**Submission for the next Members’ Forum on Tuesday, 19th March 2019**

**MEMBERS’ PUBLIC FORUM STATEMENT** from Cllrs Mark Weston, John Goulandris, Peter Abraham, Geoff Gollop, Liz Radford, Steve Smith, Chris Windows, Matt Melias, Claire Hiscott

**SILENCING OF THE “WE LOVE STOKE LODGE” PETITION**

We are seriously concerned that a petition, which has crossed the threshold for debate in this chamber, has been blocked by the Council on the pretext that debate might somehow damage the Council’s future legal position. That could be said of many petitions and we hope censoring petitions will not now become the norm in Bristol.

Thousands of our constituents have signed this petition in the expectation that they would be able to engage in the democratic process. For some of our younger citizens this would have been their first taste of democracy - sadly now leaving a bitter taste in their mouths. Their faith in the Council will have been shaken and they will be genuinely puzzled as to what the Council fears from debate of this issue. By stifling discussion in this way, councillors and the public who have not been directly involved in this issue, will remain very much in the dark as to the arguments for and against a fence at Stoke Lodge. A missed opportunity!

The key issues, which we don’t believe can have any effect on the Council’s legal position and in our view are simply statements of fact, are:-

1. Bristol City Council is the owner of the freehold of Stoke Lodge.
2. Stoke Lodge has seen multiple shared use since its purchase in the 1940s.
3. Many schools have played sport at Stoke Lodge without the need for a fence.
4. Ofsted have confirmed in writing that no fence is required for pupil safeguarding.
5. The fence is galvanised steel, concreted into the ground, 2 metres in height and approximately 1.5 kilometres in length. It encloses the greater part of Stoke Lodge.
6. The fence hinders community access to important open space.
7. Local politicians of various political colours do not agree with the need for a fence and certainly not a permanent fence of this size and type.

We trust that we will not see any further attempts to close down democratic debate.

Signed by:



  

  

