

## **TWO FORMER COUNCIL LEADERS CALL ON PRESENT COUNCIL TO SAFEGUARD HISTORIC WILNECOTE SCHOOLS**

Two former Tamworth Mayors and Council Leaders have called on the present leadership of Tamworth Borough Council to act urgently to save the former Wilnecote Board Schools from demolition by Staffordshire County Council. The county wants to sell the former infant and junior schools site to a company called Housing 21 for the erection of 55 flats, despite massive opposition within Wilnecote and the wider Tamworth community.

Last week The Tamworth and District Civic Society (TDCS) which has been campaigning to save the landmark buildings since it was re-launched last September, announced its discovery that the schools were designed in 1877 by one of the most famous architects in British history, Basil Champneys. TDCS, supported by The Victorian Society - the national charity for the protection of Victorian and Edwardian buildings - is now pressing the county council to re-think its plans and for Tamworth Borough Council to take urgent steps to protect such important buildings from the county council's plans.

Now the Civic Society has received strong vocal support from two former Leaders of the Council, who are publicly urging their present-day successor, Councillor Danny Cook, and his fellow borough councillors, to act without delay to protect the historic buildings.

Mrs. Irene Davies was Mayor of Tamworth in 1983-84, and Leader of the Council from 1984-86 and 1987-88. She was born in Wilnecote and is an ex-pupil of the schools. For her first four years as a councillor from 1976, she represented the Wilnecote Ward. John Garner was twice Mayor, in 1988-89 and 2013-14, and was Leader of the Council in 1983-84.

Both former councillors attended the Public Meeting called by Wilnecote residents last October when the County Council's intentions first became public, and both spoke out then against the demolition and housing proposals. They have praised the Civic Society's campaign to save the buildings, and following "the tremendous news of the Champneys connection" both state that "The Council has the powers to call an emergency meeting to get the buildings immediately "Locally Listed" and placed within the Wilnecote Conservation Area, and must do so without delay. Tamworth cannot afford to lose any more of its heritage."

Irene Davies added: "I entered local politics in the first place in 1976 to fight to stop any more of our historic buildings being lost and to stop the massive housing expansion that was ruining our town. This county council proposal is just more of the same madness we had back in the 1960s and 70s. It has to be stopped."

John Garner said "I am passionate about this. I'm happy to speak out publicly if it helps to get something done. The Borough Council must act quickly."

The Civic Society Chairman, Dr. David Biggs said: "TDCS welcomes this public intervention by two distinguished former Mayors and Council Leaders. We hope and

pray that their successors listen and act immediately to protect our heritage. Wilnecote and Tamworth have an architectural and historic gem in their midst, of national and local importance. We must urgently safeguard it from those in Stafford who have no interest in, and no knowledge of, Tamworth, its heritage, and what is important to those who live here.”



*Famous old boy. Footballing legend Harry Hibbs (1906-1984). England and Birmingham City goalkeeper.*



*Former Tamworth Mayor and Council Leader John Garner has called on present Leader Danny Cook to protect the Victorian buildings designed by Basil Champneys.*



*Former Tamworth Mayor and Council Leader Irene Davies speaking at the Public Meeting in Wilnecote last October held to oppose plans by Staffordshire County Council to demolish the old Wilnecote Schools.*

*(photo by S. Biggs)*



*The distinctive skyline of the Wilnecote Board Schools designed in 1877 by one of Britain's most famous architects, Basil Champneys*

*(photo by S. Biggs)*