



Ripon Spa Partnership

Please reply to:
Neil Grandison
9 Park Street
Ripon
N Yorks HG4 2AX

Tel 01765 606781

25 July 2008

To:

Dear Councillor

HBC proposals for swimming facilities in Ripon

We are writing to seek your support for the Notice of Motion to be considered at the meeting of the Council to be held next Wednesday 30 July 2008. The motion calls for public consultation in respect of the Council's proposals for new swimming facilities in Ripon.

In April 2008 the Council rejected a similar call for consultation made under a widely supported petition and have refused any discussion of the project with the Ripon Spa Partnership on the basis that our objectives are contrary to the Council's policies, [i.e. to build a new pool on Camp Close and sell the existing Spa Baths site for housing]. In our view a project of this importance to the city of Ripon should only be implemented after the widest possible consultation and consideration of the plans in the context of the long term future of Ripon as an important heritage centre and visitor destination. The consultations carried out so far have been wholly inadequate and fail to meet the most basic standards for democratic process. The Council have to date refused to enter into any discussion that might result in a change of policy – this is not proper consultation and is quite wrong.

Before this project goes ahead we would like to see consultation along the following lines:

1 Camp Close

HBC have made no contact with the recreational users of the playing fields. Consultation with the two football leagues and the organisers of the Ripon Sports Day is necessary. The main reason for rejecting the option of building a new pool on the existing site was the temporary loss of swimming facilities. The chosen plan would mean permanent loss of a senior league football pitch and temporary loss of any pitch for 2/3 seasons. The views of the local residents who are immediately affected should also be taken into consideration.

It must also be remembered that no building on Camp Close can proceed without the consent of the trustees whose duty is to ensure that the playing fields are retained. The trustees have already indicated to the Council that they do not wish to release the covenant before proper consultation and a local consensus.

2 Alternative sites

The land between Church Lane and Kirkby Rd is ideally situated for a swimming pool. There are five schools within walking distance, access is straightforward, there is ample space for coach and car parking and the land is in public ownership and in a central location. The two army camps close by represent a substantial customer base. NYCC should be consulted over the possibility of releasing the site for this purpose. HBC have not considered any land not in Council ownership.

3 National policy relating to the historic environment.

Harrogate Borough Council has in the past been strongly supportive of the national planning guidelines for historic buildings set out in PPG15. Extensive consultation is necessary in order to comply with these guidelines especially where, as in this case, the proposals involve significant alteration or demolition of a listed building. For example:

- a) The Council should aim to find the optimum viable use that is compatible with the fabric, interior and setting of the historic Spa Baths building. This may not necessarily be the most profitable use. The Secretaries of State attach particular importance to the activities of the voluntary sector in heritage matters. The future of the building may be secured by charitable or community ownership, preserved for its own sake for local people and for the visiting public. This can only be achieved by consultation with the voluntary sector (such as this group - in this case rejected completely because we are objecting to the development of the site for housing).
- b) Full information is required to assess the impact of the proposals on the special architectural interest of the building on its setting and its contribution to the local scene. In the case of the Spa Baths this is very important because it is one element in the original group of the Baths, Gardens and Hotel that comprised the original Ripon Spa facilities. In this case there is no conservation report and no evidence of consultation with the Spa Gardens support group or the Spa Hotel. Consultation with the Ripon Spa Partnership has been expressly refused.
- c) The Secretaries of State would not expect consent to be given for the total or substantial demolition of any listed building without clear and convincing evidence that **all reasonable efforts have been made to sustain existing uses or find viable new uses, and these efforts have failed**; that preservation in some form of charitable or community ownership is not possible or suitable... (or) simply because redevelopment is economically more attractive to the developer than repair and re-use of a historic building, or because the developer acquired the building at a price that reflected the potential for redevelopment rather than the condition and constraints of the existing historic building. No such evidence is available, the Council has rejected consultation with local voluntary groups and by its own admission is selling the site for housing solely in order to maximise the capital receipt from sale of the site. A conservation report supported by expert consultation and made in the context of the long term development of Ripon as a heritage centre and visitor destination is essential.

4 Funding

Under the current proposals the project is financed entirely from HBC resources and from the sale of the Spa Baths site for housing. The imminent implementation of the new Local Development Framework and affordable housing rules are driving a fast track schedule that precludes any search for additional funding. We are certain that alternative proposals for swimming facilities in Ripon can be developed that would open the door to charitable funding (sports and heritage) thus removing the need to sell the Spa Baths for housing. We would welcome the opportunity to bring the energy and expertise available in Ripon to this cause – but it can only be done through consultation.

The current proposals for new swimming facilities in Ripon are damaging both to our historic environment and open spaces. They must be reviewed in the broader context of the long term future of the city. Consultation is necessary in order to achieve this.

We look forward to your support.

Yours sincerely,

Signature removed

Neil Grandison
Ripon Spa Partnership