

STATEMENT FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - 30/4/2021

Since July 2020 Liverpool City Council has been complicit in the desecration of the graves of many of our city's citizens and the gifting of an entire public park to a private business. Since July 2020 Roscoe Gardens has been locked off, and public access removed and denied, consistently by the business operating in the space.

Roscoe Gardens is not just a public park, but a Unitarian burial ground and needs to be treated with the basic levels of decency, dignity and respect that are not only presumed human moral basics, but also obligations under law of the local authority. The council have allowed a marquee structure of such vast size, it should be subject to planning requirements, to be erected over and pegged into the graves of those interred on the site. The Listed memorial of William Roscoe, one of the first abolitionists is currently in a state of disrepair, as is the green space of the park itself.

Members of the Unitarian congregation are being denied their right to pay their respects to those interred at the site. Members of the local community, including the elderly and those less able of body, have been deprived of their nearest greenspace during a pandemic and lockdown. The structure erected by the business, is directly adjacent to, and outside of peoples homes. Families of children have had nothing short of months of misery, endured by the obscene and lurid content matter of the 'entertainment' blasted directly into their homes, let alone the anti-social behaviour of customers. This is nothing short of an affront to those buried in the ground beneath them, including founders of the Temperance movement.

As B G Orchard once wrote, "... no group of men has so manifested far-sighted appreciation of great questions affecting social wellbeing of the town or worked with more dogged ardour to promote national education, public parks, free libraries and museums... at present Renshaw Street Chapel is probably the greatest political force in our midst." – we are shocked Liverpool City Council sees fit to allow the graves of these people who built the socialist foundations of our city, to be desecrated and ran into disrepair, in such a way.

Liverpool City Councillors and Officers, and even our local MP, have been made aware of ongoing complaints since August 2020 and failed to act. In fact, to this date, Liverpool City Council have ignored every reference to desecration to the graves made, and to this date, not one single Councillor or Officer has had the foresight to contact the Unitarian Church, not only to apologise, but to seek the permission they are obliged to, for use of the space, as set out under the Burial Act.

The business operator has shown no willingness to listen to the community and currently only allows access to the space if a petition is signed in support of their continued occupation of consecrated ground. The business has also consistently breached the terms of the Land Use Agreement they had with the council, and evidence has been provided, again consistently, to the responsible officers and no action has been taken.

Liverpool City Council has failed in its duty to protect this sacred, public space and abandoned its commitment and obligations to respecting culture, faith and our city's history.

We have asked several times for answers to the simple questions overleaf, and still await a response from the council. We are now demanding the immediate restoration of the dignity of those interred at the site and unfettered public access to the public park resumed.

SIGNED

Sean Weaver

Chair,

Roscoe Garden

Residents Association

Rev Philip Waldron

Minister,

Merseyside Unitarian

Ministry Partnership

Laurence Westgaph

Local Historian

- How did it even come about that a public park and burial ground would be handed over to a private business for so long?
- Why did Liverpool City Council fail in its legal obligation to contact the church responsible for the burial ground before even indulging in the thought of changing the use of the land?
- Which council officer or elected official signed off on the Land Use Agreement?
- Does Liverpool City Council have an explanation for why it has broken the Disused Burial Grounds Act?
- Does Liverpool City Council have an explanation for why it has treated consecrated ground with such lack of dignity?
- Will Liverpool City Council address the inconsistencies in approaches highlighted above across all departments and its failure in duty of care?
- Why have noise complaints gone unanswered for this particular business since July 2020?
- Under what legal framework was the operation licensed, from the councils point of view, from July 2020 to December 2020?
- Why have yourselves as ward councillors sat by for so long whilst this has happened?
- Why were neighbouring residents not informed by the council of their plans to sequester a public park to a private business in advance, particularly given the impact it would clearly have on lifestyles during the pandemic and lockdown?
- Why has a public park been left, padlocked up by a private business for so long without intervention from the council, namely January 2021 until April 12th 2021?
- When can we expect the space returned to the public and restored to the state it should be?
- Will Liverpool City Council conduct a thorough investigation into how this desecration has come about and endured for so long?