

DECISION ARISING FROM THE PRESENTATION OF A PETITION ENTITLED
“MARKET RASEN NEEDS A SWIMMING POOL
NOT A DRY LEISURE FACILITY”

Extract from Minutes of a Meeting of Full Council on 12 November 2018

31 TO RECEIVE A PETITION ENTITLED “MARKET RASEN NEEDS A SWIMMING POOL NOT A DRY LEISURE FACILITY.

“West Lindsey District Council was presented with a Petition on Monday 13 August 2018.

The Petition was entitled “Market Rasen Needs a Swimming Pool Not a Dry Leisure Facility” and contains over 2000 signatures.

The Petition went on to state “West Lindsey District Council have secured a site on Gainsborough Road, between Market Rasen Primary School and the Limes Country Hotel, to build a dry leisure facility. We the residents of Market Rasen hereby sign to say we are opposing these plans and want the land to be used to provide a much needed swimming pool which will benefit people of all ages and disabilities”.

The Chairman advised that the matter would now be debated, in accordance with the agreed Petition Scheme and therefore she welcomed Lead Petitioner, June Clark to the meeting and invited her to make her five minute address to Members.

Mrs Clark made the following Statement to Council: -

“I am presenting this petition on behalf of the Market Rasen Action Group and the residents of Market Rasen and surrounding towns and villages. I am not representing Market Rasen Town Council in any capacity.

The petition was started when a press release in the Market Rasen Mail, from West Lindsey District Council, informed us that Market Rasen was to get a multi million pound dry leisure facility. Residents were understandably very upset that there had been no consultation about this new facility and the fact that there was no mention of a swimming pool.

As there had been no consultation, Market Rasen residents were not aware that the current facilities at the De Aston Centre would be closing. Although we agree that dry facilities are needed, a swimming pool is seen as a higher priority.

The Leader of West Lindsey District Council and one of its Officers attended a Market Rasen Town Council meeting. When answering questions from Market Rasen Action Group and the public, the Leader admitted that no consultation had been undertaken. We were told that

we either accepted what was on offer, or we would lose the money all together. A wonderful demonstration of democracy in action.

Several years ago, extensive surveys and consultation took place and led to a proposal to build a swimming pool in Market Rasen. This was agreed in 2008 at a West Lindsey meeting. Political changes that followed, meant that the proposal was shelved.

The recent presentation of what Market Rasen is getting, showed no provision for a swimming pool, just a vague 'well, we could fit one in this space, if necessary'

Market Rasen Action Group and the residents of Market Rasen would like answers to the following:

Why was no public consultation done on the new dry facility before the release of the plans?

How many people currently use the De Aston facilities?

If the premise centres on the fact that swimming pools lose money, why is Gainsborough' s kept open?

If the suggestion that sports facilities being managed across the District will result in an overall profit, does this mean that Market Rasen residents will be subsidising the loss making Gainsborough pool?

Are the Council aware, that residents from Market Rasen, Caistor etc travel to pools in Brigg, Lincoln, Wragby, Grimsby and Louth, but not to Gainsborough, thus losing revenue to other Districts?

Are the Council aware that the lack of adequate public transport means that very many residents can't travel to Brigg, Wragby, Louth, Lincoln, Grimsby or Gainsborough to access swimming even if they wanted to?

Where is the commitment to the health and well-being of local residents who are unable to use dry facilities?

Where is the commitment to ensuring that people of all ages learn to swim?

Will West Lindsey District Council carry out an in-depth feasibility study and full and meaningful consultation on providing Market Rasen with a pool, including consideration of a smaller, more cost effective pool? We would respectfully ask that a Councillor, here tonight, tables this proposal and that it is voted on.

Why does West Lindsey District Council appear to never listen to what Market Rasen residents want, but instead decide for us?

When will Market Rasen finally get a Swimming Pool?

Finally, Market Rasen Action Group and local residents would like to remind West Lindsey District Council that West Lindsey consists of far more than just Gainsborough. We, in the forgotten lands, also pay our Council Tax and we are concerned that the proposed dry facilities will fail if a pool is not included, from the start, to attract people.”

The Chairman thanked Mrs Clark for her statement. Before opening the matter for debate, Members were reminded of the three options available to them when considering Petitions. These being: -

- Take the action the petitioners have requested
- Not take the action requested for the reasons put forward during debate
- Or commission further investigation into the matter.

Debate ensued with the Leader of the Council making the initial response.

“Thank you for your work on the petition and for attending this evening.

As a Council we understand that some of the residents in Market Rasen are disappointed that our current plans do not include the provision of a pool at the outset.

We have arrived at our current proposals as a result of independent feasibility studies which have demonstrated that, should a pool be provided in Market Rasen, this would require a significant subsidy in terms of running costs. In the current financial climate this is not a position this Council can support. As a District Council we have to provide services for a wide range of residents across the whole of our district in a way that provides value for money for all our tax payers.

The proposed dry leisure facility has been made possible by the Council re-working its leisure contract to include the development. The new leisure contract which began on the 1st June 2018 is based upon a key set of outputs and outcomes agreed by our Prosperous Communities Committee, the key principle being for the leisure service to be cost neutral and not require a subsidy.

I think it is important here to stress that the Council are not ruling out a pool development in Market Rasen in the future. The site acquired is large enough to accommodate future expansion, and the building has been designed in such a way that a pool can be added at a later date should this prove viable.

The proposed centre in Market Rasen will provide a wide range of activities for all ages and provide opportunities for residents to participate in our healthy and active programme. Once built, the centre will be managed by the Council’s partners Everyone Active.

The Council have consulted widely on the plans as part of the public consultation strategy. I, myself, attended the public engagement session in September and was pleased to hear the positive comments. It was obvious there is significant support for the proposed development.

Conversely some have the view we don't spend the same in Market Rasen as we do in Gainsborough. That of course is correct and will not change due to the size of population. However we now have a stronger working relationship with Market Rasen Town Council. Strong relationships and partnership working is essential for success.

In summary the dry leisure facility proposed is a significant investment into Market Rasen built upon a solid evidence base. Furthermore this is being delivered in a cost neutral way to West Lindsey residents. Having seen the plans we are genuinely excited and proud to be able to provide such a high class facility for Market Rasen.

This project marks the largest ever single investment in the town and I as leader of the council and near resident recognise how an increased population and improvements to infrastructure is the only thing which will increase the towns offer and prosperity for the future.

Therefore, I cannot support your requested action and I will move that this Council takes no further action in respect of this petition but strategically plan for the improvements which I have outlined.

I therefore move no further action be taken.”

Debate ensued with Members of the Opposition making referencing to the Scheme commissioned in 2008. The scheme had been supported by research and had been financed but following a change in administration subsequently shelved. Concern was expressed that yet again communities were approaching the Council feeling like they had not been consulted with and not been listened to. There was a view that far too much focus was being placed on financial figures and delivering schemes at a cost neutral basis, with little consideration given to the wider outcomes of social return, area prosperity and health. The suggestion that this would be looked at in the future was disputed, with the Opposition noting that no commitment to such a project had been made within the Medium Term Financial Plan. There were calls for the petition to be supported and for the previous consultation undertaken to be re-visited.

In responding, Members of the Administration strongly refuted the simplistic re-collection of previous events. It was noted that Local Authorities over the last 10 years had had their spending power cut by up to 75% as a result of the significant cuts to Government Grant Funding. There had been an economy collapse in 2008 and the building of a pool would have resulted in a 3-4% rise in Council Tax for all residents year on year. Members of the Administration were vehement in their commitment to further investment in Market Rasen, however only when the time was right, and only when schemes were truly viable. The Administration's commitment to social return had been demonstrated in number of other projects and suggestions to the contrary were dismissed.

The Leader's earlier proposal to reject the action requested by the petitioners was seconded.

It was moved and seconded that any vote taken on the matter be by way of recorded vote.

Having been proposed and seconded earlier in the meeting, the motion was then put to a recorded vote, having had the earlier request for such also duly seconded.

Votes were cast as set out below:

For: - Cllrs, Bierley, England, Fleetwood, Howitt-Cowan, Kinch, Lawrence, G McNeill, J McNeill, Mewis, Milne, Palmer, Parish, Patterson, Rodgers, Smith, Strange, Summers, Waller, and Welburn

Against: - Cllrs Boles, Bond, Cotton, Rainsforth, Rollings and Young

Abstain: - Cllrs Devine and Oaks.

With the majority of Councillors voting in favour of the motion (19), the motion was declared **CARRIED** and therefore it was **RESOLVED** that the request of the petitioners be rejected.

Mrs Clarke, as Lead Petitioner, was advised that she would be sent written notice of the decision and also a copy of this would be displayed on the Authority's website.

Note: The majority of petitioners left the meeting following consideration of the above item and prior to the next agenda item being discussed.