



## **CABINET**

**Tuesday, 24 March 2020**

<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>THE PEOPLE'S POOL PROJECT – OUR LIDO LTD</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND INVESTMENT</b>

**Councillor Janette Williamson (Cabinet Member for Finance and Income Generation) said:**

“For much of the 20th century, there was a vast and well-loved network of open-air public pools in Merseyside. Wirral itself had no fewer than seven public outdoor pools at its peak.

This report outlines plans to revive this tradition and build Wirral’s first lido complex in decades: The People’s Pool.

Equal parts regeneration, recreation and innovation, The People’s Pool will have a powerful impact on the visitor economy in its immediate location, while increasing the borough’s leisure, health and wellbeing and tourism offers.

A key feature of the project will be the look and feel of the complex. Wirral’s historic lidos were built in the 1930s with New Brighton being a stunning example of Art Deco public architecture.

The plans, if approved, propose to bring back this social heritage, while also investing in the wellbeing of future generations.”

## **REPORT SUMMARY**

This report provides Cabinet with background information for a proposal brought forward by an external organisation named Our Lido Ltd (OLL), a recently incorporated company limited by guarantee (no shareholders), to build a lido complex on a Council site within Wirral, fully funded by external grant funding applied for by OLL. It is envisaged that the operation of the lido (The People's Pool) will support the Community Wealth Building Strategy.

The lido is intended to be a hub for the community with a mixed business model to support this including a food and drink offer, retail, spaces for community use, a proactive employment and training policy, and potentially partnerships with local independent businesses and social enterprises. The wish list for the pool itself is that it will be 50 metres long, open all year and heated using environmentally sustainable energy.

A specific site to build the People's Pool has yet to be identified with several options currently under consideration. Until such time as a preferred site is selected this matter potentially affects any ward in the borough with a potential site. Consideration will be given to the mechanism for OLL to occupy the site, including a lease, a community asset transfer, an operational licence or some other arrangement.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

That the Cabinet supports The People's Pool project and approve the investigation to identify a Council site within Wirral to potentially be transferred under the community asset transfer process or occupied in some other way to be decided at a future date.

## **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **1.0 REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1.1 To aid the regeneration of Wirral, the tourism and community economy and to promote health and wellbeing.

### **2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 2.1 Develop equivalent existing alternatives within Wirral. This will be limited by the current financial climate and access to external funding.
- 2.2 Do nothing.

### **3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1 For much of the 20th century, there was a well-loved network of open-air public pools on Merseyside. Around the world, open-air swimming is currently surging in popularity, and dozens of historic lidos have reopened successfully as vital community hubs across the UK.

Wirral had no fewer than seven public outdoor pools at its peak. This deep social history, combined with the Council's goals through master-planning for regeneration in the borough, provides a strong impetus to locate The People's Pool in Wirral. A 2019 appraisal by Swim England established that there is a 'water deficit' in swimming provision in Wirral and proposed the creation of a new 25-metre pool as a minimum.

- 3.2 OLL proposes to revive the social heritage and to invest in the wellbeing of future generations by building a new People's Pool. OLL has been formed to take this project forward. OLL is a Company Limited by Guarantee, which will shortly become a Registered Charity.
- 3.3 OLL's vision for the People's Pool is as follows: -

The People's Pool will be a community resource for the people of the Liverpool City Region (LCR), which will also act as a unique visitor destination. The People's Pool will celebrate Wirral's marine setting and social heritage. It will do so through inspiring, innovative design which is driven by good social and environmental values. These same values will guide all aspects of the People's Pool's business model.

The goal is to deliver a 50m, Amateur Swimming Association (ASA) compliant competition size main pool, heated and open all year round. It will have a smaller, children's/teaching pool, and possibly a cold-water pool. Associated facilities such as spa, gym and rehabilitation facilities will be explored, and it is hoped to have studio spaces for health, fitness and wellbeing sessions, and for gathering opportunities for community groups. The food and drink offer will be of high quality and accessible, and the retail offer and other elements may provide an opportunity to partner with local independent and social businesses. This mixed offer will ensure

both that the People's Pool's revenue model will be sustainable without the need for public subsidy, and that it delivers maximum benefit to the community.

There is abundant evidence for the physical and mental health benefits of swimming. Each of Britain's 114 lidos has built a diverse and close-knit community, and this social connection is arguably as beneficial as the physical exercise for participants' health, particularly their mental health. Designing environments that enable people to connect with others and live well is vital to improving the health and wellbeing of local people and achieving the ambitions set out in Wirral Plan 2025. It is therefore vital that the People's Pool is inclusive, actively working to break down social, cultural and financial barriers to bring people together.

The People's Pool aims to have a powerful impact on the visitor economy in its immediate location. It will attract visitors from across the LCR, the North West, nationally and – if a sufficiently iconic site is available - internationally. If a site can be identified looking out to Liverpool Bay, the People's Pool will form a stunning connection with its natural environment, be a major catalyst to place-shaping and become a powerful visual icon of the LCR.

Design quality is central to the project vision. Many of Britain's historic lidos were built in the 1930s and like much of New Brighton are stunning examples of Art Deco architecture. It is important that the design for the People's Pool celebrates the best of this heritage, but it must be absolutely focussed on the future. An important aspect of this will be designed in environmental sustainability, using the most effective and appropriate technological innovations in this fast-moving field.

A prosperous, inclusive economy where local people can get good jobs and achieve their aspirations is a key priority of the Wirral Council Plan 2020. It is essential that the People's Pool has a positive socio-economic benefit in its surrounding community. This development will therefore embed the principles underpinning the Community Wealth Building Strategy maximising the opportunities it brings for local people, business and the economy.

Depending on the site, there is the potential for wrap-around facilities to contribute not only to the People's Pool's own financial sustainability, but also to the economy and social provision around it. To this end, partnership, community involvement and positive impact will be hard-wired into the approach to planning, delivery and operation.

The People's Pool project falls in line with the current priorities laid out in Wirral Leisure Strategy - "promoting and celebrating Wirral's coast for leisure activities, providing facilities and opportunities for the local community to take part in sports, leisure and social activities and supporting volunteering opportunities. It will also support the future Leisure direction by providing opportunities for residents to become more physically active, increasing community involvement and by creating fit-for-purpose demand driven leisure facilities."

The People's Pool Project is directly related to the Sport England strategy "Towards An Active Action 2016-2021", focusing on tackling inactivity, children and young people, volunteering, taking sport and activity into the mass market and supporting

sport's core market (people who already have a genuine sport and physical activity habit).

The project also meets objectives set out in the Swim England (National Governing Body for Swimming) strategy "Towards A Nation Swimming" which aims to create a happier, healthier and more successful nation through swimming.

3.4 OLL outline its goals for positive impacts as follows: -

### **Economic**

- Job creation
- Skills training
- Employee/volunteer/trainee progression (including both internal and external)
- Increased visitor footfall in the immediate locality
- Secondary spend in the visitor economy
- Catalyst to retail, hospitality & leisure businesses on site
- Catalytic impact in the wider LCR economy
- Contribution to the LCR's social business sector
- Positive reputational impact & strengthening of the LCR's visitor offer
- Positive media coverage and social media mentions
- Positive visitor feedback
- Build community wealth

### **Social**

- Increased participation in swimming
- Contribute to reducing inequalities across a range of health, educational and economic provisions
- Improved quality of life for residents of all ages and backgrounds
- Community cohesion and reduced isolation
- Staff and volunteer wellbeing
- Education and learning opportunities (swimming; aquatic & marine environment; thought leadership; social history)

### **Environmental**

- Recycling & waste capture in construction and operation
- Renewable energy generation (potentially contributing to local provision)
- Enhance and improve the carbon footprint of any site through development (aspiration to be carbon positive)
- Influence through supply chain
- Influence on user behaviour
- Education and thought leadership impacts

3.5 OLL and those promoting it has already conducted 15 months of research, including research on precedents for similar projects across the UK, and development on the

People's Pool project, building support in a variety of sectors and in the community, whilst creating a strong network across the national lido sector. OLL secured £5,000 internal funding from Invest in Arup to undertake a high-level research into environmental sustainability precedents at lidos in the UK and overseas.

OLL has submitted, with valuable assistance and advice from Council officers, a significant bid to National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) to run a high profile and inclusive social history project on New Brighton Baths in the Summer or Autumn 2020. OLL is working with Council officers on an event focussed on the social history of New Brighton Baths to be held during the River Festival. This will be a precursor to the social history project which will also act as the first step in a wide-ranging community engagement for the new People's Pool project. NLHF's response is expected in early-mid April 2020.

OLL will be seeking to fund the full capital development of the People's Pool project via external grant investment, in order that the operating model is not encumbered by debt. If this should prove too ambitious, social investment and equity would be considered to close the gap. OLL has identified the potential sources of funding as follow: -

- LCR (has indicated it would consider a £750,000 capital bid)
- Sport England
- Coastal Communities Fund
- Power To Change
- Trusts & Foundations
- Crowdfunding
- Community Share Issues

OLL's operating business model is intended that the People's Pool will be able to demonstrate financial resilience and sustainability without ongoing revenue funding from external sources. The business will need to run at a surplus annually to build and sustain reserves to ensure that one off costs, such as large-scale maintenance can be met on demand. OLL is designing a mixed business model which will generate income all year around and guard against excessive dependence on weather dependent use of the pool.

Income generation currently anticipated includes pool - admissions, memberships, swimming lessons, events & hires (swimming and non-swimming). Cultural events such as film screenings, concerts and other performances. There will be a food and beverage offer along with a retail offer which could include spa facilities, gym, rehabilitation facilities. Commissioning fees for providing health and other support services from the People's Pool complex are other income streams being explored.

## **4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The £80,000 from the Council capital funds to be released to undertake a feasibility study for the proposed project is already built into the 2020-21 Capital Programme which was approved by full Council on 2nd March 2020. Should the scheme proceed OLL intends to raise the costs of future capital funding from external grant sources.

- 4.2 The future transfer of a site within Wirral under the community asset transfer process or occupied in some other way to be decided at a future date.
- 4.3 Potential cash and in-kind contributions from the Council towards organisational development to ensure OLL has the necessary capacity to progress the project.

## **5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 OLL will need to enter into a formal grant agreement to ensure the delivery of the grant outcomes, such agreement to be approved by Legal Services.
- 5.2 State aid issues for the grant will need to be addressed and appropriate de minimis certification obtained.

## **6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: ICT, STAFFING AND ASSETS**

- 6.1 As this is an application for a grant to carry out a feasibility study and business planning, most of which will be affected externally, only existing officers' time in monitoring progress and grant compliance is a resource implication. No further resource is required at this stage.
- 6.2 Should the feasibility study show the People's Pool project would be successful there may be a future request for land to be transferred under the community asset transfer process or occupied in some other way to be decided at a future date.

## **7.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

- 7.1 If the project does not go ahead then the £80,000 cannot be capitalised and would need to be covered by revenue or use of reserves (such as the Asset Transfer Reserve). The £80,000 capital funds used for the feasibility study would therefore not provide a return if the People's Pool project does not proceed.
- 7.2 Grant funding has not been secured for stages of the People's Pool project which would follow the activity supported by the grant applied for. The Lido project will require additional funding to bring it to a successful conclusion.
- 7.3 If insufficient external funding is received there may be pressure on the Council to step in with additional funding for the project to achieve its final outcomes.
- 7.4 A Community Asset Transfer may incur VAT and stamp duty land tax (SDLT) liabilities dependent upon the transfer arrangement.
- 7.5 Potential negative financial impacts on any nearby Council sites delivering the same services as the proposed project, such as sports and recreation sites delivering Wirral swimming programmes. The lido project intends to increase swimming participation in the Wirral and attract visitors from outside the area to complement existing provision.

## **8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION**

- 8.1 OLL has engaged widely with community groups, including Wirral Change and umbrella organisations such as Community Action Wirral and Wirral Community of Practice.

## **9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 OLL's inclusive goals for The People's Pool are already being manifested through engagement with community, public health and mental health groups and experts. If the NLHF bid for the social history project on New Brighton Baths is successful, diversity, equality and social inclusion will be central to OLL's approach. Wirral Change and other organisations have written letters of support for this bid, and the CEO of Wirral Change describes the People's Pool as "a fantastic opportunity for integration in Wirral".

Accessibility and social inclusion are fundamental considerations for the People's Pool. Throughout the research and development process OLL has researched good design and good practice at existing pools. OLL has also been building a network which will channel users' needs and aspirations into the design, both for the physical facility and the operating model. An Access Consultant will be engaged as part of the Design Team, community consultation will be extensive, and a Community Steering Group will be formed to help guide the design and planning processes.

## **10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 Capital bids are welcomed that support the Council's Climate Emergency Plan that was compiled following the declaration of a Climate Emergency by the Council in May 2019. The pool itself within this project is hoped to be heated using environmentally sustainable energy so there are elements within this project that positively contribute to the environment.

The most pressing next steps in the project's development are feasibility work such as site exploration and selection, outline design, outline project budget and project plan, and economic and social impact appraisal. To support this, as a start-up, OLL needs to undertake organisational development to ensure it has the appropriate capacity to fully support project development and delivery. LCR's Strategic Investment Fund and the Council have approved to match fund £12,500 each (Council's match funding is inclusive within £80,000 approved by Full Council 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2020) so OLL can conduct market research and business modelling for the People's Pool project.

The Council also needs to identify a potential site that would be appropriate and could be transferred under community asset transfer arrangements.

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## **APPENDICES**

None.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

There are no background papers at this point. This report is requesting funding for a feasibility study.

## **SUBJECT HISTORY**

<b>Council Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Full Council	2nd March 2020