

Dear Councillors of Gloucester City Council,

I am writing this open letter as a representative of the committee, coaches, parents and swimmers of Gloucester City Swimming Club.

The activities of GCSC have been brought to a complete standstill following the decision to close GL1. This is devastating for us all. This not only came as a shock but was a deep betrayal. Gloucester City Swimming Club is a key part of youth sport within the community and Aspire and the council claimed to place the promotion of healthy living, active lifestyle and youth sport at the forefront of their policies and aims. In their city plan for 2023-24 Gloucester City Council state that their aim is “to ensure that Gloucester’s residents can lead a healthy and active lifestyle, we will tackle food poverty and ensure everyone has access to high-quality leisure facilities and thriving green spaces by working closely with organisations within our communities” In their governing document Aspire state that their aim as a charity is to “provide or assist in the provision of facilities and services for recreations, sporting or other leisure time in the interests of social welfare” and “to advance the education of the public on the benefit of active lifestyle and in particular the value of physical activity for young people”. The closure of GL1 and Oxstalls is a sign that these aims were not valued, and has left hundreds of children and young adults feeling abandoned and unconsidered. Youth sport organisations are so valuable to the community and the council does not fully comprehend the loss caused by this decision.

As a club, the closure has left four coaches, dozens of parent volunteers and most importantly one hundred and twenty young athletes left without a place to train. GL1 is the only 8 lane 25m pool in the county, with an additional 4 lane training pool it is an irreplaceable asset for us as a club. The club has existed and trained at the GL1 site since 1910 and we provide swimming opportunities for swimmers from across the city and surrounding areas of North Gloucestershire. Just this past year we have seen huge successes from our county and regional qualifying swimmers achieving many medals and personal best times, through to four medals at national events and two qualifiers for the British Championships. We also have a thriving para squad of five swimmers, including three swimmers swimming at international competitions, one swimming at the European and World Down Syndrome Games and a younger para athlete working through the para swimming pathway with us. We have a highly qualified and experienced coaching team, who are all involved in swimming beyond the club including county and para talent pathways with Swim England.

These coaches also provide opportunities and events for swimmers, coaches and other clubs across all of Gloucestershire. Among these the most vital is our four open meets that we host each year. These meets are attended by 300-400 swimmers from clubs from across the UK and are weekend events that bring not just business to GL1 as a centre but the city also. These meets are only possible due to the facilities offered by the centre, the loss of which impacts not just us as a club but the whole of the swimming community in the South West. GL1 also hosted national and regional competitions across all swimming disciplines including polo and artistic swimming.

We have an incredibly active and diverse community of swimmers and parents. The demographic at the club reflects that of the city of Gloucester with our team providing athletic

development to swimmers of all genders, cultures, ethnicities and socio economic backgrounds. Our swimmers join us from the age of 8 and stay with us until they move on to adulthood. Starting with three hours of training a week as they progress through our programme they finish with up to twenty an hours a week. Beyond developing their swimming the club provides space for swimmers to build other skills and grow their education. Many swimmers use their sport for their GCSE and A level PE qualifications, over the years the coaches have signed of countless DofE physical and volunteer booklets and our older swimmers regularly volunteer to help coach the younger swimmers, with plenty of our young adults looking to gaining Lifeguard, Swim Teacher and Coaching qualifications to continue their involvement in the sport they love. None of these opportunities will be available now.

The dedication our young people show to their sport is unmatched. From 5am starts to 12 hour days at competitions, our swimmers give up all their free time to a sport that is their passion, their world and what many dream will be their future too. It's their lifeline and it's their second home. They build lifelong friendships here and the loss of a home training base has left us grasping for pooltime wherever we can get it. Many swimmers will be separated not just from quality training time but also from their community. The council needs to fully appreciate how much impact this closure has had. The centre must reopen as soon as possible, as any delay in reopening will cause irrevocable damage to the future of our swimmers and all other young people involved in sporting programmes who relied on these centres. [To fully comprehend the extent of the personal damage caused by Aspire and the council's actions, we urge you to read the accompanying testimonials written by our members by following this link.](#)

All of us at GCSC put vast amounts of time, energy and dedication into ensuring that young people of all ages and backgrounds have the chance to learn a sport in a fun and happy environment and give them the opportunities to develop and achieve success. This is a promise we make and is a part of our club vision, and we will fight for that vision for as long as we are able. The promises the council made have been broken with this closure and as a result hundreds of young people have been deserted. The council must make every effort to reopen GL1 and Oxstalls as soon as possible before the consequences of this closure are beyond repair.

Yours sincerely

Gloucester City Swimming Club