

Cosmeston Pilot Leisure Activity Review



Recommendations from Report



Note visitor uplift and related expenditure.



Note ecological reports undertaken before, during and after the activity in 2025.



Acknowledge resident concerns and petitions.



Undertake full-year ecological and water quality baseline assessments in 2026 with no new on water activities taking place.



Bring further report to Cabinet in late 2026 to advise on further activities or opportunities having regard to baseline surveys.

Background

- Cosmeston previously hosted commercial paddleboarding and boating.
- It continues to host Cardiff diving and canoe club.
- Country Parks are key visitor destinations for wellbeing, ecology, tourism and leisure.
- The Council to consider how we can support the sustainability of the country parks into the future given ongoing budget constraint
- Pilot allowed assessment of leisure–nature balance for future activities.



Key Issues for Consideration

- Visitor numbers & economic impact (16,000 visitors, £960k total economic impact) and Long terms sustainability of the Country Parks.
- Water quality & safety (all samples within acceptable limits except one isolated anomaly).
- Ecological impact (NRW assent (twice), multiple ecology reports, recommendation for new baseline assessment).
- Community response (petitions, objections, commentary from VAG).



Water Quality & Safety



- Sampling took place in approximate aquapark-area and was undertaken by both the company and rangers (every two weeks by Council and every 3 – 5 days by the company).
- Tests were also undertaken immediately after heavy rainfall.
- Samples were testing for E.coli & Enterococci;
- Safety assessments undertaken; injuries low and typical for activity;
- None linked to water quality.



Ecology & Environment



SSSI status required NRW assent which was granted.



Operators undertook specific ecological surveys during pilot.



Independent ecology review recommended full-year 2026 breeding bird survey and long-term monitoring strategy.



Continued checks for invasive species and continued use of measure to prevent introduction of new species through existing water users (diving and canoe club).

Community Response



- Petition with 7,585 signatures; objecting to the pilot
- concerns regarding ecology, noise, water quality and safety;
- information which was obtained was invaluable in preparing a longer-term strategy for leisure uses in Cosmeston.



Next Steps



Pause extension or any new water-based leisure for 2026;



conduct full ecological and water quality baselines;



undertake wider review of land and water activity opportunities in Country Parks for long-term sustainability.



Report to be brought back at end of 2026 regarding developing suitable opportunities.



Response to written representations

Invasive species

- Zebra mussels have been present in the lake for at least 20 years - probably brought by birdlife
- DNA testing in summer last year indicated that killer shrimps may be present in the lake. This has not been confirmed and testing continues – but if they are in Cosmeston, presence would be historical as insufficient time from the aquaparks present to provide a DNA sample

Swimming safety and use of the water

- The eastern lake has been used for leisure uses for many years in the past including for swimming – used by diving, windsurfing and canoe clubs for many years.
- Swimming stopped due to safety issues as no lifeguard not because of water quality or pollution



Response to written representations

NRW and ecology response to activity

- NRW granted Assent under Section 28H of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 twice.
- Operator employed a local ecologist before and during activity (July –mid September)
- Council employed a separate ecology consultant to review the pilot and make recommendations on how the council proceeds
- Despite suggestions to the contrary, impact on birdlife not deemed unacceptable but suggested a further baseline survey in 2026 prior to any longer-term agreement.
- Starry stonewort in lake is in good health and appears unaffected by the activity – should be noted that the species had only be recorded in the western lake but has now spread to the east lake.
- The current year of establishing a new baseline with no new activity present is an important part of establishing the potential for further activities in the water and around the park.



Response to written representations

Visual and general Impact of waterpark on Cosmeston

Part of the review undertaken by the Council was to consult Country park Staff to assess their views on impact of the aquapark this confirmed that:

- limited noise complaints were received but not substantiated
- No overall increase in unauthorised use of the water
- No increase in general antisocial behaviour
- No increase in parking or traffic issues



Response to written representations

Need for planning or other consents

- Planning permission was not deemed to be required for the activity on the water or the temporary equipment and containers associated with it due to temporary nature and the development rights of the council and its agents.
- Containers are being removed over next 3 days (weather has hampered removal to date).
- Leaving concrete anchors in the lake was deemed less intrusive than taking them out again given the growth of starry stonewort – NRW aware of this decision and have granted assent for them to remain for a further 12 months.



Response to written representations

Financial background to the pilot

- All income received from the pilot activity and any increase in parking income will be used to support the Countryside parks, the facilities within them and to directly support important ecological work within both parks.
- All income for concessions parking and other activities in the parks retained within the Countryside section for use in supporting the parks (including for new toilet refurbishments, new parking facilities etc.)



Response to written representations

Water quality and testing

- As set out in the presentation water testing started twice a month from January 2026 and will increase to once a week from April through to end of September. Testing undertaken by Public Health Wales.
- In previous years and prior to 2025 testing was monthly and twice a month in the summer.
- Testing was previously undertaken at the waters edge, which given bird and animal proximity as well as dog walking and horse use could lead to occasional anomalies.
- Most of the testing undertaken last year was on water away from the shoreline in the approximate location of the water park.
- This standardised approach will be continued this year during the baseline assessment.

