

The Future of Govanhill Baths

Although the Govanhill Baths Community Trust (GBCT) is still a long way off from achieving the ultimate aim of a fully integrated 'Wellbeing Centre', they have made significant achievements towards this goal. One key element of the importance of the Baths to Govanhill was that it brought together the richly-diverse community into a facility that they could share.

Since the opening of the centre in February 2012, the community meeting room, the workshop space and community kitchen have been used extensively by a wide range of groups, reflecting the cultural, ethnic and social diversity of Govanhill. There are 57 different organisations using the spaces. These range from craft groups such as 'Cast-Offs', the weekly knitting and crocheting group, to church groups, such as a Romanian Christian group and a Hindu prayer meeting. A partnership with Castlemilk Law Centre provides much needed welfare and financial advice.

The Trust's own community programme, taking in cooking classes; yoga sessions; the 'Rags to Riches' upcycling project; the Emporium charity shop; and other health related activities, has successfully reached out to the locals, offering many people a step back into their community, building confidence and skills. These aspects of GBCT's activities have recruited volunteers who go on to add to the range of assets and skills we have at our disposal.

However, ticking the box for community use or the sharing of the space by diverse groups, is only a small, if significant, step.

The future lies in realising the goal of a Wellbeing Centre, a community resource that caters for the social, mental and physical health of the community. This development will restore the swimming pools and Turkish baths to their former glory, establish a permanent arts and events space in the Steamie (the former public laundry), and create indoor and outdoor gardens on the upper floor and roof of Govanhill Baths.

Current in-place funding, mainly from the Big Lottery Fund and managed by the Prince's Regeneration Trust (PRT), will allow GBCT to secure parts of the building, make it watertight and develop the two smaller pools – "The Teaching Pool" and "The Ladies Pool". The Steamie can be stripped out and made ready for its development into an events space providing theatre, cinema, performance and rehearsal space. These steps will enhance the building as it stands for community and arts use, get the community swimming again and greatly increase footfall, participation and revenue for the Trust.

However, despite the generally positive course of events in recent years, there are huge challenges ahead. The financial crash and recession have led to ongoing restrictions in available funding. As community facilities are closed across the country, not only are the funding pots smaller than before, there will be more competition to secure available funding.

Structural problems in an old building can become more challenging with each year that the larger problems of the building are not addressed. Each passing winter takes its toll on the parts of the building not in general use such as the Slipper Baths, Steamie and Main pool. The danger exists that GBCT will be fire-fighting, using the raised revenue to patch up problems as they arise, deflecting from the longer term goal of renovation.

The partnerships that have been formed with City Property (the owners of the building), the project managers PRT, the in-house Govanhill Theatre Group, and the team of volunteers in various building and restoration skills, leaves GBCT in a strong position to rise to those challenges.

Going forward, GBCT have good reason to believe that they can achieve the full redevelopment of the Govanhill Baths into an innovative wellbeing centre. One of the strengths of the organisation

over the 14 years of our existence in various forms is the ability to evolve and adapt. What started as several groups of concerned locals and users of the Baths became an effective coherent campaign group. That campaign developed into a community trust, building towards re-opening while playing a full role in the community, providing a range of community workshops and classes and carrying out extensive research works. That highly effective organisation incorporating the "Centre for Community Practice" had to change again to become a company managing a busy community centre and arts facility. The Trust had to also become a restoration project, finally taking on the task of redeveloping the actual building. At each and every stage in the development, the leaders of the Trust, the volunteers and the community have excelled and shown their ability to keep striding forward, learning new skills, bringing in new people with the necessary skill set and experience. For that reason, they have every reason to be confident that challenges can, and will, be met.

The arts will play a large part in that development. Govanhill Theatre Group (GTG) and the myriad of artists and arts organisations that use the building, tend to use the undeveloped parts of the building - the Steamie, Main Pool and Ladies Pool, allowing gradual improvements to those parts of the building and much needed revenue from space that would be otherwise unused. This also allows GBCT to promote the use of these spaces, encouraging further use and demonstrating the value of these parts of the building to potential future funders.

There is a lot to look forward to as we enter the second century of the Bath's existence. The unique nature of our community, the mix and range of volunteers and employees, and the continuing success of the campaign against all odds, gives GBCT good reason to think that the next few years will see major steps forward towards our aims. The visionaries who conceived the idea of the public baths a century ago, the people who used the place over the years, and those who fought to save this vital community asset, would be proud of GBCT's achievements. This was, has been, is, and will be in the future, a team effort – a confident expression of community empowerment in action. The slogan that symbolised the campaign in 2001 still, to this day, rings true – UNITED WE WILL SWIM.