

Appendix C
Open water swimming pools
An Overview Paper

1. Context

The Cultural Services team has been asked to provide an overview paper about open water swimming pools to explore whether this type of facility is worthy of further consideration for potential future provision within Warwick District.

This paper aims to provide some high level information to enable to officers and councillors to learn more about open water swimming pools and how they are used and managed. Councillors may subsequently opt to request officers to undertake further work on developing a business case and feasibility study about such a facility.

2. What are open water swimming pools?

Open water swimming takes place in lakes, rivers, reservoirs and the sea. Facilities can either be formed from natural bodies of water or man-made structures (i.e. reservoirs or purpose built pools/lakes). Open water swimming venues can be combined with other sports and leisure facilities, such as running and cycle tracks and/or leisure facilities such as man-made beaches.

3. How are open water swimming pools used?

Aside from swimming, open water swimming pools can be used for a wide variety of water based sports and activities including: stand up paddle boarding (SUP), kayaking, windsurfing, rowing, sailing, corporate team building activities (raft building), and fishing etc.

Man-made beach areas can also be used to host further leisure/social activities, e.g. BBQ's etc.

Popular facilities typically include a range of ancillary facilities, such as parking, changing, refreshment kiosks and equipment hire.

4. How is the water space managed?

Well managed facilities control the use of the water space for customers through the provision of supervised, programmed swim sessions. The sessions include the provision of lifeguards/spotters and sometimes rescue boats. Swimmers are required to provide written confirmation that they have read and understood the centre's safety notice. Further requirements may also include the wearing of wet suits, coloured swimming caps, safety wrist bands, tow floats and swimming with a buddy.

Swimming loops are marked using buoys and swimmers should swim in the same direction. The water itself is regularly tested and some centres promote water safety accreditation.

5. Regional example facilities

The following are examples of popular open water swimming venues that illustrate the type of facility available in the region.

All of these facilities offer marked, swimming “loops” – ranging from 350m to 1500m, with most offering more than one loop.

As can be seen, typical facilities include:

- Range of water based activities; kayaking, stand up paddle boarding to fishing etc.
- Land-based activities; e.g. archery, bush craft, yoga, camping,
- Infrastructure including; lifeguard, café, shop, showers and car parking.

Lake 32, Water Land, Cirencester	https://www.ukwatersports.co.uk/triathlon-and-open-water-swimming/
Lenches Lakes – Evesham	https://lencheslakes.co.uk/
Ragley Hall, Alcester (Swimming organised by Evesham Vale Triathletes)	http://www.greatswimlocal.org/swims/midlands/ragley-hall/ragley-hall-swim
Cliff Lakes – Tamworth	https://www.clifflakes.com/open-water-swimming
Top Barn – Malvern (Water used by triathlon club)	https://wildswim.com/top-barn-activity-centre

6. Construction considerations

Some initial work has been undertaken to understand construction methods. However, more detailed work would naturally be required to provide a more detailed appraisal of construction options.

In terms of the design of new facilities, consideration needs to be given to:

- Depth of natural water table
- Required water depth. Whilst a shallow depth will mean that the water will be warmer, it also increases the risk of undesirable algae, which can lead to closure/cancellation of sessions. Shallow pools also more difficult to control weeds. It is understood that ideally the water should be at least 3 meters deep for swimming and 4 meters deep for sailing. However, some existing popular facilities do operate with more shallow water, i.e. 1.5 m - 2 m.
- Orientation of pool and prevailing winds: wind will impact "chop" on the water and can lead to closure of events if the wind levels are too high.
- Proximity to fields with crops or livestock: Crop spraying/animal waste can enter the water course, contaminating the swimming pool.
- Inclusion of an inlet and outlet to keep water flowing and avoid build-up of unwanted algae.
- Soil type will influence requirement for liners, retaining walls
- Future maintenance requirements, including treatment of water, maintenance of planting, dredging of bottom of pool to maintain depth and control plant growth.

Should Councillors request further work on this topic, it is suggested that contact is made with University of Worcester who have just opened a new open water swimming facility.

7. Potential venues for open water swimming within Warwick District

Existing, natural bodies of water

Web searches and conversations with outdoor swimmers suggest there are limited places in Warwick District for people to swim safely in existing, natural bodies of open water.

The Outdoor Swimming Society lists River Avon, Guys Cliffe and River Avon near St Nicholas Park as outdoor swimming venues but clearly the River Avon is not a venue suitable for further development by the Council, for a variety of safety reasons. These sites come with limitations due to difficulties in managing the water environment and the lack of opportunity to provide suitable ancillary facilities (parking, changing facilities etc.).

Existing, man-made bodies of water, suitable for adaptation

We are advised that existing lakes/reservoirs can offer a simpler/more cost effective solution to the provision of an open water swimming venue. One potential existing facility which could be suitable for further investigation is privately owned. An initial discussion with the owners would be required as a starting point to explore the potential of this site, should Councillors wish to progress this work.

New build potential sites

Initial work has identified two potential suitable locations for a man-made, purpose-built pool. Further work may identify further sites. The two sites identified to date are the new country park in Tachbrook and Newbold Comyn. It is assumed that both sites offer the benefit of being able to allow for ancillary facilities including changing, parking, café etc.

Officers will appraise the suitability of these sites further if Councillors have an appetite to progress this idea.

8. What is the demand?

It is widely acknowledged that open water swimming and other related activities are enjoying significant growth in participation, however it has proved difficult to find hard data to evidence this.

Sport England's Active Lives Survey 2018 states that "outdoor swimming is growing in popularity" and Sport England have published that 4.1 million people participated in open water swimming in 2018.

British Triathlon (which includes outdoor swimming as one of its disciplines) reports that in 2018 there are 150k committed active triathletes and they have seen a significant increase in membership to British Triathlon with 31k people joining in 2018.

9. How long is the outdoor swimming season?

As the water is unheated, use of the water obviously reduces over the winter period! Individual facilities/operators operate differing rules (minimum water temperatures, clothing requirements etc) which dictate the swimming season at each centre. However, research for this paper indicates that outdoor swimming facilities are typically used by outdoor swimmers/triathletes from April (at the latest) through to September/end of October.

10. Opportunities and Risks

Opportunities

- There is an opportunity to develop an exciting, in demand, new facility with the potential to be used by a wide range of customers for a spectrum of activities, over and above swimming. Further opportunities exist to develop relationships with local triathlon groups.
- The nearest popular open water swimming facility is approximately 20 miles from Leamington. Whilst open water swimmers / triathletes are prepared to travel to get to a venue, it is highly likely that a facility closer by would be of interest. Such a facility would create an opportunity for income generation, either directly to the Council or indirectly, through a contract. Depending on popularity, an open water swimming venue could become a tourist destination.
- The benefits of outdoor activities, including swimming, are well documented. The development of an outdoor facility will help to

deliver our corporate aims in terms of the Council's vision of making the District "a great place, to live work and visit, and build healthier communities", and is well aligned with Sustainable Communities Strategies (Health and Wellbeing strand)

- A managed open water swimming facility creates an opportunity for children / adults to learn about open water safety in a controlled environment. A beach facility could provide a relaxed, gentle introduction to an open water environment.
- An operation of an open water swimming pool/lake does not have the heavy carbon footprint of a heated outdoor pool.

Risks

There are undoubtedly risks associated with open water swimming. However, it is worth noting that these risks are also present to varying degrees when visiting any waterside location, i.e. a trip to the seaside, canal or riverside walk etc. Clearly risk management is extremely important and well run facilities adopt various approaches to manage and reduce these risks.

- Managed, supervised swim sessions are key. This means that swimmers are only allowed in the water during defined times.
- Other features of managed sessions include:
 - Pre-swim safety instructions and information.
 - Safety clothing and equipment – tow floats, coloured swim caps, wet suits
 - Lifeguards, spotters, swimming buddies, rescue boats
 - Time limits for swimming
 - Use of technology – safety wristbands
- Aside from the risk of accidents or drowning, the water can develop algae and harmful bacteria, which can lead to the closure of facilities. Many facilities publicise that they have adopted accreditation schemes, or are working with National Governing Bodies or the Royal Life Saving Society to manage risks inherent with water-based venues. For example, SH2OUT is a body offering Water Quality Testing, Swim Course Planning, Risk Assessment Guidance.
- The location of any new facility requires careful consideration. There could be a concern that an open water pool could become a gathering point for anti-social behaviour. Whilst these risks are not to be ignored, it is noted that other natural and/or existing water side locations also carry this risk. Use of signage, design and CCTV can help mitigate the risk as appropriate.
- Over demand: care should be given to the capacity / operational resources for new facilities. A recent new facility in the South East was forced to shut on its opening day as it was over-run with too many customers.