Text 1 – Willingham Shire newsletter

The intention of the Willingham Shire’s newsletter is made clear in a number of ways. The fact that it is called *The Voice* suggests that it is an advocate of the community, providing an opportunity for citizens to shape the ‘development and infrastructure’ of the shire, creating the illusion of a sense of ownership in Council decisions (despite the fact that, on this page at least, it is a medium for disseminating information), something accentuated by the repeated possessive pronoun in ‘Your Neighbourhood, Your Future’.

The article begins with a sombre and resigned tone with the writer positing that the closure of the Baths is a regrettable necessity. The members of the community who are most likely to oppose such a closure are those who have enjoyed them for the longest time and have an emotional attachment to them. Hence, the writer empathises with this section of the community, suggesting that they too must unfortunately experience the same loss or pain as them, hence validating the decision as sad but necessary. The colloquial personification in ‘grand old lady’ depicts the Baths as something the Council respects and reveres because of its seeming elegant distinction. The writer also attempts to humanise the councillors through the emotive, yet down-to-earth, depiction of them as someone who ‘will miss’ the Baths, as if they were personally close to them. The image of these councillors as sincere advocates is furthered through the suggestion that they ‘struggled with the decision for some time’ as if they were delaying a sad inevitability owing to a strong emotional attachment. In addition to this, the possessive pronoun ‘your’ in ‘your elected representatives’ enhances the idea that they are acting on behalf of all citizens, even those who oppose the closure.

An astute appeal to tradition is made in an attempt to ingratiate the Council with the older citizenship of the electorate. The metaphorical description of architect Aldous Meredith as a ‘national treasure’ is likely to tap into the nostalgic sentiments of readers and further suggests a shared pride in the heritage of the shire, thus obviating any accusation that the closure of the Baths is a cold and calculating strategic decision. The writer acknowledges the longevity of the building (built in ‘1895’) to signify the Council’s awareness of the historical importance it holds before using the inclusive suggestion that it has ‘been an important part of our lives ever since’ to accentuate the seeming shared loss – something designed to placate the concern of older citizens in particular.
The writer ends this section of the piece by proposing a ‘celebration’. This suggestion is redolent of a kind of funeral wake where respectful mourning occurs but in a way that suggests positive resilience – a necessary ceremony that acknowledges the reality of death and enables people to move on with their own life. The inclusive ‘we’ reinforces the idea of shared loss and affinity and the return to the personification of ‘grand old lady’ is designed to entrench the impression of the councillors as human and humble in the execution of their sad duty as guardians of the Shire’s heritage.

The rather abrupt and business-like heading of the next section, ‘The facts of the matter’ is an attempt to shake readers out of a possible nostalgic reverie, to confront them with the practical realities that must be considered in any sad situation. In attempting to impress that the Council is a caring and responsible representative body that equally feels the loss of the Baths, the writer paves the way to introduce an economic argument, without the Council seeming like an aloof and impersonal group that thinks solely of profit. For those who are less nostalgic or emotionally attached to the icon, the writer mounts a compelling and factual analysis of the state of the Baths, suggesting that it is economically ‘unteivable’ to keep the Baths open – the use of formal language with this word, coupled with facts and figures, and economic jargon throughout this section (‘commissioned’, ‘viability’, ‘critical facts’, ‘ongoing cost’, ‘per annum’, ‘annual loss’) portrays the Council as a knowledgeable, competent and professional collective well-placed to make such a difficult decision. The phrase ‘cold, hard reality’ acknowledges the feeling that many may share about the seeming callous brutality in taking away something dear to many people, yet doesn’t associate this brutality with the Council – the inclusive ‘we need to deal with’ depicts them as stoic paternal guardians making difficult and unsavoury decisions for the good of all.

The use of figures supports the argument that it is too costly to keep the Baths open. The citing of somewhat alarming figures in, and near, the millions is designed to have readers feeling the pinch of their hip-pocket-nerve, fearing the irresponsible waste of their rates. This is likely to be effective for citizens in a shire that has grown where rates have probably increased. Yet to obviate the possible accusation of being detached economic rationalists, and to reconnect with those who feel the loss of the Baths more emotionally, the writer returns to the respectful personification of ‘grand old lady’ and introduces a note of pathos with an emotive suggestion that ‘she’ is ‘sinking into the ground’. Felt in combination with the earlier emotive suggestion that the pools are ‘suffering’, the Council is once again portrayed as being empathetic to the loss any community member might feel; as if the closure is inexorable and some kind of merciful euthanasia. This position is supported by depicting past efforts to save the Baths as ‘band aid solutions’ – flimsy, ineffectual offerings given the scale of the seeming disaster. In contrast, the decision to close the Baths is portrayed as ‘decisive action’, positioning the Council once again as efficient, responsive and responsible.

In the next section, the writer develops the point that, in contrast to the wasteful maintenance of the Baths, they can create something better; something modern and more economically responsible that addresses the needs of the community. Beginning with the repeated use of the possessive pronoun ‘your’, the writer develops the idea that the Council is acting on behalf of the whole community in response to their needs. Combined with ‘building a better future’, a more optimistic tone begins to emerge and the Council seems forward-thinking and constructive. Having established the maintenance of the Baths as wasteful – something made more manifest through the graphic pun and metaphor ‘pouring money down the drain’ – the writer intends to make readers amenable to the idea that there is a better option than keeping the Baths open. The inclusive acknowledgement that ‘we need a facility to service the needs of the community’ furthers the notion that the Council is part of the community, and perhaps even a vanguard of the people, leading the way to a ‘better future’.

Citing the figure of $33.7 million as the cost of the proposed project highlights its grandeur and works alongside the adjectives ‘exciting’ and ‘impressive’ to create a sense of optimistic possibility. The graphic map of the Shire illustrates that the Western Growth Corridor is a distance from the more established parts of the Shire so the description of Everington Fields as a ‘hub’ is designed to negate the feeling that it is a distant and isolated part of the Shire, but is
instead an exciting area that could possibly become the centre of things. This is supported by the use of the embedded graphic. This graphic dominates the page with its size and is also at the end of the piece, serving as the final consideration to readers who have progressively been manipulated to see this solution as the only viable option. The light shining through the clouds at the top of the image gives it an ethereal quality, evoking the impression that the new complex is a dream realised. This becomes a motif in the image with white as the dominant colour. The wholly white building is positioned at the centre, dominating; the few other aspects included are positioned on the periphery. Logically, it is unlikely that the roof of such a building and the surrounding pavement (not to mention the cars with white windscreen and the monochrome human figures) would be such a pure white. Yet, there is also realism in the image with great detail in the building and landscape; thus, its implausible whiteness is not obvious at first glance. This allows the symbolic associations of purity and goodness to work subliminally on the readers’ minds and allow the possibility of something grand and positive to dominate their response to it. This whiteness is hemmed by the greenness of trees, suggesting a kind of urban oasis. The reality of traffic is admitted by the inclusion of cars, but their insignificant number creates the impression that the precinct is immune to the daily grind of city traffic, also implying a convenient ease of access.

The map of Willingham Shire is small relative to the artist’s impression of the Aquatic Centre, once again emphasising the seeming grandeur of the building. The raised portion of Inner Willingham and the seemingly short bus routes makes the journey from the inner city to the new complex seem quick and convenient. This is designed to appeal to these inner-city residents who will lose the convenience of attending the old Baths – a clear attempt to counter the likely anger of this section of the community.

In order to support the argument that the proposed development is the best way to serve the needs of the community, the writer continues with the logical economic argument, emphasising gain rather than drawing attention to cost. An impression of professional expertise that is communicated through the economic jargon ‘significantly offset’ combines with the weighty and precise figure ‘$21.2 million’, making the sale of the Baths seem like it creates a sizable windfall, rather than a net loss. The suggestion that there is a purchaser of the site who is ‘committed’ is designed to instil confidence in readers that the plan is not slapdash or pie-in-the-sky. The specific reference to ‘a 12 storey building’ adds to the solidity of the plan and also hints at the likely economic boost to Inner Willingham with an injection of cash-flow through increased residents to the area.

In knowing that the broader audience is not likely to be solely persuaded by this kind of self-interest, the writer returns to the nostalgic appeals that dominate the beginning of the piece, once again suggesting to readers that the Council understands and can empathise with those who have more sentimental attachments to the Baths. There is an inherent acknowledgement of the historical importance of the Baths with the plan to preserve the ‘Aldous Meredith façade’ (a specific reference that attempts to garner favour from traditionalists in the audience). The use of the adjective ‘intact’, the final word of the article, is isolated at the end of the sentence to add emphasis to its connotations of solidity and permanence; something traditionalists would value strongly.

Text 2 – Roger Smiley’s speech

Smiley begins his address to the Council by subtly suggesting that it needs to be mindful of is democratic responsibility to the residents of the Shire and to be more responsive to the sentiments and views of its electorate. The self-effacing and gracious beginning in thanking the councillors ‘for the opportunity to talk’ is designed to have the Council understand that he is no extreme reactionary who is blindly committed to opposing the Council out of principle. The purpose here is to avoid the Council becoming defensive and have them understand that his argument is genuine and considered. He acknowledges the ‘effort’ of the Council as a means of ingratiating himself further, depicting himself as reasonable and understanding, rather than cynical and anti-government – an attitude that would alienate the councillors. Yet, his beginning also carries with it a subtle assertiveness. His qualifier, ‘but I also know that our Council has enough
respect for its residents’, hints at a feeling of discontent amongst voters. Ever attuned to public opinion and the polls (the obvious sign of this being the careful construction of the letter announcing the closing of the Baths, where the Council has tried to appeal broadly to voters), the councillors would be keen to avoid any accusations of being disrespectful or irresponsible. The use of the inclusive ‘our’ here reminds the Council that they are servants of the people (something the writer of the letter tries to use to his advantage by suggesting that they had been motivated by this idea in making their decision). This serves as a subtle warning against the kind of elitist arrogance some politicians display, further motivating councillors to give genuine consideration to the argument of the Citizens’ Action Group. This is strengthened by the fact that Smiley acknowledges the crowd of people who are in ‘support’ of his views, a reminder of the possible widespread grassroots support.

Smiley ends his opening with humble pleading, obsequiously suggesting that he has nothing more than a ‘hope’ to ‘influence’ their decision – a kind of concession to the ego of the councillors who might like to feel they are in control and not forced into action. Yet there is an undertone of pressure that implies that a failure to accede to the wishes of the Action Group would be a dereliction of duty. This is no more evident in the metaphorical inference that the Council may have ‘locked’ the shire into ‘binding contracts’, words carrying connotations of militaristic coercion and thereby appealing to the democratic values that all in the room would hold dear.

Smiley continues with his speech in a conversational and nostalgic tone, making the point that the Baths have become a vital part of the electorate’s positive identity and therefore need to stay. His anecdotal use of first person here personalises the issue and emphasises the importance of the personal relationship many citizens apparently have with the Baths, making this more than an economic concern. While he speaks in the first person when recounting his experience at the pool, his imagery is likely to be evocative for the audience – perhaps including those in the Council. The memories he recounts are banal but pleasant moments – this accentuates the everyday role the Baths have played in the lives of many, implying the deep loss that would exist if this essential part of their lives was lost. The preponderance of verbs – ‘sunbaking’, ‘eating’, ‘splashing’ – is also effective here, particularly in their present continuous form (also mimicked by the gerund, ‘training’). Not only do they add vividness to the imagery, they generate the feeling that the Baths are ongoing – that the memory is indelible, which reinforces the importance they hold in the lives the people of Willingham. The repetition of this verb form adds emphasis to this sentiment.

The moments he relates also span a great period of time (the metaphorical ‘life time’) and a great number of activities which is designed to set in the listeners’ minds the apparent long-lasting versatile utility of the pools – the implication here is that closing the pools would lead to widespread loss. Smiley makes a point that he has ‘great-grandchildren’ and uses self-deprecating humour to note that he is ‘older than television’ and is ‘no spring chicken’. The colloquial language here depicts him as an ‘everyman’ figure which validates him as a symbol of the electorate and its wishes. It is also an attempt to manipulate the Council by reminding them of a core value: that is, to be respectful of the elderly given the likely wisdom they have. He attempts to make it clear to the listeners that his particular wisdom is to do with things that are right for Willingham, given that he has ‘lived all of [his] 76 years’ there and therefore is an authority whose word should be heeded, particularly given his commitment and loyalty to the area. There is also the subtle hint that his authority is widely accepted. The fact that he has been elected to speak on behalf of the Citizens’ Action Group is evidence of this, and this is added to by his humble suggestion that ‘most of you here know who I am’. It seems clear that he is a local identity, influential in the community and the Council would understand that he would have some political clout and therefore some influence come election time.

Smiley continues to validate both his authority and also the position the Baths have served as the foundation of Willingham’s cultural identity. He personifies the Baths as a seemingly loyal friend that has ‘seen us through two World Wars, and two Depressions’. The inclusive language in ‘us’ is designed here to make the councillors feel that they owe a debt to the Baths as they have served as a panacea to hardship. He promotes the idea that all members of the community
should feel this gratitude by invoking the name of Aldous Meredith (someone acknowledged as a cultural icon by the Council), also inferring a close association with the revered figure (further enhancing his position as an authority) by suggesting that few understood that the famous architect ‘felt that Willingham Baths was his greatest achievement’. By association, this apparently arcane knowledge serves the dual purpose of positioning the Baths as a valuable cultural landmark worthy of preserving and validating Smiley as the representative of the lauded architect.

His speech becomes more emphatic as he strives to evoke feelings of guilt in the councillors for their seeming betrayal of Meredith’s legacy – Meredith being presented here as a founding father of the Shire who single-handedly saved it from extinction. The repeated syntactic structure, ‘he dreamt’, ‘he got’, ‘he created’, ‘he knew’, is dominated by verbs which accentuate the committed and determined actions of Meredith to ‘drag us out of that Depression’. This depicts the citizens as having been lost and in need of the sage guidance and action of Meredith (the word ‘drag’ connoting a blind reluctance to move) to secure the future of Willingham. The inclusive ‘us’ further suggests the need for ubiquitous personal gratitude. Describing the Baths as a ‘vision’ that he ‘dreamt up’ gives them a spiritual status – something that should be respected and preserved because of this position.

The repetition of the clause ‘he knew’ emphasises Meredith’s apparent wisdom in the Baths’ conception, and is part of Smiley’s strategy to imbue feelings of guilt in the councillors. The dramatic pause, represented by the ellipsis, when noting Meredith’s belief that the Baths ‘would bring something else back …Pride’ is added to through the emphasis Smiley gives to ‘Pride’ (represented by the use of the capitalised ‘P’). This is designed to touchingly highlight the communal dignity that apparently flowed from Meredith’s vision. The suggestion is that this encompassing value was lost for a time, and that Meredith was a kind of messiah that led the shire out of its wilderness to enlightenment and their essential cultural identity.

The extent of this apparent transformation is made clear by the inclusive metaphorical suggestion that ‘we weren’t just the poor neighbours with dirt under our fingernails’. This reminder, that Willingham once suffered imputations associated with a disadvantaged, impoverished working class, is designed to make listeners reflect on how far the shire has grown as a consequence, and therefore feel a sense of gratitude for what the Baths have come to stand for – achievement in all of its forms. The inclusive ‘we’ begins to dominate Smiley’s speech along with a wistful tone, prompting this reflection and building a feeling that all should share this gratitude because all have benefited from what is seen as the cornerstone of this improved reputation, elevating the shire (through association) to something ‘world class’.

Smiley infers that the Baths are responsible for more than the symbolic transformation of Willingham with his reference to ‘local businesses, local people’. The listing of ‘jobs for builders, manufacturers, suppliers’ hints that the Baths were the beginning of economic prosperity that all residents have benefited from. Hence, the use of the modal verb in ‘we should all be proud’ underlines an obligation to recognise that the Baths should remain as an homage to Meredith and his contribution to the Shire. His direct appeal, ‘you need to think about where you came from’, is more confronting and is clearly aimed at the councillors with a latent accusation of supercilious pretension that belies the heritage of the Shire and would likely attract the ire of the more humble, long-standing residents. The nostalgic suggestion that ‘the Baths would sit there and remind everyone … forever’ serves a dual purpose. Firstly, the inference is once again that the councillors have lost their way and forgotten the core values of the residents of Willingham – that they have alienated themselves from the ‘everyone’ that should feel gratitude. The ellipsis represents a dramatic pause as the word ‘forever’ is delivered as a kind of accusation that the Council is seeing the Baths as ephemera – only for its practical utility rather than its symbolic function as a monument to the past.

While nostalgia is a big part of Smiley’s argument, he distances himself from the potential accusation he is a traditionalist impervious to change, depicting himself as progressive and reasonable. He acknowledges that there has
been ‘a lot of change’ that he has not resisted. The claim that he has been ‘the first to say a lot of [change] was needed’ in fact depicts him as an advocate of innovation and development, which adds validity to his objection to this proposed change. The aim is to have the Council consider the particular merit of his argument, rather than dismiss it as the rant of a grumpy and regressive old man. This is supported by his logical reference to the original intent behind the Baths (a development in the past) observing colloquially that change was ‘what Aldous was about’. The use of inclusive language in, ‘we’ve always looked for ways to improve Willingham’, serves to create a connection with the councillors as if the Action Group and the Council have common purpose and this would be achieved if only it were ‘change for the better’.

After spending some time trying to invoke feelings of guilt in the Council for seemingly neglecting an obvious duty to its electorate, Smiley shifts to a more confronting tone, denigrating them for suggesting that using the Meredith façade on a new building is adequate recognition of the building’s historical and architectural importance. The phrase ‘I’ll tell you another thing’ is a clichéd admonishment that generates a feeling that there has been a long list of thoughtless, ill-considered action. His repeated use of ‘Aldous’ creates a sense of familiarity which makes the reporting of Meredith’s feelings about the change more valid. The clichéd ‘turning in his grave’ adds to the depth of the feeling and plays on the idea that Council plans to ‘dig up our Baths’, making it seem like a kind of desecration. The contrast between ‘beautiful façade’ and ‘monstrous new apartment block’ adds to the feeling and the verb ‘slap’ makes the plan seem haphazard and indiscriminate.

Smiley continues with his aggressive attack on the actions and motives of the Council arguing that there is an insidious alternate agenda that the Council is pursuing. The suggestion ‘who gets what out of this’ is forcefully put and implies that the Council’s plan is a simple case of self-interest and that crass economic gain is the crux of their agenda. The repetition of ‘fact’ is delivered emphatically with each listed point (punctuating it as a one-word, minor sentence suggests the forceful nature of Smiley’s delivery here), making each point seem damningly incontrovertible. He begins by rebutting the idea that the new complex is conveniently located (‘40 minutes … not to mention waiting time’). The figure, ‘15,000 residents’ is not only used to accentuate the extent of the inconvenience, but also serves as a reminder of the number of voters the Council is disadvantaging. This is combined with an appeal to family values (specifically the ‘working families’ that would be prevalent within the electorate) and the connotation of innocence in ‘kids’ to personalise the impact of the change and make the inconvenience an everyday thing. This is accentuated by relating the inconvenience to a range of residents. Using figures to note the impact on ‘1,700 pensioners’, who would be physically unable to use the facility, is an appeal to the humanity of the councillors and this is backed up with an appeal to justice with the suggestion that the people most likely to benefit from the facility are the new residents of the Shire. The listing of the figures, ‘20 or 30, or even 50’ accentuates this injustice for those who are depicted as loyal and committed contributors to the Shire.

The insinuation is that the motive for building the new complex is to ‘attract more residents … and more money’, making it seem as though the plan is a calculated grab for cash, rather than for the provision of service. Smiley ends his speech with an imploring and disappointed tone – a seeming reflection of a community aggrieved at the injustice they have been subjected to with the Council ‘taking [their] Baths from’ them (‘taking’ here carrying connotations of theft). His metaphorical description of Inner Willingham as ‘the heart of the shire’ depicts it as a place of elevated importance – a place of historical importance but also the repository of laudable community values. The use of the distancing pronouns ‘you’ and ‘yourselves’, in contrast to the inclusive ‘us’ and ‘our’, effectively alienates the councillors, depicting them as aloof and out-of-touch: the intention here being to generate fear that this decision might have an impact at polling time. This point is brought home with the emotive repetition of ‘heart’, inferring the Councillors are totally lacking in compassion and have misread, to their electoral peril, the depth of feeling the community has for the Baths.