



## **Poplar and Blackwall District Rowing Club**

### **Proposal for Funding**

### **Upgrading the club's infrastructure to preserve our historic clubhouse**

#### **Who we are**



Poplar, Blackwall and District Rowing Club was founded in 1845 and is believed to be one of the oldest rowing clubs in the country. It was originally established by watermen and lightermen who lived on the boats and in the docks along the Thames. Today, the club operates as a charity. It is proud to maintain its links with those who work on the river while also attracting new members from the local community—people who either live or work on the Isle of Dogs and nearby areas.

#### **Objectives**

The charity focuses on education, training, health promotion, and life-saving initiatives through amateur sports and recreational activities. It supports the general public by providing facilities for leisure activities, particularly rowing, sculling, boating, and gymnastics, as well as accessing river Thames, London's most precious open space. The club operates on the Isle of Dogs with members from the City of London, Greenwich, Newham, and Tower Hamlets.

#### **History**

After World War I, the club saw increased membership from shipyard workers, but activity declined during the 1930s depression. Reformed under its current name in 1935, the club established a boathouse at Calder's Wharf in 1937, with members constructing a launching ramp. In 1964, Greenwich Council planned to purchase the site and relocate the club. Club president Dorothea (Dolly) Woodward Fisher O.B.E. negotiated an agreement allowing the club to fund its own new building, provided it included a gymnasium and served the underprivileged communities of Poplar, Blackwall, Stepney, and surrounding areas.

The last major refurbishment of the rowing club took place in 1966, funded by £55,000 raised by the club—equivalent to approximately £1,000,000 today. This investment enabled the construction of a new boathouse, gymnasium, bar, training tank, function hall, and the installation of hot running water. The new club opened in September 1970.



We are raising £150,000 to update the club's roof which will improve facilities for current and future residents in Tower Hamlets and beyond. Updating the facility will also help the club's finances by reducing energy costs.

We are a community club, run by dedicated volunteers with a vision to inspire more people in London to learn to row, compete, get fit, and stay healthy. As a registered charity, we rely on the support of volunteers and the generosity of sponsors and donors.

## **Need**

Residents in the more deprived area of Tower Hamlets are bearing the brunt of extortionate living costs and developments that do not always benefit the community. As a result, the life expectancy of someone living in Tower Hamlets is four years less than someone living in Kensington and Chelsea. Inequality has a profound impact on mental health, particularly when social disadvantage limits access to essential and affordable sports facilities that allow people to connect with nature and open spaces.

- The wards of Blackwall and Cubitt Town were in the most deprived 10% of neighbourhoods in London
- In 2015, Tower Hamlets, which includes the Isle of Dogs, was one of the worst boroughs in London for unemployment
- The borough also had high levels of pay inequality.

The need to support the health and well-being of young people in Tower Hamlets, particularly on the Isle of Dogs, is more urgent than ever. Many children and families in this area face significant economic and social challenges, which directly impact their physical and mental well-being.

Tower Hamlets has experienced the fastest population growth in the UK. However, alongside this expansion, the borough continues to struggle with some of the country's highest levels of deprivation:

- The 2021 census results have revealed that London's Tower Hamlets has experienced the biggest population growth in the UK; it is also the local authority with the highest level of child poverty, 25 percentage points above the national rate.
- As of 2021, Tower Hamlets is the most densely populated of London's 33 local authority areas, with around 112 people living on each football pitch-sized area of land. For comparison, the England average is three people for every football pitch-sized piece of land. Tower Hamlets has the highest proportion of adults (16.1%) with depression and anxiety in London (2017/18). Tower Hamlets has half the national average of green space per 1,000 people (2016). The concentration of air pollution (fine particulate matter) is among the highest in London. (East London NHS Foundation Trust, 2021)



- Local facilities are in disrepair from lack of upkeep, funding continues to be torn away from one group or another, and youth 'loiter' bored on the streets (or worse, turn to gang involvement) with few options for play or activities to engage in.<sup>1</sup>

## **What we do and how we do it**

The docks around Canary Wharf were once part of the world's largest port, playing a crucial role in global commerce, reflecting its rich history of international trade and connection. This emphasis on trade, migration, and change has also contributed to a long-standing tradition of a dynamic built environment and adaptive re-use in the borough.

### ***Club member Doggett's Coat and Badge winners at the 150th anniversary of the club***



In recent years, the demographics of the local area have changed significantly, and today, the club's membership has evolved from its original East End working-class roots into a diverse community with members from around the world, many of whom live in the area and with some that work in nearby Canary Wharf.

Despite these changes, the club maintains strong ties to the working families of the river, many of whom are still actively involved. Volunteers play a crucial role in running the club, coaching on-the-water

sessions, and preserving the local rowing heritage for new generations of rowers. The club is proudly inclusive, benefiting from a cross-generational membership, and has a long history of producing rowers and scullers who have not only represented Great Britain but have also won medals at both the World and Olympic levels.

The **PBD Rowing Club** is home to one of the finest boathouses in the UK, located opposite the historic Greenwich waterfront. Our facilities cater to rowers of all levels and include **men's and women's changing rooms with hot showers, a well-equipped gym, and an eight-person rowing tank**, where beginners can learn the fundamentals of rowing under close supervision. Additionally, the club boasts a **superb fleet of up-to-date boats**, ensuring that members have access to high-quality equipment for training and competition.

We have a deep rowing tradition, and many of its members have won the Doggett's Coat and Badge, the world's oldest annual sporting event. Raced every year since 1715 in single sculls from London Bridge to

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.c3health.org/healthy-island-look-isle-dogs/>

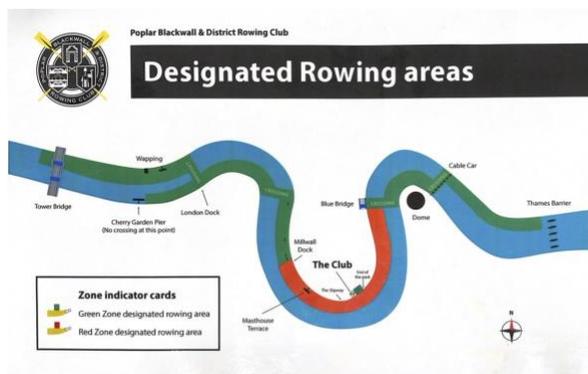


Chelsea, the club has produced over forty-five winners, including several former and current international rowers.

## Notable Achievements:

- In 1962, the club recorded its first win in the prestigious Wingfield Sculls, one of Britain’s premier sculling events, with Charlie Dearsley taking the title.
- From 1968, Kenny Dwan secured five consecutive Wingfield Sculls victories and won again in 1975—the most wins by any rower since 1926. At just 18, Kenny was selected to represent Great Britain at the 1968 Mexico Olympics, finishing in 6th place. He went on to represent Great Britain five times, including in the single scull at the 1972 Munich Olympics.
- Mark Hunter, the 2012 Olympic double sculling champion, also won gold at the 2008 Beijing Olympics.
- The club has produced more under-18 sculling medallists and National Champions than any other club on the Tideway.
- Poplar has twice won the Fawley Cup at the Henley Royal Regatta (1995 and 1996 in composite crews).
- The club has also claimed victory in the Pairs Head of the River twice and the Scullers Head of the River six times.

## How your funding will help us meet our objectives



Rowing has the power to transform lives, offering both physical and personal growth. Our programme is committed to creating an inclusive and supportive community where individuals of all backgrounds feel welcomed, encouraged, and empowered to thrive.

**We are seeking funding** to waterproof the club roof with a warm roof, the PROTEUS PRO-FELT® ‘ULTIMA-PLUS’, a high-quality, plastomeric modified bitumen torch-on membrane designed for direct waterproofing over existing substrates, **that will extend the lifespan of this historic rowing club on the Thames.**

Good health, including mental health, is primarily shaped by factors outside of the influence of health care. Access to open spaces, such as the natural environment of the River Thames, plays a crucial role in promoting both mental and physical well-being. Research shows that spending time in nature can **reduce stress, improve mood, enhance cognitive function, and encourage physical activity**, all of which contribute to overall better



health. Outdoor rowing offers the added benefit of boosting mental health by immersing participants in nature, allowing them to disconnect from daily stress and find peace on the water.

Rowing is an exceptional low-impact exercise that provides a full-body workout, whether practised indoors or outdoors. It strengthens muscles, builds endurance, and enhances cardiovascular health while remaining gentle on the joints. By increasing heart rate and promoting oxygen-rich blood flow, rowing supports overall physical well-being.

Beyond physical fitness, rowing also stimulates the brain. Learning and mastering a complex skill keeps the mind active, strengthening cognitive functions such as memory and attention. Moreover, joining a rowing club or team fosters a sense of belonging, helping to combat loneliness and isolation. Through shared experiences, teamwork, and camaraderie, rowing creates lasting friendships and a supportive community.

With your support, we can continue building on the long history of the club and its sporting and community-building success by offering better opportunities and greater accessibility to rowing for more people on the Isle of Dogs and the wider lower Thames region in London.

### **Expected outcomes**

Our clubhouse was built in 1970 and your funding will help us continue meeting our key goals:

- Fostering links with the local community, including universities in and near the Isle of Dogs, to help the charity meet its aims of fostering well-being, community engagement, and access to inclusive recreational opportunities.
- Extending the life of the current building and maintaining a historic sports and well-being facility on the Isle of Dogs, by improving the building's energy efficiency to reduce its costs.

The activities PBDRC hosts help develop participants' physical and mental well-being, fostering personal growth, maturity, and social integration while improving their overall quality of life. Rowing fosters a strong sense of teamwork, discipline, and a commitment to a healthy lifestyle. It offers participants:

- The opportunity to connect with nature, stay physically active, and develop a resilient work ethic.



- A chance to join like-minded individuals and cultivate a supportive community where adults can build lasting relationships, promote overall well-being, and encourage each other in their personal and athletic growth.

To address the pressing challenges facing the Isle of Dogs community, continuing to host a local rowing programme will create a more inclusive community where everyone has the opportunity to thrive, whilst remaining connected to the long-history of the club, the river and the athletic heritage and well being it continues to produce through generations.



## Funding request

Heritage is an essential part of what makes London a vibrant and successful city. It shapes our identity, connects communities, and plays a crucial role in the city's economic and social fabric. By supporting our cause, you will help ensure that London's rich and diverse heritage remains an integral part of its future, with proactive management that aligns with sustainable development goals.



London's historic places not only define its international status but also foster a deep sense of belonging among its residents. Heritage-driven growth stimulates local, regional, and national economies, attracting visitors, businesses, and investment while preserving the character that makes London unique.

As a donor, your contribution will help safeguard these historic spaces, ensuring they continue to enrich the lives of Londoners for generations to come.

It costs **£150,000** to upgrade the club facilities and extend the life of the building, ensuring they are fit for purpose and more accessible for generations to come.

By replacing the clubhouse roof with an energy-efficient installation to support long-term sustainability, whilst reducing overhead costs.

So far, we have raised £2,450 from individual contributions and £17,000 from events, a total of **£19,540**. We still need to raise **£130,460** to reach our goal.



With your support, we can ensure the future of this historic club while expanding opportunities for young people in the community.

Would you consider making a donation of £XXXXXX (£ as indicated in the spreadsheet per prospective donor) to help us meet our objectives now and in the future? The upgrades will keep the club functional, safe and welcoming for all members, through rowing that fosters physical fitness, mental resilience and social connections, making our club a valuable community asset.

**Your partnership will play a vital role in sustaining, preserving and enhancing Poplar and Blackwall District Rowing Club's essential presence in the local community.**

**Thank you for considering supporting our request**