

Hello everyone and thanks for the opportunity to state my views on the future of the Approach Golf Course. As a regular golfer who doesn't play golf anywhere else, I have spent thousands of hours there over the years, and this evening I'm representing the many other regular and occasional golfers, a number of whom I have corresponded with over recent weeks.

For those who don't know the background to today's discussion, the Approach Course has over the course of the last 9-10 months been dragged into what was initially a consultation about the future of Entry Hill Golf Course, resulting in a tender process seeking new operators for both sites. There has always been an inconsistency between the extensive public consultation that took place on Entry Hill, and the lack of any public consultation on the future of the Approach Course – all the more surprising when you consider that the Approach Course is a central and highly visible, sensitive site, not to mention very popular, and historically consistently profitable barring all but a very recent period under the care of an inexperienced and frankly, reluctant provider.

With this in mind last summer I started the petition on Change.org to keep golf at the Approach Course, and around that time was reassured by a commitment from Cllr Crossley that there would be no change of use on at least the 18 hole side of the course. When last week it became clear that no golf operator had submitted a tender, I and other supporters started to publicise the petition again, resulting in overwhelming support and more than 3,000 additional signatures in less than a week. Since I emailed the petition to cabinet members just a few days ago the number of signatures has more than doubled, and as of lunchtime today stood at over 4,200.

I want to make it clear that these signatures are not based on rumour or misunderstanding about any 'secret plans' to sell or build on the course. Neither are they interested in finger-pointing or apportioning blame for the gradual decline of the course over a period of ten years or more. They are simply asking the council to honour the commitment it made last summer to keep this unique facility in its current form – because it complements the heritage setting; because it effectively doubles as a park for many other casual users; because it's used by people of all ages and backgrounds; because it's affordable, accessible, sustainable, improves physical and mental wellbeing, and because it's fun.

I urge the council to note the tidal wave of affection for the Approach Course that has been seen over recent weeks and honour their commitment to retain golf on the site. In the immediate term this means abandoning the current procurement process and continuing low-level maintenance of the course, in turn giving time to work with the community to find a solution that secures the long-term future of public golf in Bath.