

## Slough Borough Council

<b>Report To:</b>	Council
<b>Date:</b>	26 September 2024
<b>Subject:</b>	Petition – "Save the Curve!"
<b>Chief Officer:</b>	Pat Hayes, Executive Director, Property and Housing
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Alex Polak, Head of Governance & Scrutiny
<b>Ward(s):</b>	Slough Central
<b>Exempt:</b>	No
<b>Appendices:</b>	None

### 1. Summary and Recommendations

- 1.1 This report sets out the details of a Petition titled "Save the Curve!", which has been received under the Council's Petitions Scheme. The petition was submitted to the Council on 21<sup>st</sup> August 2024 and received a total of 2,192 signatures.
- 1.2 The Council is invited to review and agree its course of action in relation to the petition.

#### Recommendations:

Following the debate, the Council is asked to resolve what action it wishes to take with regard to the Petition, noting the service officer's recommendation provided below:

The officer recommendation is as follows:

That Council note that no decision has been made to close the Curve and any such decision would be an executive decision reserved to Cabinet;

That Council recommend the following to Cabinet:

- (a) That an options appraisal is undertaken as part of the wider property asset review process and any recommendations be presented to Cabinet.

#### Commissioner Review

No comments from Commissioners on this report.

### 2. Report

- 2.1 This report advises the Council of a Petition – "Save the Curve!" – which was received by the Council on 21<sup>st</sup> August 2024.
- 2.2 The Council's Petition Scheme states that if a petition has 1,500 or more valid signatures the petition will be debated at a full Council meeting.

2.3 The Petition has surpassed the threshold of triggering a debate at full Council and contains **2,192** signatories, comprising of 997 collected via an e-petition on the Council's website and 1,195 from a paper version of the petition collated by the Petition Organiser.

2.4 The Petition text reads as follows:

*"Save the Curve!*

*We the undersigned petition the council to Reverse the decision to close The Curve. The Curve serves as a vital community building providing library services, study space, a facility for Slough Museum, a performance space, and vital skills learning space. It is the only fully accessible community space for town centre residents. we strongly oppose its closure and demand there should be no break in service regardless of which organisation may become the 'new operator'. We also demand the SBC conducts a full Equality Impact Assessment of any closure plans or change in core services at the curve.*

*Save Library, cultural, community services!"*

### **Supporting Information for debate**

2.5 The Petition Organiser will be invited to the council meeting to speak on the Petition (up to five minutes) and the Petition will then be discussed by Members of the Council for a maximum of 15 minutes. The Mayor has discretion to extend this time taking account of the degree of public interest in the issue, the level of support given to the petition and the number of elected members wishing to express their views on the subject.

2.6 Following this discussion, the Council will need to decide what action to take with regard to the Petition. As this matter relates to an executive function, the Council can only decide whether to make recommendations to Cabinet. Council has no power to make a decision on an executive function.

2.7 The Scheme indicates that the Council's response to a Petition will depend on what a petition asks for and how many people have signed it but may include one or more of the following (for an executive functions, these could be formal recommendations to Cabinet);

- Taking the action requested in the Petition;
  - Considering the Petition at a Council Meeting;
  - Holding an Inquiry;
  - Commissioning relevant research;
  - Organising a public meeting;
  - Mounting a wider public consultation;
  - Meeting with the Petition Organiser or representatives of signatories;
  - Providing a written response outlining the Council's views on the subject;
  - Referring the issue to the Council's Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee
- OR**
- Referring the issue to the relevant Committee/Cabinet;
  - Consulting statutory partners and local service providers;
  - Instigating discussions with the voluntary and community sectors; and
  - Making representations to Commercial or other Interests.

The development of The Curve was commissioned by Cabinet in 2013 and completed in 2016 as part of the town centre regeneration programme known as The Heart of Slough.

The building has three SBC services currently using the building:

- Library
- Registrars
- CLASS (Community Learning and Skills Service)

Third parties organisations who also provide services within the building are:

- Storyden Ltd on behalf of Norden Farm Centre Trust Ltd & SBC manage a 220-seater performance area. This activity is funded by the Arts Council with an agreement in place until 2028
- Slough Museum, which is a registered charity has pods of the history of Slough in various locations across the building.

In addition, the ground floor has computer workstations and communal seating areas for the residents to use and meet. There used to be a Café but that has not operated for some time as it has previously been deemed unviable financially to operate.

During 2023/24 financial year The Curve saw 170,390 visitors pass through its doors.

The Curve is an expensive building to run, during the 23/24 financial period the building cost the council £0.891m to maintain and run, this equates to £19.94 per Sqft.

As part of the council's budget setting process, a potential saving relating to the Curve was identified in the Council's budget. This required a review of the operating costs and a separate Cabinet decision. At this stage, no decision has been made to close the Curve. Therefore the first request in the petition to reverse the decision appears to be based on a misunderstanding as to what decision has been made. To inform any future decision by Cabinet, it is accepted that there would need to be an options appraisal for each service and a business case setting out alternative options for the building. Cabinet would need to have all relevant information to inform a decision on the Curve, including results of any public consultation, equality impacts, legal framework for services, financial implications of alternative options and any existing contractual arrangements.

### **3. Implications of the Recommendation**

3.1 No implications arising from the recommendation in this report.

#### **3.2 *Financial implications***

None arising from the recommendation in this report

#### **3.3 *Legal implications***

3.2.1 Slough Borough Council adopted a petition scheme in July 2010. This Petition meets the criteria listed in the [Council's Petition Scheme](#).

3.2.2 Under the Council's published Petitions Scheme a Petition that contains 1,500 signatures triggers a debate at Council.

- 3.2.3 Any decision in relation to service delivery with the Curve and use or disposal of the building are executive functions. Full Council does not have the power to direct Cabinet in relation to an executive function and to purport to do so, would be an unlawful interference by Full Council in the proper role of Cabinet.
- 3.2.4 A library and registrar service are statutory functions of the Council and the Council would need to follow a fair and lawful process when making decisions to change service delivery for these functions. When making any decision about the Curve, the Council needs to consider any contractual arrangements and all other relevant information, including legal and financial implications, equality implications and the results of any consultation.

*Risk management implications*

- 3.3.1 None arising from the recommendation in this report

3.4 *Environmental implications*

- 3.4.1 No environmental implications have been identified as a direct result of this report.

3.5 *Equality implications*

- 3.5.1 The Equality Act duties apply to the Council when changing service provision and disposing of assets. The Council has not made a decision on the Curve or on alternative ways of delivering services within the Curve. At the time of such decisions, the Equality Act duty will need to be considered.

**Background papers and information**

None.