

Prejudice - Local authority pools

A British Naturism Briefing Paper - Malcolm Boura - February 2007

The most common single cause of a naturist swimming session closing is a change of pool management.

Social Services and Leisure Services

In 1994 Soleil Naturist Swimming Club commenced a regular hire of The Manor Pool at Whittlesey which belongs to Fenland District Council. A few years later Soleil wished to expand and in addition hired the Oasis Pool at Bedford. Fenland District Council provided a reference. The naturist swims continued at both venues, with occasional events at other pools, for about ten years without any problems.

In 2004 a leisure services manager at Fenland District Council approached Cambridgeshire Social Services concerning children at naturist sessions. The author of the resulting letter from Social Services clearly knew little or nothing about naturism but despite that he continued with speculation and supposition for a couple of pages. It was not advice but Fenland District Council chose to use it as such. Without any notice or consultation they banned families from the naturist swimming sessions.

It took a few weeks to determine that the cause of the problem was the letter and several months more, despite numerous requests, to obtain a copy of it. British Naturism immediately drew it to the attention of the Director of Social Services and the following day the letter was withdrawn in its entirety. Even so it was several weeks more before the ban on families was lifted.

Serious damage was done to the reputation of the club and the organisers received large numbers of abusive phone calls. Many adults ceased to attend as they would not be associated with a club that had had children banned and all of the families had to stop attending. When the ban was eventually lifted many of the former regulars, both adults and families, did not return. The club has struggled on but even two years later it has not recovered fully. It is now on the brink of closure due to unsustainable losses.

This raises a very important issue. Sooner or later there will be suspicion of child abuse at a naturist event and of course that should be reported to Social Services. Attitudes such as those described above are a serious deterrent to reporting. Indeed it deters naturists from having any contact with Social Services.

Change of Management

A naturist swimming club commenced regular hire of a large swimming pool and health suite complex from the council. At the end of the year management

was transferred to a management company and the outgoing management recommended that the swims should continue.

At the first session following the transfer there were no lifeguards for the swimming pool area. Well over a hundred people, some of whom had travelled a considerable distance, had to crowd into the health suite. Due to the age limit applying to the health suite all families with children had to leave and many adults chose not to go in because they were only there for a swim.

At the next session attendance fell dramatically and the income was well short of the hire fee.

A few months later the contract came up for renewal and the hire price was increased from £450 to £1700. Naturists have not used the pool since.

All requests to use other pools managed by the same company have met with excuses.