

Haggerston Baths: some prompts and provocations

Restoring Haggerston Baths will take an enormous amount of money. Especially if it includes a swimming pool. If the estimated total cost was around £30 million in 2015, the same figure is going to be much, much higher in 2026. Let's not pretend for a second reopening it as a swimming pool/leisure centre is the easy option for the securing the future of the Baths, even if it is the most attractive one to you.

The proposals put forward by Castleforge Partners (a.k.a Haggerston Baths Limited) were an attempt to reconcile the need for huge amounts of money to be invested in the renovation of the building on the one hand, and the desire for maximum public access and benefits on the other hand.

But the scheme in essence belonged to the pre-Covid era, a time before working from home as the default for many, greater social isolation and a sense of a loss of community. There was also nowhere to park Lime bikes.

So, how else might Haggerston Baths be given a new lease of life? Or is it too late and we should think about its future in more drastic terms?

Perhaps memories from the past, whether to do with swimming in the pool, using the laundry, or simply passing by the building in the years after it closed, can inspire new ideas about its future?

The following points and questions were displayed in the June 2026 event as ways of spurring people into thinking about the future of Haggerston Baths in different ways. Given the lack of any publicised progress since then, they remain relevant.

A new pool or a new use altogether?

The plans approved in February 2022 were also finalised and submitted not long after the opening of the new Britannia Leisure Centre at the edge of Shoreditch Park in June 2021.

What with the Britannia, and London Fields Lido (and Kings Hall when it reopens, and York Hall...), does Haggerston really still need its own swimming pool? Or could the Baths building be put to a different primary use that better meets Haggerston's needs in 2026?

Would the mix of offices, workspaces, cafe and restaurant, gym and community space that was first thought up in 2015 still serve the needs of the neighbourhood in 2026?

The heart of Haggerston

Haggerston Baths used to be a focal point for Haggerston, with the swimming pool, public baths and laundry, as well as other leisure activities like boxing and dancing. While most of those functions ceased over the course of the 20th century, Haggerston was still greatly impacted by the closure of the building in 2000, and its failure to reopen at any point since.

An observation; Haggerston lacks an indoor 'third place' that is open throughout the week, somewhere where people can gather to meet people or be around people without the need to be working or spending lots of money. This is not just because of the closure of the Baths (see also the loss of The Acorn pub in 2016 and other pubs/cafes before it).

Haggerston does have four community halls with kitchens (including Centre 151) within a few hundred metres of the Baths. A new multi-purpose community space with an attached kitchen was also part of the plans for the restored building approved in 2022.

The community halls host a great variety of events, but are not open everyday for anyone to access. The planned multi-purpose community space would have been somewhat restricted in terms of when and how people could use it.

Do you think Haggerston today needs an indoor meeting place for all? What form might this take: a library, gym, cafe, or pub? Or a multi-purpose hall-type space? In which case what would it provide that the existing halls don't do already?

Approaches to regenerating the Baths

Haggerston Baths is a big building, never mind it also being an historic one with nationally-listed status, making any kind of regeneration project more complex and costly.

Previous plans have always anticipated doing everything at once, a single extended phase of work to save the building. But this is not the approach taken by many heritage-led regeneration projects, which divide up the work into less expensive phases.

Does renewal of the Baths have to be done all at once? Would it be better (and more cost effective) to do it in phases?

Can temporary 'meanwhile' uses of parts of the Baths be established to generate some income and deliver some public access or benefits too?

How much should the historic Baths building be respected and preserved if the only viable uses nowadays are ones that are very different to those it was built for over 125 years ago?

Is it necessary for new structures to respect the height and appearance of the early 20th-century Baths, or can they be taller/look different if it means they generate the money needed to save the old building?

Should the Pool Hall remain a single open space, or be partly filled with new structures to maximise use of the interior and generate more revenue?

Only 2 of the 19 surviving slipper baths on the 2nd floor were proposed to be removed — why retain so many, and prevent alternative uses of the space, when the baths themselves will never be used again?

Should things continue as they are, with the Council spending hundreds of thousands every year to keep the Baths secure, watertight but inaccessible, until such time in the future as there might be lots of money available to restore them to full community use?

Or do the past 26 years prove that the Baths belonged to the 20th century and Haggerston needs something completely different on the site in the 21st century and after? It is not impossible for a local authority to secure permission to demolish a Grade II listed swimming pool (as proven this year in Coventry) so should Hackney cut its losses and look to the future instead by seeking to demolish the entire building?

Anything to add?

At our June 2026 event we invited people to write down their ideas and memories on post-it notes to stick onto a scale model of the Baths, symbolically (re)connecting people with the building, its past and its future.

The Hackney Society is still keen to receive people's thoughts and ideas about the Baths via email sent to buildingsatrisk@hackneysociety.org.

Maybe you've harboured an idea for how to reopen the Baths for many years. Or perhaps something dawned on you only a few minutes ago.

There is no such thing as a bad idea in this context! Nor is there a single right answer!

We will add any suggestions received to what was contributed at the public event and write them up in a format that can be presented to Hackney Council, so that councillors and staff alike know people still care about Haggerston Baths and have opinions and aspirations for its future.