

## **Pathways into Sport Warrender Baths Club**

### **1. REPORT OBJECTIVES**

The purpose of this report is to highlight the concerns that Warrender Baths Club has surrounding the closure of the Royal Commonwealth Pool in 2009 and the effect this might have on Amateur Swimming in Edinburgh especially in the lead up to the London Olympics in 2012 and Commonwealth Games in Glasgow in 2014.

### **2. BACKGROUND AND CLUB HISTORY**

Warrender Baths Club was formed in 1888. It has a long record of producing fine swimmers of a high standard, the most famous of these being David Wilkie who won Olympic gold in Montreal and a bronze medal in the Edinburgh Commonwealth Games in 1970. Over the past few years, Warrender Baths Club has worked very hard to develop the performance of its athletes at all stages of their swimming career and it is no accident that this Edinburgh based club is now widely recognised as the top club in Scotland and has been identified by Scottish Swimming as a leading club and able to provide performance coaching to elite swimmers.

Although an amateur club, funded by its members, we now boast 2 full time coaches to help Edinburgh swimmers achieve their personal goals. The club caters for around 300 swimmers at all levels of competitive swimming as well as having youth and masters sections to meet the needs of older and younger swimmers who may no longer wish to compete or may only wish to compete at a lower more local level.

### **3. CLUB GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

We recognise the need in Edinburgh to cater not only for the elite swimmers but also swimmers of all abilities and ambitions. It is widely recognised that being part of a club encourages people to continue with their chosen sport and stay active. To this end, we recently introduced a youth squad into the club to encourage younger teenagers from Edinburgh to maintain their fitness rather than giving the sport up altogether.

Our main objective is to develop the skills of the swimmer to meet their maximum potential. We have found that the successes we have had recently have encouraged our swimmers of all abilities to realise that, it one day, another Edinburgh swimmer might bring home a medal to the Capital. We are especially keen to do this in a 'home' competition such as the Olympics in London or Commonwealth games in Glasgow.

Amongst those from Warrender Baths Club providing inspiration to many are of course:

- Sean Fraser, who won a bronze medal at the Paralympics in Beijing;
- Lewis Smith, who narrowly missed qualifying for the Olympics in Beijing but brought Gold home from the 2008 Tri-Nations in Canada;
- Ewan Johnston, Andrew Haslett and Sally Wood who were all placed in the top 10 at the 2008 Commonwealth Youth Games with Ewan bringing home a bronze medal.

**Pathways into Sport  
Warrender Baths Club**

#### **4. TRAINING REQUIREMENTS AND SUPPORT INFRASTRUCTURE**

We have the swimmers and the coaches in place to help bring this honour to our Capital city. Our coaches have already been chosen by British Swimming to coach at International competitions. However, we need to ensure that we have the correct facilities in order to help make this happen. We want to keep our top swimmers in Edinburgh rather than going to Loughborough, or even America, like David Wilkie who actually left Edinburgh in order to progress further.

Our top swimmers train in Leith Academy on a regular basis and have been doing so for 17 years. This is an ideal venue providing both a 25m pool (the standard size for 'short course' competitions) and also a gym for dry-land training. Having a competition size pool is essential if swimmers are to be able to monitor their performance in real competitive circumstances. When the Royal Commonwealth Pool closes next year, we will find it more difficult to provide this for 'long course' competition and our swimmers will have to travel outwith the local area to provide this. Already Edinburgh swimmers will be at a disadvantage compared with those in the West of Scotland and in England.

#### **5. COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO ACHIEVE SHARED OBJECTIVE**

We recognise that the council must meet the needs of all in its constituents and not just those belonging to Warrender Baths Club. We are also aware that we need to have lessons in place to provide new swimmers to the club to help us achieve our aims. That is why we would respectfully suggest that a working party is set up between all interested parties, Swimming Clubs, Edinburgh Leisure, Independent Swimming lesson providers and the Council to ensure that:

- the needs of the people of Edinburgh are identified in order to provide the maximum benefit for them and for the city;
- Edinburgh can continue to claim the great honour of hosting the top club in Scotland - A Capital Club for our Capital City.

Dear Councillor

#### **School Swimming and the Closure of the Royal Commonwealth Pool**

I am writing to you, and all City of Edinburgh Councillors, on behalf of Warrender Baths Club, to raise our concerns regarding the proposed plan to introduce a policy of priority use for school pools during the closure of the Royal Commonwealth Pool.

We recognise that the Council, and Edinburgh Leisure, have a difficult task in balancing the demands of public swimming, swimming lessons, and club swimming. The closure of the Royal Commonwealth Pool is a significant loss of pool resource in Edinburgh that will have impacts on all pool users. We hope that the various Edinburgh swimming clubs (and Warrender in particular), can work together with the Council and Edinburgh Leisure to minimize the impact on competitive swimming in the city, whilst also recognising the legitimate needs of other user groups.

## **Pathways into Sport Warrender Baths Club**

This is a particularly important period for competitive swimming, the 2012 Olympics and the 2010 and 2014 Commonwealth Games are highly significant events for Scotland and Scottish Swimming. In the 2006 Commonwealth Games, Scotland won 29 medals in total, of which 13 were won in the pool, including 6 of Scotland's 11 gold medals! This pattern of success in the pool for Scotland was repeated in the recent Commonwealth Youth Games in Pune, India, in which 3 of the 10 selected swimmers were members of Warrender Baths Club, and 6 were from the Edinburgh area. Many members of the Scottish Team train in the Edinburgh area, in fact Warrender alone has 25 swimmers on the various Scottish National Squads (a figure higher than any other club in the country). If we are to capitalize on this success for 2010, 2012 and 2014 we need to secure the necessary pool infrastructure to support swimming success.

Many of those who will compete for Scotland in the 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth Games have yet to be identified. They are up-and-coming swimmers in their clubs at present, but just who the few are that will have the determination to make a national representative team is uncertain. So, we argue that the support of competitive club swimming is essential to the health of the sport, and in this time of extreme pool space shortage, a coordinated, cooperative, approach is essential. We believe that a small committee involving the Council, Edinburgh Leisure, Swimming Clubs and other pools users should be created to consider how best to increase the available pool time and allocate it in a way to maximise the potential benefit.

This would involve identifying all available pools: public, schools, and private, and exploring the best way to maximise pool use. For example, looking at increasing early opening for key resources (e.g. Ainslie Park Leisure Centre), looking at matching the activity to the pool – a learn-to-swim session can easily run in a 15 metre pool – but this is less than suitable for competitive swimming training (for which a 25 metre length pool is the minimum requirement). It could also consider how to access Health Club pools (e.g. by offering to interpret this as sponsorship for 2014). This group could work over the next few months to produce a plan to ameliorate the worst consequences of the Royal Commonwealth Pool closure thereby helping to secure a significant Edinburgh presence in the 2012 and 2014 teams.

Currently, some planning is proceeding that includes some swimming club involvement. However, a more coordinated and structured approach is required. Warrender Baths Club has been informed that as part of a proposed policy for priority use for school pools during the Royal Commonwealth Pool closure, we are highly likely to lose pool time at Leith Academy School on a Friday evening in favour of the learn-to-swim programmes being relocated there when Royal Commonwealth Pool closes next year. We have been told informally that these lessons are being transferred to Leith Academy because that pool has good parking facilities, changing areas and a spectator's gallery.

We are aware that there is pool time available at other schools such as Trinity Academy and James Gillespie High School. Whilst these pools are not suitable for competitive club swimming training they are suitable for those learning to swim.

### **Pathways into Sport Warrender Baths Club**

The main issue here is the size of the pool. Leith Academy School is a 25m pool. This is the standard size for "short course" competition. Many other School pools are shorter than this. Having a competition size pool is essential if swimmers are to be able to monitor their performance in real competitive circumstances. This is impossible in a pool shorter than this length.

Warrender Baths Club has over 600 total members from within the City of Edinburgh area (approximately 50% of whom are voting adults) and is ranked as the top swimming club in Scotland having won this title for three consecutive years at the Scottish National Championships. In British terms, the club placed second overall at the recent National Championships in Sheffield this summer, a great achievement for a Scottish Club.

At present the club has numerous Scottish and British National Champions, as well as athletes who have represented Great Britain or Scotland at European Championship, Commonwealth Games and Paralympics level. In fact, one of our swimmers recently returned from the Beijing Paralympics with a Bronze medal, and was rewarded for this achievement at a civic reception in the city in which he received recognition from the Lord Provost George Grubb. I enclose a copy photograph of the presentation for your information.

We intend to build on our successes and have training plans in place towards the London Olympics in 2012 and the Commonwealth Games in Delhi 2010 and 2014 in Glasgow. In order to achieve this we must maximise our swimmers potential.

Scottish Swimming (the governing body of the sport in Scotland) have recognised Warrender Baths Club as a leading club and providers of 'performance swimming' in Edinburgh, and as such are hopeful that Edinburgh Leisure and Councillors of The City of Edinburgh Council will be amenable in providing the level of pool time required to meet this level of training. We also hope that the group of competitive swimming clubs in Edinburgh can be sustained since, although Warrender is the largest Edinburgh club, it can only exist in the context of a group of competitors.

We have recently lost pool time at the city centre University of Edinburgh pool as the University have set up a new swimming club. We will lose more when the Royal Commonwealth Pool closes for refurbishment next year. To lose even more quality pool time from Leith Academy School (especially as a direct result of the Royal Commonwealth Pool closure) would hit us very badly, and might mean that we can no longer support the training requirements of our top athletes, could have a knock on effect on all our junior athletes.

Our top swimmers have been training in Leith Academy School for seventeen years (since it opened in 1991). We have maintained a very good relationship with the school especially that as well as paying regular pool let fees, we have supported them financially by supplying the flags, pace clock and white board for the pool facility, plus recently agreeing to further financial support towards the cost of a new lane rope carousel.

This is but one example of the many decisions that will need to be taken in the run-up to the Royal Commonwealth Pool closure. Those decisions will impact on

**Pathways into Sport  
Warrender Baths Club**

Warrender Baths Club, and the other competitive swimming clubs in and around the city. We ask that you review your approach to planning for the Royal Commonwealth Pool closure to adopt an approach that cooperates with the clubs and other users to achieve the optimal pattern of use for the available pool resource. We believe that if this approach were taken, the Leith Academy Pool would be identified as a key training resource for competitive swimming.

We would be happy to come along to any meeting to discuss this issue with you further. Thank you for your time.

Cathy Archibald  
Secretary  
Warrender Baths Club  
21 November 2008