

**To the Chair and Members of
The COUNCIL**

FREEDOM OF THE BOROUGH APPLICATION – BEN PARKINSON MBE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report asks Members to consider conferring the Freedom of the Borough on Ben Parkinson MBE.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. The Council is asked to support the application and agree to bestow the Freedom of the Borough on Ben Parkinson.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE CITIZENS OF DONCASTER?

3. Conferring the Freedom of the Borough on Ben Parkinson would allow the citizens of Doncaster to offer recognition and endorsement of his bravery, fighting spirit, total selflessness, determination and his ability to inspire young and old alike with a passion and a need to meet every adversity and challenge, overcome it and move on

BACKGROUND

4. Bobbie Roberts, a Freeman of the Borough has approached the Council to ask them to consider bestowing this honour to Ben Parkinson.
5. The Council is able to bestow the Freedom of the Borough on individuals who have provided exceptional service to their town or enhanced its reputation through their actions.
6. In accordance with the Council's protocol a panel consisting of the Deputy Civic Mayor and leaders of each of the political groups (see consultation - paragraph 21 below) met to consider the nomination and gave it their full and unequivocal support.
7. The award of Freeman must be approved by a formal resolution of Full Council. A vote will be taken and if it is supported by no less than two thirds of those members present and voting then the title of 'Honorary Freeman of Doncaster' will be bestowed upon the nominee.

8. Ben needs very little introduction, he is very well known both locally and nationally. He is a person whose passion as a young boy was to join the army, in particular the Paras. He is a brave young man with a wicked sense of humour and a winning smile and indomitable spirit.
9. So far, no challenge has been too big for him despite his disability due to horrific injuries whilst serving in the armed forces in Afghanistan in 2003.
10. Ben fought the Battle of Rommalia Bridge on his 19th birthday, and he was with the 7 Para RHA and served 7 months in Kosovo during the winter months aged 20, after which he volunteered to deploy to Afghanistan with G Battery gun group in 2003.
11. On 12th September, 2 weeks before the end of his tour, Ben was the rear gunner in a WIMIK Land Rover when the vehicle detonated a huge anti-tank mine. Ben took the full force of the blast.
12. Given not a chance of survival, he was immediately flown home to see his life out with his family. But Ben had other plans - his demise was not on his agenda. He remained in a coma for several months with his family maintaining a vigil throughout this time; with a flow of his regimental family providing Ben with a constant stream of jokes, laughter, tears and prayers, as if Ben were still amongst them taking his part in the banter.
13. Ben is totally selfless, always thinking about his friends first, always dedicated to get as fit as could be despite everything.
14. He works tirelessly to go from strength to strength and is very determined to return to his beloved 7 Paras, working to improve physical fitness, his speech, his memory, and learning to walk on prosthetic limbs. A feat never attempted by anyone having suffered such a severe head injury. Those injuries included; head injuries; broken back in 3 places; punctured lungs; every rib broken; spleen ruptured, cheek, nose, jaw all smashed. At 22, surgeons removed both of his legs above the knee.
15. He always says, if asked "it could have been worse, it could have been one of my mates."
16. Ben is a Patron of 'The Pilgrim Bandits' a charity that has raised millions of pounds to help and inspire wounded soldiers to live life to the full. Ben is involved first hand in the fund raising efforts and has undertaken many extreme physical challenges, constantly pushing himself to the limit to raise money for injured servicemen and women.
17. Ben also famously carried the Olympic Torch in 2012 when it passed through Doncaster. It is a testament to the affection to which he is held, both locally and nationally, that thousands of people turned up to support Ben, including his colleagues from his regiment.

18. Ben is an example of an inspiration to young and old alike with a passion and a need to meet every adversity and challenge, overcome it and move on. The Freeman of Doncaster Borough is the least we can do to recognise this heroic young serviceman from Doncaster and his achievements.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REASON FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION

19. Option one (**recommended option**) is to recommend that Council supports the application and confer the Freedom of the Borough on Ben Parkinson. This is the recommended option, not only in recognition of his personal bravery, fighting spirit, total selflessness, determination and his ability to inspire young and old alike with a passion and a need to meet every adversity and challenge, overcome it and move on but also for his efforts in raising millions of pounds to help to support and encourage wounded soldiers to live life to the full.
20. Option two is to decline the application to confer the Freedom of the Borough on Ben Parkinson.

RISKS & ASSUMPTIONS

21. There are no identified risks associated with this report.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

22. Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972 deals with the admission to the Freedom of the Borough of “persons of distinction and persons who have, in the opinion of the Council, rendered eminent services to the Borough”. The Council is required to consider this application.
23. The title Freeman of the Borough is an honorary role. It offers no legal status and there is no remuneration linked to the honour.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

24. Those being honoured are given a civic reception, hosted by the Civic Mayor at the Mansion House, to include a buffet and beverages at an approximate cost of £400. Recipients also receive a framed Freedom Scroll that costs approximately £800. The total cost of £1200 will be funded from the Civic Mayor’s budget.

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

25. Doncaster Council aims to be outstanding in all aspects of equality and diversity. The Council seeks to create an environment that promotes, values and celebrates equality and diversity ensuring everyone feels welcome and that individuals are treated fairly, equally and with respect and are not discriminated against on the basis of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion and belief, sex or sexual orientation. We will advance equality of opportunity, intend to eliminate unlawful discrimination and foster good relations. All of these aims will be considered and upheld during the decision making process associated with this report.

CONSULTATION

26. The application has been considered initially by representatives of the Labour Group, Conservative Group, Putting Mexborough First Group and UKIP Group, who have given their unanimous approval for the application to be taken forward to be considered by Council.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

27. Freedom Application from Bobbie Roberts plus letters of support from Alan Robinson, Executive Principal, Doncaster Deaf Trust and Dean Wiffen, Community Sport and Physical Activity development Officer, Doncaster Council on behalf of Ben Parkinson MBE.

REPORT AUTHOR & CONTRIBUTORS

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