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Dear Sir/Madam

8th Feb 2010

I write to express my opposition to the proposed new school complex on the site of Lowton Civic Hall. The reasons for my objection fall within three areas, namely; the case against a new school, the choice of site, and the choice of access.

The Case Against a New School

I will begin by questioning the need for a new school. I quote the following statements from an article which appeared in the Autumn issue of the Wigan Council magazine 'Borough Life'; ***'schools all over the Borough have a chance to be transformed'; 'parents can be more confident of getting their preferred school place'; and 'schools will become the heart of the local neighbourhoods'***.

The proposal to amalgamate Lowton High and Golborne High schools into a centralized educational establishment would appear to be a blatant denial of these noble and incontrovertible objectives to the residents of the Golborne and Lowton areas. The proposal, if implemented would patently remove these schools from the heart of their respective neighbourhoods and would offer parents less, rather than more choice of preferred school placement, whilst at the same time subjecting the majority of parents and pupils to a longer journey to and from school with the inevitable consequence of greater exposure to traffic congestion and delays.

In the same article, specific mention is made of rebuilding and expanding Hindley High and West Leigh and Bedford High schools. This would undoubtedly improve the teaching environment and enhance the potential for learning. Why cannot the Council apply the same policy to Lowton High and Golborne High schools, thus affording the residents of these areas access to the same improved facilities within their respective neighbourhoods. Recently released exam results indicate that both of these schools are performing very well. My children attended Golborne High school and received an excellent education, going on to gain good degrees at University.

Quoting again from the same article; ***'schools that can help future generations reach their full potential with the latest IT and the best teachers and staff'***. The inference here being that the present teaching standards are less than adequate, and that somehow, rebuilding or refurbishing will improve those standards. I fail to see the link between teaching standards and the fabric of the building in which the teaching is conducted. Teaching standards are depended on personal aptitude and commitment, adequate training and regular monitoring. New schools alone and particularly large amalgams will not transform educational standards. It is the quality of teaching combined with a relevant and appropriate curriculum content which will achieve this objective.

Under the heading ***'The proposed ethos of the new school'*** a Wigan Council notice published in the Reporter on Thursday 14th January lists the following aspirations, ***'teaching which inspires; high standards; high achievements; conduct of the highest order; equality of opportunity and tolerance of different; and education for sustainable development'***. Do we really have to build a new school in order to achieve this ethos? Should not this same ethos be aspiration of our present schools and indeed all schools? Surely the ethos of a school or any other establishment is created not by the buildings it is housed in, but by an enlightened and inspired leadership and a conscientious and dedicated staff.

There are many well documented instances where privately funded schools have closed, leaving local authorities with huge ongoing financial commitments and imposing a heavy debt burden on future generations of ratepayers. The money would be better spent on rebuilding or refurbishing our present schools, to which the very same laudable ethos could be applied.

The Choice of Site

With regard to the choice of Lowton Civic Hall as the site for the proposed new school, the use of this site would destroy the only extensive green area left in this part of Lowton and would deny access to the considerable number of people from the surrounding neighbourhood who have been using it on a regular basis for the past twenty five years as a valued recreational facility. It also provides a habitat for many species of wild life. For these reasons it should be preserved and protected from future development.

The Civic Hall itself has direct historic links with the Second World War, having once been part of the Royal Naval camp HMS Cabbala and is one of few such buildings extant. It should be preserved and part of it dedicated to its historical past to sit alongside its use as a functional community centre. Buildings are a form of immortality, they summon memory and evoke history in a way that books and pictures can never do. To demolish it would be an act of disrespect to those who served to defend our democratic freedom against a tyrannical regime.

Choice of Access

I will now address the choice of Hesketh Meadow Lane and roads on the adjoining estate as routes to the proposed new school, a choice which has caused understandable concern and anguish, not to mention incredulity amongst local residents.

I refer to the Traffic Report commissioned by the Council and conducted by AECOM. On page 5 of that report, under the heading 'Summary Comments' the report states that site visit observations indicate that ***'most children from the three schools tend to walk to school at present.'*** I would accept that this is to be expected since most children live in proximity to the school they attend. However, there follows under the same heading, a significant caveat, I quote; ***'It is considered important to ensure that the proposed new school complex does not change this situation and does not lead to an increase in the number of people being picked up and dropped off for the school.'***

I suggest that it cannot be realistically expected that children who at present walk to a school which is close to home will choose to walk distances of over 2.5 miles from the Golborne area to the proposed new school. It has been suggested that children will opt to cycle to school. I feel sure that you will accept that no responsible parent would allow their child to cycle to school for obvious reasons of safety, and this accounts for the fact that few if any children resort to that mode of transport. The reality is that the majority of children who at present walk to school will instead be dropped off and picked up at the proposed new school. It follows that the requirement set out in the caveat referred to earlier, which forms the basis of the findings of the Traffic Report, cannot be guaranteed, which leads to the conclusion that the findings of the report cannot be accepted as valid.

Routing the volume of traffic which would result from a school complex of this size through the heart of a residential estate would inflict considerable disruption and pose a significant safety risk to residents. It would constitute a serious misjudgment with potentially disastrous consequences. If indeed this is the only route of access available and there is no other alternative, then clearly, this is conclusive proof that Lowton Civic Hall is the wrong choice of site.

For the reasons outlined above, I would implore you to reconsider both the necessity for the proposed new school and in the event of its implementation, the choice of Lowton Civic Hall as its site.

Yours sincerely

Mrs. I. Gillette