

**The upgrade of the Newcastle Ocean Baths is a staged project. Stage One focuses on the pools and lower promenade to address key safety, accessibility, and water-quality issues. Stage Two will focus on the pavilion buildings and surrounding public domain.**

### **When will construction of Stage One construction be finished and the baths re-opened?**

The Stage One work is expected to be completed by late 2023, and the baths re-opened for swimming before Summer 2023. This allows time for testing and commissioning of the new pumps before swimming re-commences.

### **Will the bleachers and boardwalk be retained?**

Yes, the historic bleachers will be retained. They are undergoing restoration work and will be repainted to match the iconic teal colour.

The boardwalk will remain in its existing position but will be widened and elevated to enable improved access, with new timber being installed to match the look and feel. Inspection of the boardwalk piers found that they have been repaired and replaced at various times since their original construction so to ensure the longevity of future use, they are also being replaced.

The design originally had a different material specified for the boardwalk, which would be easier to maintain, however the community had a strong wish for timber to be used, so we have aligned the design to meet the communities preference.

### **Will the pumphouse be retained?**

Yes, the pumphouse structure will be retained, however the old pumps will no longer be used. A new pump well system is being installed next to the old pumphouse which will improve water quality through increased water circulation, helping to minimise the opportunity for algae to grow.

The new pump has 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.

### **Will the pool deck level be raised?**

Yes, a new reinforced concrete surface is being 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 will vary across the site depending on the existing surface (ranging between 200mm to 300mm).

The baths upgrade considers a 50-year design life. Planning advice has been 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, in fact, 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 have consistently heard from the community that water quality is a key 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 and 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 does now.

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

The overall depth of the pool will be maintained as we are increasing both the deck level and the floor level. Raising the pool will allow the baths to be used more days per year, reducing the need to close when seas are too high and dangerous.

### **Will 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.

We will also consider manually replacing fresh sand in the pool after its annual cleaning depending on the forecasted swell and weather conditions.

### **Why have the walls been replaced?**

Community engagement and heritage assessments through the project's design phase showed a preference for maintaining the original aesthetic of the site.

During the design phase, investigations into the pool walls showed they were in reasonable condition, so we planned to retain the original walls in keeping with community preferences. However as construction progressed the walls were found to be structurally inadequate to meet the upgrade's intended 50-year lifespan, so a full replacement of the walls was undertaken.

### **Will the northern vehicle access ramp be retained?**

The northern vehicle access ramp will remain with minor modifications to be made during Stage One works to facilitate maintenance access to the facility.

### **What's happening to the central pedestrian stairs and southern pedestrian ramp?**

The new design incorporates the existing central pedestrian stairs within upgraded seating and improvements to ensure they meet current standards and provide access from the main entrance through to the pool. The southern pedestrian ramp will be replaced with a ramp which is compliant with modern accessibility and safety standards.

### **Has accessibility been considered in the design process?**

Yes, we engaged accessibility consultants, City of Newcastle's Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee, and the Community Reference Group 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 considers 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.

### **Has heritage been 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. City of Newcastle commissioned GHD 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.

City of Newcastle 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.

We are obliged to ensure that the recommendations outlined in the REF are addressed by the construction contractor, during construction.

Stage Two will follow a similar approach as Stage 1, with the specific planning approval pathway to be determined as project progresses.

### **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 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.
- 4,400+ visits were recorded to the Baths' dedicated 'Have Your Say' web pages.

In 2020 and 2021, we continued to seek community input on various aspects of the Newcastle Ocean Baths 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, concept and final designs for the Stage One upgrade.

As we move forward with Stage Two we are again engaging with the Community Reference Group, and we will also be undertaking broad community engagement on preliminary design options before the Concept Design for Stage Two commences.

### **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 associated with open-air change rooms with no means for controlling or detecting the use of drones – which puts users (including children) at risk of unauthorised surveillance or observation within change facilities. The study also concluded open-air change rooms provide poor outcomes for the facilities' security.

The User Needs Analysis recommends these spaces be enclosed to protect the privacy of users. The concept design will consider sky lighting over the changing areas to maximise natural light and design solutions to maximise natural airflow

### **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. The review concludes 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 engage a design consultant 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 2. CN 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, and 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 Baths were initially leased to an operator, with an entrance fee charged from 1918 until 1953, when Council took back control of the Baths.

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.