

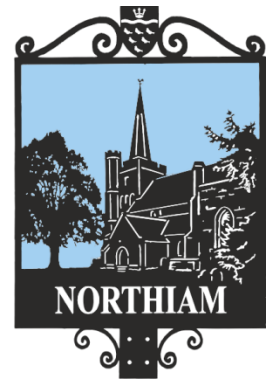
# Northiam Parish Council

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## MINUTES for Parish Meeting held on THURSDAY 28<sup>th</sup> APRIL at 7pm

*The meeting was recorded to assist the Clerk with the minutes, and written statements and reports are attached as appendices to the minutes on the website. Any resident can ask to have sight of these by emailing the Clerk or calling into the office in person.*

The Chairman, Cllr Schlesinger, (SS) opened the meeting and welcomed everyone. She said that some people may have been aware that there had been an investigation into Cllr Streatfield's behaviour following complaints made by other councillors and former councillors. She had received the results earlier in the day from the independent investigator and as Cllr Streatfield (JS) had been found in breach of the member's code of conduct, it was recommended that the results be reported to parish residents. However, as it is a 14-page report, SS only read from the final page containing suggested sanctions. (The full report is attached as Appendix 1). She further read from the covering letter from Lorna Ford, Rother DC's Deputy CEO and Monitoring Officer, (Appendix 2) which stated that a disproportionate amount of time and resources had been spent on Northiam Parish Council and the associated complaints, and suggested that Cllr Streatfield should reflect on his position as a councillor. Appropriate training and mediation were suggested but this can only take place if members are willing, and would be at a cost to the parish council.

Cllr Streatfield then spoke. He began by saying, that yes, he had broken the code of conduct by writing the open letter and posting it on social media, but he had done so because every time he raised the subject, he was out-manoeuvred or material was manipulated and nothing would be done. It's not a personal issue, a principal is at stake. He is trying to sort out a £1.4m site that the village are paying for which is meant to be an amenity for the village, and he feels it is far from that. He then read from his written statement (Appendix 3), referring to various documents (Appendix 4 (yellow paper), Appendix 5 (Doctor's Field map) & Appendix 6 (Loan Repayment Letter 2018)).

He finished by saying that if the Open Forum became 'open season' as it had done on 3<sup>rd</sup> February, he would not be staying. Then Cllrs Farmer, Johnson & Streatfield immediately left the meeting.

### Open Forum

There was some disquiet that having called for a parish meeting, those who requested the meeting had left. Sarah Giles said she felt it was more important that people in the room hear what the CIC has to say, rather than JS. She said that once more facts have been twisted, but because so much time has already been wasted on the subject, the CIC are not going to respond again – they have already given a detailed response and many people asked for a copy, and have been sent the information. Please email if you require a copy. However, if JS had not left, she was going to ask him what is his end game? It has wasted so much time. The report suggests drawing a line under things, and that is what he should do.

Pete Sargent then spoke. He said that this is a very sorry state of affairs and he was appalled that JS had walked out having called for the meeting and he felt it showed total disrespect to villagers. However, he wanted to refer to a couple of items raised: JS had highlighted a document referred to as 'whistleblower'

emails which include emails sent after he had left the parish council and could communicate with whoever he wished. JS has redacted the name of the whistleblower, but as PS has the original, he wanted it minuted for the record that the whistle-blower was Debbie Edwards. When PS left the PC, he had given the CIC a document with basic information for managing the SFF site. It contained tenants', clients' and contractors' names & contact details. By putting this document into the public domain, JS and Debbie Edwards had committed a serious breach of data protection and he suggested that the Clerk should insist it is withdrawn. A further document JS refers to is the 'Blue Cross Supporting Documentation'. PS said he had created most of this document with the help of other members and they were circulated to all councillors for approval, including the one for the Public Works Loan Board. It was issued by the PC and therefore any mis-leading information contained therein means that everyone on the PC at the time is equally culpable, not PS as an individual. The 'Blue Cross Cashflow & Business Estimates' document contains figures for possible DIY livery supplied to him by Cllr Farmer (PF) and two land agents have since confirmed that those figures are wildly optimistic. Finally, PS spoke of the 'conversation that JS had had with a man in the pub' which he referred to as evidence. An email written by JS about a conversation is not written evidence. In addition, the information is incorrect. PS had asked a plumber to do a job whilst still Chairman of the PC, but the plumber had forgotten to do the job and he still hasn't done it. Therefore, there is no invoice as no job has been done. Everyone who came to the Open day was given the opportunity to join the CIC by writing their details in the Red Book. PS then proceeded to name all the members denoting whether he had known them prior to the creation of the CIC, and asking those present if he had suggested to them that they might benefit financially from their involvement with SFF. The majority of those present had been vague acquaintances or not known at all to PS before meeting them at the inaugural meeting to form the CIC.

He stated that JS' comments about the legality of the CIC and how the chosen directors should have been put to a vote in the village, is also incorrect. They don't have to go through an election process as it is a limited company – it is not a statutory body like a parish council and is not required to hold an election process. Furthermore, JS is putting out unpleasant rumours about PS and Julian Lockett, the husband of the CIC Chairman, who as a retired architect has been a great help to the village giving advice on various matters such as the war memorial & the football pavilion. All his work had been on a pro bono basis and he cannot charge a fee as, being retired, he no longer holds professional indemnity insurance. JS is making scurrilous suggestions which have no foundation whatsoever, and if he continues to circulate this statement, termed the 'housing development scam', both Julian Lockett & PS will look to take legal action.

Carol Biggs then spoke. Referring to PS comments, she had joined the CIC after attending several PC meetings when the purchase of SFF was being discussed, and asking who was going to be on the CIC that JS had told were going to run things. She hadn't supported the purchase of SFF but respecting the democratic decision, she wanted to be part of ensuring its success. JS keeps trying to discredit both her husband and herself. He continually assumes that she conspired with TB, but as the CIC agreement wasn't signed until August 2021 any meetings held before that were purely exploratory. Any decisions would have been decided on by the PC, so there is no substance to these allegations. She feels that what JS is saying is libellous, and he has no evidence to support his assumptions. He was the main instigator of the purchase of the Blue Cross site. On several occasions she asked for business plans, surveys and a financial plan for the maintenance of the site and was ignored. Can she assume that he had been conspiring all along to run a DIY livery? She finished by saying that if JS won't respect the democratic vote, then he is not a councillor that the village truly needs.

TB said he wanted to re-iterate what he had said at the meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> February. JS refers to the meeting about the leaked emails on 18<sup>th</sup> November between the then Chair (JH) & himself and two CIC Directors. JS states that after the meeting, TB & JH did nothing further. This is not true. He spoke to the then Interim Clerk, who got in touch with the CIC and was satisfied with the explanations they gave. Furthermore, his reference to wanting to attend that meeting was discussed at length at the PC meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> November, and the minutes record that no formal objections were made and all councillors agreed that only TB & JH should attend said meeting. When residents see the full report from the external independent officer's, there is a reference to the police, (as mentioned by JS). They together with the CIC regulator, report that they find no substance to back up the allegations he made.

Greg Collett from Ewhurst Lane then spoke. He had been at the previous meeting and he wanted to share an observation. In general people fall into 4 categories – those who do good things for others; those who try to do good things for others but it becomes a horrible job; those who do good things for themselves, that are bad for others; and those who do bad things for themselves and others. This last group are known as idiots. The CIC are wonderful people doing a wonderful job stuff for the village, and it is in danger of becoming a horrible job. It needs to be returned to a great job so that they can enjoy the planning and the strategy of SFF for the whole village.

Jacqui Harding then spoke. She said she welcomed the judgement of the external investigator and hoped that it would allow the council to return to a stable, respectful working environment. However, JS wasn't alone in his actions – others were fully complicit and endorsed his conduct, even putting their signatures to some of his complaints and facilitating access to an alternative social media site. She asked, can residents be assured that they will also accept that their behaviour has not followed the rules and regulations which determine the conduct of both the council and individual councillors? Will they in the future accept the democratic decisions of Council, and are they prepared to offer their apologies for assisting in the chaos and disruption that has ensued since this all began last autumn?

Karen Ayling said she briefly wanted to thank all the people on the CIC and the PC for the incredible work they have done, and to say that the village is really grateful.

A member of the audience then asked how does the PC move on if there is no obligation for JS to resign? SS confirmed that there are no sanctions a Monitoring Officer can insist on apart from training. The next election is in May 2023, and she suggested that Northiam residents should ensure there are plenty of candidates so that there is a contested election. She said that the Parish Council does try it's best to do good things.

TB said that in his personal opinion, all councillors should resign and not stand for re-election next May. Then a completely new group of elected councillors could move forward.

Steve Pratt debated how much more rubbish is going to circulate for the next 12 months? Current behaviour has destroyed and distracted the PC from ordinary business. SS is the third chairman and the current clerk is the third clerk who is probably not staying having to put up with this rubbish. The clerk declined to comment.

JH said that there are principles of public life detailed in standing orders, the code of conduct and parish councillors, although volunteers, must abide by those rules just as town councillors etc. in larger organisations.

Anya Pagden said she was surprised that training for elected councillors was not a necessity. She had assumed it was. JH said that an agreement to undertake induction training is part of signing your acceptance of office as a councillor. SS said that the PC pay for the training courses, and newly elected councillor, Ben Dallimore, has already attended two training courses.

The discussions became more generalised and the meeting closed at 8.15pm