

## **SPLASH deputation to Leeds City Council meeting**

Monday 19<sup>th</sup> July 2006

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the council meeting today.

I am here as a representative of SPLASH the acronym stands for Save our Pool and Sports Hall and we're a campaign supported and backed by a whole host of local community organisations, schools, churches, mosques, parents, children and local people – young and old. We started out a couple of months ago – with a meeting of just 4 people – and our objective is to get South Leeds Sports Centre re-opened.

In those few short weeks a lot has happened – our campaign has had a stall at the Beeston Festival and Mela, a couple of days before the last council meeting we had a successful protest outside this building and then marched to the Art Gallery. We've organised a public meeting attended by well over 100 people – that was a week last Monday, and on Monday evening of this week we held a demonstration around Beeston attended by 150 local people. We've collected thousands of signatures and messages from school children in a very short time and signatures are still rolling in.

All the activities we've organised have received excellent press and local tv coverage.

To say that our local community is angry about the current situation regarding South Leeds Sports Centre would be an understatement!

I don't know how much you all know about what's going on – although I suspect some know a lot more than others so I'll use a bit of my 5 minutes to briefly go over what's happened.

Our sports centre has been closed since last December – a period of 7 months. If you ring the centre you get a message that says

*"thank you for calling. Unfortunately we are now closed for refurbishment"*

A notice stuck in a window at the Centre says:-

*"South Leeds Sports Centre closed in December 2005 for major refurbishments.*

*The anticipated start date has now been delayed further and the centre will remain closed to the public during this time.*

*Other essential maintenance and repair work will be taking place in the mean time.*

*Sorry for any inconvenience"*

To add insult to injury a big banner outside the sports centre proclaims:

*"Smarten up to sport – Leeds City Council"*

Another banner says:

*"50p swim for kids at Leeds City Council swimming pools – 19<sup>th</sup> July to 5<sup>th</sup> September"*

....we wish!!

Leeds City Council is quite rightly concerned about obesity in young children – in having a healthy population. We are all concerned that our young children engage in healthy activities whilst at school and in the school holidays which by the way start next week. For the kids of Beeston and Holbeck there's nowhere for them to swim during the long six weeks they're off school this year – the closure has had a massive effect on school swimming programmes – my stepson has to spend an extra hour travelling to Morley – time which could be used for education - local school sports coordinators and head teachers could express this all a lot better than I can and are fully supporting our campaign – my step son's mum took him to swim at South Leeds Sports Centre every week from when he was six months old – he's now almost eight until it closed down – she's tells me that if you didn't get down to the Centre on the day registration for summer swimming courses started you'd be too late to get your child in, that's how popular the Centre was with local people.

And of course there's a host of other activities apart from swimming which used to take place. I haven't got time in 5 minutes to cover all the activities that used to populate the centre – but suffice is to say that our sports centre was central to our community.

I've got to mention that the very future of the Beeston Broncos junior amateur rugby league club is threatened by the current situation. Since the closure they haven't been able to host home fixtures on the sports fields adjoining the centre because they can't provide adequate facilities which used to be provided by the sports centre.

The TV coverage I saw just over a week ago on the anniversary of 7/7 described Beeston and Holbeck as one of the most deprived areas of Europe. I don't know if that's true or not but what is true is that the area South Leeds Sports Centre covers does have a very high proportion of low income families and poverty. Are we really saying that it's ok to say to the people of Beeston and Holbeck that it's ok for your sports centre to be shut for 7 months – and who knows how much longer – it's ok that you can't take your kids swimming in the school holidays.

So the \$64000 question is why is our sports centre shut – with no apparent sign of opening or indeed of any refurbishment having taken place – or indeed timetabled to happen as far as we are aware.

We've followed the words of Councillor Procter over the last few weeks very closely not least because I'm lead to understand he's the only person who can explain what's going on – noone else in Leeds City Council is qualified to explain to the people of South Leeds why our centre is shut!

Those may sound unfair words for me to say so let me explain.

We invited Councillor Procter and Councillor Harris as leader of the Council to attend the public meeting I mentioned earlier. Councillor Harris sent his apologies. Councillor Procter's office at first said he was otherwise engaged and could not attend, then they said that he could not attend because his wife was expecting a baby at the same time as the meeting. This being the case we replied that if – for obviously very reasonable reasons he could not attend could he please send a deputy who could tell us what was going on and

answer questions. Despite reiterating this request several times noone from the Council came to the meeting – Councillor Procter did however send a statement to be read out to the meeting.

In a nutshell Councillor Procter argues that the centre's future was linked to a Surestart project to build an extension on the side of the sports centre to form a children's centre. When this funding fell through – and Councillor Procter has not held back from stating that National Government is to blame for this situation – the whole project to refurbish South Leeds Sports Centre fell through. His other arguments at various times over the last few weeks have been – and I apologise if I miss anything out – It's not my decision the officers will decide – the sports centre is badly positioned – the sports centre is not well used. I want to say something briefly about the last point. It's no doubt true that before the centre closed down for refurbishment numbers using it were down. This is mainly because it was closed down by stealth – with activities at the centre being cut bit by bit. And even if it were true that less people were using it, are the council saying this is a reason to close it down. How about some better marketing?

When he said the stuff about Surestart we started doing a bit of digging although I do have to say that we didn't have to dig very far – in fact only as far as the Council's web site – to find the council report and minute of the Executive Board meeting which took place on 8<sup>th</sup> June 2005 which clearly refutes what Councillor Procter is saying.

What's clear from this report is that the scheme to refurbish South Leeds Sports Centre predated the Surestart scheme. It's also clear that £478,500 worth of funding had been approved for the refurbishment of South Leeds Sports Centre by something called the Council's Asset Management Group. (Could I add here that the £10.5m which has unfortunately appeared in the Yorkshire Evening Post on a couple of occasions is infact a misreading of one of our press releases which referred to £.5m – that is the 478,500 I've just mentioned) I'm not an expert on Council procedures and I couldn't find the minutes of the Asset Management Group's meetings on the web site – but I presume they're available for some form of public scrutiny?

As you don't all have these minutes in front of you the councillors present at the 8 June 2005 Executive Board meeting were Councillors Harris, Blackburn, A Carter, J L Carter, Harker, Harrand, Jennings, Procter, Smith and Wakefield.

I don't know the ins and outs of the Surestart situation although I've tried very hard to find out without much success over the last few weeks – but what I do know and what our campaign is saying is that Surestart is a red herring. If the funding has been allocated to South Leeds Sports Centre for refurbishment our message to Leeds City Council is spend it and reopen our Centre.

Yesterdays YEP referred to using sports centres as a political football. The last thing I'd like to say is that our campaign unites people of different political colours and persuasions with the vast majority of people who are involved I suspect who do not vote in elections. Some people call these people apathetic. I don't. They're our people, our community. Their message – through me today is reopen our sports centre!

Thank you for listening

Phil Goodfield on behalf of SPLASH  
19 July 2006