

BY EMAIL

29th September 2026

C Griffin
Clerk
Sudbury Town Council
Town Hall, Old Market Place
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Dear Ciaran

Following your correspondence with Cllr Saw regarding the closure of the swimming pool at Kingfisher Leisure Centre, I wanted to contact you with some further information.

The first thing to reiterate is how devastated we are at having to close the pool on safety grounds. We share the community's sadness, and are sorry for the impact it is having on users and staff.

Thank you for sending, in advance, the questions to be raised at the town council meeting on 29 September.

I thought it would be useful to share some initial responses ahead of that.

For your information, we are committed to transparency, and we will also be bringing a report about Kingfisher Leisure Centre to Babergh's 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.

In response to your initial questions:

What were the structural problems Babergh was aware of from previous reports? How much had been spent on reports and works already? How much was budgeted for future works this year and next?

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.

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This issue has been monitored, and was part of the issues addressed, when the pool was closed in August 2024 due to damage to the roof. At this 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.

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.

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.

What changed to lead to immediate closure? Was this due to new advice or a new report and what was the immediate danger? Who gave this advice?

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.

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.

The main structural consultant throughout the surveys is Sweco.

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**Was it the rise in cost of existing/identified works or the cost of new works identified?
Did previous works and previous draining of the pool lead to the new structural problems?**

The investigations showed that the planned works could not be delivered because the extent of the deterioration is so great. The structural issues are not related to draining the pool.

Did the uncertainty on Local Government Reform influence the decision as Babergh will now exist in May 27 whereas it was assumed to be joining a new Unitary authority?

No – longer term feasibility work was undertaken in autumn 2025, this was put on hold to be presented to the shadow board of the new authority from May 2027 onwards whilst we continued to progress surveys and building repairs. It had no influence over the decision to close the pool which was on health and safety grounds.

It is proposed that the longer-term feasibility work is reviewed in light of the recent additional structural information and that the most effective option be put forward together with a funding strategy for further consideration.

Did the projected rise in energy costs in January affect the decision on remaining open or closure?

No – this was purely a health and safety decision. Closing the pool will incur costs for decommissioning and compensating Abbeycroft which will exceed any potential energy increases.

The remaining services at Kingfisher eg. gym, soft play, will they remain open in the longer term? Are they sustainable?

Babergh are supportive of Abbeycroft continuing to offer services at Kingfisher and will work closely with them to support their financial sustainability during this transition. Softplay and dry services such as gym and studio space are included within the longer-term options and are an important part of the leisure centre offer.

What planning had happened and will happen to replace Kingfisher? What financial resources exist to do so? What funding sources could be sought? What is the cost of a new pool?

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.

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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. Swim England has called for £1 billion of government investment to build new pools and refurbish existing ones.

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, and the provision of leisure facilities should also be an important part of the Sudbury masterplan work we are collaborating on.

Who made the decision to close Kingfisher? What role have elected members had? Will there be openness in the publication of reports and advice given in the making of this decision?

The Director for Property, Development & Regeneration made the decision to close the pool for health and safety reasons, in consultation with the Leader, Portfolio Holder for Thriving Communities and Portfolio Holder for Assets.

Babergh are committed to transparency and, as stated earlier, 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 in relation to Kingfisher.

In addition, an information board will be installed at Kingfisher as soon as possible to explain the reason for closure to the public.

What work or help will be given to groups, clubs and schools who use the pool for swimming to find alternatives? How many have been affected?

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 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.

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What impact could this closure have on visitor numbers and spend in Sudbury?

To date, the Council has not looked specifically at patterns of shoppers using the leisure centre and then going into the town centre. We are happy to investigate this further.

Do all Babergh members representing Sudbury agree with the decision made?

All members agree that protecting the health and safety of our residents, staff and consultants is fundamental. We regret the decision to close the pool but had no safe alternative in the circumstance.

What is the public health impact of closure? The use of swimming by GPs and care providers for medical and wellbeing treatment. What is the alternative provision for the groups impacted?

Kingfisher Leisure Centre is a much-loved community hub and has a critical role in improving health outcomes and reducing the pressure of the NHS. As already stated, Swim England is urging the Government to provide support for swimming pools, recognising their importance in reducing health inequalities across communities.

It is too early to understand the public health impact of the closure at Kingfisher, but we recognise its closure could risk exacerbating health inequalities in the town and surrounding areas. We are working hard to find alternatives.

As stated above, Abbeycroft have been working extremely hard to move swimming lessons and are liaising with swimming clubs to find alternative locations. It's also looking into alternative provision for casual swimmers and continues to operate the traditional referral activity that takes place at the centre, delivered in partnership with the Council.

We are also looking at other potential options. For example, 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.

I hope these initial answers help, and we look forward to the meeting.

Yours sincerely



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Chief Executive

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