

**The upgrade of the Newcastle Ocean Baths (NOB) is being delivered in two stages.**

**Stage One focused on the pools and lower promenade to address key safety, accessibility and water-quality issues. Stage Two focuses on the pavilion buildings and surrounding public domain.**

## **When will construction of Stage One works be finished?**

Construction of Stage One commenced in March 2022 and the pool re-opened for swimming on **Thursday 21 December 2023**. Construction will continue at the southern end of the site with minor works near the Canoe Pool set to be complete in early 2024.

## **How were the bleachers and boardwalk restored?**

The historic bleachers were restored and repainted to match the iconic teal colour.

The timber boardwalk remains in its existing position and has been widened and elevated to enable improved accessibility. Inspection of the boardwalk piers found that they had been repaired and replaced at various times since their original construction so to ensure the longevity of future use, they were also replaced.

The design initially identified a different non-timber material to be used for the boardwalk which would last longer and be easier to maintain, however the community had a strong desire for the traditional timber to be used. Therefore, we aligned the design to meet the community's preference by using a composite material for the structure and timber planks for the walking surface.

## **Was the pumphouse retained?**

Yes, the pumphouse structure has been retained and with the installation of new pumps within the pump well, the old pumps are no longer in use. The new pump well system was installed next to the old pumphouse to help improve water quality through increased water circulation, helping to reduce the opportunity for algae growth.

The new pumps have the capacity to completely replace the water of the baths within six hours. This is a significant improvement on the old system which was mainly dependent on tidal movement to refill the baths.

## **Was the pool deck level raised?**

Yes, a new reinforced concrete surface was layered over the top of the existing pool deck, providing a more stable surface around the edge of the pool. The depth of this layer varies across the site depending on the existing surface (ranging between 200mm to 300mm).

The baths upgrade considers a 50-year design life. Planning advice was taken into account when considering the height for the new pool deck, including the *Newcastle Coastal Zone Hazards Study 2014*, which showed likely coastal inundation hazards for the 2050 and 2100 planning horizons.

Raising the deck provides resilience to predicted future sea-level rise and increased inundation

risk. The raising of the deck is not intended to stop water from entering the pool during large swell events. As the sea level rises and coastal events become more frequent, the number of days the pool needs to be closed will also increase. Raising the deck is one way of addressing this by reducing the number of days the pool needs to be closed for swimming due to the safety risk of large swells.

There will always be days each year when the baths are closed due to large swells and pool inundation. This is how sand will continue to enter the pools and provide the sandy floor, as it has done for over 100 years.

### **Why was the pool floor capped?**

We consistently heard from the community that water quality is an issue at the baths. Capping the bottom with engineered concrete will allow for improved cleaning and maintenance of the baths, improving water quality for years to come.

Commencement of the project showed the pool floor already had a large section of the floor concreted. Capping the pool floor will also improve safety by minimising uneven edges on the floor, and sand will continue to build up on the pool floor as it has always done.

### **What impact does this have on the depth of the pool?**

The overall depth of the pool remains the same as it previously was as we increased both the deck level and the floor level. Raising the pool allows the baths to be used more days per year, reducing the need to close when seas are too high and dangerous.

### **Does the pool still have a sandy floor?**

Yes. The sand on the floor of the pool comes from the occasional overtopping of the baths, which will continue to occur as it has for over 100 years, even after the increase to the pool deck height and the capping of the floor.

### **Why were the pool walls replaced?**

Community engagement and heritage assessments through the project's design phase showed a preference for maintaining the original aesthetic of the site, encouraging retention of the existing pool walls.

During the design phase, investigations into the pool walls indicated they were in reasonable condition, therefore it was planned to retain the original walls. However, as construction progressed, the walls were found to be structurally inadequate to meet the upgrade's intended 50-year lifespan, and a full replacement of the walls was undertaken.

### **Was accessibility considered in the design process?**

Yes, we engaged accessibility consultants, City of Newcastle's (CN) Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee, and the Community Reference Group (CRG) accessibility representative to provide input to the design for Stage One. The design includes ramp access and improved handrail support into the pool.

The design of the project considered the route that users with limited mobility will use to park at the pool, use the facilities and make their way into the pool.

As we progress into the design phase for Stage Two, we will again engage with these advisors to ensure the design appropriately considers access and inclusion.

## **Was heritage considered in the design process?**

Yes, we engaged heritage consultants and worked with the Hunter Regional Committee of the National Trust, who are represented on the Community Reference Group to have input into the design for Stage One. In particular, the art-deco inspired circular stairs, the iconic bleacher seating and the boardwalk have been maintained in the final design.

We will continue to consult with these specialists as we progress into the design phase for Stage Two.

## **Has a Review of Environmental Factors been completed for the site?**

Yes. We commissioned a third-party consultant to prepare a Review of Environmental Factors (REF) for Stage One of the upgrade in 2021, after it was assessed that the proposed activity was subject to the provisions of Part 5 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*. The REF aims to outline the proposed works to be undertaken, identify all environmental impacts and mitigation measures and minimise impacts to the site during the construction phase.

CN assessed, to the fullest extent possible, all matters affecting, or likely to affect, the environment due to the construction of the stage one work. We have reviewed the recommendations outlined in the REF and have provided the required information to the construction contractor for their action.

Stage Two will follow a similar approach as Stage One, with the specific planning approval pathway to be determined as the project progresses.

## **What change facilities are available now the pool has reopened?**

The existing change facilities located in the southern pavilion building have been repainted, refreshed and reopened in line with the reopening of the pool and lower promenade for swimming and other uses. The upgrade of the change facilities is part of Stage Two, which is currently in the early design phase.

## **What are the opening hours for the change rooms?**

The change rooms and public amenities will be open from 5.30am, closing at dusk.

## **What are the operational hours for lifeguards at the pool?**

Lifeguard patrol hours are between 9am and 5.30pm Monday to Sunday, except during periods of pool cleaning. The schedule for pool cleaning is available [here](#).

## **Will the kiosk reopen?**

Provision of space for a future café / kiosk operator is being assessed as part of Stage Two of the Newcastle Ocean Baths upgrade.

A coffee cart is on site as an interim measure ahead of the delivery of Stage Two.

## **Will on-site parking be available?**

Construction activities will still be underway in early 2024, so a section of the carpark will remain a construction zone while the remaining parking spaces have been returned for usage following completion of the majority of Stage One.

All users of the car park are advised that there may be construction vehicles and machinery.

## **How is water quality being managed?**

The water quality in the baths is dependent on the water quality of the ocean, weather conditions, the number of users in the baths, and the amount of retained soil and other contaminants in the sandy bottom. Despite the improvements made during the delivery of Stage One, water quality will continue to fluctuate due to the nature of the ocean baths.

The baths have seen unprecedented use since the pools opening, which has been valuable in testing and understanding how the pool functions when operating under heavy use. We will continue to monitor pool water quality, adjusting the pump frequency, duration, cleaning methods and water level as required.

The pool is closed for cleaning each Wednesday - the schedule for pool cleaning is available [here](#).

## **Now that construction of Stage One is complete, will any further changes be made to the pool and promenade area?**

Designing and constructing a facility of this nature, in a manner complementary to its history, and in a coastal environment, is a complex process. Extensive consultation with the community and technical specialists was undertaken during development of the project.

As with any community facility, there are differing usage requirements and preferences amongst users, which also need to be balanced with the operational requirements for managing and maintaining the facility.

While a range of user group preferences have been considered, the design represents the best compromise between the varying needs of the community, and the management requirements of the facility.

Now that the pool and promenade areas are operational, we are monitoring the performance of key elements of the design. Where we receive feedback on certain aspects of the design such as the placement or design of handrails, we will review and consider if modification or treatments are required.

If any defects become apparent, maintenance works will be undertaken to rectify these issues.

## **How was the community engaged in the design process for the upgrade?**

Over summer 2019/2020, we carried out a range of engagement activities with the community to better understand how they use and value the Newcastle Ocean Baths, and to gain insight into future improvements.

The following activities were carried out from 22 November 2019 to 1 March 2020:

- Online ideas wall to allow for engagement via ideas boards. A total of 1094 comments or ideas were submitted on the walls by 354 people;
- 898 telephone (poll) surveys;

- 218 intercept (face-to-face) surveys; and
- 4,400+ visits were recorded to the NOB dedicated 'Have Your Say' web pages.

In 2020 and 2021, we continued to seek community input on various aspects of the NOB upgrade through the Newcastle Ocean Baths Community Reference Group (CRG). This group was formed to help the planning process for the revitalisation of the Baths through discussions and co-design workshops. The CRG had the opportunity to review and have input into three rounds of designs, including preliminary, concept and final designs for the Stage One upgrade.

As we move forward with Stage Two, we continue to engage with the CRG and have undertaken broad community engagement on preliminary design options. We have appointed a Principal Design Consultant to bring together feedback from the community and the findings of technical studies to develop more detailed options for the upgraded pavilion buildings under Stage Two.

### **Why don't either of the preliminary design options for the pavilion retain open-air change rooms?**

We engaged a consultant to undertake a User Needs Analysis study to help inform decisions about the design for Stage Two, based on an understanding of community needs, current and future demand, and considerations for safety, public health, and accessibility.

The study determined that there is a higher crime risk with open air facilities due to the ability to access the area undetected after hours. Additionally, the open-air nature of the former change rooms encouraged naked sun-bathing which is not appropriate in a modern-day environment. Open-air facilities have no means of controlling, detecting, or inhibiting the use of drones, meaning patrons (including children) within the change rooms are at risk of being targeted by unauthorised surveillance.

The User Needs Analysis recommends these spaces be enclosed to protect the privacy of users. We will explore options for skylights and ventilation to provide open air amenity during Concept & Detailed Design, while still meeting the recommendations of the Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) statement.

### **Will enclosed change rooms increase the risk of illnesses such as COVID-19?**

The User Needs Analysis includes a literature review of guidelines and recommendations from the Australian Institute of Refrigeration, Air Conditioning and Heating (AIRAH) the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE); the World Health Organisation (WHO), the Australian institute of Architects (AIA) and the NSW Health Covid Prevention Manual.

This review was undertaken to determine best practices in reducing the transmission of airborne viruses, concluding that the risk management recommendations include increasing ventilation rates, using high-efficiency air filters and implementing proper hygiene practices.

As the project progress, these considerations will be factored into the concept and detailed design for Stage Two.

### **When will Stage Two be constructed?**

Before planning for construction, we need to develop the concept design and detailed design

for the renewed pavilion and public domain. The planning pathway will be established as part of developing the design for Stage Two. We will then complete all relevant studies and supporting documentation to receive approval for the project.

Following construction approvals, CN will tender for a contractor to begin construction works.

### **Will the Baths stay open for swimming while Stage Two is under construction?**

We will work with the contractor to maintain access to the pool as much as possible during construction. There may be some instances where the pool needs to be closed to safely enable certain construction activities. Advance notice will be given wherever possible.

### **Will the cost of upgrading the Baths lead to entry fees being charged?**

Historic records show that the NOB were initially leased to an operator, with an entrance fee charged from 1918 until 1953, when CN took back control of the NOB.

A Notice of Motion was carried unanimously at the Ordinary Council Meeting on 23 February 2021 reaffirming the current Council's enduring commitment to maintaining both the Newcastle Ocean Baths and Merewether Ocean Baths as safe, free public facilities, accessible to all Novocastrians regardless of socio-economic status, gender, age, mobility or background.