

SOGS Statement from political parties/candidates

During the last couple of months, SOGS has written to all the political parties involved in the upcoming Staffordshire County Council elections, to seek their views on the future of the golf course. We have also written individually to candidates for the Keele, Knutton and Silverdale ward. Only The Green Party supplied their party line on this (below). We did not get a response from The Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat Parties but received the following statements from their candidates. The responses have been as follows:

The Green Party

Keele Golf Course was a Newcastle-under-Lyme municipal course, that closed its bunkers in 2014. Over six years after being left abandoned, nature has taken over and repaired what humans destroyed. Trees and wildlife have been left alone and allowed to flourish naturally, giving the community quality and valuable life. Badgers, foxes, grass snakes, newts, dragonflies, toads, woodpeckers and more have been spotted by walkers strolling through an unspoilt picturesque [beauty spot](#). Wildlife photographers have taken pictures of geese, ducks and moorhens nesting and rearing their young. Local campaign group - Save Our Green Space – features many images of local resident's use of the green space on their social media. Picturesque seasonal walks of beautiful flora and fauna, families captured in moments of joy, family dogs absolutely in their element and children experiencing blooming ecosystems.

Lockdown has seen people enjoy this vast open greenspace. Walking through land steeped in nature and wildlife gives people a feeling of peace giving them positive [mental health](#). Urban areas fortunate enough to have an asset such as Keele Golf Course, close to their community, are at a [lower risk](#) to various health conditions such as heart disease and high blood pressure. A report by the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) places a monetary value of [£30bn a year](#) in health and welfare benefits of the the UK's green spaces. A thousand houses will require amenities, GP's, Dentists, and schools. These amenities are already full or near full in and around the Keele area. Data from the [Local Government Inform Association](#) on school's capacity concludes the number of pupils in primary schools already exceed school's capacity.

A thousand houses will also raise an already high pollution level. [Stoke-on-Trent](#) was named as the one of the most polluted cities in the UK, and according to Public Healthy England data, life expectancy of people in Stoke-on-Trent is already lower than the average. Air pollution is [predicted to kill](#) 600 Stoke-on-Trent and over 3000 Staffordshire residents in the next ten years. Additionally, a thousand houses built on fields will require drainage. The [2014 IPCC report](#) rainfall is getting heavier and the UK's infrastructure is not adequate to cope with heavy downpours leading to localised flooding. The sale of this land for development use will ensure colossal costs to both the taxpayer and nature. Protection of this land is the glimmer of hope we need. Our fragile planet is experiencing daily trauma, and is given no time to repair, as targets are consistently missed and time is running out, we must save Keele Golf Course from destruction to enable our species protection and our global wildlife's survival.

We have received written statements from these candidates.

James Borg, Liberal Democrat Party Candidate for Keele, Knutton and Silverdale

My position on the development of Keele Golf Course is simple - I oppose it. It is not a natural position for me to oppose development; as someone in their 30s with a young family I would dearly love to own a home, but housing in this country is often unaffordable and unattainable. But development needs to be led by local need and an appreciation of unique local characteristics. Keele and Silverdale are unique, and Newcastle-under-Lyme is not short of housing. To lose the Golf Course, which is a vital nature corridor, a green divider between the rural parishes of Keele and Silverdale, and a much-loved local green space, is frankly unacceptable.

My vision for Keele Golf Course is to turn it in to public green space - I want to see planting to encourage bees, butterflies and other insects, and for wild spaces to exist alongside public green space, not fenced off like on other sites. I want to expand the allotment gardens on Park Lane on to the Golf Course site, and assign an allotment to each of the local schools. I want to expand the Cherry Tree plantations found on Keele University on to the Golf Course to create a unique environmental tourist destination. I want to build a Green Education Centre to work alongside the Keele Sustainability Hub for environmental outreach, research and education. But most of all I want to provide spaces for local people to just exist in - green space is vital for public health, having more public green space surely can't be a bad thing!

Some critics might say that we have enough public green space locally with Apedale, Silverdale Country Park and Keele University - I would say that the Golf Course provides a unique opportunity to create a space where wild spaces and public spaces exist side by side without division or fences. If we build on the entirety of this site we lose not only a great opportunity, but also vital natural and public resource.

If, and only if, green spaces are protected first can I then even begin to consider building houses on the Golf Course, and I do concede that some housing development wouldn't be a terrible thing under the right conditions. I could see a series a small developments naturally extending exiting settlements and possibly a few smaller new developments around designated green spaces. But the word small is key here, and only if we preserve the Golf Course as a public green space. James Borg. Liberal Democrat Candidates for Keele and Silverdale

Derrick Huckfield, Conservative Party, candidate for Keele, Knutton & Silverdale

"In the division of Keele, Knutton and Silverdale, I will look to protect green spaces especially those in The Green Belt." (verbal statement)

David Jones, Labour Party, current County Councillor, and candidate for Keele, Knutton & Silverdale.

*Since the possibility of building on the former Keele Golf Course was raised several years ago, I **have been firmly against any development of the site**. The green space provided between Keele and Silverdale is a vital community resource, enabling both communities to take advantage of significant space for recreational activities, amongst a wonderful range of natural north Staffordshire flora and fauna. The many*

different walks through the site have provided my family and I with plenty of opportunity to get out during lockdown and enjoy the countryside here in our community. The drive to build houses on the site is mitigated by a desire for the council to raise funds. I disagree with this approach. The social value of the former golf course is significantly higher than the monetary value. If this space is lost, to development, it will never be recovered. If there is a desire for more housing within the borough, this can be met by other brownfield sites. The push to develop on the former golf course neglects several brown field sites within the borough, with a higher need for development; without burdening additional pressure on Silverdale village, with already significant pressures on its infrastructure and facilities. Rather than seek to raise funds through the sale, or development, of this site; I would urge the council to push for a proper funding settlement from Westminster.