

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**30 November 2016**

### **BATHS' CLOSURE TO HIT DISABLED SWIMMERS**

The 18<sup>th</sup> December session of the Reading Dolphin Swimming Club will be the last in the 54-years' history of the Dolphins. The Club's committee and members reached this decision with great regret, after Reading Borough Council announced that financial pressures are forcing them to close the Arthur Hill Memorial Baths, where the Dolphins have been based from their beginnings.

When the closure of the Baths was first proposed in September, the Dolphins joined in the Campaign to defer the closure until such time as alternative 'improved' facilities would be available (which the Council expects to be in 'three or four years' time). The Council's response to the campaigners was negative. As Alan Hardie, Dolphin Club secretary explained: "In the face of this setback the Club explored other venues for our visually impaired and other disabled swimmers and their families; unfortunately there is no alternative facility that meets our special requirements or is accessible, so the Club must be wound up".

Reading Dolphin Club was founded in 1962 on the initiative of the local BP Scout Guild (an organisation of active former scouts, who also provided the volunteer support), backed by the charity support group, Round Table. From the start it drew on the expert and enthusiastic services of Charles Burt, Reading's legendary "Mr Swimming". Charles had also set up Reading Youth Swimming Club, and he continued for four decades to lead coaching and survival training with a number of other organisations, mainly at the Arthur Hill Baths.

In its early days the members of Dolphins were mostly victims of poliomyelitis, a disease little understood at the time. Typical Dolphin members of today are more likely to suffer disability due to injury or failing eyesight; for them swimming is an essential therapy. The end of the road for the Dolphins is similar to the outlook for other users of 'Arthur Hill', including four local primary schools, Reading Naturist Group, mother & toddler sessions and closed sessions for females only, although here the future situation is unclear. The impact of closure would of course be felt above all by local residents, who are drawn from the East Reading community within walking or cycling distance. It is widely hoped that the Arthur Hill Memorial Baths can be reprieved by the Campaigning group.

**END OF RELEASE**

#### **Note to Editors**

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