

## **FOGL/FL meeting 31 January 2024**

Venue: Spectrum

FOGL: Nigel Fielding, Ali Pereira; Catherine Davies; Paul Hart

FL: Melanie Main (Area Commercial Manager); Geoff Lawrence (Marketing Manager); Adam Smithson (General Manager); Brian Lamplough (Area Manager)

NB The course of the meeting varied from the sequence shown on the Agenda but all the agenda headings were covered. New headings have been added to cover substantial matters that arose in the course of the meeting.

### Meeting dates for 2024

BL proposed meetings at end March/early April; June (before schools break up); September. He also proposed holding a User Forum in mid-July. FOGL in agreement with proposals.

### Draft Pool Programme: Timetable & Lane Policies

BL presented a (pre-circulated) spreadsheet with programme timetable details. A notable feature was a return to the pre-covid times of 06:30 to 10:00 for weekday early Lane Swims, which would apply on Tuesdays and Thursdays in addition. He explained that the timetable was provisional and that FL would monitor the turn-out at the earlier start time, on a “use it or lose it” basis. This related to one of the criteria for the new times being the sale of more season passes.

There will be evening Lane Swims on Mondays as well as those on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

BL requested that FOGL notify its membership and outreach lists of the new Lane Swim times and seek their reaction. This was agreed.

### *Action: FOGL*

PH queried cleaning times and intervals shown in the timetable. BL said that the reduced times compared to 2023 season were due to two new machines FL have invested in that will clean not only the floors of the changing facilities, but

also the slabs of the pool surrounds. The machines can be used while pool users are present. They each require only one operator, which means lifeguards are more available for their main role rather than cleaning.

PH said there is a small vociferous user lobby for the pool to be open continuously with no break periods but added that FOGL recognised the need for cleaning and also breaks to deal with queue management on hot days.

BL said that FL is seeking to guarantee the availability of at least some lanes up to noon every day, with lane availability longer when attendance permitted. He specified: 3 lanes available all day when booked attendance does not exceed 500; 2 lanes available all day when booked attendance is 500 (sic, should be 501) to 999; 1 lane when booked attendance is 1,000 up. These lanes would be in the middle or at the sides, with general swim areas adjacent. Lanes in the middle reduce the general swim area due to the lifeguard oversight ratio so there was a preference for lanes to be on one side. FL undertook to erect signage stating the lane availability to bookings ratio.

*Action: FL*

FOGL committee requested speed markers to be placed at both ends of each lane. This was agreed.

*Action: FL*

Speed marker signage raised the issue of the speeds to apply to the various numbers of lanes in operation during General Swim times. BL suggested that when there were 3 lanes operating there would be a Slow lane, a Medium Lane and a Fast Lane; when 2 were operating there would be a Medium Lane and a Fast Lane. BL invited discussion of the speed that would apply when only one lane was operating. In discussion it was agreed that it should be a Fast Lane on the basis that such swimmers would cause most disruption to other users if in the General Swim area, but also that this would be monitored and could be changed.

The meeting agreed that it would be useful to get feedback on the lane policies above.

*Action: FOGL*

PH raised the issue of admitting users before the pool was open. There was no need to do so when attendance was low but when there is a queue, problems are caused by uncertainty on the part of users as to whether, having been admitted, they can get in the pool. PH pointed out that such admission was formerly discretionary on the DM. Publicly stating that General swimmers would be admitted from 09:45 had had an impact on car parking, and necessitated an earlier start for Security. BL said that he understood the argument but that he had a preference for a set policy. He was working to reduce discretion in several operational matters and this was one. In discussion with FL colleagues it was agreed that entry will not be before 10:00 (meaning that in practice the earliest someone could enter the water would be 10:15). FOGI raised the absolute requirement for a lifeguard to be present and on station before anyone could enter the pool. BL agreed that when users were admitted there must be a lifeguard on station from the moment the first user is admitted.

BL said that the new booking software would assist with queue management. MM briefed that the new software, 'Spectrix', could handle both Lane and General Swim bookings, unlike the previous system where these were on separate platforms. As well as the new booking software more scanners had been provided at the Lido, which would speed admissions. BL added that Spectrix required payment of a substantial annual fee and that its use at Spectrum and the Lido was a pilot towards possible FL-wide adoption.

PH asked when a shock dose would be done if needed. BL said that it would be done in the evening. PH said that it used to be dusk, due to the effect of light on chlorine. BL acknowledged this and said that the backwash would also be done in the evening. After the pool shut for the day core staff would generally be at work until 21:30.

### Gym

Current membership of the gym is 42. In BL's tenure it has never exceeded 55. NGF said he understood that the issue in growing membership is that the equipment is obsolete and so compares poorly with other local gyms. BL noted that there was a core group of members who were very dedicated to the gym; they primarily used the weights equipment. However, to re-kit the gym would

cost circa £0.5M. There are no plans to close the gym and it is highly unlikely that Freedom Leisure will invest or change this facility in the next 1.5 years. But it does raise what else could be there. PH and AP suggested that the space could be used for Spinning and Yoga classes, which were popular. BL was open to this. He noted that GBC are now more open to ideas but agreement would need to be sought.

### Parking

BL said that GBC is introducing 'monitoring' of the carpark. NGF asked if this meant adopting a parking management system such as Parking Eye or Ringo. BL said that monitoring stopped short of that. It would include checking whether the parked cars belonged to users and where they were not there would be vigorous enforcement action. Season ticket holders would be issued with windscreen stickers to facilitate identification. NGF noted that this was the system in place for decades until the recent past.

NGF asked if the overflow parking area could be formalised, such as by using sandbags to mark spaces, or at minimum white lining bays by spray painting the grass/ground. PH said that 70+ cars could be accommodated if the layout was optimised, and that the cost of the sandbags to do that was only £300. There was a wide discussion of measures that were considered in the past.

A need to keep the vegetation trimmed around the edges of the car park was mentioned. There appeared to be a reservation on FL's part as to whether dealing with the overflow was down to GBC. It was agreed that FL would facilitate use of the overflow by erecting a sign showing the optimal parking arrangement, and a further sign to be placed in the main carpark pointing out the overflow parking. BL asked if PH could advise on the tried and tested optimal layout so it could be used on the sign.

*Action: FL (specifically GL) and FOGL (specifically PH)*

PH suggested a means needs to be found of stopping cars parking in front of the emergency exit gates at the top of the car park, as this happens on just about every busy day.

### Summer Season Tickets, Booking and Dates

Season tickets will go on sale on 1 April 2024. There will be an online payment option as Spectrix supports this. Season ticket holder entry will still be by Active card.

PH requested that when a user buys a season ticket or books a session the system should require via a tickbox that they give their permission that their email address details can be retained on the system. This would allow FL to, e.g., warn users of a sudden closure. MM noted that it is legal for alerts to be sent without such consent provided the alert directly relates to a booked activity. But she would pursue the tickbox suggestion.

BL said that there would be no change in season ticket categories. Also, the season ticket price may reduce as the season moves on. MM and others mentioned that the One Day Offer made in 2023 in respect of the Lido's 90<sup>th</sup> year had worked well. The 2023 season had seen the most season tickets sold during FL's tenancy, approximately 475, which was 100 more than 2022.

The proposed summer season dates are Friday 26 April 2024 to Sunday 15 September 2024. This amounts to 21 weekends, and 143 days. While on the agenda as 'proposed', these dates have been agreed by GBC and are set.

### Swimathon

Lane swimming will be available on Swimathon days. While there are 450 pools nationwide participating in Swimathon BL noted that the Swimathon organisers list the Guildford Lido as one of only ten 'Spotlight' pools. FL will do a prominent PR campaign on Swimathon. Swimathon runs for only 3 days and currently the Lido has 3 sessions (all early am – start 7am). FOGI committee said that we would like 6 sessions (am and pm) over the 3 days. BL undertook to pursue this. He added that Swimathon sets the number of lanes at ten but FL will consider making the whole pool available.

BL requested that FOGI canvass what the Swimathon uptake may be.

### *Action: FOGI*

AP asked if FL received a payment from Swimathon as she is aware that Swimathon offers a per swimmer fee. BL said that as it is a charity event they do not take the fee, they regard it as a 'social good' and present it that way to

FL senior management. The managing director was a strong supporter of Swimathon.

CD pointed out that the photos of the Lido in Swimathon publicity were out of date and preceded last year's major refurbishment. She suggested that FL should provide them with new photos to post. MM and GL said that Swimathon had not reverted to FL about the photos before using the old ones but they would see if new photos could be put forward.

*Action: FL*

### Colleague Recruitment Process

BL said that adverts were going out this week for lifeguard posts and other FL posts relating to the Lido and Spectrum. FOGL was free to share the announcements via its lists.

*Action: FOGL*

BL said that FL will hire temporary contracted lifeguards as a trial this year. They will have a 143 day contract but which 40 hour weeks they work will be set dynamically. NGF said it sounded like a hybrid form of zero hours and contracted employment. BL clarified that the contract offers a full-time job with guaranteed hours but for a fixed period, unlike zero hour contracts which do not guarantee any hours. The aim is to give stability and guaranteed hours along with the benefit of being able to set rotas with predictable, fixed hours. Freedom Leisure can then 'back fill' with casual (zero hour) contracts on busy days when more lifeguards are required.

Adam said that 28 guards, 3 receptionists and 4 catering staff had signed up for the summer season, having been contacted by FL over the Christmas period. BL said that Louise (not present) would assist Adam as needed.

### SWIMTAG

MM said that this was similar to an activity bracelet resource but gave granular detail about the user's swim, including measuring progress towards goals, numbers of lengths swum in a session, timings, and a measure of stroke quality. The SWIMTAG interfaces with a user's existing activity bracelet (e.g., Fitbit, AppleWatch). It would be made available free to season ticket holders. When

swiping admission with their Active Card they would be given a SWIMTAG wristband, from which data could be downloaded after their session. The user would need to create an account to do this. An incentive for FL to take up SWIMTAG is that average swim membership is ten months longer with SWIMTAG. FL is paying the license fee on behalf of users both on the basis of enhanced retention and due to its social value, e.g., health benefit, community benefit (the system can set up competitions amongst users).

BL noted that acquisition of this product was yet to be agreed but FL was keen to launch it if possible.

PH offered to produce a note about SWIMTAG, give it in draft to FL, and then use it to consult users.

*Action: FOGL (specifically PH)*

#### Leak Works Progress and Estate

BL said there are several leaks and they are in different locations. Specialist Diving will be capping these off in February. They will also deal with the balance tank leaks. The divers will then do a survey of all the tiles to identify broken ones for repair. The boilers will need to be fired up to set the fixed tiles and GBC has approved doing so. It is not presently thought that there are leaks in the pool tank, nor the pressure relief valves.

BL said that all the poolside planters (raised beds) will be refurbished, i.e., their walls will be repaired, and capping stones reattached. He would appreciate a FOGL presence at the start of that work, which will be in mid-March. He would liaise about the exact date.

*Action: FL and FOGL*

PH noted the stone walls also need repair and BL said he would ask the contractor to check them. The contractor was also scheduled to repair the steps up to Burrito Loco and the paving around Burrito Loco.

BL said that FL will be replacing the three oldest boilers and this will be done at the end of the summer season. They have applied for grants towards this through the Energy Relief Fund. In response to PH's question as to whether the

new boilers would be gas-fuelled BL said that air source heat pumps had been trialled in other FL sites and were found wanting.

*Post-meeting note: The Energy Relief Fund application was unsuccessful but FL will therefore meet the cost in full. Tendering for this is underway.*

AP and CD asked about the status of pool covers. BL said that once the leaks are dealt with GBC wants the pool cover project to go ahead. BL noted that there is currently a significant funding shortfall that rests with GBC and suggested FOGL speak to GBC for more information. PH mentioned that Steve May had done considerable research on covers. He said that he would check with GBC if it has a record of Steve May's findings.

*Action: FOGL (specifically PH)*

#### AoB

BL noted that the 2021/2022 Winter Season had been cost neutral. While FL pays towards the heating cost the overall cost is a GBC responsibility. FL had a working assumption that there would not be a 2024/5 Winter Season as there were doubts it would be viable, bearing in mind sharp increases in fuel prices. The present contract only stipulates opening for the 142 day summer season.

PH said that FOGL is planning to lobby GBC for more customer involvement in the process leading up to award of the next operating contract. BL said there were constraints on what he could say towards that as FL are an operator that will be bidding for the new operating contract, so customer involvement in the process rests with GBC. PH queried the stage that the current contract had reached. BL said that the original contract had been for ten years renewable for a further four, which could either be 2+2 or 4. GBC elected for 2+2. FL was now in year 1 of the second extension, so the contract ends 31 October 2025. He forecast that the contract would go out to tender around January/February 2025 but FOGL would need to seek clarification from GBC. FL will be bidding. PH asked what the contract period is for Miguel in respect of Burrito Loco. BL said the period and staging is the same as for FL, adding that there is a good working relationship.

PH raised several issues relating to trees in the grounds, including removing the tree next to the men's showers, reducing the conifer trees alongside the steps



to Burrito Loco, and composting the fallen leaves that are currently stunting renewed turf growth. BL added that there was a Willow tree that needed reduction. He asked that PH send him details of the various tree actions needed.

*Action: FOGL (specifically PH)*

NGF asked if admission prices had been set. BL said that a 4.2% increase on season tickets had been put forward to GBC, with a recommendation of 3.8% for other prices. Once the recommendations are approved by GBC they will be made public. It is intended that this be on 1 April.

CD asked if there was scope to run regular Aquafit sessions as the 2023 trial had been successful. Adam and BL said FL was planning to arrange some sessions. BL said that FL was open to suggestions for event ideas and for swim events. They should avoid the school holiday period.

PH asked if it could be agreed that those aged 90 and older be given free swims. BL joked that as the Lido would be 91 this year, it should be 91 years and up.

AP asked what the café hours would be this season. BL said the café would open at 07:30 on weekdays and 08:30 on weekends. There would be some baked items (savoury and sweet) as well as beverages. CD asked if the specialty oven that had been acquired could provide fresh-baked items. There was a lengthy discussion of the variations on 'fresh baked' and of the complexities involved in inventory control, and keeping on the right side of BBE's and food hygiene regulations.

PH asked if there were plans for renovating the Western Paddling Pool. BL noted that reinstating the water flow and associated works would cost in the region of £1M. FL were planning to convert the area to a Play Area aimed at children under ten.

### DoNM

In discussion this was agreed as 3 April, starting at 10:30, venue Spectrum.