

APPENDIX L

John Davies

25th September 2013

Complain against Councillor Ian Robinson

Dear Mr Atkinson

It has come to my notice that 7 Parish Councillors from Northill Parish Council (NPC) have made a formal complaint against one of their fellow Councillors, Mr Ian Robinson and you are the person in charge of organizing the investigation. I felt it was only right that you should have the view of a member of the public who attended the Parish Meeting on the 8th April 2013.

Firstly, I must introduce myself. My wife and I moved into our house in Upper Caldecote on the 4th February 2013. We were welcomed by a nearby resident and as a result we joined in several activities in the Caldecote Pavilion. We then decided to attend the Parish Council meeting to get an idea how things worked in the village. At that time we knew no-one at the meeting.

The agenda for the Northill Parish Council (NPC) meeting had 15 items on it, with several sub – sections. Item 4 was Open Forum for 10 minutes. I don't know whether that is standard practise to allow the public to speak for only 10 minutes when there were 21 attending. Also surely it would be better to have them speak nearer the end of the meeting rather than Item 4. Five people spoke, asking questions but not getting very satisfactory answers. One noted that the draft minutes of the Planning meeting, held 14 days previously, had only just been received. One resident stated the Clerk seemed to have too much work to cope and offered help, say as a Publicity Officer. The Chair responded that administration was dealt with by the Clerk, thus turning down his very public spirited offer.

I only raise that last paragraph as it shows the Council and the Clerk do not really listen to the public, who they are supposed to be representing and it sets the tone for the rest of the meeting.

Under Matters arising, Mr Robinson raised several matters from speed checks, Parish Notice Board and Open Forum. In most cases the Clerk took over the answering the questions, although they were addressed to the Chair. Occasionally she did ask the Chair if she could respond but as the meeting progressed, it became a dialogue between her and Mr Robinson. This is where the problem lies.

Mr Robinson asked the Clerk to detail responses from relevant parties to query why the Ickwell Road site for Affordable Housing had not progressed. The Clerk stated that she had circulated all responses but had none to hand. As this was certain to be a matter to be raised, surely she should have had this information to hand. She summarised the responses she had received from memory. In light of this, Mr Robinson asked the Council to reconsider the resolution made by the Planning Committee to approve the application for the Biggleswade Road site, which was the Council's second choice originally. Again the Clerk, not the Chair tried to clarify planning procedure and whilst talking, became very animated, waving her arms about. Mr Robinson asked her to desist and several Councillors leapt to her defence, telling Mr Robinson to calm down.

Then Mr Robinson asked why his offer to help with Salt was not minuted. Clerk again replied that it was minuted "IR offered to provide wheelie bins of salt for use at Garner Close." Mr Robinson said this was not the offer of help he was referring to. In other words the Clerk had not answered his question, yet again.

Under Correspondence and Communications Mr Robinson asked if he could speak on behalf of [REDACTED]. The Clerk reminded him that the Council had invoked a restriction on the 2 residents. Then she leant across the table and pointed her finger at his chest. He asked her to answer his questions properly and not to point at him. At this point, the Clerk walked out of the meeting stating she was being harassed and the Chair said that without a Clerk, he would have to adjourn the meeting. After that, several Councillors verbally abused Mr Robinson and the Chair tried to usher him out of the meeting. At this moment, my wife and I together with other members of public left but there are plenty to substantiate what I have written.

Apart from being a new resident, I am also an ex-Clerk to a small Parish Council. I went on a training course and things may have changed radically since I left that Parish. It was made very clear to me that the Clerk is an employee, not an employer and that I had a very definite line of action at meetings. 1) Prepare, in conjunction with the Chair, the agenda and distribute it immediately. 2) Take minutes, type them up and distribute them to the Council within days of the meeting, not 14 days later as in the Planning meeting. 3) Help the Chair, when asked, with any matters especially legal ones. 4) Be seen and not be heard. This Clerk seems to run the meeting more than the Chair, who mainly sits back and lets her. The new Chair is marginally better but the Clerk still seems to lay down the rules.

I hope from this account you can see that, whilst Mr Robinson may have been very hard and insistent with his questioning, he was getting increasingly frustrated that the Clerk (not the Chair) was answering his questions and not always giving him the answers he was looking for.

Kind Regards

John Davies.