

PUBLIC QUESTION RECEIVED for Place Scrutiny Committee – 8 November 2018 from Ms Emily McIvor

To Councillor Bialyk Portfolio Holder Health and Wellbeing, Communities & Sport

Question 1

The Clifton Hill Sports Centre building was adversely affected by snow in March of this year, and the Council carried out a survey to assess and report on the damage.

Please give the following dates:

- 1) The date that the survey detailing snow damage to the Clifton Hill Sports Centre building was received by councillors and/or the Portfolio Holder;
- 2) The date on which the decision to temporarily close the sports centre to members of the public was taken,
- 3) The date on which permanent closure of the sports centre was recommended.

Councillor Bialyk Portfolio Holder Health and Wellbeing, Communities & Sport, responded to the questions:-

Response 1)

The Council did not “carry out a survey to assess and report on the damage”. An assessment was made utilising information from a range of sources.

Response 2)

The decision to temporarily close the Clifton Hill Sports Centre to the public was made on 14th March 2018.

Response 3)

The recommendation to permanently close Clifton Hill Sports Centre was made in the report considered by the Council Executive on 12th June 2018.

Ms Emily McIvor was invited to respond, thanking the Portfolio Holder for providing the dates which were of interest because so much had been said about the decision to sell the Clifton Hill green space and demolish the sports centre having been “rushed through”.

The sports centre was damaged by snow in early March, and the decision to sell the site was announced in June. So from March to June there was silence, and then – within a single week – an unpopular policy was announced, discussed and voted through by the Executive. She considered that announcing bad news immediately after an election – rather than before – was somewhat unfair on voters. The pre-election “purdah” period had been used to explain the lack of an earlier announcement, but that only began on 27th March.

The date of the formal recommendation to close the sports centre was 12th June – which we all knew already – but it seems the relevant date was 14th March, after receiving officers' recommendations and that Councilors knew on 3rd June that the sports centre would not reopen. Claiming a democratic mandate to take unpopular decisions – especially those agreed before an election but not announced until after the poll – seems unfortunate, and some of this should be set against the fact that in the Newtown and St. Leonard's Ward, in 2018, only 36% of those eligible to vote, actually did so.

The low voter turnout could be attributed to confidence among Exeter residents in the Council ability to run the city with minimum scrutiny, but the decision to sell the Clifton Hill site without consulting is crying out for scrutiny.

The Executive and Full council signed away publicly owned community assets in the space of days, without consultation, on the basis of papers that failed to provide information on the size of the Green Space, or its current use, and inaccurately described the duration of leases. There was still time to reverse this undemocratic and unpopular decision. Please keep the Clifton Hill green space in public ownership, and keep it green. It's not yours to sell.