

**ITEM 6 – ST HUGH’S PLAYING FIELDS
REPRESENTATIONS FROM COMMITTEE MEMBER AND WARD MEMBER
COUNCILLOR LYMER**

Madame Chairman

I thank you for the opportunity to address this evening’s Committee on behalf of not only myself, but the other Bickley Ward Councillors, past and present.

Madame Chairman, going back to January 2017 and beyond, when an application for a school on St Hughs Field first came to Committee we were very clear, as the Minutes will confirm, and have remained consistent throughout, that we would base our support or otherwise for a School at this location, solely on proven facts and Planning matters.

That is a position we maintain to this day.

We argued that the bulk, size and density of the Sports Hall was aesthetically displeasing and diminished the amenities of nearby residents living on Chislehurst Road.

Bizarrely this matter never even received meaningful planning scrutiny, drowned out as it became, by a secondary debate concerning the need or otherwise for school places in the Borough.

We found that quite remarkable at the time and still do in hindsight given the primary function of the Development Control Committee, but there we are.

We argued that the applicant paid mere lip service, or even pretence, to finding an alternative site for their school, and that their document in question merely went through the motions to tick that planning box, such was the intent of the Department for Education and their Funding Agency to ram their project through against all manner of objections on their preferred site, irrespective of logically worries and concerns to the contrary. We stand strongly by those assertions.

The Education Funding Agency’s ‘consultation’ process has been an absolute disgrace throughout, however we took some small solace that both Bob Neill MP and indeed, even Members of the applicant’s Governing body came to see, understand and agree with us on that narrow point over time.

We repeatedly pointed out that even if there were a shortfall in future school places in the Borough (which we all accept there was) that there was minimal local need for additional school places **at this location**.

In September 2018, 16 Bickley children enrolled at BWB, for September 2019 26 are due to do so.

Less than 1 form of entry in each year.

In September 2018, 50 out of Borough children enrolled at BWB, in September 2019, 42 are set to do so.

Posed with those figures, members of the Committee will form their own views.

We are nevertheless told that most will be walking in to avoid even more excessive traffic build up on a junction already technically running at over-capacity in the morning rush hour. We remain extremely sceptical to put it mildly.

But most of all, and above all else, we urged colleagues to consider the serious concerns raised by Road Safety experts. Over road safety in particular, we thank the majority of colleagues who supported that view both at the time and since.

Our concerns remain about road safety, and our profound hope in this regard, looking to the future, is that the Government Inspectorate's view proves to be sound, and our own views are conclusively disproved.

All off this is however of historical context. Wrongly or rightly the Inspectorate has spoken, local decision making has been set aside and their defining will and opinion has now been imposed, meaning that the school will, unfortunate as it is in our view, now be built at St Hughs notwithstanding the additional traffic and pollution issues that local Bickley Residents will now have over coming years.

Madam Chairman, moving to the head of this statement, you will recall as part of my preamble that I advised you that Bickley Members would base our support, or otherwise for a school at this location, solely on proven facts and Planning matters. The same applies for the temporary application set before us this evening.

We continue to dispute that a fair number of facts have been proven or even properly considered, but given the Inspector's decision have to reluctantly accept, in planning terms, that that conversation is now redundant.

On Planning matters however, based on this evening's report and the advice contained therein, there is nothing which we can see which amounts to a substantive planning issue to object to.

Madam Chairman, in closing, I shall therefore be abstaining from this evening's vote to mark both my own and my colleagues' collective dismay at the manner in which this entire process has been handled from the outset, and I would encourage anyone else who has travelled the same journey and agrees, to consider doing similarly themselves.

On a brighter note to finish, I would also like to take opportunity to convey and place on record, Bickley Ward Councillors' immense thanks and gratitude to the professionalism of the numerous Council Officers who have played their part in the processing of this unprecedented saga and in particular, the work of the Council's Deputy Chief Planner, Mr Tim Horsman for his outstanding work under intense pressure over many months.

It would also, of course, be churlish in the extreme, mindful of where we now find ourselves, not to also take this moment to wish the school itself, every success and best wish moving to the future.