

Amended Motion 12.3

12.3 Motion regarding Re-Open St Georges Swimming Pool

Proposer: Councillor Rabina Khan

This Council Notes:

1. Swimming emerged as a competitive sport in the 1830's in England. In 1828, the first indoor swimming pool, St George's Baths was opened to the public.
2. Located on The Highway in the heart of Shadwell, St Georges Leisure Centre has been part of the borough's history for many years and is home to a gym with a variety of equipment, junior gym sessions and women only sessions.
3. That it is always in the best interests of everyone in the borough to remain as fit as possible, especially in the aftermath of the pandemic, and that St Georges Swimming Pool on The Highway should remain open for all.
4. St George's Pool has two pools, one 33 metres in length with wonderful natural light. St George's Baths has now been closed since March 2020, 19 months, in part due Covid-19, it was poorly managed before 2020 and the re-opening is well overdue.
5. This administration's own report on swimming provision in the borough referenced a teacher who said that unless swimming pools are in proximity, schools cannot justify three - hours on sport within the curriculum as priority needs to be given to other areas of the core curriculum.
6. A letter was sent to the Mayor and all Councillors from the Turks Head The Turk's Head Charity & Save St George's Pool Steering Committee on the 3rd January 2022.
7. The letter outlined the following key concerns that the motion must consider.
 - 3,000 people sign a petition to re-open St George's Pool.
 - Through Freedom of Information requests, it emerged that the department responsible for the pool, Culture and Sport has sat on condition surveys for St George's since 2018 which were only released in November when a consultation period commenced.
 - Information on the pool has literally had to be prised from officers which stated categorically that with proper investment the pool could be refurbished to an acceptable standard if done immediately. Nothing was done and in March 2020 everything in the pool was switched off which has led to more issues.
 - In August the Council instructed architects Faulkner Browns to complete a feasibility study on St George's and look at numerous options for a pool at John Orwell Sports Centre in Wapping.
 - The options for a pool in Wapping include reconfiguring the entire site and using the derelict piece of land adjacent to the centre on Vaughan Way. This land is contaminated and if used will need a lot of money to be permitted for development.
 - There are at least 12 options for this site none of which are like for like pools to replace St George's, just a standard 25 metre pool and

teaching pool. The feasibility study for St George's did not include a complete refurbishment, but rather demolition with a housing development and pool at ground level.

- We have tried everything possible to engage with the Mayor and council officers for them to reopen the pool and have now requested that an independent feasibility study by a team led by architect Piers Gough, structural engineers Price and Myers, building economists BWA and energy experts ISO. They require full access to the site.
- We firmly believe that the pool could be refurbished to a very high standard with energy efficient water treatment and filtration systems and attract many more users by providing a spa and hydro pool that could be used in conjunction with the NHS. An extension could be added to the derelict laundry for a fully equipped gym. Given that that the Council's business model for leisure centres is for both wet and dry facilities, this could be achieved.
- There are many issues with relocating the pool to Wapping, mainly that it would leave Shadwell without a single large public facility. Shadwell residents are least likely to travel to Wapping, which is not easily accessible and building a new leisure centre there would add to the presumed wealth of that area at the expense of a much poorer area.
- We question the validity of the consultation, which has taken place over the Christmas period, was hastily put together and is only available to those who are online, computer confident and have a good grasp of English.
- We believe that Council officers need to be challenged on how the pool was allowed to be neglected for so long and with such a devastating impact. We believe that officers do not have a mandate to pursue the direction it is following and have little confidence in the outcome of the consultation which closes on 3 January.
- St George's Pool is an iconic building on the Highway and was built by an award-winning architect. Its location provides a barrier from the pollution on the Highway to homes that lay behind it and is an important contribution to the sense of well-being that is provided by St George's in the East and the recently refurbished St George's Town Hall, now the borough's registry office.
- We ask that you act collectively to actively intervene in this issue and prevent the Council from wasting upwards of £45 million to provide a pool that will not provide an adequate service. For less disruption, environmental damage and negative publicity you could have an improved and renovated St George's and John Orwell and the Wapping Lido at Brussels Wharf for which we have planning permission, for less than half the cost of the redevelopment options. Our analysis is based on the cost of the Britannia by the same architects.

The Council Further Notes:

1. It is wholly unacceptable of everyone who has learnt to swim at St George's and will do so in future that this administration should use the

- pandemic as an excuse for the baths to remain closed.
2. The very same report also suggested that the possibility of an outside swimming pool or lido is being explored. The lido is a different proposition, with its own consultation. The 5 pools on established sites in Tower Hamlets already exist, and should be appropriately managed to ensure continued service to the communities which surround them.
 3. In the words of one resident "St George's Baths is one of the bedrocks of my life and I want it to be there for all for all the people who come after me."
 4. There are few enough public exercise facilities in this borough and few swimming pools. It seems that the published costs for reopening St George's is not £10 million as the administration claims but £1m.
 5. Another excuse for this amazing community asset to remain closed is that leisure centre usage, including St Georges Swimming Baths, is approximately 60% of what it was prior to the pandemic outbreak. This is no surprise. This usage figure will remain low while, investment is lacking, GLL management is not monitored and of course if St Georges Swimming Baths remains closed.

This Council resolves:

1. To fully commit to reopening St Georges Swimming Baths as soon as possible, recognising that its use is fundamental to our community recovering (mentally, physically and economically via job creation) from Covid-19.
2. There is no need for a consultation as to whether St Georges Swimming Pools should be reopened, it must be reopened. The effort should be more focused on "what facilities the community needs at St George's and how together we build a sustainable, inclusive and accessible solution, in the current site"
3. The administration should undertake a full and open process, with accountability clear, to properly investigate what is needed to restore St Georges Swimming Pools to peak condition and in addition consider ways in which St George's revenues can be generated and re-invested to ensure its future is stable, and eventually profitable.
4. Once the necessary works are completed, St George's Pools should be reopened, for current and future generations to enjoy.