

Wave Of Support Saves Pool

By Michael Blaxland

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NEWCASTLE Council's plans for a multi-million dollar revamp of swimming facilities have been scuttled following a huge community outburst.

Conversion of Lambton Pool into an aquatic and leisure centre is likely to go back to the drawing board because a majority of councillors won't support a major plank of the proposal – the removal of Mayfield swimming pool. More than 200 people attended an, at times, heated public meeting on Thursday night which had to be moved from the pool to Mayfield East public school hall because council officers hadn't expected such a huge turn-out.

A poll of councillors last week by the Sun Herald has found the majority supports retention of the swimming pool, contrary to the council's draft pool services delivery plan. The plan, which was revealed exclusively in Hunter Extra on July 22, was devised by consultants after private meetings involving only a handful of community members. The proposed public exhibition of the plan was deferred at a subsequent council meeting, pending a series of public consultations which began last week. The four other pools, at Lambton, Wallsend, Stockton and Beresfield would be retained.

Support for the multi-million dollar proposal has dwindled to such an extent that seven of the 13 councillors contacted last week, said they now supported retention of the Mayfield pool. They are Lord Mayor John Tate and Councillors Ian McKenzie, Michael Osborne, Keith Parson, Aaron Buman, Paul Scobie and Sonia Hornery. Councillors Gwen Jackson and Cassandra Arnold said they were not in favour of retaining the pool and Marilyn Eade and Barry Scully said they were undecided.

Councillor Helene O'Neill, who had previously been vocal in her opposition to the retention, was unavailable for comment and Barbara Gaudry had been on an extended holiday overseas until late last week.

The retention of the pool should be seen as a chance to re-invigorate the Mayfield area, according to Councillor Tate.

"We need to upgrade our pools and there's no question that what the Mayfield community wants is an improved pool and one that can stay open. For instance we could see a 25-metre heated indoor pool at Lambton and a heated pool at Mayfield as well."

Mayfield community forum co-chair Bill Robinson said a plan which had been forced on the community had now become an opportunity to improve the area with community support.

"The public was unaware of the proposal until it was revealed in the Sun Herald, which caused a major outcry, but forced community consultation," he said. "We now have hundreds of families who are prepared to work with the council to build a fantastic swimming centre, which will benefit everyone and ensure its financial viability."

"Mayfield's pool was funded by BHP in compensation for the reclamation of Shelley Beach near the Tourle Street bridge. The proposal would have taken away our community waterhole."