

Herald

THE VOICE OF
PLYMOUTH

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Tories' city bombshell

ANY semblance of cross-party unity among Plymouth's politicians has been blown apart by the Conservatives' decision to withdraw their support for the Life Centre project. The announcement by Tory group leader Vivien Pengelly that her party will no longer support the £54million sports and leisure complex planned for Central Park is tantamount to a declaration of political war on Labour and the Liberal Democrats, who still back the scheme. It means that battle lines will now be drawn as the parties gear up for what promises to be a bitterly fought campaign for control of the city council in May. But, more than that, it now places a huge question mark

over Plymouth's immediate future plans, as the Life Centre represents so much more than just a much-needed boost to the city's social and leisure facilities. As recently as two months ago the Tories were giving their support to the Life Centre plans. Last year, Mrs Pengelly and some of her colleagues were among the 10,000 people who put their names to the Herald's petition backing the project. But now Mrs Pengelly has indicated that she believes the Life Centre is "never going to happen". Instead, she and her party have drawn up plans for a new 50-metre swimming pool in the north of the city, given support for another in Plymstock, the refurbishment of existing sporting facilities at

Central Park and the retention of the Pavilions' leisure pool and ice rink. Her announcement came as a surprise to many at the Civic Centre yesterday. This approach may find favour with many who protested about the loss of Seaton Pool and the planned work on Central Park. But others may now question whether the Tories' bombshell represents a genuine alternative for our city, or is merely sharp electioneering. So many projects planned to improve Plymouth hinge on the Life Centre. At a time when Plymouth was finally moving forward, thanks to a political consensus, this decision could have huge ramifications and reverberate for decades to come.