

Public Meeting

On 27th January, the Council will make their final decision about whether or not to close Noel street baths and build on the Forest. Are you one of the 78% of local people seriously concerned about pool closures? Are you one of the 50% who do not want this new development?* If you are then get your voice heard now! This public meeting has been set up for you to do just that. Cllr. Leon Unczur, Leisure Services 'supremo', and other local councillors have been invited to come along to hear your views. Use this chance now!

Tuesday 18th January

7.30pm

Forest Fields Community Centre,

Sturton Street, Forest Fields

* results of Council leisure consultation survey - October 1999

The Forest Still fighting

Nottingham City Council's 'flagship' leisure centre - complete with 'leisure pool incorporating a wave machine, water slides and flumes, a 25 meter lane pool, teaching pool, a sports hall, fitness room, health suite, sauna etc.' (City Council promotional leaflet) - sounds like a good idea? Until you consider the overall effects of the proposal.

Don't build on the Forest.

The Council suggest that the £12 million project should be built on the Forest Recreation Ground. This is the city's only remaining plot of common land. It is a much needed open space in an otherwise built up area. The council claim that the centre would only take up a minimal percentage of the total area of the Park. However, the kind of centre the Council are suggesting would:

- ruin the peace of an attractive corner of the recreation ground
- visibly dominate the whole park
- bring extra traffic onto an already overused route and so increase pollution
- cause extra safety problems by putting a 150 space car park next to a kiddies' play park
- destroy a number of mature trees, flowers and a rare species of grass
- be against the 19th century Inclosure Act, which gave the land for the use of the public 'forever' and not as a cheap place for Council buildings.

contd.

Save community facilities.

We are also concerned about the destruction of community based facilities. The Council have already closed one community swimming pool – Northern Baths, Basford. They are planning to shut two further baths – Noel Street Baths and Victoria Leisure Centre. These facilities are mainly used by local schools, swimming clubs, residents and people who work nearby. They create little extra traffic or travel costs for people who use them. In answer to our concerns with how this proposed centre would accommodate everyone who uses these local baths, Leon Unczur talked about a ‘flexible timetabling structure’ and a plan to timetable three school classes into the baths at any one time! This could mean up to *100 kids in one 25 meter pool at any given time.* What a way to create an unsafe and chaotic swimming environment for our kids!

Where is the money coming from?

We also question the Council’s estimated costs of £12 million. The Council claim that *‘the city will be looking at combining its own financial resources with grants from other agencies, including the National Lottery’ (The Forest Leisure Centre, Proposal).* However, the Lottery have already refused similar bids from this Council. They cannot be relied on as a source of funding. This would leave the Council and ‘other agencies’ to pick up the bill. Councillors have said that one way of providing the cash would be to save several million pounds a year from their budget. In which case, what would have to be cut to pay for this leisure centre? ‘Other agencies’ are likely to include private business and the expensive option of a private finance initiative.

It’s your choice – or is it?

The Council have finished their public consultation over their plans to close Noel St/Victoria Leisure Centre and build on the Forest. It’s now official – the Council say they have a mandate to go ahead.

Leon Unsure, Chair of the Leisure Services Committee, said to the Evening Post in mid-December *‘We are now convinced that most of the residents in Nottingham want a new leisure centre and the majority are content for it to be built on the eastern side of the Forest.’*

Out of interest – were you asked what you thought? No – how surprising! Statistics are interesting things though aren’t they? 66.6% of people who DON’T live in this area or in the area around Victoria Leisure Centre said they thought that the pool closures and the building programme on YOUR green space was acceptable. Yet, in a survey of pool users, 78% said they had serious concerns over the closure of local facilities and under 50% said that a new leisure centre was needed.

The Council said that their public consultation would give us – local people – a voice and a choice. What do you think?

As the saying goes: there’s lies, damn lies and statistics...

Did you know - Tom Blower, who swam the English Channel in record time in 1937 and ten years later swam across the Irish Sea from Scotland to Ireland, lived in Nottingham and trained at Noel Street Baths. *Thanks to Mrs. Dufty.*

What can you do to stop the Council building on the Forest?

- Come along to our meetings
- write to your local councillor, or to Leon Unczur (Chair of Leisure Services) at the Council House, Nottingham, NG1 2DT.
- Write to the Evening Post
- Write to your MP
- Put a poster in your window

Who are we?

We are an independent group of local residents. We want to address the problems we face in our local area through independent community action.

We meet on the 1st and 3rd Monday of each month at 7.30pm at the Forest Fields Advice Centre, Wiverton Rd. At the moment, we are mostly taken up with the Noel St Baths/Forest Leisure Centre campaign, but we are interested in any local issues. We always welcome new people and new ideas.

Write to Forest Fields Independent Residents Group: c/o 204 Noel Street Forest Fields Nottingham NG7 6AT or phone us 0115 8410457

Letters or short pieces for this newsletter welcome.

The Baths Campaign - Update

For over a year and a half, we have been fighting to save our local swimming facilities and to stop the Council building on the Forest. The campaign has been about stopping the Council riding roughshod over local people's views and ideas. The Council has spent lots of money trying to get support for this proposal. Flashy leaflets have been sent out, and an expensive - and biased - consultation exercise paid for. So, what have we been doing:

Letters to the Press - letters to the Evening Post are overwhelmingly in support of this campaign.

Demonstrations - three local demonstrations have been held, including one at the Goose Fair.

Green Festival - at our stall, over 400 people, from NG7 to as far away as Wales, agreed to send letters to the City Council and their MPs on behalf of this campaign.

Petition - we collected nearly 3000 names on our local petition in only a few weeks.

Meetings - we have held many well-attended and informative meetings, where local people have had the chance to hear the Council's views and plans and make their own views known to local 'decision makers'.

Making links - we have made links with other organisations, including health professionals, who see local pool facilities as important for our wellbeing; other local community groups; green organisations; and schools.

Alternative Report - our report, which outlined the reasons for our opposition to the leisure plan, was presented to local Councillors. The report had the support of a number of local organisations.

Consultation - just as the Council undertook a £20,000 consultation exercise over their plans to close local facilities and build on the Forest (your Council Tax paid for it!), so we undertook our own independent household survey (at no cost to you!). This

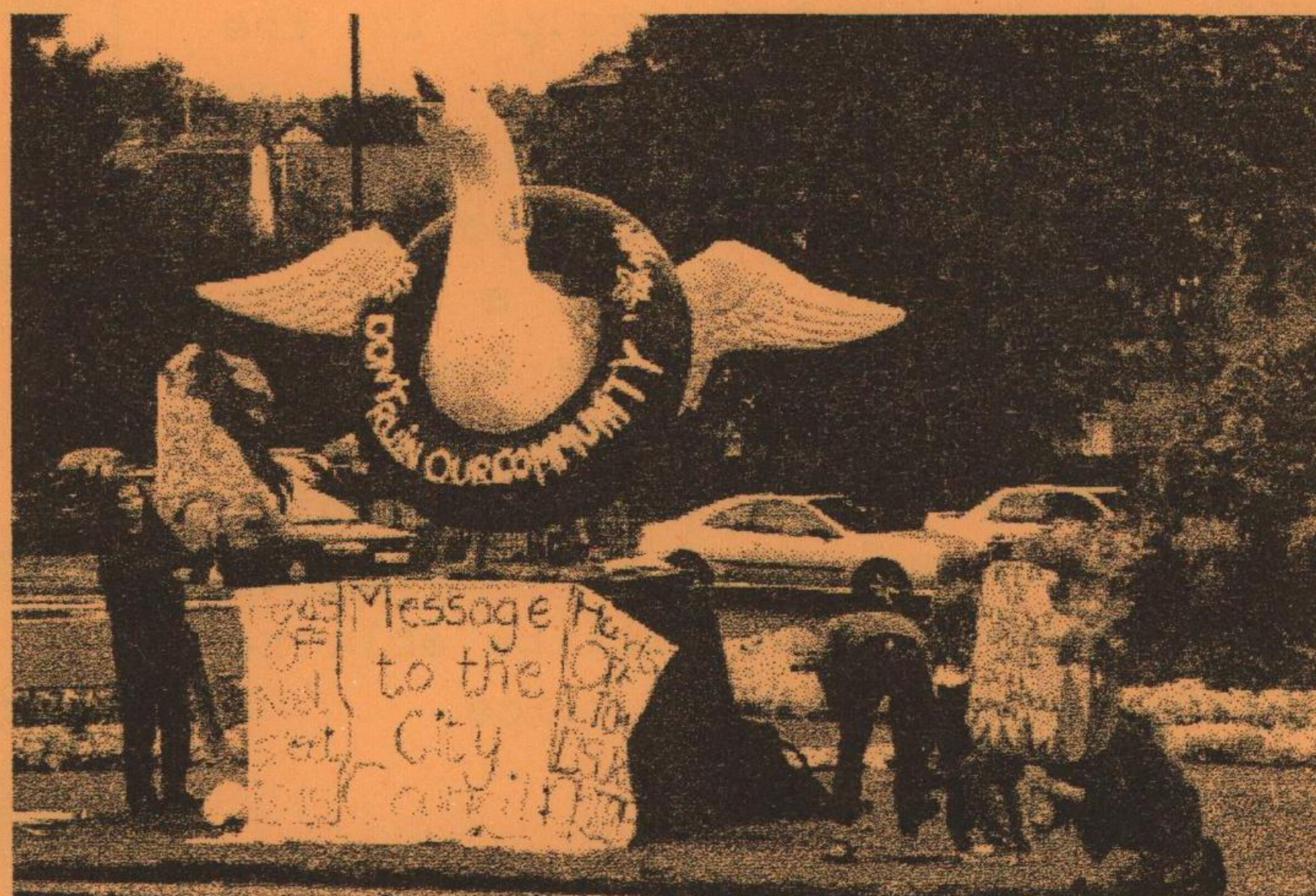
showed us what you thought about closures and building on green spaces. We now know that we have substantial support in this area.

Support - We helped the 'Save Victoria Leisure Centre' campaign get going in Sneinton and St Anns.

Conference - we are planning a City wide conference to discuss community action; council cuts; and the local environment. Organisations from around the city have already shown a lot of interest.

Meanwhile - The City Council has postponed their decision twice. We believe that this campaign, by the Residents Group and others, has staved off Council plans, and bought some semblance of democracy to the debate in our community. It shows what local people can do!

As we get closer to the Council's Leisure Services Committee making a decision, we are growing stronger and more determined to fight for our rights as local residents.



Meeting like-minded people

Recently we made contact with community groups from Newtown, Birmingham and Wolverhampton. This led to a meeting with people from both groups and a chance for us to share ideas and hear what problems they had faced.

Newtown Independent Residents' Group was set up a few years ago. They started well, with packed public meetings highlighting the problems faced by local residents and, in particular, crime and mugging on the estate. First off, the group had to confront some of the myths about anti-social crime - for example, demonstrating that muggers and victims come from a cross-section of the community. Things went from strength to strength. There was a successful march and demonstration in the area. This was followed by locals bricking up some of the alleys used by muggers. Although this was done with the consent of those on the estate, both the police and council told them not to continue and that the walls would come down. However, after the council realised the swell of support for the group they had to concede and did brick up the alleys. The results were astounding, with crime in the area reduced.

Sadly, after two years hard work, the group disbanded as key members moved out of the area. However, valuable lessons were learnt. Support has been given to the Wolverhampton initiative and experiences of Newtown have been passed on.

everyone at the meeting agreed that a truly independent residents' group should act in the interests and with the support of local residents, and not in the interests of the council or the business community.

The meeting was a success and we all agreed to keep in contact with each other. We hope this can be a long-term arrangement and, as the groups grow, hopefully we will see a network of residents' groups in the Midlands and nationally. It is ambitious - but as Labour are more interested in the middle-class vote, it leaves their traditional supporters without a voice.

We agreed that we should try to hold a meeting with local and national contacts in the New Year. In London, initiatives such as the Independent Working Class Association have offered a chance for community networks to develop. It is hoped that, by staying in touch and learning from each other, we will be able to establish a truly working class community voice.

Lobby the Council

**Thursday 27th January
2.30pm
outside the Council
House
Old Market Square.**

Can you make it to a protest meeting outside the Council House in the Market Square on January 27th at 2.30pm?

This is when the Council decide on whether to close your local facilities.

We need your support to show that we mean business and that we're not willing to go away without a fight.

Bring your friends and neighbours, your kids, your dog - anyone who is as concerned as you are.

Bring banners, placards and musical instruments. Let's show them - let's make a noise.

