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Provision of swimming services in East Reading

Community Right to Challenge Expression of Interest submitted by Newtown GLOBE Group Section 81, Localism Act 2011

This expression of interest is submitted by Newtown GLOBE Group in relation to swimming services provided at Arthur Hill Swimming Pool in East Reading. Newtown GLOBE Group is a long-standing not-for-profit voluntary group working in East Reading with an interest in community and environmental issues.

1. Background and context

The Arthur Hill Memorial Baths (usually known as Arthur Hill Swimming Pool) has provided a swimming service in the Borough of Reading since 1911. In recent years the service has been extended to cover other sporting and fitness activities with the addition of a gym and a spinning studio. The centre is currently relatively well used and we estimate that it receives around 25,000 visits per year.

The pool building is now old and in need of repair if its long term future is to be guaranteed. Reading Borough Council's preferred option is to build a replacement pool, possibly in Palmer Park, which will open, according to current estimates, in three to four years time. The Council has proposed closing Arthur Hill Swimming Pool in December 2016, which would result in an extended period over which there would be no swimming provision in the eastern part of Reading Borough. Closure would result in a loss of one third of the swimming capacity offered by the Borough Council over much of this period. An Equalities Impact Assessment conducted by Reading Borough Council acknowledges that closure of Arthur Hill Swimming Pool will have an adverse impact on disadvantaged and minority groups. Mitigation measures proposed to alleviate the impact are vague and largely dependent on pool users making their own arrangements to undertake relatively difficult and time consuming journeys across Reading to alternative facilities.

The scope of the Localities Act 2011 covers Reading Borough Council and gives community interests a statutory 'Community Right to Challenge' the delivery of a Council service. The Act entitles Newtown GLOBE Group as a local voluntary and community organisation to submit an expression of interest to run a Council service as a "relevant body".

We consider that the provision of swimming and fitness services at Arthur Hill Swimming Pool is a "relevant service" as defined by the Localities Act 2011. No decision has yet been taken to close the pool, and any decision on this matter is currently scheduled to be taken at a meeting of Reading Borough Council on 18 October 2016. Statutory guidance on the Community Right to Challenge states that local authorities are not allowed to reject an expression of interest before a decision is made to stop providing a service, stating that "the situation where consideration is being given to the possibility of stopping a service is just the sort of circumstance when an expression of interest in providing that service from a relevant body may be critical".

As a local organisation with close links to the local community we consider ourselves suitably qualified to submit this expression of interest to provide swimming services in East Reading over

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the period from December 2016 until the date when a new replacement pool is opened. In doing so we would work closely with pool users, pool staff, Reading Borough Council, and those members of the local community who wish to see the pool stay open. This application represents our formal expression of interest and has the enthusiastic support of Arthur Hill Swimming Pool users, campaigners to save the pool, and Park ward councillors.

2. Objectives

Our objectives in operating this service would be as follows:

- ⤴ To provide swimming services in East Reading until a new swimming pool is built in the area.
- ⤴ To work with health care agencies, local schools, and community organisations to increase usage of the Arthur Hill Swimming Pool and fitness centre, especially among disadvantaged and minority groups.
- ⤴ To strengthen community cohesion in East Reading by actively involving local people in managing, operating, financing, and supporting Arthur Hill Swimming Pool.
- ⤴ To encourage regular exercise and improve the health and well-being of targeted groups among pool users.

3. Financial resources

Newtown GLOBE group currently has deposits of around £900 held in an account with the Co-operative Bank (65072484). In order to operate Arthur Hill swimming pool we would raise funds as outlined below and would set up a new charitable organisation to manage both fund-raising and management of the pool. There is considerable public support for keeping the pool open, as evidenced by the 2,600 signature petition submitted to Reading Borough Council and the attendance of approximately 100 people at a subsequent community meeting to discuss the pool. We would draw on this support in setting up and running the new organisation.

The following costings are based mainly on the crude costings prepared by Reading Borough Council in a paper on Arthur Hill Pool prepared for the Policy Committee meeting on 26 September 2016. Figures presented in the paper for repair and maintenance of the pool are disputed as we consider that they represent the costs of keeping the pool open in the long term, rather than for an interim period while a new pool is being constructed. We will be requesting a copy of the condition survey report for Arthur Hill Pool, together with associated costings, before the Council undertakes a procurement exercise for this service. For current purposes, we are assuming a figure of £200,000 will be needed for repairs and maintenance to keep the pool open over a three to four year period. We consider the costings we are using to be conservative, worst case costings.

Based on these assumptions, we estimate that the annual costs of operating the pool will be roughly as follows:

Staffing costs:	£180,000
Other costs:	£70,000
Repairs and maintenance: (divided equally over four years)	£50,000

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Income will be derived annually from the following sources:

Pool customers:	£100,000
Crowdfunding:	£30,000
Volunteer work (in-kind contribution):	£10,000
High value donations:	£30,000
Fund-raising events:	£5,000
Income from schools and private hire:	£15,000
Grant funding:	£110,000

Grant funding will be sought mainly for repairs and refurbishment work, and would be requested from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Big Lotteries Fund Reaching Communities Buildings Fund, the Berkshire Community Foundation network, and local businesses.

4. Capability to provide the service

Newtown GLOBE Group (Go Local for a Better Environment) was set up as part of a network of similar groups across Reading by Reading Borough Council in the mid 1990s. The group is a constituted voluntary sector organisation but does not have incorporated status. Over the years we have worked with Reading Borough Council on a range of environmental projects, notably Reading Rescue community clean-up days. Newtown GLOBE was also a partner in the East Reading Partnership which was established in the early 2000s by Reading Borough Council to manage Single Regeneration Budget grant funding for the area.

The group currently has over 70 people on its membership list. The current Chair is Rob White, who since 2010 has been a Park ward councillor on Reading Borough Council, providing us with an excellent channel for dialogue with the Council. The current Secretary is Peter Burt, former Chair of the Reading Voluntary Sector Forum (2007-2008), voluntary sector representative on the Reading Local Strategic Partnership (2002-2003 and 2006-2008) and Vice Chair of the East Reading Single Regeneration Budget Project Partnership (2001 – 2003), who has 20 years experience of voluntary sector management. Debbie Cousins, with public sector management experience, is a third member of the organising committee.

Statutory guidance on the Community Right to Challenge states that the definitions of voluntary and community body are intended to cover a wide range of civil society organisations. The guidance acknowledges that some voluntary and community bodies submitting expressions of interest to undertake Council services may be unincorporated associations, but states that bodies delivering contracts for local authorities and other public bodies would normally be expected to be incorporated with limited liability, and that the period between an expression of interest being accepted and a procurement exercise starting will provide an opportunity for establishing an incorporated body.

In order to manage and operate Arthur Hill Pool we would set up a new incorporated organisation, operating on charitable principles, to provide limited liability to members. The organisation would operate on a not-for-profit and co-operative basis, with all customers of the pool and any staff engaged by the organisation invited to join as members. The new organisation would be set up as a separate legal entity to Newtown GLOBE group.

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At present, Arthur Hill Pool is largely self-managed by the staff who work here, with limited day-to-day input from senior managers at Reading Sport & Leisure. We would envisage that the management role played by Reading Sport & Leisure would be taken over by the new organisation on a volunteer basis. Arrangements for the provision of day-to-day operations would need to be agreed with Reading Borough Council, but our preferred arrangement would be to engage current personnel based at the pool from the Council on a contract basis. Less skilled tasks would be undertaken by volunteer supporters, and a training programme would be established to ensure that relevant personnel have the necessary skills in safety, life-saving, first aid, and other key areas.

5. Relevant service area

The service area which we are interested in operating comprises of all services currently offered at Arthur Hill Swimming Pool, namely:

- ⤴ Public swimming
- ⤴ Schools, club, and private hire swimming
- ⤴ Gymnasium / fitness centre.
- ⤴ Spinning
- ⤴ Exercise classes
- ⤴ Swimming classes and personal tuition

The client group for these services is located mainly in the immediate area of East Reading around Arthur Hill Swimming Pool, centred on the Park, Redlands, and Abbey wards but spreading further across Reading Borough and the western fringe of Wokingham Borough.

This expression of interest is not intended to cover the service offered by Reading Borough Council at Palmer Park Sports Stadium.

6. Outcomes to be achieved in providing the service.

We aim to deliver the following outcomes through this application:

- ⤴ A sport and leisure service will be provided over a period of at least three to four years in a relatively deprived part of East Reading until Reading Borough Council opens a proposed new pool in the area.
- ⤴ An increase in pool usage from a current level of 25,000 customers per year to 28,000 customers per year over the period of operation. Efforts to attract new users will be focused on under 16s, retired people, women, unemployed people, and ethnic minority groups.
- ⤴ Increased physical and mental health and well-being among customers, particularly new users. We will monitor this through annual surveys of pool users.
- ⤴ An increase in social interaction between individuals and strengthening of networks between community support organisations in the Newtown, north Redlands, and Orts Road areas. We will monitor this through recording volunteer involvement, financial giving, and attendance at community and social events.

We have identified the following stakeholders with whom we will work in achieving these

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outcomes:

- ⤴ Local schools: Newtown School, Redlands School, Alfred Sutton School, St Johns and St Stephens School, Christ the King School, and Phoenix College.
- ⤴ Medical surgeries: Melrose Surgery, Pembroke Surgery, Eldon Road Surgery, Kennet Surgery, and London Road Surgery.
- ⤴ Local authorities: Reading Borough Council and Wokingham Borough Council.
- ⤴ Community Groups: Pakistani Community Centre, Indian Community Association, Communicare, Wycliffe Baptist Church, Sri Guru Singh Sabha Gurdwara, Cumberland Road Mosque, St Johns and St Stephens Church, Kennet and Brunel Residents Association.
- ⤴ Pool users: Reading Dolphin Swimming Club, Reading East Branch of the Gurkha Association, Reading Naturists, Reading Royals Synchronised Swimming Club, Friends of the Arthur Hill Memorial Baths, centre instructors and tutors.
- ⤴ Other sports associations: Reading Swimming Club, Reading FC Community Trust.

Community involvement will be an integral part of the future operation of the pool, and as well as being the principal users of the pool, we will work hand-in-hand with the local community in managing and running the pool. We will look for community support for the pool in raising funds, helping as volunteers, and playing a key role in the management of the pool. We intend to work with stakeholders in the following respects:

- ⤴ Setting the strategic direction for the pool and its management.
- ⤴ Organising fund-raising activities such as sponsored swims, special sessions, and social events, and preparing grant applications.
- ⤴ Promoting the pool through their organisations to help increase usage.
- ⤴ Organising volunteer training events to help meet both the pool's needs and their own needs.

Efforts to improve health and well-being within the local community would be targeted on older people (60 plus), especially within Asian communities, to tackle health issues such as late onset diabetes, and on children under 16 to encourage the adoption of regular exercise as a lifestyle habit and tackle childhood obesity. Our approach would be based closely on the strategy 'Towards an Active Nation' recently published by Sport England.

Operation of Arthur Hill pool for an interim period until a new pool is opened will also add to social value in the following respects:

- ⤴ Providing continued employment for 3 full time equivalent permanent staff employed at Arthur Hill Pool, 4 casual staff members, 5 fitness training instructors, and 2 swimming instructors, who would lose work opportunities if the pool is closed.
- ⤴ Create volunteer and training opportunities for local people.
- ⤴ Reduce environmental impacts by reducing requirement for customers to travel by private car or public transport to other sports facilities elsewhere in Reading.

7. How we intend to run the service and employees who are affected

Management of the pool would be through a newly established charitable incorporated organisation, which would be incorporated under the terms of the Charities Act 2011.

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Any current staff working at Arthur Hill Pool who wished to join the organisation as employees would be permitted to transfer from Reading Borough Council to the new organisation under TUPE arrangements to protect their current conditions of service.

Current management structures would be retained, with staff rosters remaining much as they are at present. The supervisory role which is currently undertaken by operations managers at Reading Sport and Leisure would be replaced by accountability to a newly established community trust representing the interests of pool users, supporters, and other stakeholders. Volunteers would also be trained to take on certain tasks as appropriate. These are initially expected to be the less skilled elements of running the pool

We would expect to work in partnership with other relevant organisations (including Reading and Wokingham Borough Councils) in delivering services, if necessary through formal joint venture operations.

We propose that the pool is operated on a Council-owned charity-operated basis, with Reading Borough Council maintaining ownership of the pool but the new charity responsible for operating the pool, including undertaking maintenance and repairs needed to keep the pool open while Reading Borough Council's new pool is under construction. Alternatively, depending on the preferences of the Council, we would consider the options of an outright handover of ownership of the pool to the co-operative or a community trust, or lease of the pool to us at a minimal rent.

8. Procurement process

This document represents an initial expression of interest to provide the services currently offered at Arthur Hill Swimming Pool. All figures included in this expression of interest are initial estimates based on the information which is currently available. A full business case will be submitted at the appropriate point as part of a future procurement process, should the Council agree to accept this expression of interest. In the meantime, we request that you contact us should you require any further information or clarification in order to assess this expression of interest.

We reserve the right to withdraw this expression of interest if the Council decides to continue with current arrangements for providing a service at Arthur Hill Swimming Pool.

We request that Reading Borough Council makes a decision on whether to accept this expression of interest and on whether to commence a procurement exercise for the service, and require that the Council will continue to provide the current service and make no decision to terminate it until the procurement exercise has been completed.

Signed and dated,



Rob White
Chair, Newtown GLOBE Group

13 October 2016