



### **School that 'went to war with community' told to remove sign**

Residents of Bristol NW who are campaigning to maintain open access to local playing fields applauded Councillors yesterday for their decision to reject a 'threatening' sign erected by Cotham School at Stoke Lodge.

Cotham School removed three existing Council signs at the start of the summer holidays, replacing them with its own signs which rebranded the land as school property and threatened users with prosecution for a range of normal recreational activities.

Speakers drew attention to the fact that the school had taken Council signs without permission before installing its own, and had cut through the roots of a rare and notable 150-year old oak tree, which is subject to a Tree Preservation Order, to install the sign - this is a criminal offence.

Councillors agreed that the signs were misleading, threatening and harmful to the amenity of the area, which they stressed was both public land and playing fields at the same time. One Councillor commented: "In 30 years of being a school governor I have never known a secondary school go to war like this with a community."

Other Councillors agreed that a solution needed to be found to the long-running dispute over access to the land, which was an 'ongoing sore'; signs should not prevent or restrict free public access to the land, and the Council's legal services team should look again at the whole issue.

A spokesperson for campaigning group We Love Stoke Lodge said:

"Many Councillors strongly expressed the view that a solution should be found through talking, and we wholeheartedly agree. We've put forward a package of proposals to reach a resolution that works for all, but unfortunately the Headteacher and Chair of Governors have again this week rejected calls from our MP and from Councillors to sit down and talk. We continue to hope that they will change their minds - perhaps it's the season for some peace and goodwill?"

The sign must now be removed by the school as it is unlawful; it is expected that other signs using the same language will also have to be removed in short order.

For more information contact [welovestokelodge@gmail.com](mailto:welovestokelodge@gmail.com) or visit [welovestokelodge.co.uk](http://welovestokelodge.co.uk)

**20 December 2018**