



Save Mayfield Swimming Pool Campaign

A Community Group Supporting Community Resources

www.mayfieldpool.com

10 August 2012

Dear Candidate,

QUESTIONNAIRE RE PUBLIC SWIMMING POOLS FOR NEWCASTLE CITY COUNCIL CANDIDATES

I am writing on behalf of the Save Mayfield Swimming Pool (SMSP) Campaign, a grassroots community group which formed in late 2007 to ensure Mayfield Swimming Pool is retained and improved for future generations. We support similar efforts by other community groups in the Newcastle City Council area to protect and enhance their public pools. We are not aligned with any candidate, grouping, ticket or party. We are asking all candidates in the forthcoming election to answer the brief questionnaire which follows this letter before **12 pm Friday 25 August 2012**. We plan to collate candidates' responses and publicise them widely in the lead up to the election.

For the people of Mayfield and surrounding areas, the future of our local swimming pool is an important issue in this election and we believe this is also true for Council's other pools. Recently there have been dramatic increases in pool entry fees such that it now costs \$16.80 for one visit by a family with two adults and two school-aged kids. This has resulted in big falls in pool usage: last season attendance at all pools other than Lambton fell by more than 37% compared with the 2010/11 season.¹

This has generated a lot of anger in the Mayfield community, and we are aware of similar frustration in Wallsend and other areas. Our key election goal is to persuade candidates to support a motion to make Mayfield, Wallsend, Beresfield and Stockton Pools free for a three year trial period, to assess the extent to which free access increases community use of these pools and the associated community benefits. These pools are funded by all ratepayers, why not make them freely available to all of us, instead of pushing prices so high that only a small proportion of wealthier ratepayers can afford to use them?

We know Council has committed to make Lambton Pool a state of the art sporting facility, and we accept that those who want such a service should contribute to paying for it. **But we have a different vision for Council's other pools. We value these pools, not only as a place to swim but also as valuable community spaces where people of different ages, cultural backgrounds, and financial means can not only exercise, but also relax together and build a sense of community.**

Suburbs like Mayfield, Wallsend and Beresfield have a lot of kids whose parents can neither afford to get them to the beach nor afford to pay for them to visit their local public pool. Making these pools free will allow these kids access to safe, supervised recreational spaces where they can not only learn to swim but also connect with their local communities. This will bring important benefits in terms of reduced anti-social activity (vandalism, graffiti, violence) as well as reduced obesity and other positive health outcomes. Kids in Merewether, Cooks Hill and Newcastle East don't have to pay to swim between the flags; kids in Mayfield, Wallsend and Beresfield shouldn't have to pay to access their local public pool.

There are also many older people in Mayfield, Wallsend, Beresfield and Stockton who would benefit greatly from being able to exercise in the solar heated water (water walking to retain mobility). It goes without saying that free access to local pools would bring important health benefits not only to the old and the young, but to all the members of our community who are then able to access these pools on a more regular basis.

The cost of making all pools other than Lambton free could be reduced in a number of ways. Councils' budgeted last-season income from entrance fees for Beresfield, Mayfield, Stockton and Wallsend pools varied from \$91,800 at Stockton to \$135,000 at Mayfield, but the increased entrance fees have reduced attendance to such an extent that it is unlikely these income targets have been met. Last season (2011/12) Council paid Hudson

¹ All the figures cited in this letter are based on information provided by Council. Please let us know if you would like to be forwarded copies of the relevant correspondence.

Caterers \$130,915 to provide turnstile attendant/cashier services and kiosk operations at Beresfield, Mayfield, Wallsend and Stockton pools (an average of \$32,729 per pool). If there were no entrance fees, there would be no need to pay the kiosk operators to collect them, and increased attendance should make it possible to instead charge rent to the kiosk operators to use the space. We also support a "gold coin donation box" in front of all pools, which would help alleviate the cost of making them free.

If Newcastle City Council took this step it would not be the only council with free pools. Great Lakes Council has made Tuncurry Pool free and there is an honesty box system for entry to Bulahdelah and Stroud pools. Hay Shire Council has made it free to use the John Houston Memorial Swimming Pool and Buloke Shire Council announced in June that its decision to make entry to its pools free had resulted in significant increases in attendance. We very much hope you will support Newcastle City Council taking the same step.

We look forward to your response to our questionnaire. If you have any questions please don't hesitate to email us at mayfieldpool@gmail.com.

Sincerely,



Tim Connor
(On behalf of SMSP)

Letting people know where you stand on the future of our public pools

Please either cut and paste this questionnaire into an email and return it to mayfieldpool@gmail.com or else print it and post it to 39 Margaret Street, Mayfield East 2304. If you send a hard copy please ensure it is signed.

1. If elected will you work as an advocate in Council to ensure the long term future of Beresfield, Mayfield, Stockton and Wallsend Pools?

Yes No Undecided

2. If elected will you propose and/or vote in support of a motion ensuring free entry to Beresfield, Mayfield, Stockton and Wallsend Pools for at least a three year trial period?

Yes No Undecided

3. If elected will you propose and/or vote in support of a motion ensuring that promotion of Beresfield, Mayfield, Stockton and Wallsend Pools is equal to that of promotion of Lambton pool, including very large signs on nearby arterial roads?

Yes No Undecided

4. Will all other councillors elected from your party/group of independents answer the above questions in the same way as you?

Yes No Unknown Not in a party/group

5. If you would like to add a comment regarding your position on Newcastle's Inland pools please add this on a separate page.

Name:

Ward:

Party affiliation/group of independents:

Signature (if answered in hard copy):