Address to Council by Nigel Gibson

$\frac{WhyOxfordCityCouncilCould and Should Deliver the Services the People of Oxford Want and Need \\ \underline{}$

lamher ethis even ingto hand over these venth petition from the people of Oxford, who are clearly expressing their wish, yet again, that you keep Temple Cowley Pools and Fitness Centre open.

Irealisethat manyofyou regardthematterofclosingTempleCowleyPoolsas history,as something you'vemadea decisiononyearsagoandsoshouldn't have toconsideragain. But,thepeople,yourvoters,haveaverydifferentview,andexpressit plainlybychoosingto signthepetition. They are extremely an grythatyouare was tingtheir money and ignoring what they want.

Thepeopleof Oxfordwanttheirservicesforhealthandexercisekept open,providedin a placewheretheywantandneedthem,atTempleCowleyPoolsandFitnessCentre.You mustrecognisejusthowstronglypeoplefeelaboutthisissue.Thefirstpetitionpresentedto youin 2010wasthelargestinthehistoryofOxfordatover12,000signatures.We only stoppedcollectingsignaturesbecauseyouchoseto ignorethepetition—sowestarted anotherpetition,andanother,and another...Thestrength offeeling remains thesame—peopleareangrynowthatyou continueignoringthem,justasyou ignored themwhenyou carriedoutyourso-called'consultation'process.

Butit's not justaboutopinion; you would haveusbelievethat this isamatteronwhich peoplecan 'reasonablydiffer'in theirviews and that asyou arein poweryourviewmust prevail.

ButthemantraofLabourhasbeen formany yearstofollow 'evidence-based' policy making. Andin this caseitisnot justopinion thatis againstyou, butevidence. Councillors have claimed that you took "quite alot of persuading" before deciding to close Temple

Cowley Pools. Well, despite all the claims to be following an open and transparent process, at no point have we seen any evidence to justify closure that is either persuasive or even mildly convincing. We have repeatedly asked to see any evidence of what persuaded you; our requests have been met with patronising responses along the lines of 'we must trust the experts', even though it is clear that your 'experts', your hired hands, are only interested in delivering the message you want to hear.

Wehavedemonstrated, eitherusing information you have provided, or using information we have had to drag out of the council using Freedomof Information requests, how all this so-called 'evidence' of yours is a combination of misleading, in accurate, in complete and untrue. And that is unfortunate, because as a Campaign we would rather work with you than against you. And this evening, yet again, with yet another petition (now of course the largest number of petitions on one to picever to have been presented to this council) you have the opportunity to do the right thing.

Youhavedecidedtocontinuetobuilda25m,non-Olympic swimmingpoolatBlackbirdLeys. Thetotal cost of thisexercise,notjustthe currentbuild cost of £9.23m, willbeover£13m by thetimeyouhavefinished. This is the most expensive 25ms wimming pool in the UK, and probably in Europe—that is overhalf amillion pounds for each metre!

Andyou intendclosingtwosportscentresintheprocess, despiteyour claims in an answer at the last City Executive Board that "there is no policy of reducing publicly funded leisure facilities" —really? Ithinkitis clear that you are most definitely reducing facilities that people want and need, moving the maway from where they want and need them. There is absolutely zero evidence of demand for a new swimming pool at Black bird Leys—if people there really wanted more swimming, there would be a clamour for the existing pool to be open to the public much longer than the 9 hours it currently is each week.

Ifyouhadtakenadifferentcourse, you could have protected ally our front-lineservices from the swingeing cuts in your Central Government grant, and fully refurbished Temple Cowley Pools, and have done what every one wants—to keep facilities for health and fitness where they should be—inwalking and cycling distance of most of the existing users. And you have chosen a different route, to proceed with your white elephant of a vanity project. But there is still time. Time to keep Temple Cowley Pools open, and down at the public wants.

I'm notgoing torevisitall thesound, robustand factualevidencefor keepingTemple CowleyPools open,asthe Campaign haspresentedthemtoyoumanytimesbefore,and eachtimeyou'vechosen toignorethem.lgnorewhatwas themostpopularleisurecentredespite you activelytryingtorunit down, ignorethatitwasthemostenergyefficient leisurecentre,ignore thatit is sited in Oxford'sareaof fastest population growthoverthe lasttenyears,ignoretheindependentconditionsurveysthatyoucommissionedandthen hid becausetheytoldyouthereisnothingbasically wrongwithit.

Attheheartof yourdesire to closeTempleCowleyPools ismoney,orrather,'you say' savingit. Wehear repeatedlythatit costsus over£500,000ayearto operatethecentre. Youclaimthatthevastmajorityof that,£340,000last year,isacontractualpaymenttothe operators, Fusion, whoalso takealltheadmissionmoneywhileoperatinga taxavoidance scamunderthepretenceof being a charity.

Well, you publish the annual payments from the Fusion contractor your website. Herethey are, for the whole contract term:



Andyou claimedinananswerto a publicquestionat a CityExecutiveBoardmeetinglast yearthatnothing hadchanged,andthat youarenot payinganythingadditionalto Fusion. Youwillseequite clearlythat thepaymentslastyearwereunder£200,000for<u>all</u>ourleisure centres,soclearlythere's someadding upgoingwrong inyourclaim fortheoperatingcosts ofTempleCowley.<u>Orsomeoneislying?</u>

Andyou cansee, quiteclearly, that the annual payments to Fusion will stay below £200,000 for the rest of the contract. And yet for the brandnew 25 mnon-Olympics wimming pool you are going to pay Fusion £150,000 ayear! How on earthcan this be value for money?

Here'sasolution. Themaintenance cost of TempleCowley Poolsisunder£100,000ayear. Therealcontract'cost'toFusion foroperating thecentrecannot bemorethanabout £30,000ayear. You can bringthe divingpoolbackintousefor£60,000— the onlypublicly fundeddivingpoolinOxfordshire . Theonlymajorcostsinmaintenance, accordingtoyour own figures, are the air handling units and the roof—the sewill cost £300,000. So here is a real value-for-money solution that trumps anything else you are doing anywhere else in Oxford; cheapertoenact and cheaper to run than the newswimming pool, offering more facilities that will enable and preserve the health, fitness, well-being and quality of life of thousands of people in Oxford and across the county. None more so than the elderly and infirm, who relyon this health and fitness centre being where it is now as convenient for them to exercise and maintain their quality of life, enabling them to remain independent and out of the costly clutches of the NHS.

Andso, supported by the solution I have just described, I would like to present you with the seventh petition from the people of Oxford:

"Wethe undersigned stronglyoppose Oxford CityCouncil's plan to demolish Temple CowleyPools and Fitness Centre in orderto sell publiclyowned land for housing. We believethis is a short-sighted, destructive policywhich will have detrimental effects on health and well-being, particularly of the most vulnerable people, who use the centre tomaintain their health and quality of life, and independence from the NHS for as long as possible. We call upon Oxford CityCouncil to work immediately with the Save Temple CowleyPools Campaign to find the best way to enhance and preserve the existing facilities in Temple Cowley."

Nigel Gibson—February2014
CampaigntoSaveTempleCowley Pools &Fitness
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