

1452 – Aberdeen Swimming Academy Pool Planning Statement



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Foreword

This planning statement has been composed in conjunction with NPF4 Planning Policy Guidelines and Aberdeen City Council's LDP 2023 with regards to pre-application enquiry feedback dated August 2023 – Reference 230865/PREAPP.

Context

The site is in the Bridge of Don area in Aberdeen and is part of a wider industrial estate. The building, which has been vacant for a few years, is the largest of a row of industrial units in a self-contained secure site with fenced perimeter and gated frontage. The site has a mixture of shared and dedicated parking, of which the former RSL Motors Garage holds a substantial area of control over, providing 14 dedicated spaces. In July 2023 neighbouring property unit 2 received planning consent for a change of use application from class 4 (business) to class 11 (assembly and leisure), which has signified a clear change in the use patterns of industrial estates within the wider city of Aberdeen, which in recent years has seen several vacant units left underutilised or unoccupied.

Our client, Aberdeen Swimming Academy, seeks to broaden the network of swimming pools in which his business operates within. Aberdeen Swimming Academy currently operates on a rental basis with various private pools around Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, which often dictates the level of reliability in service in which they can provide. On that basis ASA wishes to run its own bespoke venue suited to the needs of its clients and staff to sustain a high level of reliability to provide the best private swimming tuition possible.

Aberdeen Swimming Academy is a multi-faceted swim school operating in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire. The business offers safe, fun, and progressive group and private swimming lessons to children from the ages of 3 through to adults. Alongside this, it offers RLSS and STA regulated training courses. The business was established in 2021 after owner, Joel Valentine, identified a gap in the market for top quality private / group swimming lessons focusing on small class sizes and a focus on wider community outreach initiatives in addition to customer centricity at the core of the business. Across ASA's network, the swimming academy provides tuition for over 1000 swimmers every week. As Aberdeen Swimming Academy expands and looks to the future, self-reliance in favour of independent venues such as hotels / gyms is part of ASA's wider business model for success in educating the next generation critical life-long skills.

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Key Community Initiatives

- RLSS Lifeguard, STA Aquatic Teaching, NRASTC Lifesaving Qualifications Training Programs. Spending £10,000 on upskilling their team.
- Community based Assistant employment for young people to develop their wider skills and provide pathways to employment within the industry.
- Carbon Offset Scheme – planting trees in third world countries to protect habitat, communities and provide employment. So far, 2000 trees have been planted.
- Charity fundraising in 2023 for Charlie House.
- Water safety talks in local schools.
- Working with local charities to help provide access to swimming tuition for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The Proposal

The proposal is to change the use class of the property from Class 4/ 5 Business / General Industrial) to Class 11 (Assembly & Leisure). On that basis, the proposal is to retrofit a vacant garage previously known as RSL Motors into a facility whereby Aberdeen Swimming Academy can provide swimming tuition for toddlers, children, and adults. This would propose and involve the removal of the existing confined internal layout and construction of new spatial functions within. This includes a 15x9m modular above ground pool with proprietary above ground services, sanitary and changing facilities attached. In addition to the pool, the internal layout would include a much more spacious arrangement of reception areas, a viewing gallery, staff training room and kitchenette alongside necessary amenities such as toilets and showers. The proposal would be separated into two key defining areas: wet and dry. This separation will allow for complete containment of heat and moisture exhausted from the pool to be utilised and retained through mechanical extraction to minimise heat loss / energy consumption, in addition to providing protection for the existing structure. As a general principle, the proposal will transform the existing industrial unit into a highly efficient pool operation through creating an internal insulation envelope, a building within a building. This strategy ensures that the internal works can be uplifted, stored, and relocated if required with minimal impact to the remaining building.

Externally, the proposal seeks to tidy the appearance of the existing unit – which due to its vacancy over previous years has become unsightly. The proposed works would include removal of existing signage, repainting of the front elevation and installation of new signage reflective of the applicant's brand. The parking arrangement would remain largely untouched, however the change of use application to class 11 would dictate an increased requirement of parking of 21 spaces. Additional spaces would be painted and provided within the boundary of the unit, whilst retaining access for other neighbouring units. The client has expressed an interest in providing cycle/storage on site, though the location for this would have to be determined.

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Planning Policy

NPF4

As part of the latest guidance and pre application advice, the following NPF4 Policies have been addressed as part of this planning application.

- Policy 1 (Tackling the Climate and Nature Crises)
- Policy 3 (Biodiversity)
- Policy 9 (Brownfield, Vacant and Derelict Land and Empty Buildings)
- Policy 13 (Sustainable Transport)
- Policy 15 (Local Living and 20 Minute Neighbourhoods)
- Policy 26 (Business and Industry)
- Policy 27 (City, Town, Local and Commercial Centres)

Aberdeen Local Development Plan (2023)

- Policy B1 (Business and Industrial Land)
- Policy T2 (Sustainable Transport)
- Policy T3 (Parking)
- Policy WB3 (Noise)

NPF4 Policy 1 – Tackling the Climate and Nature Crisis)

-The proposal makes use of an existing building on a brownfield site that has been vacant for several years and as such is conserving a key asset within Bridge of Don's complex of mixed use industrial / business zone. The positioning of the proposal is such that it is adjoined by substantial residential areas which could benefit from the services Aberdeen Swimming Academy provides, a localised basis which could reinforce a sense of community in the area. The fabric of the building is to remain unchanged, though the interior 'shell' formed by the proposal would be highly insulated and airtight, minimising heat loss and subsequent energy wastage. Additionally, the pool is to be heated using an inverted heat pump, drawing heat from outside temperatures to produce reliable warmth for the pool. Preventing heat loss and taking advantage of sustainable heat sources are not only a critical factor to ensure that the operation is conscious of the climate and nature crisis, but economically viable.

NPF4 Policy 3 (Biodiversity)

-The proposal seeks to make no changes to the existing biodiversity of the site. The complex in which the site sits is surrounded by green buffers, small woods and various planting measures. The dedicated parking spaces along the site boundary also feature mature climbing plants, which help bring greenery into the site. It is expected that the site owners employ factors which deal with the vegetation and surrounding landscape of the enclosed area.

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NPF₄ Policy 9 (Brownfield, Vacant and Derelict Land and Empty Buildings)

- Similarly, to points raised in Policy 1 (Tackling the Climate and Nature Crisis), the proposal would see occupation of a business / industrial unit for a fixed period of 15 years. Not only would this provide steady employment opportunities for young people nearby, but it would also help revitalise an area seeing a progressive shift in mixed use occupancy in former industrial areas – Unit 02 within the same development is precedent this shift, receiving change of use planning consent to launch a boxing gym. This shift can be found in industrial estates all over Aberdeen and is reflective of Oil and Gas organisations looking towards Just Transition Energy Zones in the outer city. The proposal inherently minimises external or fabric disruption, ensuring that the building can be re-used at the end of the lease agreement with the site owners – which would allow the building’s lifecycle to continue as part of a wider circular economy.

NPF₄ Policy 13 (Sustainable Transport)

- The site is served by First Buses’ No.2 route, which provides public transportation to and from the area on average of every 20 minutes. The number two bus is one of the most prominent routes in Aberdeen, connecting Ashwood in Bridge of Don to Robert Gordon University in the South of the city. Within an area of 200 metres there are 4 bus stops, two southbound and two north bound. Most of Aberdeen Swimming Academy’s customers do not travel by public transportation, however, should the proposal gain consent – a venue in the heart of a residential neighbourhood may encourage clients to use alternative methods of transportation. Despite this, car sharing is often utilised by parents of children who attend swimming lessons as a means of convenience – this is a principal which could be actively incentivised by the business. The site is also afforded by areas which could be utilised for cycle storage, which would encourage staff members to cycle rather than use their cars. The extremely limited availability of swimming lessons across public and private organisations does however dictate an increased reliance on cars being utilised as a primary means of transportation. Often, parents must travel quite some distance to ensure their children have access to swimming tuition, which is onerous to mitigate – an additional venue would allow a more even distribution of swimmers relative to their closest ASA centre.

NPF₄ Policy 15 (Local Living and 20 Minute Neighbourhoods)

- The proposal is surrounded on three sides by residential neighbourhoods and two schools with a public park immediately opposite, an approval would provide residents with the amenity of swimming tuition for their children at a convenient distance that does not require transportation. Aberdeen Swimming Academy also prides itself on its Youth Training Scheme, which provides training opportunities and employment for local people. This training scheme provides them with qualifications,

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development of skills and extended knowledge beyond academic studies. ASA fully funds training and qualifications with guaranteed employment for young people. A venue at Scotstown Road would offer young people in the local vicinity opportunities to develop their own skills whilst contribute to the education of a lifelong, necessary abilities.

NPF₄ Policy 26 (Business and Industry)

- Industrial sites across Aberdeen are seeing an increasing number of vacant units and as a result, existing landowners and prospective occupants are looking to find new ways in which to use existing buildings. Many of these large portal frame metal units were once used as warehouses or storage facilities and are now being transformed through use class changes into sports facilities, martial arts centres, or dance schools. The re-use of these buildings is providing much needed amenity to areas which would otherwise would not have these benefits. Aberdeen Swimming Academy having premises within the BoD area would contribute to compact urban growth, local living and provide balance to the development of the surrounding area.

NPF₄ Policy 27 (City, Town, Local and Commercial Centres)

- Several industrial / business units were investigated prior to making this application, considering town centre first approaches. Many of the units investigated were not suitable for purpose – typical evaluations for exclusion include:
 - Lack of required square meterage to fit all functions required to run an effective operation without compromise on quality of space.
 - Rent rates too high and not economically viable closer to the city centre.
 - Landowners / Landlords disinterested in Aberdeen Swimming Academy's venture or viewed as obscure.
 - Accessibility / lack of parking provision
 - Neighbouring properties too densely populated w2ith heavy industry causing safety concerns.
 - Indirect routes of travel / lack of transportation links.
 - High cost within units to retrofit / refurbish.
- Despite these factors contributing to the exclusion of many potential units, a unit was found which our client felt as though could be a viable option. As a result, we lodged a pre-application enquiry in relation to a unit in Murcar Industrial Estate (Reference 230714/PREAPP). This site was unsuitable but informed in our client's decision making in finding an alternative location. A second pre-application enquiry was lodged in relation to the proposed site at Scotstown Road, whereby feedback was positive and gave good indication as to the issues which would need addressing as part of an application.

ACC LDP 2023 Policy B1 (Business and Industrial Land)

- The proposal seeks to change the use of the unit to class 11 – assembly & leisure, this will diversify the local area and provide much needed amenity without hindering the ability for neighbouring businesses and industries to sustain their use. This would be achieved by preliminary operational times of between 15:00 to 20:00 on weekdays, and 09:00-18:00 at weekends. This would allow for parents to maximise pool time with minimal overlap / disruption to the neighbours where they would otherwise be closing or closed. The activities within the site are shielded by natural green boundaries on all sides as Scotstown Road approaches the arterial Parkway.

ACC ADLP 2023 Policy T2 (Sustainable Transport)

- The nature of the proposal retrofitting an existing industrial unit means that there are constraints beyond reasonable control of the client in which cannot be met within Policy T2, despite this, as highlighted within the transportation statement – there is evidence to suggest that the grass verge where the pathway ends, is still used by foot traffic and bikes as a means of gaining access to the site or beyond. Despite pathways not being provided directly to site, there are multiple methods of sustainable transportation available to clients of the swimming academy. Customers may choose to utilise the regular bus stops located within 200 metres of the site, connecting the north of Aberdeen to the south. They may also gain access from any number of the key nodes on the opposite side of Scotstown Road, where the park connects neighbourhoods with green space along the perimeter of the Parkway. Staff or parents may choose to car-share, which has proved popular for working families that may have different working patterns / shifts but still want to be able to provide swimming tuition for their children. There are options for alternatives modes of transport, however, as stated in the transportation statement – parents typically travel far and wide to be able to gain access to swimming tuition which is largely oversubscribed amongst other providers, and they utilise their cars for convenience, reliability, and safety.

ACC ADLP 2023 Policy T3 (Parking)

- The proposed use class, 11, would require an increase in parking provision from 13 to 21 – based on the notion of 1 parking space per 22Sqm. On that basis, the proposed developed floor area is 459m² which dictates 21 spaces required. Our client has worked with the site owners to maximise parking without disruption to the other units and the proposed has achieved 21 spaces as required. This will ensure that policy T3 is met, satisfying the parking requirements of the proposed use class, and comfortably accommodating clients, staff and visitors.

ACC ADLP 2023 Policy WB3 (Noise)

- To address Aberdeen City Council's policy on noise within developments, a noise assessment has been undertaken by Grosle Environmental Services which highlights key areas of concern and how they might be mitigated. As part of the study, the following queries were raised in relation to the proposed application:

01. Heating Method – Air Source Heat Pump

- To utilise sustainable methods of heat production for the pool, the proposal would use a 60KW Inverted Air Source Heat Pump. This would be externally mounted and kept adjacent to the plant room, away from general users of the building.

02. Building Fabric – Existing & Inner Shell

- Existing building is currently concrete block to height of approx. 2 metres, thereafter mineral wool insulated metal panels for walls & ceilings supported as part of a steel portal frame. In our proposal, the existing building material will remain untouched as part of letting agreement. However, the proposed internal refurbishment will form an insulated envelope within the existing building consisting of primary timber frame insulated between studs – polyurethane or similar. The pool will be an above ground pool, constructed of a steel modular frame and lined with waterproof membrane. Internal Surfaces of wet areas will be rubber floor mats & wet wall panelling. An insulated suspended ceiling system is to be formed above the pool area, keeping heat and moisture locked into wet areas where ventilation will extract excess.

03. Operational Opening Times – Weekdays / Weekends

- The proposed pool is to have different operating times during the week as opposed to the weekend. This is to maximise use of the pool for clients and minimise disruption to neighbouring properties during key business hours.

During the week, operational hours of the proposed pool would be between 15:00 – 20:00 subject to conditions attached to an approved application. During the weekends and outwith normal business operating hours of the neighbours, the operational times would be between 09:00 – 18:00.

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Conclusion

This report has sought to address the recommended policies raised during the pre-application enquiry process and conveys the potential for a positive impact to be made in both the local and wider area in providing an additional source of amenity for residents, existing clients, and prospective clients of Aberdeen Swimming Academy. The application would see the revival of a dormant industrial / business unit and offer diversity to the offerings of the industrial estate. The proposed use would be supplementing the demand for swimming tuition across Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire and support the requirement for lifelong skills to be taught not only to the next generation, but everyone.

Should you wish to discuss any of the content of the report, please do not hesitate to contact us.

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