UK’s oldest open-air pools to be restored to their



Cleveland Pools will reopen to the public in 2021 The Wessex Water Historical Archives

The oldest surviving open-air swimming baths in the UK are set to be fully restored and reopened to the public, thanks to a grant from the National Lottery.

The Grade II* listed Cleveland Pools, a 200-year-old Georgian lido in the historic city of Bath, has secured funding of £4.7million to enable restoration to begin.

Bath's second iconic crescent

Built in the shape of a miniature crescent, referencing Bath’s renowned architecture, the site includes two bathing pools, the original changing rooms and a private ladies pool. First opened in 1815 following the Bathwick Water Act which prohibited nude bathing in the river, the site has been closed since 1984. It has since deteriorated and was placed on English Heritage’s Heritage at Risk register.

The project will conserve the Georgian features and upgrade the facilities to allow for year-round swimming and other activities. The pools will be naturally treated and heated using the latest technology, and when complete, there will be a 25-metre swimming pool, children’s splash area, pavilion and café for the public to enjoy.

The project will also bring the historic stories of the Pools to life, including that of the eccentric swimming teacher Captain Evans who lived on the site with his pet baboon and would entertain visitors by being hoisted 100ft into the air and diving into the pool wearing a top hat to cushion his entry.

The grant will cover a significant amount of the £5.7m costs for the entirety of the restoration project. The Trust, having already raised £800,000, will now secure the remaining funds.

Ros Kerslake, Chief Executive of the Heritage Fund at the time, said: “We are delighted that the National Lottery are able to support this outstanding project which will see this unique Grade II* lido restored and re-opened so that the community can enjoy access to its open air pools in a spectacular heritage setting. It seems particularly appropriate as the pool was originally funded in Georgian times by public subscription.”

Endorsed by a champion

Olympic swimmer Sharron Davies MBE, who has been a long-time supporter and patron for the project, said of the success: “I am absolutely thrilled that the long campaign to restore Cleveland Pools has been awarded support by the Heritage Lottery Fund. I have watched the Trust work tirelessly for a long time in their attempt to save this historic riverside venue, and reviving it for swimming and as an heritage site will bring huge joy to the community and visitors.

"Swimming is a great way of keeping active in a time where many of us spend the day sat in front of a computer, and being outdoors in a natural landscape brings something special to the experience. I think the restored pools will be the new jewel in Bath's crown and I hope to be one of the first to swim there when they reopen.”

Paul Simons, Chair of The Cleveland Pools Trust trustees, said: “After 14 years hard work the Trust’s efforts have finally succeeded in guaranteeing the future of this unique place and community asset. The Trust is most grateful to the Heritage Lottery Fund for its support and belief in the scheme. Our thanks also go to the many hundreds of volunteers who have worked tirelessly to get us to this point, and the thousands of others who have expressed their support for the scheme over the years.”

A community project

Community group The Cleveland Pools Trust have been working since 2003 to enable the restoration of the Georgian lido and bring it back into use. The Trust has always been encouraged by the families and children on the Bathwick estate and wider area who are enthusiastic to see the revival of this unique swimming pool. The Trust is delighted to be able to continue to work with residents who see the benefit of this facility within their own community.

As landowner, Bath & North East Somerset Council has worked closely with the Trust, supporting it with a limited amount of grant funding and backing the Trust’s restoration scheme and bid for the National Lottery grant.

Councillor Paul Myers, cabinet member for Economic and Community Regeneration said: “This is excellent news from the Heritage Lottery Fund and it means the Trust can now start work to bring the site back into use. As a council we have worked with the Trust and have supported the commitment of local people who have secured the future of a valuable city asset.”