

Key Facts to inform the **BMDC Sports Facilities Service** **Review** **13-07-24**

Everything should be done to make Ilkley Pool and Lido viable. Other pools and lidos around the country are successful, and Ilkley Pool and Lido can be too if it copies how they operate by matching swimming sessions and opening hours to demand. Other pools are open longer, have more lessons, have different approaches to charging, partner with their community to offer a range of events, and cost less to run. We have worked with an expert advisory group of five successful Pools and Lidos who all say that Ilkley Pool and Lido can be much more efficient.

The first step must be to review how Ilkley Pool and Lido operate. Assessing the options of closure or collaboration without modernisation would be negligent and an abdication of the responsibility of the Council to provide public services to secure the health and wealth of Bradford and West Yorkshire.

We believe that what is needed is an independent strategic review that includes the Mayor, an Advisory Group and experts with experience in securing viable pools and lidos.

The review takes place in the context of the following contradictory policy and planning:

- The need to find significant extensive cost reductions.
- A recognition at the outset of the view by the Council that "*Bradford has the lowest level of provision of all the comparable councils in West Yorkshire.*"(Report of strategic director of place 5th March)
- The West Yorkshire Mayor's Yorkshire Plan Mission 2 "*We will ensure that where you live helps promote good health, active lives, and wellbeing, and that life expectancy aligns with the national average*",

The Review must take into consideration that:

1. Ilkley Pool and Lido is fundamental to the wellbeing of people in Ilkley and regular visitors from across the region and beyond. 30% of our community user survey respondents were from outside Ilkley.
2. Ilkley pool has 12 local primary schools that attend weekly¹. All our children have a right to learn how to swim in a pool that they are able to access easily. We do have deprivation in Ilkley (180 families on free school meals) and closure would increase

¹ Report of the Strategic Director of Place to the meeting of Executive. 5th March 2024

inequalities here.

3. There is public demand for the pools. Alongside the many recreational visitors of all ages, our swimming club has 145 plus swimmers ages from 8 to over 65 swimming up to three times a week and there are 250 people on the waiting list for swimming lessons.
4. Bradford already has the "*lowest level of provision of all the comparable councils in West Yorkshire*." (Report of strategic director of place 5th March). Families in Bradford District deserve the same access to leisure facilities as families in Leeds and London.
5. Ilkley Pool and Lido are vital to our area's economy and prosperity. It is a huge draw for local visitors and tourists who are attracted by the Lido's heritage status and uniqueness.
6. Bradford District is the next UK City of Culture, a celebration rooted in the unique heritage and character of the Bradford District as a whole. The potential loss of one of Bradford's most iconic and popular heritage attractions in the midst of a national campaign to preserve and celebrate the city's history is appalling.
7. The river is a draw to people, but it is also a risk in terms of their health from drowning and from sewage and agricultural pollution. Without Ilkley Pool and Lido we will see an increase in people using the river, at a risk to public health.

We have worked with an advisory group² and believe that Ilkley Pool and Lido can be viable in the as evidenced by their success. This requires a new way of working at Ilkley Pool and Lido and with the Council to increase utilisation and income. It requires a review of the key benchmarked costs and how these can be reduced in line with comparable pools and lidos.

There is wealth of untapped assets in the community that are not being considered. The Council can and should engage with the community to bring those assets to bear.

We believe, on the basis of discussions with other pools and lidos, and our own community engagement and consultative processes that Ilkley Pool & Lido has a viable, thriving and sustainable future as a destination for Ilkley, Bradford, West Yorkshire and tourists from the UK and abroad.

We believe this is best realised by a partnership between the Council, the community and stakeholders in the domains of sport, health and the arts.

² David Wilford, Bramley Baths; Chris Porter, Tadcaster pool ; Ian Orton, Settle Pool; Annabel Wright Jesus Green Lido (unheated); Bill Hanley, Hathersage Lido (heated).

The option of closure or asset transfer should not be recommended until all other options have been fully explored and exhausted. We ask the Council to:

1. Undertake an independent review that brings stakeholders together, provides a set of strategic options for the future of the services, explores all the funding options for Ilkley Pool and Lido within a strategic direction for access to pools to secure the health and wellbeing of the Bradford community;
2. Review all costs against benchmarked data and secure contractual efficiencies. Benchmark fees and increase in line with benchmarked providers. Bring in the CEO/Manager of another provider to review the operations of IlkleyPool and Lido to advise on utilisation, income and cost efficiencies;
3. Increase utilisation in line with pools and lidos across the UK, by extending opening hours and the Lido season;
4. Monitor the impact of 2 & 3 above on the income and utilisation of Ilkley Pool and Lido;.
5. Undertake a building condition survey. Rapidly explore the range of capital funding options through grants that are currently available for pools and lidos in collaboration with the community;
6. Establish a partnership agreement and Board with the Ilkley Pool and Lido community to bring locally gifted assets to bear on the operational capacity of Ilkley Pool and Lido. Work in partnership to bring the potential of these assets to bear in the development of a vibrant and thriving programme of activity at Ilkley Pool and Lido.

About Us

Ilkley Pool and Lido Community Group was formed by committed Ilkley residents to develop proposals to secure the long term future of the site and facilities through partnership with the Council. We believe Ilkley Pool and Lido are key to the health and prosperity not only of the town's residents and businesses, but also to the population of Bradford and West Yorkshire. The Ilkley Pool and Lido Community Group was formally constituted in April 2024. More information about the group is provided at Appendix 1.

1.2 Context for Ilkley Pool and Lido

Ilkley Pool and Lido is used by people from across West Yorkshire and attracts visitors from across the UK and abroad. Ilkley Pool and Lido is a destination for visitors locally and nationally, with people from across Bradford district pouring out of the train station on sunny days to enjoy its benefits, and swimming and sporting enthusiasts visiting from across the UK (and some from overseas). The Brownlee Brothers had their first outdoor training swim at the Lido, and Dom Coy (commonwealth medallist) trained with Ilkley Swimming Club.

Any decision affects not only people living in Ilkley, but also people from across Bradford, and from neighbouring districts. 35% of the respondents (n=745) to our community survey visited from outside Ilkley.

Any reduction of services has an impact on the vibrancy and economy of Ilkley as a tourist destination. Using Visit Britain estimations (Great Britain Tourism Survey 2024) of £245 spend per visit, any decline in visitors to Ilkley will have a substantial impact on the local economy.

The Lido is an iconic facility, a treasured place for people who live in Ilkley, being core to the identity of the community as a spa town; our members from across West Yorkshire recount how it has been fundamental to the wellbeing of themselves and their families.

Key facts as context are provided at Appendix 2.

1. The Review Process

2.1 Focus of the Review

2.1.1 Policy context & longer term strategy.

The Review whilst being focused on an immediate short term fix must do so with consideration of the longer term impact for people living in Bradford. Rather than taking a strategic approach that generates options that mitigate the long term impact, short solutions must not fail the community.

1.2 Review Methodology

Here we set out our findings and concerns against the review criteria as set out in the Strategic Director of Place report (March 2024).

2.2.1. Catchment Areas, Geographic, Demographic and drive times

- The Review must consider provisions for the whole population of Bradford District, taking

into consideration how we best meet the health and wellbeing needs of the whole community so that everyone has fair access. Rather than just consider catchment areas for each pool, the Review should consider Bradford District as a whole and how to meet needs;

- The Review must consider public transport links not just drive times. There are no pools within 30 minutes by public transport from Ilkley;
- The Review must include wider assets (e.g. pools in the private sector) and the opportunity to collaborate.
- The Review needs an external independent strategic review that includes the West Yorkshire Mayor, an Advisory Group and experts to bring innovation into the final solutions.

2.2.2 Viability : The facility operating costs, utilisation and income generation

We completely appreciate the financial restraints that the Council is under and the importance of minimising/erasing any financial cost to the Council of Ilkley Pool and Lido. It is therefore key to ensure that income generation is maximised and costs minimised.

With the tumultuous time the Council has been under over the past few years we understand that it has been hard to find this bandwidth so we sought advice from an expert advisory group on both indoor pools and outdoor lidos, interviewed many other pools and lidos, as well as tapping into expertise within our community and the Future Lidos group. We believe that there are significant cost reductions and income raising ideas to be made if the approaches used by other pools and lidos were copied at Ilkley. If these other pools and lidos can be viable, then Ilkley Pool and Lido can be.

(a) The Data used to inform this decision.

We have benchmarked the data used for the Review supplied to us, in terms of income, expenditure and usage against other pools and lidos and the data presented that underpins the recommendations does not compare favourably. We believe the data that we have seen is flawed in providing an accurate picture of the costs at Ilkley Pool and Lido should be, and a decision should not be taken based on the data as provided.

Example: Energy

We have compared the energy costs provided for Ilkley Pool and Lido to pools and lidos of comparable size and find their gas bills are in the order of 50K, whereas the data provided for Ilkley is £151K. Is this an apportionment of a Council wide bill or is it based on meter readings? If the former, we suggest the apportionment is far too high. If the latter, then the contract with the energy provider needs renegotiating.

Example: Capital Expenditure

The Budget for 2024 includes £100K to rewire the cafe and provide a fire alarm. We

benchmarked this and the costs of rewire and fire alarm should be in the order of £10K (the benchmark included the actual price for rewiring and fire alarm for a school block at 14K and asking a service provider for an estimate). The budget is inflated by 900%.

(b) The Facility Operating Model

The Review will present the future for Ilkley Pool and Lido based on the current operating model. Other pools and lidos have improved their operating model to secure viability. Ilkley Pool and Lido can operate at the same operating costs as other comparable pools and lidos, and increase its utilisation in the way other pools and lidos have shown to be possible with similar and smaller catchments. Ilkley Pool and Lido should not be closed before there have been lessons learnt from other pools and lidos and the operating model developed to ensure Ilkley Pool and Lido is working to maximum capacity.

Example: Staffing

All the pools and lidos we talked to have staffing total costs at 60% of turnover or under. The Council data for Ilkley Pool and Lido for 2023-4 has staffing costs at 80% of turnover. Either staffing costs are high or the facility is under utilised. Other pools offer much more capacity (by opening longer) for swimming lessons and clubs and bring in significantly more income. One of these pools (Bramley Baths) operates in an area of high deprivation and has a significantly better utilisation/ income: cost ratio.

(c) Income generation

We have investigated options for income generation and identified short-term projects through our public engagement events, research on successful pools and lidos, membership of the Future Lidos group, and discussions with consultant experts. We provided a paper on these outline projects as requested by the Council in April. Some of these ideas have been adopted but we have no intelligence of how any of these are driving up income this year. Benchmarking against other pools and lidos would suggest ticket prices for the indoor pool could increase without adversely affecting utilisation. Other pools and lidos are generating more income from lessons and clubs with longer opening hours. We provided a range of options for events in collaboration with the community. Online booking should drive up sales if correctly implemented (which is different from how it is currently being implemented - higher costs and still requires queueing). In the community survey the respondents identified the unlinking of the pool and lido tickets as a way to increase utilisation of the indoor pool. Merchandise sales are generating significant revenue in other pools and lidos. The community survey identified the lack of a marketing strategy for Ilkley Pool and Lido. Overall utilisation is directly correlated with income and our own view, confirmed by our advisory group, informed by the community survey, is that based on the data provided, Ilkley Pool and Lido is underutilised. This summer Ilkley Pool and Lido has offered additional sessions for Ilkley Swimming Club amounting to a 5K increase in revenue. The possibilities for increasing revenue have not been fully explored. For instance we don't know the impact of the increased ticket prices on revenue.

The 23-24 figures showing a loss against the Lido seems very out of step with the previous year, and with other lidos. Jesus Green is an unheated Lido operated by BETTER, open all year with a profit of 40K.

2.2.1 Property & Asset Stock Condition

There are opportunities to apply for grants to support the management of the building/ stock which have not been explored. Ilkley Pool and lido should not be shut before the Council has explored funding options for the site.

2.3 Levelling Down

In other parts of England, Local Authorities are investing in pools and lidos, making these accessible to their local communities. People living in Bradford should not have their health and wellbeing be penalised in a postcode lottery, without all options to keep Ilkley Pool and Lido open having been considered as part of a full strategic review.

Example: We know for instance that there are pools being opened and refurbished providing access to local people e.g. Tooting Bec lido.

Example: Northallerton and Thirsk: Both have pools less than 9 miles apart. The populations are: Northallerton circa 13,500. Thirsk circa 6000.

Appendix 1 Ilkley Pool and Lido Community Group

The group formed in March in anticipation of the Review in order to develop a collaboration with the Council to secure a sustainable future for Ilkley Pool and Lido for the Bradford community. The group demonstrates the significant assets in the community that can support a viable operating model, and secure the benefits to the community's health and wellbeing, as well as the local economy.

Our Approach to Date - what we've done so far.

(a) Public meetings

We have held 2 public meetings to date. Over 100 people joined each meeting, which focused on how the community can step up to help. As a result of this working groups were set up to explore areas where income and utilisation could be increased and savings generated in the short terms (i.e. to plug the gap now):

- Better utilisation of the indoor pool
- Intelligence from other pools and lidos
- Options for ensuring the café is in profit
- Cost saving options
- How to bring the arts and the facilities together, and contribute to Bradford City of Culture
- A schedule of income generating events in partnership with the community
- Merchandise and sales options
- Options for the grounds
- Developing volunteering.

These were shared with the Council in April as requested in a paper "Ilkley Pool and Lido Outline Projects for consideration". The Council has adopted some of the ideas in this paper. The paper and how the community can step up to help has not been discussed further with us and so, to date, the hundreds of willing volunteers have not been able to make a contribution.

(b) Consultation (survey)

We provided the Council with the results of a market research survey of 745 users of the pool and lido which showed the following:

- Lots of respondents (30%) came from outside Ilkley
- Where people use other pools, it is primarily because of the quality and cleanliness of the changing rooms and the additional facilities

- The indoor pool should open from 6am and longer at weekends
- The Lido should open longer and for a longer season
- It needs a café serving better coffee and food, open for the indoor pool users and to passing trade
- Provide online booking so that entry is guaranteed on busy days, and to manage flow and increase utilization
- At minimum cleaner changing rooms and a no shoes policy. A modular changing room as a plan for the future. Outdoor changing for the Lido
- More events, to make the Lido a destination for a wider audience
- Better marketing, even survey respondents didn't know about opening, season tickets
- Unlink the Lido and Indoor Pool tickets, it will increase usage

See the full results here.

(c) Established and formally constituted Ilkley Pool and Lido Community Group.

We have

- A finance committee to review the financial viability of Ilkley Pool and Lido, and establish the baseline for any future developments.
- A communications team
- A partnership sub group exploring operational models for the group
- Working groups as described in (a) above

(d) Collected intelligence from other pools and lidos and formed an external advisory group

(e) Partnership with the Council. We have provided a draft agreement for working in partnership with BMDC, and have met twice with the Leisure Services leadership.

Appendix 2: Context information to inform the Review

1. Heritage and Culture

- a. The Lido has its 90th anniversary in 2025.
- b. The Lido, and the Ilkley Pool and Lido Community Group, are part of a successful bid to Bradford Community Fund to provide a series of land based and water based sessions culminating in creating movement around the side of Lido and in the water in summer 2025. Some of these sessions happen in other parts of Bradford (because in winter months the lido is not open) with the view of building more people to come to the Lido for the final stage of classes that would be land and water based and connect Ilkley more to the Bradford 2025 themes.

2. Utilisation

- a. Swim England data shows “In the last 12 months, 14 million adults (31.3 per cent of the nation) went swimming – 7.8 million women and 6.2 million men. The Ilkley population is 14,854. 460 people will be swimmers, and of those 148 will be regular swimmers. This is without adjustment for the wealth of the population and the visitor numbers. Outdoor swimming continues to grow in the population.
<https://www.swimming.org/swimengland/key-swimming-statistics/>
- b. Ilkley is the first designated bathing site in England with visitors peaking at 1700 on a sunny summer’s day. However the river quality is poor and people are mindful of swimming in the river for fear of pollution.
- c. Yorkshire Swim Works, supported by the Council, has calculated that within five miles of the Kettlewell reservoir there are 277,000 people. Based on Swim England data, that would equate to over 32,000 regular swimmers (people who swim at least twice a month). Within 10 miles these numbers jump to 628,000 and 72,000+. This assumes those people will swim outdoors regularly and travel to do so; it also assumes it will subsume the Ilkley lido users, which given the demographic at Ilkley is not viable. Applying the same data approach used by Yorkshire Swim Works to Ilkley Lido, 10 miles includes Bradford at 536,986,000, Keighley at 48,000, Bingley at 19,000 and so on. Applying the same criteria Ilkley Lido has the potential to generate a significant order of swimmers in comparison.

3. Fairness and Levelling up

- a. London is receiving a £4 million investment in Tooting Bec Lido, with the council

providing 1,000 families free access to the pool, while here in Bradford we are grappling with the potential closure of Ilkley Pool and Lido. This disparity starkly contradicts the promise of levelling up for northern communities. It is outrageous that families in the north are being denied the same opportunities as those in the south.

- b. Northern families deserve equal access to recreational facilities, and the current situation is a glaring example of the inequities that persist. We demand fair treatment and investment in our community to ensure that everyone, regardless of geography, has access to the same opportunities and amenities.

4. Health, the obesity epidemic and mental health crisis

Keeping pools and lidos open will not only enhance public health but also save the NHS and social care budgets millions of pounds, according to a recent BMJ article. Swimming, a low-impact activity, is accessible and safe for individuals of all ages, making it an ideal form of exercise for everyone. It is scientifically proven to reduce frailty and osteoporosis, and it is estimated to prevent 20,000 cases of type 2 diabetes annually, thereby saving the NHS an astounding £103 million each year. Furthermore, 1.4 million British adults with mental health conditions have reported that swimming alleviates their anxiety and depression. The social connectedness fostered by swimming combats loneliness—a condition as deadly as smoking. By maintaining our pools and lidos, we are investing in the physical, mental, and social well-being of our communities, ensuring a healthier, happier population while significantly reducing healthcare costs. (McNally, S., 2024. Scarlett McNally: Boosting swimming for health and joy. *bmj*, 384).

Perimenopause and menopausal women are a group who can feel excluded from many other activities due to “ body image “ concerns etc and have embraced swimming as their preferred physical activity

People of all ages benefit from swimming for physical health and for social connectedness. Michael Moseley advocated the benefits of swimming in his Radio 4 show, Just one thing “swimming is such a good all-over workout, how it stretches your blood vessels in a way that few other activities can and how it helps with memory reaction times and may even help you live longer”³ The latter is supported by the Aquatics GB report (2017) stating that Swimming lowers the risk of early death by 28 per cent.⁴

3

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/5Y9qZzcKDYdVxSDdM9gxGqY/why-swimming-could-be-the-best-exercise-you-do>

4

<https://www.aquaticsgb.com/news/general-swimming-news/major-new-study-health-benefits-swimming-released/>

5. Learning to swim a life skill

With the Royal Life saving society publishing data that shows an 85% increase in child drownings between 2019 and 2022, with a disproportionate risk for children from ethnic minority and deprived families, closing a community pool and lido is downright dangerous. All children have a right to learn how to swim in a pool that they are able to access easily. Not all families can afford private lessons and Ilkley pool currently has 12 local primary schools that attend weekly.

There has been an 85% increase in the number of child drownings in England between 2019 and 2022, with 20 drownings occurring in 2019/20 compared with 37 in 2021/22. This is according to new data published today???? by the National Child Mortality Database (NCMD) team at the University of Bristol.

RLSS UK has recently highlighted that children from ethnic minority groups and those on low incomes are falling behind on statutory swimming and self-rescue outcomes in England^[1]. This is also the first time that data has been made available