

DIGGLE COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

To promote a thriving Diggle Village Community
www.digglevillage.org.uk

Minutes of Open Meeting held on 14th November 2013

PRESENT:- Stuart Coleman (Chair), Julie Johnson (Secretary), Ray Withnall (Treasurer) Cllr. Mike Buckley, Cllr. Rob Knotts, Matthew Milburn, Cllr. Brian Lord, Melanie Koen, Nick Cox, Glenise Eason, Charlotte Coleman, Kirsty Jones, Ken McWatty, Duncan Rhodes, Lynda Elmore, Stuart Littleford, Stuart Coulson, Sam Marshall, Paul Marshall, Rachel Wood, L. Calvin Thomas, C Woodward, S Richards, Thomas Robinson, E. Davies, R. Davies, A Cocker, L. Robinson, B. Robinson, M. Stemp, A.E. Gray, Howard Sutcliffe, Truda Sutcliffe, Andy Fletcher, Nick Hill. Andy Friedrich, Roland Heptonstall, Lee Mansfield, Aimee Howarth, Mark Brooks, Alison Weir, Paula Ferris, Susan Jennings, Geoff Wood, Val Carter, James Cruise, John Hewitt, Stuart George, Lesley Brown, Deborah Mooney, Neil Mooney, Brian Lee, Melvyn Taylor, Helen Potter, Mike Potter, Julian Blampied, D.S. Holmes, Dilys Redfearn, Keith Lucas, Tony Ackroyd, Gill Pearce, Judith Simister, Andrew Simister, Pat Lord, C. Fletcher, Paddy Diamond, Rachael Wood, Matthew Wood. Jackie Barrow, J. Grundy, P. Grundy, A. Sandiford, G. Bruce, Barbara Barnes, Vincent Henshaw, Chris Jones, John Askew, Suzanne Askew, Joan Calvin-Thomas, Kathleen Lambert, J.A. Dunne, Mary Jefferies, Marlene Maclean, Liz Iris Burns, Jim Burns, B. Gregson, M. Gregson, A. Baxter, L. Baxter, D. Reid, John Redfearn, Ian Eason, Ross Mellor, T. McNeil, Liz Eason.

1. Apologies

Margaret Hardy, Peter Carter, Graham Redfearn, Royce Franklin, Charles Baumann

2. Minutes of last meeting Signed off as true record.

3. Matters Arising - None

4. Introduction – Guest & Residents

Matthews Milburn – Headteacher, Saddleworth School
Cllr. Brian Lord – Chair of Governors, Saddleworth School
Cllr. Mike Buckley
Cllr. Rob Knotts
Melanie Koen – SDAG

5. Statement from DCA Executive Committee

I'd like to welcome everyone to the meeting and to thank Matthew Milburn, the Headteacher at Saddleworth School, Cllr Brian Lord, Cllr Rob Knotts and Cllr Mike Buckley for taking the time to attend this meeting.

Although this is an open meeting for the DCA I do want to focus on the proposals for a

new Saddleworth School. We will visit all the items on the agenda but expect that they will be dealt with fairly quickly. I hope this is acceptable to the members of the DCA and I'm happy to deal with any outstanding issues after the meeting. As we are due to meet again on December 5th, this should not be a problem.

I'd like to start the discussion by explaining the current position of the executive committee. At the exec meeting last Wednesday it was clear that some members were concerned about the proposal to build in Diggle and that the statement we issued earlier this year needed re-examining. We had stated that we, the DCA, were in favour of a school coming to Diggle if it was sympathetic to the landscape and utilized the brownfield part of the pallet works site. With this statement we added a number of concerns which I addressed in a recent press release. Up to date, none of these have been dealt with or addressed satisfactorily.

Before deciding whether we are for or against proposals to build a new school in Diggle, key concerns have to be addressed and resolved: Is the budget sufficient? If not, how much extra is needed and how will it be found? With opposition growing to building in Diggle should the current Saddleworth School site be re-assessed? Is the identified position of the school on the proposed site in Diggle the best position considering expandability, future usefulness and the historical value of the clock tower? Should the use of green belt be tolerated and does this set a precedent for future development in Saddleworth? Is the problem with the 'traffic pinch point' at the entrance to Diggle being properly considered? In relation to the latter, adding to problems on this already grid-locked section of road without proper consideration, is not acceptable. Drivers entering and leaving Diggle face queuing on a daily basis and residents and pedestrians have to suffer pollution, noise and traffic. Currently there are 2300 people in Diggle, a primary school, a nursery and two industrial sites. Add to this; a secondary school, twelve new houses on Ward Lane and two opposite the chip shop, further development of the Pallet Works, and you begin to see the enormity of the problem.

The conclusion reached by the executive committee is - Until the concerns we raise are addressed, we have no option but to oppose the Diggle proposal.

My aim at this meeting is to establish what the DCA thinks and I'm hoping, after listening to the debate tonight, we will know what our next course of action should be.

I'm going to let our guest speakers speak first then I will open the meeting to questions from the floor. (Order: Brian, Melanie (SDAG), Mike, Matthew, Rob.)

6. Saddleworth School - Debate to determine the DCA's position on current proposal.

Brian Lord – Chair - School Governors

Several years ago Saddleworth School was on the short list of BSF (Building Schools for the Future) programme in Oldham for a school, U shaped, to be built on the front fields on Huddersfield Road in Diggle but plans were not approved and passed due to Government cuts.

A National Committee came to assess the possibility of re-developing the present school site but decided that it would cost too much money. OMBC started looking at sites, (at the present time, schools were costing in the region of £30 million plus) A site in Greenfield, running alongside the canal was considered and seemed a possibility but would need to be a 4 Storey Block, which is not ideal. However, the land was bought by a developer and the only other option was the land in Diggle and then the plug was pulled.

This time around, Saddleworth is the only secondary school under this scheme. We have looked at and evaluated 17 sites and the Diggle site is the only one where the control option worked. Lots of reasons why others were not suitable or not for sale as in the case of Greenfield Paper Mill. An ideal site is 13.5 acres with no split in site, the only option was Diggle. EFA (Education Funding Agency) looked at the existing site and said it was unsuitable.

Architect John Barnes and a Building Contractor , (both with experience in the design of new schools on the BSF programme) together with Mike Buckley have looked into the possibility of building on the existing site. They have come up with a plan that they feel will work. The plans have been passed to OMBC and engineers are looking into this possibility. OMBC say that if the plans are viable the new school will be built in Uppermill.

The reasons not to build on the present site before were, too much disruption and also too expensive. With the plans suggested by John Barnes, Matthew said that he could manage and that it would not be too big a problem.

It would cost £1.8 ml. to replace the present electrical system and the school has other problems, which could result in the closure of the school. We are desperate to make sure that we get a new school. If this means that the school is built in Diggle we hope that residents will work with us to make sure that we get the best for our children.

Melanie Keon – Save Diggle Action Group

I would like to take this opportunity to share with you all the journey we – Save Diggle Action Group have come on so far.

Just to be clear we are not a protest group, protesting against the school being built. We live in a democracy. Due to our democratic right, we as taxpayers are entitled to ask these questions. I am sure that all the fallen that we remembered on Sunday would be very sad at the democracy they fought for if they felt it wasn't respected.

I would just like to comment on recent press statements that inferred whenever a new school (or other large development is proposed you always get a residents action group made up of people who live close by and would be directly affected.

BUT if I could take this opportunity to emphasize that these are not the views of the few. Save Diggle Action Group has had immense feedback through Social Media and also our website. These are not just residents along Huddersfield Road, Diggle, but rather from all over Saddleworth. Businesses in Uppermill are now contacting us, fearful of the

economic consequences of the school leaving its traditional location, centred as it is in Uppermill, the business and economic centre of Saddleworth

A recent poll conducted by the Saddleworth News (nothing to do with us) --- 40% said that the Diggle site is not satisfactory –39% said they would like the school to be placed on the existing site and 12% say yes Diggle is the best option. This poll which has only been running over a week has nearly 1000 votes this certainly is not the views of a few. We are merely asking questions as to why the existing site cannot be used and why Diggle is the only cost-effective option on the table.

The first meeting was held at the Parish Council on 28th Oct, a plea was made by the Save Diggle Action group

The Council was thanked for its forward vision in the 2009/10 Saddleworth Parish Plan which recommended that it should:-

- "Continue to resist building on greenfield sites [sites not previously developed but outside the green belt] and inappropriate development within the green belt"
- "Continue to resist any loss of Green Belt."

It was then asked to support the present campaign to keep the Saddleworth School on the present site and to support the residents in their opposition to the present plans for Diggle.

Councilor Mike Buckley spoke passionately in support of this plea and proposed a Motion that the Parish Council should adopt the resident's position.

Both motions were carried in our favour and we would like to thank the Parish Council for the opportunity to present our feelings and their support.

The voting results of the two motions are as follows:

1) Support the Campaign to retain the new school on the existing site
For. 11 Against 06 . Abstain 1

2) Oppose the building of the new school on the proposed site in Diggle
For. 09 Against. 08 Abstain 1

We then held a teleconference with Debbie Abrahams MP for Oldham East and Saddleworth, She felt unable at this stage to commit to the SDAG campaign in opposing the school being rebuilt in Diggle and admitted that she was taking Oldham Council (OMBC) plans for the re-siting of a new school for Saddleworth "on trust". But after further questioning from SDAG she did agree to assist in gaining speedy access to the pertinent documents relating to why the existing site has been ruled out by OMBC and facilitate a meeting with Cllr Jim McMahan and OMBC to address the group's urgent concerns. SDAG are yet to hear back from Debbie Abrahams and Cllr Jim McMahan.

We then held a second meeting with Saddleworth Parish Council on the 11th November, which 89 residents attended. We again had chance to address the council about how they were going to help us achieve the objections discussed within the last meeting.

Mike Buckley subsequently made an outline presentation to show how the new school could be rebuilt on the existing site given the available space and topography, and potentially well within budget. Mike will be speaking about these details later in further detail.

The Parish Council adopted his proposal to write to Oldham Council requesting a meeting to discuss the plan further in detail.

The voting figures are as follows.

For 12 Against 0 Abstain 6

Councillor Mike Buckley and I met with Matthew Milburn and Councillor Brian Lord on the 12th November 2013. Discussions were based around an option to use the existing Uppermill site.

Mr Milburn has pledged that he will put forward this option to the appropriate bodies and that ultimately he wants to work with the community to achieve what is best for the children.

He is fully committed to having the best interest of the children at heart.

If this option proves to be more cost effective and viable Mr Milburn cannot see any reason why it cannot be considered.

I would like to thank Matthew Milburn and Cllr Brian Lord for taking the time to have these discussions with SDAG

Some of the reasons why we support that the existing site be used -

Location and infrastructure

Currently Uppermill already has the infrastructure to support a large comprehensive school. Removal of the school will undoubtedly impact on Uppermill's economy. Diggle on the other hand, having village status, has minimal facilities and consequently is unable to support a large staff and pupil population

Are we to expect that there will be pressure then to build shops etc and turn Diggle into another Uppermill, finally removing its village character?

This development is not in accordance with the Local Development Plan. This should only be deviated from for very specific reasons.

Near a busy main road, river prone to flood, canal and a railway due to be electrified shortly. What more wouldn't you want near your child's school?

Access and traffic levels

The access into Diggle is narrow and often constricted with the existing traffic flow. All traffic effectively has to enter and leave by the same route. The proposed development will bring high levels of additional private vehicles and buses.

It is also the official Emergency Access Route for the Standedge Tunnel.

No solution to this problem has been proposed.

Environment

According to the Leader of Oldham Council, Councillor Jim McMahon, at the meeting in Uppermill on Wednesday 16th October, the primary reason that Diggle has been chosen is the ability to deliver the site within the tight timetable as set out by the EFA.

That does not mean it is the best site for either the school or Diggle residents. That argument was never made in support of the current proposal.

Construction of such a school will mean the total destruction of the green areas in the valley floor – and once lost will never be recovered.

The proposed Sports Block and Sports Fields are on Green Belt Land, designated as the Huddersfield Narrow Canal Recreation Route (RRI), which includes a public footpath and as such is protected from development. The public footpath would be completely re-routed under the terms of the proposed development.

Flood Risk

Concreting over the field would mean changing a large piece of permeable ground into impermeable ground, so the rain water that currently drains through the soil, will have no choice but to swell Diggle Brook and in turn the River Tame downstream in Uppermill, with inherent risk of flooding. As recently as 2012, normal rain flow increased river levels through Uppermill to an alarming degree.

There are many other reasons that SDAG and others have, these are just a handful.

We want to understand why the existing site cannot be used, what the costs versus the costs of the Diggle site are. For instance we have major sewerage problems in Diggle, there are serious questions being asked about Diggle's ability to cope with sewerage from a new school. New infrastructure would have to be introduced and old systems would have to be improved – I suspect these carry a huge price tag. Uppermill already has this infrastructure in place. They are also due to have a major sewer replacement next Spring which should improve the area's sewerage management. Diggle are not considered within these plans.

This therefore must translate into savings.

We are constantly hearing about the limited budget, which OMBC have and can contribute to this project. It seems common sense and logical to me that therefore if the costs at Diggle far out-weigh the costs at the existing site why can't this be the most viable option. I am sure everybody would agree that any money which we could potentially save by using the existing site could be used by Matthew Milburn and it can go towards the actual build of the school and the furnishings, and towards our children's education.

Our objections are not about whether Saddleworth needs a new school or not. They are based on the view that the proposal is for the wrong location and for the wrong reasons which will result in an inferior educational facility for children's long term future.

A different approach could provide this, without having to divide communities.

Cllr. Mike Buckley

I would like to clarify the confusion regarding the Diggle site

The school would be built along the two larger front fields. To build on the back of the site was ruled out, being too expensive. The rest of the valley is greenbelt.

After the war greenbelt land was deemed valuable land which kept villages from merging together. Playing fields can be built on greenbelt, also changing rooms.

All the playing fields according to the new school would have to be built on greenbelt.

Agricultural land is greenfield and the back of the site brownfield. Brownfield should be built on first according to policy.

The present plan would include the building of a sports hall on greenbelt and the building of a car park behind the terraced houses would also be on greenbelt, this is not acceptable.

The greenfield land is zoned for business use and the Pallet Works site (brownfield) for industrial services.

The statement – ‘school or houses’ is not true.

The owner could put in plans for business use or could apply to change the status for housing. Residents would have the opportunity to object, to keep the land for the purpose of employment.

Possibly 80 – 90 houses could be built but 2/3rd of the site would be protected, the only exception would be for recreation purposes.

This is not an ideal site for a new school and everyone accepts this, including OMBC. but not a lot of choice.

The question of the school being built on the back of the existing site was ruled out due to expense.

We looked at the existing Uppermill site on Google Earth with Architect John Barnes and had professional advice, resulting in coming up with a plan to position the proposed school on the existing playing fields. Discussions took place regarding costs and practicalities.

Diggle site 7.8 acres,

Existing Uppermill site 11.8 acres on steep banks – flat area 8.0 acres.

Government Guide – 13.5 acres but many schools occupy a lot less than this area.

Waterhead Academy is built on 6.8 acres.

The issue is how to build when the children are on site? Technical proposals and costings have been put forward.

Matthew Milburn has an open mind and technical and operational matters are being considered.

Building a school on the existing Uppermill site would mean building on the back corner of the site, with two storeys at the back and 3 at the front, due to a sloping site.

A new road going up to the new site would be built, where the car park and art block presently stand.. From a health and safety issue, this will be shielded from the existing school.

Matthew Milburn – Headteacher Saddleworth School

I am solely driven to create a great school for your children. There is no ideal site in Saddleworth We have a great school now but also need great facilities.

We are looking into the school staying in Uppermill, if this is a viable proposition. We do know that Diggle will take the school and if this is the case I will bend over backwards to make sure the children are kept safe.

I would like people to consider, that if the Uppermill site is not suitable, we will work together to resolve any conflict, giving a good example to our children.

People should have a say and Debbie Abrahams has helped to bring this forward.

Cllr. Rob Knotts – Independent Councillor

Started the ball rolling in July when asked if I would write to the Oldham Chronicle:-

Why can't we build on the existing site? What about the traffic issues in Diggle?
Why no consultation or transparency?

Need to be objective and look at site, transport, noise, and pollution, it's a matter of checks and balances. Had experience in traffic simulation and there is a lot of excellent software available to produce useful information.

We can't advise on planning but we can offer the facility for communication.

Meeting 25th September arranged - the first opportunity for people to voice their concerns.

Meeting 16th October, this gave people an opportunity to question opinion and seek reassurance but this was being denied, now we need to move forward

S/C Time is not on our side

R/K We will have consultation before the Planning Application goes in. We have a right to ask questions and go through the proper motions.

Questions and Comments from the floor / answers

Keith Lucas (SDAG) It is crucial that we have time and need to stop the process to get the right solution. We need a new school but Diggle is not suitable, we can't risk the safety of the children.

When Snow Sign indicates STOP children will be put at risk.

M/M OMBC are looking into putting a footpath in lower down and widening the road. Whichever location, there are risks, we need to work together to solve them.

Floor Diggle will have problems forever – Saddleworth School, 2 years.

Lee Mansfield How much time to consider design control option?
Months or weeks?

M/M Months rather than weeks

M/B The new lampposts will need to be moved, if the school is built in Diggle, to allow Widening of pavements.

Biggest issue is traffic, need a very detailed traffic assessment before putting forward to planning

Floor Discussions about access – why can't a new road be built coming in near the the Navigation?

M/B The land near the river/canal is in private ownership, houses are being built near the canal. Would need compulsory purchase order and cost prohibitive.

Floor Promised that there would be a traffic survey at last meeting – where are the results?
Traffic survey should look at the whole village. People avoiding Huddersfield Road will use Spurn Lane and Ward Lane to enter and leave the village which would put our primary school children at great risk when walking to school. No footpaths Spurn Lane, limited on Ward Lane.
When a traffic survey was done on Huddersfield Road, at the bottom of Ambrose Crescent, an average of 4,780 cars per day was recorded.

B/L The knock on effects would be looked at.

Floor Not happy with this statement, how could looking at it make a difference. In the case of Spurn Lane it is not possible to widen the road, fronts of houses built right up to road.

R/K Simulation software and test-driving required to demonstrate objectively.

Floor Walking to school on the canal towpath would be a potential safety problem

M/M Children will come on the quickest route – A travel plan would need to be in place.

Floor Will a decision be made without a political agenda?

B/L EFA provide the money, OMBC can recommend but EFA make the final decision

Floor A great deal of concern was raised regarding the sewers and the present capacity, considering the potential of the extra volume resulting from the school site. Problems already experience on Huddersfield Road at the bottom of Ambrose Crescent with surface water (it was suggested that this be channeled into the Sewers.
Cellars of terrace houses on Huddersfield Road, in front of proposed new car park are often flooded, similar impact on greenbelt land beyond.

B/L The Sewers are the responsibility of the owners United Utilities and they would decide upon any action.
Surface water is not mixed with sewage.

Floor Who makes the decision on finance?

M/M OMBC find and fund the site

EFA fund the building of the school.

The client can contribute to the design but Intersave the Building Contractors actually design the school. Intersave have been appointed to build a total of 6 schools.

Floor What are the proposals for the other field on the left? Is it part of the Land swap?

B/L No information on left-hand field, only rumours School has no say.
Guarantee that the money difference on land swap deal will be spent on the new school, plus other funding.

Floor Uppermill site open to tender?

B/L The District Valuer will decide the value

Floor Other concerns raised –
Design of the building not in keeping with the village
Environmental considerations – will lose the wildlife ie.lapwings nesting on the greenbelt.
Tourist potential lost.

B/L Assessment will be made on environmental impact.

Chair of DCA - Asked for show of hands:-

“Those against supporting a school built in Diggle?” – Unanimous result

“Those in favour of supporting a school built in Diggle?” - None

6. Village Green Update - Nick Cox

The Commons Registration Committee will make a final decision on the 26th November. Not very optimistic of a good outcome. One legal piece of complicated legislation does not meet the criteria for Village Green Status. ie. Permission to use the land was ‘as of right’ and not ‘of right’.

Allowed 20 minutes to state our case, only person allowed to speak. Just received the final response to our objections and intend to consult with Robert McCracken QC to see if he can offer any further advice.

Will have to accept the decision – no right of appeal.

7. Police Report – None available.

8. Nominations for DCA Executive 2013-14

10 nominations up for election at the AGM

Lynda Elmore is stepping down and Nick Cox has agreed to join the Exec. Committee.

If anyone is interested in putting their name forward – please contact Stuart.

9. Treasurer Report - Ray Withnall

Fund stands at £900.

10. What's On

16th Nov. Christmas Fair – Diggle Band Club

19th – 22nd Nov. Aladdin Panto – Kiln Green Church Hall

8th Dec. Diggle Christingle & Lights Switch on – Village Green

21st Dec. Diggle Band Christmas Concert

11. Date of next meeting

5th December – AGM Diggle Band Club 8.00pm.

Meeting closed.