

DEPUTATION 5 – WEST RIDING TRACK LEAGUE

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.

MS M PARKER: My Lord Mayor and Members of the Council, we are the West Riding Track League. I have with me Alan Edmondson, Committee Member and a members of Leeds Kirkgate Cycling Club, Joe Parker, one of our youth competitors, I have Richard Simpson, who is our starter, and Francesca Simpson, who is one of our young volunteers.

West Riding Track League was founded in 1945 and since then has organised grass track cycling on the banked oval circuit surrounding the cricket pitch at Roundhay Park. The banked track was built in 1894 for the express purpose of cycle racing – it was not built for cricket - which has continued every summer from Victorian times to the present day, with only the two World Wars stopping competition.

We provide races for all ages and abilities for everyone to take part in from children to adults to pensioners, and even your Councillors. We offer the same mixture of track races from sprints to handicap races and endurance events that you would find at any track meet.

The younger children ride normal bikes but children over twelve and adults have to ride specialised track bikes with a fixed gear, which means as long as the wheels are turning, so are the pedals. This follows the standard rules for track racing and means that special bikes are required.

This is the reason why we have asked to speak before you. Our aim is to raise the numbers taking part, and to provide any Leeds child, including those from deprived backgrounds, the opportunity to pursue their Olympic dream. To do so we need to provide track bikes for the children to use without the cost of purchasing the series of track bikes they will need as they grow and develop. To achieve this we need to raise funds but finances are very tight and as a non-profit making community sports club, any little profit we make goes straight back into the club. We are currently building six bikes to lend to children who cannot afford to buy them.

By providing bikes to borrow, the Manchester Velodrome and tracks such as Scunthorpe are able to attract large numbers of children into their leagues, including those from seriously deprived areas. As a racing league our costs are considerable with insurance and levies to British Cycling which we cannot alter. The cost of the hire of the circuit and cricket pavilion we use for the summer league is £300 for only 30 hours a year.

We would like to ask the Council to consider allowing the West Riding Track League to use the Roundhay park facilities at no cost each year, as well as allowing us to use the pavilion for a small amount of storage during the summer season. The pavilion is little used during the year as there is not a resident cricket club. This would release a £300 per annum to put towards the cost of additional bikes for the use of Leeds children.

We would also like to ask the Council to ensure the League's right to race on the historic track which was built for this purpose, together with the maintenance required to keep the track up to racing standard and continue to allow its use for training purposes.

We cannot match the league's heyday in the 1950s when huge crowds attended as per the photographs, but we have enjoyed an increase of 170% of children taking part and 60% of adults over the last two years, following the Olympic successes in cycling. We have received excellent support form Roundhay Parks Estate Manager, Shaun Gregory, and his Head Gardener, John Roebuck, who have continued to maintain and improve the surface of the track. This has led to the league being

awarded the National Men's 400 metre Championship and National Schools championship this summer.

The majority of Great Britain's Olympic and World class cyclists started on either a grass track racing circuit like Roundhay or a Velodrome, including Victoria Pendleton. Indeed, the West Riding Track League's cyclists read like a Who's Who of world class and Olympic competitors from Brian Robinson in the 1950s, Mark Barry and Jonny Clay in the 1980s and 1990's, one of the current top Juniors, Joshua Edmondson, 2011 Great Britain squad riders Lizzie Armistead and Anna Blyth and young Olympic Development Programme rider Matt Rotherham.

Many of these riders did not come from cycling backgrounds or a wealthy one but just happened to live near a grass track. It is no coincidence that the most of the world class cyclists live in the vicinity of a track, and this includes Roundhay.

With no other track circuit in Leeds or for Yorkshire, Roundhay is vital to the development of Leeds cyclists in the pursuit of their cycling dreams and to continue to show the importance of Leeds athletes in world class track competitions. This is why we are asking for your support. Thank you very much for hearing us today. (*Applause*)

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

COUNCILLOR GRUEN: Lord Mayor, thank you. I move that the matter under consideration be referred to the Executive Board.

COUNCILLOR LOBLEY: I second, my Lord Mayor.

THE LORD MAYOR: Can we all 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 and can I wish you good afternoon. Thank you.

MS M PARKER: Thank you very much and good afternoon, Members of Council, Lord Mayor. (*Applause*)