

SERIOUSLY SOCIAL ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT

Award submission | Tadcaster Community Swimming Pool Trust



FROM POOLSIDE WASTE TO CIRCULAR CHANGE

A community swimming pool that chose to question what 'waste' meant to prove a different approach could work.



IT BEGAN WITH A SIMPLE QUESTION

In 2020, while working at Tadcaster Community Swimming Pool, Luke Parkinson (Senior Manager) was carrying a bag of broken and unwanted swimming equipment to the bin at the end of a shift. Goggles, floats and other plastic-based products had reached the end of their useful life, but throwing them away did not feel like the right answer. After researching alternatives - and being told by major waste providers that this type of mixed swimming equipment could not practically be recycled - he decided to challenge that assumption.

Two years of research and development followed. In January 2022, Tadcaster became the place where the idea was tested for real. As a community-run, non-profit swimming pool, the Trust did not simply host a recycling point: staff and customers embraced a new way of thinking about equipment that had previously been treated as rubbish.

The innovation was to create a dedicated collection route for difficult, mixed-material swimming equipment and connect it to a recycling process capable of turning otherwise problematic plastic waste into durable recycled boards. Tadcaster then demonstrated the full circular journey by using recycled material for poolside seating and an inclusive changing space.

To date, Tadcaster has completed 110 collections - each representing 100 litres of material - giving 11,000 litres of collection capacity. The pool has recycled 323.22kg of swimming equipment and recorded 190.27kg of CO2 savings. What began as one employee questioning a bin bag became a community project that proved the model could work. That evidence provided the platform for Leisure Loop to develop the approach into a national scheme now used by more than 100 swimming pools and subsequently recognised through a partnership with Swim England.

AN IDEA NEEDED A COMMUNITY

The decisive part of the project was not the container or the recycling technology; it was participation. Tadcaster's staff had to change established habits, identify suitable equipment from day-to-day operations and lost property, explain the scheme to swimmers and keep the message visible.

Customers were encouraged to bring unwanted equipment from home, turning the pool into a community collection point rather than limiting the scheme to waste generated by the facility itself.

That engagement was reinforced through poolside signage, social media, staff conversations and visible recycled products. The approach gave customers something tangible: they could see the Recycle Point, understand what belonged in it and later see useful items made from the same wider recycling stream. Tadcaster's continued participation has made it the leading site on the Leisure Loop collection leaderboard.



The 'RECYCLED' Recycle Point at Tadcaster - making recycling visible to swimmers, families and staff.

TAKING THE MESSAGE INTO THE WATER

Tadcaster has also used swimming itself as a way to explore sustainability. School swimming classes have taken part in sustainability-themed lessons using clean discarded plastic bottles as teaching resources. Pupils have experimented with bottles as floats while practising swimming skills, demonstrating that an object described as 'waste' can still have a useful purpose when we think differently about it. The lesson is deliberately simple: before throwing something away, consider what else it could become. This takes the project beyond waste management and into environmental education, helping younger swimmers connect everyday choices with reuse, resourcefulness and sustainability.



School swimming at Tadcaster: clean discarded bottles become a practical teaching resource, encouraging children to rethink the idea of waste.

2 Further detail

EVIDENCE THAT TRAVELLED BEYOND TADCASTER

Tadcaster's results provided something the wider aquatics sector had previously lacked: a working example. The project demonstrated that swimming equipment could be collected consistently in a live leisure environment, that staff and customers would participate, and that the resulting material could enter a circular recycling stream.

That proof of concept provided the foundation from which Leisure Loop was developed and replicated nationally.

More than 100 swimming pools have since followed the model pioneered at Tadcaster. Together, the growing Leisure Loop network has now diverted more than 3 tonnes (3,047.84 kg) of swimming equipment from waste, generating a further 1,797.61 kg of recorded CO₂ savings. Swim England has subsequently recognised Leisure Loop's leadership in aquatic sustainability and entered into a partnership supporting greater sustainability across the sector. For Tadcaster, that wider adoption is an important part of the impact: a small community pool did not need to solve the environmental challenge for every facility itself; it needed to prove that change was possible.

The Leisure Loop Network

Find your local pool to recycle pool waste.





Inclusive poolside changing space and recycled-board seating: visible outcomes of the circular approach.

FROM DISPOSAL PROBLEM TO USEFUL INFRASTRUCTURE

Collecting equipment is only one part of circularity. Tadcaster wanted customers and staff to be able to see what keeping difficult plastics in use could ultimately achieve. Swimming equipment collected through the scheme enters the same specialist recycling streams as material from other participating pools and other hard-to-recycle plastics. These materials are processed together to create durable recycled boards. This means Tadcaster does not claim that a particular pair of goggles became a particular bench; instead, its collected equipment contributes to a wider material stream that replaces virgin resources and creates useful new products. Tadcaster has brought that principle back into the building. Recycled board has been used to create poolside seating and an inclusive poolside changing space, providing a highly visible example of the circular economy in practice. Approximately 180kg of recycled material was required for the inclusive changing-space panels, equivalent to around 106kg of CO2 saving using the scheme's impact methodology.

The result is more than an environmental statistic. The changing space provides practical infrastructure for swimmers who benefit from a more inclusive poolside facility, while simultaneously giving staff, families and customers a physical demonstration of what recycled material can become. That is the project's circular story in its clearest form: a swimming pool identified a waste problem, its community helped divert material from disposal, the material entered a specialist recycling stream, and recycled board returned to the leisure environment as something useful.



4

Future plans

Making circular thinking part of the pool's next chapter

FROM A SUCCESSFUL TRIAL TO THE FABRIC OF THE BUILDING

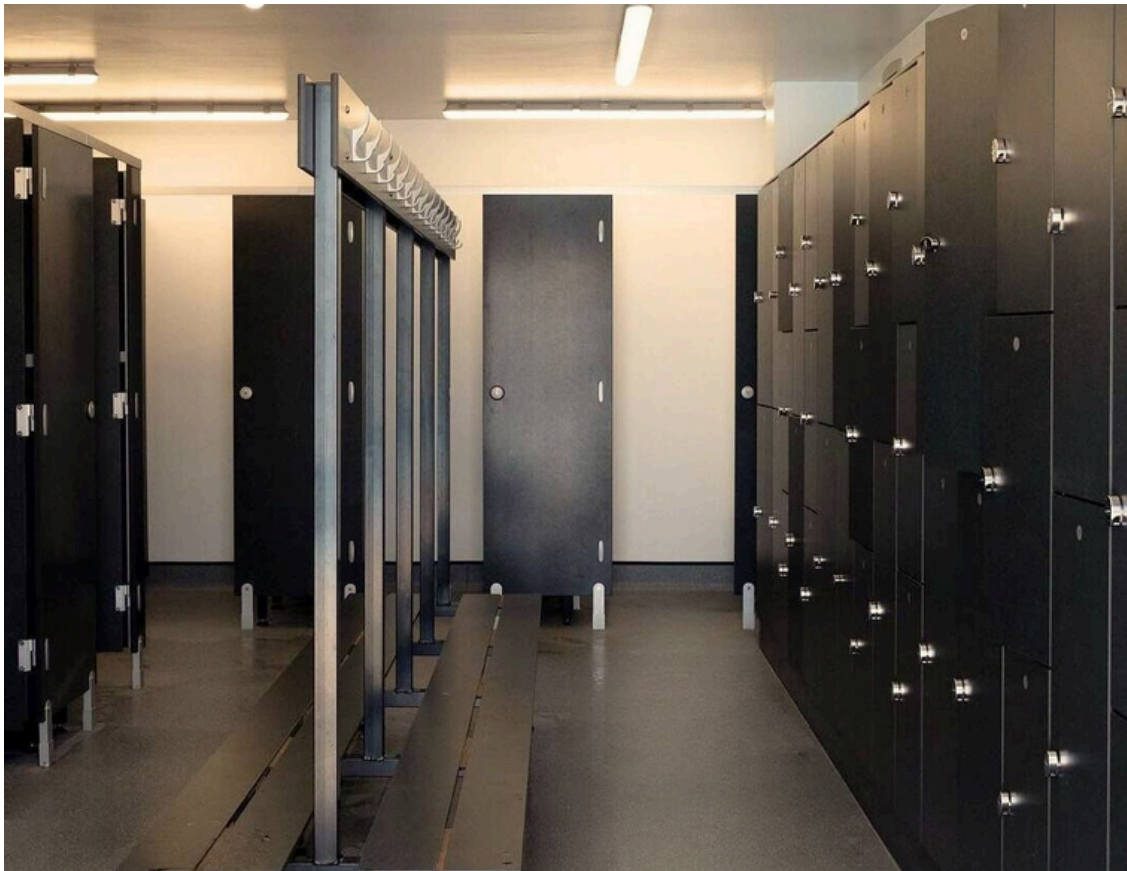
Tadcaster's next ambition is to move recycled material from individual projects into a much larger refurbishment of its changing facilities. The Trust already has a quotation for a proposed scheme; delivery is now dependent on budget and timing.

The concept includes replacing 224 locker stations and 32 changing cubicles using recycled-board components. Early estimates indicate approximately 66 panels for the cubicle element, with a further 16 panels for the doors across four locker banks measuring roughly 6m by 1.8m - around 82 panels in total.

At approximately 20kg of recycled material per panel, that represents around 1.64 tonnes of material incorporated into the future refurbishment. The significance is not simply the volume. It would demonstrate how a small community facility can begin to specify circular materials as part of normal asset replacement rather than treating sustainability as a standalone project.

The recycling programme itself will continue alongside this ambition. Tadcaster will maintain its collection route, continue engaging swimmers and staff, use its physical recycled products to tell the story, and develop sustainability education through school swimming and other community activity.

The long-term aim is straightforward: keep asking the question that started the project - 'does this really have to be waste?' and apply that thinking more widely whenever the pool replaces equipment, teaches the next generation or invests in its building.



Recycled changing rooms at Sea Lanes Brighton. Demonstrating what is already possible and providing a model for Tadcaster's proposed changing-room refurbishment.