CONSERVATION STATEMENT

THE CLEVELAND BATHS
HAMPTON ROW
BATH

Ainslie Ensom

March 2012
CONSERVATION STATEMENT

for

THE CLEVELAND BATHS
HAMPTON ROW
BATH

by

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This Conservation Statement was initially written in 2008 as part of a post-graduate MSc. in Historic Building Conservation at the University of Bath, under the guidance of Kate Clark. The author, now working in the field of heritage consultancy, joined the Cleveland Pools Trust in 2011; the Statement has been up-dated in line with current circumstances.

“Conservation is about the care and continuing development of a place in such a way that its significance is retained or revealed, and its future made secure”

James Semple Kerr  1996
# CONTENTS

List of Illustrations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Historic Background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Chronology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Statement of Significance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Vulnerabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Conservation Principles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Archaeology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Community Participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Policies : Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>“Heritage; Leisure”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Next Steps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Bibliography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>End Notes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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*Numerous volunteers, and visitors to the site on Heritage Open Days.*
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 1  Barratt's Map of 1818
Fig. 2  Bath Corporation Waterworks; Plan of Cleveland Baths, 1964
Fig. 3  Map of Bath of 1852
Fig. 4  C.Godwin Map of 1843
Fig. 5  Detail of Map of 1852
Fig. 6  Large scale Ordnance Survey Map of 1886
Fig. 7  Photograph of the Cleveland Baths from the Bette Hibberd Collection, c 1910
Fig. 8  Ordnance Survey Maps of 1904 and 1932
Fig. 9  Ordnance Survey Map of 1951
Fig.10 Site Plan
Fig.11 North elevation of Georgian crescent
Fig. 12 Western cubicles and Ladies Pool
Fig. 13 Original cast iron range
Fig. 14 Original cast iron hob grate
Fig. 15 South elevation of cottage
Fig. 16 West end of crescent
Fig. 17 South East corner of upper pool

SOURCES

Figs. 1 to 5 from Bath Records Office.
Figs. 6, 8, 9 from the Standing Building Assessment by Peter Davenport.
Fig. 7 from Bathwick, A Forgotten Village. Fig.10 Ferguson Mann.
Photographs by the author.
INTRODUCTION

The Cleveland Baths include the only pool of Georgian origin, with its associated buildings, still in existence; a second pool was added in 1861. Despite changes over the years to the site, much of the original design and fabric still stand as evidence of a specific moment in history and of a single, uninterrupted use over the subsequent years, which has led to its survival.

The Baths were opened in 1815 as a convenient and comfortable adaptation of swimming in the river Avon; river water was diverted to flow through the original single pool, with steps for access, and changing rooms were provided. As a welcome and more civilized alternative to the river or the nearby marl pits, many of the gentlemen of Bath subscribed to finance the opening. Barratt’s map of 1818 [Fig.1] shows the original scheme. The crescent of buildings and the curve of the pool within the crescent still exist, as shown on the plan of 1964 [Fig.2]. Throughout the intervening years, despite physical alterations to the site and economic and social changes, swimming continued virtually uninterrupted until 1984 when the Baths were closed and briefly used as a trout farm. Since 2003 they have been unoccupied, falling into decay, and are now on the local and English Heritage registers of Buildings at Risk.

In 2003 the Baths were put up for sale on the open market. This was the catalyst for the formation of the Cleveland Pools Trust by a group of concerned and committed local community members with the hope of saving the Baths from dereliction, restoring the original use of swimming, and enabling access for everyone, of all ages and abilities, to this important historic resource for heritage, education and leisure.

Under the auspices of the Bath Society an application was made to upgrade the Baths’ listing from Grade II to II*, which was successful in 2006. A detailed Options Appraisal and Business Plan were commissioned by the Cleveland Pools Trust in 2010/11, with the help and support of English Heritage and the Prince’s Regeneration Trust. These documents include a costing framework which supports the Trust’s conviction that the Cleveland Baths has a viable future as a community led project. Bath & North East Somerset Councillors and Officers are offering advice and full co-operation with the Trust’s goals.

This Conservation Statement will look briefly at the historical background and chronology of the Baths, and provide a short description of each element. The different aspects of significance will be assessed, and also the conservation principles essential to guide the development, and the risk factors to be taken into consideration. The importance of the Baths to the local community, and vice versa, will be explored, and policies will be outlined which justify the project and will ensure a sustainable future once it is completed.

The last section will look at the next steps which need to be taken to increase the range and depth of research and knowledge necessary to inform the development of the project, and to enable its long-term viability both in heritage and in economic terms.
Fig. 1  
Barratt's Map of 1818
Fig. 2  Bath Corporation Waterworks Plan of 1964
LOCATION

Grid ref: ST 759658. The Cleveland Baths are 1.4 km to the north east of the centre of Bath, on the south bank of the river Avon, with the canal and railway in close proximity as shown on the map of 1852 [Fig. 3]. The site slopes steeply up to Hampton Row, with areas terraced into the hillside at river bank level for the lower (1815) pool and buildings (this area is liable to occasional flooding), and above flood level for the upper (1861) pool and shelters. The only existing access is via a path which is 1.5 m. at its narrowest, leading down from Hampton Row between houses and garden walls. There is a raised bank between the lower pool and the river, and the remnants of a landing stage, evidence of a former access from the river.

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

Although the Cleveland Baths are now on the edge of the city, their initial conception in 1809 was in the context of the dynamic development of the Bathwick Estate, initially designed by Thomas Baldwin for the Pulteney family. Conceived as a new town for Bath on the eastern side of the Avon following the construction of Pulteney Bridge by Robert Adam in 1774, Great Pulteney Street and its immediately surrounding streets had been built by 1793. The planned continuation of the terraces round all sides of Sydney Gardens, to Upper Great Pulteney Street, as it was to be called [Fig.1] was never realised, although the second section of Sydney Place by John Pinch the Elder was completed in 1808, and at the beginning of the 19th century Sydney Place was a more fashionable address than Royal Crescent. Pinch was also the architect for Hampton Row, built from 1817-19, and one of the original subscribers to the Cleveland Baths.

The road beyond Sydney Gardens, now the A36, was intended to lead to a new turnpike road through Bathford, a plan thwarted by local vested interests. Close to the Baths are Sydney Gardens, one of the pleasure gardens of Bath, which opened in 1795 and were immediately popular, and John Rennie’s Kennet and Avon canal, cut through Sydney Gardens in 1799-1810.

Also to the east of the city, on the other side of the river, the major Grosvenor development by John Eveleigh begun in 1791 was again destined never to reach fulfillment. This included another of Bath’s “Vauxhalls”, on the north river bank, the Grosvenor Gardens which opened in 1792 [Fig.4].

Economic difficulties arising from the Napoleonic wars of 1802-15, the bankruptcies of Baldwin and Eveleigh, and the movement of fashionable society away from Bath to Cheltenham and Brighton during the first quarter of the 19th century, brought an end to the developments on this side of the city. These two ambitious neo-classical schemes for Bath, with the Cleveland Baths at their heart, were thus severely curtailed by wider social and economic factors.
**CHRONOLOGY**

1795  
Sydney Gardens opened.

1801  
The Bathwick Water Act prohibited nude bathing in the river.

1809  
William Bourne was granted a lease of the land of the Cleveland Baths area by the Duke of Cleveland, in partnership with Messrs Austin and Newport. Newport was the builder who constructed the Baths.

1815  
The subscription list opened, to gauge interest and to raise funds.ii  
Cleveland Baths opened.iii

1818  
First depiction of the Baths on Barratt’s map [Fig.1].

1817-19  
Hampton Row built by John Pinch the Elder.

1823  
Bourne gained a further lease on land between the Baths and Hampton Row, at a ground rent of £30.00 per annum on condition that he spent £1,200 building houses on the land; the houses were not built.

1827  
Financial problems, and the bankruptcy of Newport, led to transfer of the Baths for £350.00 to the Reverend Dr. Race Godfrey, on the verbal assurance of the solicitors for the Cleveland Estate that the condition to spend £1,200 on houses would not be enforced. This was later called into question; Newport’s bankruptcy complicated matters, conveyancing to Godfrey was never properly completed and the ensuing Chancery Court case went on until 1871. At the heart of it was the doubt that the Cleveland Baths would be profitable enough to pay the ground rent.

1839  
Brunel’s Great Western Railway reached Bath, and the canal was moved to accommodate it [Fig. 4].

1861  
Documents from the (above) court case describe the Baths :-  
‘A large open Bath 100ft by 50ft with numerous dressing rooms attached. Another large open Bath about 70ft long paved throughout and screened by lofty ashlar walls and with a large dressing room. A private Bath for Ladies with a Perpetual Shower Bath enclosed by walls and two large dressing rooms. The Baths are supplied with water by means of cast iron pipes which pass under the canal. There is a substantial Messuage or Dwelling House for the tenant or Superintendent and the
Fig. 4 C. Godwin Map of 1843
above is let at £70 per annum. A freestone brick cottage or Lodge has been erected at the entrance and is let at £8 per annum. An Ice House is let at £5 per annum.\textsuperscript{iv}

A separate path leading to the Ladies Private Pool can be seen on the map of 1852 [Fig. 5]. All the structures described are shown on the 1886 OS map [Fig.6].

1867

Mr. W. Evans was now in charge of the Baths, possibly as a tenant of Dr. Godfrey. He taught swimming and provided ginger beer and gingerbread; amongst other eccentricities, he would have himself hoisted up to 100ft above the pool to dive into 7ft of water, wearing a tall hat to protect his head.\textsuperscript{v} He was approached in 1867 by the Bathing Place Committee of Bath Corporation, looking for a public swimming bath. Evans was reluctant to allow the Cleveland Baths to be used, as it would be “the means of entirely destroying its prestige” and would “prevent the gentlemen (from) frequenting the Bath” as “the boys would be sure to use soap and flannel”.\textsuperscript{vi}

1869

The Bathing Place Committee took a lease on a site on the east bank of the canal at Darlington Wharf.

1871

Springs rising in the upper pool are mentioned.\textsuperscript{vii}

1875-78

Cleveland Row built.

1886

The OS map shows the pool cut off from the river inlet, with a sluice gate to the outlet [Fig. 6].
1898-99  The Baths closed briefly due to the liquidation of the owners at the time, the Bath College Company of Grosvenor Place.

1900  Bath Corporation’s Waterworks Committee bought the Baths for £100, to replace the Canal bathing place, which had by then been “for many years in a very unsatisfactory condition, with low water levels”.

1901  The Baths opened to the public after some refurbishment, and were, briefly, free. A strict set of rules was put in place to be enforced by a resident Superintendent, who reported to the Waterworks Committee. The first was Samuel Inkerman Bailey, who had been a diver with the Royal Navy. Letters to the Bath Chronicle & Herald of 1904 praise him - ‘I have always found Mr. Bailey at his post, courteous and obliging’ and the Baths ‘I can well remember the old mud baths on the canal, but do not think they can be compared with the Cleveland’.

1910  A photograph of the Baths shows the extension to the lower, main pool, with shelters built to the eastern end, and benches in the original cubicles [Fig. 7].

Fig. 7  Photograph c. 1910

This change is shown by the Ordnance Survey maps of 1904 and 1932 to have taken place between these dates [Fig. 8]. The paving and lining to the upper pool are similar, so presumably both pools were altered at the same time.
Figs. 8 and 9. 
Ordnance Survey Maps of 1904, 1932 and 1951-53
1941 The upper pool was used for immersion baptism by the Jehovah’s Witnesses.

1951 The Ordnance Survey map shows all connection with the river closed [Fig. 9].

1967 The Bath Spa Committee of Bath City Council took over the responsibility for the Baths from the Waterworks Committee. Various alterations were made at about this time; the main pool was given a concrete floor and painted blue, and a semi circular Cascade was built at its east end as part of a new filtration system. The upper pool and shelters were also refurbished and painted.

1978 Despite a petition with over 1,000 signatures against the move, the Baths were closed.

1982 A private company attempted to re-open the Baths, with the grant of a five year lease from the Council at £5 per week; despite spending £8,000 the attempt failed.

1983-84 The Baths re-opened briefly during the closure of the pool at the local Sports Centre.

1984 The Baths closed finally for bathing, and were used for a few years as a trout farm, then as a private residence until 2003.


2012 The buildings are empty and secured with metal shutters over doors and windows. A programme of urgent works to halt decay is about to be implemented by the Cleveland Pools Trust under licence from B&NES, funded by English Heritage.

Events with unknown dates :-

The Ladies Private Pool filled in and given a flat felt roof; the Perpetual Shower Bath discontinued (at some time after 1886).

The wall between the two pools breached and steps put in (probably during the trout farm tenure). Previously, the only access to the lower pool had been through the cottage in the centre of the crescent.
Fig. 10  Site Plan. Ferguson Mann Architects
DESCRIPTION

1. Main Pool
2. Crescent of Buildings
   (i) Central Cottage
   (ii) Cubicle Wings
   (iii) Ladies Pool
3. Upper Pool
   (i) Pool and surround
   (ii) Shelters
4. Boundary and other walls
5. Landscaping

The main elements are indicated on the site plan [Fig. 10].

1. MAIN POOL

41m x 9.17m x 1.8m average depth.
Dating in its curved shape from 1815, it was the first pool to be constructed on the site, originally fed from the river. Extended to the east to its present shape circa 1910, when the whole pool was lined with rendered brick and concrete and edged with terracotta blocks. No connection with the river now exists; the pool is fed with mains water. Concrete slabs pave the area between pool and buildings. There are stone steps into the pool at either end of the curved side, which may be the original ones re-used in different locations.

2. CRESCENT OF BUILDINGS

The whole structure is original, dating from 1815; a central two storey cottage is flanked on either side by wings of six changing cubicles [Fig.11].
There is a taller block and extension to the west, integral to the original build, which housed the Ladies Pool, Perpetual Shower and two large dressing rooms. A further stone extension to the west is set back, and is not part of the original build. [Fig. 12].

Fig. 12 Western cubicles and Ladies Pool

Simply but elegantly designed, and well built of good quality ashlar limestone, the buildings have until recently been well maintained.

(i) Central Cottage

One room deep, front and rear walls curved with the crescent, the cottage has chimney stacks at either gabled end, and a blind window in each end wall. The slate roof, with remnants of lime torching, is original. The north elevation has a central arched opening with a window opening to either side, and three above [Fig. 11]. The existing windows are from the second half of the 20th century. The central archway, through to a lobby on the south side, gave access from the entrance pathway to the main pool. On either side of this passageway is a single room, with three rooms above, now including a bathroom; the original interior layout of the cottage has been altered, and a newly positioned pine staircase dates from mid to late 20th century. A number of details remain which date from the original construction: -

• The ground floor room to the west has a plain stone fire surround containing a small cast iron range [Fig. 13].
• The upper floor room to the west has a cast iron hob grate with a stone surround [Fig. 14].
Fig. 13  Cast iron range in west ground floor room of cottage

Fig. 14  Cast iron hob grate in upper west room in cottage
• The upper floor room to the east has a plain stone surround although it has lost its grate, a simple plaster cornice, timber skirting boards, floorboards, door and architraves.
• The boarded ceiling above the north lobby.

The south elevation has a central door accessed by steps which may be original, a window to its east and three above [Fig.15].

![South Elevation of Cottage](image)

**Fig. 15**

(ii) Cubicle Wings

These have single sloping roofs now covered with corrugated asbestos sheeting. The interiors are of simple ashlar, with an original pennant step to each one, re-laid. The ledged wooden doors (now removed for storage) may be original. A few of the cubicles still have wooden benches against the walls and coat hook fittings, probably Edwardian.

(iii) Ladies Pool

Abutting the western end of the cubicles is a taller block divided by an E-W wall, having a gabled roof still covered by original slates, and evidence of a lath and plaster ceiling. This may have housed the “two large dressing rooms”, since the floor level is raised above that of the original pool. The previously open single storey block adjoining contained the private Ladies Pool and the
“Perpetual Shower Bath” [Fig. 12]. The further, set-back stone structure, not integral to the original build [Fig.16] has a hearth and the remnants of a chimney to the north west corner.

The pool has been filled in and roofed over, and doors and windows have been cut into the elevations facing the pool. At the extreme western end of this sequence of buildings is a stone and timber structure housing WC cubicles, history as yet unknown.

3. UPPER POOL

(i) The Pool

Rectangular; 15m x 6m x 1m average depth. The pool was described in the 1861 documents as considerably longer than it has ever been mapped. This may have been a simple error, or perhaps an exaggeration of its size to increase its apparent value with regard to payment of the ground rent. This pool is likely to have been originally fed by natural springs. Constructed in the same manner as the main pool, with rendered brick walls and concrete floor, edged with terracotta blocks, the surround is concrete, cast with an impressed finish.
(ii) Upper Pool Shelters

The shelters along the southern and eastern side of the upper pool are simple structures, built with open fronts, now roofed with corrugated asbestos. The use of red brick and cast iron piers would seem to date their origins to the early 20th century. There is an ashlar structure from an earlier date, possibly to the original build, in the south eastern corner; the eastern shelter is against the boundary wall and is still open fronted [Fig.17].

![Fig. 17](South East corner, upper pool.)

The southern shelter has a bench along the back wall, probably from its original date, and late 20th century cladding. One of its most recent uses was as an aviary.

4. LANDSCAPING

There are mature trees along the river bank to the north of the site, and to the south and west. To the east the aspect is open, over gardens. The slopes around the upper pool are grassed. There is now much encroaching vegetation, including weed trees, across the whole site.

5. BOUNDARY and DIVIDING WALLS

The boundary wall to the east is in coursed rubble stone, with rebuilding or refurbishment breaks along its length. The wall between the two pools is of ashlar blocks, possibly re-used from an earlier construction. Other walls, terraces and steps are a mixture of brick and stone, with concrete and render.
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Historically, the Cleveland Baths are the oldest surviving public swimming pools in the country; the next oldest, at Clifton in Bristol, date from 1850. The Baths are within the city of Bath, designated a World Heritage Site; they date from one of its periods of greatest significance, the Georgian period, and share the main reason for the city’s existence, the opportunity to bathe in natural waters. When the Baths opened in 1815, they were not only close to the Grade II listed Sydney Gardens (1795) but also to Grosvenor Gardens (1792) which offered rowing boats on the river, amongst other amusements. Together with these pleasure gardens, the Cleveland Baths are testament to the social habits of the Georgians, with their love of outdoor socializing, exercise, and public entertainment. Close to the dynamic of the Kennet and Avon canal (1799-1810) they also stand as integral evidence of the ambitious schemes of town planning to the east of the city which were never fully realised, and which are an important part of Bath’s history.

Architecturally, the site makes an extraordinarily complete statement. The original footprint is virtually intact, and any changes have not materially affected the ability of the site to demonstrate its original and continuing purpose, with the curve of the buildings echoing the curve of the first pool which was created by simply diverting water from the river. The main building, with the elegant simplicity of a tiny Georgian crescent, stands unaltered in its essential fabric and proportions with a number of original details adding to its architectural interest. Astylar, with perfect proportions and careful detailing such as the blind windows at either end of the cottage, some of the additions such as the Edwardian fittings add to the story of the building’s development through time.

The setting of the Baths retains a natural simplicity, with trees encouraged to grow and mature from the start. This is typical of its date, when the popularity of the romantic landscape was at its height, between the two formalities of clipped parterres and Victorian bedding.

Aesthetically, the site has a satisfyingly simple integrity, lying quietly beside the river. Based on the premise of an uncomplicated pleasure, that of swimming in the open air on a warm day, it provides just what is needed, no more and no less; somewhere private to change, water to swim in, grass to sit on, and trees for shade. The breath-taking simplicity of the buildings, where form follows function, matches perfectly the simplicity of the pleasure and of the setting. The high value attached to the experience of swimming outdoors in safety and in beautiful natural surroundings accounts for the longevity of the Cleveland Baths existence.

Socially, the Baths tell a fascinating story of the history of public bathing, particularly important because of the long continuity of swimming here. The segregation of the sexes, evidenced by the private Ladies’ Pool with separate entrance, is in marked contrast to the mixed bathing and reports of
scandalous conduct in the Cross Bath in the city centre in the previous century.\textsuperscript{a} The original funding of the Cleveland Baths by private subscription from the wealthy, was apparently easily obtained, judging by the opening of the Baths in the same year that the subscription list was started. Its subsequent history mirrors prevailing social conditions – for example, the remarks made by Mr. Evans, when explaining his reluctance to allow the Baths to be used for public bathing, are evidence of the difficulties for the poor of simply keeping clean in the mid 19\textsuperscript{th} century. Mixed bathing in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century is well remembered; generations of Bathonians learnt to swim in the pools, and enjoyed visiting with their families and friends. (These memories are being recorded in an Oral History project).

The Baths provided a valuable amenity then, and would still do so today. There was a huge protest when the Baths closed, and initial support for the Cleveland Pools Trust is still growing.

The site embodies much of the significance and demonstrates several of the Outstanding Universal Values for which Bath was inscribed as a World Heritage Site in 1987, notably Georgian architecture, town planning, landscaping and social history. The concept of Bath’s design in the 18\textsuperscript{th} century, where neo-classical architectural set-pieces such as crescents harmonized with the green landscape to reflect a Picturesque movement aestheticism, is here demonstrated in miniature perfection. The creation of the Cleveland Baths epitomized the aspirations and social habits of the fashionable spa culture that inspired the city. This resonance with Bath’s status as a World Heritage Site takes the importance of the Baths to the level of both national and international significance.

\textbf{VULNERABILITIES}

1. The Immediate Future

Closed, unoccupied and purposeless, the site is suffering from consequent deterioration. The buildings, close to the river and terraced into a hillside which has historically contained springs, are vulnerable to damp, exacerbated by encroaching vegetation and lack of maintenance which has led to failed rainwater goods. The sheet roofing has missing sections leading to the breakdown of masonry, and the slate roofs are also in need of attention. There are some open joints in the chimneys and other stonework. The cottage is affected by both penetrating and rising damp, with rot evident in joist ends, and some stone decay. There is asbestos present in the corrugated roofs and elsewhere. The pools, although fundamentally sound, are also in need of maintenance. Some of these immediate concerns are currently being addressed by a programme of urgent works, funded by English Heritage. However, longer term solutions such as improved drainage in and around the buildings will need to be put in place.
2. The Longer Term

One of the site’s main vulnerabilities lies in its extreme simplicity of design and construction, evidence of both its origins and its history. Any form of new build will need to be very carefully planned in order not to jeopardize this fragile and unassuming charm, by detracting from the essential relationship between building, pool and river. The crescent of buildings possesses the integrity and dignity of a building with a single and specific purpose, without added ornamentation, and only the quality of its build and grace of its proportions to give it architectural strength. Luxurious in its day, offering clean, private changing cubicles protected from the weather and comfortable accommodation for a supervisor, the quality of these early facilities will need to be carefully considered against today’s more demanding standards in order not to compromise the site’s integrity.

The site has a number of constraints:-
• Steeply sloping; the only flat areas are around the pools and buildings.
• Periodic flooding at lower levels is a liability.
• Surrounded on three sides by gardens, the relationship with immediate neighbours will need to be considered at all times.
• Sole access from the landward side is via a steep narrow path.
• The Baths are at some distance from the city centre, with little available parking in a congested residential area.

The prevailing view is that safeguarding the future of the Baths can best be achieved by restoring the original Georgian pool for swimming and by opening up public access to the site as an important heritage asset and valuable health and educational resource.

However, the planning of this project will need to be balanced by awareness of an overarching requirement to protect the site for the benefit of future generations, the fulfillment of whose possible needs and desires should not be compromised by current development.

CONSERVATION PRINCIPLES

It is difficult to conceive of any meaningful future for the Cleveland Baths without the restoration of their original purpose, and policies are being developed with this in mind, in order to protect both the fabric of the site and its history. The aim of the Cleveland Pools Trust is the sensitive conservation of the whole site, including the historic buildings and the original pool; the essential simplicity which has survived unscathed is to be preserved, with the provision of essential services kept low-key and unobtrusive.

Established principles of “conserving as found” and with “minimum intervention” can with good effect be applied to the Georgian buildings with
their sound underlying structure. The desire for modern comforts will be balanced with the necessity to retain original intent and authenticity. The buildings will be conserved and repaired as they stand, preserving all existing historic features, and demonstrating original plan and purpose by retaining the original functions of changing cubicles and caretaker’s accommodation. The Ladies’ Pool area will provide a simple space for heritage and educational activities. Where repair is necessary, like-for-like materials appropriate to the original fabric will be used. Later additions and alterations will be judged for their value in both aesthetic and historic terms. Damaging elements will be carefully removed; those of practical use, or which contribute to the continuing structural or social story, may be retained.

All decisions will be informed by detailed investigation, assessment and recording of all elements as part of the preparation of a Conservation Management Plan. Periods of significant development will be respected, and speculative historical reconstruction will not be attempted.

The Georgian pool, to be restored for swimming with naturally treated water and heated in the most environmentally responsible manner possible, will retain its original footprint and underlying archaeology. The Victorian pool will be “mothballed” and covered over to provide a flat area for occasional events, judged essential for the site’s economic sustainability.

The site will be cleared of scrub and weeds, re-planted as necessary, and maintained as the simple natural setting for the pools which it has always been.

As already discussed, care must be taken that the proposed new build, for a small café (also considered vital for the economic viability of the site) and to house pool equipment above flood level, should not detract from the site’s aesthetic qualities or compromise the integrity of its perceived completeness. This will require a full Heritage Impact Assessment which will consider:

- A fully researched understanding of what is important.
- Appropriate materials, environmentally and aesthetically.
- Location, scale and massing in relation to the historic buildings.
- Justification and mitigation.

**ARCHAEOLOGY**

Underlying the site will be relics of its previous phases; proposed interventions should neither preclude nor compromise their possible further investigation or interpretation, for the sake of their value to future generations. Evidence might include the original connections to the river with the later sluice gate, the Ladies Pool with its Perpetual Shower Bath, and the water supply referred to in 1861, as being ‘brought by cast iron pipes under the canal’. It is anticipated that an archaeologist will hold a watching brief during development.
COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

The value of the Baths to the local community since it opened is clearly demonstrated by its many years of continued use; the importance of the community’s participation in caring for that which is valued collectively will be vital to the Baths’ future. Beneficial for both enjoyment and social cohesion, as well as for the protection of heritage, this involvement will be economically crucial. Many of the open-air swimming pools described in Janet Smith’s book ‘Liquid Assets’ survive only because of initial vigorous campaigning and continuing support from local groups. The Cleveland Baths already has an organised and effective group in the Cleveland Pools Trustees. Through their efforts the Feasibility Study, Options Appraisal and Business Plan have been produced, the listing status of the Baths upgraded, and many enthusiastic volunteers with a range of talents and capabilities recruited. The future of the project is dependent on volunteer input in all manner of ways; there is no reason to suppose that the existing and proven enthusiasm will not be sustained through the hard work and fund-raising involved in restoring the Baths, and beyond, to the enjoyment of using and caring for them when open again. The vision for the future is of a valued and unique heritage asset and resource for both education and health, run by and for the local community for the benefit of Bathonians and visitors to the city alike.

The pleasure of bathing in sustainably heated and naturally treated water, surrounded by grass and trees, the opportunity for exercise in the fresh air, for learning to swim, and the existence of a safe alternative to the risky current practice of swimming in the river or local gravel pits will all benefit the local community. Intended through carefully controlled pricing to be accessible to all ages and abilities, this will be the only facility of its kind in Bath, with outdoor swimming in a natural setting. Offering not only swimming and simple refreshments, but also a wealth of educational and heritage awareness opportunities, it is envisaged that those who come to swim will be drawn in by the embodied history of the site (as well as more overt interpretation) to explore the romance of the past and to become aware of the fascination of our collective heritage. Conversely, those who become familiar with the site through visiting for exhibitions and historic talks, may be tempted to don a swimming costume and take some healthy exercise.

POLICIES

EDUCATION

This is already embedded in the development of the project, and links which have been established with local educational providers will be extended as further opportunities arise. Students and tutors at Bath Spa and Bath Universities are involved in the Oral History project and in surveys on swimming and heritage education; further projects will be added, and other Universities drawn in. The award-winning students of stone-masonry at the
City of Bath College are looking forward to assisting local specialist firms (with whom they already have a practical working relationship) on aspects of the Baths’ conservation. The College also has a media department, which is to be invited to film and record the project as it develops.

When the Cleveland Baths are open again, there are a number of undergraduate and post-graduate degrees offered by local universities in the fields of heritage, history, science and architecture which could benefit from an ongoing relationship with the site, with all its varied areas of interest.

Schools are being contacted, and also historical societies, tourist groups and organisations such as U3A, in order to plan and offer formal and informal learning opportunities for all ages. These opportunities will take advantage of the attributes of the site as a primary educational resource with a variety of aspects, from natural history to the social history of Bath, and from the story of public swimming to the economic effects of warfare.

The unique opportunity to include swimming lessons in a heritage setting, in a city surrounded by water and with a recent history of occasional drownings, will also be explored, and indeed the Life Saving Club at Bath University has already expressed an interest in using the Baths for training purposes.

**HERITAGE**

Quite apart from any activities which will take place within the Cleveland Baths, the site is an important heritage destination in its own right; the principles of careful conservation outlined above will retain the essential character of the site in order to provide an authentic experience. Currently closed entirely to the public, an unacceptable situation for an historic site of such significance, an opening regime to enable full access to the site for all ages and abilities is part of the vision for the future. Unobtrusive interpretation, helpful information by written and illustrative material and knowledgeable guides, “hands-on” experiences such as providing a dressing-up box for children, are all avenues to be explored. A small permanent exhibition, augmented by a programme of regular talks both on and off site on relevant themes, will assist access to the history and significant elements of the Baths.

Publicity campaigns will need to be organised to promote awareness of the Baths amongst local people and visitors alike. Co-operation with local attractions and museums, for example the nearby Boating Station and the Holburne Museum, will be mutually beneficial. Joint events on subjects of common heritage could be arranged, and possibly multi-ticketing systems.

**LEISURE**

The recent rise in popularity of “wild swimming” resonates with plans for the Cleveland Baths, as does the current emphasis on the proven health-giving benefits of outdoor exercise. Children will have their own safe splash pool.
As well as swimming and other water sports such as scuba diving, canoeing and triathlon training, the secluded site will lend itself to physical activities such as yoga and tai chi, and also painting and photography classes.

Once restored, the attractive surroundings of the Baths will lend themselves to all manner of social events such as chamber concerts and small weddings, utilizing the space provided by the covered upper pool, adjacent to the proposed café. These occasions, whilst important for economic viability, will need to be balanced against the need for access by the general public, and consideration for neighbours in the surrounding houses.

A small café will provide for day-to-day catering, and it is anticipated that there may be visitors who simply come for a cup of tea, to meet their friends, or to read a book in pleasant surroundings. Entrance fees will need to be scaled to recognize many different uses of the site; annual subscriptions, season tickets, or a Friends’ scheme, could reward regular support, encourage repeat visits, and extend the season beyond swimming weather.

ACCESS

For future public use, access needs to be improved. The installation of a floating landing stage initially for small craft, but possibly in the future for larger river boats, will enable access by river. The gradient of the path from Hampton Row will be improved, handrails and non-slip surfaces introduced, and a motorized buggy for the less able will be available. The visually impaired can be guided by hand rail “routes”. Access between levels will be provided by a lift. Informal discussion with the Mineral Water Hospital has ascertained that the pool temperature is unlikely to be sufficiently warm for hydrotherapy, so full disabled access to bathing is for future consideration.

A transport plan will be produced as part of the development process, for walking, cycling, access by river, by bus etc. The National Trust will be consulted, since Prior Park Garden operates successfully without parking. Publicity leaflets could contain maps, bus and boat timetables. Installation of waymarkers may be possible, and mobile ‘phone technology utilized.

NEXT STEPS

- Explore and expand activity plans for education, heritage access, and swimming and leisure pursuits, including surveys as relevant.
- Prepare a full Conservation Management Plan including detailed building analysis, recording, and assessment of significance.
- Implement the Fund Raising Strategy.
- Increase community and volunteer participation.
- Organise events at the Baths to raise awareness and gain support.
- Research further historic sources and record findings in more detail.
- Quantify the Oral History project.
- Consult further with existing Lidos to benefit from their practical experience.
- Prepare a clear and detailed proposal for the development to discuss with Conservation Officers and architects.

The Cleveland Pools Trust, in partnership with Bath and North East Somerset Council, and with the support of English Heritage, the Prince’s Regeneration Trust, and a band of skilled and enthusiastic volunteers, has the human resources in place to pursue their campaign to re-open the Cleveland Baths.

The framework provided by the existing research documentation shows that the project can have a feasible economic future whilst still retaining the historic significance and conserving the valuable and fragile heritage of the site.

There is much still to do by way of fund raising and preparation before work can begin, but the Trust has the will and support to make their plans succeed, while there is still time to rescue this unique historical treasure for the people of Bath and of the wider world.
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End notes

i Grade II* Listing; Summary of Importance, 30th January 2008.
'The Cleveland Baths, dating from 1815, are believed to be the oldest surviving public outdoor swimming pools in England. Their layout, in the shape of a miniature Georgian Crescent, and place within the (social) history of outdoor swimming, make them unique both within the Bath World Heritage site and on national level. They are of particular interest as an expression of the continuing importance of ‘bathing’ at Bath and as one of only a small number of pre-Victorian recreational/sporting buildings to survive nationally. As such the Cleveland Baths deserve to be included on the List at Grade II*.

ii Bath Weekly Chronicle, July 20th 1815.
'The public are informed, that a PIECE of GROUND is secured near the Marl-Pits, for the purpose of forming PLEASURE BATHS and erecting Apartments for dressing &c. The object in view is to provide a place in connection with the River, where those who swim and those who do not, will be alike accommodated. - As the completion of these plans will depend on the first Subscriptions, those gentlemen who wish to encourage it are requested to insert their names, in a book opened for the purpose, at Messrs. James Evill and Son’s, and Messrs. Bourne and Austin’s, Market Place, and at the Kingston Pump-Room. No money will be taken, until the sense of the public be known; an if sufficient names be entered to discharge the first expenses, those persons who insert their names will then be called on, and a plan submitted to their approval'.

iii R. Mainwaring, Annals of Bath 1800 - 1830. Feasibility Study. 1815
' The Pleasure Baths in the vicinity of Sydney Gardens were this year erected, and have proved in each succeeding one, a high source of gratification to those who delight in the healthful recreation of bathing and swimming. The ground, where they now are, was contiguous to some marl pits (an unprofitable waste piece of land), and admirably designed to form a connection with the river, which sends a running stream constantly through the baths. They have been much improved of late years, are nearly shut out from public view, and will soon be entirely so, by the continued growth of trees which will surround them'.

iv 1861 Court Case Documents. Bath Records Office.

v Bath Chronicle, August 24th 1957.
Quoting correspondence in the Chronicle from the 1930’s. Bath Records Office.

vi Draft Minutes of the Bathing Place Committee Meeting on August 23rd 1867.
Bath Records Office.


ix Neale (1981), p.17, quotes from a contemporary publication, that, at the Cross Bath, were “perform’d all the wanton dalliances imaginable"