

The Orchard,
37 Dunnocksfold Rd
Alsager
Stoke On Trent
ST7 2TL
29/06/2014

Our Ref: ARAG/FB/2014_06_29

Dear Fiona,

Following our recent telephone conversation I have now had time to discuss its content with the ARAG executive and members of the project team.

Your main points were:

- You wanted to be honest and direct with ARAG.
- A UTC in Alsager will not happen. It is being blocked by Cheshire East and in particular, Michael Jones. Cheshire East will only consider a UTC for heavy engineering in Crewe.
- You consider that you have been badly treated by Cheshire East over the MMU site and will discuss that with the Cheshire East Chief Exec.
- You don't think that Michael Jones' position on the ARAG proposal has any political support or involvement external to Cheshire East.
- Ministers will not intervene because of the Localism Act.
- You have always been a champion of this project and the breakdown in communications between ARAG and yourself was an unfortunate misunderstanding, probably miscommunication between yourself and your constituency office.
- In your Local Plan submission to Cheshire East, you have fought strongly for the inclusion of education.
- You didn't communicate with ARAG because you thought that your office was arranging a meeting with ARAG.
- Involvement of the press is regrettable
- You hoped we could put this behind us and move on.

It appears to us that your main concern is around who is to blame for blocking this proposal and public perception of your position, especially now that the press has been involved. Our main concern is that our elected representatives and the MMU refused to back a widely supported, Community driven opportunity to deliver high quality education and 500 jobs to Alsager. This proposal is a **once in a lifetime opportunity**. It is the best and only opportunity for jobs in Alsager since 1954 when Twyfords located here. In our locality, we have lost most of our major employers: Twyfords, MMU GEC and ICL, the very reason why Alsager grew so substantially in the first place in the 70s. This politically motivated position determines and demonstrates that we are condemned to be a dormitory town.

In correspondence of 1/3/2014, 14/3/2014 and 21/3/2014, we informed you of the opportunity to bring 500 jobs to Alsager and the need for immediate action to retain our committed major industrial sponsor. Lord Baker told us that a UTC focussed on IT with a major industrial sponsor was appropriate and compelling and there was no reason why an Alsager UTC could not operate alongside one focussed on heavy engineering. We delivered a world class sponsor, which wanted to buy the site in order to establish a UTC and an IT development centre.

Our letters and e-mails asked for your urgent help and intervention. Despite the obvious urgency from our letters, we were unable to solicit any supportive response from you, Cheshire East or MMU. Our letters were ignored, promises of calls back were not fulfilled and meetings were cancelled. We concluded from this and other sources that we had been blocked politically and abandoned. You have confirmed that view.

Michael Jones has clearly blocked this proposal but we find your claim that ministers will not intervene because of the Localism act unbelievable. This proposal is Localism in action and consistent with most government key objectives. The Alsager Community presented a proposal which would have delivered:

- development of a site and preservation of facilities which had been developed with substantial amounts of taxpayers' money
- a UTC and vastly improved education possibilities
- 500 jobs
- mixed use housing
- a residential community for the elderly
- major health and well-being benefits including a sports hub

It has been ignored and actively blocked.

You have access to Secretaries of State such as Pickles and Gove who intervene on a daily basis on all sorts of issues, so why not here when this is such a compelling case? David Cameron frequently has said he wants a UTC in every town and he makes great play of creating new jobs. Perhaps he should be advised to say "a UTC in every town and new jobs except for Alsager". Michael Jones clearly has high level political support for his actions. Why else would your party stand by and allow him to behave in this way?

In condemning this proposal to the waste bin and with Cheshire East's determination to build anywhere, which is driven by your party, Alsager will lose 500 jobs, an educational establishment and its facilities, the opportunity to deliver a prestigious UTC and it will gain 2,000+ houses with no meaningful infrastructure improvement.

This has all happened on your watch.

We would have expected you to fight “tooth and nail “ for this opportunity but in your Local Plan submission to Cheshire East, from a 5 page document, there are only 7 words on education. The Local Plan still states that the MMU facilities will be moved to Crewe, these 7 words have been ignored. We do not consider that 7 words in a 5 page document “champions the project” or demonstrates that you have “fought strongly for the inclusion of education”.

Your submission is focussed on retention of the playing fields and the ASRA proposal and although taking ideas from the ARAG mixed use proposal, it neither mentions the ARAG proposal or the benefits it would bring to the Community. We have never been negative about the ASRA proposal but you are aware that a clear objective of the ARAG proposal was to secure the site and its facilities for the Community through the infrastructure, capabilities and financial commitment of a major industrial sponsor and a university. We are concerned that the proposal you support is only a holding position for the developer and that phase 2 will move facilities from the site and bring more houses. This would be consistent with Cheshire East’s behaviour and stated intent.

We created a vision which we know will be developed by our sponsor, they will now go on to bring prosperity to another community on another site. Another company is also looking carefully at our proposal with a view to its development elsewhere but sadly not Alsager. The basis for our sponsor’s engagement was to establish an IT development centre immediately employing 300 people but equally important to them was the establishment of a UTC alongside this hub which would enable them to train and educate young people within a “grow your own” programme. This demand and these jobs exist now. The spin off for our community from such a project would have been enormous for both the economy and the delivery of education at all levels throughout the town. As it is, we will be surrounded by Stoke On Trent and Manchester UTCs implementing our model.

In recent days, Michael Jones and the Town Council have claimed they could not support the ideas due to lack of a business plan. The Town Council in fact voted not to discuss it. This demonstrates little understanding of the UTC application process or the benefits this project could have delivered. To impose a business plan of ours onto a globally influential company would be, to say the least, insulting. Given their spending power and capabilities, it must be assumed that they know what they are doing. The fact that M.Jones did not even attempt to engage with them by whatever means shows his utter disregard for the welfare of one of the Communities for which he is responsible.

The plan we developed together with local businessmen and planning professionals who freely devoted significant amounts of time, energy and money, includes a mixed development and housing across all needs. It was scrutinized by our principal industrial partner and in fact formed the basis for them wishing to purchase the MMU site. This site would have been developed very quickly as the company wanted early access for the IT hub. We also have correspondence with the MMU financial director showing that he was informed our sponsor was interested to purchase the site.

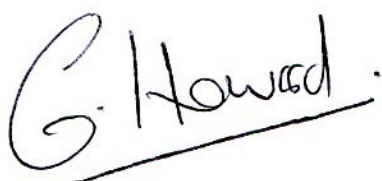
The important questions are very simple:

- Why would our elected representatives ignore an opportunity to create 500 jobs in Alsager?
- Why has Cheshire East ignored the MP and will not consider or even evaluate a “compelling” UTC in Alsager?
- If an MP can not facilitate change or influence ministers when a situation is so compelling, why would anyone support that MP?

We received our mandate from the people of Alsager. For the first time ever we put something into every home to get their views and we received overwhelming support. We now consider it incumbent on us to tell this story fully and as widely as possible. We owe this to all who have given us their support and assistance.

Yours faithfully,

on behalf of ARAG officers: Derek Bould, Rafe Wakelin and Chas Howard
and the independent Alsager Councillor Prof Derek Longhurst

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "C. Howard." The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line.

Charles Howard - Alsager Action Group (Chairman)

www.alsageraction.org.uk