

My name is Nigel Gibson, and as part of this address I will be presenting a petition asking the Council to reconsider the decision to build a new swimming pool in Blackbird Leys and close both Temple Cowley Leisure Centre and the existing Blackbird Leys swimming pool. This petition demonstrates yet again the strength of feeling throughout Oxford that the Council is ignoring the views of the people who pay for these services.

The Council decided, in the City Executive Board meeting on the 21<sup>st</sup> July of this year, to move ahead and build a new 25m, non-Olympic swimming pool at Blackbird Leys for an ever-escalating cost that is now fast approaching £10m, knowing full well that £3m would refurbish and improve both the Temple Cowley Leisure Centre and the existing swimming pool in Blackbird Leys.

The Council's decision was made without properly consulting with the public, who pay for these services through their council tax, and also through the admission charges when they actually use these facilities, and without considering properly the effect that closure of Temple Cowley Leisure Centre will have on a range of minority groups. The decision was also made on the basis of information provided by the council which the Campaign team, and many members of the public, have pointed out is a combination of misleading, inaccurate, incomplete and untrue. An excellent example is the way in which the Council issued a side note to one of my last addresses to Council, attempting to point out the 'truth' of what they are saying – they have been unable to prove any of their points, simply because the Campaign is evidence based, using mostly information from the Council itself.

There is simply no evidence of demand for a new swimming pool in Blackbird Leys. The existing swimming pool, much appreciated by those who do use it, is only open to the public for 10 hours a week and there is no-one asking for it to be open longer. Building in Blackbird Leys will take away yet more green space, already much lower than the Council's own target for green space in the community. It will cause enormous traffic problems as people are forced to drive down already congested roads if the desk-based forecast by Fusion Lifestyle of 400,000 visits a year is reached. It will do nothing to support the Council's aspirations to get more people out of their cars and walk or cycle to their leisure centre – only Blackbird Leys residents and possibly a few people from the fringes of the estate will be able to walk there, and this is supposed to be a facility for people across the whole of the city, like Temple Cowley Leisure Centre is at present. Thousands of people in East Oxford and beyond, existing users at Temple Cowley, will be disenfranchised through this cut in services by the Labour administration. And it flies in the face of the Council's own Core Strategy, which demands that a new swimming pool should be built in a Primary

District Centre ie Temple Cowley, in preference to a District Centre, ie Blackbird Leys. The Council Core Strategy also says that closure of a centre can only happen if there is a replacement in the immediate area, and there is no sign of the Council providing another swimming pool, diving pool, sauna, steam room, gym and exercise studio in Temple Cowley.

The consultation on how sites will be developed if they became free has recently been completed. And we find that in this exercise, yet again, the democratic will has been ignored. At both the Temple Cowley Leisure Centre site, and also the Cowley Marsh works, people said they wanted leisure facilities to be kept or provided; the planning officers' recommendations ignore these comments completely, and don't even consider them. Instead, it is yet more new housing in highly inappropriate areas – there is absolutely no point in building more student accommodation, or even residential homes, if the infrastructure and amenities are not there to support them. Even Brookes University students don't want more student accommodation – they would rather live out in the community and have a swimming pool and gym local to them.

The decision in July, and the Council's continued intransigence despite repeated informal requests, has prompted a number of actions by the public, and despite the unwarranted criticism from both Council and the media, they are all completely justified democratic processes.

The first of these is an application by a group of local residents in Blackbird Leys, the 'Town Green 14', supported by many more residents, for Town Green status for the park on which the Council wants to build the proposed new swimming pool. The submission is in, and an initial decision is awaited by the County Council.

And because the Labour Council has ignored the public, by not consulting or listening to the people who would be affected by its proposed cuts to services in East Oxford, the Save Temple Cowley Pools Campaign is challenging its decision through the High Court and a Judicial Review. Anyone wanting more information can email [savetcp@gmail.com](mailto:savetcp@gmail.com) or look at the website, <http://tiny.cc/savetcpblog>. And we are open for donations – it is completely wrong that the public can only challenge a Council decision if they have deep enough pockets. The fate of a generation should not depend on whether there is enough funding. Donations can be made direct into the following Bank Account: Sort Code 08-92-99, Account Name Save TCP, Account Number 6551 7499.

And finally, we have the latest petition. The first petition gathered over 12,000 (twelve thousand) signatures and is the largest ever in the history of Oxford. It was dismissed by Labour councillors as not really representing what people think, not being the whole of Oxford, and being easy to collect. We faced accusations that simply anyone would sign a petition, and that we had made signatures up. I find it appalling that Labour councillors would dismiss so readily a democratic process that was enacted in law by the last Labour government to provide us, the people, with a voice to be heard.

And when we have submitted petitions before, we have been accused of having less support for the Campaign because the numbers are so much lower. This is simply not true, and misses the point completely. The Council has set 1500 (fifteen hundred) signatures as the trigger for a debate in a Full Council meeting. If anyone has tried getting signatures, you will realize how difficult it is. Yet the Campaign team has found that on this issue, wanting to close Temple Cowley Leisure Centre in order to waste our money on a new swimming pool, we regularly have queues of people wanting to sign.

And so Lord Mayor, I would do two things – firstly, to ask Council to reconsider the decision to move ahead with its white elephant of a vanity project, and consult properly with those who actually pay for the services before committing our money, and to reconsider the decision to move ahead with its white elephant vanity project in Blackbird Leys - £9.5m on a new only-25m, non-Olympic swimming pool in a place where there is no evidence of demand simply doesn't make sense when £3m will refurbish and improve two existing facilities that are in a place where people want and use them.

Secondly, I am presenting this petition of over 1500 signatures to Council for debate at a future meeting – it represents the continuing demand of the people of Oxford that they be listened to, and consulted with properly before the Council commits large amounts of our money on projects that will not benefit the city.

The Campaign to keep Temple Cowley Leisure Centre open will continue for as long as there is support from the people of Oxford. The short time it has taken to gather over 1500 signatures for this latest petition demonstrates yet again the strength of feeling on this issue, and should be a wake-up call to councillors who simply have not been listening, or responding to the wishes of their voters.

This page is intentionally left blank