



BALLARAT AQUATIC STRATEGY 2014

AUGUST 2014

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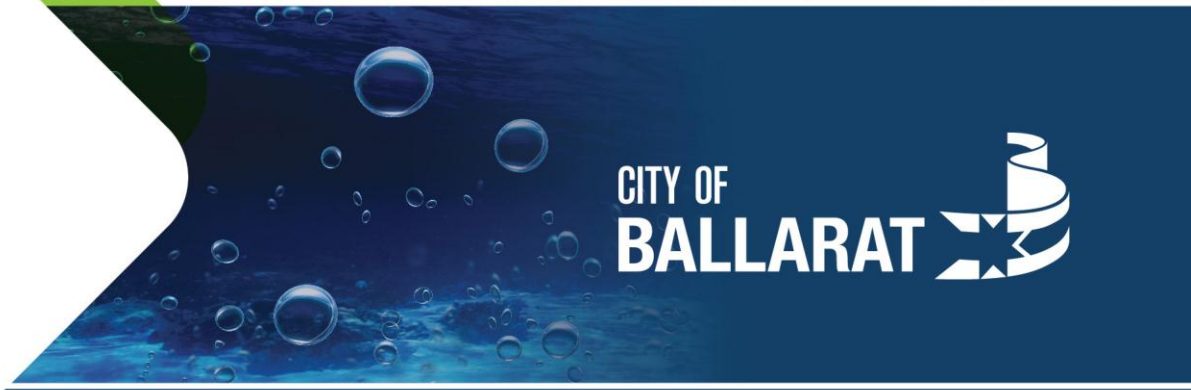
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1. INTRODUCTION

The City of Ballarat Aquatic Plan presents practical projects to be delivered across the municipality over the next five to ten years. These projects are designed to increase participation in aquatic activities by all people, regardless of gender, age or physical capabilities.

Encouraging greater participation in sport and recreational activity will deliver enhanced levels of physical and mental health for Ballarat residents. Council can support community wellbeing by providing improved aquatic facilities and aquatic play spaces that will add to the suite of resources available to those wanting to become actively involved in sport and recreation.



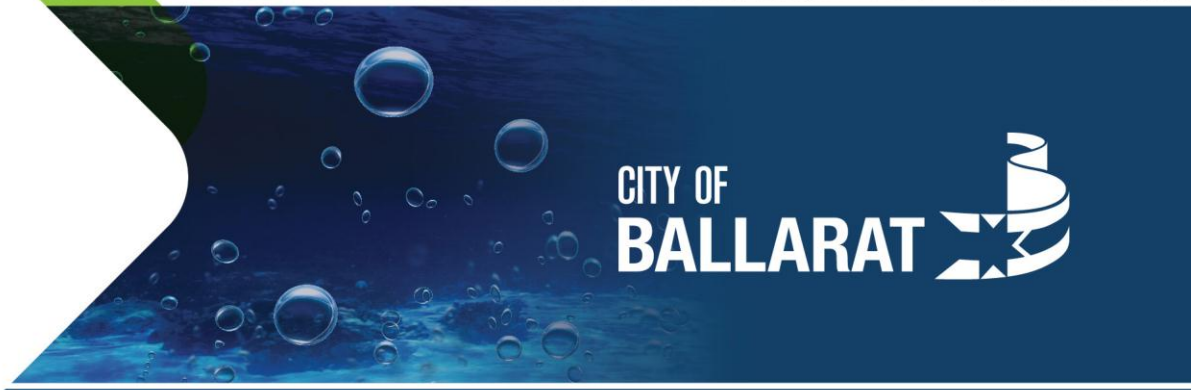
2. VISION

The vision for the Ballarat Aquatic Strategy is:

To make Ballarat a healthier and more active community that has access to a wide variety of aquatic recreational facilities and activities.

Ballarat will provide first class aquatic facilities for all members of the community regardless of gender, age, ability and cultural background. We will promote the benefits of a healthy, active lifestyle for all residents.

Well planned and varied aquatic facilities will make Ballarat a destination for others in the region for play, fun and competition.



3. OBJECTIVES & PRINCIPLES

There are both Council-specific and aquatic-specific objectives this strategy considers and links to. In addition, key principles have been established to guide the development of the strategy within the broader objectives established by the Council. The strategic framework for its development is shown in Figure 1.

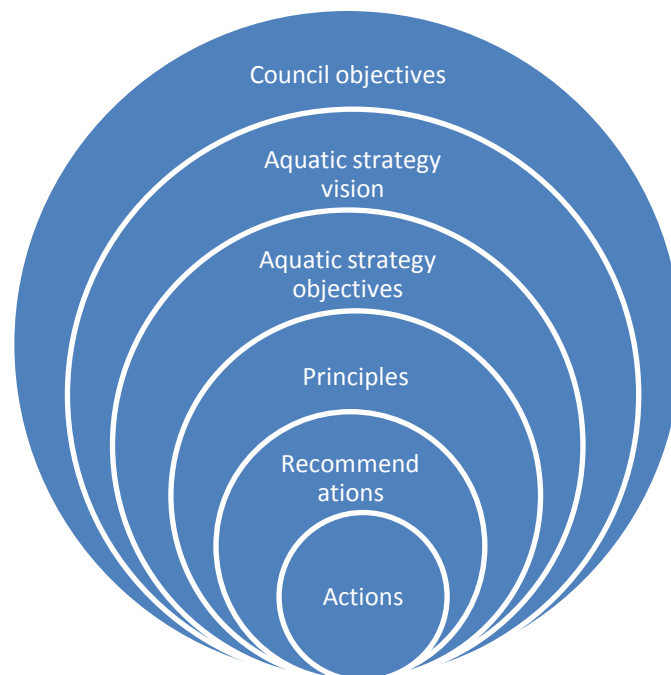


Figure 1: Strategic framework for the development of the Ballarat Aquatic Strategy

3.1 Council objectives

Relevant Council objectives for the aquatic strategy are outlined in Table 1:

| Theme | Objective | Rationale for inclusion in aquatic strategy |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| Growth and development | Planning for growth | ▶ Number and type of aquatic facilities should reflect City needs now and into the future. |
| | Managing our assets | ▶ Assessing aquatic facilities are critical to the objectives of improving access to leisure and recreational facilities and reducing the City's infrastructure renewal gap. |
| People and communities | Promoting healthy lifestyle | ▶ Aquatic facilities are an integral component of this objective. |
| | Promoting accessibility and inclusion | ▶ The useability of aquatic facilities across all age groups and areas goes to the objective of accessibility and inclusion. |

Table 1: Relevant Council objectives

There is a clear link between the need to continually assess the suitability of the City's aquatic facilities and Council objectives.

3.1.1 Health and Wellbeing

The City of Ballarat's Council Plan (2013-2017) outlines five health and wellbeing domains that the Council will focus on. These are:

- ▶ Healthy, safe and inclusive communities;
- ▶ Sustainable built and natural environments;

- ▶ Culturally rich and vibrant communities;
- ▶ Dynamic, resilient and local economies; and
- ▶ Democratic and engaged communities.

Aquatics as an activity and aquatic assets old and new have a role to play in improving the health and wellbeing of the all residents of the City of Ballarat. The 2014 Aquatics Strategy will assist in the City of Ballarat delivering on its stated health and wellbeing domains.

3.2 Aquatic strategy objectives

The aquatic-specific objectives that need to be delivered through this aquatic strategy are:

- ▶ Through aquatics, increase participation in physical activity and recreation by Ballarat residents to achieve National Physical Activity Guidelines¹;
- ▶ Encourage water safety education for all residents through appropriate public and private facilities;
- ▶ Inspire all members of the community of Ballarat to realise the importance of physical activity and recreation;
- ▶ Increase the opportunities for the entire community to participate in aquatic recreation regardless of ability, with particular emphasis on encouraging women, people with disabilities, older residents and people from CALD backgrounds;
- ▶ Provide a range of multi-use and fit for purpose aquatic facilities that enable the Ballarat and its regional community to participate in recreational activities whilst recognising Council's environmental, social, safety and public health responsibilities;
- ▶ Ensure aquatic facilities are efficiently operated and investments in aquatic assets provide acceptable social, environmental and economic returns;
- ▶ Ensure state of the art aquatic facilities meet the changing and future growth, recreational and sporting needs of the Ballarat community, including elite users; and
- ▶ So that Ballarat can be positioned as a regionally significant aquatic destination, provide aquatic facilities that will attract sporting and recreational events and visitors to Ballarat.

3.3 Timeframe of the Ballarat Aquatic Strategy

This strategy must accommodate the population growth and demographic issues that will occur in Ballarat during in the short and medium terms. The strategy must also plan for and consider the longer term aquatic requirements of Ballarat.

3.4 Overarching principles for aquatics in Ballarat

The overarching principles listed in Table 2 provide the pillars for Council's decision-making in the area of sport, recreation and aquatics. These principles ensure that any work being undertaken by Council is accessible for

¹ <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/health-pubhlth-strateg-phys-act-guidelines>

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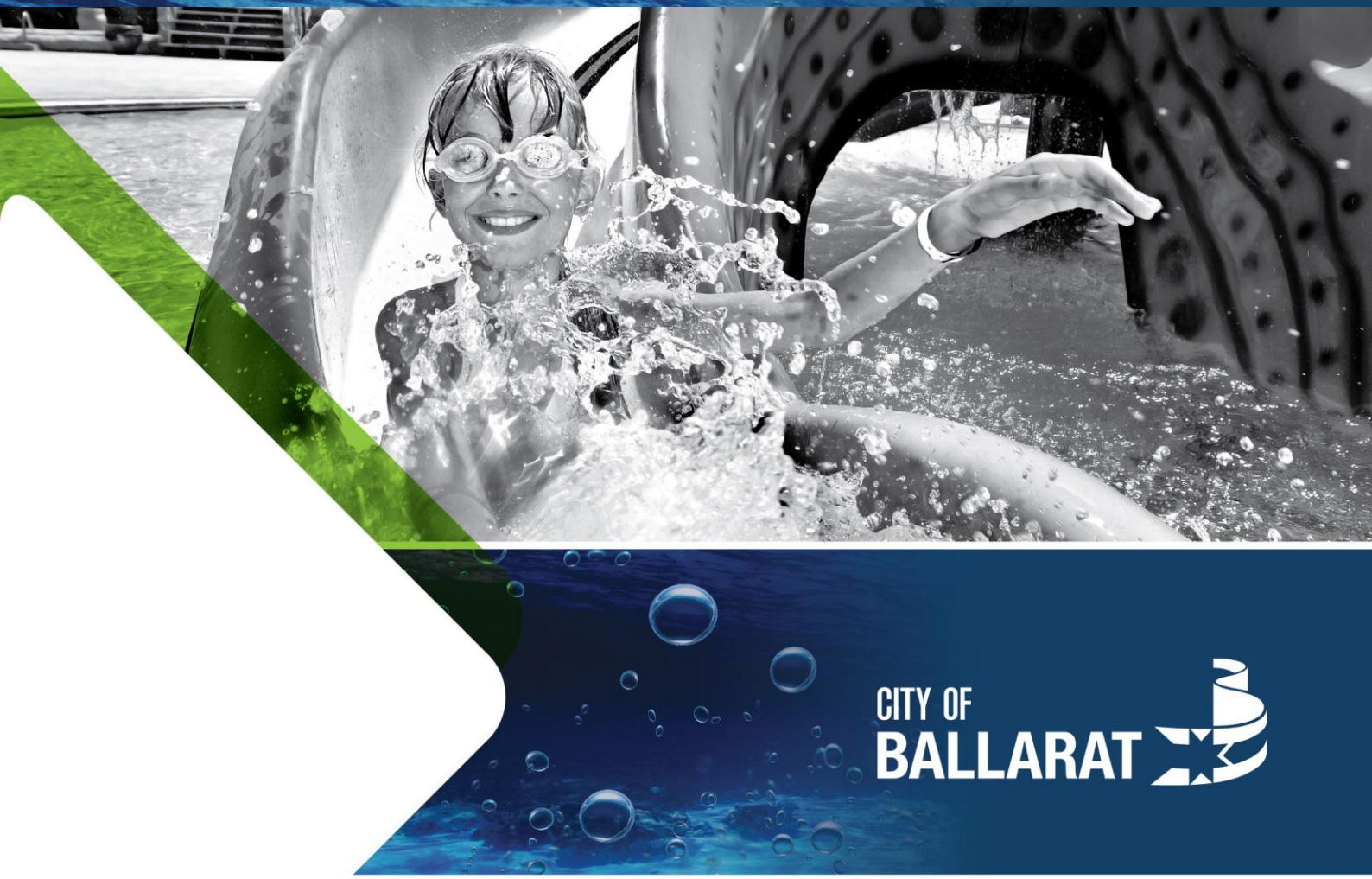
all, environmentally sustainable and meets the ongoing and changing needs of residents. These principles underpin the 2014 Ballarat Aquatic Strategy.

| Principle | Implication | Strategic response |
|---|--|--|
| <p><u>Environmental</u></p> <p>Several environmental issues are prominent and require specific attention when planning sport and recreation facilities and programs. The most prevalent is climate change, causing multiple weather and environmental problems.</p> <p>In recent years there has been a dramatic increase in extreme weather events, dry spells and droughts as well as wet spells and floods. These climatic events have led to an increase in the popularity of indoor sports, aquatic play and activity. Additionally, the extended cold periods and winter weather enhances the appeal of large indoor aquatic play spaces and smaller neighbourhood spaces that can double as 'water-free' playgrounds during the colder seasons.</p> | <p>The sport and recreation pursuits of the Ballarat community have been impacted by natural occurrences throughout history. The rising temperatures of summer periods have resulted in a sharp increase in the amount of people attending pools in Ballarat. With this weather trend forecast to continue, it is essential that aquatic facilities are prioritised for construction and improvement.</p> | <p>The aquatic works proposed in this Plan will consider the use of natural resources in the construction and running of future facilities. Alternative energy systems and processes will be explored as part of facility planning and will form a unique element of all aquatic works undertaken by Council.</p> |
| <p><u>Universal design</u></p> <p>In order to increase access and participation in sport and recreation for people with a disability, the use of universal design principles is essential.</p> | <p>Universal design will allow for all sport and recreation facilities to be accessible for not only people with a disability, but also for the aged, children and all adults regardless of ability. Adoption of this principle will ensure the widest possible reach of aquatic facilities is achieved.</p> <p>Universal design principles also take into account facilities for the aged and older population.</p> | <p>The inclusion of accessible aquatic play areas, access ramps and hoists will be implicit in all Council aquatic works being undertaken. Additionally, change room and toilet facilities will be based on universal design principles.</p> <p>Sport and recreation facilities will be designed to enable their usage to be changed over time. This means they can adapt to changes in sporting and recreation trends and meet the changing needs of people using the facility.</p> |
| <p><u>Family friendly</u></p> <p>All aquatic facilities constructed or planned by Council will be family friendly.</p> | <p>The provision of larger change rooms, child changing areas and space for children's play will be primary considerations for all aquatics and sport and recreation works. Female participation is also paramount.</p> | <p>All designs and planned works will utilise a family-friendly approach in an attempt to increase female and, in turn, family participation rates.</p> |
| <p><u>Tourism and economy</u></p> <p>All recreation, sport and aquatic facilities identified for delivery under the Aquatics Plan will provide tourism opportunities to Council and the community.</p> | <p>Usage of these aquatic facilities by residents and regional, national and international visitors will assist in supporting the local economy. For example, recent major basketball and baseball events were estimated to have injected more than \$500,000 from each event into the Ballarat economy.</p> | <p>The aquatic projects planned will bring sporting and recreational visitors to Ballarat and, thereby, provide economic advantages that must be taken into consideration when determining the aquatic strategy.</p> |
| <p><u>Health and wellbeing</u></p> | <p>Swimming is one of the most popular</p> | <p>The 'weightless' nature of swimming</p> |

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| Principle | Implication | Strategic response |
|---|--|---|
| <p>Any sport, recreation or aquatic facility planned to be built or improved within Ballarat will make a direct contribution towards the health and wellbeing of Ballarat residents.</p> <p>City's health and wellbeing domains considered in developing the 2014 Strategy.</p> | <p>physical activities undertaken by Ballarat residents. Each aquatic facility in this Plan can have significant City-wide impacts by increasing the physical activity of a cross section of the Ballarat population. By promoting play and physical activity, the benefits will be experienced by the entire community.</p> | <p>allows for all people, regardless of ability, age or sex to participate. The building of the warm water pool at the Ballarat Aquatic and Lifestyle Centre has seen a significant increase in participation. Increased participation to similar levels is forecast for all elements of this Plan.</p> |

Table 2: Principles used to guide strategy development



4. TRENDS IN RECREATION & AQUATICS

Sport and recreation trends continue to change around the world, with one remaining constant: the social and individual importance of physical activity.

The broader benefits of sport are being increasingly recognised by governments, business and communities. Sport for children and adults is an effective means of reducing the rising rates of obesity and chronic illness. If managed appropriately, physical activity can be an effective mechanism in helping to achieve social inclusion for marginalised groups and reduce crime rates (Cameron & MacDougall, 2000; Schmitz et al., 2004).

The *National Participation in Exercise, Recreation and Sport (ERAS)* annual report for 2010 and other sources present a number of relevant trends and social outcomes associated with sport and recreation activity, as summarised here.

There have been a number of changes in recreational participation in recent years with the following being some of the more pertinent trends.

4.1 Organised sports

- ▶ Field sports and team sports have become less popular recreation options.
- ▶ In the 12 months prior to the ERAS 2010 survey, only 23.5 per cent of respondents indicated that they participated once a week in an activity or sport organised by a club.
- ▶ Walking (both individually and with others) had the highest participation rate of all activities (37.2% - nearly twice that of any other activity). For males the rate was 27.7 per cent and for females 46.1 per cent.
- ▶ Individual and small group activities such as swimming, walking, running and gym have increased with a focus on individual 'personalised' fitness programs (fitness DVD's, celebrity-backed internet programs) and reliance on personal trainers and fitness advisors to deliver individual-type fitness. These activities have enjoyed increases across all age groups.
- ▶ Highly ranked activities, in order of participation, were: aerobic/fitness (19.1%), swimming (13.6%), cycling (10.1%) and running (7.4%).
- ▶ Significant increase in the underlying use of recreation and physical activity as a way to socialise with others.

4.2 Swimming and aquatics

- ▶ An increase in the demographic diversity of lap swimmers at both 25 and 50 metre distances.
- ▶ A move toward learning-based aquatic play and the design of inclusive aquatic play spaces for children, the disabled, families, teens and the elderly rather than traditional structured play.

Case study: Regional aquatic play spaces

Swan Hill and Shepparton are two regional centres that have benefitted from recently completed aquatic play spaces. These play spaces are offered in two contexts: where the facility is used on a pay-per-use basis and is attached to an existing, high patronage pool; or is constructed at a community open space and is free of charge.

Research suggests that aquatic play not only delivers an enjoyable aquatic experience, but also provides a high level of educational opportunities for young children. Other cities in Australia, including Brisbane, Townsville and Sydney, have also benefitted from recently installed aquatic play spaces, with a focus on providing play for three subsets of the community: families, teenagers and children.

4.3 Broader participation

There has been a notable increase in participation levels of females and the disabled in physical activity. Additionally, participation surveys indicate a growing desire for families to share recreational activities or pursue related activities at one venue rather than different activities at different locations.

Changing work schedules now mean people undertake physical activity at varying times, with daytime and night-time participation rates increasing. Residents, therefore, expect and require use of facilities at hours that suit them.

4.4 Facilities provision

The design and usage of sports, recreation and aquatics facilities have changed significantly over recent years. Usage requirements, participation rates and external pressures are requiring more strategic planning in the design and location of facilities. Some of the trends affecting facilities are:

4.2.1 Design

- ▶ Increased requirement for multipurpose / multi-sport facilities for use by a range of sports and community groups;
- ▶ Construction of recreation facilities and reserves using the rating system outlined in Table 3: local, regional and national; and
- ▶ The construction of a wide range of quality indoor sport and recreation facilities making activities accessible all year round and extending operating hours.

4.2.2 Management

- ▶ Inclusion, where relevant, of community groups and sporting clubs in the management of facilities and reserves;
- ▶ Delivery of marketing and promotional strategies to increase spending at recreational facilities and recreational events; and
- ▶ Risk management and public liability issues as major concerns for recreation providers.

4.2.3 Environmental

- ▶ Planning for long-term environmental changes such as drought and heatwaves;
- ▶ Provision of passive recreation areas, including natural landscaping features such as water, grass, rocks and trees; and
- ▶ Encouraging non-car related transport for travel to new facilities with paths and trails linked to existing networks.

4.2.4 Partnerships for outcomes

- ▶ Increase in partnerships in funding between State and Federal Government, local councils and sporting clubs and associations;
- ▶ Recognition of the important role that community sporting groups and clubs play in building inclusive and healthy communities; and
- ▶ Local government working in closer partnership with sporting clubs to provide educational opportunities to further promote the benefits of physical activity.



5. BALLARAT AQUATIC STRATEGY – THE LOCAL CONTEXT

Ballarat is a unique regional city, offering a diverse and plentiful range of sports, recreational and aquatic assets for the enjoyment and recreation of its residents and those of the broader region. To ensure the quality and access to these aquatic assets are enhanced, this aquatic strategy must reflect the specific issues facing Ballarat now and in the future. These issues must be considered in the context of Ballarat's existing aquatic assets.

5.1 Planning for population growth

Ballarat is experiencing high rates of population growth and the City's growth profile is expected to continue into the foreseeable future. Ballarat's City Strategy area is actively identifying and planning for future new communities and business activity. These plans must continue to consider the need for aquatic assets and the participation of local residents.

How to plan for and provide infrastructure and services in future new communities is a key issue in relation to growth. This includes the provision of sport, recreation, parks and open space.

To help inform the development of this Plan, the following questions were considered in planning for aquatics now and into the future:

- ▶ What recreational facilities will be needed in a future new community?
- ▶ How does the placement of aquatic play spaces enhance passive recreation and active recreation sites?
- ▶ Will these facilities be accessible by all and shared and valued by community groups?
- ▶ Will schools and other children's groups have easy access to the facilities?
- ▶ Will older members of the community have areas in which they can participate in aquatic pursuits?
- ▶ Will people of varying abilities have access to these aquatics facilities?
- ▶ Do play experience areas clearly figure in planning for these new communities?

5.2 Ballarat's population trends

Ballarat's population is expected to grow in several demographics, including in particular:

- ▶ Families with school-aged children;
- ▶ Regional and rural home leavers and university students;
- ▶ Retirees and seniors from western Victoria and Melbourne; and
- ▶ New arrivals and refugees from overseas.

Figure 2 shows the population growth projections and helps to identify future works under this Plan and how future aquatic facilities would benefit the Ballarat community.

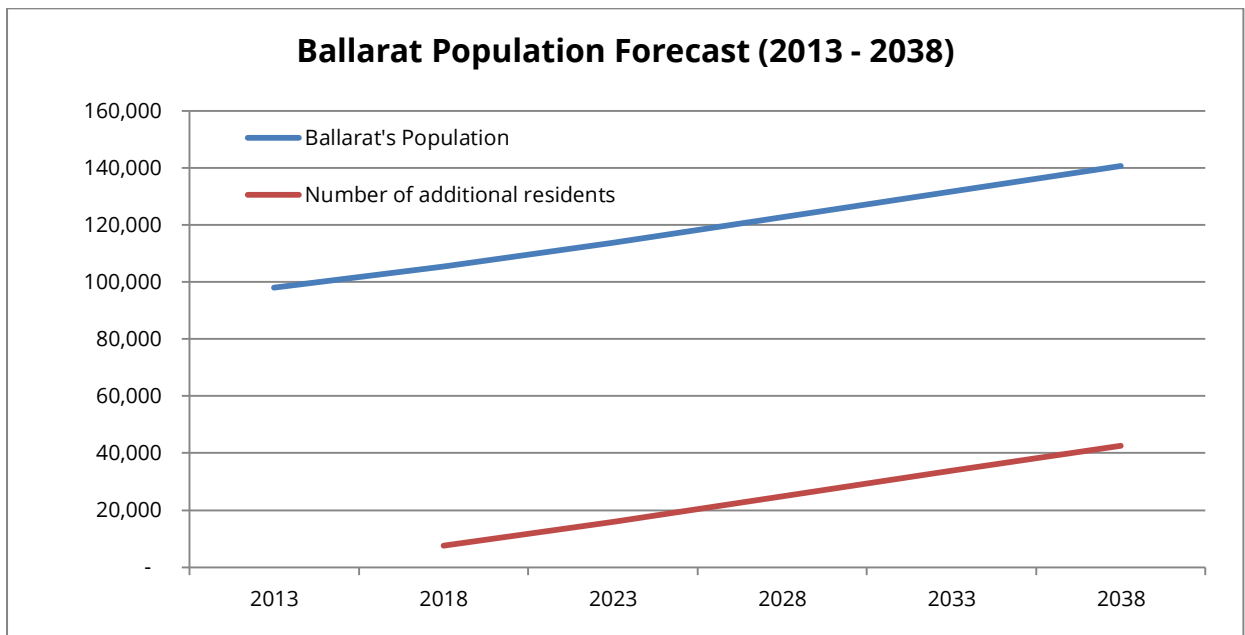


Figure 2: Ballarat's population growth (2013 - 2038)

Forecasts indicate that by 2018 an additional 7,500 people will reside in Ballarat and by 2038 this number will increase to over 40,000. The breakdown of this growth by suburb is shown in Figure 3:

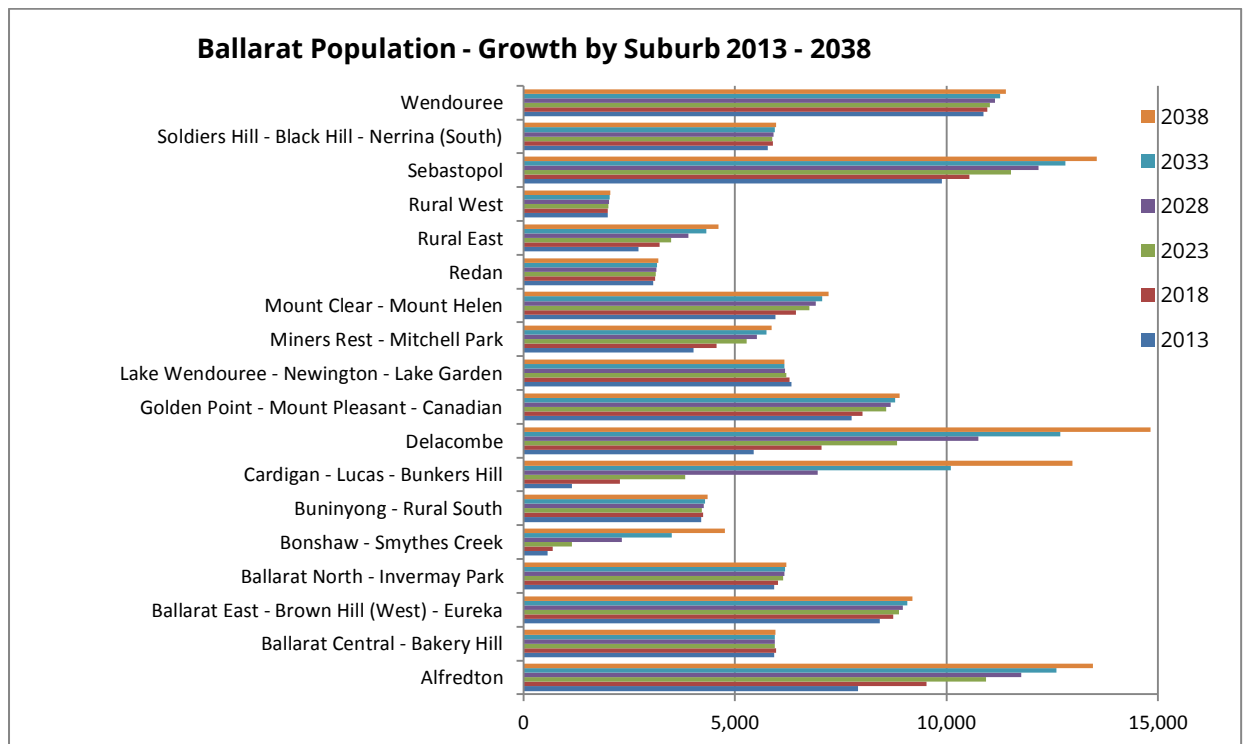


Figure 3: Population growth trends by Ballarat suburb

Most suburbs within the municipality are expected to experience increases in population over the next 10 years and beyond, however much of this growth is expected to occur in areas to the north, south and west, with Delacombe, Alfredton, Cardigan - Lucas and Sebastopol anticipated to experience significant increases.

These suburbs have been identified as having the greatest capacity to accommodate growth due to land availability for new housing.

With Ballarat's population expected to surpass 100,000 residents in the very near future, and then continue to grow strongly over coming years, it is imperative that aquatic investment occurs to match this growth. The current construction of an indoor 50 metre pool at the BALC will significantly assist in managing the recreational needs of the growing community. Notwithstanding this development, the City's aquatic assets will come under continued capacity constraints over the medium term and proper and appropriate planning for additional capacity in the right geographical locations will need to be undertaken in the short term to ensure these capacity related issues are well managed.

The construction of several aquatic play spaces will also provide smaller scale experiences in growth suburbs and communities of need. These facilities will assist in increasing participation rates amongst younger age groups.

There is a need to consider the longer-term growth profile of Ballarat's population and to begin the consideration of long-term aquatic planning to match the future needs of the city.

5.3 Aquatic participation in Ballarat

Total participation across all Ballarat aquatic facilities is estimated to be over 650,000, or 6.6 visits per resident. Figure 4 shows the impact on aquatic visitations as a result of the forecast growth in Ballarat's population to 2031. This assumes a consistent participation rate of 6.6 units per resident.

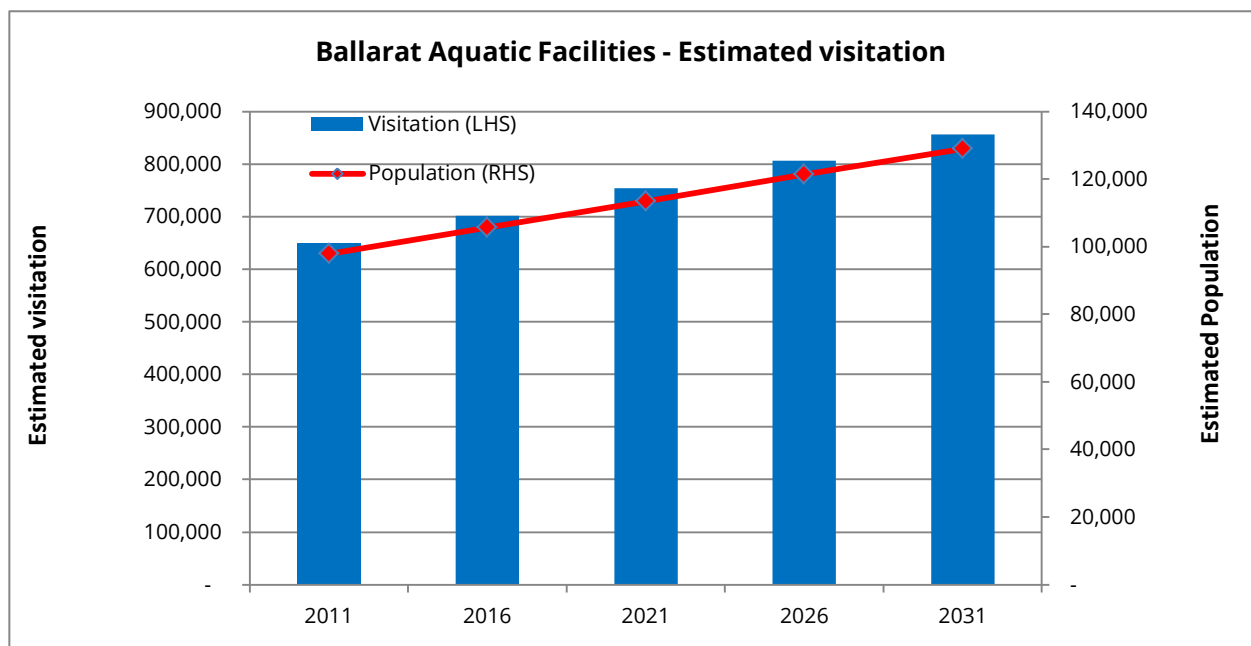


Figure 4: BAC estimated visitation

Based on current participation rates, by 2019 total visitation will increase by around 85,000 visits per annum, with total visitation across all Ballarat’s aquatic assets exceeding 735,000, a 13 per cent increase on current levels. If participation was to increase to 7.0 visits per year, then total visitation would increase to around 785,000 per annum by 2019, an increase of 18 per cent over the next five years.

It is clear that with even with the current construction of the new 50m pool at BALC Ballarat’s aquatic facilities will be nearing capacity over the next decade or so. Without ongoing action and planning during the life of this plan, demand for aquatic activity and participation will outstrip the capacity of existing facilities over the medium term.

The analysis highlights the need to ensure planning for the future development of aquatic facilities over the medium and longer term. Ensuring appropriate short term consideration of planning related issues will be paramount to delivering longer term outcomes and benefits.

5.4 Longer-term aquatic precinct planning

Figure 5 maps existing City of Ballarat aquatic facilities and population by suburb in 2013 and by forecast population in 2031:

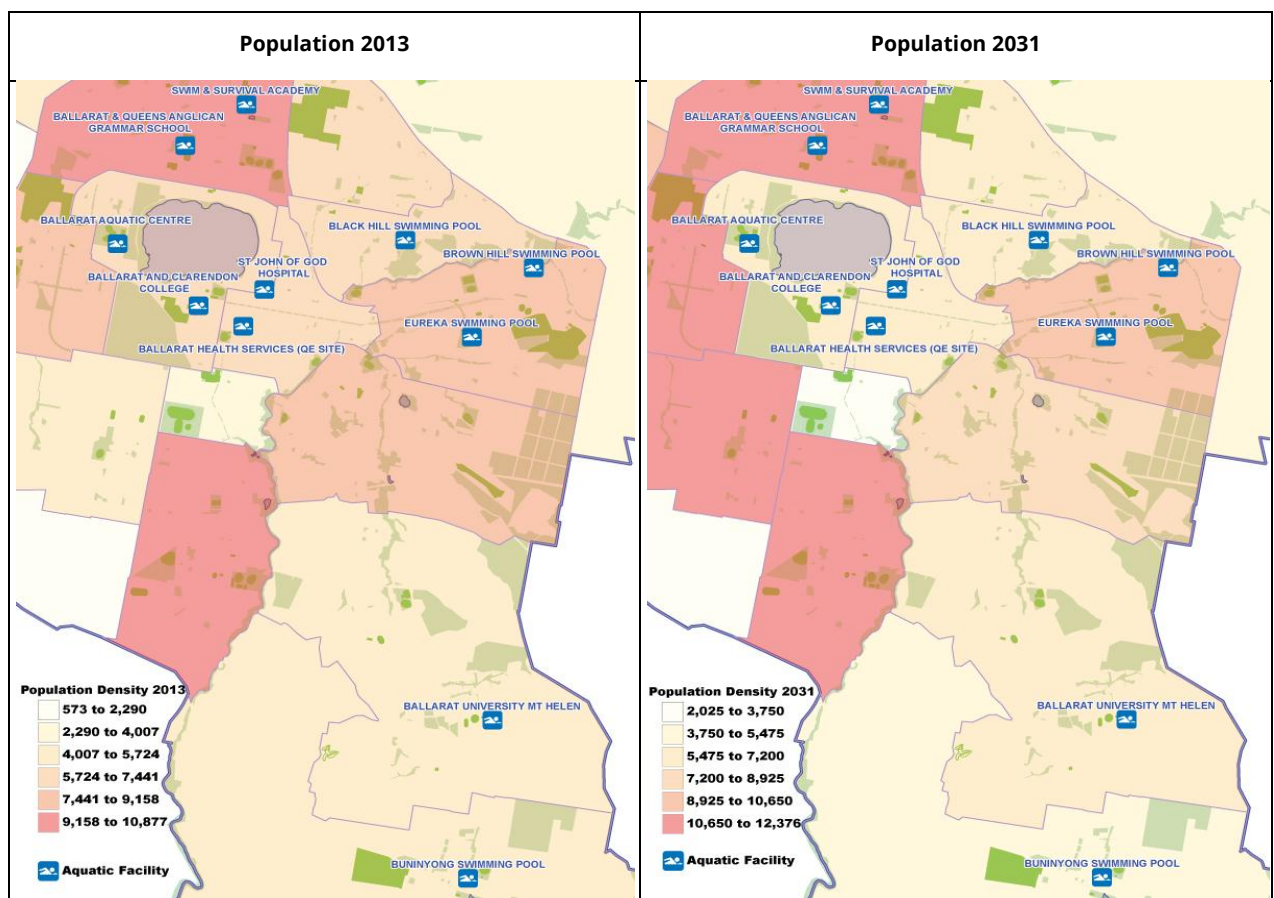


Figure 5: Comparison of aquatic facilities and population 2013 - 2031

The analysis indicates that there will be a need to consider further longer range planning for aquatic centres and capacity, particularly around key growth zones. The Ballarat Aquatic and Leisure Centre is the predominate

site servicing these regions at present. Further analysis in relation to the geographic location of future centres needs to be factored into land use and other planning mechanisms, systems and structures. If appropriate reservation is not made, then future generations will not be able to as readily access aquatic facilities and enjoy the health and wellbeing benefits that stem from utilising these facilities. What the network of facilities may look like in the future is shown in² Figure 6.

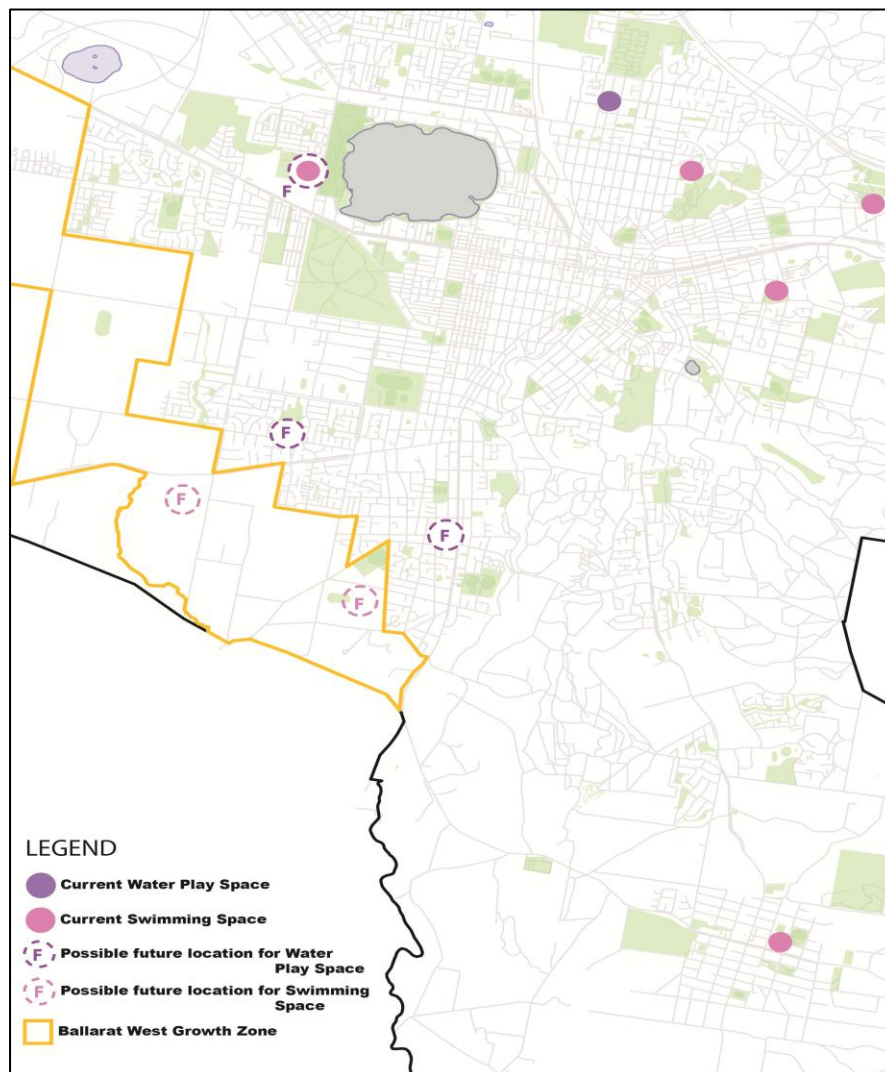


Figure 6: Potential future pool swimming and aquatic playspace facilities

Figure 5 and Figure 6 highlight the need focus planning efforts in the key growth corridors in the west of the City.

The analysis also highlights the cluster of pools servicing the inner north and east of the city (Brown Hill, Black Hill and Eureka); wards which will have moderate population growth until 2031. The cluster of existing pools and ageing pools, a legacy dating from pre Council amalgamations together with the lower level of population

² Locations of future facilities are representative only

in these areas, is as equally an important consideration in future aquatic facility planning as the population growth and lack of facilities as in the City's west.

5.4.1 Recommendation

The Plan has highlighted the rapidly growing population of Ballarat and the impact it is likely to have on access to aquatic facilities within Ballarat. The impact of new growth suburbs on the demand for aquatic facilities is highlighted. To ensure this growth is accommodated, it is recommended that planning is commenced during the life of this plan for development of Ballarat's aquatic facilities beyond 2019. Unless such planning is undertaken, there is a very real risk that aquatic facilities will come under capacity strains within a decade.

5.4.2 Recommendation

Given the high growth expected in Ballarat's west, specific planning must also be undertaken for aquatic play spaces and additional aquatic facilities in this part of the city.

5.4.3 Recommendation

Ensure consideration of the existing cluster of pools in the City's north and east is factored into future planning of aquatic facilities.

5.5 Sports and aquatic precinct planning

As part of community planning, Council recognises that sustainable and suitably sized new facilities need to be placed in appropriate locations to meet community needs. To streamline the strategic planning of aquatic and sport and recreation facilities, Council uses a precinct-based model of the municipality. The model incorporates population growth predictions, as well as facility participant numbers and usage rates.

Site classification is based on the facilities present, level of development and ability to attract users and events. These classifications not only provide some clarity as to the nature and desired audience of each facility; they also provide the necessary detail to assist with the budgeting and completion of works at each facility.

Replicating the open space hierarchy (City of Ballarat Open Space Strategy, 2008), each park, open space and sporting area is categorised as local, neighbourhood, district, regional, State or National/International. This hierarchy provides a further definitive category system to assist in the selection of sites for the various aquatic play spaces offered in this Plan. Table 3 provides an outline as to the classification of each park and open space area in Ballarat and provides parameters for the locations of the proposed aquatic play spaces:

| Hierarchy | Size and description |
|--|---|
| <p><u>Local</u> Not ideal for Aquatic Play Space (APS)</p> | <p>Parks typically between 0.1 ha and 0.2 ha in size. These areas cater for activities such as family play, unorganised ball sports and small-scale physical activity.</p> |
| <p><u>Neighbourhood</u> Perfect for smaller APS</p> | <p>Parks typically between 0.5 ha and 1.0 ha in size. Generally these parks have play space facilities and open space for family play, unorganised ball sports and small-scale physical activity. These parks generally include landscaping and provide for many frequent, short duration visits from residents from the surrounding neighbourhood.</p> |
| <p><u>District</u> Good position for larger scale APS</p> | <p>These recreational parks are for larger numbers of people completing organised sport and other recreational opportunities. A district facility provides recreational users from the neighbourhood level with a place to play organised sport, socialise with others and access playgrounds and other facilities.</p> |
| <p><u>Regional</u> Good locations for APS but costs need to be managed. Reflects Ballarat's role as regional city / regional capital.</p> | <p>A significant sized area that attracts visitation from across and beyond the municipal area. The site of these regional facilities is specific to the sport or recreational pursuits they are designed to encourage. These centres attract not only organised sport from inside Ballarat and in surrounding municipalities but also across country Victoria.</p> |
| <p><u>State</u> APS at these parks would need to meet the prestige of the facility and would have a high price tag.</p> | <p>These highly significant areas are focused on attracting recreation, sporting visitation from within and outside the State of Victoria. These facilities generally provide elite standard playing facilities in order to attract elite sporting teams and groups.</p> |
| <p><u>National / international</u> APS at these parks would need to meet the prestige of the attached facility. Very high price tag.</p> | <p>These highly significant areas are focused on attracting recreation/sporting visitation from within Australia and from international audiences. These facilities provide elite standard playing facilities in order to attract elite sporting teams and groups from around Australia and internationally.</p> |

Table 3: Open space hierarchy (APS – Aquatic Play Space)

5.5.1 Recommendation

The Plan encourages the construction of a regional sized Aquatic Play Space facility.

In addition, several smaller, neighbourhood aquatic play spaces will also be developed that will become the key locations for family gatherings and socialising. These neighbourhood facilities are on a much smaller scale than the regional Aquatic Play Space but will provide the opportunity for families and friends to gain access to them without travelling to the regional facility.

It is essential that these neighbourhood types of facilities are positioned in parks with easy access to transport, parking, passive surveillance, shade, BBQ's and other amenities.



6. BALLARAT'S AQUATIC FACILITIES

The following provides an overview of aquatic facilities currently available to Ballarat residents.

6.1 Neighbourhood pool patronage

Figure 7 outlines patronage numbers to the seasonal pools over the last four years.³

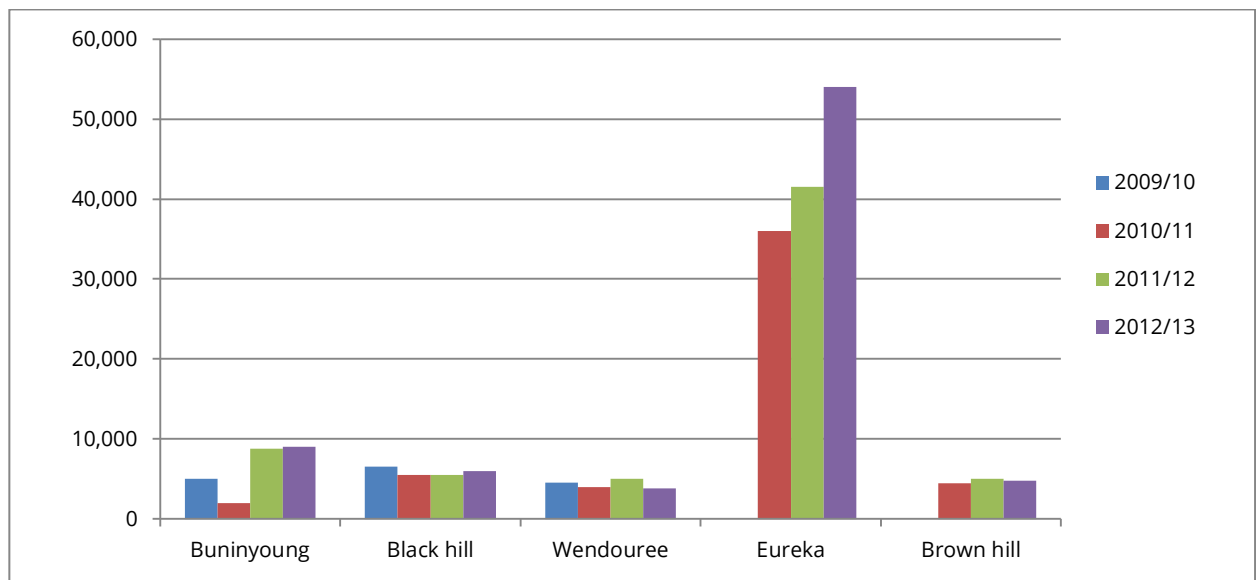


Figure 7: Participation rates (2009 - 2013)

The increase in participation at the Eureka and Buninyoung pools demonstrates an ongoing need for aquatic facilities in these areas. The chart also illustrates the general declining patronage at Wendouree, which contributed to the decision to close this facility also no notable increase in patronage at Brown Hill. Patronage at Black Hill is also declining.

The geographic location together with the patronage figures of Brown Hill, Black Hill and Eureka suggest that increases in patronage at Eureka are servicing growing demand coming from the inner north and east of the City, possibly at the expense of growth in patronage at Black and Brown Hill facilities. To this extent the pools within this cluster 'compete' with each other for patronage. The relationship between these pools and the areas of the City they support are important considerations in future planning of aquatic facilities for the City.

Consistent with national trends which consider the closure of smaller local pools, particularly those that 'compete' with nearby facilities and where other facilities are located nearby; there is a need to consider the consolidation of the Brown and Black Hill facilities.

There is anecdotal evidence that early years programs, such as learn to swim, are already at capacity.

Attendance at outdoor pools is directly influenced by weather patterns. Ballarat has, on average, 23 days over 30 degrees, and four days above 35 days. Anecdotally, customers are using indoor facilities in extreme temperatures, likely due to increased awareness of the health risks caused by excessive exposure to direct sunlight. With 75 per cent of Ballarat's current aquatic space outdoor, there is a need to recalibrate the City's

³ Statistics for Brown Hill and Eureka only available for the past three years.

aquatic assets to reflect the needs of the users. The 50m pool at BALC will go some way to effecting this adjustment.

Trend: Consolidation of aquatic assets

Local governments in both metropolitan and country Victoria have moved to consolidate aquatic assets in order to minimise costs and move resources toward the construction of aquatic play spaces. Bendigo City Council has experienced similar issues with ageing aquatic facilities and in 2013, made the decision to close three local pools.

6.1.1 Recommendation

In conjunction with Council's pool contract manager, work will be undertaken to differentiate the outdoor pools in terms of patron offering from the 2014-15 summer season onwards.

6.2 Ballarat Aquatic and Lifestyle Centre

The Ballarat Aquatic and Lifestyle Centre (BALC) is the premier indoor facility in Ballarat and provides a variety of aquatic and other recreational activities for the region. The facility contains a 25 metre lap swimming pool, which is currently being upgraded with the addition of a 50m facility. The facility is used for lap swimming as well as emerging sports such as water polo. The learn to swim pool and toddlers 'play' pool have high patronage, while the warm water pool provides great opportunities to those wanting warm water exercise. There is also a sauna, spa, steam room and all access change rooms that complement the quality aquatic experiences on offer.



Figure 8: Ballarat Aquatic and Lifestyle Centre

According to per square metre usage figures, the BALC is currently operating at near capacity. The 2013 year-to-date visits are just under 450,000 people, an increase of 28,000 patrons from 2012. Capacity issues at the BALC have impacted on the Centre's ability to provide much needed classes for seniors and the disabled.

AQUATIC STRATEGY 2014

Construction of the new 50 metre pool will allow for additional classes to operate in the facility and reduce capacity related issues. This will improve the physical activity of many at risk people, and also help to increase overall participation rates in Ballarat.

The 50 metre pool will provide additional lap swimming options, increasing the capacity of the learn to swim program and aquatic education sessions, and provide an indoor aquatic area for teens and others to play.

The construction of the 50 metre pool will also provide Ballarat with the opportunity to attract competitions as at present there is no suitable facility to host championships.

The Regional Aquatic Play Space proposed for the BALC will add additional regional significance to the facility and, in turn, the City. The project would provide an indoor, aquatic play space for children, families and teens with an all access design enabling participation from all members of the community. As with all aquatic play spaces, an educational element exists with tactile learning opportunities available via some of the features to be included.

The current development of the existing facility will greatly increase the capacity of Ballarat's aquatic assets.

6.2.1 Recommendation

Incorporate a regionally significant indoor / outdoor play space and water slide at the Ballarat Lifestyle and Aquatic Centre.

6.2.2 Recommendation

Work with Swimming Australia and Swimming Victoria and local swimming clubs to form a Podium of Excellence at the new 50m pool. This will involve capital and operational support from the YMCA, City of Ballarat and all squads in town.

6.2.3 Recommendation

Utilise the uniqueness of the new 50m pool with 1.85m standard depth to attract competition and events for new and emerging sports.

6.3 Eureka Swimming Pool

The Eureka Pool is the flagship outdoor pool in Ballarat. It operates for a longer swimming season in comparison to Brown and Black Hill and features a 50 metre lap pool, providing recreational swimming and water play usage. A toddler's pool and smaller play pool are also contained within the centre accommodating younger children and facilities, whilst the recently refurbished waterslide provides fun opportunities for older children and families. The Eureka Pool provides BBQ facilities, family swimming sessions and a new shaded play space.

The Eureka Pool is the most popular outdoor pool in Ballarat. It hosts upwards of 20 school carnivals and events throughout its season for schools, both in and outside the Ballarat area. For the 2013 season, the visitation numbers were, for the first time, well above 50,000.

6.3.1 Recommendation

Increase infrastructure investment, (including pool plant, buildings, change facilities, kiosk) for the Eureka Pool to deliver an improved experience for patrons.

Additional shade, play facilities and outdoor furniture would also greatly improve this facility and increase its useability for a wider user catchment.

6.3.2 Recommendation

Develop aquatic play space at Eureka.

6.3.3 Recommendation

Undertake a review, including usage patterns, of the waterslide at Eureka and determine future development.

6.4 Outdoor neighbourhood aquatic facilities

The Black Hill, Brown Hill, Eureka and Buninyong outdoor pools service diverse community groups across Ballarat during the summer pool season. The Brown Hill pool is operated by the Brown Hill Progress Association via a community shared management model, whilst the other three facilities are managed using a profit share model through a commercial contract, currently tendered to the YMCA. The respective entry prices for the outdoor pools are subsidised by Council.

All of the neighbourhood outdoor pools are ageing facilities. They require constant maintenance, with some costing significantly more than others. Responsibility for all major maintenance works lies with Council.

Notwithstanding these issues, such facilities play an important role in servicing nearby residents, as well as taking overload during peak seasons and weather conditions.

The development of these assets should be consistent with these key functions, be cognisant of the condition of the infrastructure, the costs of maintenance, the ongoing patronage of the facilities and the proximity of other facilities.

6.4.1 Recommendation

Given patronage levels and proximity of the pool to Brown Hill, it is recommended that the Black Hill facility be closed and redeveloped in such a manner as to increase participation within the Ballarat region.

6.4.2 Recommendation

Invest in significant infrastructure into the Brown Hill facility to improve amenity and attractiveness of the facility for users as well as to reduce the costs of operation and future maintenance.

6.4.3 Recommendation

Further develop the Buninyong site for additional infrastructure and potentially some elements of aquatic play.

6.5 Aquatic play spaces

Whilst Council plays a key role in the provision of aquatic facilities, it is also the custodian of parks and public open space that could become home to future aquatic play spaces. Ballarat's park and open space assets include:

- ▶ Over 2,000 hectares of public open space;
- ▶ 45 kilometres of walking trails;
- ▶ 18 major parks; and
- ▶ 149 neighbourhood parks.



Figure 9: Ballarat aquatic play space

These assets are developed and managed to ensure the people of Ballarat have a wide variety of safe and accessible sport and recreation facilities. Council also works closely with service contractors to ensure a quality experience for those visiting and using pools, parks and recreational spaces across the city.

When considering the development of future play spaces, consideration into the costs of managing such facilities versus the benefits of open access needs to be weighed up.

Open aquatic play spaces offer an opportunity for broader sections of the community to have access and enjoy the broad range of physical and wellbeing benefits such spaces offer. However such spaces also have an

increased cost of maintenance and repair due to the non-supervisory environment as well as the costs associated with sundry assets such as tables and pathways. This model needs to be contrasted to 'gated' type aquatic play that are accessible on a user pays type model (similar to pools), where costs associated with repair and maintenance can be recovered.

It is likely that future aquatic play spaces will be a combination of gated and non-gated models.

6.5.1 Recommendation

With evidence linking increased participation by younger age groups to aquatic play spaces, it is recommended that Council develop a program of building aquatic play spaces at appropriate sites and give consideration to gated versus non gated facilities. In addition to a rise in youth participation, family participation rates will also increase in broader aquatic activities.

6.7 Maintenance and management

There are several factors which will influence the maintenance burden on the City of Ballarat's aquatic facilities over the life of this strategy and beyond. The key drivers of the increasing maintenance requirement include:

- ▶ Ageing facilities;
- ▶ Expected increasing usage;
- ▶ Higher patronage, further increasing usage; and
- ▶ Further development of aquatic facilities, including aquatic play spaces.

Unless a considered and appropriate maintenance and renewal program is instituted, the costs associated with maintaining the facilities will become higher than they otherwise might. In addition, a failure to adequately maintain and renew the facilities increases operational, health and safety and reputational risks to the City.

6.7.1 Recommendation

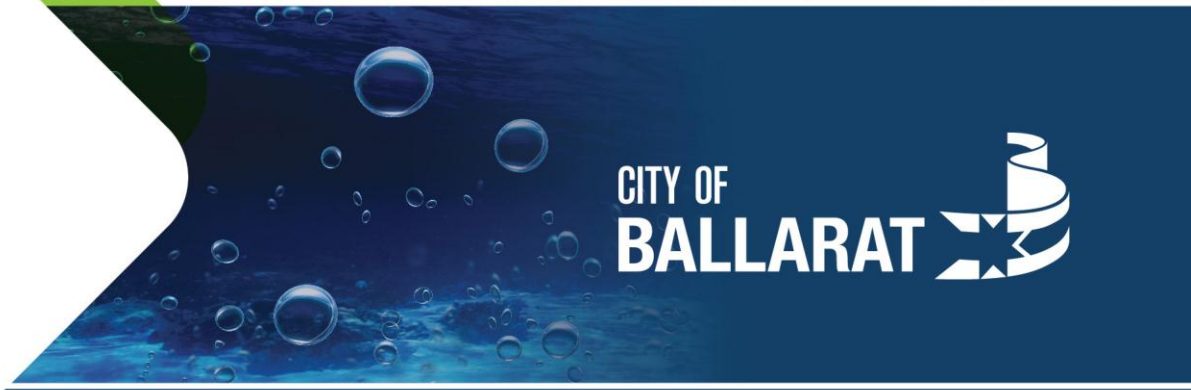
Work with the City's asset management group to develop a coherent maintenance program for all aquatic pool and play space assets.

6.7.2 Recommendation

New aquatic play space assets are designed to be homogenous and interchangeable across the city. This design feature will reduce construction and maintenance costs over the life of the asset, as well as reducing costs associated with holding replacement stock.

6.5.2 Recommendation

Explore future management options for the City's outdoor pools and aquatic play spaces.



7. TALKING TO OUR COMMUNITY

Over the last five years, Council has undertaken a broad range of engagement activities with the community to understand aquatic usage and future need. These engagement activities, which are outlined in Table 4, informed a range of Council strategies and directions documents, including:

- ▶ The previous Aquatic Strategy (2005);
- ▶ Sport and Recreation Strategy (2014);
- ▶ 2013-18 Council Plan; and
- ▶ 2013-14 Council Budget

During 2012-13, a process of consultation was undertaken with stakeholders and the community. Surveys and questionnaires were distributed and completed at aquatic facilities across the city. Ninety per cent of those surveyed were positively motivated by the construction of aquatic play spaces in Ballarat and a majority (70%) also showed support for the construction of a 50 metre pool.

Throughout the consultation process, a large number of residents expressed support for the Aquatics Strategy to focus on investing in new and first class aquatics and delivering water play facilities for Ballarat. Decisions and recommendations regarding investment and recreational priorities in the Plan align with the findings of the consultation processes undertaken.

| Community Engagement | Type | Number | Topics |
|---------------------------------------|------------|--------|---|
| Children's Engagement | Survey | 2,000 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Play spaces ▶ Aquatics ▶ Safety ▶ Wants / needs |
| Outdoor Pools Engagement | Survey | 500 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Play spaces ▶ Aquatics ▶ Current services ▶ Future services |
| BALC Members Engagement | Survey | 1,000 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Future infrastructure ▶ 50 metre pool ▶ Aquatics / dry constructions ▶ Current / future Services |
| Youth Engagement | Survey | 2,000 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Wants / needs ▶ 'Ballarat Imagine' ▶ Current facilities ▶ Future facilities |
| Association / Club Submission Process | Submission | 75 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Sport / recreation and aquatic wants and needs. |
| Health & Wellbeing Forums | Forums | 200 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Wants / needs ▶ Current / future facilities ▶ Ways to increase health |
| ASR Community Infrastructure Plan | Plan | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Current facilities / spending ▶ Future facilities / spending |
| Transport Forum | Forum | 100 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Connectivity and accessibility to recreational facilities |

| Community Engagement | Type | Number | Topics |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|--------|--|
| Koori Community Survey | Survey | 250 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Wants / needs ▶ Current / future facilities |
| Victoria Park Revision | Consultation | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Play spaces / aquatic play spaces ▶ Plan for the future ▶ Activation of site |
| Various Community Advisory Committees | Advisory meetings | 500 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Various |
| Grampians Best Practice Group | Advisory Meetings | 240 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Aquatics trends ▶ Aquatics best practice ▶ Management / design practices |

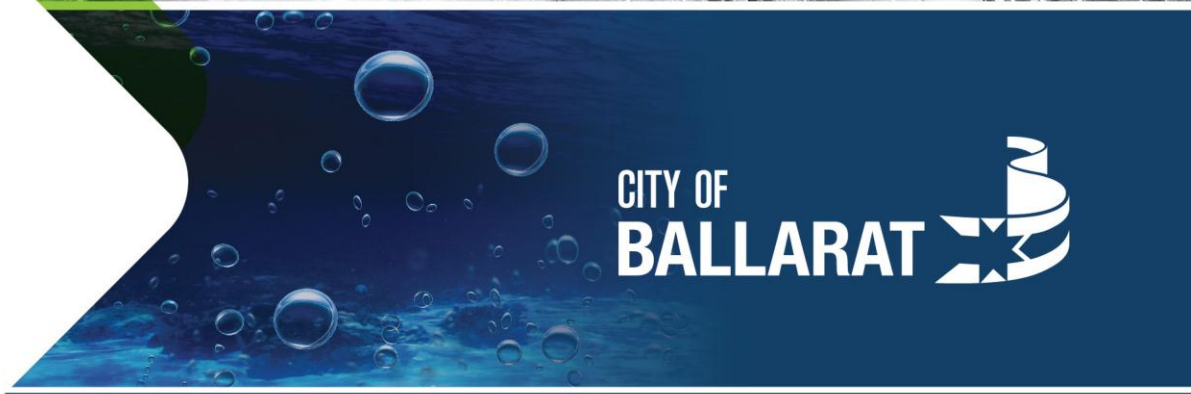
Table 4: Community engagement activities 2012-13

7.1 Summary of consultation results

The engagement activities over the last twelve months and previous five years identified the following aspirations for aquatics that converge with what this plan will deliver:

- ▶ Water play facilities;
- ▶ Planning for ongoing development of aquatic assets within the City of Ballarat;
- ▶ Higher standard and newer facilities suitable for a range of participants; and
- ▶ A desire for year-round swimming, access for the elderly and disabled clients and a desire for aquatic education for the elderly and young people.

The consultations have highlighted the importance of aquatic assets to community groups and young people and also the role they play as community hubs and meeting places.



8. RECOMMENDATIONS AND PRIORITY ACTIONS

AQUATIC STRATEGY 2014

1. Implement the 2013-14 aquatics upgrade package, including:
 - a. Construct a 50m pool at the BALC;
 - b. Construction of an Aquatic Play Space at Midlands Reserve;
 - c. Construction of a regionally-significant indoor Aquatic Play Space at the BALC;
 - d. Consideration of a further Aquatic Play Space locations to be determined after public consultation ; and
 - e. Continue to provide community and family areas with improvements in play, shade and furniture at Eureka Pool facility.
2. Implement aquatic best practice management principles in partnership with contract holders.
3. Undertake a landscaping and related amenity works program at all outdoor pools.
4. Actively introduce and promote the benefits of aquatic play to the Ballarat community.
5. In partnership with the Pool contract manager, develop and implement a unique patron offering at each of the outdoor neighbourhood pools.
6. Partner with Ballarat Tourism and other regional tourism and event providers on the attraction of aquatic events that utilise the BALC and other City assets.
7. Assess the need for new aquatic facilities as strategic plans develop that relate to new community developments and land use activities across the municipality.
8. Consider the longer-term growth profile of Ballarat's population and commence consideration of long-term aquatic planning within this context, specifically Ballarat West as well as the inner north and east. This should include site selection to ensure provision for the physical location of future aquatic facilities is made and adequately provided for.
9. Identify potential sites for future development of Aquatic playspaces.
10. Work with Swimming Australia and Swimming Victoria and local swimming clubs to form a Podium Centre of Excellence at the new 50m pool. This will involve capital and operational support from stakeholders.
11. Utilise the uniqueness of the new 50m pool with its standard 1.85m depth to attract competition and events for new and emerging sports.
12. Undertake a review, including usage patterns of the waterslide at Eureka and determine future needs.
13. In light of patronage and proximity to Brown Hill, close the Black Hill facility and redevelop to increase participation of sport within the City.
14. Make infrastructure investments in the Brown Hill facility to improve user experiences, amenity and reduce costs of operations.
15. Further develop the Buninyong site for additional infrastructure and potentially some elements of aquatic play.

16. Work with the City's asset management group to develop a coherent maintenance program for all aquatic pool and play space assets.
17. New aquatic play space assets are designed to be homogenous and interchangeable across the City. This design feature will reduce construction and maintenance costs over the life of the asset, as well as reducing costs associated with holding replacement stock.
18. Explore future management options of outdoor pools and aquatic play spaces.

8.1 Project funding

The Plan indicates the priorities for the future of aquatic facilities planned by Council for Ballarat. Many of the priorities are not short term and may take time to attract funding for final project design and delivery. Funding can be applied for from a variety of sources, with several of the priority projects reliant upon grants from State and Federal government bodies. The following funding options will be explored for each of the projects:

- ▶ Council capital expenditure;
- ▶ Income collected from facility management, e.g. profit share arrangements;
- ▶ Federal and State Government funding: such as Sport and Recreation Victoria, Community Facilities Funding Program and the Putting Locals First program;
- ▶ Asset sale and consolidation in line with the various strategies compiled by the recreation department such as Aquatic, Bikes, Play Space and Open Space;
- ▶ Current and future potential developer contributions; and
- ▶ Innovative regional infrastructure and partnership funding alternatives that may arise, or become available, over the life of this strategy.

APPENDIX A: LINK BETWEEN COUNCIL OBJECTIVES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

