



First response

Scenario: Part 1

Background

You are the monitoring officer at Borchester District Council.

The head of planning calls you and explains that he was recently approached by an individual, who wishes to remain nameless, who complained to him about the conduct of Councillor Brian Aldridge, a member of your planning committee and a parish councillor. He had found it a little difficult to understand the complainant but the essence of it was that Cllr Aldridge was generally behaving 'out of order'.

Some weeks later you receive the attached letter and memo relating to a further complaint about Cllr Aldridge.

Although Cllr Aldridge has been a district councillor for 15 years he only joined the council's planning committee two years ago.

His brother-in-law, Councillor Grundy is the leader of the council, although they are in different political groups. It is well known that they do not get on with each other and this has been particularly apparent since Cllr Aldridge's wife left him following the discovery that she was having an affair.

The democratic services officer mentioned that she thinks Cllr Aldridge has previously declared interests in matters due to his directorship of a building firm and the gossip is that he was convicted of assault 10 years ago.

You know his wife is an employee in the district council's leisure centre because he previously asked you about interests when the licensing application came up for renewal.

Cllr Aldridge has also been a county councillor for a number of years.

Memo

To: Monitoring Officer
From: Director of Planning
10 June 2008

I enclose a letter from Mrs Linda Snell, about Cllr Brian Aldridge. Sorry about the delay in forwarding but I have been on holiday.

I met her when I was asked, by Ambridge Parish Council, to attend a public meeting some weeks ago – not sure if it was a formal meeting as they were a bit confused about that and I arrived late anyway.

They wanted me to talk about the new recreational facilities we are building for the five parishes in the south of the district to replace those on the old Hill View recreation ground, which is in Ambridge. We are also transferring some facilities from the town centre. The Hill View recreation ground is due to be developed, partly for new affordable housing and partly for a budget hotel.

The Housing Association has recently submitted its planning application for the new housing on the recreation ground site and the meeting also wanted to discuss the plans for this aspect of the development.

You will recall you dealt with the planning agreements with the hotel developers to pay a sum of money towards the cost of the new leisure facilities, and there was some confusion over the ownership of some parts of the Hill View land. Your conveyancing team was looking into this because it caused a problem with the planning agreement and who could sign it. I know your staff were not happy, but we had to rush this through at the planning committee's request otherwise the hotel would have pulled out.

I don't think that this is a matter for the planning department as it is about Cllr Aldridge's behaviour as a parish chairman. I don't think he even spoke at planning committee when the planning applications were first considered. But I can't really remember. I think this comes within your territory. Your predecessor had a lot of trouble with him when he first came on the planning committee because he seemed to get confused about his pecuniary interests.

Over to you.

Primrose Cottage
Farm Lane
Hill View Village
9 May 2008

To: Borchester District Council
To: Director of Planning

Letter of complaint

I am writing to complain about Councillor Brian Aldridge who you know is chairman of our parish council. He has been chairman for a year and I am appalled and disgusted at the way he is always bullying and intimidating other councillors at meetings and railroading them into making decisions he wants. He is rude to the public at public question time.

He never used to be like this and I think he has gone power mad since he became chairman. It is well known in the village that he has been having personal problems because his wife left him for someone else. I don't think he should be chairman as he wasn't even elected to the council but no-one else wanted to do it.

Last month you spoke to the parish about the new developments on the old Bowling Green and tennis courts and you showed us plans for the replacement leisure facilities down the road. Everyone agreed that the views of the villagers would be sought before a decision was made.

After you left, Councillor Aldridge said he wanted to propose that the parish writes to the council to object to these proposals saying that the village had had recreation ground since 1875. His family had been on the council for generations and had been council trustees since 1920. He did not see why our villagers should have to travel 10 miles to the next parish to play bowls or cricket. He said that, as he held the purse strings for the Bowls Club and Tennis Club, he wouldn't be signing any cheques until we got these proposals stopped.

The meeting was in chaos with some people for and some against but I have now been told that the clerk has written to you objecting to the planning application as instructed by the Chairman. I don't remember any vote being taken.

He is on your planning committee and you should be able to sort him out. He was there when all these matters were being discussed. We thought he was there to push these things through but we have been told he shouldn't even have voted. These rules are all very confusing and we want his involvement in all this looked into and what he has been up to. We want the new facilities and he won't spend any money on our club activities.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Linda Snell