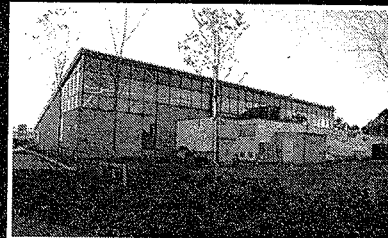


Council says it is responsible for closure plans

SEATON POOL: THE FACTS



PLYMOUTH City Council has stressed that it made the controversial decision to close Seaton Pool amid confusion over who is to blame for shutting the venue.

The authority has defended the proposed closure of the pool at Derriford in April on its website and the South West Regional Development Agency, which owns the site, has also confirmed that it was the council which made the decision.

Confusion reigned at a heated public meeting on Wednesday night over who was to blame, but the council says the decision was made 'reluctantly' and it has plans to relocate schools and swimming clubs to Central Park and the College of St Mark and St John.

Seaton Pool, on the Plymouth International Business Park, was inherited from the armed forces when Seaton Barracks closed. The council says it would cost more than £1million to bring the ageing building up to scratch.

The council's lease on the site expired two years ago. The authority has posted a detailed statement about the pool's closure on its website, to be found at www.plymouth.gov.uk.

Conservative and Liberal Democrat coun-

by **ROB PREECE**

Herald Reporter

cillors have written to council chief executive Barry Keel following the authority's decision to shut the pool, saying more should be done to secure the future of the facility.

Cllr Vivien Pengelly, leader of the council's Tory opposition group, said: "We have a meeting with him on Monday to discuss it and, once we've heard more about it, we will see what we do next."

Lib Dem councillor Lee Finn has sent an email to Mr Keel to find out more about the closure, forwarding a copy to Richard Caborn MP, the Minister for Sport and Tourism.

Cllr Finn said: "I believe there are some serious points that need to be readdressed. I hope for a response as soon as possible."

A council 'option appraisal' report, published in October, said the RDA was willing to support the provision of a swimming facility at the business park - but would not have helped pay for the pool.

Another site on the business park could have been used, but the council would have had to pay for a new facility, it said.

CITY COUNCIL

THE statement sets out a list of works required to improve the pool, including installing new plant equipment, upgrading changing rooms, revisions to drainage, external works, upgrading the reception area and staff room and making the pool compliant with disability access legislation.

It reads: "These standards need to be seen in the context that the council does not own the site."

It later adds: "The council's lease on the site expired two years ago. However, the council made its decision due to the cost of running the facility and need for substantial investment."

"The absence of a lease focused the council on the need to make a decision."

The council denied it would receive a 'kickback' payment following the decision to close Seaton.

"This is categorically not the case," its statement reads.

The statement added: "The council understands the value of the pool to local people but suggestions that 100,000 people a year use the pool are very misleading."

"The figure probably relates to the number of swimmers at the pool, not the number of people who use it, which is a fraction of that amount."

"The city council has a revised programme for Central Park which will accommodate all the schools being displaced from Seaton."

"There will be a full programme of swimming lessons using the three pools at Central Park. Marjon has also been very co-operative about the use of its pool for public swimming."

"It has been suggested by campaigners that the council 'wasted' money on the Big Wheel in the city centre over Christmas instead of investing in the pool. The wheel was not paid for by the city council but by the City Centre Partnership, ie. city-centre traders."

"The plans for a new Olympic-sized pool at Central Park are now well advanced, with a £25million bid for lottery funding recently submitted."

"The plan is for the existing pool at Central Park to remain open until the new one has been completed."

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

THE South West Regional Development Agency has emphasised that it was the council which decided to close the pool.

However, the statement reveals that the agency has no firm plans for the site.

The statement reads: "Prior to the decision to close the pool we had discussed options with the council for retaining and renovating the existing pool and for relocating it to another site."

"These discussions continued until the council announced the pool's closure."

"There are no detailed plans for the site of Seaton Pool at present but we would envisage a future use for the site which would be complementary to achieving our goals to create a high-quality medical and technology park at Plymouth International. We understand the reasons for the council's decision to close the pool."