

**IN THE MATTER OF:**

**COMPLAINT BY LEANNE BACON, PARISH CLERK TO NORTHILL PARISH COUNCIL  
AND PARISH COUNCILLORS  
AGAINST CLLR D.I. ROBINSON, NORTHILL PARISH COUNCIL**

**STANDARDS SUB-COMMITTEE HEARING  
TO BE HELD ON 29 AND 30 SEPTEMBER 2014**

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**WITNESS STATEMENT OF  
CLLR HELEN PAPWORTH**

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1. I, HELEN PAPWORTH, a Councillor of Northill Parish Council ("the Council") and my address is Colemoreham Farmhouse, 17 The Green, Ickwell, Biggleswade, Bedfordshire SG18 9EE, do hereby state as follows.
  
2. I attended a General Meeting of Northill Parish Council on Tuesday, 8 April 2013 as a member of the Parish Council and also as the Vice Chairman of that Council. Since then, I have been elected as Chairman of the Council (on 1st September 2014).
  
3. During that meeting, I witnessed the Chairman, Cllr David Milton having to abandon the meeting when the Parish Clerk, Leanne Bacon, left the meeting room in distress. Mrs Bacon had been subjected to some very hostile and repeated questioning over a period of 20 minutes or more from Cllr Robinson during the "Matters Arising" section of the Agenda. Cllr Robinson was in such a state that he could not remember the names of the Councillors, calling them "Councillor what's his name", refusing to let anyone else speak or interrupt him as he did not want his behaviour challenged. Cllr Kay and Cllr Dawson were attempting to interrupt Cllr Robinson for that purpose, and I had my hand raised to attempt to speak to complain. This disgraceful behaviour follows on from the previous Council Meeting, on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2013, when both a Planning Meeting to discuss Affordable Housing and the Annual

Parish Meeting were held on the same night. Cllr Robinson had monopolised the floor at these meetings, with complete disregard for protocol, despite the Parish Clerk having set out this information quite clearly in an email sent to all Councillors beforehand.

4. In my opinion, Cllr Robinson's behaviour towards the Parish Clerk at the meeting on 8 April 2013 constituted bullying. He also prevented the Chair, Cllr David Milton, from effectively chairing the meeting by prolonging the "Matters Arising" item and not allowing any other Councillor an opportunity to speak.

5. An Agenda item at the meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> April 2013 was to approve the Planning Committee decision of 25<sup>th</sup> March 2013 for Affordable Housing in Upper Caldecote. The Council had had a consultation with parishioners in September 2012 as a result of which the Council preferred a site on Ickwell Road, Upper Caldecote. However, the developers, Grand Union Housing Association were not able to progress this site as there were several owners of this land and not all of them were willing to sell their share. I do not think that Cllr Robinson was aware of all the issues with regard to the sale of this land and he therefore repeatedly questioned as to why the Ickwell Road site was not being put forward by the Parish Council, and continues to do so to this day.

6. As a result of Cllr Robinson's erratic, inappropriate and extremely rude behaviour, the Planning Committee decision of 25<sup>th</sup> March 2013 was unable to be approved by full Council until a reconvened meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2013. There were a large number of concerned members of the public present on 8<sup>th</sup> April 2013, all concerned to see what would be decided, an opportunity which they lost. In my opinion, Cllr Robinson's behaviour brought the Council into disrepute. I would say that there were at least 25 people at this meeting who witnessed Cllr Robinson's behaviour.

7. Cllr Robinson seems unable to accept the democratic process and accept that once a decision is made by the Committee/Council corporately, then that is the decision of the Council and he consistently tries to have issues re-debated and even overturned.

8. I believe Cllr Robinson was out of control at the meeting on 8 April 2013. Cllr Robinson was playing to the floor with complete disregard for the procedures and standards expected by the Council.

9. At this meeting, Cllr Robinson brought up a list of matters arising at Item 6 on the agenda, some of which related to [REDACTED]. There was a history to the Council's previous dealings [REDACTED] which had culminated in the Parish Council resolving to restrict [REDACTED] communications to Council, because of [REDACTED] vexatious attitude and correspondence and the submission of numerous Freedom of Information requests and emails to the Parish Clerk. Cllr Robinson was therefore acting in direct conflict with Council's resolution.

10. The background to the Parish Council's dealing with [REDACTED] was that there had been a number of requests to purchase land [REDACTED] which was in the ownership of the Parish Council. The land was community land transferred to the Parish Council by a developer and contained covenants that the land was to be used as such. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] This same decision had been previously made twice by the Parish Council. After that, [REDACTED] Parish Clerk, with emails and in August 2011, she resigned referring to harassment by [REDACTED]

11. Leanne Bacon, the Parish Clerk, joined Northill Parish Council in September 2011. Numerous emails were still being sent to the Parish Clerk. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The Parish Council had their reasons why they would not agree to sell the land. There were covenants on the land which restricted it to amenity use by the public, and the Council felt that it was inappropriate to dispose of the land. [REDACTED] were subsequently deemed as vexatious due to their persistent requests, including Fol requests, to the Parish Clerk in 2011, a decision which was upheld by the Information Commissioner but later reversed on appeal.

12. After the Parish Clerk left the meeting on 8 April 2013, she was very distressed. I believe that the Parish Clerk is a "strong" person, evidenced by the fact that she withstood very hostile and repeated questioning from Cllr Robinson, a bombardment that lasted longer than most other employees would have tolerated. After 20 minutes, she left the meeting and went to the kitchen. I followed her out of the meeting in protest at what I had witnessed.

13. I went back into the room after five minutes to see what was happening. I just remember the situation being somewhat confused as nobody had sat back down again and it was at this point that Cllr Milton had to abandon the meeting.

14. Before Leanne Bacon left the meeting, the Chairman, Cllr Milton had attempted on several occasions to regain control of the meeting and I also have a recollection of Cllr Kay and Cllr Maudlin who were sitting opposite Cllr Robinson, both trying to bring the meeting under control.

15. This situation had arisen because Leanne Bacon was having to answer all the questions relating to the "Matters Arising" agenda item. The procedure of the Council was that all of these questions and answers should have been referred through the Chair.

However, because of Cllr Robinson's behaviour and persistent questions directed at Clerk, the Chair was unable to follow this procedure.

16. The abandoned meeting was reconvened on 2 May 2013. Cllr Robinson continued to occupy the Council's time on Affordable Housing but his behaviour was better – he had apologised in-between. I wrote to him during that time as I felt so strongly about his disgraceful behaviour. I wrote to say that I was not prepared to discuss Council business with him, as I did not think his behaviour was acceptable for a Parish Councillor. I also felt unable to discuss Council business with him because of his close liaison with [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Cllr Robinson has always denied that he was a friend or acquaintance of [REDACTED]. I continued to maintain my self imposed ban of not corresponding with Cllr Robinson until January 2014, when Cllr Robinson sent very long email in large bold font to Clerk. I found this e mail particularly aggressive and decided to answer on her behalf, but his reply continued in the same bullish manner as the original e mail. However, when I became Acting Chair in May 2014, I wrote to Cllr Robinson to indicate that I would communicate again, in order for Cllr Robinson to maintain some contact with the Council, because of an employment panel situation that had arisen.

17. This was because the ongoing behaviour of Cllr Robinson led to Leanne Bacon raising a grievance about her employment with the Parish Council in early May 2014. As a result, Cllr Robinson was instructed not to have any further communication with the Parish Clerk and to address all emails and correspondence to the Chair, at that time, Cllr Wild. He continued to send in various irritating e mail requests, one of which included 15 FoI questions. Most of these were considered irrelevant to his current case eg a request for the resignation letter of our previous clerk, and another for the details of our current clerk's employment contract.

18. Northill Parish Council had to hold two Grievance Panel meetings, as required by employment law, commencing 8 May 2014, to consider issues raised by the Parish Clerk. As a result of this, Cllr Robinson was asked to attend their second meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> May 2014 to give his views on her grievances about him, but decided not to attend. He complained that he had only been given 24 hours' working notice to prepare for the meeting and consistently failed then ( and even now continues to fail) to understand that Clerk's grievances needed to be resolved and replied to within 7 days. He was however informed of the opportunity to attend on 9 May 2014, the day after the Panel's first meeting. The Parish Clerk had handed in a list of 13 grievances, which the Grievance Panel went systematically through, looking at evidence from emails and minutes. Eleven out of thirteen of the grievances were upheld by the panel. I was not a member of the Grievance Panel but acted as note taker .

19. One of the observations I have made about Cllr Robinson's behaviour is that he misreads or mis-interprets information and statistics that are presented to him. It is worrying that Cllr Robinson reads a document and fails to interpret it correctly. He appears to interpret situations as he sees them and not as presented in documents.

20. I think the decision of the Grievance Panel illustrates the steps that had to be taken to control and moderate the behaviour of Cllr Robinson in order for the Parish Clerk to function effectively in her role.

21. The Caldecote Voices Group was established after 8 April 2013 as a splinter group and Cllr Robinson and others took opportunity to criticise the Parish Council publicly about the siting of the Affordable Housing. However, when challenged, Cllr Robinson said he was not a member of the group, just their publicity officer. I am of the opinion that Cllr Robinson used his position as publicity officer of the Group to write critical articles on the Parish Council. I deem this unacceptable.

22. Cllr Robinson's behaviour has been better since 8<sup>th</sup> April 2013, but still unacceptable at times. Due to illness, I was not present at this year's Annual Parish Meeting (31.03.14) and a subsequent Council Meeting (14.04.13) but I have been told that his behaviour was again out of order, and "that a line had been crossed". However, I would like to stress that since the decision of the Grievance panel to restrict his contact with Clerk, his behaviour has been exemplary.

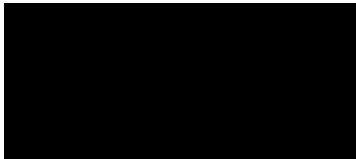
23. The meeting on 8 April 2013 was not an isolated incident as there had been previous bad behaviour from Cllr Robinson. After the apology Cllr Robinson wrote to Leanne Bacon, his behaviour still did not change very much and he continued on his mission to overturn a previously made corporate decision about the Affordable Housing site at Biggleswade Rd, as opposed to the Ickwell Road site.

24. Cllr Robinson also continued to put forward matters which were in the favour of [REDACTED] and I feel that Cllr Robinson should put forward comments which are representative of the whole Parish, not just the views of [REDACTED]

25. In my opinion, Cllr Robinson's interrogation of Leanne Bacon, the Parish Clerk, challenging her competence and causing her to walk out of a public meeting brings the Council into disrepute. Cllr Robinson had contributed to Leanne's recent glowing appraisal, approving her pay rise, yet weeks later on 8<sup>th</sup> April 2013 he was challenging her abilities. I believe that Cllr Robinson thinks that the Parish Clerk is competent when she acts in accordance with his wishes, but when she does something that she has been instructed to do by the Council with which he disagrees, he "goes off the rails".

26. At no time during the Affordable Housing issue did Cllr Robinson declare a disclosable pecuniary interest, although he only lives 5 houses away from the development site. He was also slow to declare a personal interest. As so much time has gone by, I am unable to remember at exactly what point he declared a personal interest, but in my opinion he should have done it much sooner than he did. Obviously, it is a matter for Cllr Robinson to decide whether or not he had an interest to declare, however had I lived where he does, I would have declared both a personal and, more importantly, a disclosable pecuniary interest. His failure to declare this meant that he was able to continue fighting publicly the decision to site the affordable housing at Biggleswade Rd, so close to his house.

**Signed:**

A solid black rectangular box redacting the signature of Cllr Helen Papworth.

**Cllr Helen Papworth, now Chair, Northill Parish Council**

**Date:** 21<sup>st</sup> September 2014