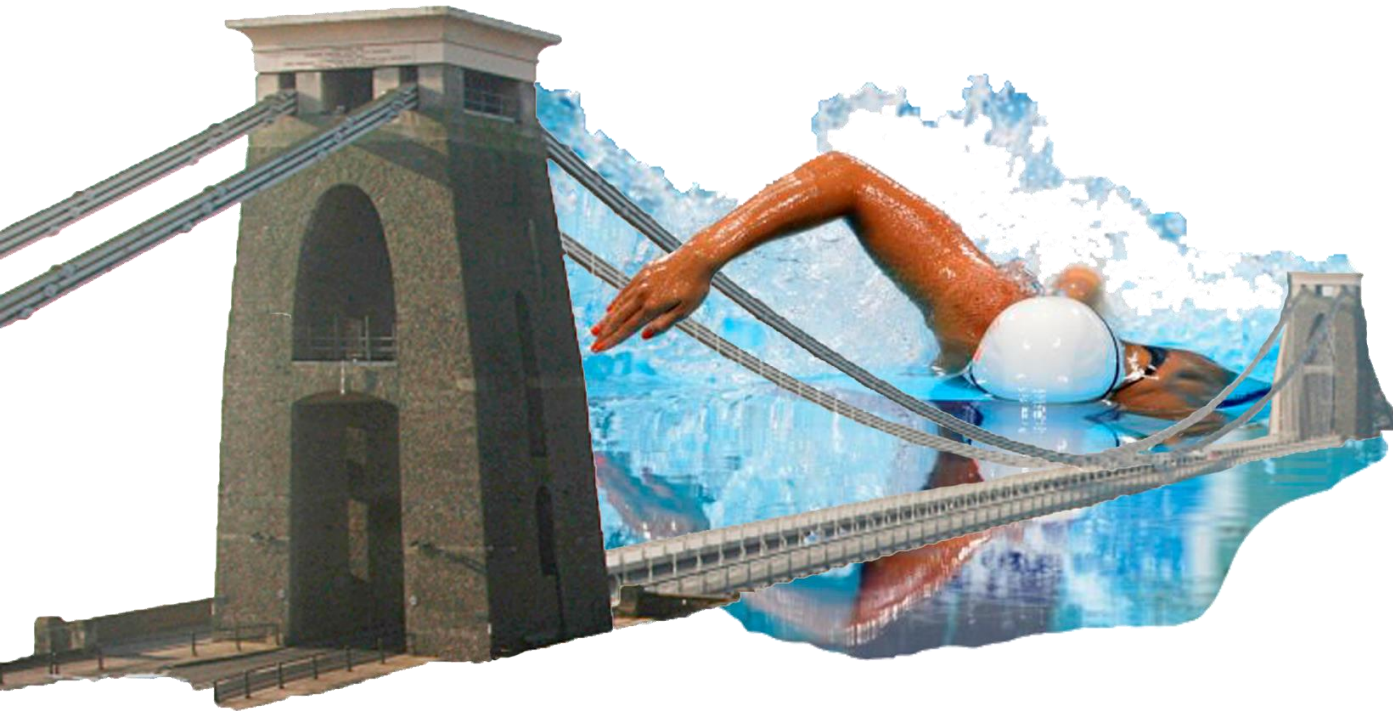


CITY OF
BRISTOL
AQUATICS



Development Plan for City of Bristol Aquatics Network



Executive Summary

September 2017



SwimMark
NETWORK MEMBER



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The vision of the City of Bristol Aquatics Network is to establish a centre of success and performance excellence at Hengrove Park in the aquatics disciplines of competitive and synchronised swimming, and water polo.

Whilst the aim is to equip athletes to compete at the highest levels of national and international competition, this can only be achieved if a sustainable programme of participation in the aquatic disciplines can be established across the wider Bristol area at all stages of the athlete journey from learning to swim through to international competition. The clubs that collectively form the City of Bristol Aquatics Network ensure that the programme is appealing, engaging, motivating and, above all, delivered irrespective of age, gender, ethnic and social background, income and disability.

The decision of Bristol City Council to build an Olympic-specification swimming pool at Hengrove Park and to incorporate access to pool time for a performance swimming club afforded an opportunity on which to build something special in the city. City of Bristol Aquatics grasped that opportunity and its successful network of six clubs offers competitive swimming, synchronised swimming and water polo to nearly one thousand athletes across the city. A para-squad has recently been formed and is growing in size. The network can boast the 2016 national synchronised swimming champions as well as an increasingly successful performance squad of fifty swimmers and one of the best water polo teams in the country over many decades.

The experience and incredible enthusiasm of the clubs' coaches, the forward thinking and tireless activity of an active network committee, and the support of Bristol City Council and has seen the network become firmly established in the aquatics world. The Amateur Swimming Association is now seeking to inject funding to aid the realignment of the aquatics disciplines in the Bristol area and build a performance base which can ultimately challenge the established power bases in the country and ensure that Bristol athletes feature prominently in future national squads and teams. Something really special is being created for the city of Bristol.

Network Principle

The underlying principle of the City of Bristol Aquatics Network is that a performance athlete is developed from a long-term investment of time, skill, effort and discipline from everyone involved. What typically begins

as an enjoyable recreational activity develops slowly over time into a burning and all-encompassing desire to be better than the rest. The aquatics programme must therefore create the initial spark of interest that says to a potential athlete, “I’d like to do that”, and then carefully takes that athlete on a journey whose destination is limited only by their ambition and desire.

Of course, not every athlete strives for Olympic success and the journey may only go as far as club, county or regional competition, or indeed no competition at all; fewer than five percent of athletes in the network train at a performance level. There is a place in the network for every journey and the network must inspire as many people as possible to *make the trip*.

Development Plan

In delivering the vision, the network has collectively agreed a development plan that focuses on three key areas:

1. Increasing Participation in Aquatics
2. Achieving Greater Success
3. Consolidation and Sustainability

Encouraging **Participation** in all of the aquatics disciplines is a priority objective not only for the network but also for Swim England and the City Council set as it is against the national context of a sharp reduction in the number of people who swim regularly. Three significant groups within the city’s population are historically under-represented within the swimming pool environment, notably:

- Athletes from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities
- Athletes with a disability or other special needs
- Athletes from low income families

Improving participation generally, and specifically in each of these key target groups is a priority for the network. Three sections of the development plan consider in detail the likely reasons for under-representation, an action plan to redress the balance as well as critical success factors and performance milestones over a prescribed timeline. Early success has seen the creation of a para squad and plans for a specialist learn to swim programme for disabled swimmers which have reached an advanced stage.

Whilst the network can do much to facilitate greater participation in general terms, the network will seek external funding programmes and work in partnership with others to offer support for athletes from low income families.

The aquatics sports typically see a fall-off in participation starting from around the age of 12. The reasons for this are many and varied and include the attraction of team sport and a dislike of early morning training sessions! Therefore, in addition to increasing levels of participation, the development plan proposes an action plan designed to reduce the dropout rate of athletes from the aquatics disciplines, particularly those between the ages of 12 – 24.

Success in performance terms can be measured easily enough through metrics such as the number of athletes competing at national level and the number of medals won and finals reached at every stage of the competition hierarchy, or the finishing positions of teams in a league. The City of Bristol synchronised swimming squad knows all about success, being national champions for the second year running. The success of a performance athlete quantifies the quality of the training programme and the expertise of the

coaches both in terms of technical skill and the ability to inspire the athlete and instil competitive discipline. The focus of competitive success therefore resides in offering the highest standard of coaching in a balanced programme of land and pool-based physical activity, psychological preparation, nutrition, training discipline and injury prevention.

Not all successful outcomes can be measured by counting medals however. Increasing the number of participating athletes who have a disability or who come from a BME community or a low income family provide a measure of success of the accessibility and inclusion initiatives of the programme. Providing an overall environment which meets the recreational, social and competitive needs of participants *at every level* will ensure improved retention levels of athletes in the sport and members in the network.

The network has established a target operating model based on the [Cycle of Success](#):



The Cycle of Success

In its current form City of Bristol is a new aquatics programme and the network is a new network. Much of the early work has therefore been centred on **Consolidation and Sustainability**. All clubs are accredited to Swim England SwimMark Essential standard and the network was itself only the second in the country to be awarded the SwimMark Network accreditation. This provides the assurance that the network clubs are commercially well-run, financially sustainable, properly organised, have the policies and procedures in place to ensure a safe and healthy environment, and work collaboratively to deliver the athlete pathway in Bristol, ensuring that athletes meet their full potential and are retained in the sport.

The synchronised swimming and water polo sections hold the SwimMark Performance accreditation, which is the highest level of accreditation recognized by Swim England and is an indication that the pathways, physical environment, coaching practices and support services are all in place for athletes to reach the pinnacle of their aquatic sport, and that there is historical evidence to illustrate that athletes regularly achieve

success through this performance programme. In conjunction with the City Council, Swim England and Parkwood Leisure, the network will, through the development programme, also seek to accredit the competitive swimming programme to the SwimMark Performance standard in 2018 with the aim of ensuring that *City of Bristol* becomes as synonymous with success in competitive swimming as it is in synchronised swimming and water polo.

Something very special in the world of aquatics is being created in Bristol. Please read through our development plan and see how you can be a part of it.

Mike Pearce, Chair, City of Bristol Aquatics Board

John Sissons, Chair, City of Bristol Water Polo

Alan Powell, Chair, City of Bristol Synchronised Swimming

Colin Jackson, Chair, Backwell Swimming Club

Paul Sartain, Chair, Bath Dolphin Swimming Club

Ben Mullen, Chair, Bristol Penguin Olympic Swimming Club

Richie Lamb, Chair, Calne Alpha Swimming Club

John Warren, Chair, Keynsham Swimming Club

Rhona Phelps, Chair, Soundwell Swimming Club

Hengrove Park, September 2017