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Update on the sale of the Arthur Hill pool site

At the beginning of this year Reading Borough Council placed the Arthur Hill swimming pool on the property market with a view to selling the site, and in August the Council's Policy Committee voted to sell the pool. Unfortunately, the vote was conducted in a secret session of the committee meeting, and the Council has not released information on the identity of the purchaser, the price agreed for the sale, or the details of what the site will be used for in future.

The Arthur Hill campaign considers that the local community has a right to know this information, and takes the view that it is poor practice for the Council to conceal such details from the public. We have written to the Council to complain about the handling of the matter and have lodged a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act to seek details of the sale. To date our complaint has not been answered, and our request for information has been turned down by the Council. We have lodged an appeal over the case with the Information Commissioner – the government watchdog for information matters.

In response to a question from Park Ward councillor Rob White, the Council has revealed that it did not offer to sell the pool to any of the community and voluntary sector organisations which put in bids to buy it (including at least one potential purchaser who intended to reopen the pool for public swimming), and that its intention is that the site will be used for residential property development.

Although the decision to sell the pool was made in August, Reading Borough Council has yet to exchange contracts with the prospective purchaser and there appears to have been some hitch with the sale process, although the Council is refusing to comment on this.

'Operation Transparency' – our campaign to get Reading Borough Council to reveal who has bought the pool.

We're hopping mad about the unnecessary silence and secrecy surrounding the sale of Arthur Hill pool, and we think it's high time the Council told us who the pool has been sold to and what the plans are for the future of the site. In order to press the Council to release details, we're launching 'Operation Transparency' – a direct action campaign which will put the spotlight on the Council's concealment – and are inviting all our supporters to join in!

The campaign will start on Friday 14 December when we will present a letter to the Council asking them to release the information we want and explaining what we will do if they refuse. In the New Year the campaign will gradually escalate, commencing with an 'Operation Transparency Window Wash' at the Council Offices on Friday 4 January, when we will symbolically clean the windows to remove the grime and shed some light on what the Council is up to. The next stage will be to leaflet Council workers on Friday 11 January, when we will invite them to act as whistleblowers and act in the public interest by leaking details of the sale to us. Finally, if none of these steps succeed, we will conduct a document inspection at the Council Offices on 25 January, and seek to enter the building peacefully to search for the paperwork ourselves.

We want these activities to be fun and light-hearted, and make the Council look pompous and silly. In order to succeed, we need people to come along and help us, so please join us at one or all of the events. We will provide full briefings and training beforehand, and details will be posted on the 'Save Arthur Hill Pool (<https://arthur-hill.us15.list-manage.com/track/click?u=e28821199d37283a3e1494f6d&id=e6bb07f17c&e=cabc45b74c>) ' Facebook page nearer the time.

Join us to mark the second anniversary of the closure of Arthur Hill pool – and for a Christmas drink!

Arthur Hill Pool closed its doors to the public just before Christmas 2016, and we are now approaching the second anniversary of the pool closure. We want to mark this sad day – and also show the Councillors who voted to close the pool that we haven't given up fighting for swimmers and gym users in East Reading.

To commemorate the anniversary we will be resurrecting a popular Arthur Hill tradition – Christmas drinks at the Abbot Cooke pub (now the Hope and Bear) opposite the pool on the Friday afternoon before Christmas.

We would like to invite all former swimmers, gymmers, and pool users to join us outside Arthur Hill Pool on Friday 21 December at 2.00 pm for a photo-call with a Christmas

theme. Please wear something Christmassy or red, and we will provide placards saying 'Santa – please can we have our pool back for Christmas'. After we've taken some photos to pass on to the local media we will adjourn to the Hope and Bear, and hopefully have the opportunity to catch up with old friends again.

Everyone is welcome to come along, and we look forward to seeing you.

The future for the Arthur Hill – Save Our Swimming Community Interest Company

After the Council announced its plans to close Arthur Hill Pool in 2016, a campaign to save the pool rapidly developed. It soon became apparent that to deal with the Council on an equal basis, and also to have the power to open a bank account, seek grant funding, and enter a bid to re-open the pool, we would need to set up as an organisation on a more formal basis.

As a result, the campaign decided to set up the Arthur Hill – Save Our Swimming Community Interest Company. Since opening the Company has submitted a bid to re-open the pool in 2017 (which was regrettably turned down by Reading Borough Council), raised money which has been used to help local school children continue with swimming lessons, organised a series of community fitness activities at local summer festivals, and given evidence on leisure provision at a public hearing on the future Reading Local Plan. Over recent months, however, the Company has been much less active and there no longer seems to be any need for the Arthur Hill Campaign to operate as a formally constituted body.

Running the Company still takes quite a bit of time and effort, however, and there is no point in putting this effort in if it does not bear fruit. The Board of Directors of the Company has therefore decided to recommend closing the Company by the end of this year. This will not mean that the Arthur Hill campaign will stop campaigning for swimming provision to be restored in East Reading, but it will mean that we will operate less formally in future – and will hopefully have more time for campaigning as a result. We have a small amount of money remaining in our account, and we propose to hand this over to St Johns and St Stephens Primary School as a donation to a fellow community institution in East Reading.

We will be discussing the proposal to close Arthur Hill – Save Our Swimming CIC at a community meeting on 13 December (see below for details) and all company members are invited to attend to give their views on the matter.

Palmer Park consultation

For many years Reading Borough Council has been talking about building a new swimming pool in Palmer Park. When the idea was first discussed, back in 2003, the Council pledged not to close Arthur Hill pool until the new pool was built, but this promise has not been kept.

Proposals for a new pool in Palmer Park have been slowly moving forward, and the Council has now prepared a Development Framework document for the Park. This sets the planning guidelines within which any new development in the park would have to take place. The document sets out two options for design and construction of a new swimming pool as part of the leisure complex area at the centre of the park.

On the basis of the information in the Development Framework document it is not clear what the impact of the new pool would be on the existing parkland, but questions asked by Arthur Hill campaigners at a recent Council meeting have elicited the reply that there would be an increase in the overall footprint of both the leisure complex and car parking areas, and thus a net loss of park land.

The Council intends to consult the public over the Palmer Park Development Framework from mid-December onwards, and we would urge everyone with an interest in swimming provision in East Reading and / or public open space in the Borough to give their views during the consultation process. We will be providing further information on the 'Save Arthur Hill Pool (<https://arthur-hill.us15.list-manage.com/track/click?u=e28821199d37283a3e1494f6d&id=56e0cae52c&e=cabc45b74c>) ' Facebook page when the consultation has started, and will also be responding to the consultation on behalf of the Arthur Hill campaign.

The council report on the Palmer Park development framework, which includes a copy of the draft consultation document, can be read here (<https://arthur-hill.us15.list-manage.com/track/click?u=e28821199d37283a3e1494f6d&id=adb03c8fcd&e=cabc45b74c>) .

Find out more and have your say: Community meeting, Thursday
13 December

It's been a while since we last got together as a campaign group, and there have been a number of new developments over the Arthur Hill situation since the summer, so we think it's time to organise another community evening with our supporters.

We'd like to invite you to come along to our next meeting on

Thursday 13 December at 231 Kings Road (part of Wycliffe Baptist church and next door to the main church). The meeting will commence at 7.30 pm in the basement meeting room - access is via the Wycliffe Baptist Church rear car park.

We will be giving a more detailed update on some of the matters in this newsletter – particularly the sale of Arthur Hill pool and the proposals for Palmer Park – and will also be discussing the future of the Community Interest Company and our proposal to close the Company down.

Everyone is welcome to attend and tea and biscuits will be served.

Finally ... we would like to extend the season's greetings and a very big thank you to all our supporters and friends for your backing and assistance over the course of the past year. We hope you have a relaxing Christmas and a healthy and active New Year.

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** (<https://arthur-hill.us15.list-manage.com/track/click?u=e28821199d37283a3e1494f6d&id=8a8105ed02&e=cabc45b74c>)

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