Dear Councillor

I am writing to you about the closure of the Fairlop Outdoor Activities Centre.

The Centre is not a commercial centre hiring boats to the general public it’s primary purpose is to support school and youth groups from across the borough. It supports Young People from all backgrounds and income brackets to gain life skills and build confidence. The Centre is heavily used by these groups in normal times and by closing the Centre you are closing a vital resource and in the case of some youth groups whole depend on it for their primary activity you will wipe them out.

Councillor Jas Athwal has said that the centre will not close ‘on this watch’ yet it is the undeniable truth that the Centre is closed. The gates are locked, it has not been maintained for the last year and the staff have all been told they no longer have a job there. In a meeting with the Campaign to Save Fairlop Outdoor Activity Centre this week Cllr Athwal promised that the Centre would open to its user community as soon as the government deemed it safe to do so. Given the Government’s commitment to getting grassroots sports and Youth activities moving again this is likely to be so, yet with no staff and a centre in disrepair that would be impossible to do.

At the budget meeting on 25 February you will be asked to approve the Council’s budget which includes making £78k saving this year by closing this valuable community resource. Given Councillor Athwal’s clear statement that the centre would re-open as soon as government allows such centres to re-open, this budget line item (21/22LE014) is not compatible with delivering that promise made this week and must be removed.

Please be aware that although you are being asked to save £78k this year by closing the centre the Council is simultaneously allocating £500k to the Fairlop Waters regeneration project for quick wins, which includes £130k in consultancy fees. It seems the Council has the money but is not prepared to use it to protect a valuable existing community resource. Furthermore if the Centre is not allowed to closed it WILL be able to open this year and generate money for the Council. Last year this Centre remained closed even as most other similar places were opened and earned record amounts of money for their local authority or business due to the pent up demand. You may also be interested to know that the Centre staff have also identified ways of earning at least a further £65k a year from Centre activities and yet VisionRCL management are not interested in hearing about this.

There are so many questions that need asking about this decision but for the moment you have a clear choice to make.

Approve the budget as it stands and make your legacy the lasting negative impact this will have on so many vulnerable young people and the volunteer groups that support them.

Make sure this budget in its current form does not pass thereby making it clear that you stand shoulder to shoulder with the young, disadvantaged and vulnerable people in your community.

The staff and volunteers that support the youth groups impacted by this closure are willing and able to help. You can reach them on campaign@fairlopwaterslake.org.uk and https//fairlopwaterslake.org.uk

Yours,