

Summary of Guild Meeting with Councilor Procter on the 25/01/05

The Council says they are unable to honour their promise to the Amateur Theatre groups, which make up the Leeds Civic Arts Guild.

At this meeting Councilor Procter the Executive Chair of Leisure Services told the assembled members of the Guild Societies that despite the New Civic Theatre development being further delayed until at least 01/10/05 they would have to move out of the current Civic Theatre this May.

The contractual arrangements for the New Civic Theatre were explained to the meeting as being as follows:

1/ Leeds City Council has a contract with Asda St James who is the Property Developer and main Architect on the project. Part of this contract provides for the leasing back to Leeds City Council of the new Civic Theatre. Councilor Procter said he was not sure of the length of this lease when asked. He said he presumed it was indefinite but undertook to find out exactly what the contract says on this point.

2/ Asda St James has a contract with Quarmby who are building the new theatre.

Councilor Procter said that therefore the Council was not able to apply direct pressure to Quarmby when they failed to deliver against agreed build dates. Instead what happens he said is the Council officers apply pressure to Asda St James who in turn applies pressure to Quarmby.

He said that there were monthly project board meetings where the progress of the project was monitored & that the Council had officer representatives on this board.

He said that the Council have in writing from Asda St James that the completion and handover date for the new Civic Theatre to the Council was 11/02/05. He said the Council then had 2 weeks for their officers to check the building over and make sure everything was OK with it. He said if everything was OK then the fit out could commence.

He said that the latest delay in the building of the new theatre meant it would be ready for 01/10/05. He said he would get it sorted for that date. When asked for clarification on whether he meant it would be ready for the Group booked to perform on that date he said he would need to check. He said he would look at a contingency plan for LAOS if the Theatre were not ready for them to perform in the first two weeks of October.

He said it was not possible for the Guild societies to remain in the existing Theatre until the new one is ready because there were penalty clauses in the contract between the Council and Laing O'Rourke (the builders engaged on the museum project) which would mean the Council would be liable to the tune of £36,000 for every weeks delay in handing over the building to the builder. He therefore said the Council did not think it was an option to allow the Guild to remain in the existing theatre until the new one is ready.

When asked whether it was possible to renegotiate the contract for the redevelopment of the existing Civic Theatre Building into a museum he said it was not. He suggested if the Council went to renegotiate the contract with Laing O'Rourke the Builder would increase the costs of the development meaning it would cost significantly more than had been currently agreed and budgeted for.

He on too many occasions to count told those assembled that he and his party had not been in control when the original contracts had been drawn up and therefore he was not to blame.

It was pointed out to him that the Guild had been promised by the Council that we would not have to vacate the current Theatre until the new Theatre was ready. Once again he

said that he had not been responsible for this decision.

He said that the effect of the further delay in the new theatre being ready meant 4 groups were to have their shows displaced. He said that the Council officers were working with the Guild Exec representatives to find suitable City Centre Venues for them. One venue mentioned he said was Leeds Met University's Theatre. He also said that the Council had agreed to underwrite any losses the displaced societies suffered as a result of the change of venue.

He drew a rather strange analogy to having work done in your house suggesting that it is rarely done on time therefore we should not be so surprised that there have been delays on the new Civic Theatre project. He said part of the reason for the latest delay was the roof, which had been put on leaked and needed replacing.

He said that the Service Level Agreement between the Council and the Guild will be in place before we have to move out of the old Theatre in May providing the Guild representatives can agree. He said this Service Level Agreement would guarantee the Guild Societies the time we require in the New Theatre. He said he hoped as a result of the new facilities and the boost in audiences he believed a new venue would bring, that Societies would want to put more productions on.

He said that the Guild Societies would be the cornerstone of the new theatre and a permanent feature of it.

It was put to him that the name chosen for the new Theatre was not the best choice and it was suggested that the building could be called "The Carriage Works" whilst the Theatre could be called "The New Civic Theatre". He said the sign for the new Theatre (The Carriage Works) had been made.

He suggested to the Guild society members present that it was not appropriate for them to write to the Heritage Lottery Fund complaining about the Council because the Lottery Funding was already secure for the New Museum Project therefore we could have no effect on that. He said however that Leeds was looking at receiving a potential allocation of funds from the HLF amounting to £120 million for Cultural projects in the City. This sum he said included funds applied for the City Varieties and Grand Theatres.

He suggested that if people contacted the HLF raising objections to the way in which Lottery money was being spent on the Museum project (given the Council's failure to honour it's promise's to the Guild) this would not have any effect on that project but could effect the allocation of some of the potential £120 Million.

He said that the HLF is not subject to Political pressure but said they are very conscious of their PR in relation to projects they are funding. Therefore he seemed to be saying, I am concerned about your ability to influence the HLF by contacting them and making your views known to them, because I think this could have an influence on decisions due to be made over the coming months and years, but that does not amount to Politics.

He said I am here to take your anger and complaints, come and see me and write to me rather than to the HLF.

He said that the old cell area underneath the Town Hall would be ready for Societies to move there costumes and props into when we move out of the old Theatre in May. He said Quarmby were currently using these as offices but he will ensure they move out of there quickly.

*** end ***