

Arun District Council, Civic Centre, Maltravers Rd, Littlehampton, West Sussex, BN17 5LF

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From: Simon Bliss [REDACTED]
Sent: 04 August 2021 21:10
To: Planning <Planning@arun.gov.uk>
Subject: RE: M/88/21/PL

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Dear Arun Planning / Mrs Gardner

I would be grateful if you would include the emails below (both of which were sent to the Parish Council) as part of our application on the online portal & in particular to be taken into account in your final deliberation & decision on this matter.

In short, over the past weeks, there has been some very unsatisfactory actions of certain elements of the Parish & general community, which we have stayed completely silent on. However, the time is right to provide you with some of this background, so that you have what I believe to be a well balanced view from both sides. I also have a full report to share with you (and the online portal) which I will forward before the deadline of 5 August 2021.

Many thanks

Simon Bliss

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 04 August 2021 13:52
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: M/88/21 Coffee Trailer Proposal - Follow up

Dear [REDACTED]

In relation to the deferral of the Development Control Committee ("DCC") discussion on application M/88/21 from 21 July 2021 to 4 August 2021, I am now inclined not to attend. Unless the DCC can satisfy the decision criteria that we talked about previously in terms of:

- making a judgment with an open mind;
- listening to all of the evidence; &
- not having a bias, prejudicial interest & not having pre-determined their decision

it's just a complete waste of everybody's time. I keep reading & re-reading the Parish Council Members Code of Conduct & the Statutory Principles within it & it's an interesting read when you consider what I have outlined in my two emails. To summarise where I am at :

- I attended & was ready for the discussion with the DCC & the public at the 21 July 2021 meeting;
- I had fully prepared & provided the DCC with a detailed report in advance (on 19 July 2021), plus the email sent to you on 20 July 2021 (below) outlining some concerns I had over the process to date;
- The DCC have at some level been aware of this proposal at least 2 weeks prior to the 21 July, so I am not sure why the DCC needed more time which was confirmed to me as the reason for the deferral;
- I have tried to co-operate fully & communicate with you on & before 21 July & that discussion was deferred to 4 August, the day before final comments are due to Arun DC.

I also understand that the DCC may have actually met at 6pm on 21 July 2021 presumably to have some sort of "pre meeting" discussion, I can only assume that this proposal was part of that pre-meeting discussion which I cannot see in the minutes on the website. I think the other point missing from the minutes of 21 July 2021 is the statement made by the Chairman of the DCC directly to the public in attendance, which was that planning applications are decided upon based on planning considerations & not individual/personal views. Also, having reviewed those minutes, the DCC were opining on 8 separate planning applications on 21 July, and the meeting ended at 6.39pm (9 minutes after the start) which demonstrates that decisions are effectively made before & outside the meetings of public record & this application is no different.

The final straw for me personally on all of this is in relation to the following 3 points :

1. **On 21 Jul 2021** at the DCC meeting, an individual who I understand to be a very senior member of the PC (& member of the DCC) raised a point of conflict given their home address ("I live opposite" were the exact words used so I think the draft minutes of 21 July also need to accurately reflect that statement as they currently refer to "being a nearby resident" which are two completely different statements & could be misleading as currently documented in the draft minutes in my opinion). However this situation is another perfect example of the general consensus amongst the DCC (eg the difficulty in detaching personal views from the professional ones), but I guess the positive point here is that the clear conflict & the inability to satisfy the criteria above were formally recognised by that member of the PC/DCC & on that point I agree 100%. Maybe others will follow suit.

2. **Furthermore, on 29 July 2021**, a letter of objection was actually lodged on the Arun DC portal by an individual who I now know to be a very senior member of the DCC (in fact it was STRONGLY objected to per the wording of the letter). This individual will presumably be voting on this application today and having already lodged a letter of objection at Arun DC before any discussion or decision has been reached by the DCC. I have no idea if this STRONG objection by a member of the DCC is actually permitted, but it's there for everybody to see). In any event, this is another perfect example of how the decision criteria outlined above cannot actually be adhered to by the DCC. I assume this 2nd individual will follow the lead of the previous DCC member, and now also declare a conflict of interest tonight ? If so, we will then have a very senior member of the PC (& member of the DCC) & a further very senior member of the DCC completely conflicted on this matter (potentially along with other members of the DCC in my opinion – see below).

3. **Today (4 August 2021)**, the DCC member (& Facebook Administrator) who had previously confirmed that **"feedback will be monitored CLOSELY by Councillors who use this group for gauging public opinion"**, has now stated on Facebook (this morning) that he cannot comment publicly comment on this until you have debated the issues. It goes on to say that the individual has to remain neutral & listen to all sides of the debate etc etc etc – This statement is in my opinion, quite frankly laughable in terms of its timing. To have it posted today, probably 2 weeks after anybody had posted anything at all on the thread (other than last night from 3 of the major objectors & 1 of those is the spouse of a DCC member who continues to encourage others to object "if they feel it is wrong") FaceBook had gone completely silent. It also states that the DCC member is continuing to allow others to comment. On the face of it, this seems to be trying to address some of my previous concerns (albeit over 2 weeks late) & is another example of the inaccuracy of public statements, as I believe this individual has already made his thoughts clear by "liking" negative posts (and no positive posts). To my mind, today's post has been put on there to :

- a) Deal with some of the points from my previous email (below); &
- b) stimulate more debate again on FaceBook before your DCC meeting tonight & the closing of comments tomorrow – the thread had gone completely silent for 2 weeks & is further confirmation that the vast majority of the public have no problem with this proposal.

Anyway, in the spirit of my continued co-operation on this matter (& providing the DCC with the ability to listen to all of the evidence), I would like to share you with some (as of now) statistics relating to the public response to this proposal which I believe are relevant, important & should to be understood by the DCC. I am more than happy for these statistics to be shared with the DCC & the public in attendance & for the formal minutes:

1. **Starting with Social Media (Facebook)**, which you & I agree is not particularly relevant when it comes to formal decisions, but I wanted to cover it, as it has had some airtime over the past weeks & is clearly an important forum for some. I have also shared with you previously that a member of the DCC confirmed on the Middleton & Elmer Matters Facebook page that the DCC were monitoring the comments in advance of the original 21 July meeting, so was clearly a relevant forum for the DCC & to that extent here is my own feedback on it:
 - There are approx. **2,600** Facebook members of the Middleton & Elmer Matters Facebook page & by my calculations just **53 people** have commented on the thread over a number of weeks that it has had airtime (& only half of those are deemed negative & the other half are either positive or neutral)
 - So in total, just 2.0% (or 1% of the negative) of the total Facebook community of 2,600 have aired their views & a landslide majority of 99% are either positive, neutral or have no issue or interest in this proposal at all.

2. **Responses lodged at Arun DC** – as of today, there are a total of **89** letters on the system, of which 11 are duplicate letters, **so 78 valid individual responses**. Of the **78** valid responses, **55 of them are letters of support or no objection** & there are **just 23 objections**. Of those **23** objections, they include the following :
- 1 letter from an administrator of the Middleton & Elmer Matters FaceBook page. A “leader” (of sorts) in the community who also made completely false statements (at the time) to the community about MOSA’s position (at the time) on this matter. Coincidentally, this letter went in on 3rd July, 2 days after the application went live on the portal on 1 July - a very quick response indeed.
 - 1 letter from who I understand may be the spouse of a member of the **DCC**
 - 1 letter from who I understand maybe the spouse of a member of the **PC**
 - 1 strong letter of objection directly from a very senior member of the **DCC** (before any formal DCC discussion has taken place or decision has been made)
 - 1 letter from **MOSA** itself; very swiftly followed by
 - 1 letter from who I understand may be a Road Representative of **MOSA** (who by the way uses some of same arguments & exact wording as the MOSA letter)
 - 1 letter from who I understand may be the spouse of a member of the **MOSA** management committee, the **MOSA** planning advisory committee (who I assume was part of the formal **MOSA** decision) & various other **MOSA** sub committees
 - 1 letter from who I understand may be another Road Representative of **MOSA**
 - 1 letter from who I understand to be on the **MOSA** Management Committee, the **MOSA** planning advisory committee (who I assume was part of the formal **MOSA** decision), & various other **MOSA** sub committees
 - 1 letter from who I understand to be a **MOSA** Trustee (all in all, **MOSA** have been very busy over the past few days)
 - The point here is that just 13 letters have been from lodged from members of the wider community who on the face of it seem to be un-connected with a public office, a public role or a public officer (& 4 of those letters were from 2 sets of husband & wives submitting separate letters, which of course is fine).

The conclusion to the feedback from the Arun DC portal is that the vast majority (or another landslide) of 71% of people who responded, have responded positively for this proposal. I have no doubt that more objections will follow after the reminder to the public made on social media today by a DCC member (indirectly reminding people, by making an un-necessary post which could have been made weeks ago) and others (very directly reminding people) on social media today.

Furthermore, during the past days, we have received environmental health sign off via the Arun DC portal (we believe this deals with any concerns around smells, noise & litter). We have also received a positive report from the Highways Agency via the Arun DC portal (we believe this covers any parking & congestion concerns).

I do not have a feel for the total population of Middleton (maybe 5,000 plus), but the reality is that there has been a very (very) small sub-section of the community that have tried to ramp up the negativity on this proposal, but on the face of it, the positives seem to have far outweighed the negatives. The output from the Arun DC portal confirms that.

In short, the statistics & the feedback via facebook & the Arun DC portal speak for themselves, the public have spoken & they have spoken to emphatically support this proposal.

If the DCC are making a decision based on their own personal/individual views, then taking into account this email & my email below, I am absolutely confident they will reject this proposal. However, if they are actually taking into account:

- a. The core planning considerations as was confirmed verbally at the 21 July meeting by the Chairman of the DCC (all of which we have answered in our first report to you plus more to be made available to Arun DC in due course); and

- b. The consensus of the community (please refer to the comment made by a member of the DCC on Facebook which said that ***“feedback will be monitored CLOSELY by Councillors who use this group for gauging public opinion.....”***)

then there surely cannot be any other decision than one of no objection (or maybe even support ?). It will be extremely disappointing if the DCC cite (or sit behind) a standard list of objections as they have done on various previous planning proposals (please also refer to the 30 July objection letter from a very senior member of the DCC directly to Arun DC, which lists some of those points already). For example :

- i) neighbourly concerns;
- ii) the setting of precedents for future applications; &
- iii) the design statement / the area of special character / the impact on the street scene etc etc etc

I would also like to note for the record a statement made by an individual who is a very senior member of the PC (& member of the DCC) on 21 July 2021 when discussing a separate planning application which included a front garage extension – “historically these things were a “no no” (per the design statement) but now everybody was doing it” was the gist of what was said by the individual.....this was a very clear acknowledgement of existing & past deviations or adapting to changes from the design statement (which I believe we have absolutely adhered to by the way) & which some objectors seem to be relying on.

The reality from my side is that the voting members of the DCC just don't like the idea of a small barista type coffee trailer in the village & that is that. Unfortunately, the personal views of an element of the voting DCC seem to be getting in the way & that appears to have been the case since the beginning (please see my previous email below). If you take into account that, on the face of it, 4 of the 6 members of the DCC (**so c.67% of the vote excluding the clerk, who I assume does not vote**) may have in some way directly or indirectly expressed a negative view on this proposal outside of & before the formal decision process has taken place, then you will surely understand my significant concerns about the way in which this process has been conducted from start to finish.

To bring this to a close, I would like to thank you personally for your assistance on this matter, but to be clear, the way in which the PC/DCC have gone about this generally has been extremely disappointing & in some respects just beggars belief.

Finally, for complete transparency from my side, I will now be asking Arun DC to upload these 2 emails to the online public portal for them to review & consider in conjunction with the overall decision process at their end. At the end of the day, I will leave it to the Arun planning committee to decide on this. I have tried my best to communicate & co-operate with the DCC, but I have come up against a barrier of negativity, some very odd actions by various individuals either close to or actually in a public role/office & what I see as being personal views clouding what surely needs to be an unbiased, unprejudiced, transparent & professional process.

Best wishes

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 20 July 2021 19:28
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Bliss Coffee Trailer Proposal - Further information - Strictly Private & Confidential
Importance: High

Dear [REDACTED]

Following on from the report previously circulated, I am sending you this email with some additional thoughts directly from myself, as I do not think the information I have summarised below is appropriate for discussion in a public forum by all & sundry & should in my opinion be considered internally within the Parish Council.

This is not an easy email for me to write or send as there are some “gritty” points in here, but I do feel very strongly indeed that for whatever reason, we have the tide heavily against us here with the Parish Council & before any formal discussions had even started. I confirmed to you previously that I have some concerns over the way in which this proposal has/is being dealt with within the community so far, and in particular some direct participation from what I believe to be :

- Two members of the Parish Council Development Control Committee (“DCC”)
- A close family member of a member of the DCC
- A close family member of a member of the Parish Council Committee
- Another “leader” in the community

I understand that there is a Parish Council Members Code of Conduct and Standing Orders that need to be adhered to. Further to an email exchange with you, I also understand that the Development Control Committee is required to adhere to certain key areas around any decision making, for example:

1. Making a judgement on the application with an open mind;
2. Listening to all the evidence (which is why we have provided you with our report in advance of your meeting); and
3. Not having some form of bias or prejudicial interest and not having pre-determined their decision

Some of the points I am specifically concerned about are :

- a) Given that they were tagged (or copied) into the original Facebook post, it seemed to have the blessing of the 2 Facebook administrators (or leaders) of the Middleton & Elmer Matters Facebook page (subsequently supported by various comments added and likes to posts by both individuals).
- 1 of the administrators stated that he “believed that MOSA would ALSO be objecting”. I contacted MOSA directly at the time & they reassured me that the committee does not conduct its business on social media platforms, and that their next meeting is on 21/7 at which the committee will consider the application. I am also curious as to why the word ALSO was used.

The same administrator then went on to say a few days later that MOSA had actually objected. I received confirmation from the MOSA chairman that same evening that this was not the case. So, there are 2 pretty important statements made by somebody who co-administers a village FaceBook site with a member who I believe may be on the DCC.

I understand this individual is not actually connected to the DCC (and that you are a different body than MOSA), but these statements were made in the public domain and were quite simply wrong. I have also not seen any response from the other administrator on these points eg as to whether they were in fact valid statements or not, so I can only assume both of them are on the same page and maybe have some kind of “heads up” on the MOSA position ?

- I understand that the other FB administrator may be a member of the DCC. This individual liked a post made by another member which was urging members with a strong view to send objections to the council & put this proposal to bed (he seems to have strong views given his like to the post) and a 2nd post on the evening of 14/7 which confirmed this was being discussed on 21/7 by the committee. There were no likes to any supportive comments, so it seems like a bit of an unbalanced approach being made on social media for a person in a public role.

The same individual commented on Facebook and said “Thanks for all of the feedback. The subject was briefly discussed at last weeks DCC meeting. I am sure there will be a full discussion of the PC in due course soon.....” – I have reviewed the DCC minutes of 7 July 2021, and cannot see any reference to any discussion, brief or otherwise. You also confirmed to me previously that no discussion had taken place on 7 July. To my mind this is another example of misleading and potentially stoking up the social media members by an individual in a public role much the same as the MOSA comments, albeit from an individual unconnected to MOSA.

You have already confirmed that the Parish Council will decide on the planning applications on planning issues only, but this individual has also stated very clearly on Facebook that ***“feedback will be monitored CLOSELY by Councillors who use this group for gauging public opinion.....”***

I believe all of these points go to 1 & 3 above

- b) A 2nd member of the DCC having “liked” a very selective 2 comments made by other members relating to concerns around the proposal. There were no likes to any supportive comments, so again it seems like a bit of an unbalanced approach being made on social media for a person in a public role.

I believe this also goes to point 1 & 3 above

- c) We have also seen what we believe to be comments & formal letters of objection from 2 close family members (possibly spouses ?) of Parish Council Committee Members. I have no idea if this is permitted or not, but it seems odd to me given the public role of a Parish Council or Development Control Committee Member:

- Firstly, what I believe to be a very close family member of a member of the main Parish Council Committee submitted a letter of objection on 14/7 sighting various points we have responded to in the advanced materials we circulated. The family member made the very first comment to the Facebook post so on the face of it seemed armed & ready for the social media debate & has commented many times since, including asking “how people can object to the application as seems we need to share this to those who can’t find it” (a bit like herding sheep).

I believe this also goes to points 1 & 3 above

- Secondly, what I believe to be another very close family member of a member of the Development Control Committee who has gone public on Facebook with comments like “they doubt that will happen” presumably in relation to the success of the application and so many other comments I have actually lost count & interest to be honest - You should read some of the Facebook comments for yourselves, they really make for interesting reading. This was followed up by an objection to Arun DC by the same individual family member.

I believe these points also go to 1 & 3 above

In terms of point 2, we have provided you with all of the detail from our side in the report previously circulated, however, we do have some other points to communicate in the 10 minute public discussion period, which will be more than enough time.

Taking all of the above into account, I am really struggling with the notion that some of the DCC members can actually make properly informed decisions with an open mind and not being pre-determined given the strong views & position taken by themselves, close family members and co-administrators of local Facebook sites. Every example above is either negative or supporting (liking) a comment that is negative.

From our side it seemed like the original Facebook post had some sort of Parish Council push behind it and to that extent we want to make sure that this proposal is being by considered no differently from any other & that a decision will be reached based on the facts & if required, on the feedback from the local community & that decisions will be made completely separate from any thoughts that the committee (or anybody closely connected to it) may have as individual residents of the community.

From our side, this has gone on long enough already, so we hope that a decision can be reached by the DCC on 21/7 & we can all move on with our lives & let Arun DC do whatever they need to do.

Finally, please take my feedback here in the spirit that it is intended, which is designed to ensure that a fair & balanced approach is adopted by everybody, particularly those either in or very close to a public role or office. After having read it, I really hope you understand where I am coming from here.

If anybody wants to talk to me about this tomorrow, they should call me on [REDACTED]

Many thanks for all of your help over the past few days. I will be at the meeting tomorrow, as will my son.

Regards

[REDACTED]