

STATEMENT TO COLNEY HEATH WARD RESIDENTS AND ELECTORATE

In my capacity as Trustee of the Colney Heath Village Hall, a resident of the Colney Heath Ward and more recently the husband of a Parish Councillor, not only do I enjoy a close connection with Parish Residents, but I have been uniquely placed to witness what has been happening within the Parish Council over a period of time. I believe that I have a responsibility to Parish residents and the electorate to make them aware of matters that I believe are of importance to them.

My wife Susan Blunt was elected as your ward Councillor in May. She has now resigned. You may be aware that three out of the nine Councillors on the Colney Heath Parish Council have now resigned.

Having attended the Parish Council Meeting in the Colney Heath Village Hall on 18th July 2019, it was not, in my opinion (and one which I believe was shared amongst the other attendees of the meeting), a collaborative meeting of Councillors working together as a team with the community benefit at the foremost of their agenda.

I heard comments from some who attended the meeting that it seemed to them like a "Council fighting with itself", to which I agree, as the meeting was disorderly and Councillors were talking over each other.

Between 2016 and 2019 there were conflicts between the Parish Council and the local community which resulted in various legal disputes - for example the Scouts at Roestock Park, the Village Hall, the Football Club, and the residents on the High Street. Of course, in addressing these conflicts public money was spent. It seemed to both me and Susan therefore that taxpayers' money was being used to fight the taxpayers themselves.

By way of further example, there was a dispute over access to the field behind the Charles Morris Hall which resulted in high legal costs being incurred by the parties, which, from my understanding of the person involved, could have been avoided had the Council acted more reasonably.

Some residents in Colney Heath Village also felt that community activities were not being supported by the Parish Council to the extent that they could have been.

By way of example:

- the Larks in the Parks declining in show content and attendance, and cancelled for 2019
- bollards to prevent incursions on the Common by travellers have been installed which were a good idea, but might have had the effect of deterring the use of the Common by the annual funfair
- the "beating of the bounds" has lapsed as a local tradition.

Many residents have expressed a view that there is a lack of communication from the Parish Council, and that the notice boards appeared to be out of date. The Chronicle has also not been circulated since 2015, despite it being a popular and valued source of information and news about the Parish. It used to be published quarterly in hardcopy and was delivered to all households in the Parish, however the Council has not replaced it in either hardcopy or on its website.

That brings me to Susan's resignation.

Susan worked for blue chip company for 20 years, finishing her service there as a manager. She subsequently worked for the NHS before retiring at 60. She has been in some difficult situations and those who know her they will recognize she is no “shrinking violet”.

Susan has lived in Tyttenhanger Green and subsequently in Bullens Green Lane for 19 years. Our garden fence is on the boundary of Colney Heath Parish which entitled her to stand for election in the Parish (the rule is one must live within 3 miles of the Parish). She is actively involved in the Colney Heath WI and the Twinning Association. She appreciated that volunteering to be a Parish Councillor would involve quite a bit of her time and she would not receive any payment, but she was proud to have the opportunity to serve our community. She knew she would have to make time alongside her various community interests, looking after horses, and of course her family commitments including sharing the care of an aged parent.

During Susan’s short time on the Parish Council, she has not found it to be a supportive environment, and she has, on certain occasions, felt insulted and humiliated. Below are a few examples of the things she has experienced.

After making a proposal, which was accepted by some as being helpful, she felt deeply insulted when, in response, she was told she should consider the additional financial impact on tax payers in Colney Heath Parish, and that this would not affect her because the Council tax she pays does not contribute to the Parish she represents.

Susan also felt she was unfairly treated during a meeting during which her integrity was questioned. Due to a perceived conflict of interest by the other Councillors, she felt she had no option but to leave the meeting, which she did under protest. However, another Councillor, who Susan felt should have left a subsequent meeting as they had an actual conflict of interest of a pecuniary nature, was not challenged when they stayed and participated in the discussion (although they did not vote).

On another occasion, when making a proposal to defer the consideration of a motion (as she had not been sent the relevant materials beforehand, and believed more time was needed to prepare for the discussion), she was told it was not possible as the rules did not provide for this. This was contrary to her understanding of the rules, and she felt unsupported in her role and that she had been obstructed.

As a result of these experiences, Susan has expressed to me that her time on the Parish Council has been deeply unpleasant and she has felt insulted, unsupported and humiliated.

I hope and trust therefore that you will appreciate and understand why she has resigned.

John Clemow
3rd October 2019