

Alsager Chronicle

23rd September 2014

Dear Sir,

Why weren't the town council consulted over new technical college?

I am responding to your article in the Alsager Chronicle (Thursday 18th September) based largely upon the misleading assertions contained in Councillor Derek Hough's letter (**Accepted five-year supply is the key**) published in the same issue. Normally I would not involve myself in this sort of nonsense. It is clear from his letter, however, that Councillor Hough's continuing purpose is to cast doubt on the credibility and integrity of the proposals that were developed by the MMU site project team. This was a group that worked hard to generate a plan for the MMU site that was exactly in line with the adopted Town Strategy and Local Plan for 'mixed use'. For those of your readers who would like an open and factual account of what was involved in this project I would urge them to consult the Alsager Residents Action Group website (<http://alsageraction.org.uk/the-mmu-site/>) where they will find a full and detailed report that will counteract the twisted 'logic' of Councillor Hough's letter.

Since Councillor Hough is fond of asking questions, here are a few for him to answer in relation to his account:

The voluntary group who put together the MMU proposals – of which a University Technical College was one element – did so in their own time and at their own expense in an attempt to bring both employment and educational benefits to the whole community of Alsager. We also sought to preserve the sports facilities and to include purpose-built accommodation for the elderly and disabled in a community context. It is interesting to note the early indication from the appointed Developer that it has no plans to include such provision for commercial reasons of profitability. So, then, as an elected representative of our community why did Councillor Hough consider it appropriate not just to NOT support the group but to engage in attempts to undermine the credibility of the project, then and now?

Why did Councillor Hough think it appropriate to publicly denigrate the project at a Cheshire East Council Strategic Planning Board meeting in May 2013 even before the Town Council had publicly debated it? This was particularly striking as the Agenda item under discussion bore no relation to the project.

Why would the Project Team, the University or the Lead Sponsor come to the Town Council for support or consultations when Councillor Hough had led the motion to declare that the Town Council had no remit to consider the proposal and that it should be left to 'the education community' to make any such decisions? This fact alone reveals that Councillor Hough's current position represents hypocritical nonsense. Moreover, he disregards for the sake of his hostile perspective the fact that the Lead Sponsor indicated that it would be prepared to meet with Fiona Bruce MP and Michael Jones or, indeed, Council officers. It was not the lack of will on the part of the Lead Sponsor that resulted in such meetings not taking place. Moreover, Councillor Hough refers to the Lead Sponsor as 'unnamed' with the implication that this is somehow dubious; the Lead Sponsor was named and known to the MP and Cheshire East Council.

Is Councillor Hough now seeking to compound his earlier derogatory attitude to the project by implying that lack of consultation with the Town Council – the same Town Council that had

declared itself redundant in relation to the proposals – now undermines the credibility and integrity of the project? I would remind Councillor Hough that the Project Team conducted a Town-wide consultation at its own expense about the proposals last year and received around 3000 positive responses. Can Councillor Hough claim to have a comparable mandate for his views?

Is Councillor Hough also, typically, operating as a divisive force within the community by suggesting that the interests of Alsager School would not be served by the proposals? Does that mean that Alsager School would have to declare itself opposed to the Lead Sponsor's proposal to establish a Development Centre which would bring 300 IT jobs into the community? Or that it did not support the Proposals for a community village for the elderly and disabled within any residential accommodation that was developed. Contrary to this approach, the Project Team, University and Lead Sponsor made it absolutely clear that Alsager School would be a key partner in the project and that the UTC would not 'stand in opposition' to the School in the absurd way that Councillor Hough claims.

Councillor Hough is perfectly within his rights to argue as he does that he would prefer housing on the MMU site – and our proposals did not exclude some housing in the way that Councillor Hough suggests – but he should not base such an argument on misleading and downright inaccurate accounts of a project on which I and others spent a great deal of time and effort. We did so because Alsager is bearing the brunt of the Cheshire East Council's failure to provide a five-year supply of housing land in the borough as a whole. One thing we are not likely to experience is a shortage of house-building in Alsager in the near future. One thing of which there is already a shortage is jobs or employment opportunities for the future.

Yours sincerely

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