



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

To Whom it May Concern

28 May 2024

Bid to the Community Ownership Fund to re-open Ward Freman Swimming Pool, Buntingford, Hertfordshire

I am writing to offer my full support for the bid submitted by Ward Freman Community Pool Group CIO for funding to repair and re-open Ward Freman Swimming Pool which neither the County Council, which owns the building, nor the District Council have funds to repair. The pool building now stands redundant and there are no other plans for its community use. This project holds significant importance for our community in Buntingford and surrounding areas, offering substantial benefits across multiple aspects of community life.

I was pleased to support the group in its successful application earlier this year for charitable status and I applaud the work they have done to get this project underway since the pool's closure in December 2023.

The closure of Ward Freman Pool has been felt deeply by residents, not only in the town of Buntingford itself but also in the surrounding rural area, where for many village residents, Ward Freman Pool is their closest swimming pool. An online survey eliciting 630 replies demonstrates the strength of feeling. Buntingford has seen a 64% rise in population between 2001 and 2021.

Since the pool's closure, users have not all been able to find vital swimming lessons, classes or suitable sessions at pools in other towns; and for others the additional journey is not possible and they are no longer able to swim. For many, the pool was more than just a recreational facility—it was a hub for social interaction, physical fitness, and community cohesion. Re-opening this pool would provide an invaluable resource that promotes healthy lifestyles, supports aquatic education, offers life-saving skills and a safe and enjoyable environment for all age groups and of all abilities. Carers of children and adults with special needs have remarked on the intimate and comfortable environment provided at this small local pool, not experienced at larger pools.

Several key benefits underscore the need for this funding:

- **Health and Well-being:** Swimming is an excellent form of exercise suitable for all ages and fitness levels. Re-opening the pool would encourage physical activity, helping to combat issues such as obesity, heart disease, and mental health challenges through both individual exercise and community programmes.



- **Community Engagement:** The pool has historically been a gathering place for families, friends, and community groups. It has hosted swimming lessons, both private and for schools, water aerobics classes, fun swimming during school holidays, our local Buntingford Swimming Club, U3A groups and private events, fostering a sense of community spirit and togetherness.
- **Young people's Development:** Accessible swimming facilities provide vital opportunities for young people to learn essential life skills, develop discipline through competitive swimming, and find positive, engaging activities. This can be instrumental in steering young people away from negative influences, and particularly so in the light of the recent closure of Buntingford's youth centre.
- **Safety and Lifesaving Skills:** Learning to swim is a crucial life skill that can prevent drowning and increase overall water safety awareness. A local pool ensures that these essential skills are within reach for everyone in our community, particularly children.
- **Economic Benefits:** The re-opening of the swimming pool, with the plan to extend the hours open to the public, can stimulate the local economy by creating jobs, attracting visitors, and potentially leading to further investments in the surrounding area.

Given these compelling benefits, I strongly urge you to consider this funding bid favourably. The revitalisation of Ward Freman Pool will undoubtedly bring profound and lasting positive impacts to our community, contributing to the health, well-being, and vitality of our residents.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I am more than willing to discuss this further and provide any additional information that may assist in securing the necessary funding.

Yours faithfully

Signed electronically as Sir Oliver is indisposed