

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

POLICY COMMITTEE

16 JULY 2018

AGENDA ITEM NO. 8

PETITION

	Lead Petitioner	Subject	Response
1.	David McElroy	Save Reading Libraries	Councillor Hacker

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

	Questioner	Subject	Reply
1.	Roger Lightfoot	Sports Forum	Cllr Hoskin
2.	Peter Burt	Contributions to Leisure Service	Cllr Hoskin
3.	Peter Burt	Use of Out-Of-Borough Facilities	Cllr Hoskin
4.	Anne Green-Jessel	Swimming Pool at Palmer Park	Cllr Hoskin
5.	David McElroy	Why Restrict Pool Location?	Cllr Hoskin

QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

	Questioner	Subject	Reply
1.	Cllr White	Is a Pool in Palmer Park really guaranteed?	Cllr Hoskin
2.	Cllr White	Recycling league to boost recycling in Reading?	Cllr James
3.	Cllr Gavin	Planning Process for Pool at Palmer Park	Cllr Page

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Petition from David McElroy:

Save Reading libraries - Central, Palmer Park, Whitley and more

Reading Borough Council is proposing cutting library opening hours across the town. Palmer Park library, for example, is having its opening hours cut from 21 down to 15. This means it won't be open in the evening or at weekends.

We fear that this will result in less usage of our libraries and the Council will eventually close some of them because they are not being used.

Libraries are a vital resource for the community. Many people use them to borrow books, read papers or attend Rhyme Time sessions. If the hours are cut we will all lose out.

We want the Council to look again for a creative solution to preserve opening hours - evening and weekend opening for Palmer Park library for example.

Save Reading's libraries!

RESPONSE by Councillor Hacker (Lead Councillor for Culture, Sport and Consumer Services):

Thank you for the petition and to everyone who responded to the recent consultation on the library service. Under item 13 of tonight's agenda the Committee will be considering a report on the feedback received in the consultation and officer recommendations for revised savings proposals, including the proposed changes to opening hours at Palmer Park library. I hope that you will stay and listen to the discussion.

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QUESTION NO. 1

Roger Lightfoot to ask the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing & Sport:

Sports Forum

At the last Council meeting the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing, and Sport stated that he had requested that officers canvass stakeholders for interest in and support for attending a Sport Forum in Reading.

Please can you tell me what organisations and stakeholders will be consulted about the need for establishing a Sports Forum in Reading? Please provide a list of these organisations.

Will you confirm that the Sports Forum will be open to all community groups and individuals with an interest in sporting activities to attend?

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin (Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing & Sport):

Thank you for your question Mr Lightfoot. You may or may not be aware that the previous Sports Forum suffered from a gradually declining membership and eventually stopped meeting and I am now keen that we build something that is inclusive, effective and sustainable. As you are aware we have commenced a procurement process for a new leisure operator to work with the Council to deliver a significant improvement to the town's leisure facilities and in the first instance this provides an opportunity to canvas the views of our local clubs who currently use our facilities both on their aspirations and what they see would be the longer term value of a 'Sports and Physical Activity Forum'. This initial exploratory meeting to help shape thinking is taking place tomorrow evening and I would be happy to provide you with a list of invitees.

In the medium and longer term I would like to see attendance and engagement from a wide range of people and groups with energy and ideas to contribute. This would include colleagues in Public Health and community / voluntary sector organisations with a particular interest in health and well-being and how sport & physical activity could play a significant role in delivering better outcomes for people in the town. I look forward to your support as we develop this further over the coming months.

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QUESTION NO. 2

Peter Burt to ask the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing & Sport:

Contributions to Leisure Service

At the last Council meeting the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing, and Sport advised swimmers from outside the Borough of Reading to press their own Councils to make contributions to Reading's sport and leisure service.

Could he explain why he feels that the entry fees and hire fees that such swimmers pay to use Reading's leisure facilities are not already an adequate contribution to Reading Sport and Leisure's finances?

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin (Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing & Sport):

Thank you for your question Mr Burt. You are helpfully highlighting that we, Reading Borough Council, are being pressed by many people living outside of the council area to provide a 50 metre pool as a regional facility and that many people from outside the Borough benefit from this Council's investment in infrastructure and facilities. This is not unusual nationally but is exacerbated in Reading because of the very tightly drawn local authority boundaries, which means that a much higher proportion of non-'Reading' residents gain this benefit.

Historically this Council has had to subsidise the operation of its leisure facilities - for very good reason in relation to the health and well-being outcomes - but nonetheless the Council is, effectively, subsidising access for those who pay their Council tax elsewhere because the fees and hire charges paid do not cover the cost of operation.

As you are aware we are in the process of procuring a new leisure operator as part of a strategy to radically improve leisure facilities in the Borough. This model is indeed based on operating surpluses generated from fees and charges providing the opportunity to reinvest in better quality and new leisure facilities. Nevertheless contributions from other authorities to reflect the benefit their residents receive would greatly assist with affordability of a 50 metre pool, and be a more equitable basis for sharing funding responsibility and risk. Not that I believe there is a realistic prospect of this happening.

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QUESTION NO. 3

Peter Burt to ask the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing & Sport:

Use of Out Of Borough Facilities

Please can the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing, and Sport tell me:

a) how much Reading Borough Council has paid to Wokingham Borough Council as a contribution towards use of the Loddon Valley and, until recently, Bulmershe pools by residents from Reading Borough who have been forced to travel to these pools by the closure of Arthur Hill Pool and Central Pool,

and

b) What discussions Reading Borough Council has had with neighbouring Councils about cooperation over sports and leisure provision and the long-term development of new leisure facilities?

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin (Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing & Sport):

Thank you for your question Mr Burt. The answer to the first part of your question is in short 'nothing'. This Council has invested over £2m in providing a new demountable pool at Rivermead as an alternative offer pending the development of new facilities - and overall I'm pleased to say that this provision has been very well received. It is also pertinent to point out that swimming facilities at South Reading Leisure Centre and Meadway also continue to offer an in-Borough option that many people and schools avail themselves of. A large number of residents of Tilehurst and Calcot pay their council tax to Newbury but their closest pools provided by their council are in Burghfield Common or, predictably, Newbury.

With regard to the second part of your question, we regularly share information and plans with our neighbouring authorities and have, indeed, jointly commissioned a Playing Pitch Strategy with Wokingham. However, we do not have a shared service arrangement and have to respect the right of each Council to determine the facilities it considers are necessary to meet local needs. In this regard our own strategy for the provision of facilities has been directly informed by an independently conducted 'Indoor Facilities Needs Assessment' that the Council commissioned to ensure that proposals were informed and appropriate including consultation with Reading's neighbouring authorities.

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QUESTION NO. 4

Anne Green-Jessel to ask the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing & Sport:

Swimming Pool at Palmer Park

At the last Council meeting the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport stated emphatically that it was Council policy and a Labour Party manifesto commitment to build a new swimming pool in Palmer Park.

The Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport stated equally adamantly that the Council is committed to its policies for protecting public open space.

As any new swimming pool in Palmer Park would be built on public open space, how does the Council intend to resolve the evident conflict between these two policies?

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin (Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing & Sport):

Thank you for your question that rightly identifies an inherent tension between the protection of open space and the delivery of desirable and beneficial development, which can both contribute in different ways to the social and economic wellbeing of Reading and its residents. At a strategic level the Council's Local Plan seeks to manage this and a number of other competing demands on land use across the Borough. In this regard application of policy at a site specific level needs to balance the advantages and disadvantages of any particular proposal whilst ensuring that overall policies are adhered to. For example, over the previous Local Plan period whilst there has been a significant amount of development, the overall amount of public open space has actually increased.

With regard to Palmer Park Stadium Area the new draft Local Plan (submitted to the Secretary of state) specifically designates the site as a potential location for a new swimming pool with a range of factors that need to be taken into account for such development to be acceptable (for reference this is policy ER1j of the Plan that is publicly accessible via the Council's website). In this instance it is considered that enhancing formal leisure use of the Stadium area is capable of providing significant benefit to local people whilst not prejudicing the wider functions and value of Palmer Park as a whole.

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QUESTION NO. 5

David McElroy to ask the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing & Sport:

Why Restrict Pool Location?

The Council plans to persuade a private leisure company to build a new pool to replace Arthurs in east Reading. However, instead of putting out a tender saying 'build a pool in East Reading' it has said 'build a pool in Palmer Park' - leaving the private company no other options - such as re-using Arthur Hill, or talking to the University, or any other land nearby. Question is why, when you want a pool in East Reading, do you insist it has to be in Palmer Park?

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin (Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing & Sport):

Thank you for your question Mr McElroy. Quite simply a pool at Palmer Park Stadium makes sense. The Council owns the land and a pool would complement and enhance the existing leisure offer as well as catering for demand in East Reading. Whilst a leisure operator will design, build, operate and maintain the new pool for the period of the contract the asset will be owned by the Council, and consolidation of leisure facilities at Palmer Park makes sense for both long-term management and for residents who want to conveniently access a range of facilities in one location.

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COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 1

Councillor White to ask the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing & Sport:

Is a pool in Palmer Park really guaranteed?

Labour Councillors have guaranteed a new pool in Palmer Park with multiple promises, but there are no guarantees that a leisure provider will find that they can make money from the Reading tender, and so sign up to it. My question is what is the guarantee based on exactly, and what is 'plan B' should no leisure provider come forward on the Council's terms?

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin (Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing & Sport):

Thank you for your question Councillor White. As you are aware we have commenced the procurement process for a new leisure operator with a very clear specification of our requirements, including the provision of a new swimming pool at Palmer Park Stadium. These requirements are though based on a thorough analysis of needs carried out by independent consultants, including an estimate of water space required in the Borough to meet current and future demand.

I am therefore confident that leisure providers will respond positively to the opportunity presented by the procurement exercise and will concur with our assessment that a pool at Palmer Park Stadium is both desirable and viable. In this context I do not think that a 'Plan B' is either necessary or merited as 'Plan A' is well-founded with significant flexibility within the procurement process to ensure that a pool at Palmer Park Stadium will be delivered.

Green councillors, at the last full council meeting, voted against continuing with the procurement of a new leisure pool in Park ward. They seemed to be supporting the RG50 petition that the council should drop plans for an East Reading pool and instead put all our resources into building one 50 metre pool. We're well used to Green councillors opposing everything in the council chamber but I am surprised by their opposition to providing excellent new leisure facilities in Park ward with no hint of a suggestion what they would do instead. Green party councillors oppose our Plan A but have nothing credible to propose instead. Quite an astonishing position for three Park ward councillors to take.

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COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 2

Councillor White to ask the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods and Communities:

Recycling league to boost recycling in Reading?

Reading has an appalling recycling rate. Oxford Council runs a recycling league by area to boost recycling. Please can I get the current recycling rate as percentages for each round? Please can I get figures for every quarter over the last year? Please can I also get a description of the area each round covers?

REPLY by Councillor James (Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods and Communities):

Reading currently sends 19% of its municipal waste to landfill with 81% being recycled, composted or sent for Energy from Waste. The Council is committed to achieving the EU Directive target recycling rate of 50% by 2020. The Council recognises that the current recycling rate of 32% is too low and that increasing it represents a considerable challenge for the Council at a time when the resources necessary to achieve our aims have significantly reduced.

The Council recently adopted the revised re3 Strategy and at its meeting of 4 July 2018 the Housing Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee approved the replacement of the current Reading Waste Minimisation Strategy with a Waste Action Plan for Reading which sets out a clear path for the delivery of the high-level strategic objectives of the re3 Strategy and the specific service development priorities for Reading Borough Council. This includes the need to increase the current recycling rate whilst delivering substantial savings as set out in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

With regard to the Blue Bin Recycling League, Oxford have split the Borough into eight areas and offers incentives such as vouchers and free or reduced subscriptions to chargeable Council services on a monthly basis to the area which produces the highest tonnage of domestic kerbside recycling. Officers will liaise with the waste operations department in Oxford to establish the basis of the means of assessing the scheme, but it is likely that the performance of each of the eight areas is based on the geographical collection rounds and assessed by the tonnage of recycling collected per area per month. Oxford City Council obtained grant funding to provide sufficient resources to set up and administer the scheme, funding which is not available to RBC.

Officers will also discuss whether the scheme has resulted in a measureable increase in recycling rate. Bracknell Borough Council have offered recycling incentives through its E+ card and whilst this provides the Council with a direct

communications channel with its members there is no statistical evidence that it increases the recycling rate.

The Council does not assess the recycling rate per round, because the recycling rate, which is reported through Waste Data Flow, the governments national waste monitoring system, is built up of waste collected at the kerbside but also waste recycled at the Household Waste Recycling Centre which is taken there directly by residents from across the re3 area (Bracknell, Wokingham and Reading). The assessment of recycling rates on a round-by-round or area basis in the absence of an area-based incentive scheme would be abortive work which the Council has no resource to carry out.

Officers will provide Councillor White with the recycling rates for the Borough by quarter for 2016-2017 and the figures to date for 2018 -19, but not for each round as explained previously.

Officers will also provide a map of the current round layout to Councillor White.

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COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 3

Councillor Gavin to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport:

Planning Process for Pool at Palmer Park

In light of the Council's restated position on providing a 25m pool on Palmer Park can the Lead Member for Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport please advise on the next steps in the planning process for taking forward the delivery of this commitment?

REPLY by Councillor Page (Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport):

I thank Cllr Gavin for her question.

The Council's draft Local Plan will be considered by a Planning Inspector in September with the intention of adopting the Borough's new Local Plan by April 2019.

The plan proposes a dedicated policy in relation to Palmer Park (Policy ER1j) which supports the provision of a new pool at the Park, subject to a number of criteria. One of the criteria requires that the pool has no adverse impacts on the use of the park and its sports and leisure facilities.

Given the progression of the Leisure Procurement Process which seeks to secure funding for a new pool, it is timely now to develop a more detailed planning framework for how the pool could be accommodated at the Park.

I would expect the planning framework to come forward in the autumn of this year for public comment and input, with formal adoption of the framework in early 2019.