

Our ref: KP001

24th September 2026

James Cartlidge MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear James

Re: Kingfisher Swimming Pool Closure

Thank you for your letter of 22nd September and questions.

We, too, are deeply disappointed that we have had to close the pool and we share the community's sadness. The pool at Kingfisher has been an important part of the community for four decades and generations of Sudbury children have learned to swim there.

As previously stated, the pool's condition left us with no alternative – closing it was the last thing we wanted to do, but we cannot compromise on public safety.

I am happy to provide further details, and responses to your questions can be found below.

We are committed to transparency, and you may also be interested to know we will bring a report about Kingfisher Leisure Centre to our cabinet meeting on 10 November 2026. This will provide more detail in relation to the pool repair issue and next steps for longer term options.

What alternative swimming provision has been established?

Our partners Abbeycroft have been working extremely hard to move swimming lessons and are liaising with swimming clubs to find alternative locations.

At the time of writing, around 100 swimmers have had lessons moved to Hadleigh Pool and Leisure.

All school swimming lessons for 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, and we will update in due course.

We are very sorry for the impact this is having on both users and staff.



Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils
Endeavour House, 8 Russell Road, Ipswich IP1 2BX
Telephone: (0300) 1234 000
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Has the outdoor pool at Great Cornard Leisure Centre been assessed to make it suitable for all-year round use?

Cornard Swimming Pool is a great community asset, which the district council continues to support through an annual Community Development Grant.

It is run by Thomas Gainsborough School, and we are currently reaching out to see what is possible and how the facility might be used in the future.

How long has the council known about the deteriorating condition of the pool?

The structural issues relate to the undercroft (the area below the pool deck). Chlorinated water has been penetrating the undercroft and this has caused the reinforced concrete to deteriorate.

This issue has been monitored, and was part of the problems addressed when the pool was closed in August 2024 due to damage to the roof. At that time, additional propping was installed to the undercroft area to spread the loads.

Since then, a series of invasive surveys have been undertaken which have shown that the steel reinforcement within the concrete has deteriorated as well as the surface of the concrete which is visibly wet.

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.

For clarity, the decision to close the pool is not related to the issues with the damaged roof which caused a closure two years ago.

With Swim England stating the average life of a pool is 38 years, what alternative provisions were put in place?

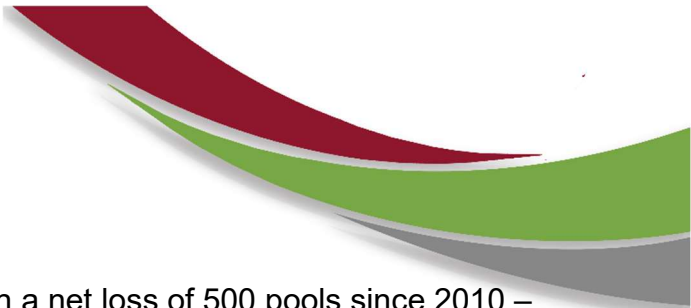
We had hoped to extend the life of the pool. Around £400K has been spent since 2024/25 to ensure we could keep it operational. There is £1.7m within the capital programme from 25/26 to 30/31, but the cost of rebuilding a pool is far beyond this.

Babergh had already started to explore longer-term options for swimming facilities in Sudbury, and this work will continue.

The initial indications from work we commissioned in 2025 highlighted a range of options – all costing over £10million, and some reaching £28m. As you will be aware, this is a cost few councils can afford.



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This is also why 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.

It argues that £1 billion of government investment is required to build new pools and refurbish existing ones. I agree this is a national issue which must be addressed urgently.

Has the council identified suitable grant or funding streams that could cover the cost of the rebuild of the pool?

We are 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 fight for the funding Sudbury deserves. I know you share our disappointment about the closure of Kingfisher and I am sure you and our other partners in Sudbury will support us in any future bids.

As you know, we are working together on a masterplan for Sudbury and leisure facilities should be an important part of this.

I will also be writing to the Sports Minister to raise this issue.

Yours sincerely



Cllr Deborah Saw

Leader of the Council & Cabinet Member for People and Place

Babergh District Council

deborah.saw@babergh.gov.uk



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