

6. Observations, Conclusions and Recommendations

The survey work and stakeholder engagement have provided a range of views from a wide cross section of Harlow's children, young people, parents and carers and community organisations. The response levels to the residents' household survey has been particularly high and there is a strong degree of consistency across the various sources from which we can be confident that the findings are robust and reliable. The information and findings from the consultation report provide a useful source of evidence to feed into the wider review of Harlow's paddling pools.

Residents of Harlow overwhelmingly welcomed being asked about their views of the paddling pools and will no doubt be very interested in both the outcome of this consultation and any decisions that it may lead to. In the interests of transparency and as good practice, it is suggested that the council publish a reasonably extensive executive summary of this report and make it widely available, with the full report presumably also being available to those who wish to read it.

Residents clearly value the pools as important local play/recreation facilities, part of the heritage of the town and recognise the benefits they provide for children, young people, parents/carers and the wider community. The Town Park site, in particular, is something of an iconic community hub, not only an important destination to the family life for so many residents, but widely recognised as part of the character of the town.

It is notable that when looking at options for the future, residents tend to opt for what they know i.e. people want paddling pools where they use them and a splash park where they use it (i.e. Potter Street response).

Replacing any of the existing paddling pools with splash parks without further community engagement at the local level is likely to be unpopular with a large number of residents. If the council does decide to press ahead with such a plan on any of the sites, it would be advised to address other concerns as part of a package, particularly the widely expressed need for toilets and other facilities at the sites.

Residents may be more willing to support the conversion of some of the sites into splash parks if there is a clear commitment and plan for improvements to be made to each of them, with toilets, again, being the clear popular priority.

The inaccessibility of the sites to disabled children should be cause concern. Now that this has been identified, the provision of toilets including accessible toilets and changing facilities would considerably mitigate this.

In conclusion it is recommended that the council, subject to other considerations emerging from the review, should consider announcing a long-term commitment to: -

- Improve all the sites over an agreed timeframe - including in particular, the provision of toilets. In this respect as well as new provision, consideration could perhaps be made of negotiating with the nearby indoor community facilities to gain access to toilets for the six-week opening period and/or providing portable toilet units.
- Retain the paddling pools, at least at the three most popular sites (Town Park, Norman Booth and Summers), but with a staged renovation programme that should include renewing the underwater surfaces (less of a priority it appears at Norman Booth than the others) and the provision of more seating for parents/carers.
- Consider the feasibility of introducing splash park features to the Town Park pool, but without fundamentally altering, so much as enhancing, its current identity as a paddling pool.

- Consider further, more local, community consultation on any plans to fundamentally change any of the individual sites, other than the improvements identified by this current consultation.
- Monitor, over time, the community's response to any incremental or staged changes to any of the sites, in order to make well-informed decisions about further possible changes.
- Future provision in areas of growth should be kept under review. i.e. there are parts of Harlow where there has been recent growth, and are not as well served in terms of access to either paddling pools or splash pads.