

AGENDA ITEM 4

PETITIONS

1. Lead Petitioners - Jeremy Muscroft and Katie Hooper:
RG50 Make a Big Splash !!

We the undersigned residents of Reading and its environs, fully support the need for a new 50m swimming pool facility being opened within 3 years of Reading Borough Council closing Reading Central Swimming pool. We call upon RBC to:

- Work with the residents, and Aquatic Clubs of Reading and the ASA to deliver this much needed facility; and
- Ensure that it is opened by 1 January 2021 at the very latest.

RESPONSE by Councillor Hoskin (Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport):

Thank you Mr. Muscroft and Ms Hooper. As you are aware the Council shares your desire to deliver much improved swimming facilities for Reading and has embarked on a process for achieving this. This has involved the planned closure of outdated, ageing facilities at Central and Arthur Hill pools; the development of a demountable pool at Rivermead, that opened in January this year, to provide some continuity of provision; and the procurement of a new leisure operator to manage existing retained facilities and to develop new pools, including a competition standard pool with provision for diving to replace Central. This procurement process has commenced and it is anticipated that a new leisure operator will be awarded a contract in June of next year. On that timescale it is eminently possible that new facilities could be open by the 1st of January 2021 but I cannot guarantee that at this stage given the many variables and uncertainties when delivering major construction projects.

With regard to a 50m pool, the Council is not specifying that this is essential and nor is it ruling it out and we will ensure that those bidding for the contract are fully aware of the aspirations of our aquatics clubs and others for such provision. If a 50m pool is affordable then I can assure everyone in Reading that we will work hard to deliver it. It cannot be repeated enough that for a council that has suffered over £50 million per year national government cuts to its budget affordability is critical.

I am also aware that many of the members of the aquatics clubs of Reading live outside of the Borough and pay their council tax to neighbouring boroughs. This is not their fault but is a result of the ridiculous council boundaries we work with. However I do urge anyone here tonight who lives in a neighbouring council area to contact their councillors and demand a financial contribution towards a competition pool for our region.

I would also like to thank the RG50 campaign and Mr Muscroft and Ms Hooper for making clear on their public website and petition site that their campaign is explicitly for Reading to build one 50m competition pool rather than the two pools we have planned. RG50 may well be right that, in their words, a 50m pool "is cheaper to build and more economical to operate than two 25m pools on separate sites."

This council does not agree to drop our plans to build a new leisure pool for East Reading. As Lead Councillor I am particularly concerned that we provide convenient local access to

swimming for all of Reading's communities and this includes provision of a pool at Palmer Park. This is a commitment of this council and was a manifesto commitment on which Reading Labour Party fought and won the recent council elections. In this context the Council will be seeking to deliver a major and significant improvement in the quality of swimming facilities for all in the Borough whilst ensuring affordability and value for money. We cannot agree to sacrifice a new and permanent pool for East Reading in order to deliver a 50m pool.