

Dear Helen Lockwood,

In March 2017, a high court judge ruled that the process followed by Oldham Council in reaching its decision to grant planning permission to build a new Saddleworth School in Diggle was **unlawful**. The court also heard that the Education Funding Agency (EFA) has always been willing to fund a new school in Uppermill, and would still do so if either requested by Oldham Council or if the current planning applications for Diggle are refused. This was accepted as fact by Oldham Council during the recent Judicial Review.

However, as a Saddleworth resident I am deeply dismayed that, almost four years on, with delay after delay, a judicial review quashing the approval of its planning applications, and planning law and policy against it, Oldham Council are still quoting the same line that Diggle still represents 'the most viable site'. The Diggle site is anything but viable. The facts and evidence which were presented at the Judicial Review hearing are still being ignored by the Council and unreported to its elected councillors.

It is a fact that the Diggle site is fraught with many unresolved statutory and toxic land contamination issues, whereas the Uppermill site is not. It is also true that the complex highways and access issues at Diggle remain unresolved and unworkable whereas at Uppermill (with its six separate access points), there is already good access to the school and good transport links. The numerous issues at Diggle are most likely to lead to long delays. If you want the children of Saddleworth to be accommodated in the new school building in the shortest possible time frame, then building the school in Uppermill on the existing playing fields is the quickest possible solution.

It is also a fact that the costs to support the school move to Diggle have already gone above and beyond what was initially anticipated when the site selection process was undertaken, but there are still numerous as yet unknown costs as a result of unresolved issues – these are most likely to spiral out of control. By contrast, the Council would have certainty over the amount of costs they have committed to in supporting the school to be built in Uppermill.

Residents are confused as to why the Diggle planning applications remain live on the council website. This would suggest that the council are still hoping to push ahead with the Diggle site despite their statutory obligations. It is still within the council's power to request that the planning applications be withdrawn and to call for a revisit of the now acknowledged inadequate site selection process, which should now take into account Mr Justice Kerr's ruling that Uppermill is **a viable and affordable site on which to build the school, which would avoid serious harm to Cultural Heritage and the Green Belt** (as well as avoidance of the other problems associated with the Diggle site e.g. highways issues, flooding & sports pitch issues, protected wildlife issues – all of which remain unresolved).

Refusing the Diggle planning applications will not result in no school for Saddleworth – a myth currently being perpetuated through social media – the funding has been ring-fenced by the EFA to be spent on a new school in Saddleworth at any suitable location. This was the determination by the judge in agreeing that there was a viable and affordable alternative site for the school. Local residents demand that the council take ALL its duties seriously i.e. to schools, communities, the environment, and to local businesses - most importantly listen to Saddleworth residents. In 2013 an independent poll reported that 78% of Saddleworth residents wanted the school to stay in Uppermill; in February 2015, the largest petition in Oldham's history also asked for the school to stay in Uppermill. Between July 2015 and April 2016, 2000 people submitted objection letters to the now deemed unlawful OMBC planning application while only 35 letters supported it. It was because of their frustration that the Saddleworth public funded the legal challenge which led to the recent unlawful verdict.

I now ask Oldham Council to recognise Uppermill as the most viable site to build the new school; to tell the EFA that they no longer intend to acquire the site in Diggle; that the flawed Diggle planning applications be withdrawn by all parties and that the EFA put in a new planning application to build the school in Uppermill without further delay. This, so that Saddleworth will at last get the school it deserves as requested by the majority of residents.

Name: _____ [required]

Address: _____ [required]

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Further comments:

Fill in your name and address over the page and return to local post offices. Alternatively, post directly to Helen Lockwood at the address below:

Helen Lockwood

Executive Director Economy, Skills and Neighbourhoods
Civic Centre, West Street, Oldham, OL1 1UT

helen.lockwood@oldham.gov.uk

Also, consider writing a personal letter to one or all of the following Council Executives and public officeholders – those responsible for initiating the decision-making process on where to locate the school:

Dr. Carolyn Wilkins

Chief Executive's Office
Civic Centre, West Street, Oldham, OL1 1UT

carolyn.wilkins@oldham.gov.uk

Cllr Jean Stretton

Cabinet Member for Economy and Enterprise (Leader)
Civic Centre, West Street, Oldham, OL1 1UT

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Debbie Abrahams MP

Lord Chambers, 11 Church Lane, Oldham, OL1 3AN

abrahamsd@parliament.uk