

Kingfisher Leisure Centre pool closure

**Sudbury Town
Council briefing:
September 2026**



What we'll cover

- Background
- Why the pool had to close
- Survey details
- Immediate mitigations
- Alternative arrangements
- Longer-term strategy

Background

- The leisure centre and swimming pool opened nearly 40 years ago, in 1987
- Kingfisher is much-loved, a big part of community life in Sudbury, and thousands of people have learned to swim in the pool.
- Babergh has invested in the leisure centre over many years
- Average life of public swimming pools 38 years (source: Swim England)



The closure in 2024

- In 2024, the pool was forced to close due to damage to the glass roof
- To enable access to the roof, the pool had to be drained to enable scaffolding to be erected (*pictured left*)
- We used this as an opportunity to do additional pool repairs and surveys



- These surveys showed there were some **structural issues with the undercroft**. This is the area beneath the pool deck
- Chlorinated water had been penetrating the undercroft and pool walls this had caused the reinforced concrete to deteriorate
- It resulted in an extended closure in 2024 to mitigate the issues
- We did additional work, and 'propping' was installed to spread the loads on the pool walls. (*pictured right*)
- Around £400K has been spent since 2024/25. (there is also £1.7m within the capital programme from 25/26 to 30/31)

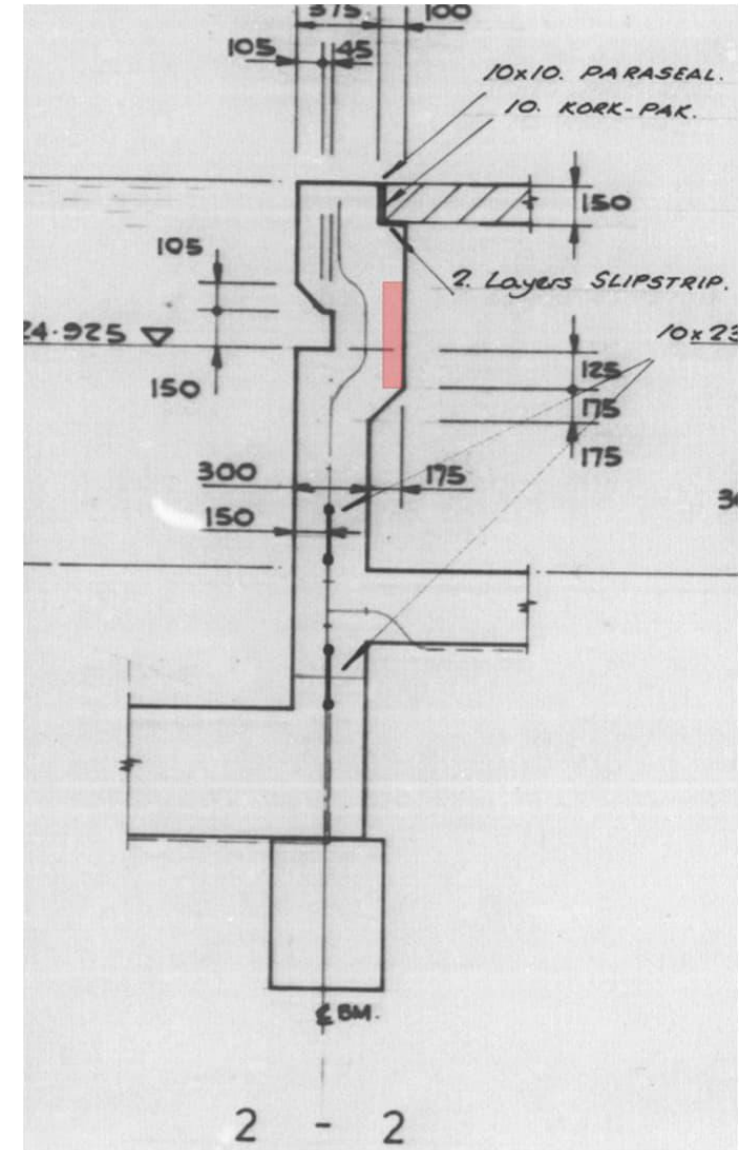


Why has the pool had to close now?

- The pool safely reopened after that work.
- Since then, there has been regular monitoring and a series of invasive surveys and laboratory tests undertaken
- This is so we could fully understand the extent of the problems and ensure the pool remained safe for swimmers
- The main structural consultant throughout the surveys is Sweco UK Ltd, though a number of other experts have been involved too
- Inspections and laboratory testing have shown all the pool walls have levels of corrosion - the most significant of which being the southern wall
- **The latest report highlighted serious concerns and left us with no choice but to close the pool immediately**

Survey details

- On 16 September we received the final report in relation to the **southern wall in the undercroft area**, including analysis of laboratory test results
- This was the most difficult wall to access and the last one to be reported on
- This report showed the highest level of deterioration and the structural engineers were unable to provide a residual life of the wall as a result. Consequently, they could not guarantee its safety moving forward
- The investigations showed that, in effect, the pool would require a rebuild. The age of the plant and machinery means this would also need to be replaced



Examples of findings

- The concrete at the investigated location was found to be damp, cracked and delaminated at reinforcement level
- Sections of concrete detached in large pieces, indicating a significant loss of bond and cohesion around the reinforcement
- This confirms the cracking is associated with substantial deterioration of the surrounding concrete, rather than being limited to surface-level cracking.
- The exposed reinforcement was severely corroded. Bar diameter had **corroded from 12mm to 5mm** in some areas. This is a significant finding – loss of steel may reduce the wall's capacity.







- Following a review of this report with the consultants, representatives from the Council's Health & Safety team and Abbeycroft – it was agreed by all parties that there was no option but to close the swimming pool that evening and not re-open.
- Consideration was given to continuing inspections to identify increased risk of failure – which would present as increased water in the undercroft and more tiles coming away from the pool.
- However, due to the extent of water already in the undercroft and the tile survey undertaken previously, this option was not considered to be safe for the public. It also exposed contractors and consultants to unacceptable levels of risk.

Immediate mitigations and alternative provision

- Our partners Abbeycroft have been working extremely hard to move swimming lessons and are liaising with swimming clubs to find alternative locations.
- Around 100 swimmers have had lessons moved to Hadleigh Pool and Leisure.
- All school swimming lessons this term have been relocated to Hadleigh and Halstead.
- We are continuing to work with Abbeycroft to establish other provision. This is being treated as a priority.
- For example, Cornard Swimming Pool is a great community asset. It is run by Thomas Gainsborough School, and we are currently reaching out to see what is possible

Longer-term strategy

- We had started to explore longer-term options for swimming facilities in Sudbury, whilst seeking to extend the life of the existing pool for as long as possible through ongoing repairs and maintenance
- The initial indications from work we commissioned in 2025 highlighted a range of options – all costing over £10million, and some reaching £28m. This is a cost few councils can afford
- Swim England says there has been a net loss of 500 pools since 2010 – many pools are coming to the end of their life, and serious financial pressures faced by local authorities mean they cannot afford to build new facilities
- Swim England has called for £1billion of government investment to build new pools and refurbish existing ones
- Babergh's council leader is writing to the Sports Minister to raise this issue

Longer-term strategy

- We are reviewing the long-term options in light of the new structural information and actively exploring a range of funding options with our consultants Alliance Leisure.
- This includes Sport England funding, and any other government funding streams, and Community Infrastructure Levy funding
- We will continue to work with partners in Sudbury, including the town council, to secure the funding the town deserves
- A report will be taken to Babergh Cabinet on 10 November providing background information, details of the issues the pool is facing and next steps

Questions