

Pool to close as new sites are looked into

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CENTRAL Pool is to close for good as Reading Borough Council announces its reshuffle of swimming facilities.

Plans have been drafted to quit the site and create two new pools in the town including a "neighbourhood" pool at Palmer Park Stadium to replace Arthur Hill in the long term.

A location has not yet been selected for the replacement for Central Pool but a temporary eight-lane 25m extension is set to be built at Rivermead Leisure Complex in the meantime.

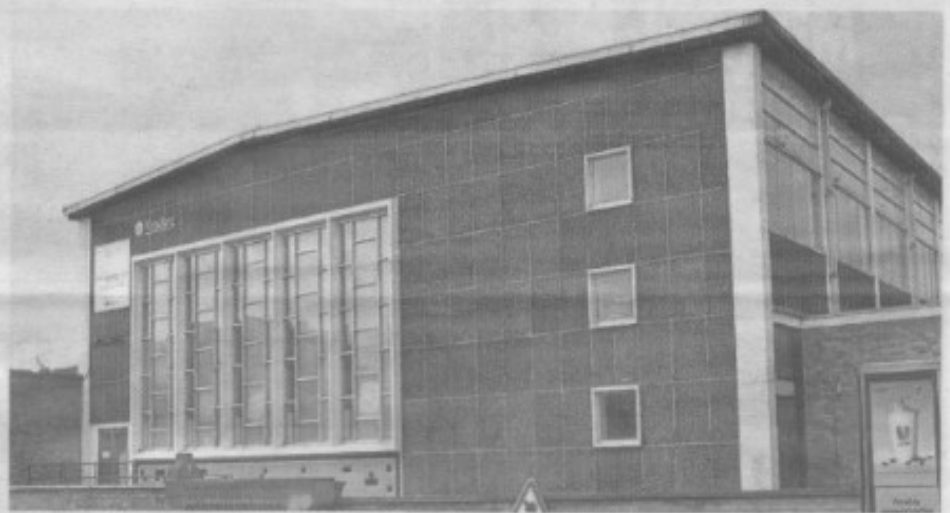
The cash-strapped council has also said it will be looking for a development partner to reduce the building costs of any new facilities and take over the day-to-day running.

It is estimated the pop-up pool could take as long as two years to build and up to £350,000 worth of maintenance work will take place at Central Pool to keep it safe to use in the interim.

The Battle Street site is the borough's only competition standard pool and is home to multiple clubs including Reading Swimming Club and the Albatross Diving Club.

However, with the new pool not expected for around five years and the nearest diving facilities in Hemel Hempstead, concern has been expressed over what will happen to the sports in between builds.

Emma West, secretary of the Albatross Diving Club, said: "We deserve the local support of the council and we really are embracing the fact that it looks like we are going to get some



The outdated Central Swimming Pool in Chatham Street

Picture: Chris

state-of-the-art facilities.

"The challenge is how we cope in the interim, but we really hope that by working together we can reach something that works for both."

Mrs West added the group was in the process of trying to obtain a slight extension to the planned temporary unit at Rivermead to make space for a 1m spring board for mid-week practices.

Cllr Paul Gitting, lead member for sport at Reading Borough Council, said: "While existing pools remain well used, it is no secret that some are ageing and, in reality, are nearing the end of their design life.

"That applies to Central Pool and Arthur Hill, which have been forced to shut a number of times for essential works. The council needs to make major savings over the next three years.

"It makes no sense to continue to

pour money on outdated facilities in order to keep them going for a limited period of time.

"Instead, the better option is to invest that money in modern new swimming and leisure facilities in Reading."

The replacement for Central Pool would include up-to-date diving provision, but Cllr Gittings admitted that adding full height boards to the temporary build at Rivermead would be out of the council's price range.

A feasibility study is set to be commissioned to look at the potential of providing a six-lane 25m pool at Palmer Park.

An options appraisal, looking at how and where a replacement for Central Pool would take form, is also being put forward for councillors' approval at a policy committee meeting on November 30.