

Hydrotherapy Pool Feasibility Study

on behalf of

West Berkshire Neurological Alliance
and
Greenham Common
TRUST

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Profundus Consulting Ltd.
PO Box 519, Reading RG7 5YZ, U.K.
Tel +44(0)118-971-2948; e-mail info@profundus.com

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The Gellert Thermal Spa Bath, Budapest

1. Executive Summary

Profundus Consulting thanks the West Berkshire Neurological Alliance (WBNA) and the Greenham Common Trust for awarding to it this feasibility study. It has proved to be a most interesting project. We also thank all those who have contributed information and advice (see Appendix A).

For the purposes of this study hydrotherapy is defined as: “a form of physiotherapy treatment conducted in a heated pool where clients undertake specially designed exercises to help regain or enhance their well-being”. The “well-being” statement included in the definition is generally taken to include exercise, for instance the elderly or those with some neurological disorders. The use of pools is sometimes restricted to the enhancement of physical well-being. It seems to us that any artificial distinction between physical well-being and mental well-being is tenuous and unnecessary. For instance, the benefits of hydrotherapy are well recognised for children with moderate to severe autism. It has a calming and relaxing effect which is an enabler for improved teaching and other treatments.

Hydrotherapy is conducted in a pool containing heated water. The water in a pool is typically heated to 32-36°C - that is to just below blood temperature and is a level which assists healing. The pool will be designed to meet the needs of people of any age, with impairments due to illness, disease, intellectual deficiency or congenital defects.

Hydrotherapy is well known to benefit a wide range of conditions, notably:

- Arthritis.
- Pain in the back, neck, and shoulder; sports injuries.
- Balance and co-ordination problems; dementia; Parkinson’s Disease.
- Post-operative rehabilitation, especially hip and knee replacements.
- Cerebral Palsy, MS and other neurological disorders.
- Autism, Down’s Syndrome, learning difficulties.

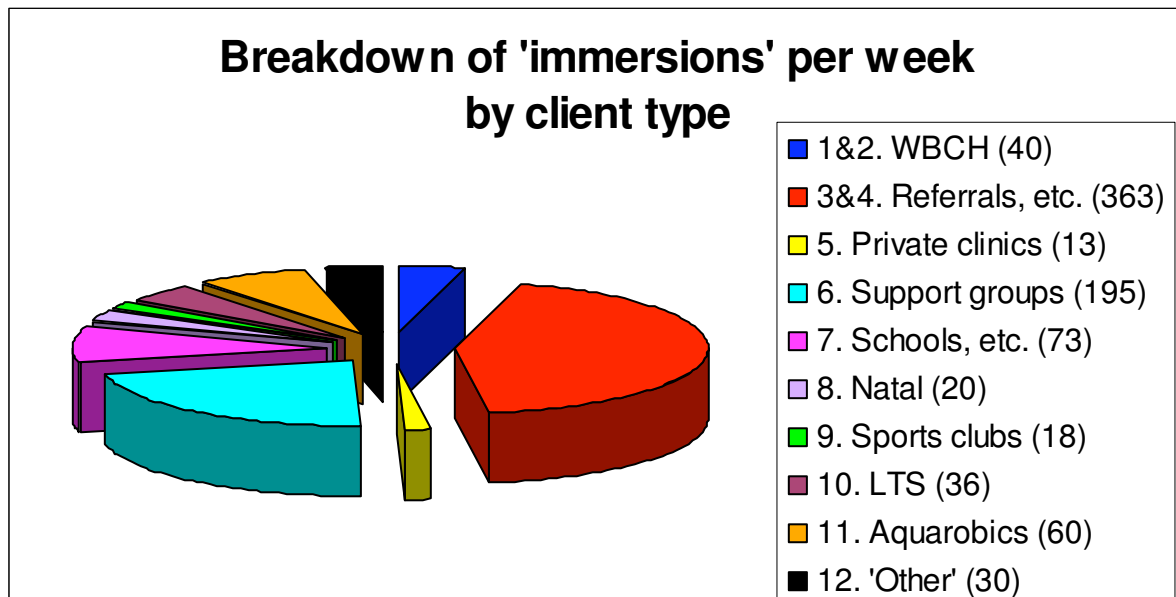
John Holt, of the WBNA, has produced an excellent and detailed review of the health benefits of hydrotherapy and this is reproduced in full in Appendix C.

West Berkshire has a total population of 145,000. We have defined a catchment area of 100,000 population for a pool located in or near Newbury.

Detailed research of twelve market segments was undertaken:

1. **Hospital in-patients** - This is usually a prime source of clients for hydrotherapy pools associated with hospitals. Should the pool be co-located with the West Berkshire Community Hospital (WBCH) then it will contribute a small number of users.
2. **Hospital out-patients** - Again, this is usually a prime source of clients requiring, for instance, hydrotherapy to assist post-operative rehabilitation for replacement hips and knees, cardiovascular problems, etc.
3. **Referrals from GPs and elsewhere** - This is generally the greatest source of clients for a typical community pool. For instance, referrals account for 1100 clients in a year at the Thamesdown Hydrotherapy Pool, Swindon, and clients average twelve visits each.
4. **Self-referrals** - Subject to certain conditions, including an initial assessment, we propose allowing self-referrals who believe they will benefit from hydrotherapy.
5. **Private clinics** - Some private clinics might wish to hire the pool for their own client sessions.
6. **Support groups** - Demand from groups, usually organised charities, will be high. Those especially positive about the benefits of hydrotherapy are the Alzheimer’s Society, Arthritis Care, Cancer Care, Mencap, the MS Society, the Parkinson’s Society and Newbury Stroke Club.

7. **Special schools, units and centres** - Many local special schools or units either have or would like their own pool. The alternative is to share a community pool. In addition, the Ormonde Centre, located at Newbury College, is very interested in dedicated sessions.
8. **Ante- & Post-natal classes** - In some areas of the country hydrotherapy is popular, to ease back pain.
9. **Sports clubs** - The more professional and well-funded a club is, the greater the likelihood that its therapist would value hydrotherapy for players. In West Berkshire, Newbury Rugby Club is especially interested in weekly pool hire.
10. **Learning to swim classes** - While warm water pools are not suitable for most swimming classes, the elderly and parents of very young babies are suitable clients.
11. **Aquarobics** - The use of hydrotherapy pools for gentle exercises for the elderly and infirm is very popular in some other countries, and increasingly in some UK pools.
12. **Other groups** - Hire of a community facility by other groups would have to be carefully controlled, but in many cases it will be justified.



This level of demand, totalling 848 'immersions' per week, can readily be accommodated by opening the pool for 57 hrs. There is capacity for a further 20+ hours per week. The two largest user segments are:

- Referrals - our figures are extrapolated from the Thamesdown figures, adjusted for the different catchment area, and they carry a high degree of confidence.
- Support groups - the result of discussions with every one likely to use hydrotherapy.

During the course of this study we visited four other nearby hydrotherapy pools in order to understand their demand and usage profiles, to hear about their promotion and pricing, to appreciate their design features, to obtain any information on operating costs and to ask their managers' views on a potential pool for West Berkshire and to seek advice.

Throughout this study the **Thamesdown** pool is extensively quoted. It is close to being a model for how a new community pool in West Berkshire should be run. Additionally, there is a wealth of statistics available on its usage and its financial accounts were also opened to us. It is a superb example of a community resource. There is a wonderful 'clubby' atmosphere and while we were there the pool was full of people who were obviously happy despite some having very serious disabilities. It is clear that management responds to the needs of the community, which in turn supports the pool with substantial financial assistance. Its design is old and has been rather piecemeal but after several extensions it now represents a design blueprint which on the whole works, though less efficiently than if it were of a more modern build.

Brookfields is a private physiotherapy clinic, incorporating a hydrotherapy pool, situated in the village of Highclere, five miles SW of Newbury, built sixteen years ago in the grounds of the founder's house. Here we had a special quest to assess what damage would be done to Brookfields' business if a new pool were to be built in or near Newbury. Several groups and many individuals currently travel from Newbury for hydrotherapy at Brookfields. Those we spoke to - both group organisers and users - praised the clinic; but equally they all found the location difficult and expressed a preference for a more convenient, central location.

Therefore Brookfields Clinic would undoubtedly lose some business - a proportion, perhaps up to 20% or 30%, of that which it currently obtains from hydrotherapy; so 8-12% overall. However, a new community facility would be vigorously promoted and awareness of hydrotherapy would rapidly be raised from its current low levels. Some new users would visit Brookfields instead of the new pool and these are likely to make up a large part of the shortfall.

A new pool at the **Oxford Nuffield Orthopaedic Hospital** was suggested to us by WBNA as a possible benchmark design. It does indeed have many desirable design characteristics but also one or two significant flaws. Lessons can be learnt from both. However, above all the pool here has a hospital 'feel', which would be less appropriate for a community resource. At less than 30 hours per week it is underutilised.

The even newer pool at **Royal Berks Hospital** is also currently underutilised but hopefully it will soon be available for hire by groups in the afternoons and evenings. We feel that Royal Berks could have chosen a more modern and flexible design.

We recommend a pool of at least 80 sq m and we have also made recommendations regarding many other design parameters, including:

- Depth and floor gradient.
- Pool edge and surround, changing facilities.
- Pool access and building access.
- Water temperature.
- Lighting and acoustics, decoration and overall ambience.
- Humidity, air-conditioning and ventilation.
- Office, consulting room, social area, staff facilities, utility room and storeroom.

Additionally, we recommend adopting - as far as possible - a new Australian Standard for Hydrotherapy Pools (the UK having no equivalent).

Discussions with Thames Water proved inconclusive and need to be re-established when a location has been firmly chosen.

We were asked to evaluate three locations for a new West Berkshire pool, one being at WBCH. The others chosen, in consultation with WBNA, were Brownfields at Thatcham and adjacent to Park House School and Newbury Rugby Club.

If one were to attempt to define a 'centre of gravity' for potential hydrotherapy users in West Berkshire, then it would result in a point very close to **WBCH**, mid-way between Newbury and Thatcham. Almost all users and organisers of user groups we spoke to favoured this location, many of the elderly and disabled are already used to going there for other purposes and communications are good. There is plenty of room on the site and planning permission should not be difficult to obtain. WBCH management have shown enthusiasm for the project and have already identified an ideal spot near to the main Bath Road entrance.

WBNA has held informal talks with the mayor of Thatcham, who is very keen to attract the pool to the town, believing that a suitable site can be found in the **Brownfields** area. It is three miles east of Newbury centre, twice as far as the Community Hospital, and so it will be

less convenient for users from Newbury itself and from all points west, north-west and south-west. However, communications along the A4 Bath Road are good.

There is not much spare space in Brownfields and security for a stand alone building might be problematic. While there are some health related organisations in Brownfields, none are highly relevant to hydrotherapy, so there is little synergy here.

West Berks Council states that there is a plan to merge Castle School with **Park House School**, though both schools discount it as no more than a long term possibility. Should a merger take place then the need for a new hydrotherapy pool on or near the Park House site could easily be justified. It happens that the Park House School site abuts those of both Newbury Rugby Club and the Falkland Surgery. And so, two other organisations of some relevance are located just yards away from Park House.

There appears to be a lot of playing field space here and it is possible that some could be annexed for a community hydrotherapy pool. However, planning permission could be an issue. It should be stressed that this idea has not been put to the council education department nor to Park House School. Any site in this area would have to have its own access, since access through Park House would be difficult in daytimes because of pupils and in the evenings and weekends because of security.

An alternative has been mooted, that the combined schools might use a community pool at the WBCH site. This could add up to twenty hours per week of further usage.

Wherever it is located, good marketing will be paramount if this pool is to succeed. Fortunately the pool manager can learn from the successes of others, notably Thamesdown, in respect of promotion and fund-raising.

We recommend pricing which is at or even slightly higher than charges at other pools. The thinking here is that those who can pay should pay a full price, while a fund should be available to assist individuals and groups who need a discount.

We anticipate a Social Enterprise, overseen by a Board of Trustees. We believe four staff will be required by Year 3, by which time the demand will have ramped up to what should remain as a plateau. One of two qualified physiotherapists/hydrotherapists will act as manager; there will also be two unqualified assistants. This level of staffing is required to provide full cover for 60+ hours per week opening.

Based on salary guidelines provided by the Hydrotherapy Association of Chartered Physiotherapists (HACP), we have calculated full staffing costs of £106,000 pa. Other costs of running the pool and enterprise will amount to £46,000. Most costs are fixed, putting an even greater emphasis on generating usage and income.

A revenue model, with conservative projections, points towards an annual income (from Year 3) of £212,000, but it could take two years to ramp up usage to this level. This figure is based upon the usage projections and the prices known to be affordable by most users, but for prudence we have reduced the revenue projection by 15%. The result is still £60,000 higher than the cost projection, so there is a substantial margin for error. Indeed, at the prudent level there is as much scope for greater usage and revenues as there is downside.

Hence, we can confidently state that a community hydrotherapy pool for West Berkshire is a feasible enterprise. There is definitely a strong demand for such a resource, a preferred location has been identified and many key design parameters and marketing issues have been defined.