

Address to Council by Nigel Gibson & Jane Alexander

The Reality of Temple Cowley Pools – Nigel Gibson and Jane Alexander

It is now four years since the Campaign to Save Temple Cowley Pools was started, in response to the Council's stated aim of closing it. Well, two years after you wanted it shut, it's still there, providing facilities that people want and need, in a place where they want and need them. And with the seventh petition close to its target number of signatures, it is clear that the people of Oxford still want you to do what you know is right – keep Temple Cowley Pools open.

And throughout the Campaign, we have been faced with a wall of propaganda, misinformation that comes from the Council purporting to be the truth about the state of Temple Cowley Pools. And despite real information being exposed time and again by the Campaign, it's disappointing that even now, when the Campaign is supposed to be over, that Labour councillors continue to repeat things that they must know are untrue.

For example, at the One World Fair a couple of Saturdays ago, a Labour councillor refused to sign the petition, repeating yet again that Temple Cowley Pools is "shabby, expensive and has high carbon emissions". And this is what's at the heart of things; you choose, either through ignorance or knowingly, to repeat information that you know, because we've told you often enough, is a combination of misleading, inaccurate, incomplete and untrue.

Let's examine what that councillor said. Shabby? Well, yes, undoubtedly Temple Cowley Pools needs cleaning and maintaining. Whose responsibility is that? Well, yours – the Council. You have a duty to maintain public facilities in good order, whether or not they are going to close. You have failed to do that at Temple Cowley Pools, deliberately running the facilities down in an attempt to reduce public support for keeping it open. You've succeeded in running it down; it needs proper cleaning and maintenance. You should have repaired the diving pool, the only public one in the whole of Oxfordshire, but you've chosen not to. You should have repaired the air conditioning system when it failed two years ago – it would cost £5,000. What have you done? Instead, last summer, you installed two apparently 'temporary' air cooling units at a rental cost of £300 a week. They are still there, not providing real air conditioning, and at a total cost now approaching the £5,000 that would fix it properly! A complete waste of our, the public's, money.

Expensive? The maintenance cost for the whole centre is under £100,000 a year. This is to provide for the 25m competition swimming pool, the learner pool, the diving pool, the sauna and steam room, the exercise studio and the gym. I call that value for money – particularly when compared to the new, apparently more efficient and cost-effective swimming pool in Blackbird Leys, that will cost us £150,000 a year. There are other costs – water and utilities that we pay wherever these facilities are, and then the burden of the contract with Fusion, which was deliberately constructed to show a higher cost at Temple Cowley than any other leisure centre. Again, in a vain attempt to justify a closure that the public simply don't want. So based on the

facts, and comparing like with like, the evidence demonstrates yet again that Temple Cowley Pools continues to deliver value for money services for the people of Oxford.

And Carbon Emissions? The total carbon emissions, measured in tonnes of CO2 equivalent, is certainly high, but that reflects the energy usage and the variety of services being delivered. You have refused to install rigid pool covers that would save warm water evaporation (and save heating costs, and reduce the chlorine corrosion in the air handling units). You have an electric powered sauna and a steam room sited against two external walls, sucking out heat. But despite this profligate energy usage, when we compared Temple Cowley with Barton and Ferry leisure centres using your figures it still had the lowest emissions per square metre, the most efficient in Oxford. So it could be even more efficient if you decided to put cost-effective energy saving measures in place – and you still have time to do that and save money and carbon emissions, even if you were to be successful in closing Temple Cowley Pools in January 2015 as you've said you want to. More revealing still is the like for like comparison. You have trumpeted how green your new, only 25m and not bigger than Temple Cowley, non-Olympic pool in Blackbird Leys will be. You have admitted that the forecast emissions will be 300 tonnes CO2 a year. The equivalent at Temple Cowley Pools is in comparison 180 tonnes CO2.

So the councillor was wrong. Wrong to accuse Temple Cowley Pools of being shabby without taking responsibility for proper cleaning, wrong to say it is expensive without taking responsibility for the Fusion contract, and wrong to accuse the most energy efficient leisure centre of high carbon emissions when it's supposedly green replacement has even higher emissions.

But fundamentally it is time that Oxford City Council recognised that the new pool it is building in Blackbird Leys is only a replacement for the existing pool there, not Temple Cowley Pools, and is only built because that's what the Swimming Club wants. And time you recognised that the majority of users, past and present, the public in East Oxford and across the city, and the many users from outside the city still want it kept open. I ask you again to rethink your decision, recognise what is possible, and start working with the Campaign to keep Temple Cowley Pools open.