

**Meeting hosted by Ripon Civic Society, to discuss the Spa Baths' future**  
**Thursday 21 February 2008, 7:00 pm at Thorpe Prebend House**

Well, what an interesting meeting this turned out to be! The turnout included residents, councillors and members of the swimming fraternity; strong emotions and colourful, informed opinions were expressed from all corners of the floor.

A number of possible avenues for action emerged, more of which below.

The meeting was chaired by **David Winpenny** of **Ripon Civic Society**, who opened by explaining that the meeting was to focus on the future of Ripon Spa Baths, rather than the plans for the new pool. Ideas for practical action – plus funding – were required.

The stated aim of the meeting: to discuss ways in which Ripon Spa Baths might be preserved, with public access retained – to the beautiful pump room, at least.

The meeting was then opened to the floor, and the following points were raised and discussed.

**Listed status of Ripon Spa Baths:**

Enquiries were made concerning the Grade II listed status of Ripon Spa Baths, and the hoops through which Harrogate Borough Council (HBC) must jump if it is to secure permission to have the Baths demolished / partially demolished and redeveloped.

**David Winpenny** confirmed that Ripon Spa Baths and its curtilage (i.e. the enclosed land surrounding the building) are listed in their entirety.

Applications to change/remove the listed status of any building must be submitted to the relevant local authority. In this case, the local authority is – Harrogate Borough Council!

**Cllr. David Parnaby (Ripon Spa)** also sits on Harrogate Borough Council, and chairs HBC's Planning Committee. He confirmed that HBC could apply to itself for the listed status of Ripon Spa Baths to be changed/removed – but stated that before it could be passed, an application would also have to be approved by the relevant Secretary of State. He pointed out that this would take time.

**Cllr. Charlie Powell (Ripon Moorside)** stated that if the plans to sell off the Baths and build a new pool were to proceed as planned, the application had to go through by November.

### **Why not sell off Hugh Ripley Hall?**

Resident (and former Mayor of Ripon) **Paul Freeman** proposed an alternative to selling off Ripon Spa Baths to private property developers. He suggested selling off the city's Hugh Ripley Hall instead.

Mr Freeman pointed out that at present, Hugh Ripley Hall runs at a loss. The funds raised from its sale could go towards the new pool, and Ripon Spa Baths could become the city's public hall and entertainment centre. This would ensure that the building remained – along with public access. The changing rooms could be converted into kitchens.

One speaker expressed concerns that Hugh Ripley Hall was also a community asset that should be preserved if possible, but on the whole, this idea met with a noisy chorus of approval. **Dorothy Taylor**, Chairman of Ripon Civic Society, declared it to be an "excellent" idea.

### **Current condition of Ripon Spa Baths**

**Paul Freeman** stated that a sponsor (who wished to remain anonymous) had offered a substantial sum of money with which to renovate Ripon Spa Baths – but that this offer had been dismissed by HBC.

Resident **Jim Taylor** lamented the current condition of the Baths, and spoke of his belief that the Council had neglected the facility over the past decade.

### **Action**

**Cllr. Jeremy Banyard (Ripon Spa)** said that to his mind, if all those assembled were agreed that the site should not be sold off for housing, there were a number of possible scenarios, which included:

1. North Yorkshire and York Primary Care Trust to purchase the site. This would chime with the Department of Health's aim of opening clinics around the country.
2. Ripon Spa Baths to become a public entertainment centre.

**Dorothy Taylor**, Chairman of Ripon Civic Society, reminded those assembled that HRH The Prince of Wales is a Freeman of the City, and suggested that those with an interest in Ripon's future should "make more of him". Mrs Taylor also pointed out that HRH lent his support to the Harrogate Royal Hall project.

### **North Yorkshire and York PCT**

**David Winpenny** revealed that the PCT was considering making a formal expression of interest in the site – and that its decision was likely to be made by the end of the month.

### **Do we need a new pool building?**

One resident opined that we should “celebrate the pool we have”, and look at redeveloping current facilities.

**Cllr. Kenn Hart (Ripon Minster)**, who is also Chair of Ripon City Amateur Swimming Club, said that although the pool was beautiful to look at, the reality is different. He reported that at present, the bottom of the pool is held up by scaffolding. There is a waiting list of children who wish to join the swimming club, and the shortcomings in current facilities mean children from one local primary in Ripon go to the pool in Thirsk.

He has already enlisted the support of three of our MEPs, who back the idea for a new pool – but agree that plans should not be rushed, and that more time was needed in order to ensure that Ripon residents were not saddled with another set of inadequate facilities. What was needed, said Cllr. Hart, was “a pool for Yorkshire”.

### **Funding - 1**

It was suggested that if a new pool is to be built, but the Ripon Spa Baths building is to be retained for the community, the finances need to be considered. HBC wants to sell off Ripon Spa Baths for £1.4 million, so that this money can go towards the estimated £3 million cost of building a new pool. If money can be raised for a new pool by other means, HBC’s hasty plans to sell off Ripon Spa Baths may be revised.

The question was posed: how could money for a new pool be raised?

In response to a query from the floor, **Cllr. Kenn Hart (Ripon Minster)** disclosed that the new pool at Nidderdale had received funding from Brussels. It was eligible for this funding because it had been built as part of a local school.

Cllr. Hart then pointed out that an alternative site for a new pool was the land behind the city’s Trinity School. He believes this to be a more suitable site for the new pool for a number of reasons (which have been described in more detail within the notes of the Ripon Leisure Centre meeting), such as parking. However, another good reason for building the pool here is that it could be eligible for funding from Europe.

It was stated that with so many shared objectives, campaigners for a new pool and campaigners for Ripon Spa Baths should work together, and format their shared objectives. However **Dorothy Taylor**, Chairman of Ripon Civic Society, felt that it was important not to rush at things.

**Nigel Rawlinson**, Vice-Chairman of Ripon Civic Society, pointed out that the target population of Ripon for 2020 is 20,000, and that we need facilities befitting an increased number of residents.

### **Possible obstacles**

Talk returned to the possible sale of Hugh Ripley Hall, and the possibility that if Ripon Spa Baths was turned into a public entertainment centre, it could incorporate a multi-level hall that would lend itself to a wide range of needs and activities.

However, it was then stated by one member of the floor that despite the enthusiasm for such ideas, residents would be hard-pressed to get the Mayor of Ripon to support them. This is because the Mayor has a mandate to get constituents a new pool, which he takes very seriously. The words, "runaway train" were used.

### **Funding – 2**

**Maurice Taylor**, Local Historian, described the origins of Ripon Spa Baths, with particular reference to its funding. Ripon Spa Baths were built with a £10,000 loan, which was not paid off until 1957. In the 1920s another loan, for £16,000, was obtained. This was not paid off until the 1980s. Mr Taylor suggested that the possibility of obtaining loans for the building of a new pool should be seriously examined.

### **How to obtain a consultation**

Resident **Elizabeth Berkeley** asked if HBC could be forced to hold a consultation with residents. To date, a public consultation over the future of Ripon Spa Baths has not taken place.

**Paul Freeman** revealed that in fact, this could be achieved. It required two councillors, currently sitting on HBC, to move a motion for a public consultation to take place. This would not only oblige HBC to pay some attention to Ripon residents' concerns, but would also defer a decision on the new/present pool.

Those assembled expressed a good deal of enthusiasm for this idea.

**Cllr. David Parnaby (Ripon Spa)** explained that there were two councillors present who sat on HBC and would thus be in a position to act: himself, and Cllr. Powell.

Cllr. Parnaby stated that he should certainly move such a motion, if he could find another councillor who would help him do so.

**Cllr. Charlie Powell (Ripon Moorside)** was asked if he would join forces with Cllr. Parnaby to pass the motion. Cllr. Powell shrank into his seat and declined to comment.

Cllr. Parnaby then explained that although he has five fellow Ripon councillors sitting on HBC, it would not be easy for him to find a colleague who would be prepared to step up to the task. He did emphasise, however, that even if no Ripon representatives were prepared to do so, this still left a relatively large pool of potential motion-movers.

(Editor's note: You can draw your own conclusions from this episode. Personally, I was horrified. If it is true that the majority of Ripon representatives sitting on HBC are unwilling to sanction a platform for residents' concerns – valid concerns that have been noisily articulated – then what *are* their priorities, exactly?

To date, the blame for this debacle has fallen squarely upon HBC's shoulders. Now, in light of the above, I am convinced that most of the Ripon councillors sitting on Harrogate Borough Council could be doing a lot more than they are.)

### **Widespread support from young people**

It was noted that local young people are supporting the "Save Our Spa!" campaign in droves. A Facebook group called "Save Our Spa!" has been set up – and has swiftly attracted widespread support from almost 100 Facebook users.

It was at this point, due to time considerations, that the meeting concluded.

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