

Dear

I am writing to you as the Young People's Champion for Wigan and for your ability to ask questions in the Wigan Council Cabinet. In addition, the questions I feel need raising in the Cabinet forum on the 30th July will potentially affect your constituents in Golborne. I refer to the open report '**Building Schools For The Future: Stage 1**' On the face of it the Council seem to be giving Lowton a lot of new resources which is fantastic. However all plans need to be tried and challenged to make sure they are robust enough to move forward. This is a huge loan for Wigan Council to take on and any responsible Councillor should be sure that it fulfils its potential. PFI pitfalls are also an issue. Hopefully lessons have already be learnt about jumping on to band wagons **such as 'campus' style schools** like Lowton High that are to be knocked down 35 years later as unfit for purpose. Having very large school campuses may yet fall into that category. Certainly the planning of such schools have already received criticism hence the setting up of a Government managed large project website www.cabe.org.uk . The planning of large schools must be managed carefully. There are a number of things in this document that concern me and you may have already picked similar questions to ask. Would you look at the following:

I found this document via the link <http://www.wigan.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/92016D68-C98B-4B7E-B243-5555F6662CB4/0/07bsfconsultation.pdf>

I am concentrating on the new learning complex on the Lowton Civic Hall site and will limit myself to just two concerns about its size: Lack of future proofing leading to overcrowding, larger impersonal environments and lower educational standards; Inadequate access and travel congestion.

LACK OF FUTURE PROOFING EVIDENCE:

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'Pupil numbers are falling across the borough and it is predicted that, if nothing is actioned, by 2014/15, just 1,564 students will be on roll across both schools which could leave one of he schools with up to 35% surplus places. The proposed new admission number has been estimated by taking into account all of the non-Catholic children that live in Golborne, Lowton and Pennington that will require a place at the school for the foreseeable future.'

Question 1:What specific years are being referred to in this foreseeable future? The year 2015 is the furthest view mentioned in this document.

Question 2:Why have Catholic children not been taken into account? Catholic children/parents may to come to the Lowton site because of parental unrest at **St Aelred's RC High** closing and merging with another school further away.

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'For the 2009 reception intake year, every available reception place has been filled across the Lowton and Golborne primary schools. The corresponding birth rate year was not particularly high and this was not predicted. Birth rates relating to all future intake years are higher and the most recent information on birth rates in Lowton suggests that additional places are needed in the future in order to provide sufficient flexibility in provision for any newcomers to the area.'

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'When the schools come together in the new build premises in 2012, it is predicted that there will be more than 300 students in years 9 to 11. However, the flexibility of the premises and the fact that some students will be accessing off-site curricular activities in Years 10 and 11 will ensure that the school is able to manage the numbers.'

Question 3: The document states the new school will already be too small for the predicted numbers of 300 per year group in Y9-11 and birth rates are already higher than predicted at the primary level. In addition: New housing is planned for the local area over the next 5/10 years; the financial crisis will ensure fewer parents send their children to private schools; child free residents will move out of the area because of traffic congestion. How confident are the planners that we will have falling roles in schools when they seemed to have planned inaccurately only 6 years into the future and only 3 years into the lifetime of the new school?

Possible Question 4: If pupil numbers are not falling as significantly as first thought why are school sites still being closed? Surely some sites need to be maintained so that when pupil numbers rise in the foreseeable future we still have a school near to its community.

INADEQUATE ACCESS AND TRAVEL CONGESTION:

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Hesketh Meadow Lane is relatively straight and approximately 6.5m in width, up to No 11 where the width reduces. Given this arrangement it is considered that Hesketh Meadow Lane can accommodate type and volume of traffic that will be generated by the proposed redevelopment of the site. Increases in traffic on Newton Road are not expected to be significant as a result of the school development on the site.

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'It is proposed that the new school be co-located with a Children's Centre, primary school provision, a library, and health provision and offer extensive community facilities around sport, performing arts and many other activities that meet local need.'

Question 5: The width of Hesketh Meadow Lane reduces to 4.9m. Currently the lane contains terrace housing and residents and staff from the Council Offices (not mentioned in the document) on Hesketh Meadow Lane park on either side of the lane. In effect, this means the lane is reduced to one way and a coach can pass with difficulty at the widest point only. Even without parked cars, two coaches could not pass each other. This Lane will be unsafe for pupils and residents alike. There must be at least two safe entrances, one for primary and for secondary use. Where are safe access points planned?

Question 6: How can all these buildings, additional car parking for staff, parents and visitors and playing areas be accommodated on the current Lowton Civic Hall site? (I can only assume they will try to purchase more land?)

Question 7: The document states the school will already have over the recommended numbers in Y7-9. Over 2000 pupils, staff and visitors will attend the complex twice a day. Over 700 pupils and parents from the Golborne area will have to travel an extra 2 miles through Lowton where intelligent traffic lights cannot tell them to go away and come back later when it is less busy.

How can the document justify the 'Increases in traffic on Newton Road are not expected to be significant' statement?

I hope you have the opportunity to ask some of these questions and I would be grateful for any feedback. This is a huge change to the community and education of our children. It would be a great shame to just nod it through without acknowledging some of the negative consequences.

Regards

Liz Brown, Hesketh Meadow Lane, Lowton