

Notes of an interview with Councillor Mike Taylor

Interview date: 13 January 2022

Subject of Complaint: Councillor [REDACTED]

1. I have been through the Standards Process 6 or 7 times myself and I find it a very legalistic and bureaucratic process which is ultimately toothless. Most of the complaints against me have been when I've been fighting on behalf of my residents, and they have resulted in me getting an increased percentage of the votes at election. So I understand that there can be an impact in this regard.
2. I moved into the village in the 1960's and settled here. I joined the Parish Council in 2000. I got involved in building a youth club and ran it four nights a week for 8 years. Then in 2003 I started to build a skatepark for the local young people. In 2003 I stood down from the Parish Council because there was a possibility of a role being developed as a local Youth worker and I felt that it would be a good role for me to take to tie in with the skatepark construction, and groundsman roles. The role never materialised so in 2005/6 I applied to come back onto the Parish Council. The Chair at the time asked if I would stand back as someone else had applied and they wanted to give them a chance. I agreed to do so and [REDACTED] joined the Parish Council. [REDACTED] was appointed as the Project Manager to the skate park which I was constructing. He did cause some issues to me over this.
3. In 2008 and 2009 myself and [REDACTED] were trying to get back on the Parish Council. Vacancies were coming up after resignations but these resignations were not being reported and the councillors were instead being given 6 months sick leave to try and put off the vacancies. In the end we forced an election and [REDACTED] and I were elected. By this time [REDACTED] was Chair. In 2011 another election resulted in the old members of the Parish Council being removed apart from [REDACTED]. I took over as Chair from [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] had to announce by appointment to Chair as the outgoing Chair. As he went back to his seat he said 'God help Borough Green'.
4. The next major project was the Potters Mead sports pavilion which had burnt down in 2007. When the new Parish Council took over we had 50-60 quotes which had come in under the old regime. We wanted the tenders to go to local builders. The local builders all put in quotes for shell only which was how we wanted to do it. A local builder got the contract. We then project managed each step of the project separately under our control. This was much cheaper.

I project managed the project and did a lot of the work on the pavilion. It was around this time that ██████ seemed to gain the impression that I was some sort of master criminal. He has never done his duty and reported it. I think he thinks I am benefitting from working for the Council. What actually happened is that I was employed as the Parish Council groundsman and I was then paid to install the Skate park at a cost of about £6000 over three months. The building and maintenance of the skatepark was done by me for free. At one time ██████ put an article in the paper accusing me of corruption. He said that I was altering the layout of the skatepark to increase my hours, we did alter the layout in conjunction with the children, but I didn't get paid for this, which ██████ didn't seem to understand.

5. I have had standards complaints made against me previously. These were mainly to do with planning. I regard the old Parish Council as corrupt, this is in relation to a housing development, the Hazelbourne development, 176 houses. I had clear evidence of lying by officers and members. I was threatened by the Chief Executive with standards complaints or court if I didn't shut up. I gave it three weeks and then reported myself via the standards system. It cost £10,000 just to decide whether I could report myself, it was deemed that I could.
6. With regards to ██████, a lot of members get very annoyed with him because he will frustrate Council business with legal arguments. He doesn't actually do very much and I always said if he did do anything he'd be dangerous and now he has done something dangerous.
7. For a short while ██████ ran a local flower shop and employed a local lady. The flower shop went under and the lady was left with unpaid earnings which she took to tribunal and won. ██████ refused to pay, the lady approached me and said that as Parish Councillor ██████ should not be able to get away with not paying. I reported it to the Monitoring Officer as a Standards complaint. ██████ phoned the lady up and threatened her with various things. She phoned me up in tears and stated she would have to withdraw the complaint.
8. The second thing that happened was that ██████ had an affair with a new Parish Councillor, this was again reported to the Monitoring Officer by me. It was deemed to be outside capacity. These events have contributed to the animosity between myself and ██████, from his perspective.
9. Our Parish Council is proactive and we do get things done. We always have a project on the go.

10. In terms of the hedge we had an action day with 6 of us to trim the hedge and open up the hedge where we were planning to install the gateway sign. We cut the hedge back a few feet to find that behind it there was actually no hedge. It was dead hawthorn, brambles etc. We arranged another volunteer day and cut back some more. We got to the point where we realised that road dirt had built up at the base of the hedge and things had started growing out of it. There was a bank to to three feet high behind which was a hole and then the stock fence which was broken down. At a Parish Council meeting it was decided that we would hire a digger and level the ground and then replant a new hedge and reinstate a new stock fence. This was done and this was when the problems started. We had tried over many years to contact the landowner, [REDACTED] but it had not been possible. The hedge was encroaching on the footpath and we had it in the back of our minds to install the gateway sign.
11. [REDACTED] found out about what we'd done and made contact with me with a cease and desist email. We eventually met with [REDACTED] at the site, it was a fairly hostile meeting to start with but over a few weeks we managed to placate her by agreeing to remove the clippings from the old hedge removed and reinstating the stock fence which had rotted away. We had already decided to put a new whip hedge in and intended to do so. [REDACTED] wanted a mature hedge and a watering system. This was where we disagreed. Our advice from experts was that this was the best way to do it. We were in the process of offering her £5000 towards the cost of a mature hedge when everything went pear shaped. We refused to pay for the irrigation system. The new mature hedge was between twelve and fifteen thousand pounds. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] claimed she wanted her privacy back. We were of the opinion that a mature hedge would die and we sought advice from 'Kent men of trees' who agreed.
12. There was a switch in attitude with [REDACTED] from hard negotiation to legal action around October 2020. We got Warners solicitors involved at this point.
13. Any minutes of part two meetings are not published on the website. If a part 2 minute can be written without naming anyone then if they need to be they can be published. For example we called a vote of no confidence in [REDACTED] and we did publish this without his name being mentioned. I then gave members the opportunity to call a vote of no confidence in me.
14. I do not know what specific information [REDACTED] gave to Pitmans solicitors, all we know is that he has given them information on myself as if I'm some



sort of master criminal. we had suspicions that someone was leaking information but our solicitor Mike McNally was the one who highlighted that there must be someone feeding either Pitmans or [REDACTED] information. This was when we set up the integrity cell as we were at the point then where we were dealing with offers to [REDACTED] and we didn't want those offers to get back to [REDACTED] via the mole.

15. I wanted to fight the case but realised it wasn't my money and so we settled the claim outside court. I believe that we were on the land and did the work on it as agents of Kent County Council. [REDACTED] clearly blames me solely for the situation despite the fact that the decisions were made by the whole council and other members went on the land and carried out work on it. I think that if [REDACTED] believes that I have done something wrong then he should report the matter under the standards process rather than take the action he did by speaking to Pitmans solicitors or [REDACTED] which was clearly detrimental to the whole Parish Council. I accept that the Parish Council should have issued a 14 day notice to [REDACTED] that we intended to go on the land and would do this differently if the same circumstances arose.
16. As far as I am aware no standards complaints were submitted against me as a result of this incident which is the route [REDACTED] should have taken in my view. I believe that he knew that he didn't have a case but wanted to engineer as situation where I was seen to be to blame.
17. [REDACTED] admitted during a Parish Council that he had spoken to Pitmans solicitors and then started to rant about me. I was surprised by this.
18. I believe that the matter could have been resolved without solicitors for about £5000. Once the solicitors got involved we expected to be able to settle for about £10,000. The cost of the mature hedge which [REDACTED] installed (along with an irrigation system) was about £14000. Our insurance company refused to pay for our legal services but we are still hoping that we may be able to claim for this.
19. I think the only time there was a briefing with our solicitor was on 2 December 2020. I don't believe that I mis-briefed Mr McNally and if I had I would fully expect another member to highlight this. Other members will freely challenge me if they don't agree.
20. Our local Kent County Council Harry Rayner wrote a letter to state that we had been bonafide agents of the County Council when carrying out the work on the land. Our solicitor's view was that other than not submitting the 14 day



notice we hadn't acted wrongly and that as we had been shown to try and resolve the matter we may, even if we were found against at court, still not have to pay [REDACTED] legal costs.

21. I do not think that [REDACTED] was worried about the cost to the Parish Council, his sole motive in my opinion was to ensure that the whole thing was seen as my fault., to discredit me in the eyes of the community and the other members of the Parish Council.