

DEPUTATION TWO – FRIENDS OF BRAMLEY BATHS

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.

SPEAKER: Thank you very much. Lord Mayor, Members of Council, we represent Friends of Bramley Baths. Bramley Baths is an Edwardian building housing a gym, a pool and a fitness room, that serves a population of around 30,000 people, chiefly those living in Bramley and Rodley. The baths were restored in 1992 with civic investment to ensure the survival of the last of eight public baths built in Leeds between 1899 and 1904, one of only 13 that now remain in use and open to the public for swimming in the UK. This is a Grade II listed building, a stunning architectural gem that this city should be proud of, we believe, and that has the features to inspire visits and support from across Leeds and beyond. It offers the user an experience that goes well beyond the act of swimming, an experience that is becoming harder to come by and that could help the City demonstrate why Leeds has something special to offer beyond shopping.

Bramley Baths is a community resource that has served the for over 100 years. The baths are situated in the city's poorest authority ward, West Leeds, in an area with precious few community resources and facilities. It is not just a place for exercise; it is a neutral space where people of all persuasions can rub shoulders and a symbol of civic pride for an area that has previously been stripped of many of its original features.

In February of this year, a campaign backed by local Councillors and the West Leeds MP, fought proposed cuts to reduce the opening hours at Bramley Baths to 29 hours per week from the standard 80 hours. Whilst a recent announcement has stated that the Baths will remain open 60 hours per week for the next twelve months, the future beyond this is unclear. The Baths have been running at a deficit and local residents are aware that this resource needs to be used in order for it to survive but we need your help.

There are factors influencing the long term success of this resource that rely on support from you, our Council to help Bramley Baths realise its potential.

Communications about Bramley Baths is next to zero. The team at Bramley Baths, who I have met and spoken with, are full of good and viable ideas for promoting the current service and extending its capability through creative marketing of the space. They are champions of this building, whose voices have been largely ignored and whose ideas are vital to a sustainable future.

There is also no evidence that potential untapped markets have been explored in a meaningful way, though the staff have themselves identified many areas that are ripe for development. They need your active support to improve communications about Bramley Baths, to test services that will appeal to potential new markets, such as early 7.00 am opening and late 10.30 closing. Clearly there is an argument for this type of approach and, critically, demand, given that the opening hours at the much-lauded Armley Leisure Centre are 7.15am – 10.30pm weekdays.

There is in general much more scope for creative thinking around the services offered for filling the pool. Currently the Baths close on Bank Holidays, as do other leisure facilities around the city – a strange and seemingly counter-intuitive approach to making money and providing community resources.

Bramley Baths, amongst its unique features, also has the city's only Russian banya, a steam room – a feature that is little known about more broadly.

The story of Bramley Baths is rich and delightful, and the rationale for ensuring a happier, safer, healthier community is clear and widely evidenced. The Government claims it wants to tackle child obesity, and claims that the UK is a country worth of hosting the Olympic Games – yet locally, in areas like Bramley, we are apparently not worthy of facilities to enable citizens to exercise affordably or learn the basic strokes needed to compete on any scale, in any arena. Bramley itself is on the River Aire and the Leeds to Liverpool Canal. Swimming is for local children in the long term not simply a form of exercise, but a safety measure.

The recent rescue package is short term and without proper support by the Council's communications resources and by enabling the team on the ground at Bramley Baths to put in place affordable but income earning ideas, the rescue package will only act as a temporary sticking plaster. Many of us believe that Bramley Baths can turn itself around, but only if staff are given the backing to take some positive proactive steps.

I recognise that cuts are necessary and that Bramley Baths needs to address the recorded decline in visitor numbers and find new ways to stimulate revenue. My point is that both of these issues could be addressed with simple steps to identify the services that customers would use, to promote at a very basic level the services already offered, and to simply tell people more about what is there.

Thank you very much. (*Applause*)

THE LORD MAYOR: Thank you. Can I call on Councillor Gruen, please?

COUNCILLOR GRUEN: Lord Mayor, this is an important matter and I move that the issue be referred to the Executive Board for further consideration.

COUNCILLOR LOBLEY: Lord Mayor, I am delighted to second that motion and congratulate you on an excellent presentation.

THE LORD MAYOR: Can I call for the vote on that, please. (*A vote was taken*)
That is CARRIED.

Can I 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 to you, ladies.