

SCHOOL CAMPAIGN WINS BACKING

The closure of Rolleston's Forest of Needwood School would be an "act of educational and community vandalism," a councillor has claimed.

Speaking to members of Forest Action Committee, Councillor Brian Campbell, Chairman of Staffordshire Youth, Community and Careers Service, said he wholeheartedly supported the retention of the school.

"I cannot see that the present proposals would do other than rip the heart out of this prime example of community education at its very best and fatally wound the youth and community and adult education

provision within the area," he said.

However, in looking at the problems faced by education in Staffordshire, a consistent education policy should be adopted which would carry on into the 21st century and short term policies should be avoided.

The present situation in Staffordshire offered a golden opportunity to make such an educational leap forward, he said, although the education committee with its restricted budget could not be expected to meet all these demands alone.

VALUES

To help with the financing of education, Councillor Campbell

called for a reform of the rating system.

"It has always seemed to me an anomaly that, if agricultural land and churches represent such important and basic values to the community as to allow them not to pay rates, that schools and educational establishments are not similarly treated as being so crucially important to our basic values and the future of our society.

"Now that, it seems to me, would be a matter for debate with central government with whom I am afraid it is unlikely to find favour at the present time."

But some local authorities already offered rate relief for industry and shops and perhaps schools could also be included in the list, he said.

And as many communities were threatened socially by the removal of their school, the education budget may also be supported by creating a community campus which would fully utilise the existing school buildings.



● Councillor Campbell

Therefore a community wing could include a public library, area social service officers, health centres, playgroups, as well as education, careers and welfare officers.

"It may be worth an approach to the Department of Education and Science for funding for such a worthwhile experiment."



CHEMICAL DATA

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In memory

Members of Etwall Parish Council stood for a minute's silence in memory of former councillor Peter Thorn who died at his home in the village recently.

Concern, decorating the homes of old people and digging, planting out and tending their gardens.

The parish council agreed it was worth applying to clear the land, and agreed to meet task force officers on March 12.

47, 68, 79, 64, 30, 85, 71, 36, 60, 39.

Daily Mail (Casino, game 27): 6, 4. (Super Snooker, frame 12): B10 red.

Daily Express (£100,000 accumulator, day 3): 61.



● The education experts gather before last night's meeting: (left to right) Councillor Bob Cant, Chairman of Staffordshire Education Committee; Councillor Roger Wright; Mr Hugh Cunningham, senior education inspector; Mr Alan O'Donnell, deputy chief education officer.

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"The worst thing we could do would be to let one school run down. We are determined to avoid that.

"What we are proposing is that at the time when the final decision will be made, from the date of the amalgamation, they become one school and a headmaster designate would be appointed."

But one question which failed to get a satisfactory response in the eyes of many people was: when a school closes, what will be the new catchment areas?

Principal Assistant Education Officer Mr Denis Cork said it was impossible to say what the new areas would be.

"The domino effect of the closure of one school would make it difficult to see what would happen afterwards and to give a detailed description of catchment areas," he said.

However, one parent quickly replied: "If you have no idea of catchment areas how can any consultation with parents be meaningful if they don't know where their children are to go?"

Other parents argued angrily that the Robert Sutton Roman Catholic School had not been included in any plans, although Councillor Cant said it was

being examined via a plan to make it viable jointly with Paulet.

The running costs of each school which would be saved if it were closed were last night described as:

Forest of Needwood	£189,000
Wulfric	£215,700
Paulet.....	£124,600
Palet.....	£179,300
Abbot Beyne.....	£192,300
John Taylor	£193,500

The treasurer's department had not cost studied the Robert Sutton Roman Catholic School.

Many people took the opportunity to blow the trumpet of the Forest of Needwood, describing it as the core of the community and praising its successful youth club.

Councillor Ken Bradley said there were other criteria which should be looked at apart from finance and maintaining a certain level of children.

"The quality of education should be taken account of, and the social function of the school.

"The Forest of Needwood has a youth club and a well-run

youth club, and one of the largest evening institutes in the county.

"The school is widely used by many other groups. It is the widest used school in East Staffordshire and must be one of the widest used in the county.

REPORT

"It is not the object of the people in this hall to suggest which school is to close because that is setting community against community.

"I think the county should prepare a far more comprehensive report."

Councillor George Callister, Chairman of the Wulfric Governors, said if the closure of Wulfric was the preferred option the meeting could have been packed out with Wulfric parents and teachers, while Mr Ken Green, Chairman of Forest Governors said: "Before you decide to close down a school, the best thing you could do is visit that school and see it for yourself."

By the end of the sometimes turbulent meeting, the county council representatives knew only one thing, that whatever decision they made many people would be angry and upset.