

**LEEDS CITY COUNCIL**

**EXTRAORDINARY  
MEETING OF THE COUNCIL**

Held on

Wednesday, 10<sup>th</sup> September 2014

At

THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,  
CIVIC HALL,  
LEEDS

In the Chair:

THE LORD MAYOR  
(COUNCILLOR D CONGREVE)

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**VERBATIM REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS**

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VERBATIM REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS OF LEEDS CITY COUNCIL  
EXTRAORDINARY MEETING  
HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 10<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2014

ITEM 1 – CITY OF LEEDS TRIBUTE TO BERYL BURTON OBE

THE LORD MAYOR: Can I welcome everyone to this afternoon's Extraordinary Meeting of Council and just remind Members of Council to switch off mobile phones, or at least put them on silent and also remind Members that the meeting is webcast.

I would like to welcome Denise Burton and her family to this very special occasion. As you know, Beryl was a remarkable woman and, I am sure most of you will agree, one of the best sportswomen that not just Leeds but that this country has ever produced. She is well remembered in this city and this is our opportunity today to bestow the highest honour the City of Leeds can, on a truly inspirational citizen.

Can I ask Councillor Wakefield, please, to move the resolution.

COUNCILLOR WAKEFIELD: Thank you, Lord Mayor, and can I echo your greetings to Beryl Burton's family – her daughter Denise, husband Charles and all the other family and friends. Can I also welcome Gary Verity who has come along. We all know Gary as a friend of the Council and very instrumental in bringing the Grand Départ to Leeds, so welcome to this really special occasion. (*Applause*)

A special occasion and, given the success of the Grand Départ, which we are going to discuss later – that well known cycling fan, Councillor Les Carter (*laughter*) – given that we have had a play that has been one of the most successful plays about Beryl in the history of theatre locally, given that we now have actually the highest profile and awareness of biking, I cannot think of a better time to honour a citizen who is, as the Lord Mayor said and as Maxine Peake has said, the greatest sportsperson this country has ever produced.

I actually like the French comment which says, "If Beryl Burton had been French Joan of Arc would have been the second woman" (*laughter*) because they absolutely worship her and admire her because of her achievements.

I think the truth is, and I have said this many times, her astonishing achievements have never been properly recognised. Yes, she got an MBE in 1964, an OBE in 1968 but, frankly, some of the achievements she made (and I will let colleagues go into the detail of that) are truly astonishing, even in today's world of top class athletes being supported.

The one thing that stands out for me, and anybody who does cycling will appreciate this phenomenal achievement, to do 277.5 miles in 12 hours is still one of the most outstanding achievements. You can understand why through 1967 and 1969 she held both the men's world record and the women's world record at that time – all

on rice pudding, so I am told, all while she was working both in clothing and a rhubarb factory and without the sponsorship and support and the teamwork you see today.

You can imagine what it would have been like today. Clearly she would have been on every TV programme and sports quiz and so on, but clearly she would have been recognised all over the world and I think that is why it is appropriate to have this event today.

Here is a woman, born in Halton Moor, lived in Morley, cycled miles around Yorkshire, had ill health and has actually been an inspiration for thousands of athletes for years. Even our Lizzie Armistead quotes her as her inspiration. Here is a woman who did it in such a modest, quiet way.

I think this recognition of bestowing the highest honour is long overdue and I hope that we all find some time to reflect on what an inspiration she was and what a great thing it is to have somebody like Beryl alongside the other great Freemen of the City, like Nelson Mandela, like Jane Tomlinson, like Denis Healey, Alan Bennett and so on and she deserves that pride of place alongside them.

I move the White Paper, Lord Mayor. (*Applause*)

THE LORD MAYOR: Councillor Andrew Carter.

COUNCILLOR A CARTER: Thank you, my Lord Mayor. Can I say first of all, I am not Councillor Les Carter, who will be moving a vote of congratulations on the Grand Départ and the Tour de France later on. I know it has been a matter of some conjecture amongst people, officers, Members of the Council, as to why Les Carter, that well known cycling enthusiast should be moving it – stand up, Les, so they can see why! I will let him explain in his own words.

Can I commence first of all by apologising to Charles and Denise for not being present at the luncheon a little earlier today. I know that I will have been well represented by my colleague Councillor Buckley and I thank him for standing in for me at the last minute, but I do apologise to Charles and Denise for my unavoidable absence.

For people of my generation in the City of Leeds, Beryl Burton was a sporting icon and, remember, back in those days cycling was not the sport that it is today. It was to some degree a minority sport except in countries like France, of course, which has already been mentioned. To my generation, the success of Beryl Burton in her chosen sport made her an icon to all of us and we all remember well her many feats and medals.

I just want to mention a few of them. She won the World Championship medals almost every year across three decades. She was the World Champion five times – 1959, 1960, 1962, 1963, 1966; silver medallist three times – 1961, 1964 and 1968; bronze 1967, 1970 and 1973. The medals go on and on and on. She was so successful and accomplished at her sport.

It is always sad on these sort of occasions when the recipient of an honour from the city is no longer with us to receive the accolade personally, but thankfully

members of Beryl's family are here. In some ways it is opportune because of the success the City of Leeds, the place of Beryl's birth, has had such a successful Grand Départ and part of the Tour de France, which has brought with it such prestige to the city and I am sure Beryl will be delighted that that has been the case. As I say, for people of my generation, a sporting icon. She broke one record that even men cyclists could not manage to achieve. She was that good.

I have great pleasure in supporting the proposition put by Councillor Wakefield that the City of Leeds bestow this honour upon Beryl Burton today. It is much deserved. Thank you very much, my Lord Mayor. (*Applause*)

THE LORD MAYOR: Councillor Golton.

COUNCILLOR GOLTON: Thank you, Lord Mayor. I am not going to repeat the very extensive list of the achievements in sport of Beryl Burton. I will, instead, concentrate upon the importance of why someone like Beryl Burton should be given the Freedom of the City.

It was plain today that for the people at the lunch, this was very much a lady of flesh and blood and day-to-day family concourse. By making her a Freeman of the City, even posthumously, we are in danger of mythologizing somebody, but that is almost the point of it because as time goes by we need to ensure that that self-started, singular enthusiasm and commitment is something that we pass on to the next generation. I know it has already been popularised through the play that was written by Maxine Peake so there is already a little bit of mythologizing going there, but if we can do something as a city ourselves to say to the next generation, "You too should be following that singular example, you too should be following your dream, you too should be fighting adversity."

In a long line of women, not just Beryl, of course; we have got Fanny Waterman in front of her, we have got my own resident from Rothwell in terms of Jane Tomlinson and I really am proud of being in a city that recognises women of achievement in that way and pointing out that actually, especially as Beryl did it so often herself in races, they are doing a lot better than equivalent men who often get more thanks for it.

I am very pleased to be supporting the motion put forward by Councillor Wakefield. (*Applause*)

THE LORD MAYOR: Councillor Elliott.

COUNCILLOR ELLIOTT: Thank you, Lord Mayor. Those of us who know of Beryl Burton's achievements and those who attended the play "Beryl" at the Leeds Playhouse, would agree that Beryl Burton deserves to be awarded the highest honour that Leeds City Council can bestow, the Freedom of the City of Leeds.

Although this is a posthumous award, Beryl's husband Charlie, her daughter Denise with her husband, Clayton, and Beryl's grandchildren, along with other relatives and friends, are here to witness the event and be proud of the award for Beryl.

Maxine Peake in her modern and imaginative play “Beryl”, caught the spirit of Beryl, her life with Charlie, Denise and members of the Morley Cycling Club. We have heard this afternoon from others of Beryl’s achievements which no other cyclist has managed to beat, and at a time with no sponsorship. This was done with determination and pure love of cycling and winning. Beryl, we are told, said at one stage, and I quote, this is what she said, “I am winning for Morley.”

We have in Morley memorials to Beryl – Beryl Burton Gardens, where a mural takes pride of place with Beryl and Morley landmarks in the background; two plaques, one in the Town Hall and a recent one fitted in Beryl Burton Gardens.

I am delighted to have the opportunity to give the Morley Borough Independents’ support for the award of the Freedom of the City of Leeds posthumously to Beryl Burton OBE. The award is very welcome by the citizens of Morley on whose behalf I speak. Thank you, Lord Mayor. (*Applause*)

THE LORD MAYOR: Councillor Ann Blackburn.

COUNCILLOR A BLACKBURN: Thank you, Lord Mayor. Beryl Burton was born Beryl Charnock in the Halton area of Leeds and lived in, as has been alluded to, in Morley and the Morley area throughout her life. She was introduced to cycling through her husband Charlie Burton, who she married in 1955. Two years later she took her first national medal, a silver in the National 100 mile Individual Time Trial Championship and before the decade was out she was competing internationally.

Beryl was the National Pursuit Champion 13 times and won the World title on twelve occasions. She was 18 times the National 100 Mile Champion, 23 times the National 50 Champion, and 26 times the 25 Mile Champion. She was in her forties when the Road Time Trials Council introduced a National Ten Mile title, yet she also won that four times.

In addition to these titles, Beryl was for 25 successive years between 1959 and 1983 the British Best All Rounder. She set records dozens of times, reducing them over the course of her career by as much as 15%. In 1963 she was the first woman to go under the hour for 25 miles and subsequently bust the two and four hour barriers for 50 and 100. All of these she significantly improved on. Most of her ultimate records stood for the best part of 20 years.

Now I have mentioned some of her fantastic achievements, what about the character of the woman herself? One of her most famous idiosyncrasies was offering witticisms to riders she caught. Dave Taylor, of the Cycling Time Trials, recalled in an article in Cycling Weekly, “The only experience I had with Beryl was being caught by her in a ‘25’ in Essex. As she passed me she said ‘Eh lad, you’re not trying’, then she disappeared up the road.”

In her book, Beryl recalled the sympathy she felt for Mike McNamara as she approached him when he was on the way to recording a new men’s national record, 0.73 miles shorter than the record she set. “Poor Mac, his glory, richly deserved, was going to be overshadowed by a woman.”

Recognising the need to make a gesture as she passed, she offered him a Liquorice Allsort from a bag she had in her back pocket. Years later, the Rockingham

Forest Wheelers club honoured that moment by presenting Beryl with a giant version of the sweet at their annual dinner.

What a remarkable woman. On behalf of the Green Group I am pleased to support that Beryl Burton's name be inscribed alongside those of the Honorary Freemen of the City of Leeds in recognition of her outstanding sporting achievements in cycling. Thank you. (*Applause*)

THE LORD MAYOR: Councillor Dawson.

COUNCILLOR DAWSON: Thank you, Lord Mayor. It is my great privilege to speak on the achievements of Beryl Burton and the granting to her posthumously of the Freedom of her home city of Leeds. I am proud to represent Morley, the town which is associated most with Beryl Burton.

We live in an era when many sports are dominated by money, and sportsmen and women become celebrities and achieve iconic status even when their achievements are fairly modest. In her sport of cycling, the achievements of Beryl Burton have never been matched, never come near to being matched and most likely never will be matched. It is doubtful if anyone in any sport could come close to matching her record.

Her achievements are immense and Councillor Blackburn has listed many of her championships. As she also mentioned, she was crowned British Women's Best All Rounder for 25 consecutive years. She was World Champion five times and in total won 122 national championships. Her desire to win was immense.

What is perhaps most incredible is that despite the vast improvements in British cycling and cycling technology over the last few years, the achievements still remain head and shoulders above any other British cyclist.

As well as being a champion, Beryl also worked through her entire career. She refused to become a full-time professional. Beryl was a housewife and a mother and a farm worker as much as she was a cyclist. During her lifetime she was honoured, receiving the MBE and the OBE in the 1960s, but it is right that she is honoured now and becomes the first sportsperson to receive the Freedom of Leeds. She joins many famous names such as Sir Winston Churchill and Nelson Mandela who have received this accolade.

My Lord Mayor, it is absolutely the right thing to do to award Beryl Burton the Freedom of the City of Leeds. Beryl Burton was an ordinary woman who had an ordinary job and came from an ordinary background but her achievements were beyond extraordinary; they will never be surpassed. Thank you. (*Applause*)

THE LORD MAYOR: I now call for the vote on the motion. (*A vote was taken*) The motion is CARRIED.

I now ask Mrs Burton-Cole to respond.

MRS D BURTON-COLE: Thank you, Lord Mayor. Thank you, Councillors, for all those wonderful words that you have just said, so true and it is fabulous to hear it. The family is, I know, overwhelmed too.

Also, thank you everyone for all the work you have done to make this day happen because there has been lots of background work, I know.

My mother, a true Yorkshire woman, would have been deeply honoured to have been chosen as a Freeman of the City of Leeds. Her roots were in Leeds, she was a Leeds lass.

We, her family and friends, are very proud of her cycling achievements – very proud – and very proud that her name will be amongst such great people in history.

BB, as she was affectionately called by my dad, was a woman who never gave up and gave her best every time. For her to be given the Freedom of the City you have ensured that my mother's legend continues and that her energy and determination will be there to inspire future generations to achieve.

Thank you for remembering Beryl Burton OBE. *(Applause)*

THE LORD MAYOR: I now invite the Chief Executive to read the Tribute from the City of Leeds.

THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE: At a meeting of the Council of the City of Leeds held in the Council Chamber at the Civic Hall on the tenth day of September 2014, at a Special Council convened for the said purpose, the Lord Mayor Councillor David Congreve in the Chair, resolved unanimously that the name of Beryl Burton OBE be inscribed alongside those of the Honorary Freemen of the City of Leeds in recognition and high appreciation of her outstanding sporting achievements, her lasting legacy of inspiration to women in sport and to her significant and lasting contribution to the international reputation of the City of Leeds for cycling. *(Applause)*

*(The Lord Mayor presented the Scroll to Mrs Burton-Cole) (Applause)*

*(Mrs Burton-Cole signed the City of Leeds Roll of Honorary Freemen)*

*(Presentation of a bouquet to Mrs Burton-Cole) (Applause)*

THE LORD MAYOR: I now like to declare this part of the meeting closed. Thank you very much.

*(The meeting closed at 1.25pm)*