



**St. Joseph's
Catholic Infant
& Junior Schools**
Birtley



Wednesday 22nd March 2023

Dear Parents and Carers,

Birtley Swimming Centre

As you are aware, we have actively encouraged you to complete Gateshead Council's Leisure Centre Consultation process. <https://www.gateshead.gov.uk/article/20262/Proposed-changes-to-the-provision-of-Leisure-Services-in-Gateshead> This consultation closes at midnight, on Monday 8th May 2023.

'From further work, including the information learnt during the first public consultation which ran from 2 November to 20 December 2022, the outcome from the revised evaluation identified Gateshead Leisure Centre and Birtley Swim Centre as being the least sustainable. When the results of the first consultation were presented to Cabinet. On 24 January 2023, Cabinet granted a 3-month extension to the review to allow for the consultation to reopen so that the voice of all leisure centre users could be heard and not just those of the centres identified as at risk. No final decision will be made until the updated report is presented to Cabinet in June 2023.' [Proposed changes to the provision of Leisure Services in Gateshead - Gateshead Council](#)

Because of the consultation and report to Cabinet, two swimming clubs – Gateshead and Whickham Swimming Club and Birtley Swimming Club have agreed to work together over the next two months to investigate the possibility of requesting a Community Asset Transfer (CAT) for Birtley Swimming Pool, from Gateshead Council. This involves engaging with representatives from local schools, other organisations and the public - who already use the leisure centre - as well as potential new users of the centre.

Essentially, the community group would work together to write a business plan which would be submitted to Gateshead Council to help secure an asset transfer of the pool to the community. Once completed, the group would then oversee the strategic and operational management of the pool.

We have had very productive initial discussions with the group but while their business plan is proposed and, hopefully, approved, it is evident that swimming, in the academic year of September 2023/2024, may need to take place in a different pool.

As always, we will keep you informed of any changes, but we ask you to take time to read and digest the information attached. We also encourage you to get involved with the community group should you be able to offer time, expertise or support.

It is the passion and commitment of the St. Joseph's community that helps to make it even better for our children – and I ask you to seriously consider supporting the team in any way you can.

The team members' email addresses are attached.

With every good wish,

Mrs K. Swaddle.
Executive Headteacher

Communication to Birtley Community about potential asset transfer

In early November last year, Gateshead Council (GC) announced their intention to close two of their swimming pools and indicated that the most likely to close would be the leisure centres at Dunston and Gateshead. A six-week consultation period then took place in November and December.

After assessing the feedback from the consultation, GC announced on January 24th that they were no longer proposing to close Dunston pool, but instead proposed that Birtley Swimming Centre would close. In response to further feedback received after this announcement in January, GC have extended the consultation period until May 8th, to enable people who use Birtley Swim Centre to give their feedback.

GC will then assess the feedback from this second period of consultation and will announce their final decision on which two pools will be closing on June 20th. Their current plan is that Gateshead Leisure Centre and Birtley Swimming Centre will close at the end of July unless feedback from the second round of consultation results in a further change.

Community Asset transfer option for Birtley Swimming Centre

The committees of Birtley Swimming club (BSC) and Gateshead and Whickham Swimming club (GAW) have agreed to work together over the next two months to investigate the potential for a Community Asset Transfer (CAT) for Birtley Swimming Centre. This will involve engaging with representatives from local schools, other organisations and the public who already use the leisure centre as well as potential new users of the Centre.

The CAT project team, currently comprising BSC and GAW representatives, will need to come up with a new way of operating the centre, which could involve new leisure activities as well as the existing ones, to increase the income generated by the centre. It will also need to identify significant sustainable cost savings, so that the total income from all the activities, plus some funding from other sources like grants, would sustainably cover the operating costs. The CAT project team already includes people with significant experience of swimming activities, local knowledge and contacts with existing users of Birtley Swim Centre, financial expertise and building and plant management capabilities.

The CAT project team have had recent discussions with GC about the possibility of a CAT for Birtley Swimming Centre. If the current proposal to close Birtley at the end of July remains unchanged, then the staff at Birtley will be redeployed to the other GC run Leisure Centres which remain open.

If Birtley Swimming Centre later reopens after a successful CAT had been achieved, then the expectation is that TUPE would not apply, which means there would not be a requirement for staff to be transferred back to Birtley from other Leisure Centres. This means there is potential for significant savings to be made in the employment costs at Birtley Swimming Centre by doing things differently, which could mean a CAT for that pool can be financially viable.

There are also many other advantages for doing a CAT at Birtley Swimming Centre.

- There is a good synergy between BSC, which delivers learn to swim, lifeguarding and club swimming at Birtley, and GAW which delivers competitive swimming and learn to swim, so the activities would be complementary
- There is a significant opportunity to increase income through expansion of Learn To Swim lessons at Birtley in the two large learner pools.
- Several local primary schools already have swimming lessons at Birtley and other local schools may also be interested in this following a CAT.
- There is demand from the public for lane swimming in the late evening and at other times, which is currently not being met as GC are operating BSC on reduced hours.
- Once GC reduces to three leisure centres, GAW expects a 30% reduction in its water time at the GC run pools and would like to access pool time at Birtley to replace this water time.
- Other local swimming clubs are also interested in taking water time at Birtley.
- Birtley pool has a very passionate staff group who love the centre, so we believe there would be interest from some of them in applying for new roles at Birtley after a CAT has taken place.

These advantages mean that there is significant potential for increasing the income that could be generated from Birtley Swim Centre following a successful CAT.

Timescales for the Community Asset Transfer

Phase 1: High level business case

Over the next two months the CAT project team will be engaging with representatives from existing organisations who use the pool, as well as the local community in Birtley, to identify and quantify the activities that would be run at Birtley following a CAT, as well as identifying the staffing requirements and costs to run these activities. We will organise some open meetings during April to enable community users to give us their ideas.

If this results in a viable high level business case for the Birtley CAT, with income covering costs, it will need to be presented by the CAT team to GC by the middle of May for approval.

Phase 2: Detailed long term business plan

If the high-level business case is approved, and GC confirm in June that Birtley Swim Centre is to close at the end of July, the CAT group will then need to undertake more work to produce a detailed long term business plan for Birtley Swim Centre. This would include identifying and securing funding for any required capital works, agreeing water time and pricing with the future customers of Birtley Swim Centre such as BSC, GAW, other clubs, local schools, public users, and developing a pool timetable, staffing rota and roles required to run the activities in the business plan.

If the detailed business plan is still financially viable after this phase, it would need to be presented by the CAT group to GC for approval at the end of this phase which is likely to be towards the end of the third quarter of this year.

GC will put protective measures in place for Birtley Swim Centre following its closure at the end of July, similar to what was in place during the COVID lockdowns, so that the pool can be reopened relatively quickly if the CAT goes ahead.

Phase 3: Implementation phase

If the detailed Business plan is approved by GC, the final phase will require the planning and delivery of all the tasks required to reopen Birtley Swimming Centre. This would include setting up the new community organisation which will run the Centre after the CAT, recruitment of staff, agreement of contracts with customers, undertaking any capital work required before the pool reopens, marketing the new facility and setting up the necessary systems and processes to manage BSC after the CAT.

A significant period of time will be required to deliver phases two and three. CATs of this size typically take at least a year to deliver, so if the business plan is viable for Birtley Swimming Centre, it is likely that it would not reopen until towards the end of the first quarter of 2024.

CAT project team members

The CAT project team currently includes the following representatives from BSC and GAW:

Edith Scott	BSC chair	edithscott1951@gmail.com
Stevie Speight	GAW chair	stevenspeight@sky.com
Claire Kelly	BSC Treasurer	
Matthew Grant	GAW Treasurer	matthew.grant2112@outlook.com
Dean Cox	BSC secretary	

We hope that more people will join the project team to help with the work over the next two months.

Matthew Grant

On behalf of the Birtley CAT project team