



POOLS ON THE PARK
**HEALTH
SUITE**
ACTION GROUP

Mike Jackson
Chief Executive
London Borough of Richmond upon Thames
Civic Centre
44 York Street
Twickenham
TW1 3BZ

4 January 2024

Dear Sir,

We are writing to you on behalf of the 371 residents who wanted to see the health suite refurbished and reopened at Pools on the Park in Richmond when asked in Richmond Council's survey that ended in September 2021. We all feel terribly let down by the council over the past three and a half years.

After 28 years in operation, the health suite at Pools on the Park was closed in March 2020 as a result of the Covid-19 lockdown and never reopened. 18 months later, the council announced in September 2021 that the facilities had: *...all now reached the end of their natural life and are no longer viable for repair.*

In July 2022 the equipment and infrastructure was fully removed and the room was stripped back to bare floor and walls. On 7 November 2023, the Environment, Sustainability, Culture and Sports Committee voted in favour of converting the empty room to a group exercise studio.

It is very clear that the council have not handled this matter in the proper manner. This action group was formed to uphold the democratic position of residents, to ensure our wishes are not ignored, that due process is followed, and the right future is developed for Pools on the Park and the health and welfare of the community. To this end, five corporate complaints have now been filed as detailed in the attached list.

We are now calling on the council to:

1. Withdraw its proposal to convert the former health suite area into a group exercise studio, on the following grounds:
 - Ignoring of residents' views: An overwhelming 84% of member respondents and 68% of non-member respondents supported the health suite refurbishment in the 2021 survey. In the 2023 leisure centre survey, 74 respondents wanted a health suite vs only 13 respondents wanted more group exercise space.
 - Misuse of allocated £187K budget. Conversion of the area for another purpose is not 'Health Suite Refurbishment' as was stated in the Capital Programme and Funding budget that was first approved in February 2022 and most recently by full council in March 2023.
 - Failure to get planning permission to make alterations to a Grade II listed building when the health suite room was totally stripped out in July 2022.
 - Breaking of commitment to former health suite users in August 2023 to only make a decision on the future of the health suite when the leisure strategy is complete.
 - All projected demand for group exercise studio is derived from computer modelling resulting in an insignificant 1% increase in Pools on the Park memberships over 1 year, when actual data shows that memberships are down by 42% since 2019.
 - Committee members were very poorly informed by Richmond Council (resulting in much confusion about what they were debating) and were not provided with sufficient background information.
2. Immediately suspend any tender process currently in progress for the conversion of the area into a group exercise studio.
3. As promised, postpone the health suite decision until the leisure strategy is complete (currently expected in Spring 2024). Environment, Sustainability, Culture and Sports Committee members should be fully informed about the 28 year history of the health suite, the contribution it made to health and wellbeing as well being an incentive for membership and the arguments for refurbishing and retaining it.

You can read the full details of our case and the history at our website below. We are more than happy to meet and discuss this matter in person, and look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely

Martin Baker, Mary Higgins & Wendy Merchant
Founders of Pools on the Park Health Suite Action Group
healthsuite.org.uk

Corporate Complaints

FS-Case-568957453 | Filed 12/12/23

Council broke commitment to residents made on 14/08/23 that a decision on the health suite would not be made until the leisure strategy was complete (currently due in Spring 2024).

FS-Case-568960436 | Filed 12/12/23

Council misused £187,000 budget allocated to 'Pools on the Park – Health Suite Refurbishment'. The word 'refurbishment' has a very clear meaning: to improve or renew equipment or decoration. It most certainly does not mean conversion of a room to another use. The council's proposal was therefore invalid.

FS-Case-570054554 | Filed 17/12/23

Multiple concerns – assignment of Matthew Eady as lead officer (the poor quality of his report, his lack of knowledge/data and his inability to answer questions put to him by members), lack of clarity on what a health suite was/is, lack of any evidence that the health suite equipment had reached the end of its natural life, ignoring of residents views, use of computer modelling to create 'evidence' of demand for a group exercise studio, lack of financial acumen, confusion over Pools on the Park not being a suitable location for a health suite (after 28 years of existence!), 2021 survey data initially missing as background paper (added on Fri 3 November but the meeting document pack was not updated) and missing 2023 leisure centres survey as a background paper.

FS-Case-573095468 | Filed 31/12/23

Complaint against Fenella Merry, Director of Finance for making false statement that there was approved budget for the council's recommended option 2 in Matthew Eady's report dated 07/11/23 that was brought to the Environment, Sustainability, Culture and Sports Committee.

FS-Case-573564996 | Filed 02/01/24

Complaint against Matthew Eady, Assistant Director of Leisure for making false statement in a virtual meeting on 21/12/23 that the Environment, Sustainability, Culture and Sports Committee had reallocated £140,000 of funds. They did no such thing, and according to the council's constitution they have no power to do so due to the £100,000 limit.