

Full Council Meeting – 7 March 2024

Agenda Item No. 6 - Petitions

“Stop the Closure of Southwell Swimming Pool” (2,370 Signatures)

Almost 60 years ago members of the Southwell community set up a groundbreaking crowdfunding initiative to raise £40,000 to build the pool in Southwell. The leisure centre and pool was run successfully for many years by the Southwell Leisure Centre Charitable Trust.

In October 2021 Newark & Sherwood District Council took on the management operations of Southwell Leisure Centre on a long-term lease, as part of a partnership arrangement that promised to protect leisure provision in the town for years to come.

The pool has a significant leak and is in need of repair. NSDC have declined to repair the pool and are not going to re-open it. Instead, they've submitted a proposal to build a new swimming pool, costing £5.5million, to be built next to the leisure centre.

The swimming pool is used for exercise, learning and social purposes by many in the town and surrounding villages. Swimming is one of the most inclusive physical activities around, suiting older people, people with disabilities, and has one of the most equal participation rates of all sports in the town in terms of gender. It's a meeting place for parents with newborn babies going to the baby swimming classes, for local schools to bring their students for swimming lessons, for the older generation to continue to participate in exercise, for Southwell Swimming Club to provide expert tuition to the children and the chance to compete, for people with disabilities to learn to swim and enjoy lifelong exercise, for pre-teens to enjoy fun swim on the inflatables. The loss of this pool would be felt across the town.

While we applaud the proposal from NSDC to build a new swimming complex, we do not consider that it's appropriate to have to wait 2 years for a fix to our lack of pool. Neither do we believe that the estimate of 2 years is realistic, given that NSDC have neither the land nor the funds to commit to this project. It's a very real concern that despite all good intentions from the council, this is a project that may well be kicked into the long grass over and over again and never come to fruition.

We are calling on NSDC to fulfil their obligation to repair Southwell Swimming Pool under the terms of the lease with the town. We call on them to repair our pool alongside developing their plans for the leisure centre rebuild, rather than instead of, so that our access to a local pool is restored within the year. This means NSDC can take the time to work with local stakeholders and properly consult, plan and finance the rebuild, ensuring the final proposal and design offer a fit for purpose leisure centre to serve Southwell for another 60 years.