

BARONESS JOINS FIGHT TO SAVE POOL

Former MP calls for a solution

FORMER Plymouth MP Baroness Fookes has joined the fight to stop Seaton Pool being closed.

Plymouth City Council's Labour cabinet members agreed in November to close the pool after hearing that the facility was costing the council £160,000 a year.

Lady Fookes, formerly MP for Plymouth Drake and an Honorary Freeman of the city, has responded to requests from city residents asking for her support.

She said: "Frankly I am appalled at the prospect of Seaton Pool being closed when swimming facilities in the city have been inadequate for many years.

"I am all in favour of the building of a 50-metre swimming pool to Olympic standards in Central Park and indeed I campaigned for such a pool, wholly without success, in my last years as an MP.

"However, the pool is not yet up and running and until that time, it is vital that the existing pools are kept open.

"Even then, I would regard having satellite pools around the city as an ideal, rather than total reliance upon any one pool, however splendid."

The pool is to close in April, and the council has no plans to build

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another one in the north of the city.

Instead, it plans to move schools and clubs which use Seaton to other pools, including those at Central Park and at the College of St Mark and St John in Derriford.

Lady Fookes said: "I would certainly welcome any offer by the College of St Mark and St John to allow community use of its pool, but I would not regard that as a substitute for the closure of Seaton Pool."

She added: "I am making my views very strongly known to the city council and to the South West Regional Development Agency and I hope that these two bodies between them can contrive a solution for the short and medium term."

The Seaton Pool site is owned by the South West of England Regional Development Agency, which has told the council it wants the site back.

SUPPORTER: Keen swimmer Baroness Fookes with Durican Goodhew, right, and Seaton Pool below



POOL CLOSURE background

- Seaton Pool, which attracts more than 100,000 swimmers a year, is set to close in April.
- Labour Cabinet members agreed to shut the pool at a meeting last November after hearing it was costing the council £160,000 annually.
- Members also heard that the authority would need to spend more than £1million to bring the crumbling facility up to scratch.
- But the move has been opposed by campaigners who say that the city will have inadequate swimming provision for schools and clubs.
- Conservative councillors tried to 'call in' the closure decision so it could be scrutinised further, but the

- challenge was defeated at a meeting last December.
- Consultants have been called in to oversee a revamp of swimming lessons at city council pools in preparation for Seaton's closure.
- The council has pledged to ensure that all groups which use Seaton will be able to swim at venues elsewhere in the city.
- The pool is located on the Plymouth International Business Park at Derriford, a site owned by the South West of England Regional Development Agency (RDA).
- The RDA says it has no detailed plans for the site at present.