

CONGLETON TOWN COUNCIL

COMMITTEE REPORTS AND UPDATES

COMMITTEE:	Town Hall, Assets and Services Committee Meeting		
MEETING DATE AND TIME	28th September 2023	LOCATION	Congleton Town Hall
REPORT FROM	Town Hall Manager – Mark Worthington		
AGENDA ITEM REPORT TITLE	Agenda Item 8: Paddling Pool Season 2023		
Background	<p>Work started towards opening the paddling pool for the 2023 season in April. This including the drain down and jet washing of the pool surface, the annual start of season service as well as the installation of a new soft play surface to the pathway surrounding the circumference of the pool. Six additional members of existing staff were also trained in the Active IQ Level 3 Managing Pool Operations qualification to allow them to operate the pool. The paddling pool opened on Saturday 27th May and remained open until Sunday 3rd September. Details below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pool open Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday during term times• Pool open 7-days per week, including Bank Holidays, during school holidays• 2 x sessions per day 10am – 1pm and 2pm – 5pm (initially)• Pool closed between 1pm – 2pm for cleaning and maintenance (initially)• Capacity of 140 people per session• Free ‘live’ booking system• Ability to book at the gate if places are available• Maximum of 8 people per booking• 1 x booking per week per email address• 1 x member of qualified pool staff on site during opening hours• 1 x member of gate security to check bookings		
Update	<p>Due to the capacity of 140 and operating with two sessions per day, the pool plant and automatic chemical dosing system have operated faultlessly throughout the season, leading to improved water quality and no closures for maintenance.</p> <p>Warm, sunny weather for the opening three weeks of the pool season were a welcome start to Summer and led to much debate on social media around the capacity of the pool and booking system. The main</p>		

complaint from members of the public was that although the pool was fully booked on the booking system, the pool didn't look full due to no shows. No shows are users who book a slot but fail to show up on the day. If no shows cancel their booking before the start of the session, their places will go back onto the system for other users to book. During the 2022 season the average rate of no shows was almost 49%. No shows were still a considerable issue at the start of the 2023 season, however, figures for the first three weeks of the season during a prolonged period of good weather showed that the number of no shows had fallen to 38%. Following discussions between Officers and engaging with local residents about the need for a booking system to prevent long queues and disappointment, the decision was taken to use social media and signage around the pool to highlight the issue of no shows, and to move from 2 x 3 hour sessions per day to 3 x 2 hour sessions per day. This increased available daily spaces from 280 to 420. There would still be the need for a 1 hour break between each session to allow for cleaning and pool maintenance. To back up our position around capacity and the booking system, an independent Health and Safety assessment of the Paddling Pool area was undertaken by the Health and Safety Manager for Ansa / Alliance Environmental Services. A breakdown of their assessment is below:

1. I don't think, based on the evidence you provided, that there is reasonable case to increase the capacity of the site.
2. The current system of pre-booking appears to be sensible although I am not surprised to hear that some residents complain when they are refused entry. I don't see this facility as different from any other leisure facility where a maximum capacity is required
3. It seems reasonable to expect that to move away from the booking system and towards a first come first served approach would, at peak times, likely lead to queueing
4. The only drawback of the booking system is that spontaneous, drop-in visitors (or those unwilling or unable to book) may not be admitted to site
5. Visitors queuing on the footpath outside the site is not a good idea. The path is not wide enough to accommodate a queue and still maintain access for pedestrians using the path, forcing pedestrians into the road which to make this approach work

you would close the footpath to pedestrians and construct a suitable safety barrier to separate the queuing public from passing traffic. This would result in the permit parking being removed.

6. There does seem to be a couple of options for modifying the site to allow queuing on site, either alongside the footpath at Park Road to the east of the site or the boundary fence to the north. Both of these would require some considerable groundworks to complete, new fencing and gates, and of course would reduce the available space for occupants within the facility and therefore,
7. I would steer away from the idea of having the capacity split between pre-booked and drop-in. I think such a system *could* work but I would suggest that it shows the worst elements of each system

After highlighting the number of no shows through social media and using signage around the pool, plus the introduction of 3 x 2 hour sessions per day, figures from the booking system during a 4 day period of good weather at the end of August indicated that no shows had fallen to 20%. Overall bookings for the whole of the 2023 season are documented in the chart below.

Bookings	Check Ins (Attendees who turned up)	No Shows (Attendees who didn't turn up)
13,647	8,504	5,143 (37%)

Improvements to the paddling pool for the 2024 season are already being investigated. With the need to reduce queues forming outside the perimeter of the pool, Officers feel that queuing inside of the perimeter is an option worth pursuing and have contacted a company to provide us with an initial quote for these works. Initial quote to create a fenced pathway down one side of the pool area to allow users to queue off the footpath as they are checked into the pool, and dig out an area to accommodate a shed base is £9,870 + vat.



Despite the reduction in No Shows it is an area where improvements can be made. With the use of Town Council social media to emphasise the issue of No Shows we are hoping to reduce the numbers further. We are also looking at ways to adapt the booking system to automatically or manually cancel places after an agreed time has elapsed for the session to allow others to book. During a period of good weather at the end of August figures showed that on average 68% of bookings turned up within the first 30 minutes of the start of the session. This is something we would try to encourage as it gives a better idea of potential No Shows and could give the option to promote additional spaces through social media as a 'live' update.

Financial

To be in accordance with allocated budgets and financial regulations.

Environmental	To assess via the procurement process environmental impact and benefits.
Equality	Where applicable in the procurement of services this is taken into consideration.
Proposal	To receive the report relating to the 2023 paddling pool season.