

(5) PUBLIC QUESTIONS - ADDENDUM

Notwithstanding the timing of submission, the Cabinet Member has been able to provide responses to the additional public questions received, as follows:-

(5) Question from Mr Ray Jenkins, Chairman of Down Ampney Parish Council, to Councillor Jenny Forde, Cabinet Member for Health, Well-being & Public Safety

'Local residents, who are current users of the Fairford Leisure Centre and who have benefitted from this important facility, are shocked to hear that it is closing. Could the Cabinet Member please confirm whether or not this centre is closing; and, if so, why?'

Response from Councillor Forde

'Linked to a strategic review and options appraisal of the Council's Leisure and Cultural Services, Farmor's School in Fairford requested a transfer of the dual use facilities to the School, rather than such facilities being included in an outsourced contract award to SLM. This followed a period of extensive consultation with the School during which the School reviewed the operating costs and income. In agreeing to the School's request, the administration at the time gave a generous support grant and the School set up a limited company to run the facilities. In short, the asset and rights and responsibilities, including the community use of the leisure facilities, were transferred to the School. The Council therefore has no management, ownership or control of the facilities.

Despite the grant payment, and also agreed variations to reflect patterns of use and enable the more effective use of resources, the School recently advised us that, without further ongoing subsidy, the community use of the facilities is financially unsustainable.

We understand that the School wrote a letter to their members in which they stated that they were "keen to keep the buildings available for community use"; and they also went on to say they would "like it to be known that we are exploring ways in which we can continue to provide as many of the Sports Centre facilities as we can for the local community...which is something we feel strongly we want, and should be able to maintain." I'm sure the School would welcome any support that the community would like to give to ensure this happens.

For further information, you would need to contact the School, as the decision is theirs. However, as we all know, schools generally have very little capital and increasing pressures to continue to drive up standards and educate our children.'

(6) Question from Mr Ray Jenkins, Chairman of Down Ampney Parish Council, to Councillor Jenny Forde, Cabinet Member for Health, Well-being & Public Safety

'In the Liberal Democrat manifesto 2019 entitled 'Because the Cotswolds deserves better' you pledge on page 8 to provide 'better health, well-being, social mobility and community safety'. Specifically, there is a bullet point in which you pledge 'to promote healthy lifestyles by working with the District's leisure centres, gyms and fitness clubs'.

How does this pledge equate to the rumours about Fairford, how can you justify these rumours and what are your proposals for the well being of residents in Down Ampney?’

Response from Councillor Forde

‘I have sought to deal with the School’s situation in my response to your first question - from a factual perspective rather than ‘rumour’, which by definition is ‘a circulating story or report of uncertain or doubtful truth’.

More widely, on learning about this unfortunate prospective closure, it has strengthened my belief that what we need is a more holistic approach to health and fitness across the Cotswolds, underpinning our Manifesto pledge.

The challenge at Farmors is a very present and real example of the challenges we face in accessing health and fitness in our rural communities. Recent statistics I requested from Sport England confirm that only 11.8% of the population attend a fitness centre - so we need to be much more creative in our approach.

We are in a strong position to support the long-term health of our residents and there are already a number of pilot projects underway across the District - by way of example, a pilot project in Bourton-on-the-Water is testing the District Council’s effectiveness in improving the health outcomes of residents. It is hoped that, as a result of this intervention, the community in Bourton will be more aware of services, able to access wider range of opportunities, and be more actively engaged in matters concerning their own health. If successful, we can replicate the successes across similar areas.

I also look forward to attending the Community Well-being Action Day in the Autumn in which there is a collaboration between Fairford and Lechlade.

I feel sure that I’m already preaching to the converted when I say we have a number of challenges to contend with in terms of access to fitness activities - issues such as rural transport, isolation, communication, and broadband/mobile phone signals amongst others. We also need to ensure that our existing leisure centres are responsive to the changes in demand from their users and I look forward to our future plans for these facilities.

I believe access to exercise should not be imposed on residents by their councils or providers but driven by their needs as a community. I am always open to ideas from the residents of Down Ampney and indeed across the Cotswolds.

Finally, moving back to the issue at Fairford - notwithstanding the need for a holistic approach to provision for the District as a whole, we are already looking at ways in which we can possibly help. By way of example, at our request, our Leisure Management Contractor has put together a 50% reduced rate membership package for existing users - which will be provided as an option to encourage users to move to the Cirencester facility and reduce the risk that those users stop taking part in leisure activities. We believe - and I am sure that residents will agree - that this is the most sensible and pragmatic approach, as it does not make any sense to plough further public money into what, regrettably, is a proven failing enterprise.’

(END)