

Falmouth's Iconic Swimming Pool Sunk Without Lifesaver

Cornwall Council officers recommend ceasing procurement of alternative operator for Ships & Castles triggering Community Interest Company's cry for help to rescue leisure centre.



We are absolutely gutted to read that Cornwall Council officers are recommending that Falmouth's Ships and Castles close in their Leisure Procurement Outcomes paper [published at 7.30pm this evening](#). We offer our sincere sympathies and support to the Ships and Castles workers, members and customers who will be so badly affected by this proposal.

We will continue to do all we can to keep Ships & Castles operating and ask everyone concerned to help us by using the links [below](#) to email the politicians responsible for this decision **now**; don't delay or it will be too late and our leisure centre will be lost and closed forever.

While we are still in a procurement process, albeit one officers are recommending abandoning, we cannot comment on the details of our alternative proposal; however, we should clarify that we have not asked Cornwall Council for long term funding, but did ask for short term funding to enable a smooth transition from GLL.

Gemma Adams, director of Pendennis Leisure Community Interest Company, says:

"The Cornwall Council plan to close the only public leisure centre serving almost 50,000 people in Falmouth, Penryn and surrounding areas is shortsighted, wasteful and will have a devastating effect on our community. It feels particularly unfair to recommend closing just one leisure centre in Cornwall – Falmouth's.

Over 3000 people signed our petition to keep Ships & Castles open, to protect the site on which it stands and to work together to improve swimming facilities in Falmouth. Throughout our campaign and Cornwall Council's procurement processes, we have never been given the opportunity to talk directly with decision makers about their plans.

I would like to ask the man responsible for this decision, Councillor Richard Pears, what he has to say to the hundreds of children and their families who depend on Ships & Castles swimming lessons and for whom there is no space at the pools of Carn Brea, Helston or Truro or with other local providers? What does he say to the 1000+ local children and their teachers who depend on Ships and Castles as the place within walking distance of their schools where they can complete their statutory Key Stage 2 swimming lessons?"

On 15th February Pendennis Leisure Community Interest Company submitted formal proposals to renew and improve the Ships & Castles operation. Aside from acknowledging receipt, we have heard nothing since from Cornwall Council until shortly after 5pm today, two hours before Cornwall Council [published their proposal](#). We have the following initial comments on the paper as published:

1. It is completely wrong and unfair to the people of Falmouth and Penryn and surrounding areas to close the only public swimming pool serving Cornwall's largest population of almost 50,000 residents and thousands more visitors. The proposed closure of Falmouth's Ships & Castles has extremely worrying implications for the physical and mental wellbeing for thousands of local people at a time when Cornwall Council has stated its priorities are to create vibrant local communities which are the best places for children to grow up. These risks are referenced in the officer's own impact assessment – yet the recommendation is to ignore them.
2. Over 300 children from Falmouth & Penryn rely on Ships & Castles for their swimming lessons. A further 1,000+ children from 6 local schools depend on Ships & Castles to complete their statutory Key Stage 2 swimming lessons. We have consulted Helston, Camborne and Truro pools and we know they do not have capacity to take on those lessons. Cornwall has the highest number of drownings in the UK.
3. In light of the above it is clear that Cornwall Council has failed in its duty to conduct a meaningful assessment of the impacts of this proposal – particularly in terms of the health equalities impacts and of climate impacts. The one bit of green in their 'Decision Wheel' is with respect to 'Political Voice', but no coherent rationale is given for that. We ask for rigorous assessments of the health and air quality impacts to be conducted and independently reviewed.
4. It is irresponsible for Cornwall Council not to acknowledge its obligations as the owners of an asset of community value and completely unrealistic for them to deny the investment needed to operate Ships and Castles successfully. Cornwall Council's overall approach has not allowed us any chance to engage or negotiate with decision makers, and, unlike Wadebridge, no Falmouth councillor is party to the decision-making. This approach has missed the opportunity to harness the value the community could bring to an alternative operation. The paper claims that Cornwall Council is "committed to continue to work with the community, partners and stakeholders to develop plans for an alternative leisure offer" – we have seen no evidence of such commitment so far in the process.
5. Cornwall Council is proposing to make this decision on the basis of its unfinished Draft Leisure Strategy, referenced again in today's document. This strategy incorrectly places Falmouth, the town with the largest population in Cornwall, in Tier 2: 'Community Leisure Facilities Serving smaller towns and surrounding catchments', Only Tier 1 towns have a minimum offer of a Swimming Pool, 25m x 4 lanes. This means Cornwall Council is planning to permanently deprive Falmouth, Penryn and the surrounding area of a decent public swimming pool.
6. In their December Cabinet Paper, Cornwall Council stated 'The Falmouth Ships and Castles site lends itself to redevelopment'. This is likely to mean the iconic headland land will be lost as a Falmouth Community asset and sold to the highest bidder. We ask Cornwall Council to come clean on its alternative vision for the site.

We urge Cornwall's leaders to override the officers' recommendation when they meet on Friday. We urge Cornwall's councillors to speak up for the clear needs of our residents and ask doctors, teachers, other caring professionals and everyone in our community to put pressure on Cornwall's leaders to do the right thing when they meet on Friday by telling them **to keep Ships & Castles open while a better solution is found**. Please write now to:

Cornwall Councillor for Customers (including Leisure) Richard Pears: cldr.richard.pears@cornwall.gov.uk

Cornwall Council Leader, Linda Taylor: cldr.linda.taylor@cornwall.gov.uk

Cornwall Council Deputy Leader, and Portfolio Holder for Resources: cldr.david.harris@cornwall.gov.uk

Cherilyn Mackrory MP <https://www.cherilynmackrory.org.uk/>

ENDS

Background for Editors

Pendennis Leisure Community Interest Company was formed in November 2021 to operate Ships & Castles, protect Pendennis Headland and work to secure improved leisure facilities for the communities of Falmouth, Penryn and surrounding areas.

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Cornwall Council Extraordinary Cabinet Meeting details:

<https://democracy.cornwall.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=577&MIId=11638&Ver=4>

Leisure Procurement Outcomes Report:

<https://democracy.cornwall.gov.uk/documents/b35054/Supplementary%20Agenda%20-%20Leisure%20Procurement%20Outcomes%2004th-Mar-2022%2010.00%20Cabinet.pdf?T=9>