

Cleveland Pools – A Proposal for Restoration and Future Use

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This proposal has been written by the residents of Hampton Row and Cleveland Row - the Immediate Neighbours of the Cleveland Pools.

Mission

Our Mission: to ensure a viable future for the Cleveland Pools - that a realistic, sustainable and low-risk scheme be adopted for the preservation of the historic fabric of the buildings and their unique surroundings for future generations.

Our objectives are threefold:

1. To preserve the valuable historic elements and beauty of the site in a manner that is sympathetic to the buildings, site and location
2. To ensure there is a low-risk, sustainable plan for the long term; requiring only minimal, realistic financing, thereby giving it the best chance of survival for future generations
3. To ensure the maximum number of Bath residents and community groups can enjoy this historic site, affordably or free, while also encouraging visitors to Bath to visit at a reasonable price

Current Situation

Community and Residents

Residents throughout the Bathwick Estate take pride in living in this special conservation area and there is a strong sense of community and good involvement in the Bathwick Residents Association. Many of the residents of Hampton/Cleveland Row have lived here for more than 30 years and would like to have a say and some involvement in the future of the Cleveland Pools that we all neighbour, many of us directly.

Current State of the Site

The site and buildings are in poor repair and have become increasingly derelict. Despite the large sums of money spent recently by the CPT on developing and marketing a scheme to develop the site into a heated pool/lido, parts of this beautiful, Grade II* listed building (in particular the crescent of changing rooms) are completely without (even a makeshift) roof and being allowed visibly to deteriorate.

Cleveland Pools Trust's Scheme

This community has made numerous attempts over the last 12 years to engage with the future plans for The Pools and to have some involvement in its future. The CPT has completely refused to engage or consult with the community (even now, when they have been specifically advised to do so by the HLF), hence our need to write this proposal. We, and the members of the Bathwick Residents' Association, remain extremely concerned about and baffled by the CPT Proposed Scheme. Concerns - perhaps shared by the HLF - including: disregard for the extreme limitations of inadequate access and lack of parking, the high financial risk of opening a heated pool requiring 36,000 - plus (we believe) visitors per year in a residential cul-de-sac on the outskirts of Bath, and the complete lack of consultation with or support from the local community.

Critical Success Factors

To ensure we arrived at a suitable scheme, with a high chance of success, the following critical factors have been carefully considered when developing this proposal.

Location

The site access is extremely limited. This has several implications:

We believe any large-scale building project would risk going dramatically over budget at any stage, from initial clearing of the site and removal of tonnes of rubble to getting machinery and building materials onto the site.

The entrance to the pools is exceptionally narrow. Large numbers of visitors entering and leaving the site would be both a safety issue and cause extreme noise disturbance to the direct neighbours.

We therefore considered schemes that have a low to moderate need for large-scale building works and do not require tens of thousands of visitors per year to be financially viable. (The 2016 CPT Income and Expenditure estimates state a minimum requirement of 23,000 swimmers per season, 10,700 heritage visitors annually - and other ancillary activities.)

Distance from City Centre

Without a significant amount of parking, we believe it will be difficult to attract tourists or other-than-local Bath residents to frequent a pool that is on the outskirts of the city. As a swimming facility, this is even more of a challenge, visitors needing to bring changes of clothes, towels – and to travel home, perhaps with wet hair and children!

Proximity to neighbouring houses

Cleveland Pools has nine houses as direct, immediate neighbours, most of them in multi-occupation. The windows of these homes, in particular those in the Rose Cottage flats, open directly onto the entrance to the Pools. This was considered a serious issue and we have developed a scheme that we believe will have a low level of disturbance to these residents.

Parking

There is no parking available at the site whatsoever. As the pools are also situated on a narrow dead-end street with no throughway, there is no sensible, safe place for turning vehicles.

River Flooding and Historical Issues

We believe the Pools will flood every few years (much more than the CPT proposal estimates) and cause financial issues for the running of a heated pool. We have also considered the several previous attempts to run the site as a public swimming pool, all of which have seen it close due to financial issues.

Community Support:

We believe it is of the utmost importance for any scheme on a residential street to have the support of the local community to support, promote and volunteer to help operate the facility. As the direct neighbours of the Cleveland Pools, we have held at least 10 separate meetings to which every resident of the street and those at the top of Rockcliffe Avenue have been invited - essentially, all residents who would be affected directly (visually, audibly) by any development of the site. Each resident has been consulted on their wishes and hopes for the

Pools and also their concerns about both the current CPT plan and other alternative plans discussed.

At the 2017 BERA AGM, approximately 90% of residents (of the whole Bathwick Estate, not just the immediate neighbours) present voted in favour of opposing the CPT's plan to develop the site as a heated pool.

This proposal is supported by and has had input from all residents of Hampton and Cleveland Rows.

Serious Concerns of the wider BERA members:

Traffic Safety and Pollution: – residents would prefer a scheme that is unlikely to bring large numbers of people by car. There is no parking at all at the site and cars will be forced to turn at the top of the road, reverse along it post – drop-off, or attempt to park where there is no official parking (this is potentially dangerous; young children often play in this dead-end street)

Noise: – residents would prefer a scheme that does not disrupt the peace of this extremely quiet road and estate

Risk of recurring dereliction: – residents believe a large-scale scheme requiring large numbers of visitors just to break-even is highly risky. If such a scheme fails, the site will again fall into dereliction and millions of pounds may have been wasted. Swimming pools are rarely profitable and Bath residents will be most upset if there is public liability for the project, as with the Thermae Spa.

Values: – residents strongly favour a scheme that is in keeping with the character, values and spirit of the street, the estate and Bath. In short, these have been described as ‘friendly, community spirited, environmentally aware, heritage-led, quiet, peaceful.’”

Prioritization

The group has taken time to methodically review all the critical success factors and the various reports and proposal from the CPT. We have then prioritised what we believe to be the Key Performance Indicators by which any scheme should be judged :

1. That the historic fabric of the buildings be conserved for future generations. In order, we believe the most important historical elements of the site to be:
 - a. The Crescent of changing rooms, including the house
 - b. The ladies' pool (built in 1827 and probably the oldest in Britain)
 - c. We are less concerned about other structures, which are either built much later or have less historical interest e.g. the main pool.
2. That the site be as accessible and as affordable as possible for the local community to enjoy, as well as to visitors to our World Heritage City
 - a. Ideally free access to Discovery Card holders
 - b. Small fee chargeable perhaps for tours, audio guides etc.
3. That the unique beauty of the site and buildings be retained.
 - a. The connection with the river - this was originally and importantly a river swimming site, not a discrete pool - and the ability for visitors to enjoy the site in its riverside context

b. No additional buildings be added to the site. There is plenty of scope to add a toilet in an existing building if required, but we strongly prefer no additional, modern buildings be erected that would spoil the beauty and integrity of this site.

4. That any scheme should be sympathetic to the quiet, peaceful residential, semi-rural location and community

a. Low to modest visitor numbers to reflect the lack of parking, need for road safety and clean air targets and to retain the peaceful nature of the location

b. Opening hours between 10-4pm ideally

5. That the Pools be managed as a community asset by a group with:

a. Accountability to the local community (Council ideally)

b. Involvement from the direct neighbours and local community

c. Strong values around environment, community, heritage and sustainability and a desire to conserve The Pools rather than transform the site into a high traffic, high profile tourist destination.

6. That Community Groups be encouraged to utilise the site in a sympathetic manner that will further add to the 'magic' of the site.

7. Swimming. None of the residents of the street believe the Cleveland Pools should be opened again as a swimming facility. This has been tried several times and failed. Also, for all of the above reasons, we believe a peaceful park and heritage centre would be much more in keeping with the location and require far less damage to the historic fabric of the site than the building of a heated pool (including removal of the children's and ladies' pools, the building of a large modern toilet block on the riverbank and so-on).

Proposal

Overview

We propose that the Cleveland Pools Site and Buildings become a combined park and heritage visitor centre, celebrating the architecture, history and location of the site and buildings.

Bath residents and visitors will be encouraged to visit and, for a small fee, enjoy an audio tour of the site, highlighting its history, architecture and the stories of the people who enjoyed it. As at Clevedon Pier, there could be a small, interactive museum - perhaps in the ladies' pool area.

Visitors would then be welcome to stay and enjoy the grounds, bring a picnic and so-on.

Buildings

The first priority is to halt the delapidation of the beautiful Grade II* listed buildings on the site, necessarily starting with temporary roofing.

We would also propose prioritising restoration of the small house so it can be occupied by a live-in caretaker.

Main Pool

We propose preserving the outline and shape of the main pool and creating a very shallow water garden. This would maintain the beauty of the site (buildings reflected in the water and so on) plus reduce the danger of having a large hole or deep pool of unclean water. It would also allow the pool to be used for paddling or for children's (toy) boating in the summer.

As this pool is not Georgian and was in fact built at the turn of the 20th century, we believe this is a sensitive and realistic means of keeping an attractive and appropriate water feature while removing the issues involved with maintaining or financing a heated swimming pool.

Children's Pool

Similar to the main pool or cover this pool completely allowing for a larger parkland/ picnicking/ garden area or children's paddling area.

Ladies' Pool

This is the oldest and most historically interesting of the 3 pools. We propose preserving whatever elements of this pool remain, allowing them to be viewed e.g. old signs or steps and making this room a visitor centre or small museum.

The River

We propose preserving the link between the pool and the river as far as possible, in direct contrast to the proposal from the CPT, - which fences off the river, and places a large toilet block on the riverbank.

Opening Hours

We propose that the Pools are open and available to visit all year round. A live-in tenant on the site would be able to open the site each morning and ensure its security in the evenings.

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Community Value

We believe it is our duty to make this beautiful site a valuable place for the local community. We suggest it be made available for use by :

Schools

Local interest groups e.g. for Historical talks, lectures

Family nature trails

Open Studios/ art trails/Theatre events

Events

In keeping with the situation and community surrounding the site, we propose that a small number of annual events be held at the Pools, for example:

A venue for Bath Folk Festival

Local Schools or Charities might book the venue for a regular fundraising event e.g.

Summer Fair

An annual fundraiser in aid of the Pools themselves

Art exhibitions have already been held at the site. Once restored further, there would be great demand to display art in such a beautiful setting

Revenue Generation and Partnerships

As above, events should generate a good income for the pools

Potentially, a small fee could be charged for entry to non-residents as at Parade Gardens

Volunteer-led pop-up shops for refreshments

Partnerships with local businesses

Riverboat trips

We will seek a partnership with the Sydney Gardens Parks For People Project (Council led, full community engagement and support, preparing for HLF Stage 2 bid). This is just 500 metres away along a beautiful stretch of the Kennet and Avon Canal towpath and presents many opportunities for joint or linked events and common support.

Staff and Volunteers

A caretaker could live in the house for a small rent, taking care of opening the site and of ensuring security.

Many local residents are keen to be involved and would be happy to take on duties including maintenance, gardening, welcoming groups of visitors, helping organise events and so on.

Next Steps

Consultation and Collaboration

We invite feedback, ideas and input from BERA, B&NES and other Councillors, Heritage Associations, the HLF and other lottery funds.

We have already reached out to influential local residents for their support, including Ken Loach who has agreed to put his name to this proposal.

We are happy to be active, involved members of a team comprising some or all of these groups.

Finances

We would like to undertake a financial feasibility study immediately after feedback on this Proposal from B&NES Council.

Phase I

We recommend beginning Phase I as quickly as possible:

Making good the site so it is safe to visit to a limited degree during 2018

Encouraging community groups to help fundraise – with the proceeds being used immediately to improve the site, garden, buildings and so-on, rather than to fund marketing, PR or project management fees.

Diverting some funds already ear-marked for the CPT proposal to allow more concrete plans to be drawn up.