

DEPUTATION THREE
NATIONAL FEDERATION OF MARKET TRADERS

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

MS J WILLIAMS: My Lord Mayor and fellow Councillors, my name is Jo Williams. I am here today with Mrs Laughton, Mr Singh and Mrs Hocken we are here representing the National Market Traders Federation Leeds Branch.

Leeds Kirkgate Market, the largest undercover market in Europe, a magnificent landmark and once a highly successful resource for the people of Leeds. Indeed the flagship for Leeds where customers and tourists came from near and far to benefit from the service this wonderful market provided.

Sadly, this is no longer the case - the market has been in decline for the last 20 years or more, as threats of redevelopment have blighted reinvestment in the Market. Market traders, many of whom are long standing businessmen and women are struggling to survive due to the low standard of the environment in which they are trading, and the high level of rents which they are being asked to pay for sub-standard conditions.

Leeds Kirkgate Market currently generated over £3m of rental income per year, with a surplus of over £1,000,000 and yet as this money goes into the central Council pot, very little comes back out as reinvestment into repairing or improving the market.

The standard of the market has fallen significantly and we need to bring it back to become a place where people want to visit, shop, stay and promote as a wonderful resource filled with quality, value for money, product expertise and a service which is second to none. If we can generate this amount of income now, just think of what we could do if in the future we get it back to where it should be. The people of Leeds deserve to benefit from this income.

The market has approximately 400 units and a large proportion of these are currently unoccupied. Why are these unoccupied? Well for a variety of reasons, mainly due to the fact that potential tenants take one look at the market and think 'Is this a viable place to build or develop my business?' and at present, it is not. Any businessman or woman knows that for your business to survive, you need to be situated in a place that looks attractive, is clean and is safe for customers to visit. A number of the traders have had in-depth business analysis with financial experts and business link and the outcome of these investigations are that the 'businesses are successful, but their location and surrounding environment is letting them down'.

The ripple effect of the decline of the market goes much wider than the tenants though:-

- Each unit employing between 1 to 10 people

- These businesses supporting up to 50 suppliers
- Each of these suppliers employing between 1 and 350 people

It does not take a genius to see the huge economic impact that this market has, not only on the livelihoods of the tenants, but the significant impact this has on the employment market should this be allowed to continue to decline. Leeds cannot afford to support further unemployment, and if the market goes, where would these low income people shop? Out of city supermarkets? Taking further income from the City Centre? We need to take action on this and we need to take it now.

Why is the market in crisis? Well, some people would say it is due to the recession, but this is not the case as this decline was happening long before the credit crunch of 2009. The fact that these businessmen and women are still standing here after coming through the other side of not only one but in some cases two recessions surely shows that they have good business sense.

So what has gone wrong? Could it be the redevelopment strategy, which we have been advised is the only strategy which the markets have been working with for the past ten years? How can you run a market or any business without a strategy?

We need someone to take this bull by the horns, be open and transparent about the short, mid and long term plans for the market and manage this market.

- We need an immediate lift of the recruitment ban to enable proactive headhunting of an expert who has experience of rebuilding failing markets.
- We need an immediate rent reduction.
- We need an immediate reduction in car parking for the markets and surrounding areas.
- We need immediate reinvestment
- Time is not on our side.

We need to work together and rebuild this into the market and flagship for Leeds it once was and can be again – give people of Leeds something to be proud of, and you can be the ones who can look back in years to come and say ‘I played my part in making that happen..’

Thank you for giving us this opportunity.

THE LORD MAYOR: Councillor Bentley?

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

COUNCILLOR GRUEN: Lord Mayor, I have great pleasure in seconding.

THE LORD MAYOR: Could I have a show of hands in favour? *(A vote was taken)*
This is 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.