

## WOODHOUSE MOOR BARBECUES

Lord Mayor, Councillors, my name is Martin Staniforth and my colleagues are Sue Buckle, <sup>Richard Hallawell</sup> ~~Bill McKinnon~~, <sup>Tony Green</sup> ~~Philip Walshaw~~ and Professor John Kent. I would welcome the opportunity to speak to you today to oppose the Council's unpopular, expensive and damaging plan to concrete over part of Woodhouse Moor, though I am sad that it is still necessary to do so. I am speaking on behalf of all the community groups in the Hyde Park and Woodhouse area. More importantly I am speaking on behalf of the hundreds of local people who have objected to this scheme at meetings and in writing, and the thousands who have been denied a voice because of the Council's failure to deliver consultation packs to them.

Lord Mayor, I want to concentrate on three issues. First, the proposal itself This would involve sinking 40 large concrete blocks into an open, grassy area of the Moor to allow for up to 80 barbecues to be lit at any one time. Local people have strongly opposed this plan both because of the impact it would have and because it is another sign of the Council's lack of concern for Woodhouse Moor. What used to be an open space for all to enjoy is becoming an area where, on sunny weekends, many people feel uncomfortable and unsafe because of the drunkenness, vandalism and anti-social behavior which goes on there, apparently unchecked. Local people don't want to see money wasted on concrete blocks. They want it spent on improving the Moor, undoing the damage that has been done in recent years, and making it a welcoming, attractive and safe area for all.

Second, consultation. The Council claims to have sent 10,000 questionnaires to local households seeking their views on the proposal. However it's very clear, from public meetings and other surveys, that many people who should have received questionnaires didn't do so. But instead of investigating the complaints, Council officers have relied on assurances from the delivery company that they delivered to all households in the area, with one or two exceptions. Well, to quote Mandy RiceDavies, they would say that, wouldn't they! Officers also seem to believe that because some people in a street responded, everyone in that street must have received a questionnaire. However, as I'm sure you know, people delivering house-to-house often take short cuts and miss out houses or whole streets to get the job done quickly.

Fin ally, apparently replies were received from only 155 of the 551 streets which should

have received questionnaires. Statisticians say it is highly improbable that replies would be concentrated in such a small number of streets if the forms had been properly delivered. My colleague Professor Kent, Professor of Mathematics at Leeds University, would be pleased to answer any questions you may have about the statistical analysis of the figures.

And now we have the truly bizarre situation that the Council's Scrutiny Board has said the consultation was earned out properly while at the same time it has been extended to the end of July so that people who didn't receive questionnaires can send in their comments by e-mail! Frankly this isn't a consultation, it's a shambles, a fiasco, and the investigation nothing more than a whitewash. It should be abandoned now and there should be an independent investigation into what went wrong.

Third, the role of local residents' associations. We were excluded from the group which drew up this proposal. I use the word "excluded" deliberately because a Council officer told me that while associations had been invited to the first meeting "subsequent meetings of this forum evolved into a partnership of agency representatives and council officers providing a cohesive and constructive working group that are committed to and actively resolving the various issues on Woodhouse Moor". Apparently local residents have nothing to contribute to resolving issues facing the Moor, despite our very real commitment to its long-term health. This is not the first time that proposals have been put forward for changes to the Moor without involving local people, and not the first time they have been strongly opposed by them. The exclusion of local residents from groups considering plans for the Moor is unacceptable, results in bad decision-making, and must be ended.

Lord Mayor, Woodhouse Moor is an historic park, dear to those who live near it and use it regularly. It is an asset that we hold in trust for future generations, and we should leave it in better condition than we find it. If the current proposal goes ahead, our legacy will be 40 concrete blocks and a degraded open space. We therefore call for the current plans for a barbecue area to be dropped, for the flawed consultation process to be abandoned and for local residents to be fully involved in any group developing plans for the Moor in future.