

DEPUTATION THREE – WEST PARK CENTRE CAMPAIGN GROUP

THE LORD MAYOR: Good afternoon and welcome to today's Council meeting. Please now make your speech to Council, which should not be longer than five minutes, and please begin by introducing the people in your Deputation.

MS V JAQUISS: Good afternoon. I am from the West Park Centre Campaign. On my right is Mavis West; on my left are Douglas and Anne Gilliam. I am Victoria Jaquiss.

My Lord Mayor and fellow Councillors, even though you are not discussing it today, I would to thank you for giving me the opportunity to present the case for getting the West Park Centre up and running as soon as possible. I am only speaking here only on behalf of the charities and community groups.

I would like to make five points

On November 5th 2012, a hundred or so of us turned up as usual for work only to be called into an extraordinary meeting. Here, in the main hall we were that the centre's electrics had been condemned, and we were to pack enough equipment to last two months and then leave. The Council groups there were immediately given a previously mothballed room in Merrion House.

Then it we were asked to pack everything; pack away 20 years' worth of bags, filing cabinets, gamelan, resonance boards, cupboards-full of costumes, and we were given three days to do it in. Then when we did not do it in three days we were given three weeks.

We were 30-plus displaced organisations amounting to 2,000 or so regular users including, of course, all the Council services and then all the charities, who had bumped along in harmony with each other for decades, and now who hardly or never meet at all.

It is fair to say that we were taken aback the manner of the so-called "temporary closure". One minute the electrics needed fixing and the next minute there was a consultation on the building's entire future. Not only were we asked to leave with nowhere (or nowhere suitable) to go, but six months later we are still operating from our garages and spare rooms.

The next point is about the numbers and types of people affected. We feel that the numbers of users and how the centre was in demand has been under-estimated. The last report talks about under use; not so. The place was buzzing from morning to late evening. What was lovely about the West Park Centre and what made it so special was the combinations of arts and sports, education and leisure, adults and children, disabled and able-bodied. Groups included the Travellers' Education Service, children and adults with Special Additional Needs, the unions, self-help groups such as Gamblers Anonymous, and all day Sunday, every Sunday, the Church filled the Centre; many groups of vulnerable people and all surrounding the wonderful foyer for all the serendipitous meetings.

The next point I want to talk about is what a wonderful, practical building design it is. At the end of three spurs and in the middle there are four really good performance spaces - the former gyms, the rehearsal room, studio and the main hall. The main hall's acoustics are good, in fact they have been recently improved. Many, many toilets, including disabled adapted. YAMSEN and ArtForms Music Service installed a multi-sensory classroom at one

end of the centre and it was sad to see the result of ten years' planning taken down in just one morning. Storage – there is exceptional and absolutely vital storage – there was PE equipment, the orchestra's shared instruments, the opera's costume cupboards and a car park, and you cannot under-estimate a good car park. It would fit a 100 piece orchestra or a fleet of minibuses for the disabled, and with disabled access.

The fourth point I would like to make about West Park is its geography. It serves as a base for city-wide and regional work. It is a happy accident, but its geography near Leeds Ring Road is on best bus routes (1, 56, 96 and so on) and players and workers would come from as far away as Scarborough for the orchestras and from Sheffield for YAMSEN. The aspect to the West Park Centre has been significant too. It is an open aspect, surrounded by woodlands and playing fields and that gives you an extra feeling of security and it is also very convenient for a lovely parade of shops up there.

My last point is about West Park, the Accidental Inclusive Arts Centre. It did not start as a plan; it just grew. It was 25 years-plus in the making, groups developing links with each other. The Music Service and the music charities worked together and when we had a Christmas sing-along, the Northern Ballet sent two dancers to play for the kids, the orchestras shared their timpani, etc, etc.

The Council petition that we ran collected over 500 signatures in the two weeks that it was live. There are organisations (such as ourselves at YAMSEN) still unplaced or not satisfactorily placed. There are children and adults with special needs who are missing the hall and their regular rehearsals and there are orchestras missing the hall, the space, the storage - all the reasons that they chose West Park in the first place.

I am here today on behalf all these groups and on behalf of people who cannot speak for themselves. We need the £170,000 - or whatever it takes, really - spending on the electrics, and we need to get back into the building which, until this year, never suffered from the regular petty vandalism that is beginning to appear.

THE LORD MAYOR: Please will you make your final point, Ms Jaquiss, we have got to the end of the five minutes.

MS JAQUISS: In the first instance, we need to get back into West Park Centre and then we would be more than happy to plan for the future, whether it be as a CIC or staying within the Council. Thank you very much. *(Applause)*