

BELOW IS A MESSAGE FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL, JON COLLINS.

ALTHOUGH IT'S NOT BEEN PRESENTED AS SUCH, THIS IS THE COUNCIL'S SOLE RESPONSE TO THE PETITIONING, LETTER WRITING AND DEMONSTRATING OF OVER 4000 PEOPLE (NOW WHEN DID A LOCAL ISSUE LAST AROUSE THAT MUCH ANGER)?

A message from Nottingham City Council:

Many of you recently signed a petition about Victoria Leisure Centre that was presented to the Full Council meeting on February 8th. I'm writing to you in response and to explain to you our plans for a new leisure centre.

Victoria Leisure Centre will close at the beginning of April. Work to build a new leisure centre costing £9 million will start soon afterwards. The new centre will include a six-lane 25-metre swimming pool and a separate children's pool and a fun splash play area. A new café and fitness and health suites will also be built. We expect this facility to open in 2012.

This is not the first time the replacement of Victoria Leisure Centre has been proposed. It is now quite run-down, relatively under-used and definitely no longer economically viable so its replacement cannot wait any longer. We asked local people what they wanted the centre to be replaced with during a consultation last year.

There were (and are) those who said they wanted to keep and upgrade the existing centre and some who said they wanted a new centre on a new site but the most people said they wanted a new centre on the existing site and for the clocktower to be kept. It's this third option which we are taking forward. Obviously, building on the existing site means the current centre must be closed in the mean time.

We want the local community to have the best leisure centre it can, one that satisfies all the people who use the existing centre and that attracts a wide range of new users from local communities and further afield. We intend to build a new leisure centre that will bring pleasure and health benefits to the people of St Ann's and Sneinton and that will be economically viable in the long-term. We want the new centre to be open as soon as possible which is why work to prepare for its construction will get underway in the next few weeks.

We are aware that the most popular option, and the one we have chosen, is not the one preferred at this time by some local people and centre users, mainly because Victoria Leisure Centre is well loved by those who know it well. I hope and I'm confident that the new centre will be well loved too and that the number of people using it will be much higher than these days.

The replacement for Victoria Leisure Centre will be the biggest single investment made as part of our Leisure transformation programme and I'm proud that we're able to make an investment of this kind now.

I hope that in time the new Victoria Leisure Centre will be a facility that you too become proud of.

Yours sincerely, Councillor Jon Collins

HERE IS OUR RESPONSE:

A MESSAGE FROM SAVE VICTORIA BATHS CAMPAIGN GROUP:

Dear Councillor Collins,

Thanks for the message.

The petition, letters and march all asked for the same thing: to keep the Leisure Centre open until planning permission has been granted for whatever it is that will go in its place. You have not acknowledged this simple request and neither have you given an answer as to why the VLC has to shut so quickly.

You claim that work will start "soon afterwards" but neither you, nor your officers have any idea how soon because the plans have not even been submitted; and once they are submitted you have no idea how they will take get permission, given the opposition they will face and the intense scrutiny they will be placed under. This is the nature of the planning process in England.

Taking into account such delays and unforeseen problems with digging a new pool in an area never previously excavated, local people may be left without a leisure centre for 3 years. That is a long time in the life of a child who wants to learn to swim.

How disappointing that instead of engaging with all of our concerns, you simply repeat the false claim that the Council's chosen design option is the most popular – it is not. A close look at the consultation figures shows that the only thing that backs this claim are the views of school children hurriedly canvassed last year when the Council realised most people in the local area did not back their scheme.

The majority consulted want the current building, with its fantastic, unique and broad range of facilities retained but modernised. It is what the public has been asking for since 1998. The Council's own research bears this out.

You choose to repeat the claim that the current facility is under-used, which the Council's own figures disprove; and that it is economically unviable, again simply untrue. The proposed new centre offers fewer facilities than the current one. For a fraction of the £9million price tag, the Council could bring the existing one up to state-of-the-art, modern standards. Shockingly, the Council itself estimates the new smaller one will cost 25% more to run than the existing one

Your claim that the current centre is run down is at least something we can agree on – and is a result of consistent under-investment during your time on Leisure Services Committee and as Deputy Leader and Leader.

It is surprising that you expect gratitude for a decision to demolish a well –loved, viable building and replace with a smaller facility at vast public expense. It is unbelievable that you expect the same people who have protested so loudly and vigorously against your chosen course of action to meekly accept what you have decided is good for them.

The issue of what to do with the Victoria Leisure Centre has rumbled on since the early 90s, always with the Council on one side trying to knock it down and with the local community on the other campaigning to stop them. It is time this issue got sorted. The Council needs to put an end to its wasteful and perverse political posturing and give the community of St Anns and the Dales what it has consistently requested for over 12 years.

Yours sincerely,

Mat Anderson
On Behalf of Save Victoria Baths