

Campaigners blame council over pool bid

by **Joe Gammie**

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INSULT piled on injury for campaigners after a bitter bidding battle over the future of the Kings Meadow Baths went against them.

The historic Edwardian lido off Napier Road has been at the centre of debate led by the Kings Meadow Campaign (KMC) which was given exclusive rights to raise the cash to repair the building, but was unable to do so in the allotted time.

Last week it was announced five bidders had submitted plans to rejuvenate the baths, including the KMC, but Reading Borough Council leaders decided on Monday to give Bristol-based Clifton Lido preferred bidder status to create a pool and spa complex.

The decision outraged KMC chairman Bob O'Neill, who complained that the policy committee had made its decision before the meeting and accused the council of withholding support for the project. Speaking afterwards he said: "It was a done deal. During our period of exclusivity we never had any positive

support from the council. We were hoodwinked into giving up our time when they were waiting to come in and grab a bid when they could.

"It was just insulting for them to say thank you to us at the end of the meeting."

Clifton Lido will now put together a more detailed plan to regenerate the baths to create a spa, cafe and restaurant, but council leader Jo Lovelock stressed nothing was set in stone. She said: "We do not have time on our side, this building is deteriorating and I hope Clifton Lido will work with people from the KMC and listen to their ideas."

During the debate Tory councillor Ed Hopper questioned Clifton Lido's bid after revealing the company charges around £20 a day to use its open-air pool in the upmarket suburb of Bristol.

But Cllr Lovelock stressed that public access was a top priority to the council and added: "Public open space and accessibility is important and we have to hear more detail about how the local people will be able to use the pool when it is finished."