

**PETRA and 'Hands off Haywood High' Community Group meeting
7.00 p.m. Thursday 15th November 2007**

Chair: Roger Miller; Panel: Mark Meredith, Stoke-on-Trent's Elected Mayor, Steve Robinson, Chief Executive, Stoke-on-Trent City Council

Chair introduces himself, gives evacuation procedures, explains purpose of meeting - to discuss future of Haywood Engineering College - and introduces the panel.

Joan Walley addresses the group, before attending the formal consultation session at Brownhills School. She believes that we (all interested parties) must find a way through the very, very difficult situation which faces our schools. She is glad we invited the Council to the school, and is sorry that SERCO are not present at the meeting, as they have drawn up the schools' proposals. Joan realises that Stoke-on-Trent desperately needs the £200 million to invest in school buildings, as this is the best opportunity in our lifetimes to improve education. The problem is that the devil will be in the detail in the final expenditure proposals. SERCO will look at and take forward, or amend, the existing proposals. The MPs for the city - Joan, Rob Ffello and Mark Fisher - don't feel that the current suggestions serve the best purposes of the city. They feel that the proposals are a number crunching exercise. An exercise that is right for Knowsley and Northamptonshire isn't necessarily right for Stoke-on-Trent.

It is important that projections of live births, numbers of children in pre-primary and secondary schools are accurately reflected. 13.6% of Stoke-on-Trent children are educated outside the city, in other Staffordshire schools. Each of these children is worth £4,600 per year to the education system, so we want to allow them to return to Stoke-on-Trent schools. The regeneration work and growth of live births and education within Stoke-on-Trent schools will lead to civic pride in Stoke-on-Trent, encouraging future leaders and enabling issues which arise across the city to be dealt with by people across the city.

SERCO are sure that their projections are right, no matter how many times they are questioned. The resulting proposals have to be right for the North, Central and South of the city. Students may prefer to go to school in Kidsgrove or Biddulph, rather than travel to Longton or Thistley Hough. (This relates to students not wanting to travel outside 'their' area).

The other issues that Haywood has are the building plans, on-site City Learning Centre and the mentoring and other programmes which Yvonne Jeffries started with the 'Aim Higher' project. The community link into the school must be recognised. The pre-consultation hasn't been successful in achieving something that will work for the whole city.

Joan Walley gives her support for Haywood, as she sees how it's transformed things. If SERCO were present, she'd say we could make the site big enough, using Dimensions and Port Vale as the sports facilities we're crying out for. This must work towards the right configuration for *all* schools across the constituency. The three city MPs are concerned to ensure that the current proposals are not set in stone, and that a rethink is given to new proposals, as Stoke-on-Trent is not like Knowsley. Joan believes we owe it to ourselves to get this right; that all Heads and governors hold schools in trust for the next generation and that this is the 11th hour, and we are not where we need to be. We should be big enough to find a way through, but we don't know what that way is. Joan is committed to finding this way through for Haywood.

Mark Meredith responds: Thanks Joan, welcomes the opportunity to be here and is happy

to see so many people. States that education is vital to the city. The current decisions determine the next two or three generations of the city, so we (the panel) have to listen. He, Steve Robinson, Ian McLaughlan - the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services - and Ged Rowney will be listening to parents and pupils of every secondary, primary and special school in Stoke-on-Trent that will be affected by these decisions. Acknowledged that staff also need to be consulted. The discussion of the reasoning behind the proposals and decisions started this Monday. Everyone should read a copy of the proposals document (this was displayed), which is the favoured way forward for education in Stoke-on-Trent. This booklet currently contains four options. Listening to parents, pupils and the Trade Unions may lead to listening to more options.

This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to invest in secondary education in the city. £200 million is being given towards a rebuild. Student numbers have fallen from 16,000 11 to 16 year olds in the city in 2002, to 13,000 today, with the trend set to continue to 2015. We know the figures, because we know how many people have been born in the city, and there is a 23% decrease from 2002. This means we can no longer afford or accommodate 17 schools in the city across the next 20 or 30 years.

New, sustainable, affordable, excellent, striving schools are to be built - 7 new secondary schools, plus one which is already built - Sandon High School, in the south of the city - 2 new special schools and to refurbish 6 other secondary schools in the city. Also, those schools are going to be slightly different to the way schools are run at the moment, in the sense that those schools should either be City Academies, Trust schools or Voluntary Aided schools. This means that the Governors will control premises, employ staff and decide on school policies. We will have a family of schools, but a network of independent institutions, that will give parents and pupils choice to go to your local school, or another type of school in another part of the city.

That is the type of network of schools that we're striving to create. The main proposal which we're putting forward is 12 secondary schools in Stoke-on-Trent, instead of 17, with four special schools; all of those schools to be either academies, trust schools or voluntary aided schools, with between 900 and 1200 11 to 16 places. Therefore we have to reduce the number of schools, and I know that's going to be very difficult. That's why we're here tonight, to try and listen to you, as local people to this area. The consultation period ends mid-January 2008, when proposals likely to be acceptable to Government have to be put forward. We'll only be able to spend that £200 million, if the proposals that we put forward are acceptable to the Government and Government ministers.

We've been discussing re-organisation for the last couple of years. The last proposal, for 15 secondary schools, was unacceptable to the Government. That wasn't an acceptable number, nor an acceptable spread of the type of schools. At the end of the day, we hope to get the vast majority of agreement of our local councillors, our local MPs and of the vast majority of parents and pupils in this city. It is important to get the vast majority of hearts and minds in the city, because it's a wonderful opportunity to rebuild and take us up the league table. Our 147th of 150 local authorities, in quality of attainment in schools, can't continue. We have to give every young person in Stoke-on-Trent the best chance that education can provide.

Questions from floor:

Gentleman: "There is a lack of information as to who SERCO are. The only information parents have had is from Mr. Dickinson, the Headmaster here. Is the £200

million SERCO's money? Are SERCO in charge of the Council? Can you explain the relationship with SERCO and exactly who they are?

Steve Robinson responds: I have been Chief Executive of the Council since October 2006. When I had been in office for three days, Beverley Hughes called me to a meeting in London - as Children's Services in Stoke-on-Trent were not good enough - which was to lead to Government intervention. The Government and Council jointly appointed a Senior Management Team. There is a three-year Council contract and "**SERCO are accountable to the Council**". They will oversee, drive and manage change in Children's Services. SERCO have no interest or involvement in Academies. Their contract ends in 2010. The 5-6 year rebuild process will not all include SERCO. We're here today to listen to concerns, so we can take them into account on the 29th to find a way through that's approved by the Government.

Chair: Will you recognise this meeting as a formal community consultation meeting?

M Meredith responds: Yes.

Mr. Robert Adams: Gave some of the history of the site. "I saw this school built, I'm not prepared to see it ... pulled down. Education should not be in the hands of politicians, who can be voted out next week. Education should go back to teachers and Headmasters, who know what education is about." (Sustained cheering and clapping)

M Meredith responds: I couldn't agree with you more. These proposals are about taking education out of the hands of politicians. These proposals will deliver, I think, what you're asking for. For the last 30 or 40 years, the local council has controlled education - whether that be Conservative or old Labour. I can only pass opinion on education for the next decade in the city. The proposals create independent institutions across Stoke-on-Trent, where parents, pupils, educationalists, businesses, colleges, universities help make schools better, independent, autonomous organisations. Interference by semi- or un-qualified politicians is not good.

Helen Wallace: We are a Foundation School, moving towards self-management. Ofsted called us 'excellent'. Why, in the light of this, are you closing us?

M Meredith responds: That's excellent. We are not trying to close schools, but to open 12 brand new schools (heckling). It is not in the proposals, the intention of closing, permanently, good schools in the city. Tough decisions will lead to 5 schools less. We have no intention to close some and leave others open. That's why we want to close *all* and re-open 12, which parents and pupils will work together to create.

Mr. Turner: Mr. Meredith made a point about money for schools, and building to improve education. Staff commitment and school ethos improve education, a new building will do nothing for that.

M Meredith responds: This is not purely about buildings, but what goes on in them. Nevertheless, buildings are important, and some in the city are clearly not good enough. I'm

ashamed that some schools are crumbling around pupils and teachers. Not this one, but there are some schools like that, because there has been a lack of investment for 30 or 40 years. There need to be fantastic buildings, inspiring architecture, airy, light and modern, with modern equipment - like Sandon High School, which has an Entrepreneurship specialism, where students have the chance and facilities to start their own manufacturing and retail businesses. Also, the new schools need to be open to the local communities (heckling) and to be open for extended hours, like parts of this school are, with the ICT Centre. Not everything about the existing schools is bad, but the new schools will be better.

Jay Gardiner: Earlier, you said the number of school closures is based on birth rates. The Government housing figures state that, until 2020, they must build 235,000 new houses per year to deal with growth in the British population. If the country is growing, what's so different about Stoke? The £200 million could be better spent on refurbishments. Also, do birth rates reflect new people coming into the city, like me from London?

M Meredith responds: The UK population increase doesn't necessarily reflect in Stoke-on-Trent. There will be a 23% decrease in 11 to 16s. As far as housing predictions are concerned, planning and demand is known. Several thousand homes are due to be demolished and rebuilt, leading to about 2,000 actual *new* houses. Migration *in* has been calculated, with 5% spare capacity built into the proposals.

You say that with academies, the community and governors will work together. Is it right that, of a governing body of 13, 7 will be the sponsors, one parent will be allowed and no teaching staff or members of the school will be allowed to have a say?

M Meredith responds: Over the next few years there will be flexibility. When Academies first appeared, private sponsors had to invest up to £2 million in the institution, this has been reduced. We need serious discussion with Higher Education institutions, as these organisations have expressed interest in sponsoring academies. If local universities, FE colleges or the Council were sponsoring the school, surely their expertise would be valued?

Roger Miller: I would like to give a response to an earlier question about the Head's lack of presence. The Head felt that it would be inappropriate to attend and influence the meeting.

Lady: Could I ask Mayor Meredith how much research he himself, the Council or SERCO has done - visiting schools, seeing facilities, speaking to staff and students - before the proposals were produced? Ged Rowney said he would come to our school and meet, he hasn't honoured that.

M Meredith responds: I have visited a couple of times in a couple of years (heckling). I feel it is important that those people visit all of the schools. I personally will visit one school in the North, South and Centre and a Special and a couple of Primary Schools between now and Christmas. The same promise will be made by the Cabinet Minister for Education, Ged Rowney and SERCO colleagues. Between us, every single school will be visited. We are listening to the points of view of everyone through consultation.

Mr. Connolly: My daughter came to Haywood in September 2007 and was in the set above bottom. Within 6 weeks, with help and support, she is now in the top set. The statistics I've given out are Chloe's SATS predictions. The average in CATS tests was 90%, Chloe scored 115% and 114. If that's not teachers pulling their fingers out and pushing students, I don't know what is.

Chloe Connolly: My set change has improved my confidence, challenged me and I owe the teachers thanks for bringing out the best I can do.

Mr. Connolly: If you want to help the school and teachers, stop stressing them out. Let them carry on with the job that they're doing here (points to Chloe). (Sustained cheering and clapping)

Mrs. Chapman : This school is excellent. My son's on the SEN register in Year 8 and is doing fantastic. I don't know if you've ever been in a school that's closed, but I have, and the morale is s**t. This school does not need to be closed, it has dragged itself up. Come here day in and day out, to see just what the teachers do. Many pupils come here below average and leave above average. The confidence instilled in pupils is amazing. Look seriously at what you're doing before you suggest closing this school.

Hugh Irvine: Question and immediate answer, if you don't mind. Joan Walley said SERCO didn't listen to her. SERCO is accountable to the Council, the Council to the electorate, therefore, SERCO to the electorate, am I right? Convey the message to Ged Rowney that SERCO *must* listen and will fail if they don't.

M Meredith responds: The consultation is to listen to people like Mrs. Chapman We know the stats, but know that consultation is about people.

SERCO and the Council have made a commitment to listen, and *want* to listen and take comments on board, so the final proposals - as the booklet only contains favoured options - take them into consideration and discussions may lead to us taking on practical alternatives.

S Robinson: We are in a process of formal consultation and we want to be clear on how you want the proposals to change. At the moment, am I to understand that you don't want *any* change? **(Collective 'No' from floor)**

Well, that's a start, how do you want the proposals to change?

Several years ago, proposals were made to change from 17 to 16 schools. There was a message from the Government to review these proposals. This review led to the new proposals. How should the proposals be changed?

(Shout of "investment, not demolition" from the floor)

Cllr. J. Garner: I'm speaking to you as a local resident, an aunt of someone who goes to this school and a relative of an ex-member of staff. I'm a local Councillor to this area, along with Jean Edwards and Dave Conway - who gives his apologies that he can't be here tonight. The £200 million must be spent wisely. I don't want to see the school moved from this site, but we would love to see a brand new school on this site (clapping and cheering from floor). It's true that with bad teachers in a good school, nothing's going to change. With good teachers in a magnificent school, fantastic things happen.

Myself and Jean met another Councillor and an officer by Acreswood Fields last

week. We were told Bank Top and were under the impression this was by Bank Top stores. The fields they intended were Acreswood, going towards Bradeley. There are methane pipes on Bank Top and the officer agreed it would be costly to deal with them - how much of the £200 million would be spent on them? We need to tell them (the panel) what we want on this site, because over there is nowhere near this community. 'Building Schools for the Future' suggests rather than spending money on schools for the day and community centres for night, you combine the two. This school has the CLC, but needs to be used as a community centre more regularly. I question figures, when we know we're attracting people from commuter belts - when we talk about 15 and 20 years away, we'll have a bigger problem and we need to think for the future.

Bycars Field and Dimensions are there to be used. "Why can't we rebuild on the same site? We've done it before, and that's what I think we should do. "

Lady with two children at school: There is no reason to build a new school. I agree that this school could be improved with buildings. Norton School was re-built while the school was open. You can do the same, and keep Haywood School open. I don't want a school on my doorstep. I've got a school here, and I'm happy with it. It's not the building, it's the people who work there who give education.

M Meredith responds: I agree. Where possible, schools should be kept in the heart of communities. I hope there is a problem of over-expansion in the future, but every year of the last decade, 1,000 people have left the city per year. (heckling). "Some schools can and will be built on the same sites." "In this school, I know a lot of things happen in this place."

J Garner: Have surveyors been up to Bank Top today?

M Meredith responds: I don't know. (Heckling)

We have the education of the whole city to reform. Views are important and we will listen to them all.

Mr. Connolly: Mr Mayor, we voted you in, we voted Joan Walley in. Why not give us a chance to vote on if we want to keep the school or not? (Clapping) Can you give me eye contact? I gave you a form ten minutes ago, my daughter's name was on that form - what was her name? Chloe. Surname? You say you've been here and met students on a couple of occasions, but you've just met my daughter and can't remember her name. Thank you for your time, but please give us a chance.

Mr. Flint: I'd like to address the meeting as a resident of the area; as a parent of two children due to come to this school and as a local employer for two engineering companies in this area. This school has been a unique Engineering College since the 1960s, why change it? I came round this school for the first time a couple of weeks ago, as a parent. I learnt more in that time than I learnt in 5 years in my high school, so why do you want to shut it?

Gentleman: Our children started school in the city at Meir Primary School. They were doing really well until they merged two schools together. The building is fantastic, but the trauma that it caused meant a lot of children dropped. If the school was rebuilt -

here or on another site - could we guarantee no disruption and drop in education? At Meir, there was no money left for extra costs. Could we guarantee that there'd be enough money for the full facilities at the new school?

M Meredith responds: It is not our intention or desire to create a school nearby, worse than this one. We want to take on board the best qualities, if the school needs to move to a new, bigger location. We'd hope this movement wouldn't lead to a drop in attainment. There can be no cast iron guarantees, but a drop would be unacceptable. 12 schools from 17 requires planning. Pupils in schools on existing sites may complete exams on existing sites, whilst new schools are rebuilt.

Lady: I've moved from Wales, where they've kicked SERCO out. My son represented Stoke, in Birmingham, as a Young Engineer. He wants to be an engineer, so I moved near Haywood for him. He is in the top 5% in England for Maths. I think this school is marvellous. Have you got children? No? You're taking over what our children want. When you close this school, my son will be in Year 9, 10. You've written that Year 10 children will be left in an empty school to do their exams. Do you think that's right? If that happens to my son, I will sue you.

Sue Reynolds: Going back to the beginning of the meeting, you said that we'd all be issued with a document of the proposals. With the formal consultation in a fortnight, when are we going to receive that document?

M Meredith responds: To go back to the earlier lady, that's why we're here. If that's unacceptable to you, we need to take that back and think it through. We are not going to railroad proposals through. If we weren't in control and couldn't change proposals, I wouldn't want to stand in front of you.

Lady from Wales: Are you in charge of the Council? Surely it's up to you to do what we want, not what SERCO want?

M Meredith responds: We're here to listen to you, teachers and governors, as we are in all schools.

Will you come back to us and have another meeting? If I survive this one, yes.

Student: The teachers here are fantastic. They've changed people's lives. People have got jobs they'd never dreamed of and all these people sitting in front of you are going to leave with GCSEs and bring their children here.

Mr. Slack: Can you tell me what exactly is wrong with this site, why the school cannot be rebuilt on this site, with the existing staff?

M Meredith responds: I'll answer the question about the proposals document. If the document is printed, we'll get them here tomorrow. The technical reasons will be explained on the 29th, when technical staff are present. I understand that new sites have to be slightly bigger for the same number of pupils, do if this school was rebuilt, the site would be too small.

Roger Miller: You can be assured that someone will answer that question in a fortnight.

Jean Edwards: I'd like everyone here tonight to know, your three ward councillors want this school to remain on this site. Under Nigel Rigby, I sat on this school's governing body when the BSF money was discussed. The promise was made that some of that money would be spent *here* to refurbish this school by adding another layer on top and having an extended school. This school is at the heart of the community - fantastic teaching, pupils happy, community happy. We're making a plea that this school stays here. The land across the road is Acres Wood, not Bank Top as the site visit was supposed to be. To develop that land will take a large chunk of the money you've got, because of the levels and methane. I've had a call from a lady saying that surveyors have been on the land today, so ever likely people are aggrieved. Do we need to hear more than parent and student views to convince us? The kids go to Dimensions and we've got Port Vale to work with - accessing them through the bottom gate and across Dolly's Lane.

Lady: A question for Steve - Wasn't it said that people with Special Educational Needs would be more integrated into mainstream school? I visited two larger schools prior to my son coming here. They couldn't provide the statement that my son receives. My son has had a turnaround since he came here, so why would you break something that's already fixed?

S Robinson replies: With the right support and investment, Haywood can be even better than it already is. The question is, is this on this site or another site. Closing schools means reducing the number in the city from 17 to 12. One way is to close all schools one day and open 12 new schools the next day, dealing with all staff on the same day. Our intention is to keep all teachers in the school they're in.

An alternative is to close all schools and re-open some. What would happen to staff then? The point is, we're here to take the proposals forward in an appropriate way.

M Meredith: We value your points of view, and the opinions of Jean Edwards have registered loudly in my mind. We need to take them back to the Council and SERCO. I will give you my promise that I'll take your opinions back and will test and lobby the Council and SERCO with them.

V Keeling: In the proposals, you refer to some schools keeping their specialist status, but not Haywood. This is unacceptable. Please keep our specialism, even if you have to move us.

You proposals will not allow us to keep our over-subscribed numbers. If you re-calculated, you'd see that we'll still be over-subscribed.

Student: The CLC has had a new building. Why waste money knocking it down? Also, it's not just for us, it's for the whole community.

M Meredith responds: The ICT Centre has good facilities, and is important. Thanks for raising the specialism point. I'll take this back and look at it with the proposals.

Sue Kuzubasoglu: Speaking as Director of the ICT Centre, the CLC, I think the links we've built up with the school are very important. How does it work that the CLC is to stay on this site, and the school be rebuilt elsewhere?

Gentleman: Are SERCO teachers, Heads or accountants?

M Meredith responds: SERCO are a mixture of individuals, some teachers, some social workers - helping us to deliver our care for Looked After Children differently - so they are from a mix of backgrounds.

The CLC is important. Thank you for your comments. We will feed back, so our professional education officers can answer your technical questions.

Lucy Welch, Yr 11: Over the time I've been here, I've been involved in Project Aiming Higher. Why have 'Aiming Higher' plans become unacceptable, and why can't they happen?

Amy Slack, Yr 8: If the school's too small, but birth rates are dropping, won't the school be the perfect size in a couple of years' time?

M Meredith responds: That's a good question, and the answer may be 'Yes', so we'll have to go back and look at that. Clearly, the school can house its existing students and could house less.

We'll reply to the other student (Lucy Welch) at the formal consultation, but the overall package to make the school taller was thrown out, as it was not seen to improve education across the whole city.

Representative from Keele's 'Widening Participation' unit: Haywood works very hard on getting 'widening participation' students into H.E. Keele also currently has three trainee teachers within the school and other projects are running between the two. Please rethink the future of Haywood. Modernisation it may need, but you can build up and out.

Samia Haroon: Under the new proposals, I feel the city will be more racially divided. Has this been considered?

M Meredith responds: This is the very last thing we want to see in the city. Government legislation forces us to look at this, as segregation is unacceptable. I think there are tensions on this point, but I think the city is a greater city for its tolerance of those from different backgrounds. Schools like Haywood promote community cohesion, and this should be congratulated.

I promise I'll work with the three MPs on this issue and try and come up with a solution acceptable to the majority of teachers, parents and pupils.

I would advocate the academy programme to promote work like that with Keele, which we need more of, across more schools. If academies promote links between institutions, then this work can only increase and improve.

Julie Rutter: Is the school being moved because of the value of the site to the hospital or builders?

M Meredith responds: We'll check about the surveyors being on site and answer this on the 29th. No discussion has taken place about the value of land here or at Bank Top. I'd estimate that land and building would be more expensive over the road. This is no reason

not to do that, if it leads to a better school. No discussion has been entered into with the hospital or builders.

Lady: So you're saying the land would go to waste? 5 new housing estates are being built across this area, what's to say this wouldn't be another?

M Meredith responds: No, I'm saying there's not - as the lady (Julie Rutter) seems to suggest - an ulterior motive to the move. Of course we'd want to find a useful function for the land.

Lady: The land already has a useful function - this school.

Gentleman: You mentioned at the beginning that this is a chance of a lifetime to improve education. Kids only get one chance of education in their lifetime. I want a cast-iron guarantee that there'll be no disruption. We want change, but also the guarantee that you'll listen to us.

Angela Miller: There are 3,300 schools across the country, and less than 50 academies. Given that academies are still largely experimental, why give Stoke four?

M Meredith responds: We are taking comments back about your existing excellence and need to convince you that we're listening. At the 29th, we will be able to give you answers about academies.

Gentleman: The school currently uses 'Dimensions'. Has this been taken into account when calculating the size of the existing site? Also, a few years ago, Bradeley residents opposed a golf course, so you'll have a fight if you propose a school in that area.

M Meredith responds: Again, we need to look at the site - and all the sites across the city. I hope we have enough time to plan and work with schools, to lead to less disruption during rebuilds or moves. Rebuilding is more difficult, but we'll try and make transitions as smooth as possible.

Julie Montgomery: Please take into account that all staff and community are passionate and make this school work.

Geoff Doyle: Whose decision will it be to look at the proposals - yours (M Meredith); Steve's; SERCOs? My son has been here 18 months. I'm a parent governor who hated school, but I'm proud to be involved with this school and the whole organisation. It's the jewel in the crown of the city's education, and if the jewel is prized out and thrown away, it will be a great opportunity missed.

M Meredith responds: The decision will ultimately be mine and the Chief Executive's. We will need to agree that the proposal in front of us is right and acceptable. Then, take it to Government for them to decide it's acceptable. I am accountable to you, so it's particularly important that I, as your only elected official, take your views back to deliver a step change to education across the city, to improve our 147 of 150 position. One of the reasons for this 147th position, in my view, is that people in my position or similar have been unprepared to

face people, say that education is not good enough and take difficult decisions to improve it.

Karen Ratcliffe: People don't want you to 'listen to', but 'act on'. How can we trust the Council about numbers (population data) when the Government don't know them? Despite the failure of previous LEA's and local governments, we need to build on existing success. Also, as in Sandon, why can't this school be rebuilt on the existing site. The children should come first in this.

M Meredith responds: The figures have come from the Audit Commission and National Statistics Office, not just the Government. The details will be provided on the 29th, the point of tonight is listening.

It's impossible for me to deliver the same answer you want for your school to all those 17 schools...

Karen Ratcliffe: but not all schools have a good Ofsted with outstanding features

M Meredith responds: No, I'll take this back to be discussed.

Jay Gardiner: As an Arts consultant, I work in around 70 schools, and many of these are super schools. What I've found is that these seem soulless. The staff and community here have passion, giving happier kids, which means they learn better. What about 15 or 16 schools with reduced class sizes - in line with reduced birth rates - ? Wouldn't that make a tasty proposal to go back to the Government with?

M Meredith responds: We don't want to go for super schools, as we are a city made up of 6 towns - but 40 or 50 small communities - and a narrow North to South city. We have peculiarities here. Coventry has gone for 7 super schools of 1700 pupils. I'll agree, soulless, with no guarantee of better education. It's debatable, but the optimum size of school for delivering today's curriculum is seen as 1000 to 1200, similar to Haywood. We are *not* proposing 6 super schools. We are proposing that no-one is more than two miles away from a school, but may be further from their current school. We want schools that are super in performance, not in size. Ultimately, the Government would throw out a proposal for 16 smaller schools.

Year 7 student: We had a respect assembly the other day. I don't think you have any respect for this school. My teachers (listed) are great.

Lady: Burslem is under a regeneration scheme. We are trying to attract new businesses, as we've lost enough big businesses. We want jobs, so we move. You're creating 5 new housing estates. Decent education makes people move to areas. Well, we have the education and you're bringing the houses. Part of the £200 million should be invested in our kids, but we want this excellent education in this site, with these links. We've seen enough change in this area, and we enjoy sending our kids to this school, knowing they're safe and secure and receiving excellent education.

Lady: Norton Primary School was rebuilt half the size of the existing school. Can you go and look at their plans and come back and tell us this site isn't big enough?

M Meredith responds: Thanks to our Chair, we had to be here, he didn't. Enormous progress has been made, as I'll listen to and take back all your valuable points, some of

which weren't on the agenda and are on the agenda now.

I've taken a lot of flak for my decisions in 2 and-a-half years in this elected position, including the decision to invest in Port Vale. I thought it better to agree to a £2.5 million loan to secure a respected local institution's future. The City Council had previously supported Stoke City and I hope some people here respect me for the difficult decision to support Port Vale - who, in turn, support our community with their Children's Centre and so on. I do not shy away from difficult decisions.

I've heard that you accept that change needs to take place and I thank you for that. I'll take these views back, and to other schools where parents haven't had the 'Hands Off' campaign or the chance to articulate their feelings as you have. I respect everything that you have said tonight. I'll take that back. You'll have to go through another meeting in two weeks, with some uncomfortable proposals, but we will listen, to achieve what's most appropriate.