

Buoyed by wave of support for Mayfield pool

Let's accent the positives of this community facility, writes **Bill Robertson**.

NEWCASTLE City Council should be commended for seeking the community's views and reviewing its draft Pool Service Delivery Model report, which included the controversial recommendation to close Mayfield swimming pool.

It's worth remembering that the consultation and review only happened after community outrage forced the council's hand.

The Save Mayfield Swimming Pool campaign cautiously welcomes the report's new recommendation that Mayfield pool be kept open for five years.

We also commend the council for agreeing to work with our community and constructively

consider how to enhance the pool and ensure its long-term future.

Our submission to the consultation process called for community representation on a management committee for Mayfield pool so that local needs and input can be properly included. For people in Mayfield and surrounding suburbs the pool represents an important opportunity for the council to invest in our local community. Initiatives such as the open day at the pool are to be supported and expanded, promoting longer-term use of this community facility.

Working towards ensuring the pool's future must be done in a way that highlights the pool's current social value – and its potential. Attempting to frame the pool debate in limited financial terms is a recipe for continued and exacerbated social disadvantage. There are kids

in Mayfield and adjacent suburbs who for one reason or another don't make it to the beach. The idea that a two-bus trip to Lambton pool is a realistic substitute is a backroom bean counter's flight of fancy with significant negative implications for community health and welfare.

As it happens the suburb which was a potential target for pool removal can readily meet the traditional definition of disadvantage, but simply labelling Mayfield as disadvantaged doesn't do our community justice. A better approach is to consider how the pool fits into community life now, and the positive role the pool could play in our community's future.

The council has resolved to work alongside an increasingly vibrant community. This means recognising and building on existing community strengths. A recent example of this is the extremely popular skate park,

also in Dangar Park. This was an idea generated in our community and then supported by the council.

Mayfield is a community of people with diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. The changing face of Mayfield is represented through community relationships that cross socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, evident in playgroups, pre-schools and schools, and the wide range of sporting and social groups.

Newcastle council has the opportunity to take the lead and emphasise its commitment to its social policies. It can do this by working alongside the local community, receiving its input, and empowering local communities with a real say over local services.

Bill Robertson is deputy chairman of Mayfield Community Forum.

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