

Promoting healthy living

Babergh TALKBACK

The future of Hadleigh Pool

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In the second Babergh Talkback, Craig Martin and Mike Motteram (right), Hadleigh residents and editors of the community website www.hadleigh.org.uk quiz Cllr. Nick Ridley, Chairman of the Strategy Committee, about the future of swimming in the town. The current Hadleigh Pool is coming to the end of its 'natural life' – hence Babergh's current investigations into its future options.

Q: What are Babergh's plans for replacing the swimming pool, if and when, it fails?

A: Firstly, let me address a misunderstanding doing the rounds and say that there are no present plans whatsoever to close the pool!

However, the cost of a new pool is estimated to be in the region of £3.25m – that's the equivalent of a 4.4% increase in the Council Tax. In addition, Babergh needs to deliver its other priorities across the district and they too will have to be paid out of the Council Tax. The Government has indicated that it will 'cap' the budgets of any council who increases the Council Tax by more than 5%. And that's our dilemma. If we are able to resolve this funding issue, then we will be working with all relevant partners on a feasibility study into the type of facility wanted by the community.

What must be very obvious is that if the pool is to be rebuilt on its present site, then there would be no pool during the time needed to demolish and rebuild it. An alternative site would allow the changeover from old to new to be seamless, but now is not the time to re-run this already contentious issue

Q: If Babergh receives a planning application from Tesco to build a supermarket in Hadleigh will consideration be given to building a new pool from "planning gain"?

A: Babergh will always look to maximise the value of any assets at its disposal and where necessary will target any resulting resources on its service priorities. There would be no 'planning gain' if a supermarket is built on the Brett Works, but there may be a return to Babergh, should the access to the supermarket cross the Council's land. However, current estimates suggest that any such figure would be



considerably smaller than the total required to build a new pool.

Q: Why hasn't Babergh put in a Sports Lottery Bid for a new pool?

A: A few years ago, Babergh was involved in discussions with Sport England to try to secure financial support for Hadleigh Pool. Sport England explained to Babergh that the Council stood very little chance of success against the then existing criteria (we only met one of the six).

Since then we have had a further discussion with Sport England and sought specialist advice from Suffolk County Council's External Funding Unit, but have been told that the limited funding that there is available (only £1m for the whole of the Eastern Region!) is being targeted not on buildings but on 'people projects.'

Q: Hadleigh has clearly grown significantly over the last few years. Therefore, do you think there are sufficient amenities for teenagers and young people in the town, should the pool close?

A: The current pool is particularly well used by local primary schools, as well as members of all ages of the Hadleigh Swimming Club and other swimmers, so it is an important facility for young and old. Babergh's Corporate Priorities include a task to promote a healthy lifestyle for all its citizens as well as a Youth Policy. The loss of the pool would be a serious blow to Hadleigh and so the Council will continue to work with all the other agencies, health, education and the County Council as well as Hadleigh Town Council and personal private and business donors to try to avoid this happening.

Babergh also delivers a wide range of youth-related services in the Hadleigh area, including sports and fitness activities. In 2005, nearly 600 spaces were filled on these courses.

