

Your Ref: C/ARAG/FB/LE
Our Ref: ARAG/FB/2013_06_21

Development of the MMU Site in Alsager

Dear Ms Bruce,

Thank you for your letter of 12th June. There are a number of issues raised in our previous letter which were not covered in your response.

As you point out, we are disappointed with the lack of support for our UTC proposal from the Town Council and Cheshire East. We are of course aware that National Government cannot impose UTC sites on communities and we agree with you about the positive attributes of an Alsager base for a UTC.

We feel there is a compelling case for the Alsager Campus to be used to improve educational facilities in Alsager because of the imminent increase in school leaving age, the efficient use of public assets and the strongly held views of the community.

We understand that Cheshire East wants a UTC on its own land in Crewe and that their University partner will be MMU. It seems unlikely therefore that the MMU would support a second UTC site in Alsager, given their stated desire to 'dispose of their Alsager assets'. Crewe of course already has significant provision for further education with substantial spare capacity on the MMU Crewe College site and Alsager now only has its 6th form. Staffordshire University has expressed a willingness to support a UTC in South Cheshire through its Engineering department located in Stoke On Trent. It would be a tremendous shame if this opportunity were to be ignored.

We see the MMU site as a once in a lifetime opportunity to deliver lifelong education, health and well-being benefits for current and future Alsager generations. Although these views are reflected in the Alsager Town Plan and the emerging Cheshire East Local Plan, there are no concrete proposals or plans to deliver these benefits to Alsager.

The only plans of which we are aware are focussed on saving some sports facilities and sprucing up the Leisure Centre. We strongly feel this does not go far enough to fulfil the expressed wishes of Alsager Residents. We hope that any discussions or 'deals' made about the future of the MMU site are consistent with these wishes and the Town Plan.

We believe that it is indefensible to demolish perfectly good buildings erected and maintained using public money and we hope you would agree with that position. We have had substantial feedback from our members supporting our views and in particular supporting the idea of a UTC on the MMU campus.

ARAG has undertaken a number of Freedom of Information requests and we have acquired knowledge of exactly how much public money has been invested in the MMU Alsager Campus and in the transfer of those facilities to Crewe. Fortunately some sources have been more informative than the MMU response to our FOI request. Of course, the University will also have been receiving Band C funding from HEFCE (Higher Education Funding Council of England) for many if not all of the Alsager-based students and this involves a significant premium for each student over a long period to support the sports facilities required for their degree programmes.

Furthermore, we believe that this situation is inconsistent with the Conservative policies of encouraging 'free schools' and community engagement through Localism. Here we have a community with an educational need, a ready built publicly funded site, University support and strong support from the residents. We fail to see how that can be 'inappropriate' either to central or local government.

We do feel that Alsager is threatened by a large number of speculative building proposals in its area and that Alsager itself is too often overlooked by Cheshire East. As a Key Service Centre, Alsager needs much more investment to serve its community effectively and removing something as significant as the MMU campus and its obvious capabilities and potential for the community works against that. It makes even less sense when one considers the recent '£90m once-in-a-generation scheme to revitalise Macclesfield town centre'.

We are in the process of mounting a substantial campaign where we intend to engage with the whole of the Alsager community. We want Alsager Residents to know what is happening in Alsager and in particular how they could lose such an important Town asset if we don't act now.

You will understand that although we have been discouraged following certain recent actions by those who supposedly represent us we have been tremendously uplifted by the increasing number of Alsager residents / voters who are contacting us on a daily basis offering their strong support. They do want to know why certain individuals are taking the stance they are and we don't intend to give up.

We are being urged by our members to meet with you to discuss these matters further and if you think that is appropriate we would be happy to arrange another meeting. In the meantime will publish our correspondence on the web site, to keep our members informed.

Yours faithfully,

ARAG Officers:

President:	D.Bould
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www.alsageraction.org.uk