

# PE2018/I: Recognise the value of swimming pools and provide financial relief to help keep pools open

## Petitioner written submission, 7 January 2025

The battle to keep swimming pools open continues with the announcement last November that Dundee City Council are proposing to close five school pools. The five schools are Baldrigon Academy, Grove Academy, Harris Academy, St John's RC High School and St Paul's RC High School. These schools host vital swimming lessons, club training sessions, disability sessions and community swimming for the safety, health and wellbeing of the population. Some of the pools are in areas of deprivation where fair and equal access to swimming is vital to tackle child poverty and ensure every child can swim.

A public consultation with regard to council budgets opened on 29 November and ran until 29 December. These are the reasons Scottish Swimming believes are why these pools should remain open:

- Pools are costly to build. These pools are nowhere near the end of their lifecycle (as much as 60 years with correct maintenance). Baldrigon Academy is only 6 years old and Harris Academy, 8 years old. St Paul's, the oldest of the pools had a significant refurbishment in 2007
- Over 1000 children and adults benefit from using these pools every week for a variety of purposes from vital life-saving swimming lessons to club swimming, disability sessions and recreational public swimming
- More than 800 children a week learn to swim in these pools every week for safety
- St. Paul's RC High School and Grove Academy are already at full occupancy. Accommodating any potential displacement at other pools within Leisure and Culture Dundee's portfolio would be very challenging with current capacities.
- Swimming is the highest participation sport in Scotland for children and adults with additional support needs. The pools earmarked for closure host vital lessons and holiday camps for children with additional support needs some of whom attend schools in areas of deprivation (St Andrew's Primary School) and have never experienced a pool before
- 1 in 3 adults in the UK cannot swim. These pools have a thriving adult learn to swim programme with around 70 adults aged 20 to 70 using the pools to learn a vital life skill
- Baldrigon Academy is in an area of deprivation and, as part of a successful school swimming pilot with **sportscotland** and school swimming, offered employability for local school children who would otherwise have left school
- 640 athletes, volunteers and coaches in 3 local aquatic clubs rely on these pools every week for fitness, fun and friendship to improve their mental and physical health and wellbeing

- The cost of closure and decommissioning would be significant, not to mention the disruption to schools.

The Dundee case is one example of pool closures in one area. The same budgetary constraints and financial pressures exist across councils in Scotland putting many more pools under threat. 56% of public pools are over 30 years old which puts them at risk of closure. At the same time there is wide public support for swimming pools as the general public see the value in keeping them open according to an opinion poll by JL Partners in February 2024. Scottish Swimming published on 19th December 2024, 'The Benefits of Swimming Pools' which summarises the benefits of pools from a safety, health, communities, social and sporting perspective. A summary is provided below.

95% of the Scottish population agree pools are important for safety. In fact, 1,533,744 children participated in swimming lessons in leisure trust facilities in 2023. Safety is especially important in Scotland where the drowning rate per head of population is more than double that of the UK. 47 people lost their lives through accidental drownings in 2023. We also have one of the longest coastlines in Europe at 11,800km and around 30,000 inland waters, so danger is never far away.

86% of the Scottish population agree swimming pools are important for health. Headline findings from the Scottish Health Survey in 2023 show that almost a third of adults (32%) were recorded as living with obesity, the highest level recorded in the survey since 2003. For children there is also a worrying trend. 30% of children aged 2 to 15 are at risk of combined obesity and overweight. Swimming is one of few activities accessible to all including those with fitness or mobility issues and so keeping pools open is vital for the ongoing health of the population.

91% of the Scottish population agree that pool closures are bad for communities. Swimming pools are the beating heart of many a community. From the first splashes of water on a baby's face to the regular routine of a recreational swim, swimming can be enjoyed by children, families, individuals and some 150 community clubs across Scotland supporting 23,000 members.

88% of the Scottish population agree that pools are important for communities. Swimming pools are part of the social fabric of society. They are somewhere to hang out with friends. They are community hubs – a hive of activity and positive energy with young and old enjoying the water and relaxing in the café for a drink afterwards. Time at the pool is a positive and productive way to spend time and swimming has been proven to generate social value savings (£2.4 billion in 2022 according to Swim England) including reduced crime and improved social and community development.

87% of the Scottish population agree swimming pools are important for our success as a sport. Pre-pandemic swimming was Scotland's highest participation sport. It is now the fastest growing according to the 2022 household survey. Swimming is also Scotland's most successful sport at an Olympic and Commonwealth Games level, with Duncan Scott OBE Scotland's most decorated Olympic and Team Scotland athlete ever.

Scottish Swimming is committed to keeping pools open and securing financial relief given the level of threat that closing swimming pools poses for the safety, health, and success of communities across Scotland. We also strongly advocate school

swimming as a means to improving the water safety of children across Scotland and enhancing the occupancy of swimming pools during the school day to improve their overall efficiency.