

## **Public Statement – Annual Council Meeting 12<sup>th</sup> May 2016**

Exactly a fortnight ago in this very room I made a public statement regarding the deeply concerning behaviour of a few people which is damaging the reputation and functioning of Ledbury Town Council. The council has been notified that these matters are now under independent investigation at county level. Therefore, I am shocked by the blatantly unlawful attempts being made here today to pre-judge the outcome of these investigations by removing me from all meaningful involvement in parish business.

This action is designed to obstruct me as an elected councillor from continuing to act in the public interest by highlighting maladministration and misconduct within this council. It won't work.

The allegations of bullying, intimidation and harassment made by staff are without foundation – and I refute them absolutely. All I have done is to make constructive efforts to encourage professionalism and integrity throughout the town council. I have an overwhelming mandate to modernise and improve – a mandate given to me, and to my reforming councillor colleagues, by the people of this town only a year ago. I will not be diverted from this work – it is long overdue and the need is great.

I accept that my questions may be uncomfortable and my scrutiny of people's undemocratic actions is unwelcome in some quarters – but that doesn't make me a bully. Asking difficult questions will cause frustration and worry to some – but that doesn't mean I am being intimidating or harassing. I look forward to a time when Ledbury Town Council is open to scrutiny, welcomes new ideas and seeks to continuously improve itself and its service to the town.

It is illegal for a parish council to judge my conduct as a councillor. I have confirmation of this from Jonathan Wragg of Highgate Chambers – a UK expert in Local Government Law and barrister to the National Association of Local Councils – which is the governing body for parish councils. The Monitoring Officer of Herefordshire Council, who is statutorily responsible for the oversight of councillor conduct, has repeatedly requested that the Town Council await the outcome of her independent investigations. She also asserts that this is the legally correct approach.

Given the mess these councillors have already created, it almost beggars belief that they are happy to hazard large sums of public money by such a blatant disregard for the law on this matter. This council is no-one's personal play-thing.

Back in December I argued that Ledbury Town Council was in need of urgent modernisation and review; now it has shown itself to be a shambolic disgrace. Two thirds of its councillors are under investigation for breaching standards and the councillor code of conduct. The council's operation fails to meet the most basic standard of quality laid down by national governing bodies. I worry the town council will shortly be judged unfit for purpose and is at risk of being put into 'special measures'.

Meanwhile Ledbury continues to be failed through poor leadership, lack of ambition, missed opportunities and bungling incompetence.

I leave it to the residents and voters of Ledbury to decide which is more likely:

1. That the Town Council is properly run and my behaviour is inappropriate? ... Or
2. That I have been tough in challenging complacency, corruption and malpractice and the people involved have fought to prevent me from getting to the truth?

If the council is well-run, and has nothing to hide, why is it unwilling for an impartial third party to investigate these matters?

I do not recognise and will not be deflected by these councillors' prejudiced and illegal attempt to smear and sanction me. Instead, I welcome the Monitoring Officer's independent scrutiny of the actions of all parties concerned – myself included, and I look forward to the outcome of her investigations in due course.

Meanwhile I shall continue to fulfil my responsibilities as a county councillor and as a town councillor in representing the interests of Ledbury residents to the very best of my abilities.

*Cllr Liz Harvey*

12th May 2016

**Copy of Public Statement given at the Annual Town Meeting, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2016**

Over the last 2 years I and a small number of councillor colleagues have identified several serious issues concerning Ledbury Town Council, its elected members, and its procedures.

These concerns include the handling of public money, the declaration of interests in planning matters and the withholding of information from councillors and from members of the original Neighbourhood Plan.

As councillors, we have persisted in our attempts to obtain satisfactory explanations for these issues from the people involved, and to improve our working practices within the council. We have been blocked at every turn.

We have been subjected to reputationally damaging smears and have been the targets of intimidating and abusive behaviour, some of which has been orchestrated and very public.

I now believe it is likely that wrongdoing has taken place and I have reported my concerns to the Monitoring Officer of Herefordshire Council who is taking the necessary action.

As a direct result of my enquiries I have been accused of behaviour which alleges a breach of the councillor code of conduct. This is a direct challenge to what I see as my duty to ask questions in the public interest. Therefore, I have also reported myself to the Monitoring Officer of Herefordshire Council who is required by law to investigate such allegations.

I welcome the Monitoring Officer's scrutiny of the actions of all parties concerned and I look forward to the outcome of her independent investigations.

I have nothing to hide and nothing to gain from my work as a councillor. My only interest is in achieving the very best outcomes for Ledbury and for its residents.

I believe a competent and capable Town Council has a central role to play in the life of the community and I fully support all those who share that objective.

*Cllr Liz Harvey*

28th April 2016