



# FRIENDS OF THE STRAND POOL

## COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2016 7.30pm at Hastings Arms, 18 Lower Rainham Road, Gillingham ME7 2YD

Attendance: Peter Wright, Jackie Wright, Graham Bourne, Jane Bourne, Alan Blyth

Apologies: Victoria Jordan, Adrian Sambrook, Jo Matthews, Heather Morgan, Patrick Nolan

### 1.0 WELCOME

Peter explained that Victoria was awaiting her new baby at any time, and could understandably not attend. He also apologised for the late change of meeting date that may have affected the attendance. Thanks were given to Debbie, landlady of the Hastings Arms, for the use of the room.

### 2.0 CURRENT SITUATION

PW advised that he had updated Victoria with most of the Agenda content, and had since met again with Bob Dimond at Medway Council, following the conclusion of the Pool season.

The feedback from this most recent meeting with BD was:

*Pool equipment condition report – BD had previously advised that a report had been commissioned. He confirmed that this had now been carried out but he had not received the report at the time of our meeting, promising to provide a copy when received.*

*2016 season figures – PW requested a full set of 2015 and 2016 attendance records. BD agreed to supply these but had only just received them from his staff and wanted to review them first.*

*FOSP involvement – PW had advised, in response to a question raised in an earlier meeting with BD, that FOSP was 'unlikely' to be in a position to set up a trust or community interest company for the 2017 season. FOSP 'may' be able and willing to in the future but needed a full season, without the cleanliness and safety issues of 2016, in order to analyse the effectiveness of improvements to management and marketing.*

*National Lido Conference – PW provided BD with an overview of the Conference – see later Minutes.*

*Website – PW had provided BD with links to the new website for Council feedback.*

*Scrutiny Committee – PW confirmed that FOSP had requested a further review of the opening hours decision and that this would be raised at the 25<sup>th</sup> October Scrutiny Committee meeting.*

*Preparation for 2017 – Discussion around the opening hours planned for 2017 was inconclusive. BD remains of the opinion that the 2016 limited days / hours opening was 'a success' in reducing costs. PW confirmed strongly that FOSP are adamant that nothing less than a full, three month, season would be acceptable and that careful management allied to enthusiastic marketing would increase usage and therefore income.*

*Possible third party management – One aspect of the National lido Conference was the emergence of a third party business that had already taken over management of 7 lidos, and over 50 conventional pools. BD confirmed that this was an option that was under consideration and that a fact finding visit had been arranged. However, he was of the view that this would not be a viable option for the Strand as more facilities would need to be added to make the business model work.*

### 3.0 NATIONAL LIDO CONFERENCE FEEDBACK

Jackie and PW went through the information that they had gained from this two day Conference, held in Portishead near Bristol. The overriding message was the huge and growing interest in outdoor swimming, and that this was quite different to being in an indoor pool. As FOSP had seen from the volume of support via the petition, there is an emotional connection that needs to be nurtured and developed.

Conference speakers emphasised the social and community aspects of Lidos, the wide demographic of users ("all equal in swim hats"), the family histories, and the feelings of freedom in swimming in open air. Further, the resurgence in interest was seen as coming at the right time to offset what is seen as an increasing central control of people's lives.

This led to a wide range of cultural output, from art deco style artwork to poetry and even a 'writer in residence' at one Lido. From a practical point of view, PW saw the possibilities of producing cards and prints featuring the Strand Pool which could be sold to raise funds. One artist had also suggested that he would produce a suitable image, which FOSP could adopt and use in marketing at no cost, with the artist producing and selling prints for the benefit of both. Other promotional ideas already in use elsewhere include encouraging young visitors to produce poems, stories and drawings relating to the Pool with these being displayed and added to the website and social media pages, to drive additional contacts and strengthen the bond people feel with the Strand.

Another idea that has proved successful is to invite photography groups to visit and record different aspects of the Pool. The final images can then be displayed and voted for by the public. Again, there is the possibility of driving publicity and gaining new visitors. Other pools had established noticeboards for large post-it notes for visitors to record their experiences, and for a blackboard with regular updates of poems by local people. Some had commissioned local / student filmmakers to create a suitable video. All of these provide human interest stories for the website and should help keep the content interesting and up to date.

Speakers confirmed the importance of building and maintaining a following via social media, mainly Facebook and Twitter, and to embed these into the website. Also, to be consistent with the name and branding. FOSP members agreed that 'The Strand Pool' was so long established as a name that it would not be helpful to try to rename it, but a strapline of 'Medways' Open Air Lido' made sense.

Other speakers confirmed the growth of 'Lido Collectors', who travel across the country to experience as many pools as they can. Whilst not a huge market, they exist, they are enthusiastic, they are very active on the various outdoor swimming websites and they bring in revenue and publicity. A new guidebook to Lidos in the UK was being planned for publication next year, PW confirmed that the Strand Pool was included and that we have pledged to support the book.

The Conference then moved on to the loss, survival and reopening of various Lidos, some remaining closed after many years, and others that have become very successful after being rescued by their local community groups. A range of models are in use, with CIC and Trust status being preferred to the Charity route. PW and Jackie had had the opportunity to visit Portishead Pool, where they have over 170 people in the volunteer organisation and run a very slick and successful pool operation.

Fusion Lifestyle presented their approach to managing outdoor pools, and the financial requirement for a wide range of facilities to keep revenue coming in whatever the weather. Pool operators generally agreed that pure swimming income only covered 15% to 20% of their costs. Most pools retained some out of season activity, perhaps for two or three cold water sessions per week. Whilst these were slow to become popular, consistent availability gradually brought usage up, for example from 8 people per session to 35 or more on a regular basis.

Health and Fitness centres and Cafes were recognised as the most important elements to drive revenue, in and out of the open air swimming season.

Finally, Conference speakers shared ideas for events that had proved popular at different locations. These ranged from parties and music events to Aquathon evenings, combining a park run with a swim, for all ages and abilities.

#### **4.0 FUNDING OPTIONS FOR COMMUNITY-MANAGED POOLS**

PW reported that Victoria, Jackie and PW had been invited by Cllr. Andy Stamp to meet with Dan McDonald, CEO of Citizens Advice Medway. Dan had helpfully researched and downloaded some key guides relating to communities taking more responsibility for local services, the possible sources of funding, and a specific guidance report for pools from the Amateur Swimming Association (ASA) and the Asset Transfer Unit (ATU).

FOSP Committee members are recommended to read this last document, which explains the steps taken by Government to make the transfer of assets (such as pools) from local authority ownership into community management.

<http://locality.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Guidance-for-community-owned-and-managed-swimming-pools.pdf>

PW took the meeting through the salient points in the ASA / ATU document – the facility in question should be surveyed professionally for condition, all potential quality marks and standards should be sought, and a long term business plan written and tested against known data. The strength of the volunteer organisation is seen as critical, with a need to identify required skills and build a suitable, committed team. The organisation needs to be more formal, with a requirement to become 'incorporated', i.e. a legally-recognised enterprise. A Company Limited by Guarantee, a Community Interest Company or a Trust or Charity are typically the routes taken. This formality should unlock access to potential sources of funding, but naturally bring far greater responsibility and administrative workload.

The Committee members present discussed the opportunities presented, but agreed that, at present, FOSP does not have the strength in depth to consider this option yet. PW suggested that we keep this subject on the Agenda for future meetings and continue to monitor progress in our knowledge.

#### **5.0 MEDWAY COUNCIL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

PW updated the meeting with the latest situation with the FOSP petition. Disappointingly, a fairly dismissive response had been received by Victoria from Richard Hicks, Director of Regeneration, Culture, Environment and Transformation, again stating the Council officers' perceived logic that reducing the pool opening hours enables them to work within the reduced budget set by members.

After discussion, it had been agreed that FOSP would ask for the matter to be reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at their next meeting on Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> October, 6.30 at Gun Wharf.

Adrian Sambrook has provided a paper with suggestions to be raised, and PW has incorporated these into a leaflet that will be distributed to the Scrutiny Committee members on the day. A copy is attached to these minutes, offering an alternative approach with greater emphasis on management and marketing in order to improve visitor numbers and reduce the subsidy required.

PW will be allowed to speak at the Scrutiny meeting, for 5 minutes, but other FOSP members are welcome to attend in the public gallery. Those that wish to attend to please advise PW immediately so numbers can be communicated to the Democratic Services tea

#### **6.0 WEBSITE PROGRESS AND REVIEW**

As part of FOSP's offer to help improve the marketing of the Strand Pool, we had committed to set up and run a dedicated website. PW had met with Pat Nolan about this but it is clear that Pat's time is limited, though he was very happy to oversee. PW has therefore now established a basic website and members were asked for their feedback as potential users. For example, Victoria had requested a more consistent use of typefaces and less graphic content to improve ease of navigation, changes that had since been incorporated. PW asked members for more photographs, both recent and historic, plus user memories and anything else relevant to the Pool, to increase website content and interest.

Members to please visit <http://www.strandpool.info> or <http://www.strandpool.co.uk> regularly and to e-mail ideas and content to PW.

## **7.0 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Given the limited number of attendees, the Meeting did not discuss Working Groups as planned, and this will be carried over to the next meeting.

Adrian Sambrook had also provided a check list of matters to be attended to at the Pool during the closed season, in order to prepare the Pool for the 2017 season. It was agreed to await the outcome of the Scrutiny Committee meeting before planning FOSP activity – essentially we need and expect that the Pool will be given a full, 100 day, season to justify the extended volunteer hours that FOSP are prepared to provide.

Finally, the meeting did not set a new date but FOSP members were keen to meet again pre-Christmas, perhaps to combine a meeting with a social event / meal to reflect upon progress made since our initial informal meeting on 31<sup>st</sup> May.

**Meeting closed at 9.40 pm.**