

DEPUTATION TWO – LEEDS OWL TRAIL

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

MS A STOWE: My Lord Mayor, fellow Councillors and beautiful owls on the coat of arms, I would like to introduce our own team here today – myself, Antonia Stowe, Clifford Stead, James Brown and Natalie Kyrkos.

Many of you will be familiar with the Leeds Owl Trail and what we do and, for some, this will be first time you have met us, so hello. The Leeds Owl Trail is a not for profit organisation set up in 2009 with the aim to inspire and encourage people to learn about Leeds' rich history and create new owls for future generations to enjoy. We do this by taking Leeds' greatest icon, the owl from the coat of arms which appears on many buildings and structures around Leeds, and in particular the city centre. We then use the owl to connect people with the city and make a personal connection. This is where the magic takes place, as we make heritage accessible and fun.

We currently have a 25 owl location map with an annual distribution of 88,000 and the map is free; a website where we inform people of our activities and you can download the map; trails led by 'owl' actors from the Leeds theatre company the Blahs, and you may even have seen 'Owl' on your travels; an education project called Every Owl Matters, and we also take visitors around the city, including delegations and conferences.

How does Leeds benefit from what we do? We connect people of all ages, regardless of their income, background or ability, with the city centre. We raise the profile of Leeds on the local, regional, national and international stage by our promotional activities and our increasing and rising presence in the city. We welcome people to our city and show the city off. As one Belgian tourist emailed after a visit and said, "Leeds, it is the pretty city of owls."

We provide employment to many, including actors, artists and researchers. We help retain young talent by offering training and employment to young people who may leave the city to go elsewhere.

We believe the Leeds Owl Trail is the fourth cultural dimension to the city after eating, shopping and drinking. For visitors we just show the city off – an innovative way to find your way around by teaching something about the buildings and creating a sense of place.

Most of all, to date we are proud to say we believe the Leeds Owl Trail is about helping to make every citizen a stakeholder in our city and our partnerships are growing stronger each day.

Our deputation is not only about saying, “Hey, thank you, here we are and thank you for initially supporting us”, but also some requests. We would like you to support our growth by working with us. We want you to help us secure our future in Leeds and help us to work in partnership with you.

We would like you to encourage the Council to act as an umbrella organisation for all the trails that exist in Leeds and promote them.

We would like you to encourage city centre Local Authority spaces to make free space for the Leeds Owl Trail maps that are easily accessible to the public. Recently there seems to have been a removal of these in favour of the paid distribution service racks which we simply cannot pay for, and why should we? There is clearly a larger issue here with other organisations that might want to reach out too.

We would also like you to address ‘Welcome to Yorkshire’ and ask them to include the Leeds Owl Trail as something special in the city for visitors, instead of only promoting organisations if they pay corporate membership. We are not alone in our concerns about this. After all, the city does part-fund them and actually we do their job pretty well.

Finally, our dream is to continue the legacy of commissioning new owls for future generations to enjoy and we are beginning to talk to developers who are keen to do this. It would be great if, within the planning authority, you could encourage this too as a section agreement.

Thank you for welcoming us today and we have left our Leeds Owl Trail maps in the antechamber for you to take home. Thank you very much. (*Applause*)

THE LORD MAYOR: Councillor James Lewis, please.

COUNCILLOR J LEWIS: Thank you, Lord Mayor. I move that the matter be referred to the Executive Board for consideration.

COUNCILLOR LOBLEY: I am delighted to second, my Lord Mayor.

THE LORD MAYOR: All those in favour? (*A vote was taken*) That seems to be CARRIED.

Antonia, before I say something about thank you, perhaps Members would like to see that we now have a new gavel. I am not going to use it but it does have an owl on it, so I think that is another one to your list.

MS A STOWE: Thank you.

THE LORD MAYOR: Thank you for coming along and for saying what you have said. You will be kept informed of the considerations which your comments will receive. Thank you very much. (*Applause*)