



Councillor Anne Quilter  
Executive Member for Vibrant and Healthy Places  
Cumberland Council  
Cumbria House  
117 Botchergate  
Carlisle  
CA1 1RD

17<sup>th</sup> February 2024

Dear Anne,

I am regularly asked by my Keswick-facing constituents about Keswick Pool and the council's plans for its replacement.

When I became Deputy Leader of Allerdale Borough Council in 2019, there had been plans to sell off the Keswick Leisure Centre site through the then-controversial Allerdale Investment Partnership, alongside land all around Allerdale including the Lakeside car park in Keswick, which was earmarked to be sold off to build a hotel.

The leisure centre had been deemed to be at the end of its useful life, but that was a consequence of wider issues where the previous administration in Allerdale had determined buildings to be disposable, forgoing maintenance across the estate in favour of wasteful spending in the moment, rather than planning for the future and reducing the burden on generations then yet to be born.

While plans existed for closure of the leisure centre and disposal of the site, no plans were in place for its replacement. We made sure that those plans for disposal were not progressed and instead started discussions on future replacement.

When enforced covid closure hastened the pool's permanent end, Allerdale Borough Council set about on a consultation exercise to determine the leisure facilities that Keswick needed, publishing a full report in March 2022. In March 2023, a feasibility study was published which proposed two options for a new leisure centre both including a swimming pool - one at a cost of £9.3m and a larger option at £13.6m.

On the 1st of April 2023, the baton passed to Cumberland Council, and there the story seems to end. Initially the council's response was that it would be at least four years before any plans may be made for replacement, suggesting that capital programmes were fixed. That is not the case of course, and since then the council has brought forward capital projects that were not in the budget at 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023.

That decision is also despite the council having a capital budget of over £0.6 billion, the largest ever for your constituent councils combined, thanks to significant record levels of funding from the government - which provides the majority.

Under local pressure, just two months later in June 2023, the council agreed to 'look again' at that decision and the closure. Yet all we've heard since is silence.

Our local councils don't have great track record with swimming pools. Your predecessor Cumbria County Council closed Wigton Baths until it was saved by a local charity. The same administration closed the Netherhall School swimming pool for the sake of just £150,000 investment.

When I secured nearly £5m for a new pool in Maryport as part of the Maryport High Street funding, Allerdale Borough Council embraced it, finding the additional capital required to deal with then-



rising construction costs. But when the baton passed to Cumberland Council, you refused the government funding to build it and refused to look at the government-funded revenue support schemes to run it - cancelling the plans in the face of widespread public opposition.

I'm sure you will claim that some of these decisions are about running costs - but this is purely about political choices. Millions of pounds are currently being wasted by the council every year maintaining nearly empty buildings, carrying far too many 'Assistant Directors', and subcontracting statutory responsibilities – many out of county.

Instead of delivering savings that could be used to support our local communities, the budget you agreed earlier this week seeks to borrow over £66m to plug budget gaps, a shameful political choice that looks set to cost council-taxpayers £6 million every year, saddling our grandchildren with further debt.

Yet just two years at that level of payment could replace Keswick Pool. Realising relatively quick savings, rather than incurring further debt in order to push decisions into the long grass, could see our communities have the facilities they deserve.

There is a cost to deteriorating public health, and swimming pools can make a significant saving by keeping people healthier for longer. Yet that doesn't seem to factor in your calculations.

And while you will no doubt resort to lazy tropes about 'government cuts' – despite Cumberland having a higher real-terms revenue budget today than its predecessors did in 2010 on the same footprint – I will reiterate that what you fund, or don't, comes down to political choices made at the top table on which you sit.

Leisure facilities across Cumberland are already subsidised from revenue budgets to the tune of over £2m/yr. The options identified by Allerdale Borough Council for Keswick Pool showed a revenue cost of £178,000 in year 5 - less than Maryport's Wave Centre receives every year without a pool, despite it apparently running as a commercial entity.

The Sands Centre in Carlisle recently underwent a £20m makeover to include a new pool, and is about to undergo a £multi-million Phase 2 redevelopment. Yet it receives over £1m/year in subsidy. You are simply prioritising Carlisle (by a huge margin), Workington and Whitehaven over Keswick and Maryport.

So, in order that I can update my constituents, I would appreciate answers to the following questions:

- What happened when the council 'looked again' at the closure?
- What work has been undertaken since April 2023 on replacement leisure facilities?
- What is the timescale for the return of a swimming pool to Keswick and will a replacement pool be a proper laned swimming pool as residents have displayed a preference for?
- Will you commit to a replacement leisure facility being council-owned?

Yours sincerely

**Mark Jenkinson MP**