**Closing Temple Cowley Pools – A Political Decision**

My name is Nigel Gibson, and I’m speaking this evening as the Director of the SaveTCP

community interest company, set up out of the Campaign to Save Temple Cowley Pools to

keep health and exercise facilities where the community wants and needs them, in Temple

Cowley.

I’m speaking this evening about the consequences of Labour’s decision at both the City

Executive Board Meeting on the 10th December last year, and also the Special Scrutiny

Committee Meeting on the 23rd December, and also providing you with some insight into

the community interest company’s response to this decision.

What was most disappointing about the decision making process was the lack of

engagement with what we were proposing, both from the council officers, but also Labour

councillors themselves. We are very appreciative of the support that both the Green

members and also the LibDems provided in the meetings themselves, but also outside. Even

our Labour MP, Andrew Smith, took the time to meet with us, and discuss the proposal in

sufficient detail to then be able to explain its merits to members of the public.

The decision to close Temple Cowley Pools was, of course, a purely political one, as

established by the Inspector when considering your Core Strategy. So the lack of

engagement from Labour is really no surprise. But everyone should be in no doubt: despite

repeated requests, we were never provided with a set of criteria by which our proposal

would be assessed. Indeed, we still have no idea what criteria were used. We were

compared for the most part with the £3.6m conditional offer from Catalyst. And conditional

is the operative word here. If you had looked into the detail of this offer at the meetings, we

would not have had to use Freedom of Information to establish that there is no guarantee

that you will achieve this headline figure, so rendering any monetary comparison with our

figure as meaningless. You also chose to pointedly ignore your obligations under the Public

Services (Social Value) Act to consider the value to the community of any proposal. Our bid,

taking over and operating Temple Cowley Pools at no cost or risk to the Council, can offer a

value to the community equivalent to £20m a year.

So, what of the consequences? The rush to shut Temple Cowley Pools at 4pm on the 23rd

December, without any notice to the public, followed by the immediate boarding up of the

site on the morning of the 24th indicates that you knew exactly what the outcome of the

meeting was going to be.

Interesting also that you have left the library car park available for use. For the moment.

There were immediate complaints not only over the closure itself, but also the now very

restricted parking. How many people are aware that the library car park is also part of the

sale, and will disappear completely if the site is developed?

We have constantly highlighted the impact on the public of closure, and this is recognised by

yourselves in your Core Strategy Policy CS21, although totally ignored at your decision

making meetings in December. You have placed in the Core Strategy obligations on

yourselves not to close a leisure centre if it causes a “deficiency in the area”, and to ensure

that alternative facilities are in a location “equally or more accessible by walking, cycling or

public transport” – you simply can’t argue that for someone who walked or cycled to

Temple Cowley Pools, then any of the other leisure centres meet these criteria. And public

transport is limited to one bus route. The claim that the new Blackbird Leys swimming pool

is a replacement for people in Temple Cowley just indicates that you don’t understand the

area. Unlike the councillors who in 1963 built a swimming pool in Blackbird Leys recognising

that it is a totally different community, in a totally different place, from Cowley.

The Campaign surveyed users three years ago around their intentions if Temple Cowley

Pools was closed – something the council didn’t dare to do because it would have revealed

just how much opposition there was to what you have now done. This survey revealed that

about 20% would simply drop any form of exercise. We carried out another similar survey

just before Christmas. And again it showed that 20% of Temple Cowley Pools users would

stop any form of exercise. It really is disgraceful that a council actively sets out to withdraw

health and fitness facilities from residents through a purely political decision. We have

received many emails from people about how they are exercising less, and having to travel

much further at additional cost, as a result of the closure.

And what of the community interest company and our proposal? Well, it is still viable, it

proposes a housing density in line with that mandated by the Inspector, and remains the

best way for people in the Cowley area to maintain the health, fitness and independence

away from the NHS as they grow older. And we don’t intend to let them down, so are

pursuing a number of options to achieve what the community wants to see. As at present

we have no other way of challenging your decision, we are being forced reluctantly to look

at legal action. But it’s not something we want by choice, and I would invite you yet again to

consider how best you can meet the needs of your communities, the ones who elected you

to look after their interests, and who are now shocked to find that you have so readily

ignored them.