

LEEDS KIRKGATE MARKET

Leeds' Kirkgate Market is situated in the city centre and is visited by around 150,000 people a week. It is one of the biggest markets in the UK, with around 400 indoor stalls and 200 outdoor stalls, employing around 2,000 people. It sells fresh food, household goods, clothes and other services. It is made up of various halls, some of which date back to 1875. Two halls are listed. The market is owned and managed by Leeds City Council, which has tended to neglect the maintenance of the building since a fire burnt down half of it in 1975 and large halls were constructed. Various proposals, some of them including private developers, have been announced over the years, with the common element of trying to reduce its size and modernise the facilities, but traders have not been meaningfully involved in these discussions and a conflicted relationship has developed, with many traders lacking trust in the council. A project in 1985 involving a Dutch property developer was fought successfully by the traders' association, with support from citizens and a 250,000- strong petition.

Trader grievances around high rents, the lack of maintenance and involvement in decision making peaked in 2009 when they staged a vote a No Confidence in the market manager and took a deputation to a council meeting. **Friends of Leeds Kirkgate Market (FoLKM)** was born in April 2010, partly inspired by campaigns in London. The campaign brought together long-term customers and traders who were concerned by the long-term neglect of the the market by the council, and issues such as rent rises. The campaign was launched from a need to support traders and to campaign against the partial abandonment of the market. Members were concerned about the increasingly empty stalls (due to high rents) as a potential prelude to another redevelopment proposal. Connected to this, the site next to Kirkgate Market had been earmarked for a luxury shopping centre but was stalled due to the 2008 global financial crisis. The emergence of the campaign, a change of local authority control, a new market manager and the resuscitation of the luxury shopping centre proposal by a private developer turned Kirkgate Market into an important local issue. In 2011, 10,000 people signed a petition launched by FoLKM demanding investment in the market, lower rents and traders' involvement in decision making. FoLKM also campaigned against the planning application for the construction of a luxury shopping centre (Victoria Gate) right next to the market, arguing that it would negatively affect it and be the start of its gentrification. After decades of neglect, the local authority became more interested in investing in the market, partly due to its potential to attract wealthier customers, With consultants,they developed a £12.3m refurbishment and investment plan. Traders feel that they were not properly engaged in the consultation process and FoLKM objected to the plans on the basis that they would lead to higher rents, displacement of traders and pricing out of the poorest customers (although the market serves a diverse clientele, research by FoLKM suggests that it is those from the poorest neighbourhoods in Leeds that caters for most). However the proposal was accepted and both development projects have started. The refurbished part of the marked is due to open mid-2016 and the Victoria Gate development is due to open in late 2016.

MORE INFORMATION: <https://kirkgatemarket.wordpress.com>