

Case Study : In-use stage

Darlaston Swimming Pool DQI pilot project

This case study is based on Martin Spring’s article “How to Account for Taste” in Building Magazine 12 July 2002

Darlaston Swimming Pool is an award winning pool in Walsall , designed by Hodder Associates and consulting engineer Arup and opened in November 2000.

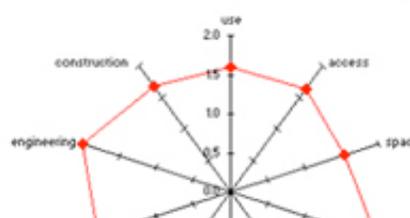
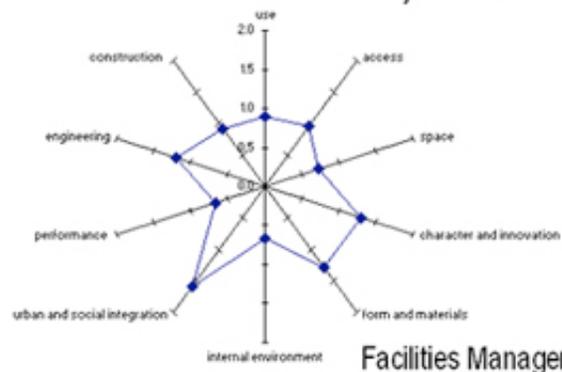
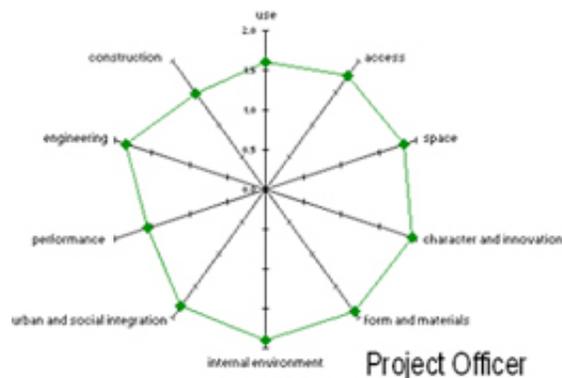


The DQI appraisal at Darlaston was convened by the CIC as a pilot project and entailed three of the building's stakeholders filling in standard questionnaires during a two-hour session in April 2002. The participants were Walsall council's development manager, the pool's manager, and the pool's most frequent user, who is currently training to swim the English Channel .

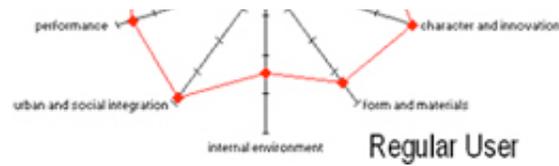
The council's development manager, filled in his questionnaire separately from the other participants and turned up towards the end of the session. "As the project lead officer, I thought it was important to let people express their own views," he says. “The feeling was that it was a positive day, with people quite keen to voice their opinions. This building project had very extensive community involvement from day one, and the DQI gave the community representatives a formal way of evaluating whether the building does what it said it would do.”

How Darlaston pool did: Functionality

Reassuringly for Walsall council, Darlaston Swimming Pool scores resoundingly well on the most vital aspects of the building's function. According to the three respondents to the DQI questionnaire, the open-plan



building interior works well, easily accommodates the users' needs and enhances the activity of people who use it regularly.



The building scores poorly on just three out of 28 functional points. These include accessibility by public transport, an issue beyond the control of the project team. People with impaired sight were reckoned to be poorly served, probably referring to discreet notices that were designed by the architect with tiny lettering and have been replaced by big bold notices in red lettering.

Storage space also scored low marks, which becomes glaringly obvious when the facilities manager reveals his laughably poky office and staff room.

Though not brought out in the responses to the DQI questionnaires, one of the most critical failings of the building is glare on the water surface caused by the extensive curtain walling. The glare obstructs lifesavers from spotting struggling swimmers.

How Darlaston pool did: Impact

The building scores well on character and innovation, as respondents reckoned it lifted the spirits and praised its quality. "The building is new, fresh and exciting," says the facilities manager

However, forms and materials came off poorly - the stylish fold-over metal-sheathed roof was not regarded as a pleasing shape, and the quality of materials and detailing were criticised. Orientation also drew criticism, especially with the main entrance being located inconveniently at the back of the building away from the road.

Air quality and thermal comfort also come off poorly. This, explains the development manager, refers to complaints about stuffiness experienced when the fitness suite fills to capacity.

Another environmental problem that is not brought out by the spider charts concerns reception. "It's a hard place to work," says the facilities manager. "It's hot, and when there are screaming kids in the pool, it's loud. I would put up a screen between the desk and the pool."

How Darlaston pool did: Build quality

In terms of engineering, the building scores poorly, and this, suggests the development manager, is almost entirely related to the unresolved problems of stuffiness in the fitness suite.

"It's an engineering problem that's down to the chiller units," explains the

development manager. “It probably originated when the installer went into receivership in the last throes of the building contract. A report has been commissioned from another specialist contractor and this is now with the main contractor under the defects liability agreement.”

The stuffiness problem in the fitness suite is doubly exasperating for Blyde and manager Etchells as it eclipses a top-of-the-range ventilation system within the main pool hall. As designed by Arup, the beauty of the ventilation system here is that air is extracted through the water run-off around the rim of the pool, where it is at its most humid and rich in chlorine vapour. The air at breathing level around the pool is left free of humidity and chlorine. The building scored well for its use, character, innovation and performance, but lost marks for engineering on account of its faulty air-handling system.



(c) 2003 - 2007 Construction Industry Council