

Working for you

**CABINET MEMBER FOR CULTURAL SERVICES
COUNCILLOR FOR STRAY WARD**

COUNCILLOR MRS PAT JONES

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2 May 2008

Mr N Grandison
Co-ordinator
Save Our Spa Group
9 Park Street
RIPON

Dear Mr Grandison

I write to acknowledge receipt of the petition submitted on behalf of the 'Save our Spa' group and to give you the Council's formal response.

Whilst also acknowledging the amount of work undertaken by your group in compiling this petition the Council must take issue with the inaccuracy of some of the content and the failure to evidence some of the aspirational proposals.

It must be observed that the petition statement is an amalgamated series of objections put forward by different groups during the recent consultation processes. As such they are already known to us but are clearly contradictory in terms of deliverability.

First, we are aware of the call for a significantly larger pool by a small number (10%) of the respondents to the consultation on the new pool. This point has been answered in the Design team's response which has been publicised since the consultation and indicates quite simply that the Council is not in any position to contemplate building a pool which, on all known evidence, would be far in excess of that required to service local needs. That would require significant capital sums well beyond the council's purse and would require a significant annual subsidy – the £500,000 per annum quoted (in both the recent Q&A and your petition) - being the **net** annual running costs.

Additionally British Swimming, the new name for the Amateur Swimming Association, have been consulted on the proposals and have responded by fully supporting the plans put forward by this Council. The provision of a 25m x 6 lane pool with separate learner pool fits perfectly with their national facilities strategy.

They also emphasise that they are not in a position to help finance the pool, even at its current level of proposed provision. This undermines any attempts to obtain significant funding from 'sporting sources' – a claim made in the petition, although we will still pursue as many avenues as possible to raise external contributions to finance our plans.

Secondly, in relation to the proposed location for a new pool (11%) of respondents expressed concern on this matter in the original consultation. Put quite simply the Borough Council is not in any position financially to support proposals to build a new facility on land which it would have to purchase, nor to maintain two separate leisure buildings under separate management arrangements in the Ripon locality.

The council is prepared to borrow significant sums to finance the building of the new pool but this commitment must be made in the context of the serious financial pressures on the council's finances as a whole.

It is the ability to build the pool on land already in the council's ownership and the simultaneous opportunity to make ongoing revenue savings by combining management and operational arrangements for both buildings, which enables the Council to contemplate such an investment.

It should also be noted that the building of the new pool on the proposed Camp Close site has been debated and approved by both the Borough Council and Ripon City Council. This matter has therefore clearly been debated in accordance with due democratic process.

Thirdly you raise the matter of development of the Spa Baths site and its retention as a "community asset with continued public access". This Council has always stated that we would seek to secure the most appropriate use for the Spa Baths site whilst paying due reference to the need to generate a significant capital receipt in order to fund the new pool scheme.

At the City Council meeting held in public on January 7th this point was made on a number of separate occasions by our Head of Leisure, Museums and Arts and Director of Community Services. You will have noted from recent press reports that we continue to support this approach and that the application to develop the site for housing is being made as a 'back stop' position. Whilst discussions with potential health sector partners continue to be progressed it would be imprudent of the Council to fail to progress this application and risk a significant reduction in capital receipt should negotiations on alternative uses fail to come to fruition.

It also must be noted that the opening paragraph of the petition signature form states:

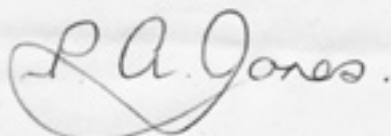
"Harrogate Borough Council wants to sell our beautiful Spa Baths off to property developers – and use the proceeds to build an inadequate new pool on our public playing fields at Camp Close"

This displays significant bias and inaccuracies.

As I point out above the disposal of the site for housing is only one option which are considering. Whilst we may not prefer this option and continue to seek alternatives, it is one which is perfectly legitimate in planning policy terms, but to infer this as our sole intention is misleading. Also, as supported by British Swimming, the proposed facility is wholly adequate in terms of size of provision and sustainability for the Ripon catchment and the question of "inadequacy" is not specifically addressed in your submission.

It is the Council's intention to proceed to planning stage on the basis outlined in our plans so far and as such you will have further opportunity to comment once the plans are out to formal consultation. We would wish that further comments are based on the actual facts of what is proposed rather than inaccurate interpretations of those plans.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "P. A. Jones." The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

COUNCILLOR PAT JONES
Cabinet Member (Cultural Services)