

DEPUTATION ONE

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.

MR R PARK: My Lord Mayor and Fellow Councillors, my name is Richard Park, I am the Chairman of the Sparrow Park Action Group. That is a group constituted as a sub-group of the Cardigan Triangle Community Association. I am accompanied by Joan Brown, who is the Secretary of the CTCA.

We are here today to seek your help to regenerate Sparrow Park in Headingley. It is in the Headingley Conservation Area on Cardigan Road, not far from the stadium - I am sure most of you will know where it is. It is specifically referred to in our Neighbourhood Design Statement as being an important green space which, as you know, is a densely-populated part of Leeds.

The history of Sparrow Park is that it is one of the few undeveloped plots in Headingley and the last vestiges of the Zoological and Botanical Gardens that stood there in the mid-19th Century. When the zoo failed and the estate was sold off and divided into building plots, Cardigan Road was laid out and cut across Spring Road and Chapel Lane creating a separate triangle of land. Walls and rails were erected to create Sparrow Park.

Now, it is rapidly become derelict and urgently needs investment to secure its future. The original Victorian walls and railings need repair and maintenance. In places they have been smashed and deliberately knocked down. The undergrowth and the trees need to be managed. The park is used for littering and dumping rubbish and it is also used by groups who drink and take drugs. The dereliction sets the tone for the neighbourhood and the way visitors to the rugby ground and the like, the transient residents that come from the university and their landlords behave.

It is our aim to regenerate the park and to secure its future management and maintenance. We want to make it a safe and pleasant place for people to visit, to be an outdoor classroom for Spring Bank Primary School across the road, and to manage the trees and undergrowth to increase the animal and plant diversity.

In an urgent attempt to slow the rate of dereliction and vandalism, local residents have raised funds to repair the most damaged part of the wall and erect a temporary wooden fence to plug the gap in the railings. We have also thinned some of the undergrowth.

However, we are prevented from developing a long-term solution because, despite extensive investigations at the Land Registry etc, we cannot trace an owner and this means we cannot access grants or get insurance and protect ourselves from any liabilities. Whenever we work on the land we are trespassing.

We have looked into taking adverse possession; however, this would take ten years and would require an individual to demonstrate factual possession of the park to the exclusion of all others. This is unreasonable, given the location of the park in

a crowded urban environment next to a main road, as this individual would be responsible for maintaining the boundaries and any liabilities arising. Also, there is no guarantee that we could obtain the adverse possession after ten years. Adverse possession has become difficult and we cannot wait ten years.

We suggest the best option is for the Council to make a Compulsory Purchase Order on behalf of the community. This would resolve the issue of ownership. A trust arrangement would enable access to funds and grants so the residents of Headingley, with Council support, could maintain and manage the park. Small scale repairs could be undertaken via MICE money and some 106 funding which is available, and the recent sale of the adjacent Grove Villas by the Council will have generated some potential funds for local environmental improvements.

We understand the concerns of some Council officers that contesting a CPO could be expensive. Should someone successfully claim ownership, there will be no reason for the Council to contest it because we would have established ownership and responsibility for repair and maintenance. The chances of an owner making a claim are negligible. Extensive searches have already been made by residents and the Council. One indication is that the original Victorian railings survived the war, among the few to do so in Leeds, and this indicates that ownership may have been uncertain then, as a contribution to the war effort at that time required the owner's permission.

The land has very low value. The Council valuation is approximately £2,000. Due to it being green space it has never been built upon and permission would not be granted for building.

An earlier proposed plan of restoration and, it has got to be said, the extravagant development of Spring Road was drawn up by the Council in 2009/10. We are not asking for this, just a simple scheme of tidying and repair. As part of the earlier plan, £10,000 was allocated for the compulsory purchase of Sparrow Park and it is still unused. We are asking for this to be spent on the CPO of Sparrow Park and to consider incorporating the road area of Spring Road as detailed in the earlier permission.

THE LORD MAYOR: Just to remind you, you have got a minute left.

MR R PARK: Yes. I am nearly finished.

Just to reiterate, Sparrow Park needs action now, we cannot wait ten years so please support our request and enable us to regenerate this historic green space and community asset. (*applause*)

THE LORD MAYOR: Councillor Lewis.

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

COUNCILLOR G LATTY: I will second that, Lord Mayor.

THE LORD MAYOR: All those in favour? (*A vote was taken*) CARRIED.
Thank you for attending and for what you have said. You will be kept informed of the consideration which your comments will receive. Good afternoon.