

## 8.5 TAMWORTH REGIONAL AQUATIC AND LEISURE BUSINESS CASE – FILE NO SF9064

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Minute No 234/18  
Item 21.1 to Ordinary Council 23 May 2017 - Minute No  
142/17

**1 ANNEXURES ATTACHED**

### **RECOMMENDATION**

*That in relation to the report “Tamworth Regional Aquatic and Leisure Centre Business Case”, Council:*

- (i) receive and note the report; and*
- (ii) endorse the Tamworth Regional Aquatic and Leisure Centre Business Case.*

### **SUMMARY**

The purpose of this report is to present to Council a business case on the proposed Tamworth Regional Aquatic and Leisure Centre.

Following community driven lobbying in early 2017, Council embarked on detailed industry research and extensive community consultation to prepare a business case for the provision of a modern aquatic and leisure facility, designed to serve the present and future generations of the Tamworth region.

In December 2018, a draft business case was reviewed and refined by Council and is now presented for final endorsement.

The enclosed Aquatics and Leisure Centre Business Case **ATTACHED**, refer **ANNEXURE 1**, has been produced in conjunction with leisure planning consultants “OTIUM Planning Group” and their associated partners. The business case provides detailed information on the following areas:

- project background;
- the case for a new facility;
- rationale for investment;
- options considered;
- economic analysis; and
- proposed funding strategy.

Once endorsed this document will be used to assist Council in securing co-funding from the State and Federal Governments.

### **COMMENTARY**

#### **The Project**

The Tamworth community and Council have been debating the development of a new aquatic facility for more than 20 years. It is widely recognised that the city’s existing outdoor pool complexes are reaching an age where maintenance and renewal costs are rising annually and a major investment will soon be required to enable these facilities to continue to safely operate and comply with standards.

Ground swell from the community for a new aquatic centre began in mid 2016, when Council sought community feedback on their priorities for the revitalisation of Keychange 2017-2027 – Tamworth Community Strategic Plan. In early 2017, the

swimming community united to form the Tamworth Aquatic Group (TAG). This group undertook a high profile lobbying campaign, which led to a Council decision in May 2017, to commit to the development of a business case for a proposed new facility.

As part of Council's commitment to prepare a business case, Council also determined that a new aquatic and leisure facility would be best located at the Northern Inland Centre of Sporting Excellence. A regionally significant aquatic facility would integrate well with the ever growing Centre of Sporting Excellence, which is already widely used by the community and also a significant visitor area for sporting and other tourists to the region. Efficiencies for building design and operation at this location were also considered, as well as the increased interest from government in helping establish a regional centre of sporting excellence in Tamworth.

Council also committed that if a new facility was to be built that Council would sell the existing pool complexes and allocate the proceeds towards a new and improved aquatic and leisure facility.

The first stage of the business case development was to research what makes a successful modern aquatic and leisure facility and how to ensure that any new facility for the community would be as cost effective as possible. It became clearly evident during this research phase that any modern facility would need to be more than just a pool of water and that it would need to be a community and social hub, offering a range of leisure interests including retail, food and beverage, gymnasium, health and wellness services, kids water play facilities, as well as flexible bodies of water to cater for a range of activities and to attract new users and high profile competition and events.

It was also important to consider Tamworth's position within the region and the likely population in the years to come as any new facility would also need to consider future generations.

### **Community Consultation**

Initial consultation was designed to seek an understanding of the community's support for a new facility and if so, what they would like to see in a new facility. The results of the consultation showed that 83% of respondents were in favour of a new facility and with strong support for both indoor and outdoor pools, leisure water, kids splash area and water slides being part of a new facility.

Throughout the consultation there were a number of concerns raised by some community groups and members in relation to the proposed new facility.

The sentiment behind these concerns centred around:

- objection to the sale of two existing pools to fund a new facility;
- the high cost of development for a new facility;
- the proposed location of the new facility, being away from the CBD and associated transport networks; and
- the loss of a sense of place and the nostalgia associated with our existing pools.

In an effort to address these main concerns, Council committed to asking the community more specific questions in future consultations concerning the new aquatic and leisure facility.

Following initial community consultation, Council engaged OTIUM Planning Group, who have significant experience in the development of aquatics and sporting facilities throughout Australia, to help develop three concept plans with differing levels of embellishment and based on the community responses from the initial consultation.

These concept plans and preliminary cost estimates were taken back to the community for further consultation to determine which facility option they would prefer to see built. Again there was continued strong support from the community for a new facility and more than 80% of respondents preferred the option with highest level of embellishment – wanting a facility that caters for the present as well as the future.

In addition to the broad scale community consultation, the project team also undertook market research on the proposed aquatic and leisure centre in conjunction with Council's broader community satisfaction survey in October 2018. Council engaged a recognised external company (Micromex) to undertake qualitative data collection on Council's current community satisfaction levels and included specific questions in relation to the proposed aquatic and leisure centre.

The results of this data collection, which accurately reflected the LGA's demographics, further demonstrated community awareness and support for a new facility:

- awareness of a new aquatic centre was high, with 76% stating they were aware of the proposal prior to the call. Ratepayers were significantly more likely to be aware, whilst those aged 18-34 were less aware;
- when asked how supportive they were of a new aquatic and leisure facility, 86% of the community indicated a level of support for the general concept with only 14% of the community unsupportive;
- when asked about their level of support for selling two existing facilities, 70% of the community were supportive in some way; and
- sentiment on the location of a new facility was mixed with an even split of 45% regarding the location being at the Northern Inland Centre of Sporting Excellence or somewhere else.

### **The Business Case**

Following the completion of community consultation, the Council engaged OTIUM Planning Group to further assist with the development of a business case based on the community's preferred concept plan. Significant work has been undertaken to document the project background, options considered, social, health and economic benefits as well as detailed financial and business modelling. The result of this work is the enclosed Tamworth Regional Aquatic and Leisure Centre Business Case, which has been prepared as a resource to assist Council in seeking State and Federal Government funding for this proposed project.

#### **(a) Policy Implications**

Nil

#### **(b) Financial Implications**

There are no financial implications with the endorsement of the enclosed Business Case.

If State and Federal Government funding was successfully obtained a further report would be provided for Council to consider their financial commitment to the construction of the proposed Regional Aquatic and Leisure Centre.

#### **(c) Legal Implications**

Nil

#### **(d) Community Consultation**

A multi-staged community consultation strategy has been undertaken for this project and is detailed in the above commentary and enclosed Business Case.

**(e) Delivery Program Objective/Strategy**

A Spirit of Community – C12 Provide high-quality sporting facilities to meet the diverse needs of the community.

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