

Dear Sir, - With reference to your article 14<sup>th</sup> August about the approval of a University Technical College (UTC) for Crewe.

As a resident of Alsager I am conscious of the enormous effort over two years that went into the detailed proposal for a UTC in Alsager and the way that the Alsager Residents Action Group (ARAG ) were apparently, deliberately misled and ultimately betrayed, by Cheshire East Council, ARAG's generous and positive comments can only be admired. Without wishing to disparage the prospects for Crewe's UTC, other Alsager residents are not so magnanimous over the way their town has been treated by both Cheshire East and by the MMU over this and other issues. There is still a great deal of real anger. And many other people in Alsager are *still* unaware of what has happened and what the town has been deprived of in terms of jobs (at least 500 - mostly high status), educational choice - and a revived local economy!

Michael Jones, Leader of Cheshire East Council has rather given the game away with his references to 'connectivity' and 'rebalancing the economy'. Where have we heard these buzz-words before? As many have long suspected, the bid for a heavy engineering UTC in Crewe is actually all about Mr Jones' obsession with the Tories widely opposed and ridiculed HS2 vanity project. The fact that Alsager's proposal for an IT specialist UTC was believed to be far better (and thus much more likely to succeed) than Crewe's bid was obviously considered to be irrelevant. Where in fact will the Crewe UTC find sufficient numbers of students of the right calibre? The leader of Cheshire East Council is clearly determined to make a name for himself with his misguided support for HS2 and nothing and, it would seem, no one was going to be allowed to get in his way. The irony is that a UTC in Alsager would have complemented the one in Crewe. It is not as if Alsager and Crewe would have been in direct competition. Students cannot (or should not) be forced to take up *either* engineering *or* IT if they are not interested. They should have a choice. As well as engineers, apparently, there is a desperate shortage of trained IT professionals which the Universities are not providing, hence the interest and support of the lead sponsor for Alsager's bid, an as yet un-named (for legitimate business reasons, I understand) major international IT company.

One of the reasons why this IT company wanted to set up shop (alongside a UTC) in Alsager is our already excellent connectivity – road and rail! Any local business man (except those with a vested interest of course) who travel regularly by train, especially to London, will tell you that that the existing service does not warrant the building of the extravagant white elephant which is HS2. Comments made, for example, by Tory MP John Redwood about his train journey(s) from London to Manchester for the last Tory conference back this up.

Most of the arguments about capacity and speed do not stand up to close scrutiny and any further improvements to both capacity and speed on the West Coast Mainline can be carried out at far less cost and certainly without the enormous disruption, massive damage to the environment, homes and businesses that HS2 will cause.

There seems to be very little doubt that the UTC proposal for Alsager and the involvement of a major IT lead sponsor were blocked by Cheshire East Council for political reasons and by the MMU which of course is involved in Crewe's UTC. Furthermore, it does not take a great leap of imagination to suspect that Chancellor George Osborne (the chief proponent of HS2 who has also expressed the need for a specialist college to train railway engineers!) must surely have been at least supportive of the shadowy and sordid machinations of our Conservative-controlled Council. This might also explain why our MP, Fiona Bruce abruptly stopped communicating with the Residents Action Group back in February after saying that Cheshire East had blocked the UTC. Indeed, one can only speculate about what promises or threats must have been used - both locally and in Westminster - to silence *anyone* who had or might have, supported Alsager's proposal. In today's less than democratic political climate, nothing would surprise me. The only consolation now is that those who have let us down and any lies they have told, will I earnestly hope, be eventually exposed.

The views expressed regarding HS2 are my own, I understand that Alsager Residents Action Group has not indicated its position on this subject.

Yours faithfully,

Miles Palmer