

POLICY COMMITTEE

PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 3

Peter Burt to ask the Leader of the Council:

Sale of Arthur Hill Swimming Pool

The report on the sale of Arthur Hill Swimming Pool considered and accepted by Policy Committee in secret on 16 July last year recommended sale of the Arthur Hill site to OOK Developments, acknowledged as being a young company of limited experience, for a sum of £1,150,000 on the anticipation that contracts would be exchanged within 28 days and completed 28 days thereafter. The report asserted that this would result in what was described as the "certainty" of a capital receipt of £1,150,000 for the Council in the 2018/19 financial year.

One year later contracts have still yet to be exchanged, the anticipated capital receipt has not been materialised, and a popular and much needed local sports centre remains locked up and decaying thanks to Reading's Labour councillors.

The Policy Committee report indicated that in the event of the purchaser not performing to an acceptable timescale, the Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services had the authority to engage with the second placed bidder or remarket the property.

Given that the purchaser has quite clearly failed to perform to an acceptable timetable by even the most generous standards, and apparently has no prospect of being able to do so in the foreseeable future, why has the Council not reconsidered its decision on the sale of Arthur Hill Pool to OOK developments?

REPLY by Councillor Brock (Leader of the Council)

Thank you for your question Mr Burt.

The decision to dispose of the freehold of Arthur Hill swimming pool was agreed at Policy Committee in July 2018 following a process to market the building. The Council was open about advertising the disposal of the building publically and named the successful bidder.

Following the Policy Committee decision, officers worked with the preferred purchaser towards disposing of the property as soon as possible. Dialogue to this end, coupled with required due diligence work, was more extensive and time consuming than originally envisaged. While it is regrettable that this has resulted in the disposal not being concluded, it is of course incumbent

on the Council as a public body to ensure such processes are robust and compliant with statutory duties and obligations, including to ensure best value for public assets.

I advised the Policy Committee in June that due diligence was ongoing and the Council had commissioned further surveys and site investigations at Arthur Hill Pool. That work has now concluded and I am pleased to confirm this has provided constructive reports on current conditions at the site and in relation to the building, which is particularly important in the context of the locally listed frontage.

I also confirmed at Policy Committee in June that, once this due diligence had been completed, the Council would need to take a decision about the future of the Arthur Hill Pool building.

To enable this, options are being reviewed and a report will be submitted to a future Policy Committee. At the present time dialogue with the preferred purchaser has been discontinued. The Council will continue to consider the re-use of the site for housing, including Council housing, key worker housing, or other affordable housing provision.

The Council remains committed to delivering a new pool at Palmer Park as part of the leisure procurement process.