

Wadebridge Town Council

Response to Cornwall Council's Leisure Consultation

1. At its Full Council meeting on Wednesday 13 October 2021 the Town Council resolved to write to Cornwall Council to advise that it would challenge the consultation process as Members believe it is flawed. The Town Council will also challenge Cornwall Council for mismanagement of public funds.
2. Wadebridge Town Council will not be providing a direct response to questions posed in the Consultation document as it believes the questions are not open and have been devised to garner a response to support a decision already made. This is not a genuine consultation document.
3. This consultation is ill conceived and the time frame for the community solution which Cornwall Council purports is the only saviour for our Leisure Centres is unrealistic. GLL have had 4 years to make these Leisure Centres 'sustainable' with significant taxpayer investment. Cornwall Council have given 'the community' 6 weeks to formulate a plan with no information and then 5 months to implement that same plan. This is not a workable time frame. Cornwall Council appear set to allow GLL to walk away from their responsibilities by strong arming communities with the emotional message that their Leisure Centres will close if they do not come up with a solution in an impossible timeframe.
4. The Town Council believe that the provision of leisure services should not be about cost and disagree with the Cornwall Council statement that the provision of leisure services should be cost neutral. We ask that Cornwall Council provides the information which forms the basis of their 'cost neutral' statement. Leisure services and leisure centres are locations where our community and individuals can gain the positive impact that sport and physical activity brings to their wellbeing and physical, mental, and social health. If Cornwall Council insist on focussing on cost, the Town Council asks them to quantify the financial impact that Wadebridge Leisure Centre brings to our communities' wellbeing, and their physical, mental, and social health. To ignore these benefits in Cornwall Council's 'cost neutral' approach is ill considered.
5. The Town Council disagree with Cornwall Council's statement that it is not obligated to maintain a leisure service and considers that Cornwall Council is ignoring its statutory duties as a Local Education Authority (LEA) for national curriculum swimming lessons, and, if no other solutions are found for those leisure centres facing closure, with fewer pools.

Wadebridge Town Council Public Meeting – Friday 8 October 2021

6. Over 100 people attended a public meeting in Wadebridge on Friday 8 October 2021. Scott Mann MP and two Cornwall Councillors (Stephen Rushworth and Robin Moorcroft) all stated they support the Wadebridge community in keeping Wadebridge Leisure Centre open.
7. The meeting heard from several speakers with full support for keeping our Leisure Centre open. Concerns were raised about the role of Cornwall Council, the contract with GLL for the provision of Leisure Services, the poor Consultation document, the timeframe of the entire Consultation process and the expectation that our community is expected to travel to other leisure centres especially from outlying areas. Concerns were also raised about incorrect statements made in the Consultation document.

Online Consultation Event for Wadebridge Leisure Centre – Monday 11 October 2021

8. Those who attended Cornwall Council's online Consultation for Wadebridge Leisure Centre were not impressed at the unprofessional approach of the consultation for the following reasons:
- It was stated that all local schools had been informed of the consultation. This was denied by the Head of our largest School and user of the Leisure Centre (Wadebridge School) and other school representatives on that call.
 - Members of the leisure centre have received no communication to inform them of Cornwall Council's intention to close the centre.
 - There has been little visible publicity of the Leisure Centre consultation in general other than online consultation.
 - Members of the audience were unable to ask questions or voice an opinion and the key presenter was disconnected in mid transmission of important data. It was a one-way managed monologue.
9. Questions asked and responded to with nothing other than a promise they will be addressed in the 'report to Cabinet' remain unanswered. The Town Council do not accept that the provision of unsubstantiated advice to guide Cabinet on these key matters is acceptable. These questions are:
- *What is the impact on people without access to a car in accessing leisure services for those areas whose centres are at risk?*
 - *What is the additional cost to Social Care and the NHS on closure of the Leisure Centres?*
 - *What is the carbon footprint impact of the additional travel and the impact of all the additional journeys on all neighbourhoods?*
 - *In the online consultation it is stated that Bodmin is only 8 miles away and a 20 minute drive is acceptable. This completely ignores the real-life journeys people will be making – especially from areas further afield such as Rock, St Minver and Padstow who will be faced with a doubling of travel time.*

Cornwall Council's Leisure Consultation

10. Highlighted in bold are statements made by Cornwall Council in the Leisure consultation document with the Town Council's response below.
- i. **Cornwall Council is not alone in having to make difficult decisions about the future of leisure provision.**
There is evidence to support this statement. There is also evidence that when other Councils are faced with 'difficult decisions' they have decided to safeguard Leisure Services by bringing the provision in house to ensure it is delivered for the benefit of the community. Why is Cornwall Council addressing the difficult decision around Leisure provision in this way?
- ii. **A recent survey of district councils found one in three expect to be forced to close gyms and swimming pools due to the devastating impacts of the pandemic, with 117 leisure centres in England estimated to be at risk of closure.**
We understand that this was a District Councils' Network survey which reported in May 2021. We understand that Cornwall Council is not a member of this network.

- iii. **Cornwall Council does not have a statutory duty to provide leisure centres**
Neither Parish and/or Town Councils have a statutory duty to provide these services either, yet they regularly and willingly step forward to support Cornwall Council in finding the answer to these ‘difficult decisions’.
- iv. **The sustainability of public leisure centres is dependent on usage of the centres. If a centre becomes unsustainable due to lack of use, closure of the centre would need to be considered.**
Why does Cornwall Council state that the sustainability of public leisure centres is dependent on usage? Why would Cornwall Council or indeed GLL not undertake a review of the offer to address whether this is the correct offer, adjust the offer and in doing so gauge whether this could remove the threat of the closure of the leisure centres? The Town Council believe that there has been little demonstrable effort in working to find a solution by both Cornwall Council and GLL which does not involve its closure. If the Town Council is incorrect in this assertion, then can Cornwall Council provide the Town Council with those measures which have been implemented at Wadebridge Leisure Centre to identify underuse and those measures which have been put in place to address this.
- v. **The potential of our open spaces, playing fields, community centres, schools and colleges should be maximised by enabling our community groups, sports clubs and volunteers to bring local leisure opportunities to life for all ages and abilities. We will help local communities to innovate and develop financially sustainable delivery models.**
An aspirational statement which the Town Council endorse. Can Cornwall Council provide, from their informed position, what communities can do to innovate and develop financially sustainable delivery models with 5 months until proposed closure of a Leisure Centre when GLL have seemingly failed with significant injections of taxpayers’ money over a much longer period.
- vi. **To safeguard the operation of the majority of leisure centres in Cornwall, we propose to remove the contractual requirements on GLL to operate the four leisure centres in Wadebridge, Launceston, Saltash and Falmouth and the operation of the hydrotherapy pool at St Austell leisure centre.**
- vii. Is Cornwall Council saying that by sacrificing these Leisure Centres the remaining Leisure Centres in Cornwall will be safeguarded? If so, how can Cornwall Council justify this statement to the Council taxpayers in the areas of the ‘at risk’ centres? How confident is Cornwall Council that this approach by GLL to relieve them of these leisure centres is not just the first wave and that other centres in Cornwall will, in time, be offered as ‘unsustainable’ with other communities having to ‘innovate and develop financially sustainable delivery models’.
- viii. Cornwall Council states that ‘**Every resident has equitable access to good quality, fit for purpose, sustainable leisure offer, enabling our communities to be more active and benefit from improved health and wellbeing**’. How do Cornwall Council’s proposals for closure reconcile with this statement? The Town Council believe that GLL are holding Cornwall Council and the Council taxpayer to ransom.
- ix. **The site (Wadebridge) is not central and is constrained by the school site and car parking particularly in the daytime.**
What does Cornwall Council mean with the word central? Central to what? What evidence is there to support ‘constrained by the school site’ and car parking particularly in the daytime. Can Cornwall Council provide the Town Council with further information in relation to these statements?
- x. **The catchment served by the centre (Wadebridge) is small and overlaps with**

multiple other leisure provision. Bodmin Leisure Centre is eight miles away from Wadebridge and has a larger offer in slightly newer facilities with better parking arrangements.

What is the catchment of Wadebridge Leisure Centre? What areas and numbers are used to make Cornwall Council consider the catchment to be small? What are those overlaps with multiple other leisure provision – a precise description rather than other Leisure Centres is required. Bodmin Leisure Centre is offered many times as the alternative for Wadebridge users. Users of Bodmin Leisure Centre however state there is no spare capacity. What analysis has been undertaken of capacities of 'other leisure provision' to allow the Town Council to fully understand what 'other leisure provision' is out there?

- xi. The majority of daytime usage (of Wadebridge Leisure centre) is by the adjacent school, reducing opportunities to generate income.**

What are the usage figures and what is the usage by the school? What income generating opportunities have GLL identified that they feel are being restricted by the school?

- xii. We believe our proposals are the best way of guaranteeing a sustainable and viable network of public leisure centres in Cornwall, without needing to use additional taxpayers' money. We believe these proposals are the best way of ensuring Cornwall residents who want to use leisure facilities have access to these facilities for the foreseeable future.**

What about the taxpayers of Wadebridge who will lose their Leisure Centre? How will these taxpayers compare to the taxpayers of the 'saved' Leisure centres? Cornwall residents – all equal taxpayers who are expected to accept varying levels of leisure provision from Cornwall Council.

- xiii. Cornwall Council 'entered a contract with the social enterprise GLL in 2016 that was intended to enable the Council to sustain and invest in our network of public leisure centres without needing to subsidise their operation. This approach enabled us to remove the annual subsidy of £3.5 million per year'.**

Has Cornwall Council reflected that by saving the annual subsidy of £3.5million per year by awarding the leisure contract to GLL was not the best decision to have made? Has Cornwall Council used its taxpayers' money in an informed manner? GLL have received significant injections of taxpayer funds and have failed. The contract has failed, and Cornwall Council has failed its taxpayers. If Cornwall Council made the wrong decision for Leisure Services in Cornwall in 2016, why does it not take the service back in house, admit some poor decisions have been made rather than suggesting that Leisure Centres close to the detriment of the health and wellbeing of our Community?

The Town Council ask what Capital investment Cornwall Council has made in Wadebridge Leisure Centre in the 10 years prior to awarding the contact to GLL in 2016? Cornwall Council have also advised that GLL have refreshed the gym area and new equipment purchased. New boilers have been installed, new pool covers provided and LED lighting installed in the swimming pool and sports hall areas. Of the £18.5m provided to GLL by Cornwall Council for capital investment in leisure how much have these improvements at Wadebridge Leisure centre cost?

- xiv. Our vision for Leisure provision in Cornwall is that:**

A network of public leisure centre facilities along the spine of Cornwall that will provide access within thirty minutes (by car) to the vast majority of Cornwall residents

Why does Cornwall Council believe the spine of Cornwall is an acceptable solution? Where has this idea come from? Has the impact of tourism been factored in to travel times?

As a minimum, Cornish residents should have reasonable access to Sports Halls, Swimming Pools and Health and Fitness facilities.

What is the definition of the subjective word 'reasonable' by Cornwall Council?

- xv. **We have experience in Cornwall with local communities to help them manage assets and services. We are ready to work closely with any local councils or community groups that believe they could offer a solution capable of making some of these facilities financially viable and to explore other sustainable alternatives. However, if no solution or alternative is found, these facilities would close. Wadebridge Leisure Centre would close on 31 March 2022.**

Can Cornwall Council provide the information as to what they can do to assist any individual or group with ambition in taking on the responsibility of the operation of Wadebridge Leisure Centre?

- xvi. **Cornwall Council is happy to explore with local communities the devolution of either assets or services.**

What options does Cornwall Council believe that communities can explore and what systems are in place to allow Town and Parish Councils to be part of this devolution.

- xvii. **Should the centre close, we believe alternative provision is available within a 30 minute radius, including in Bodmin Leisure Centre.**

On a good day Bodmin Leisure Centre can be reached by Wadebridge residents within 30 minutes by car. This does not consider the travel time for residents from beyond Wadebridge or any delays they may face or when travel is by other means than car. Is Cornwall Council saying that you can use leisure services in Cornwall as they can be reached by car and that 30 minutes is an acceptable journey time? Is Cornwall Council advocating a tiered approach for access to leisure services by category of users such as gym use at Bodmin Leisure centre for those with a car and for those without a car or unable to source alternative transport they should go for a run in a local park?

- xviii. **There is significant additional leisure provision across Cornwall in addition to public leisure centres. Our natural environment is used extensively for a range of outdoor activities. There is also a significant private sector provision of fitness facilities, holiday parks, spas and hotels.**

Can Cornwall Council provide the Town Council with details of these alternative leisure provisions, their opening times, offers, costs and the transport links and costs of these services?

Wadebridge Town Council Position

- 11 Swimming lessons are vital to a coastal community. Our leisure centre and the activities delivered within are key to the health and wellbeing of people in our town and surrounding villages.

- 12 Wadebridge Town Council does not have the capacity to take on the operation of Wadebridge Leisure Centre. The Town Council has taken on Cornwall Council's public toilets in Wadebridge and Wadebridge Library. The Community Governance Review was a wasted exercise if Cornwall Council expect services they no longer wish to fund to be provided by Town and Parish Councils. For a fair and equitable service provision at Town and Parish Council level this mechanism must be effectively reviewed.

- 13 If Cornwall Council decides that Wadebridge Leisure centre needs to close, then the Town Council will work with its community to find a solution. However, in the absence of any useful decision-making information from Cornwall Council the Town Council cannot state what role it will have in this solution or indeed neither can any other interested party at present. The Town Council has asked for key financial information about Wadebridge Leisure Centre to be provided yet this has been denied. If Cornwall Council truly seek a solution for the retention of our Leisure Centre, why is this information not available now?
- 14 The Town Council request that Cornwall Council delay the decision to consider the closure of Wadebridge Leisure Centre and that it provides all interested parties with the financial and operational information needed on which informed decisions can be made.
- 15 Cornwall Council has declared a Climate Emergency while asking users and communities in the areas of the 'at risk' leisure centres to get in cars or use other transport to take them across the County in search of the equitable leisure service that Cornwall Council wish to see delivered. Does Cornwall Council understand the challenges faced by individuals and communities to access Council services in Cornwall at present? Does Cornwall Council have the detailed analysis of journeys which will need to be taken for the reprovision at those other centres?
- 16 Can Cornwall Council explain the contradiction between their Leisure Centre Consultation with another recently launched consultation titled 'The Cornwall Transport Plan: Local Transport Plan to 2030' where, under Objective 1, 'Support communities to live locally to reduce the need to travel' the following is stated for Policy 1:
- We will support the provision of local services and facilities to enable people to live locally and reduce car reliance as and where possible.**
- How can Cornwall Council have two such opposing objectives? The Leisure Consultation proposes those taxpayers whose leisure centres are at risk to travel to other Leisure provision, yet the Transport Consultation is about supporting 'the provision of local servicesand reduce car reliance as and where possible'. We would welcome Cornwall Council's view on this.
- 17 Cornwall Council has continued to use taxpayers' funds to invest in GLL's provision of leisure services while stating that leisure is not a statutory service. The Town Council expect Cornwall Council to either continue with this investment or work with our community to find the solution to retaining and improving Wadebridge Leisure Centre and in doing so, demonstrating accountability to Wadebridge council taxpayers.
- 18 The Town Council still await the presentation slides at the Consultation meeting on 11 October 2021.
- 19 The Town Council request that future consultations are conducted in an open and co-operative manner to give a real voice to our community rather than direct them to provide a response that Cornwall Council wants to hear.