

## **'A Pool for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century'**

### **Notes of Public Meeting to discuss the future of swimming in Ripon**

**Held in Ripon Leisure Centre on Sat 16 February**

**Chaired by Councillors Kenn Hart and David Parnaby**

Kenn Hart opened the meeting with a review of the proposals by HBC that were presented at the Ripon City Council meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> January. He stressed that neither the Council nor the public had any inkling of these proposals before then.

It was explained to the meeting that the Ripon City Councillors had voted for Option 3 on 7 Jan 08, because they had been informed by the Mayor that the pool complex would be at the south end of the Ripon Leisure Centre (RLC). The sketch subsequently put on display for the consultation showed this to be incorrect.

There has been considerable press interest in the Spa Baths with exposure on Stray FM, BBC Radio York, BBC Online and Look North as well as the local papers.

Kenn has been soliciting support from Mr David Curry MP; a meeting is planned on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 8 with him. Ripon Civic Society (RCS) will be invited to attend. Our MEPS have also been contacted so far with positive replies from Richard Corbett, Timothy Kirkhope and Diana Wallis.

Ripon swimmers are keen that any new pool is an improvement on the existing facilities. The HBC proposal will actually result in a net loss as there is no proposal to replace the health spa services in the Spa Baths (the Battenburg suite). Several individuals commended the use of Thirsk pool as an attractive model for any new scheme.

The swimming community believe that a 25metre, eight lane pool with a moving floor would be a significant addition to the city amenities. A moving floor makes a pool extremely versatile. It can be used as a dry floor (eg for dancing); or a shallow school for primary children; or a general leisure pool or as a deep pool for sub-aqua and diving.

Some display material was available (see [Moving floor](#)). These pools are now common in Europe and are gaining popularity in the UK.

Such a facility would probably cost in the region of £7M (double the HBC figure), it would be a long term project and not one that could be rushed into this year. Time is required to explore funding (EU, Yorkshire Forward, supermarkets and local entrepreneurs were all mentioned).

David Parnaby expressed three concerns:  
The demolition of the Spa Baths for housing;  
The loss of playing fields and the associated breach of covenant;  
Inadequacy of the proposed new facilities.

He explained that under current HBC policies any rural development of more than 2 dwellings must make some contribution to affordable housing and any urban development of more than 15 dwellings must do likewise. HBC are changing this policy on the 1<sup>st</sup> October 2008 with the effect that *any* development must make a contribution towards affordable housing.

The hypocrisy of HBC pressing forward with this proposal in order to avoid the consequences of their own policy making was expressed on the floor of the meeting.

Combining the RLC with the aquatic complex would produce the opportunity for an 'integrated staffing structure'. The meeting understood the implications of this statement from HBC. Having all leisure facilities in one location was agreed on being the ideal, but it should have been done on the original build.

There also strong support from the floor that the loss of the some of the playing fields at Camp Close and the need to over-ride the covenant that the land be kept as a free space for local children was a serious issue - not to be taken lightly. It was pointed out that HBC cannot build on Camp Close adjacent to the leisure centre without Ripon City Council consent. The City effectively has a veto on the use of the Camp Close site. Some Ripon City councillors are taking steps using formal procedure to seek clarification that other sites will be considered, rather than just the Camp Close one.

Building on Camp Close will result in the loss of

:

- Another green field site in a much used location, which in certain circumstances maybe unavoidable but not in this instance.
- Soccer pitch, which will be moved we are informed.
- Children's play area – this will become a car park.
- Basketball court. Much used by the youngsters, but not commented on or apparently considered by anyone.
- Skateboard park. Is this threatened by the movement of the soccer pitch? If so will an alternative site be found?

The scuba community is not in support of a scheme that simply replaced existing facilities on a different site. This is an opportunity to improve Ripon amenities and bring new users and revenue into the City. A long term look is needed. On a more specific point the HBC plan incorporates a 'changing village' to be used by both sexes and by disabled users. There was widespread support from the meeting that segregated changing is preferable and problems at the Harrogate Hydro were cited.

Kenn Hart ran down a list of possible [alternative sites](#). One important new contender emerged in discussion – the area behind Trinity Primary School. There are major attractions to this site; there are 5 schools in the immediate vicinity and with judicious planning European funding could be possible for a community development (as for Nidderdale School); parking would also not be as difficult an issue as it is at Camp Close. Use of this site has been considered in the past – and rejected by NYCC but there was no reason not to reopen discussion. Kenn will be contacting Bernard Bateman (NYCC) on this plus the NYCC direct.

Nigel Rawlinson (RCS) stated that demolition of the Spa Baths, which is an important listed building, was inconceivable. The entire structure and everything within the curtilage is listed. A long term plan was needed; involving consultation both in respect of the future needs for leisure facilities in the City and for the future use of the Spa Baths. HBC is under an obligation to ensure that this building remains in charitable or community use. The Civic Society are holding a similar meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> February to discuss the future of the Spa Baths.

RCS are holding a meeting on 21 Feb 08 and Kenn will be attending along with Cllr Sid Hawke, to ensure that we have joined up action between the two groups. This was one of many points brought up by Bob Britton, former Mayor of Ripon another being the legal covenant that protects the open space that is Camp Close.

Both Ripon Councillors asserted that we should 'aim high' and aspire to a new swimming pool that would enhance the amenities of the City and bring in new visitors and revenue.

Ripon Spa Baths can continue to meet the needs of the swimming community while an alternative scheme is developed. This may take several years.

The meeting concluded that a petition should be raised asking HBC to drop the current proposal and to commence proper consultation with the aims of:

- Developing a scheme for a pool that would enhance our leisure amenities and attract new visitors and revenue to Ripon.
- Finding a more appropriate site, and
- Securing the future of the Ripon Spa Baths as a community asset.

Kenn Hart will arrange for circulation of a draft petition to interested parties.

Neil Grandison  
Neil Grandison [neil@grandison.co.uk]