). If pursued, the strategy would allow all indoor and outdoor aquatic and dry health and fitness facilities to be brought together at one location. It would also allow the existing indoor leisure centre to be sold for other more appropriate commercial uses and as such, generate funds toward the redevelopment program. The constraints of this option are the same as those of all other options: capital cost, the small market and the potential operational deficit when capital replacement allowances are made.

Table 5.2: Optional action strategies for the future of an outdoor pool in Ararat

Option	Strengths	Weaknesses
1. Close and remove the existing outdoor pool an do not replace it	Save the capital cost of replacement Save the annual operational subsidies presently being incurred Return the land to the Gardens and/or use for other recreational purposes Free up capital and operational costs for other Council initiatives	Loss of only 50 m. pool in the Council area Loss of only outdoor pool in Ararat, the Rural City's major urban centre Loss of venue capable of accommodating school, swim club and other carnivals Loss of summer social venue for families, children, teenagers, lap swimmers Cost of demolition and removal Likely to generate a negative political impact in the community
2. Retain an outdoor 50 metre pool at the existing site and upgrade or replace it	Retention of popular outdoor summer recreation resource Site is known to the community Retention of pool in a high quality existing parkland setting Potential to insert a stainless-steel based "Myrtha" pool into the tank of the existing pool would save time and money although it could result in fewer or narrower lanes Potential to develop services to both the pool and the parklands	Capital cost of replacement Very weak market justification for replacement of a 50 metre pool A replacement pool as the sole initiative would not have any measurable impact on the market served As indicated in Chapter 6, the venue would incur significant operational losses once asset replacement budget allocations were allowed for The total replacement of main and toddler pool and all change, amenities and management buildings would entail the probable need to close the pool during one summer season. Starting at a new site would avoid this Continued issues relating to venue safety, vandalism, access and parking Continuing serious site deficiencies regarding access, parking, safety, vandalism will continue unless extensive remedial works are initiated (eg: rail underpass widened; provision of sealed paths; installation of extensive lighting; extension of car parking; possible provision of road access from Girdlestone St) Major constraints on the capacity to add a mix of other facilities unless an extensive area of land was excised from the Alexandra Gardens Continued operation of two aquatic venues in Ararat with efficiency and cost impacts Continued decline in operational and financial viability
3. Replace the outdoor 50 metre pool at the existing site with a 25 metre outdoor pool	Would save on capital costs Would still permit competitive use to national short course standards provided spectator spaces were retained Potential to insert a stainless-steel based "Myrtha" pool into the tank of the existing pool would save time and money Would allow provision of additional types of aquatic and social spaces in the remaining 25 metres vacated by the former pool Potential to develop services to both the pool and the parklands	Significant capital cost Would not increase the market reach As with the 50 metre replacement option, the venue would incur significant operational losses once asset replacement budget allocations were allowed for Loss of only 50 metre pool in the Council area This would duplicate the existing indoor 25 metre pool although it is reiterated that the indoor pool cannot meet a number of market and user needs which are currently met by the outdoor pool Continued operation of two aquatic venues in Ararat with efficiency and cost impacts

Table 5.2 continued: Optional action strategies for the future of an outdoor pool in Ararat

Option	Strengths	Weaknesses
4. Replace the existing outdoor 50 metre pool with a 25 m. outdoor pool and provide a mix of other aquatic and dry facilities in association with this	Retention of popular outdoor summer recreation resource Site is known to the community Retention of high quality existing parkland setting Potential to insert a 25 metre stainless-steel based "Myrtha" pool into the tank of the existing pool would save time and money (although it could result in fewer or narrower lanes) Opportunity to insert an enclosed warmer water program pool and toddlers pool in remainder of original pool shell Diversification of the facilities and programs offered to the community dependent on the mix of additional aquatic and non-aquatic facilities which could be accommodated Strengthened operational and financial viability of venue Potential to develop services to both the pool and the parklands	Capital cost of replacing both pools and all change, amenities and management buildings Need to close the pool during one summer season Continued, and potentially *more* serious deficiencies relating to venue safety, vandalism, access and parking Major constraints on the capacity to add additional components due to site size and configuration; probable need to use part of the botanic gardens to meet space needs; proposals for associated football facilities would put these in the wrong location re the sun and would exacerbate pool access problems Continued operation of two aquatic venues in Ararat with efficiency and cost impacts Continuing and greater impact on Alexandra Gardens
5. Relocate the outdoor pool to a new site and provide a 50 metre or 25 metre outdoor pool and augment this with a mix of other indoor and outdoor aquatic and dry health and fitness and community facilities.	Offers ability to develop modern aquatic facilities and a range of associated other aquatic and dry sporting, social, health, educational, community and commercial facilities on an unconstrained site Avoids the shortcomings of the existing site Allows selection of a site which offers long term staged additions in response to changing community needs Allows a clearer determination of the pools which are needed and possible alternate provision configurations and mixes Allows possible long-term co-location of new facilities with other recreation and community/health resources Allows long term relocation of all required elements of the existing indoor leisure centre to the new site to eliminate management and servicing duplication and to allow use of the indoor centre land for other more economic uses (and financial return to Council) Permits return of present outdoor pool site to parkland and other related uses	Capital cost New site would be less well known than existing location New site might not be perceived to be as accessible as existing site Could alienate existing uses

5.3.6 Overview: The Implications of the Options

The foregoing material and Table 5.2 have differing implications depending on the perspective taken:

From a **financial** perspective, the details provided in Chapter 6 indicate that whatever proposal is pursued, there will be a high capital cost. And when asset replacement allowances are applied, there will also be a high annual "sinking fund" cost. These costs may preclude Council proceeding with any replacement program and lead to the eventual closing of the outdoor pool. Council will thus need to determine whether it can afford these costs.

If Council determines that it cannot afford either or both of the capital and annual operating costs, it will then need to assess what capacity there is to enhance the existing indoor centre and the other outdoor pools in the City.

From a **market support** perspective, the population of the Ararat township and surrounding areas is expected to remain small –and perhaps to decline further. The ageing of the community will also reduce the market *unless concerted programming efforts are made and unless new facilities and services suitable to an older community are provided*. It is improbable that the population will ever be sufficient to allow the outdoor pool to operate at a level which will cover operational and replacement costs, not to mention capital costs. Yet, the research reported in Chapter 4, and research conducted in other municipalities, indicates that an outdoor pool attracts quite different users and meets quite different needs to an indoor venue.

Further, Ararat Rural City's remaining two pools are in a worse market position than those in Ararat as they service no more than one-third of the Council population between them. It is also certain that *all other* outdoor sports facilities and informal parks and gardens receive heavy annual operational subsidies from Council. Despite its shortcomings, the outdoor pool in Ararat attracts more use than many other recreation resources provided across the Council area. As such, market share and size should not be the sole determinant of whether the project proceeds or not.

From a **leisure opportunities provision** perspective, the foregoing evidence (together with that on benefits in Chapter 1 and the community needs reported in Chapter 4), indicates that replacement of the outdoor pool would allow residents of Ararat and surrounding areas to continue to enjoy the experiences provided by the present facilities. *These experiences are different to those gained from the use of the indoor pool.* Were *further* facilities and programs to be added which met wider health and wellbeing needs, it could be expected that the benefits would be extended into the wider community. Research evidence strongly suggests that these benefits generally exceed those offered by many other recreation facilities and programs. As such, from a community health, wellbeing and recreation perspective, every endeavour should be made to retain and enhance the opportunities provided by an outdoor pool.

From a **political perspective**, it would be very difficult to close the existing outdoor pool and not replace it. It is certain that seeking to do this will spark a strong protect campaign in the community and potentially, within Council.

From a **project development** perspective, the evidence suggests that the last of the five options discussed above –developing a new aquatic leisure centre at a new site—is the superior option to pursue. This is because it overcomes the siting and locational deficiencies of the present venue and provides a basis for the long term development of one integrated indoor and outdoor aquatic leisure venue in Ararat. Even if there was *no* relocation of facilities from the existing indoor leisure centre, it would allow still other facilities and programs to be collocated with it.

In **conclusion**, it is the view of the planning team that despite the large financial commitment required, retention of an outdoor pool in Ararat will allow important recreation, health and education benefits to be offered to the community.

However, these benefits will be somewhat restricted as to who they are delivered to and a far stronger commitment to programming than is presently applied will be needed. Simply replacing the ageing outdoor 50 metre pool with another outdoor pool (whether of 50 or 25 metres), should not be pursued. Rather, any new provision should allow for a range of further indoor and outdoor aquatic and dry facilities to be provided *in association with* a replacement outdoor pool. These additional components should be complementary to the outdoor pool and should not duplicate provision at the indoor leisure centre. They may well, over time, however, replace ageing facilities at the indoor leisure centre.

5.4 Development Sites for Replacement Aquatic Facilities

As indicated above, the planning team believes that if a new outdoor pool is built in Ararat, it should be built at a new site which overcomes the shortcomings and constraints of the existing site. It should also allow a range of additional indoor and outdoor aquatic and dry health and fitness, community, social, education and possibly, commercial components to be added over the coming years.

In order to identify an appropriate site, six alternate venues were assessed. These were, in alphabetical order:

1. Alexandra Oval
2. Centenary Park
3. Former caravan park site (skate park)
4. Gordon Street Reserve
5. Ararat Rural City Recreation and Aquatic Centre, and
6. Kokoda Park.

Table 5.3 assesses the weaknesses and strengths of each of these sites. In assessing them, a minimum size of 10-15,000 square metres (ie: 1 to 1.5 ha.) was adopted as being essential to ensure that long term, as yet unforeseen facility additions can be made over the coming 40-50 years.

Several sites identified through the research program have been rejected because of (a) their location, (b) they are not in Council/Crown ownership and/or (c) likely redevelopment costs. These were Richardson Oval in Golf Links Road (location, ownership), the former Bruck Mill in Lowe Street (location, ownership, condition), the Showgrounds (location), and Green Hill Lake (location).

The sites detailed in Tables 5.3 are those found to be appropriate for consideration *at the time of this Study* (ie: 2005). If Council put off making a final decision on the future of a new aquatic leisure venue for several years or if the outdoor pool was forced to close, a number of other sites, including those rejected above, may warrant reassessing before new development decisions were made.

With regard to the sites reviewed in Table 5.3, **Alexandra Oval** was found to have severe space and access constraints while the opportunity to co-locate with tennis or football would be impractical physically and would offer little of benefit to the different activities.

The **former caravan park** site was found to be low-lying and narrow, the latter issue meaning that properties to the south would need to be purchased to provide adequate sound ground and sufficient space.

Centenary Park has an initial attraction given its size. However, it is poorly located with regard to access and future residential growth in the town. More importantly, it is the only multiple oval sports reserve owned by the Rural City. This strength should not be lost by building a new aquatic centre on it.

In the past, Council has sought to negotiate a development and use agreement with the Education Department regarding **Gordon Street** and has gained little to encouragement it in this process. As such, it would be inappropriate to pursue this option at present. The relatively inaccessible location and the surrounding industrial landuses also make this site inappropriate.

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Alexandra Oval: the only section of the site capable of accommodating a new aquatic leisure centre is on the north-east corner (shown here), unless the tennis courts are resumed and relocated. Even this action would have a major detrimental impact on car parking and access and hence, on the effective use of the oval for field sports

The **Ararat Rural City Recreation and Aquatic Centre** site is already overdeveloped. A 50 metre outdoor pool could only be fitted onto the site if the gymnastics building was demolished and if the laneway and former hotel between the site and the railway were acquired. A 25 metre pool could fit on the remaining outdoor area but would require the whole of this space leaving no room for any other provision needs to be met. However, the toddlers pool could be converted to a warm water program pool and wet and dry outdoor play areas could be provided.

Centenary Park. This site suffers from poor access. It has the two playing fields and this is the only Council-owned site with such a capacity. As such it should not be alienated for other uses.

The Ararat Rural City Recreation and Aquatic Centre showing the only space available for further development unless existing buildings are demolished. This space has some potential for actions which do not use all the open area.

Kokoda Park is an attractive, single-ground playing field which is underused and little by way of useful infrastructure. It is close to the town centre and accessible by road and could be well-serviced by cycle/walking paths.

The **Kokoda Park** oval is underused and has what are apparently close to derelict service buildings on it. The Park is readily accessible from the town centre via the Pyrenees Highway and could be linked with cycle and walking trails to the town centre, the Alexandra Gardens and residential areas. The site is of sufficient size to accommodate all demands which might be made on it. As such, and in the light of the shortcomings of the other venues, Kokoda Park will be recommended at the conclusion of this report that if Council determines to proceed with the development of a new outdoor pool in Ararat.

Table 5.3: The weaknesses and strengths of alternate venues for a new outdoor pool and other associated facilities

Site Option	Strengths	Weaknesses
1. Alexandra Oval, Lowe Street	Potential for co-location and integrated development with oval users, tennis, netball and J Ward	Site size is generally insufficient to allow long term flexibility and optimum co-location capacity unless at least half the tennis and netball courts are relocated and unless land through to the perimeter of the J Ward buildings was used Would have a detrimental impact on car parking for and access to the Alexandra Oval Would require extensive excavation to achieve a flat site Accessibility from town centre is poorer than to the existing pool site, especially for pedestrians. Vehicle access would require use of the Western Highway to the north-west as the road off Lowe Street would most probably need to be closed Co-location of aquatic facilities with field sports do not offer significant synergies Co-location with field sports social facilities (as proposed within the community) can raise problems regarding access, competing uses, liquor licenses etc Limited ability on overcoming access and parking problems associated with the existing site
2. Centenary Park, Marx Crescent, Tatyoon Rd and Princes St	Large two-playing field reserve which is presently under-used A range of indoor and outdoor sporting, recreational and social facilities could be accommodated including eg: relocated skate park, cycling trails, internal and district walking and cycling trails, café within the compound and serving the park	On the south-eastern fringe of the town where future growth is expected to be limited Access only possible via residential streets Reported drainage problems The area required for the provision of extensive aquatic and indoor facilities is a potential threat to the long term flexible use of the site, as this is one of few multi-ground sports reserves in Ararat or across the Rural City as a whole
3. Former caravan park site (skate park)	Central location on the Pyrenees Highway which would give the facility a high profile Could accommodate a range of indoor and outdoor sporting, recreational and social facilities including eg: cycling trails, internal and district walking and cycling trails linking to Gardens, café within the compound and serving the park	Potential drainage and flooding problems Site is almost certainly too small and would require the purchase of houses and other buildings along Palmerston Street
4. Gordon Street Reserve, Gordon Street	Large two-playing field reserve with capacity to accommodate short and long term developments	Not owned by Council Recent Council difficulties in seeking a long term use arrangement with the Education Department could recur On the perimeter of residential development Surrounded by industrial sites

Site Option	Strengths	Weaknesses
5. Ararat Rural City Recreation and Aquatic Centre, Western Highway	The major aquatic and indoor leisure/fitness facilities would be brought together at one site Considerable management and operational expense savings could be achieved Extension of the outdoor pool opening season would be permitted	Any additions would create a gross overdevelopment of the site The site would be unable to accommodate all the facilities or program needs of the community over the coming years so the development of another site could be required The purchase of adjoining properties would most probably be required if all development needs were to be met Parking and access problems would be exacerbated Space pressure on already overcrowded facilities would increase
6. Kokoda Park, Wilson and McLellan Streets	Attractive, single oval which is under-used Close to the town centre In area of major projected future urban growth Good accessibility via Pyrenees Highway Capacity for trail/pathway links along creek from the Gardens to Cemetery Creek In area of projected future town growth and urban renewal Existing buildings on site would not be wasted as they have been condemned Existing sporting uses could be relocated to other grounds and encourage use consolidation	Weaker accessibility from majority of existing town population who live south of the Western Highway and railway Remote from Ararat Community College and Ararat West Primary School The relocation of existing sporting uses would be required

5.5 Fallback Options

A further issue which needs to be addressed is what **alternate courses of action** Council might pursue if it determined that it does not have the financial capacity to (a) replace the existing outdoor venue with a new, multi-facility development or (b) to cover the projected asset replacement costs of such a centre. The most likely options are:

1. Continue to repair the outdoor pool until the capital cost of doing so becomes prohibitive and then close it and encourage/assist the community to transfer its use to the indoor pool or the remaining outdoor pools in Willaura and Lake Bolac
2. Replace the outdoor pool with a 50 metre or 25 metre insert and replace the change, toilet and service buildings
3. Initiate further works at the indoor leisure centre in order to replace some elements of the outdoor pool when it is forced to close eg: enhanced outdoor lawn areas, water play, shade, social areas, barbeques, beach volleyball
4. Bus community members wishing to use an outdoor pool to Willaura, Lake Bolac and/or Ballarat depending on their needs.

Option 1 could be expected to generate a negative political response but if the reasons for the strategy were sufficiently explained to the community, they might be accepted over time, particularly if option 3. was to be pursued as well.

If **Option 2** was pursued in isolation it would achieve little beyond meeting current outdoor pool needs and condemn Council to maintaining the site with all its inherent restrictions. However, apart from allowing the existing facility to eventually close (as in option 1), it would be the least cost strategy. An alternative would be to take the redevelopment one step further and to add other pools to the facility. This capacity is further explained in Chapter 6.

Option 3 could achieve some positive outcomes but would mean the gross over-development of the existing venue and create a less-than-ideal outcome. The mix of initiatives which should be considered to achieve the most effective outcome if this course of action was pursued, includes:

a. Reconstruction of the existing toddler pool area to convert this to a warm water program/learn to swim/health pool and conversion of the adjacent management office to a specialist change and service delivery suite

b. Construction of an interactive outdoor water play area with sprinklers, play hoses, mini-slides etc in part of the present lawn area

c. Assessment of the capacity to raise the surrounds of the main pool to increase the water depth to a minimum of 1.1 metres to permit effective club use

d. Extension of the north-facing indoor concourse area to allow it to accommodate mobile, stackable seating for use during carnivals

e. Provision of outdoor facilities which encourage/support social, barbeque, event, informal sport and other types of activities

f. Rebuilding of unused squash courts to provide more dry health and fitness space and multi-purpose program rooms, and

g. Construction of a pedestrian bridge over the Highway.

Option 4 could be applied as a short term strategy while other works were underway in Ararat. However, it is unlikely that it would generate significant use of the other pools after 2-3 seasons except, perhaps, for club and school events using superior facilities in Ballarat. Unfortunately, even the busing to Ballarat is unlikely to be highly successful as City of Ballarat facilities are not of a good regional standard. Ballarat residents seeking advanced coaching and competition currently have to travel to Melbourne.

5.6 Conclusion

This Chapter has presented a set of planning and design principles to guide development decisions, a recommended mix of facilities to be provided in association with a new outdoor pool, an assessment of a range of development options, a sites analysis and several “fall back” strategies if Council determined that capital and operational costs meant that it was unable to proceed with the recommended course of action.

The study has presented a case for the development of a new, replacement outdoor pool at Kokoda Park. It is recognized that achieving this outcome has a substantial capital cost and will take some years to achieve. However, the planning team believe that it is achieveable and that it is the most effective and beneficial course of action for Council to pursue. If, as noted previously, Council determines that it cannot afford the recommended strategy, then it should assess the alternate “fallback” options outlined above or others which may emerge in the interim.

The following chapter presents the design options developed for a new venue and locates these at both Centenary Park and Kokoda Park to demonstrate the way in which they could fit at those venues. A series of development stages are proposed. Detailed capital costs for each stage of the initiate are provided. The Chapter also details a 25 metre outdoor pool option for Kokoda Park and the capital costs of this strategy. The Chapter then provides an assessment of the financial performance of the 25 metre and 50 metre models. It concludes with a possible fall back design for the existing pool site and the estimated cost of this strategy.

6

Design Options for Aquatic Facilities in Ararat

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the design options developed for a new venue and locates these at both Centenary Park and Kokoda Park to demonstrate the way in which they could fit at those venues. A series of development stages are proposed. Detailed capital costs for each stage of the initiate are provided. The Chapter also details a 25 metre outdoor pool option for Kokoda Park and the capital costs of this strategy. The Chapter then provides an assessment of the financial performance of the 25 metre and 50 metre models. It concludes with a possible fall back design for the existing pool site and the estimated cost of this strategy.

6.2 Planning and Design Principles

The future of the outdoor pool in Ararat cannot be determined in isolation from the indoor leisure centre, from other public pools in Ararat Rural City or from the wider, regional provision of pools. This is largely because the small markets available to facilities in Ararat, across the wider Ararat Rural City and across the region mean that duplication will threaten the financial viability of what has already been provided. Further, duplication would significantly reduce the chances of obtaining government funding assistance for new provision.

In addition, the approach to modern leisure facilities planning, Council's recently-adopted Recreation Plan and Council's corporate policy directions stress the need to pursue a more structured and integrated approach to the provision of community resources.

With regard to aquatic and other leisure facilities, decisions regarding *what* is provided and *where* it is provided have been guided by a number of key principles. These are listed with a brief explanation below:

Co-ordination: Provision across different facilities must be coordinated so as to avoid duplication and inappropriate development timing and to achieve the most effective use of Council and community resources

Enhanced operational and financial viability: Provision initiatives should also seek to achieve stronger operational and financial performance by extending venue markets, by achieving better use of staff and community skills, and by capturing new markets

Provision integration: Wherever possible, practical and appropriate, new facilities should be brought together so as to reduce the cost of services such as parking, utilities connections, management etc and to encourage cross-use and shared use of facilities

Flexibility: What is provided should not be fixed in the uses which can be made of it. Rather, it should have the capacity to be used for other activities and by other groups in the community as needs change

Diversity of opportunity: Provision must meet the needs of as wide a cross-section of the community as possible

Quality: Facilities and programs must be of an appropriate standard if they are to deliver the optimum experiences and benefits to the community

Multiple use: What is provided must have the capacity to meet more than one major use *at the same time*

Equity of access: People of all abilities should have the same ease of access to the facilities and programs which are offered

Safety of access and use: Users of the facilities must be assured of safe travel to and access to the venue, and

Shared resourcing: Opportunities for involving other providers and agencies should be explored and encouraged.

6.3 The Centenary Park Development Option

The accompanying designs have been prepared by Prior + Cheney Architects for Centenary Park. They show a set of four development stages for that site *with a 50 metre outdoor pool*. The development is sited to the south of the reserve so that there is no building overshadowing of the remaining sports ground. The overall site positioning is shown with stage 1. The existing, near-derelict sports pavilion could be retained and upgraded or replaced with buildings integrated into the pool complex.

The facility components to be provided in each stage of works are set out below and the detailed capital costs prepared by Currie and Brown, quantity surveyors (which apply to both Centenary Park and Kokoda Park), follow. The total cost of each stage is listed along with the details.

Stage 1: $6.9 m.

1. 50 metre outdoor pool with spectator seating for around 300 people and extensive lawn areas
2. Outdoor water play/leisure pool
3. Administration, kiosk and change/toilet facilities
4. Multi-purpose program room (with all year use capacity)
5. Informal outdoor non-pool water play feature (This would operate as an attraction and loss-leader. It would also encourage social activity around the pool in a managed environment on the part of those who are unable to pay to visit the pool each day)
6. 100 vehicle carpark

Stage 2: $3.1 m.

1. Indoor all year warm water program pool for health and learn to swim use
2. Dry health and fitness centre
3. Additional multi-purpose program room
4. Creche
5. Additional 60 car parking spaces

Stage 3: $3.4 m.

1. Relocation of sports halls from existing indoor leisure centre when due for rebuilding, with room for further courts. These spaces would accommodate some or all of the present indoor court activities such as basketball, gymnastics etc or other sports as deemed appropriate at the time of relocation

Stage 4: $6.2 m.

1. Relocation of playground from north-west corner of Park (or earlier if desired)
2. Relocation of 25 metre indoor pool from indoor leisure centre when due for rebuilding
3. Relocation of 1-2 squash courts from indoor leisure centre depending on need
4. Possible relocation of indoor court/activity areas.

It is evident from the site layout that Centenary Park could incorporate all of the above components plus a range of other facilities *if needed*. A large oval is retained to the north.

Yet, despite the physical capacity of Centenary Park, it was rejected as the preferred location in Chapter 5 on the basis of poor accessibility, the projected pattern of urban growth in Ararat and the fact that using it would mean *the loss of the only multi-field outdoor sports ground owned by the City in Ararat township*. This opportunity should not be lost when other, more appropriate pool locations exist.

6.4 The Kokoda Park Development Options

The four stages detailed for Centenary Park are shown for Kokoda Park on the second set of designs also with a 50 metre outdoor pool. The designs indicate the ability of the site to accommodate the proposed facility components *and* later additions. The site would be accessed by road and cycle/ walking paths through informal parklands from the west. These parklands can also be developed to link through to the botanic gardens and the town centre.

Kokoda Park was been recommended as the preferred site for any new aquatic leisure development if Council determines to proceed at a new site. This is because of its location close to the centre of town, the fact that it can accommodate all the needs which have been identified, its ability to accommodate other as-yet unidentified facility needs and the fact that the development would occupy a single, under-used sport ground, unlike Centenary Park which provides two grounds.

The capital cost of the Kokoda Park initiatives would be the same as for Centenary Park.

In addition to designing a 50 metre outdoor pool for Centenary and Kokoda Parks, a *25 metre* outdoor pool option has been designed for Kokoda Park. This has been provided in the light of the detailed review of community needs in Chapter 4 and the facility component and site analyses in Chapter 5. The design stages for the 25 metre outdoor pool option are shown following the 50 metre option and are followed by a chart detailing the capital cost of this option. It can be seen from a comparison of the latter table with that for the initial Centenary/Kokoda Park 50 metre pool options, that a 25 metre outdoor pool would achieve a capital cost saving in Stage 1 of just over $1,200,000.

6.5 Fallback Options

Section 5.5 of this report outlined a set of fallback options which Council might wish to consider if it decided that it could not afford to proceed with the action recommended in this report, that being to commence construction of a totally new aquatic leisure complex at Kokoda Park with the replacement of the existing outdoor pool. The fallback strategies which entailed building works were Options 2 and 3, these being:

2. Replace the outdoor pool with a 50 metre or 25 metre insert and replace the change, toilet and service buildings
3. Initiate further works at the indoor pool in order to replace some elements of the outdoor pool when it is forced to close eg: enhanced outdoor lawn areas, water play, shade, social areas, barbeques, beach volleyball.

A design concept has been prepared for option 2 and this is provided following the Kokoda Park 25 metre outdoor pool designs. This shows:

1. A new outdoor 25 metre pool inserted into the western end of the existing 50 metre pool tank
2. A small indoor program pool using the remainder of the pool tank, and
3. New replacement change/toilet, management and kiosk facilities to the north of the pool compound. These facilities would serve the wider Alexandra Gardens as well as the pool. This siting would also provide more space to the north-west of the pool for a more attractive entrance and improved parking.

The small indoor pool listed in 2. has been provided for on the basis of this not being available at the indoor centre (because of space limitations and because it has been proposed that that venue eventually be replaced); to broaden the role of the outdoor centre and the markets and serves, and to strengthen the financial viability of the outdoor venue. A range of other water play and dry play features could also be provided in the surrounding lawn areas.

The capital cost of this design is $3.7 m. and is detailed in the chart following the plan.

The second fallback option (3 above) has not been designed or costed as a number of different strategies could be pursued. If Council was to consider strategy 3, it would be essential that it commissioned a full masterplanning exercise for the total centre to ensure that the optimum

outcomes were achieved.

It is stressed that pursuing either of these fallback options would commit Council to the long term retention of both of the existing outdoor and indoor sites or at the very least, to the existing indoor leisure centre with all its inherent shortcomings.

6.6 The Financial Performance of the Recommended Development

6.6.1 Introduction

The projected financial performance of the 25 metre outdoor pool option for Kokoda Park has been modeled using current and projected data on a range of population, market, operational cost and other data. These analyses are provided in the accompanying charts.

The financial analysis, which is provided on the following pages, relates to the replacement of the existing outdoor facilities with Stage 1 of the recommended development plans shown previously. These encompass a new 25 metre outdoor pool, water play, dry 50 square metre health and fitness program room, kiosk, change facilities and reception area.

The purpose of the financial analysis is to provide Ararat Rural City Council with an indication of the performance which has been projected for the total recommended development stage 1 of a long term redevelopment of aquatic facilities in Ararat.

The financial analysis has been prepared using data from other aquatic health and fitness facilities in Victoria. The analysis has been benchmarked against the current performance of the outdoor Pool.

All data in this analysis are subject to review and a regular data collection program should be initiated immediately upon completion of this recommended first stage. The data to be collected should include the types of activities pursued, the socio-economic characteristics of users, user origins, cultural background, gender, age, and visit frequencies. This data should be matched by regular (say, three yearly) random community surveys to determine the level of popularity of aquatic facilities in the community and which members of the community are and are not using them. Collection of this data and the collection of similar data from other Councils will allow the modification and refinement of the projections provided in this report.

All data marked in yellow in the accompanying charts can be adjusted so as to conduct sensitivity analyses regarding rates, pricing and the consequent financial outcomes.

6.6.2 The Analysis Framework

The financial analysis provided in the accompanying charts has used a number of parameters to develop the projected attendances. These are detailed on page 1 of the analysis. They are:

a. Catchment population

It is assumed that the pool has a catchment market derived from the current Ararat township population of 7,200 residents and the remainder of the Ararat Rural City population (4,000 residents). This market is based on the 2001 Census population of 11,000 and the Victorian Department of Infrastructure projection for a population of 11,200 in 2006. The Victorian Department of Infrastructure data indicate a growth rate for Ararat Rural City over the 2001 – 2006 period of 0.9 percent per annum. The same rate of growth has been projected for the period 2006 – 2021. These estimates have been used to plot the future growth of the Stage 1 aquatics market. As needed, adjustments can be made to these estimates as they are confirmed or modified in the light of experience over the coming years.

In addition to population growth allowances, the financial analysis has allowed for:

1. A “facility market life cycle growth component”, this reflecting the rising and then stabilizing market popularity of the redeveloped centre
2. A CPI/inflation factor for the recreation sector

3. Venue income growth per annum as the product of the two previous factors
   wages inflation, and
4. An expenditure growth estimate, based on CPI/inflation factor for all sectors except housing

b. Aquatic Centre Use Rates

Data from other outdoor aquatic leisure centres indicate that use rates of 6 to 8 visits per head of the catchment population per annum can be achieved. For the purposes of the present analysis, a rate of 4.0 visits has been used, this being similar to that recorded in similar venues.

A visits rate of 3.0 per head of the township catchment population of 7,200 and 1.6 visits per head from the Rural City catchment of 4,000 equates to an initial rate of 10,154 visits per annum. The dry program rate of 0.13 visits per head of the population is based on the use of similar-sized dry program rooms elsewhere in Victoria.

On the basis of other comparable venues, the total annual visits has been allocated as follows:

40 percent: *programmed* used of the aquatics facilities

60 percent: general, *non*-programmed aquatics use, and

0.13 visits per head of total population: dry program use.

c. Fees and Charges

A range of proposed programs and uses and the fees and charges for these has been established. These are in keeping with current rates for similar rural Victoria.

d. Financial Performance

Page 2 of the financial analysis details the projected financial performance of aquatics programs in the first full year of operation. It shows that the anticipated income from all aquatics is $26,209 of which $12,046 is derived from general admissions, and $14,163 from aquatics programs including Learn to Swim and classes.

The projected financial performance of dry (ie: *non*-aquatic) programs and ancillary income sources (café, room, hire) in the first full year of operation, shows that $27,895 is derived from these. A discount 10% of the full program costs has been allowed for dry activities so that the centre can pursue a marketing program as is common in the promotion of exercise programs elsewhere.

Ancillary services, including the kiosk and room hire will generate income in the order of $14,754.

A conservative range of programs is included in the plan but other programs such as film or disco nights, parties etc could be extended to generate extra income. It is assumed that the Council grant of $60,000 per annum would be continued at the same rate each year of the plan. Sponsorship and fundraising of $1,500 is also assumed.

Pages 3-4 of the financial analysis detail the operating expenditures to be incurred in running the facility. The key elements of this are staff costs $55,640, administrative costs $9,200, and facilities costs, $37,500. The total anticipated expenditure for the centre in the first year of operation is $102,340 which, after allowing for GST collections, gives a total expenditure of $101,869.

A comparison of the final line of page 2 with that of page 4 indicates that a surplus of $9,111 could be expected in the first year.

Pages 5 – 8 of the financial plan shows the projected financial performance of the total centre over a 20 year period starting in 2006 (Year 1). This indicates that with an expected decline in the rate of growth of the use of the venue, and anticipated consumer price and wage increases, the surplus would decline to $3,063 in Year 5). From Year 5, a deficit is anticipated with this rising to $11,043 in Year 9. In Year 10, an allowance of 10 percent of the initial capital cost has been made for the major

refurbishment of the facility and to arrest a declining product life cycle. The anticipated deficit in Year 10 is thus $581,063. Subsequent years will still see deficits but these range from $15,202 in Year 11 to $56,363 in Year 20. The rising deficits reflection the combined effects of Ararat's modest population growth, wage inflation, and price inflation (with recreation being lower than general expenditure price inflation). Several of these factors have changed widely in the past decade and therefore long term predictions are likely to vary with changing economic conditions.

It should be noted that in an earlier version of the financial plan, a set assumptions were made about provision for building, plant and equipment maintenance, replacement and refurbishment. Changes have been made to the present presentation format so that these costs are clearly distinguished from the annual financial performance. As the earlier version of the financial analysis led to some confusion as to the projected financial outcomes, it has been decided to separate the day to day operational performance of the venue from longer term asset renewal allowances and return on investment allowances. To this end, we have put the latter items "below the bottom line". It is suggested that a "below the bottom line" provision in the form of a sinking fund be established by Council calculated on the useful life of the facility (probably 25 years).

If the sinking fund provision was included on an annual basis in the financial plan, then the fees charged would be expected to pay for the facility and the staffing and running costs ie the true cost of the facilities without subsidy. Competition policy requires that a Council facility which may compete with existing or potential private operators is fully costed including the annual costs of borrowings. A private company would have to borrow the cost of the facility and maintain the facility in a condition which would not devalue the capital asset.

Further to the above, the earlier draft financial modeling has been altered to include a NPV table (on page 9) which shows when and if a facility will break even at an appropriate discount rate. For a financially viable facility, the NPV chart should show a break even cumulative cash flow before year 20. Page 9 of the financial statement shows that if the capital improvements cost of $5,682,721 and a discount rate of 7.5% are applied, the cumulative cash flow will remain negative (at minus $6,083,721) at the end of 20 years and the development will not have paid back the initial capital costs. While a negative result, it should be noted that all stand-alone outdoor pools have significant financial losses and that the subsequent three stages of the redevelopment proposed for Kokoda Park have been designed specifically to avoid this outcome.

6.7 Management

As indicated in earlier Chapters, a comprehensive review of the management of the Council pools in Ararat Rural City was undertaken as part of the present study. A separate report has been provided to Council as a result of that review. The following paragraphs present the executive summary from the review. Readers are referred to the full report for further details.

In general, the review found that the YMCA is doing a very good job in managing the aquatic leisure assets with which it has been entrusted. However, its work is hampered by a lack of direction from Council as to what it wants the YMCA to provide or achieve for the community.

Further, the review found that there are excellent opportunities to provide a very broad and attractive array of programs targeting different groups in the Ararat Rural City community at both the indoor and outdoor venues, and particularly at the latter. Until such programming is initiated – and this will almost certainly require additional financial support from Council—*none* of the assets will be able to offer the optimum programs, experience and benefits to the community or achieve the optimal financial outcomes.

In the light of this, the review made the following recommendations. Time frames, responsibilities and indicative costs were included to guide Council in the implementation process. Council will need to implement some of the recommendations through planning processes and others can be implemented immediately through and in consultation with the venue managers.

C = Council
M = Manager

Key Recommendation	Timeframe & responsibility	Cost
❖ *Council develop and adopt an overall aim and set of objectives to guide all short and long term decisions and outcomes relating to the management and operation of Council's Aquatic Leisure Centres*	1 month C	Nil

Contract / Lease Recommendations	Timeframe & responsibility	Cost
❖ *Renegotiate and consolidate all the contracts/ agreements between Council and the managers for all sites into a single agreement to consistently reflect the service outcomes and reporting mechanisms that Council wants from the overall service.*	3 months C/ M	- $10k

Services Recommendations	Timeframe & responsibility	Cost
Display prominent signage at the entrance to all the outdoor pools outlining the weather policy in very simple terms.	2 months M	- $2k
Conduct a promotional campaign to inform the <u>whole</u> community of the weather policy for the outdoor pools reducing negative impressions by the community.	6 months Council/	- $1k
Expand the range of activities offered at all the Centres.	Ongoing M	variable
Expand the Swim School program at the Indoor Pool Complex both in terms of program length and weekly time slots.	Ongoing M	Nil
Expand and create a flexible Swim School program at all the Outdoor Pools both in terms of program length and weekly time slots.	Ongoing M	Nil
Monitor and analyse usage patterns to determine benefit of operating hours for all sites.	Ongoing M	Nil
Collate attendance statistics at each site by program segments for analysis on a daily, weekly, monthly, seasonal and yearly basis.	Ongoing M	Nil
Expand the range of activities offered at the Outdoor Pools by introducing regular weekend and weeknight activities.	Ongoing M	+$18k
Initiate a flexible Swim School program at outdoor pools over the Pool season based on a ten- lesson program.	Ongoing M	+ $12k

Communication Recommendations	Timeframe & responsibility	Cost
❖ *Develop an <u>annual</u> Business Plan to include time lines and staff responsible for all sites.*	3 months M / C	Nil
❖ *Develop an <u>annual</u> Marketing/Promotional plan to include time lines and staff responsible for all sites.*	3 months M	Nil
❖ *Provide up to date promotional material and ensure that a minimum amount of hard copy stock is available at all times.*	6 months M	-$2k
❖ *Implement a set of Performance Indicators as a bench mark for measuring the centres performance.*	6 months	Nil
❖ *Implement an annual effectiveness survey to measure the quality of the service and needs of users*	6 months	Nil

Organisation Recommendations	Timeframe & responsibility	Cost
❖ *Develop a staff qualifications and skills matrix for use by Leisure unit personal.*	2 months Manager	Nil
❖ *Implement the recommended staff structure as outlined in appendix 2.*	3 months C / M	variable
❖ *Implement an ongoing risk management system for the Centre.*	Ongoing Manager	Nil
❖ *Implement a regular training program for all staff.*	Ongoing M	Nil

Facilities Recommendations	Timeframe & responsibility	Cost
❖ *Develop formal cleaning and maintenance procedures for all sites.*	Ongoing M	Nil
❖ *Develop an asset and maintenance register including life expectancy and costs of buildings, equipment and cyclic works*	6 Months C / M	-$5k

6.8 Overview

This report has sought to provide advice on the two key Objectives of the project Brief, these being

> To conduct a feasibility study into the most appropriate site and design for an outdoor pool in Ararat, capable of catering for both competition and leisure activities, and
>
> To determine if the provision of a new outdoor pool, in addition to the existing Ararat Rural City Recreation and Aquatic Centre, is sustainable.

The Study has evaluated community needs and aspiration, demographics and a comprehensive array of sites for a new outdoor pool, including the site of the existing facility. On the basis of this research, it was concluded that the community would be best served if Council abandoned the old outdoor facility and commenced redevelopment of a new, modern outdoor and indoor aquatic and dry health and fitness facility at a new site, that being Kokoda Park. The reasons for this conclusion centred around the major shortcomings of the existing site, the age and poor condition of the existing pool facilities, substantial site shortcomings and facility and site weaknesses associated with the existing indoor centre.

Designs have been prepared for a new integrated facility to be developed over 4 stages, the first being the replacement of the outdoor pool and the addition of a multi-purpose room to begin the process of product diversification. Subsequent designs show each of the following three stages with these culminating in the total relocation of the existing indoor venue to Kokoda Park over a yet to be determined time frame --but perhaps of as much as 25 years.

A financial analysis of the 20 year performance of the first stage of development shows that with a continuing Council subsidy of the order of $50-60,000, the replacement outdoor pool will continue to operate in a manner which is not very different to that of the existing venue. As such, it would appear to be quite sustainable. However, if capital replacement allowances are taken into account, the venue would operate at a substantial deficit although this would still be quite low compared with many other community recreation venues and *very* low when compared with the indoor leisure centre. This does not mean that Ararat Rural City Council should not make significant contributions to an asset replacement sinking fund. However, the extent of those allowances should not be used to either put off or cancel the needed redevelopment unless it becomes untenable *within the global context of* similar allocations being set aside for other Council assets. And if the sustain-ability of the outdoor pool did become potentially untenable, Council may well need to assess whether *other of its assets* should be closed or disposed of

instead of the pool redevelopment proposal because aquatics facilities offer such significant benefits to the community.

The final point which needs to be kept in mind in this context is that the "poor" financial performance of the outdoor pool is largely a reflection of the fact that it cannot offer the mix or breadth of programs the community now desires. If Council determines to progressively work through the four stages of development which have been recommended in this report, the financial strength of the final product will be far stronger than either of the present parts.

The other key issue addressed by the present report was that of whether the existing outdoor pool should be replaced at its present 50 metre length or whether a 25 metre pool would suffice. If Council was starting with a totally clean slate, it would be unlikely to be building an outdoor pool at all let alone a 50 metre outdoor pool.

Yet it is evident that things are not that simple: Council does have an outdoor pool in Ararat and it is 50 metres long. Further, the existing indoor centre and pool were built *in the light of there being an outdoor pool of 50 metres length in the town* and because this pool exists, *the indoor pool was not built with the capacity to replace the services offered by the outdoor pool*. Thus, if the outdoor pool was closed and not replaced, the Ararat community would be a lot poorer off – particularly as the full potential of the 50 metre pool has not been exploited.

As to whether the outdoor pool is replaced with a new 50 metre or 25 metre facility, the Council already has two outdoor pools which are less than 50 metres in length so providing another 25 metre facility in Ararat –and the *fourth* in the Rural City as a whole—would be less than optimal in terms of the opportunities offered. That said, it is acknowledged that there is a significant capital (and a lesser operational) cost differential between a 50 and 25 metre facility which cannot really be justified by market demands or *needs*. The special competitive needs which the 50 metre pool currently supports are achieved *because of its setting* rather than because of its length although a 50 metre pool offers club, squad and competition advantages which a 25 metre pool cannot and would offer these in a market which has fewer and fewer modern pools of this size. If Council was to build Ararat Rural City's *fourth* 25 metre pool it would be losing a unique venue and it would need to do considerably more at a smaller venue (through supporting wider programming and servicing) to offset this loss.

In summary on the size of the replacement pool, a 25 metre facility can be designed to meet all the needs which have been identified, and it would do so more cheaply. However, if Council decides on a 25 rather than a 50 metre pool, it will lose the chance *for the next 40-50 years* to offer more than a standard 25 metre pool, particularly on a regional basis, and what is built will become just another of many 25 metre pools across the Council, the region and the State.

6.9 Recommended Next Steps

The consulting team make the following recommendations for further action by Council:

1. Accept this report as the professional resource for further discussion and decisions on future aquatics provision and proceed to public exhibition and revision as deemed appropriate

2. Initiate a review and revision of the terms of the management agreements for the operation of all Council's pools. This review should seek to strengthen and diversify the programs offered to the community through the venues and establish complementary programming across all four Council venues

3. Consider all aspects and impacts that this report will have on Council's financial position and its capacity to effectively address other future projects

4. Endorse the closure of the Ararat Solar Olympic Pool and its replacement with a new 8 lane 25 m. outdoor pool at Kokoda Park with the design permitting (a) the addition of a range of other complementary indoor and outdoor facilities and (b) the long term relocation to the new venue of the facilities provided at Ararat Rural City Recreation and Aquatic Centre

5. In the light of its global long term capital works develop program, determine whether Stage 1 of the outdoor pool redevelopment program at Kokoda Park can also proceed to stages 2. – 4. as part of the initial works program

6. Determine a timeframe for action at Kokoda Park and at the appropriate time, publish a call for the registration of interest from architects for the design of the agreed development

7. Appointment a preferred architectural design team

8. Negotiate with the managers of the indoor and outdoor pools and others as deemed appropriate re financial contributions, continuing management rights and the future programming of any new facilities. Dependent on the outcomes of these negotiations, appoint the current managers as continuing managers or call for registrations of interest from alternate management groups. Appoint a preferred manager for the new facility to assist with the design development process

9. Proceed through the schematic design, design development and documentation phases with a continuing input from the community and the preferred management group

10. Initiate a building contract tender process and proceed to construction of Stage 1 (and additional stages as agreed in 5. above) as recommended in section 6.4

11. Establish a defects review and rectification program

12. Establish a framework for the regular review of the operational performance and the technical condition of the developed facilities

13. Dependent on decisions made in 5. above, proceed with stages 2-4 of the recommendations in section 6.4 as resources permit or as the condition of facilities at the Ararat Rural City Recreation and Aquatic Centre dictates.

If at any point during the above 13. steps Council determines that it does not have the financial capacity to proceed with the subsequent recommendations within the sustainable remaining life of the outdoor pool or that it does not have the resources to establish the required asset replacement sinking fund, it should consider implementing the following fallback strategy:

14. Apply further funds to the Ararat Solar Olympic Pool to keep it in operating order pending Council's ability to take action on recommendations 1. – 13. or its decision to proceed with recommendations 15. – 17. following

15. Commission a masterplanning study for the Ararat Rural City Recreation and Aquatic Centre to evaluate the capacity of the venue to accommodate site improvements and a range of indoor and outdoor aquatic and dry facility additions which will (a) meet the aquatic provision gaps identified in the present Study and (b) as far as is practical, meet the needs presently serviced by the Ararat Solar Olympic Pool and/or

16. Review the capacity of Ararat Rural City's outdoor pools at Lake Bolac and Willaura to meet needs presently met by Ararat Solar Olympic Pool and initiate action based on the findings of the review

17. Use the findings of steps 2., 14. - 16. to initiate programming and capital works which will best meet aquatic and related needs amongst residents of Ararat Rural City.