



COLNEY HEATH PARISH COUNCIL

Highfield Park Office
 Highfield Park Visitor Centre
 Hill End Lane
 St Albans
 Hertfordshire AL4 0RA

Colney Heath Village Office
 83 High Street
 Colney Heath
 Hertfordshire AL4 0NS

Tel: 01727 825314 Email: clerk@colneyheathparishcouncil.gov.uk

MEETING:	Full Council
MEETING DATE:	Thursday 22 nd July 2021
SUBJECT:	CH Scout Group Correspondence
AGENDA ITEM No.	21/22 Item 39a
REPORT BY:	Lisa Chaplin: Clerk to the Council and Responsible Finance Officer

For Information?		For Action?	X	For Discussion?	X	For Resolution	X
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Since 1st July 2021 there has been a significant increase in the correspondence received from the Colney Heath Scout Group. Four freedom of information requests received and the following correspondence for which the following drafts are submitted to Council for acknowledgment and approval as recommended by the HR Committee:

- a) 2nd July – letter
- b) 4th July – email
- c) 5th July – letter
- d) 6th July – email
- e) 9th July – email
- f) 13th July – letter

All responses when approved and sent will be published on the website as freedom of information request responses and the time spent on the responses will be noted.

2nd July letter

Ultra-Vires Payments - URGENT RESPONSE REQUIRED - Reference: CHSG/7/202

We have now had a chance to talk with our bankers and have been through all of our bank statements for the full period you allege to have provided a grant to the Scout and Guide Group.

We can now categorically prove that no payment for £2000 was received in the name of the Scout and Guide Group.

As such we have three questions which require your urgent attention within the next 10 days. If we have not heard back from you within this timeframe, we will be making contact with the Herts Advertiser in order to set the public record straight.

The questions we have are as follows:

1. Why were we not informed before the public release of the report and given an opportunity to check the facts of the case were correct?
2. How will you ensure that the public record is now corrected and reclassify this money as unaccounted for?
3. Please can you also let us know whether other organisations mentioned in the report are disputing other allegations made in the report?



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We understand that the Parish Council have apparently drawn a line under the accounts of April 2004-July 2015 which, given the seriousness of the misinformation in your report, seems both inappropriate and not within the best interest of openness and transparency.

CHPC Draft Response

1. No organisation was issued with the report in advance of publication.
2. The information issued is what is held by this Council from audited accounts.
3. Other but not all organisations have enquired as to evidence of what was stated in the report.

The Parish Council have drawn a line under this matter and accepted a settlement agreement in this case.

4th July email

Thank you for your email and for organising access to the HQ to collect equipment.

Needless to say however we are most disappointed that the clear questions posed in our letter to you of 14th June have not been addressed. Please can you let us know urgently:

1. The current status of the heads of terms agreement you provided us with which we responded to in full to after taking legal advice as advised by yourselves. We need a clear and definitive answer on this please.
2. Are you instructing surveyors to work with our surveyors as discussed at the meeting on the 13th May?
3. Information on any organisations/agencies that have expressed an interest at using the HQ when not being used for Scouting purposes.

We could not have been clearer in our note and would ask that the Council provide clear and definitive answers to the questions that were posed.

CHPC Draft response

1. Currently, the heads of terms have been superseded by Council decision to undertake a feasibility study on a new building which will be modern and inclusive in design, safe and open to use and hire to the entire Parish.
2. This matter was discussed in Council and as confirmed a third-party surveyor has no legal standing only the corporate landlord is required to make the decisions as to the safety and requirements of the building. So, as it stands our surveyor is not authorised to discuss Parish Business with any other surveyor.
3. Any organisations who have expressed an interest in the Roestock Hut will be treated as commercially confidential until such time as the Parish Council have anything to offer them.



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5th July – letter

I am writing to you in your personal capacity as Chair of Colney Heath Parish Council to express my significant concern regarding the decision to read out a totally unsubstantiated, inaccurate (and potentially slanderous) letter as part of a formal meeting held by the Parish Council. As you are aware, the letter in question was presented at the meeting between the Council and members of Colney Heath Scout Group and St Albans District Scouts on 13th May 2021.

I would appreciate your response to the following questions:

1. Whether all councillors saw the letter in advance and agreed to the contents being shared as part of the meeting on 13th May?
2. What enquiries and research were undertaken in order to clarify the legitimacy of the letter and whether you were able to substantiate such serious accusations?
3. The relevance of such an unsubstantiated letter to the issue of negotiation of a lease between the Parish Council and Colney Heath Scout Group?
4. Whether any of the signatories of the letter were members of the Council or direct relations of members and officers of the council?
5. Why no declarations of interest were made by Cllr West and the Clerk of the Council as to the contents of such a letter – given that it is very clear that the letter made direct reference to ‘those more closely involved with the Guides and the Parish Council’.

I would also be interested to understand how you believe such action falls within the Code of Conduct of the Parish Council “to promote and maintain high standards of behaviour by its members and co-opted members whenever they conduct the business of the Council”.

Over the last year and a half, I have tried my hardest to encourage the Scout Group to enter into meaningful dialogue with the Council and provide you with all the information you have requested in a timely manner. Despite this the Council have continued to put up barriers, change the goalposts and generally waste significant amounts of the time and money of both parties.

As such, I have informed the District Commissioner Annette Payne that I will no longer be acting as a District Representative but will be aiming to support the Scout Group as an independent advisor from this point forwards.

Given the seriousness of this letter I feel it is not unreasonable to expect to receive a response to the above questions from you personally by Friday 30th July as this will also give you an opportunity to discuss the contents with all members of the Parish Council.



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CHPC Draft Response

The Council will need to discuss and confirm their response to this correspondence, or it can be delegated to the Clerk to respond.

Council should note that the meeting in which the letter was raised was not a formal Council meeting it was an informal working party.

6th July – email

I am writing to strongly complain about the letter you read out on the 13th May at the joint parish council / scout working party meeting. I am so disgusted you felt you could read out this highly offensive letter during the meeting, without checking any of the facts. It is a defamation of character. To top this off, you said a copy would be provided but when we requested this the parish clerk took it upon her self to publish it as a FOI request. It has now been published 4 times! None of what was written in the letter is true. The letter is extremely hurtful to my family but it is also damaging towards my work. I want to know how you feel you had the right to read out such slander in so much haste with no evidence whatsoever. I am looking forward to your response then I will consider if I need to take further action.

CHPC Draft Response

The Council will need to discuss and confirm their response to this correspondence, or it can be delegated to the Clerk to respond.

Council should note that the ICO (Information Commissioners Office) were consulted on the letter and confirmed that any information that was held by the Council had to be declared as an information request.

Council should also consider that in the 9th edition of the Colney Heath Village Newsletter 'the Coal Post' issued May 2021 the letter was printed in full without redactions. The letter was also widely circulated by the Scout Group to all parents of the cubs, scouts, and beavers by email.

9th July – letter

I am writing with regard to the letter you read out at the joint CHPC and Scout Group Working Party on 13th May. I as many other people were disgusted that you read this out without looking into any of the allegations.

I have been involved in the Group for 36 years and during that time neither the executive committee or myself have ever received any complaints about the running of the group. I am one of the warranted Beaver Leaders and also the Scouter in charge. I find it extremely hard to believe that any of the 13 signatures on the letter have been involved for 30 years.



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The majority of Scout Groups have many family members involved, this is quite normal, as this is what Scouting is all about, it is referred to as The Family of Scouting, but of course we all have to follow all the National Scouting Guidelines.

To my knowledge I have never been rude or abusive to anyone in my life, it is not in my nature. Many local residents have expressed to me that they were shocked to read such allegations.

Although I don't feel the need to explain myself, I would like a few facts known. The cleaning was carried out by myself (supervising) and my two grandsons, sharing £6.00 an hour (£12 maximum charge). This was a way of earning a little pocket money for them. At the time nobody else was willing to take on the cleaning. Over the years many other Committee members and Leader's children have been given the same opportunity by cleaning or grass cutting, for example Councillor Wests eldest son cut the grass. All of the payments for this have always been put through the Groups Audited Accounts.

Regarding work carried out by my Husband, for any major works other quotations were always obtained, and then voted on at committee who was going to do the work. Obviously, any emergency work that was required had to be done quickly, and with myself being the Scouter in charge very often I pressured my husband into helping out at no cost to the group. My Husband has spent many 100's of hours maintaining the building and grounds, mostly voluntary, but occasionally, larger jobs where he had to put on hold his day job, paid for. The work carried out whether paid or unpaid was always to the highest standard and very often complimented on by other professionals.

As regards the statement "sticking with it for their children", I cannot begin to understand what they are implying. Parents/Guardians always have other options for their children if they consider their children a priority! Scouting, like any activity, isn't for every child, and if that is the case and they don't enjoy the meetings they don't stay and they are not invested. This is why we have a 4—6-week trial period. That being said, surely any concerns/complaints that parents or guardians felt were not being addressed by the group, especially with children involved, should and we would have definitely expected to have been taken higher, through the correct channels ie. in the first instance to the Scout District Commissioner and then if not satisfied to the Scout County Commissioner to look into.

Since returning to Beavers after the lockdown, the Colony and the group have grown vastly, mainly because children are telling all of their friends what a great time they are having and enjoying themselves taking part in all the different activities that we have organised.

If you have any evidence, you can give me to the contrary, I would be very pleased to see it. If not, I would like a full public apology for reading out this abusive, vile and defamatory letter.

CHPC Draft Response

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13th July – letter

Letter read out on the 13th May — Reference: CHSG/8/2021

We are contacting you regarding the letter you read out at the end of a meeting between Colney Heath Parish Council and members of the Colney Heath Scout Group and St Albans District Scout Team on 13th May 2021. As Trustees of the Scout Group we have discussed this thoroughly and taken advice on how we should respond to such a libellous, untrue and to be frank ridiculous letter that allegedly was sent to the Council by 13 residents of the Parish.

We respect that everyone is entitled to their views, and we are advocates of freedom of speech — however we would like to set the record straight. Scouting is a large family, and it is not at all uncommon that members of the same family are involved as it's in their blood. Often the only way to get new Leaders is to look to family members for support. Without this, over the years sections of Colney Heath Scout Group and indeed Scouting across the world would never have been able to keep going.

We were particularly disgusted by accusations made against our Beaver Scout Leader and Scouter in charge Patricia Hall. Patricia has been running Beavers in Colney Heath for 36 years and has never once received a complaint from parents. In fact, since the Parish Council made the letter public there has been tremendous support shown for Patricia from members, families, supporters of the group and across the wider Parish. Already over 250 residents of the parish have signed a petition in support of the Group and in particular supporting Patricia. We know that there are many more people willing to add their names as a show of strength and unity in support of Colney Heath Scout Group.

With regards to decision making in the Group, all decisions are made by the Executive Committee, discussed and then voted on. In the past the Guides have always been a part of this and no decisions concerning the Group and its running could ever be or were ever made by individuals. Until the Guides decided they no longer wanted to meet at the HQ and left in December 2017, they were always a part of the democratic process operated by Scout Groups across the UK. Finances are handled by the treasurer of the Scout Group and we have strict rules and regulations that we have to follow both from the Charity Commission and also the national Scout Association.

The Cleaning was undertaken by Patricia when nobody else could be found to do it. Two of her grandsons helped her as it needed to be done on a Friday evening in time for any weekend bookings. The "wages" for this were £6.00 an hour between the three of them, all put through the group accounts.



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In order to help us decide what action we feel might be necessary to take next, please could you let us know the following:

- We would like to know if all Councillors were shown this letter prior to reading it out? If so, did all Councillors agree to reading it out?
- Was the letter discussed with all the Councillors at a meeting and was it agreed and resolved to read it out?
- What was the purpose of reading the letter out and what relevance was it to the meeting which was arranged to discuss the lease?
- What evidence do you have to back up the accusations made in the letter?
- Are all the 13 people who signed the letter residents in the Colney Heath Parish?
- As this letter was written from a Guiding perspective did the Clerk and/or Councillor West instigate this letter?
- Did the Clerk and/or Councillor West sign the letter?
- Why was the letter published as a FOI as the people who asked for a copy were implicated in the letter and you mentioned at the meeting, we could have a copy?
- We look forward to receiving your response by Friday 30th July 20210

CHPC Draft Response

The Council will need to discuss and confirm their response to this correspondence, or it can be delegated to the Clerk to respond.