



Swimming Facilities Forum
Tuesday 11 February 2020, 6pm
Parliament Hill Meeting Room

Attending:

Karina Dostalova (Chair)	KD	Chairman, Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood & Queen's Park Committee, CoLC
Bob Warnock	BW	Superintendent, Hampstead Heath, CoLC
Colin Buttery	CB	Director of Open Spaces, CoL
Tim Johns	TJ	Facilitator, Orato Consulting
Eleanor Kennedy	EK	Parliament Hill Lido User Group
Jeremey Watson	JW	Highgate Men's Pond Association
Chris Piesold	CP	Highgate Men's Pond Association
Chris Ruocco	CR	Highgate Lifebuoys
Mike Sands	MS	Mixed Pond Association
Kasia Sikora	KS	Mixed Pond Association
Margaret Dickinson	MD	Mixed Pond Association
Marc Hutchinson	MH	Winter Swimming Club
Robert Sutherland-Smith	RSS	United Swimmers Association
Nicky Mayhew	NM	Kenwood Ladies' Pond Association
Mary Powell	MP	Kenwood Ladies' Pond Association
Declan Gallagher	DG	Operational Services Manager, CoLC
Paul Maskell	PM	Leisure and Events Manager, CoLC
Paul Jeal	PJ	Senior Swimming Facilities Supervisor, CoLC
Kate Radusin (notes)	KR	PA to Superintendent, CoLC

1.	Apologies
	Anne Fairweather, Julia Dick, Richard Gentry, Jennifer Wood.
2.	Notes of the previous meeting (4.2.20)
	Agreed.
3.	Matters Arising
	RSS raised a query in relation to the timeline for engagement. KD outlined the process and set out the timeline and next steps of the engagement.
4.	Facilitated Discussion to consider draft proposals
	<p>KD thanked Members of the Swimming Forum for their time and the comments and feedback received, which would be addressed during the facilitated discussion led by TJ.</p> <p>TJ commenced a facilitated discussion to consider the Position Paper prepared by the CoLC and discuss the feedback letter received from the Swimming Association Chairs. It was noted that the Swimming Forum was not a decision-making body, but instead informed the Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee and ultimately the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee, who would make a decision on the proposals.</p>

Timetable

There followed a discussion around when the engagement commenced, and it was noted that the Swimming Association Reps considered the meeting on 14 January 2020 to be start of the process.

KD noted that whilst the matter was discussed at the previous meeting on 1 October 2019, the advice from the HSE had not been received until after this date and that the Coroners Court did not conclude until 31 October 2019. Therefore, the full implications were not able to be considered until November 2019, at which point Officers commenced background work on the Swimming Review. The final date for comments on the proposals was 9 March 2020, ahead of the Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee meeting.

MS noted that the Swimming Association Chairs had not yet sought to consult their Members, as they were waiting to receive firmed up proposals.

KD confirmed that the proposals would be considered by the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood & Queen's Park Committee on 11 March, to ensure there was time to implement ahead of the Summer swimming season, which commences on 2 May 2020.

TJ asked the Swimming Association Chairs to confirm how long they would need to consult with their Members.

Financial Data & Dashboard

KD confirmed that proposals were not initially tabled by the CoLC at the meeting on 14 January 2020, as it was considered that these would be collaboratively processed to formulate proposals during discussions. However, responding to feedback at the meeting CoLC Officers has subsequently considered draft options which had been discussed at the 4 February 2020 meeting. There had been a lot of common ground established at the meeting, which was very encouraging, although there were areas where there was not agreement. This demonstrated the varied issues covered, which were not solely around charging.

NM felt that the issues around Health and Safety and charging had been conflated.

CP noted that if the CoLC contribution to the funding of the Hampstead Heath Charity had remained constant over a number of years, then in real terms it had reduced.

MP noted that the proposals had been based on data, which did not stack-up.

KD confirmed that the 2018/19 income was £67k.

MP felt that the inefficiency of the current collection system was a factor.

Lifeguard Breaks & Alertness and Maximum Bather Loading

MP noted that in relation to the proposed use of cameras to assist with the bather loading count, there was unease amongst some swimmers about what the technology could be used for, and this would rely on trust.

Minimum Lifeguard Numbers

There followed a discussion around the need to avoid gold plating, especially in relation to the number of Lifeguards on duty.

TJ noted that there was been clear feedback on gold plating and confirmed that CoLC were working to establish the minimum additional number of staff

required, and that this would vary between the winter and summer seasons to respond to demand. Trials of a roving third Lifeguard had begun. PJ confirmed that an electric bike had been ordered to assist the roving Lifeguard traveling between the sites so that they could cover breaks and quickly provide assistance should an emergency arise at any of the facilities. BW confirmed that the swimming facility Risk Assessments were being reviewed and updated in-line with the HSE advice received. Recruitment for Fixed-Term Lifeguards had commenced.

Lifeguard Training

PJ confirmed that training was scheduled for March and would be externally verified.

BW noted that stand-alone radios were being considered to allow greater internal communication between the swimming facilities. This would stop the main Heath radio being 'clogged' and had already been successfully used at the Lido. Two or Three radios would be required for each pond, and Lifeguards would carry these radios in addition to the Heath radio.

Facility Management

TJ CoLC are comfortable with the response given to 7a&b.

BW Rangers would have a role at the Bathing Pond and Lido to ensure the Lifeguards are not distracted by managing queues, toilets etc. The approach to queue management was trialled last summer and will be embedded for the 2020 summer season. At the Lido this would include litter picking and placing queue barriers. Contract Security staff would continue to be deployed at the Lido.

MS queried if turnstiles would be used at the Bathing Ponds?

BW turnstiles are not being considered. Mechanised touch and release gates could be used. These could be activated by Season Tickets or contactless payment.

MS this would not be feasible with the existing Mixed Pond entrance gate.

BW a tailored approach would need to be taken for each facility entrance. MD noted that this approach could deter new people from swimming into the winter season.

BW want to ensure that the infrastructure used is in keeping with the Heath.

MP noted that some people may choose not to use contactless payment in their everyday lives and could therefore be digitally excluded if they came for a one-off visit.

KD there would be a transition period where cash payments could still be accepted at the facilities.

MS felt that the contactless payment should be trialled before it was linked to access. The perimeters of the facility should be made secure before it was linked.

KD hedging has been discussed, and we may need to phase with Rangers assisting in the first instance.

MP there are boggy areas around the Ladies' Pond where hedges do not grow.

BW we are looking for solutions, which will be tailored to each facility.

Charging Options & Charges

TJ noted there had been clear feedback from the Associations on keeping the Self-Policing arrangements, with the addition of contactless payments.

Hypothecation had also been raised.

BW we need to generate income to support the cost of running the facilities, which will still be subsidised.

CR will Associations have to pay for members access?

BW please encourage your Members to purchase a Season Ticket or a day ticket if they do not want a season ticket.

KD noted the value that the Season Tickets provide to people swimming regularly at the facilities.

NM noted the current online application process was clunky and did not offer a renewal reminder. More effort should be made to promote it to swimmers.

PM confirmed that this would be looked into.

There followed a discussion around phasing of technology and low-tech solutions which could be trialled to assist with bather loading in the short term, such as wristbands.

RSS agreed there was a cost to run the facilities but did not believe that the CoLC had the right to charge for access to the Bathing Ponds.

TJ there has been a lot of feedback around signage and lack of information around the current payment points.

There followed a discussion around the signage and messaging at the Bathing Ponds. There was confusion around the final wording of the signage, and Association Members did not feel that the signage was clear enough.

CB confirmed that currently the Bathing Ponds were running with a £680,000 subsidy.

NM felt more swimmers would pay if they clearly understood that the Heath is a charity. Money spent on swimming cannot be spent elsewhere on the Heath, if there was a greater understanding then it would free up money to invest in the swimming facilities and to be spent elsewhere on the Heath.

CB agreed that this message needs to be put across more widely at the Heath and across all the CoLC Open Spaces.

EK queried if gift aid could be added to the Season Ticket application form, as this would also highlight to people that the Heath is a charity.

There followed a discussion around the role of the Rangers and additional Lifeguards at the facilities.

BW clarified that the Rangers would support the Lifeguards and would ensure that they were not distracted from watching the water. Contract cleaning was also being investigated. The costs for the additional staffing and resources will be kept as low as possible.

There followed a discussion around the implications of changes at the facilities on the non-lifeguarded ponds and concerns were raised that this would increase.

CB noted that the proposals had focused on sustaining the current number of swimming hours. The alternative could be to reduce the number of swimming hours and not increase costs. However, we are currently focusing on trying to

sustain the number of swimming hours, recognising the popularity of swimming on the Heath.
RSS queried if the income from swimming would off-set the cost of other sports on the Heath.
CB confirmed that all sports and activities were subsidised across the CoLC Open Spaces.
BW confirmed that licensing for dog walkers and fitness trainers was being progressed.

TJ feedback on the proposed hardship fund?

MP felt it would be patronising and divisive.

NM many people see swimming in the ponds as an extension of enjoying the Heath. It is unrealistic people will pay £5 for a 5 minute swim in winter.

CP noted that many people use the Men's Pond socially in the winter months, and do not swim.

MH noted that socialising was an aspect of the Men's Pond culture and would have to be managed, with consideration to the bathing loads, as these people do not use the facility to swim.

BW confirmed that the priority was to manage the bathing load on busy days and having technology in place which shows how many people are in the facility. People may need to be held outside the facility. This is already practiced at the Mixed Bathing Pond and had been trialled at the Ladies' Pond last summer with help from Members of the Kenwood Ladies' Pond Association.

JW noted that the Serpentine model was based on 2,000 swimmers paying £25 a year to access non-lifeguarded waters.

CB confirmed that there was a lot of onus on the Club to manage this. Similar models could be considered at the Bathing Ponds.

TJ concluded the discussions and asked Members for their final comments.

EK contactless payment has been discussed over a number of years but has yet to be installed. Many swimmers are happy to pay voluntarily. It could explode.

PJ there has been lot of work to rebuild the relationship between the swimmers and Lifeguards since 2005. Do not want to detract from this moving forward.

PM we have a Duty of Care towards the Lifeguards. Accept the payment machines are not ideal and have not always worked reliably.

CR hope we can carry on as we are. The Lifebuoys have been going for 100 years. Can receipts be provided for Season Ticket purchases?

RSS will never accept compulsory payment. Good will can easily be dispersed if there is not a proper discussion around the voluntary payment.

CP concerned that people will be pushed out to the non-lifeguarded ponds, which could be dangerous. If there is not a more elegant solution to collecting money, then you may end up collecting less.

NM do not spend a lot of money on changing the things that make the Bathing Ponds unique. Do not increase the charges or make them compulsory.

Emphasises the need, and make it easier, for people to pay.

MS CoLC have a stewardship responsibility. A lot of what has been discussed is contrary to the Heath Vision. Understand the need for more Lifeguards. Have a phased process and work with the Associations to raise more income. Good that

	<p>it is proposed to freeze the Season Ticket prices, can day tickets also be frozen? The ponds are unique and cannot be benchmarked. KS when I first started swimming at the Mixed Pond 15 years ago, I didn't have much money, I think that if people have the opportunity to pay, they would do so. MD it would be unfortunate if big changes were made in a rush. TJ thanked everyone for their time and feedback. KD we recognise that signage and technology are an issue. We want to improve our data, but we have a responsibility to respond to take onboard the HSE advice, and we have a responsibility to know how many people are in our facilities and the water so we do need to take action. It is clear that the current model is not sustainable. We are grateful for your time and contributions. I welcome the Chairs of the Associations to attend the Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee and to speak at the meeting for a few minutes to get your views across to the Members. We are also happy to receive any more feedback you have in writing. The Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee consider many issues and their feedback informs the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood & Queen's Park Committee when making decisions. I will ensure your views are put across to Members at the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood & Queen's Park Committee meeting on 11 March.</p> <p><u>Comments received from the public gallery</u> I urge you to look at H&S and funding differently and to work with the Associations to increase the income. You do not understand us, and we do not trust you.</p> <p>What level of subsidy are you looking for? If it is £2 a swim you will break even, if it is £5 you will make £2m profit. My concerns are around the financial modelling.</p>
5.	AOB
	N/A
6.	Next Steps
	<p>A report will be prepared for the Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee, who will meet on 9 March 2020. Swimmers will have until 9 March to put forward their comments. The proposals would be considered by the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood & Queen's Park Committee, taking account of the view of the Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee, on 11 March 2020.</p>
7.	Date of the next meeting
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TBC