

DEPUTATION TWO – FRIENDS OF LEEDS KIRKGATE MARKET

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.

SPEAKER: We are the Friends of Leeds Kirkgate Market. In March, after a public consultation, we were promised a regeneration of the Market.

The Council promised that £12.3m would be borrowed against future market income to fund the refurbishment, that a new management structure would be put in place and that in excess of £1.6m would be spent this financial year on maintaining and upgrading the property. The people of Leeds were promised that the process would be open and transparent.

Instead, two thirds through the financial year the only sign of improvements are the electrical works, which some traders are being asked to pay for themselves (some are not) but nothing else – no wonder there is confusion.

At this critical time, management support is reduced. There is little if any trader involvement in any management decisions and no forum or democratic process to enable that. Unlike many other market and trading areas, there is no organised and regular communication with traders, only demands for money or new rules to follow.

As the traders leave footfall is reducing, and with it the Council's income from the market which is needed to borrow the £12.3m, but the Council is publicly accountable for what is happening in the market and each one of you here today is sanctioning these changes.

The market means more to Leeds than any number of big box shops. It caters for all cultures and incomes and is a lifeline for affordable and healthy fruit and veg, fresh meat and fish and with universal credits round the corner and rise in the number of food banks the market will be more, not less, important for the foreseeable future.

Additionally it is a source of reasonably priced clothes and household goods. Some Councillors claim that necessities can be obtained from Lidl, Primark and Poundland, but the best these shops can offer workers is the minimum wage while profits go to tax havens, whereas the market is a cradle of enterprise where businesses can flourish and the money stays in Leeds.

Leeds market is a bedrock of retail enterprise – the birth place of Marks and Spencers. This particular aspect was celebrated at the opening of the new shop by a number of Councillors, so it seems Leeds City Council boast the market's merits on the one hand whilst behind the scenes the market is slowly being dismantled.

Among the proposals put to the public consultation was for a "Heart of the Market" as a centre for special events, but all that has happened to date is that the traders are having the heart ripped out of them and the market is losing its soul.

So what on earth is going on? Who is sanctioning this in Leeds City Council. Who will be accountable and who can stand up now and defend the indefensible? We have some specific questions to Councillors:

1. We are now eight months into this financial year – how much of the £1.6m has been already spent?
2. On what will the remainder of the expenditure be spent?
3. If this is the first phase of the total £12.3m, how can anyone be sure any of this will be delivered as announced? We also understand the £750,000 agreed for maintenance has been stopped.
4. Why are some traders being asked to pay for electrical works even in units, including Butchers Row, which are meant to be demolished under current redevelopment proposals?
5. Why is there no clear consistent policy for all traders?
6. When will the proposals for this project be brought back to Executive Board for approval?
7. The area behind the George Street shops is a major loading area for traders. What suitable arrangements for market requirements will be made for alternative loading facilities when this is gone?
8. When and how will detailed proposals for the market changes be shared with the public and traders?
9. How are traders themselves being involved in the design of this alternative management structure agreed at the Executive Board to include Councillors, traders and independent representatives, and when will these management proposals be taken to the Executive Board for approval?
10. Can you please explain the reasons for the restructuring of the market management and the apparent reduction in expertise and resources and identify who is now acting as Market Manager and why are they not visible to traders?

We leave you by a quick poem actually designed by one of the traders:

The market is ailing and in a sorry state,
The traders are abandoning this once magnificent place.
So many notices handed in to leave in the New Year
Will surely bring it tumbling down, like a deck of cards, as all the businesses disappear.

No plans to change a single thing or clean and spruce it up,
The millions promised never spent, just bailiffs to hang us up
Like a hungry vultures preying on those who dared to try and run a business in this place, now bled until they die

Finally, just for your awareness, 13 traders have since handed in their notices to quit from January 2014. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.

THE LORD MAYOR: Thank you. Councillor Nash.

COUNCILLOR NASH: My Lord Mayor, I refer this matter to the Executive Board for consideration.

COUNCILLOR G LATTY: I second that, Lord Mayor.

THE LORD MAYOR: I will call for the vote. *(A vote was taken)* That is CARRIED.

Thank you for attending and for what you have said. You will be kept informed of the considerations which your comments will receive. Good afternoon.
(Applause)