

King's Meadow Pool, Reading RG1 8DQ.

Proposed works and repairs.

Historic Fabric.

The Listed Grade II building is to be entirely refurbished and the pool restored for public use. The surrounding range of buildings will be converted to a variety of complimentary activities of which the principal uses are a restaurant with associated kitchens, a Spa with treatment rooms, sauna, steam rooms and associated changing facilities and the pool itself with its own changing facilities.

All these will be available for use all year round, the pool being heated by a variety of means including gas, roof-mounted solar thermal collectors and possible ground or water source heat pumps. The existing 1951 extension to the main (1902) building will be extended to accommodate enlarged entrance facilities. At present two entrances exist, one on the south side through a double height Octagon, and one on the west side through a large sliding door. Both will be retained so that the building has two entrances in the same way as the operation at Clifton Lido, the West entrance accessing the restaurant, bar and upstairs Meeting rooms and the Octagon entrance accessing the Spa and Pool.

The historic fabric consists of an annular building with outward-sloping monopitch roofs, carried on a red brick perimeter wall with cast iron columns surrounding the pool and supporting timber trusses with steel (boxed in timber) bracing. The diagonal timber roof sarking and much of the other timberwork is seriously decayed, mainly as a result of blockages in hidden gutters. All rotten timber and seriously rusted steel will be replaced and the roof will be recovered after installation of insulation. The main intervention in this historic fabric is the enclosure of roughly half the perimeter of the pool in glazing to allow the creation of a restaurant along the north side of the pool. The east and west ends will be partly enclosed and the south side left open with the restored timber changing cubicles.

Along the south side a further range with the Octagon at its centre, runs almost full width with its own red brick walls punctuated by rubbed arch window openings and roofed in plain clay tiles. At a new first floor level, a range of Spa Treatment Rooms along the south pool side is proposed with access from a new corridor leading from a new stair in the Spa entrance Octagon.

The exact configuration of the enclosing glazing is not resolved in detail. The sketch section included shows one option with a new layer of clear glazing set outside the existing structure so that the entire assembly of cast iron columns, timber trusses and enclosed steelwork and decorative iron projecting brackets is enclosed within the new glazing. Both vertical and horizontal setting out are derived from those of the existing structure with an upper and lower zone of sliding opening glazing affording ventilation and access in and out of the enclosed spaces. The glazing structure is independent of the historic fabric, albeit braced for wind loading to the steelwork enclosed within the timber trusses. The timber fretwork roof edge remains intact and outside the line of the new glazing.

In order to make the narrow internal space usable along the north side, a series of openings is proposed to allow circulation along a new corridor along which small windows allow views into and out of the pool area towards the river and the lock.

Pool.

The pool itself will be replaced by a slightly smaller version, approximately 25m by 10m with a constant depth of 1.2m (4 feet). The existing detailing of the pool edge will be retained as part of the new pool surround. The void left over from the reduced pool size will contain below ground overflow/balancing tanks and connecting pipe work to the new basement plant room. A variety of sources will supplement the gas heating needed for year-round swimming. This is likely to include ground source heat pumps using pipes laid in the ground and roof-mounted solar thermal collectors; the Clifton Lido installation includes 720 evacuated tube solar collectors which substantially extend the fossil fuel-free summer heating season.

New Building.

At the west end of the Edwardian pool building a flat-roofed brick extension was added in 1951. It is proposed to keep and enlarge this to form kitchens, and entrance space for the restaurant as well as storage and a basement level plant room for pool equipment, pumps filters and so on. The addition will be in matching brick and form a simple rectilinear volume in low key contrast to the more elaborate forms of the roofs and walls of the Edwardian building. On the top of this brick "plinth" is a simple pavilion structure, substantially glazed and quite separate from the pool roofs and containing meeting and function rooms. Beneath the plinth is the plant room.

Access and Parking.

The location of the Baths next to King's Meadow, close to town centre and to the regionally important Reading Station with high speed access to Central London, international airports, and next to the River Thames with its local and long-distance footpaths means that large numbers of visitors using foot, cycle and public transport can be expected. There are large car parks nearby at Napier Rd but Spa users in particular (visiting for an average of four hours) will require dedicated parking which is proposed as an addition to the Napier Road car park.

Landscape.

Removal of the existing access road is fundamental to the creation of a landscape plan more worthy of the baths and the parkland as a whole. The principal elements of the proposal are a new avenue with footpath access from Napier Rd to the Octagon (this could be suitably lit and sign-posted to form part of the flood egress strategy), a new hard landscape connection from the west entrance to King's Meadow Rd, the new parking area itself and work, perhaps including lighting, to improve the somewhat gloomy riverside path which passes to the north of the building. All these areas remain open and available for the other uses which take place in King's Meadow throughout the year.