

Committee OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY	Date 6th March, 2007	Classification Unrestricted	Report No.	Agenda Item No. 6.2
Report of: ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE		Title: REPORT "CALLED IN" – Disposal of Poplar Baths (CAB 137/067)		
Originating Officer(s): Angus Dixon		Ward(s) affected: All		

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 The attached report of the Corporate Director of Environment and Culture, Alex Cosgrave, and Interim Service Head Property & Facilities Management, Ian Brown, was considered by the Cabinet on 7th February, 2007 but has been "Called In" for further consideration by Councillors Tim Archer, Phil Briscoe, Emma Jones, Peter Golds and Rupert Eckhardt in accordance with the provisions of Part 4 of the Council's Constitution.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That the Committee consider the contents of the attached report, review the Cabinet's provisional decisions arising and decide whether to accept them or refer the matter back to Cabinet with proposals, together with reasons.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 2000 (SECTION 97) LIST OF "BACKGROUND PAPERS" USED IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT

Brief description of "background paper"

**Cabinet report (CAB 137/067)
dated 7th February, 2007**

Name and telephone number of holder
and address where open to inspection

**Angus Dixon
020 7364 4850**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The attached report of the Corporate Director of Environment and Culture, Alex Cosgrave, and Interim Service Head Property & Facilities Management, Ian Brown, was considered by the Cabinet on 7th February, 2007. It however has been “Called In” for further consideration by Councillors Tim Archer, Phil Briscoe, Emma Jones, Peter Golds and Rupert Eckhardt in accordance with the provisions of Part 4 of the Council’s Constitution.
- 3.2 The Cabinet after considering the attached report provisionally agreed:-
1. That the disposal of the Poplar Baths site, for redevelopment on the open market, be deferred for a period of 6 months, to allow for further detailed work to be completed by Tower Hamlets Environment Trust and Swan Housing Association (on behalf of the Poplar Baths Steering Group), in partnership with the Authority and to a set of agreed milestones.

4. THE “CALL IN” REQUISITION

- 4.1 The reasons advanced in the “Call In” requisition are set out below:-

Poplar Baths is a landmark site for the area. Its future has been a major local issue for far longer than 2003, as stated in the report.

The baths were a campaign topic in the 2002 local elections and candidates, later councillors featured this in their campaign material.

In February and March 2003 LAP 7 held special meetings to discuss the baths. These were attended by well over 100 residents on each occasion. At the meeting held on 1 February 2003 a presentation entitled “A vision for Poplar Baths” was presented by SPLASH (South Poplar Action for Safe Housing) and a petition in support of this was launched. Contributions from the majority party councillors were supportive of preserving the baths site. This matter was considered by Cabinet and proposals withdrawn for a further LAP meeting held on 8 March 2003.

At the meeting assurances were given by councillors that there would be discussions within the community before a final decision was made.

At the March LAP meeting a planning brief was circulated, which it was understood had been deferred by Cabinet.

The report that was submitted to the Cabinet was brief and does not consider both the current and recent situation regarding disposal of this asset. The report contains a number of minor inaccuracies which could conceal a number of major inaccuracies. The baths are located in the Limehouse ward and the report suggests the wards affected are Limehouse and East India and Lansbury. In fact the baths are on the border of these wards and also Blackwall and Cubitt Town wards. At the LAP 7 meetings in February and March 2003 former councillor Julia Mainwaring- who represented Blackwall and Cubitt Town- was invited to attend and contribute to the discussion on the future of the baths and this shows that the Council was aware that this ward would be affected.

We would highlight the following issues both in relation to the incomplete and misleading nature of the report and also broader issues related to Poplar Baths:

- a) Local residents remain in the dark as to what will actually happen.
- b) Despite the six month respite, the report considered by Cabinet glossed over the historic status of the building and what conditions the authority would put in place to protect it.
- c) There was no recognition of the concerns of local people regarding the future of the baths as expressed at the February and March 2003 LAP 7 meetings.
- d) The report needs far more detail if the public are to be re-assured that this six month grace is not merely a cosmetic exercise.

5. ALTERNATIVE COURSE OF ACTION

5.1 In accordance with the Committee's procedures, the "Call In" Members have provided an alternative course of action for consideration:-

"Councillors make the following recommendations:

- 1) 1 A new meeting on the future of Poplar Baths should be held to allow members of the public to place their concerns about the issue before Council officers and to insure that any future course of action undertaken on the baths has the backing of the public.
- 2) Discussions with THET and Swan Housing should continue in the hopes that the original proposals that had the support of a wide section of the community can be brought to fruition.
- 3) Given the Councils commitments to the 2012 Olympic Games, all options that can preserve the use of the swimming facilities in Poplar Baths should be examined before the Council accepts that there is no alternative to the open market approach.

6. CONSIDERATION OF THE "CALL IN"

6.1 The following procedure is to be followed for consideration of the "Call In".

- (a) Presentation of the "Call In" by one of the "Call In" Members followed by questions.
- (b) Response from the Lead Member/officers followed by questions.
- (c) General debate followed by decision.

N.B. – In accordance with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Protocols and Guidance adopted by the Committee at its meeting on 6 June, 2006, the "Call In" Members are not allowed to participate in the general debate.

- 6.2 It is open to the Committee to either resolve to take no action which would have the effect of endorsing the original Cabinet decisions, or the Committee could refer the matter back to the Cabinet for further consideration setting out the nature of its concerns and possibly recommending an alternative course of action.

7. RECOMMENDATION

- 7.1 That the Committee consider the contents of the attached report, review the Cabinet's provisional decisions arising and decide whether to accept them or refer the matter back to Cabinet with proposals, together with reasons.