

How a powerful partnership can drive sustainability

3 years ago



Chris Porter

A 2022 campaign by Swim England warned that 40% of local authorities could be forced to reduce and even close leisure services in the face of soaring energy prices.

And when Tadcaster Community Pool found itself struggling with these rising costs, it turned to specialist electrical contractor Volta Compliance for support. Chris Porter, facility manager at the popular pool and fitness venue, discusses their long partnership – and explains how newly-installed solar panels are leading to energy savings on site.

How long have you been facility manager at Tadcaster Community Swimming Pool, Chris?

I've been with the business for over 20 years. I joined as an apprentice, and worked my way up until I had overall responsibility for the site.

The pool itself opened in 1994, and has become one of the area's most popular swimming and fitness venues. It's run by paid staff, with support from a team of volunteers.

How long have you been working with Volta, and has it been beneficial to build a long-term relationship with the business?

We've been working with Richard (managing director of Volta Compliance) and his team for many years. Establishing a long-term relationship with a trusted electrical contractor has had massive benefits.

Our pool is subject to a covenant, and Volta understands the strict limitations in place. According to this covenant, the building needs to look a certain way, remaining in keeping with the rest of the town. There

can be no sky dishes or obvious signs of modernity.

When installing replacement fittings, for example, we must ensure – not just that they're cost and energy efficient – but that they're in keeping with the philosophy of the covenant.

Because we've worked together for so long, Volta understands these challenges. We'll sit down to discuss them, and MD Richard will come up with a few potential solutions.

This approach works well. When we wanted to install new exterior lanterns, he presented specifications and physical examples to the covenant owner, ensuring that the look of the fittings – and even the level and colour of light – were suitable.

Swimming pools across the country are struggling with rising energy costs. Has Volta helped you to address this challenge?

The huge increase in energy prices has been very challenging, driving up our bills. Whether our facilities are being used by one person or 100 people, we must ensure that the pool temperature and filtration rates remain the same. We can't turn them up and down, and systems run almost 24/7. Recently, our electricity bill has increased threefold – which, in turn, impacts the profit we're making as a business.

We foresaw these issues around seven years ago and began taking steps to make the site more energy-efficient and sustainable. Volta supported our efforts, installing reliable, efficient new LED lighting in offices, changing rooms, plant rooms and outdoor areas. I don't think there's a non-LED light left in the building!

It's been a two-pronged approach; we've focused on becoming more sustainable and more efficient, which has led to cost savings.

Volta recently oversaw the installation of solar panels at Tadcaster Community Swimming Pool. Could you tell us more about this project?

We'd looked at installing solar panels before, and felt it was the right thing to do from an energy and cost-saving perspective. However, concerns were raised about the fact that they might change the appearance of the building. We worked closely with the covenant owner, exploring how we could mount the panels to ensure they weren't visible from the road or carpark.

Eventually, we arrived at a solution that suited all parties; the panels would be mounted on the roof of the facility, helping us to save money and energy without altering its outlook.

It was one of the easiest capital investments we've ever made, and Richard and his team managed the whole process. They worked with a great supplier and oversaw the mounting of the panels; the roof is aluminium, with some flex in it, which made things a little more challenging. Ultimately, though, it was a straightforward and hassle-free installation.

Today, the panels generate around 10% of our daily power requirement and are saving us roughly £5000 per year. Our calculations suggest that payback will come sooner than the five years initially proposed. It's something I'd recommend other facilities managers explore.

What other sustainability initiatives do you plan to introduce in future?

Going forward, we'll be looking at other energy-saving measures – like covers that help the pool to retain heat when it's not in use.

Ensuring that our electrical systems continue to run efficiently is also key. Volta has implemented a testing and inspection programme onsite, helping us to remain compliant and operational. We're now able to manage the facility's compliance via a client portal, which has made this often labour-intensive process completely paperless.

And, if a reactive issue arises, we know we can call on Richard and his team at any time. Not many contractors offer that level of service!

To learn more about Volta Compliance, visit <https://voltacompliance.com/>.

For more information about Tadcaster Community Swimming Pool, visit <https://www.tadcasterpool.org.uk/>.