

Community Meeting

15th November 2007

Rowney, without apology, fails to appear

Ged Rowney, Serco's Director of Children's Services for Stoke-on-Trent, **did not even have the common courtesy to send his apologies for his non-attendance** at the Park Estate Tenants and Residents Association / Hands off Haywood High Community Group meeting held at Haywood on 15th November. This clearly demonstrates Serco's complete disdain for the Community. Also absent, without apology, were Councillors Joan Bell and Ian McLaughlan. All had accepted their invitation to the event, and confirmed their acceptance.

More than four hundred parents, students and community members were present to make their feelings known to the Elected Mayor Mark Meredith and to Council Chief Executive Officer Steve Robinson.

Joan Walley, M.P, started the meeting. She said that the plans for the cluster of four schools in the northern part of the city need to be totally appropriate within the framework of the plans for the city: "*We owe it to ourselves to get this right*". We were also told that during the pre-consultation period, Serco has not taken account of nor listened to counter proposals. Serco also insist that their demographic projections are correct, and refuse to acknowledge that other statistics may be more appropriate. However, the proposals for reorganisation are not "*set in stone*". To which Ms. Walley had replied "*Make sure they're not set in stone*".

The City Executive were then faced with a barrage of questions from the public. All were against the closure of Haywood, and all wished the school to remain on its present site. It was discovered that what Serco refers to as "Bank Top" is in fact Acreswood – so much for Serco's local knowledge! Many parents and pupils extolled the virtues of the school – how struggling pupils were helped to improve, how special needs were catered for, how teachers and staff excelled, and how the school, on its current site, is an integral part the community.

Mr. Robinson, in trying to sum up the message being sent to the City Council, asked three questions: "*Do you accept that change must take place?*", "*Do you want Haywood to close?*" and "*Do you want the school to remain on its current site?*" The unequivocal replies were "**YES!**", "**NO!**" and "**YES!**" respectively.

The Elected Mayor had no knowledge of the fact that survey work was being carried out on Acreswood (Serco being secretive again). He was informed that local people considered that the site was unsuitable for a school due to the cost of making it good. It is too sloped, and there is the problem with methane. Remedying these problems would eat up capital that should be earmarked for school buildings and fixtures.

The Council Chief Executive Officer emphasised that Serco is accountable to the Council. When questioned, both members of the Council Executive agreed that the Council is accountable to the people of the City. Mr Meredith said "*People like me are directly accountable to people like you*". Both then agreed that as Serco is accountable to the Council, and the Council is accountable to the people, then Serco is accountable to the people. **Serco has to listen to the people!**

The meeting was assured that there have been “*no discussions with respect to the future use of the Haywood site*”. No developer has expressed interest in the site, and no applications have been made for change of use.

Mr. Meredith summed up the Executive’s view thus: “*We’re not going to railroad these proposals through. I respect everything that has been said tonight. I will take your views back to senior Officers of the Council. We’re not going to botch this. We’re not going to fudge this. We do need to listen*”.

The main points that the Community presented to the Executive are:

- **We accept that change is necessary.**
- **We do not accept the need for a school to be built on another nearby site.**
- **We do not accept Serco’s demographic projections, which demonstrate a total lack of local knowledge.**
- **We want Haywood’s Engineering specialism to be continued in a new, or refurbished, school on the current site with the same staff under the same name.**
- **We want Serco to listen to and act upon our views.**

The Hands off Haywood High “campaign is a positive campaign”.

Mark Meredith,
Elected Mayor of Stoke-on-Trent,
15th November 2007

Mayor's pledge over school plans

Stoke-on-Trent's mayor has pledged to listen to parents about his education plan, which includes closing all of the city's schools. Under Mark Meredith's £200m plan, the city's 17 high schools would be shut and replaced with 12 new schools. He said change was necessary because the city was the fourth worst education authority in the country. The Labour mayor met angry parents at Haywood High School and Engineering College in Burslem on Thursday.

'Haywood ethos'

Dawn Clewes, chairwoman of the Parents, Teachers and Friends of Haywood High group, said: "I think Mr Meredith would have come away last night with the feeling that the community, parents, staff and everyone don't want Haywood to close. What the community would like is for the school to stay on the site which we feel can be built on and extended. This keeps the whole of the Haywood ethos, which is very, very important."

The school's headteacher, David Dickinson, has labelled the plans a "nuclear blitz".

But Mr Meredith said he had been encouraged by the meeting and was pleased to hear parents' views.

'Not good enough'

He said: "I need to listen to the views and opinions of parents and pupils and teachers and indeed the other staff at work in our schools across the city and that's precisely what I will do." He added: "The problem I'm dealing with as the leader of the city is that Stoke-on-Trent ranks 147th out of 150 in education terms in the country in comparison to the other local authorities. That's simply not good enough. We're at the bottom of the pile. What I explained to the parents of Haywood is we need to take the very best out of some of our better schools, like Haywood, and transport them into 21st-century buildings which will be inspiring and will attract high quality staff over the next 20 or 30 years."

The council says pupil numbers will fall to 12,500 in 2015 compared with 14,500 in 2002. It is also consulting on other plans which involve preserving the three Roman Catholic schools. Further options include closing two of the Roman Catholic schools but saving St Joseph's and there is also the possibility of saving some of the state schools.

Story from BBC NEWS:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/england/staffordshire/7097986.stm>

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Mayor vows to lobby for School future

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Hundreds of parents and pupils fighting to keep their closure-threatened high school open have been given hope after receiving the backing of Stoke-on-Trent's top politician. More than 400 people challenged elected mayor Mark Meredith during an unofficial meeting about the future of Haywood High School, on High Lane, Burslem.

They told Mr Meredith their school should not be moved to a site at nearby Bank Top.

Mr Meredith told the meeting: "I will take these opinions back and I will fight and I will lobby, test and scrutinise the present set of options in terms of this school and this site." But he says the city needs to reduce its schools to 12 because there are fewer children in Stoke-on-Trent. He said: "The number has fallen from just under 16,000 students in Stoke-on-Trent aged 11 to 16 in 2002 to just under 13,000 today. This trend is going to continue until at least 2015."

Stoke-on-Trent North MP Joan Walley told residents: "I am committed to helping support Haywood and finding out what is right for our children and our grandchildren."

Former pupil Bob Adams, aged 60, from Burslem, said: "I saw this school built; I am not prepared to see it pulled down. Education shouldn't be in the hands of politicians."

Eleven-year-old Chloe Connolly, from Stanfields, told the meeting how the school had changed her life since she started there in September. She said: "The teachers at Haywood have given me lots of help in 10 weeks. When I came to Haywood, I was in set D. Now I am in the top set. I owe the teachers a lot."

Her father Dave Connolly, aged 33, told Mr Meredith: "If you want to help the school and you want to help the teachers, stop stressing them out and let them carry on with the job they are doing." Mr Connolly called for the people of Stoke-on-Trent to be able to vote on the future of the city's schools.

But Mr Meredith said: "We can't have a referendum because people would vote to keep every single one of the 17 schools and I am not prepared to make that decision."

The unofficial meeting was organised by the school ahead of an official meeting about the plan later this month. Burslem North councillor Jean Edwards is joining the fight, along with fellow ward councillors Joy Garner and Dave Conway. She said: "All three ward councillors want this school to remain on this site. We can build a new school on this site and use the facilities at Dimensions and Port Vale."