



Withington Baths and Leisure Centre

Annual Report 2024-25



Introduction

Following the completion of our major refurbishment and restoration in 2024, this year has focussed on getting back to basics and the delivery of high-quality leisure services which benefit our users and the broader community.

Our role as a local employer is a particular source of pride. When we first opened the doors of Withington Baths as a community-owned enterprise back in 2015, we employed 10 staff and 8 instructors. We now employ 58 people, with the vast majority being local. This includes 10 young people on our Swim Assistants programme, gaining invaluable experience and skills towards future employability. In addition, we also now work with 36 instructors, so that is nearly 100 people gaining a regular income through our operation.



Paul Smith
Managing Director

Highlights from the year

Every day is a series of highlights.
A busy gym, a full studio, the beautiful
community garden, hearing the singing
from a Baby Swim class or the laughter
from a Family Fun Swim session.

Our membership has increased again,
peaking at 4,000 at one point in the year,
with demand being met through our
ever-expanding classes programme, and
each class is like a little community all of
its own.



Stand out moments



Over **4,000** gym members – a record number.

Over **1,000** children taking after school swimming lessons.

Installation of a pool cover and replacement of our obsolete boilers

Over **100** babies and toddlers on our infant lessons.

10 young people on our Swim Assistants Programme.

Over **30** regular users of Withington Works and the start of a networking programme for local businesses and entrepreneurs.

Packed calendar of social events, including trips to Blackpool, Bury Market and monthly walks.

Our mission

The mission for Withington Baths has always been to provide the Withington community with a place where they can exercise and socialise in a beautiful setting. Now, in our 9th year of running the Baths, we have definitely achieved that.

But we are not stopping at that. There are still further restorations we would like to complete. For example, the seating at the back of the pool and the glazed lantern roof over the gym area. Any financial reserves we generate, after operating costs, are committed to completing these projects with a view to creating our ultimate vision for the Baths and the future generations of the Withington community.

The Board Directors



Keeping People Healthy

This year has seen the largest number of visitors for the gym, classes and the pool since we took over The Baths 9 years ago. Swimming lessons, school swimming and baby swimming lessons, as well as new aqua classes in the pool have meant that our pool timetable remains extremely busy, making maximum use of the facility. In the studios, we have now increased to 125 classes, including new Pilates, Tai Chi, Silver Circuits and new styles of yoga including a breathwork session. Classes are still extremely popular and cater for all age ranges and abilities. As part of Run Club, we have led a successful Couch to 5K, with two people going on to run a 10K following completion of the programme.

The Baths continues to support people to stay active into their later years, both psychically and socially, with regular Silver Circuits, Table Tennis and Tai Chi sessions. From a social perspective, we continue to organise regular social trips, walks and parties throughout the year, all of which help to reduce the social isolation that some of our older members often refer to.

At the other end of the scale, we continue to offer baby swimming lessons, children's swimming lessons and classes such as Mum and Baby Yoga and the wonderful Bob Tales.

For our older juniors we offer a 14+ Junior Gym membership and a twice weekly drop in Junior Boxing Club for 11-15's with an experienced local boxing coach. This is focussed on building fitness, strength, discipline and confidence as well as having some fun. We have also introduced the Junior Swim Assistant role for 14- and 15-year-olds which helps to guide youths into the rewarding career path of swim teaching.



Our heritage projects

Our comprehensive heritage restoration project to the pool hall, studios, common areas and external building fabric reached contractual completion in Autumn 2024, and these parts of our beautiful heritage building are now back to their architectural best.

We are continuing to look at how we can further improve The Baths and are currently looking into a number of projects including improvements to the outside garden area, the ground floor café and former women's entrance spaces, a new external lighting scheme, the glazed lantern roof over the gym as well as looking to re-introduce the original tiered seating area to the far end of the pool hall.



Heritage engagement

We have delivered 23 heritage tours to a range of people, including pre-booked volunteer-led groups, community organisations, schools, and adult education students. In September 2024, we hosted our first conference for the Historic Pools of Great Britain Network and continued our participation in the National Heritage Open Days programme, offering a series of tours.

Educational outreach was also a priority, with 172 Key Stage 2 students from local primary schools — St Paul's CE Primary, Old Moat Primary School, and Manchester Muslim Prep — participating in our Heritage Schools programme. Our relationship with Manchester Adult Education Service has continued to grow, and we have adapted our heritage schools programme for the adult SEN learners, with our first session delivered in March 2025.

The heritage story of The Baths has been captured and preserved by Withington Civic Society who have produced a book about the history of the baths. In addition to this book, we have also commissioned local artist Len Grant to produce a book covering the first 10 years of community ownership.





Our team

This year, our team has experienced very little staff turnover, which we believe is testament to a high level of satisfaction among our staff. This year we have been delighted to welcome Katie, one of the new additions to our team. Starting in a Leisure Assistant role, she has already progressed to Duty Manager due to excellent performance. As ever, we look forward to welcoming new student staff and wish all the best to those who are going on to university or other roles.

Sustainability

We are open nearly every day of the year and keep our pool operating at a temperature which is accessible for all of our users. This is great for our swimmers, but means we have a sizeable carbon footprint. This year, we've made significant strides in reducing that footprint, both through investment and through changes to our operating practices.

We secured funding of £115,000 from Sport England, via Manchester City Council, to install a pool cover and to replace our obsolete boilers. The combined impact of this investment is to reduce our annual carbon emissions by 14 tonnes of CO2.

Four of our team have completed carbon reduction training and are Carbon Literacy certified. We have introduced a number of improvements to how we recycle and dispose of our waste. We have become a site for the recycling of used blister packs and a used battery recycling site, as well as implementing printer cartridge and used pen recycling.



Our Community

We have continued to grow and deepen our connections within the community, developing new partnerships and expanding existing relationships. We launched a partnership with Mandem Meetups in summer 2024 with a successful ice bath event, evolving into bi-monthly Talking Circles in Withington Works. For the first Withington Bookfest we hosted a series of writers' talks and creative workshops, helping to spark literary conversations within the community. For a second year, we have worked with Withington Pride to programme our green spaces with family-friendly workshops and performances, with the Pride March beginning from the Baths. We continue to host regular Volunteer Ambassador Coffee Mornings, bringing together volunteers and local groups to share ideas, build connections, and strengthen community action. For International Women's Day 2025 we secured external funding for a day of workshops led by young adult author Kimberley Whittam. The sessions celebrated the achievements of women from Manchester, inspiring future generations.

Our community gardens have flourished this year, thanks to the commitment of our Sunday morning garden volunteers. With their care and effort, we've enjoyed a bumper harvest from Summer 2024 through Spring 2025, ranging from green beans to Jerusalem artichokes, and we even had our first pumpkin! We've continued our commitment to biodiversity by introducing a small wildflower meadow, a bee hotel, a hedgehog house, and swift bird boxes.

Over the past year the Baths has also acted as a donation centre for the hygiene bank, who collect hygiene products for the most vulnerable in society.





Events

This year, we proudly hosted a wide range of community activities in what has become a programme of regular seasonal events that bring people of all ages together to celebrate, connect, and enjoy shared experiences. This year saw the return of many firm favourites in the Withington Baths social calendar.

Seasonal markets included Spring Fest, Autumn Fair, and the Christmas Market, each featuring arts and crafts, artisan stalls, supporting local independent businesses, and activities led by our garden volunteers. We additionally participated in West Fest, joining in with their celebration of businesses on Burton Road.

We marked our 9th birthday with a fun-filled family party, complete with face painting, pool inflatables, a bouncy castle, and children's entertainment. Other highlights included our Members Summer Social – an evening out around Withington Village, Halloween Party with a spooky disco, and festive Christmas activities such as a Nativity with St Catherine's RC Primary School choir,

Christmas parties for our Baby Swim and Silver Circuits groups, and a community Christmas lunch.

We also held Summer and Christmas Fashion Shows showcasing local businesses and consistently host post-class socials in our café following Baby Swim, Mum and Baby yoga, Silver Circuits and Bob Tales to help connect and bring people together. Our events, which are open to all, also take our community beyond the Baths with monthly walks, a group trip to Blackpool and Chester Races.

Withington Baths has come to be looked upon as a community hub and serves as a beacon for people who are looking for connection or want to be part of something community based. Through offering a reliable, consistent, welcoming space and hosting regular social events, the Baths has come to be a place people can depend on for a social fix.

Withington Works

Situated in the beautifully restored former warden's quarters above the Baths, Withington Works has grown into a thriving co-working hub for local professionals that also hosts regular lunchbreak socials, after-work gatherings, networking meet ups and professional support opportunities, and other community activities.

Offering a shared workspace, meeting rooms, dedicated communal kitchenette and courtyard space, over the past year improvements have been made to enhance the functionality of the space. These include a reconfiguration of the layout to improve quality of the workstations and increase capacity — now accommodating 26 desks — a new meeting room, and an additional quiet space for calls.

Used by up to 30 regular members and with over 400 day pass visits in the last year, the space continues to provide a productive, comfortable, and sociable alternative to working from home. Serving both self-employed individuals and remote workers — most of whom live in Withington or nearby

neighbourhoods — Withington Works offers flexibility through a range of membership options, from day passes, month to month memberships to rolling plans.

The introduction of a new Withington Works Combined Day Pass allows visitors to take advantage of all the facilities offered across the whole building, including the wider facilities of the Baths.



At Withington Works, members not only access a professional working environment, but being situated within the Baths brings wider opportunities to support a healthy, balanced lifestyle, which encompasses fitness within the working day. At the same time, members become more embedded in the wider Withington Baths and local community.

“Two swims, two gyms and three yoga’s each week now. The choice of classes is extraordinary and the tutors inspirational”

Charlie, Withington Works Member

Beyond the workspace, the community is flourishing. Friendships continue to form, and members of the Withy Works community frequently meet to socialise and exercise together outside of work hours.

The space is also used to host external workshops and groups. Men’s mental health charity, Mandem Meetup, use the space to host a talking circle two evenings a month and Withington Bookfest hosted talks and workshops as part of their festival in October 2024.

Additionally, we have set up a Withington Self-Employment & Small Business Network, which has grown beyond our membership to support the wider community and local enterprise. Open to local professionals, the Network meets regularly to provide peer support and networking opportunities in a relaxed setting. Topics have included marketing and a quarterly financial check-in, helping local professionals stay connected and feel supported.



Bathhouse Café

Nestled in the heart of the building and open to all, the café continues to be the nucleus of the Baths — a hive of activity and a welcoming sanctuary for all. As a true social hub, it plays a vital role in daily life at the Baths, bringing together a community of regulars, class-goers, and visitors alike. The café is where people stay connected to goings on, find out about upcoming events and strike up conversations with familiar faces or new friends. Budding friendships and connections formed in classes, blossom over a coffee in the café afterwards.

Warm, friendly, and sociable, the café fosters a unique sense of belonging. Far more than just a place to grab a coffee, the people-focussed ethos that runs throughout the Baths is embodied within the café. Our staff get to know the people who frequent, often identifying when someone may need extra support. This informal, caring environment plays a vital role in safeguarding, listening, and helping people access the services they need — offering quiet support to those who may be vulnerable or isolated.

This year, we also expanded our food and drink offer, working with an increased number of local suppliers to provide a broader, high-quality selection. In line with our commitment to sustainability, we introduced reusable cups to reduce waste. The café remains a place where community care, conversation, and connection come together.



Training and Education

We continue to offer reduced price lifeguard courses for those looking for a career in leisure which provides a great opportunity to gain valuable work-based experience.

This year we have also hosted student employment placements in our café for SEN learners, welcoming Tanisha and Aisha, with more planned for the next academic year.

We have recently taken on a new apprentice, Gio, who will be supporting our maintenance department, with another apprentice starting soon.



Look to the future

In June 2025 we will celebrate our 10-year anniversary of running this beautiful community asset. Over that time, we have helped thousands of people to lead healthier lives and to meet others in the local community. We'll be enjoying a big old party on the 14th of June to mark the occasion and reflecting on the people we have worked with and for over that time. It should be a great day.

Over the last 10 years, we have focused all of our energies within the four walls of Withington Baths. In 2025 we have two really exciting forms of expansion. We have been invited to take over the operation of Broadway Baths in Moston which is another heritage facility in a very strong local community.

We're also going to be expanding Withington Works into the lovely Withington Public Hall Institute on Burton Road. This will be a more informal workspace, providing a further resource for local entrepreneurs, students and work-from-homers to help them succeed. It will offer the same high-quality services and access to the Baths, but with a chance to enjoy a beer at the end of the day.

Looking slightly further ahead, we continue to work with funders and other partners to build additional leisure and community facilities on our current site. This will be a significant investment, so it is inevitably a slow process, but we are making strides towards that goal.

As part of our commitment to the local area we aim to use local suppliers where we can. Our thanks this year to [Moffatt's Chartered Accountants](#), [Conker Communications](#), [Swimphony](#), [Seven Architecture](#), [Hine Chartered Insurance Brokers](#), [Wilkinson Photography](#), [Worker Bee MCR Tea & Coffee](#).



