



17 July 2015

The Commissioners  
Rotherham MBC  
Riverside House  
Main Street  
Rotherham  
S60 1QY

For the attention of Ms Manzie

*by post and email*

Dear Sirs

**Conduct and culture of Rotherham Council Officers**

At the monthly meeting of Bramley Parish Council, 12 May 2015, an item appeared on the agenda, which related to the letter issued by yourselves to all parish clerks, 05 May 2015, and entitled *An invitation from the Commissioners' Office*.

Initially the item received little enthusiasm, however there ensued a passionate informal recollection by members of the prevailing enmity between the Borough Council and the Parish Council, and how the actions of senior Borough Council management comprised a significant element thereof. Consequently and in the light of your letter, I was instructed to compile a response, conveying the local community's experiences and accumulated dissatisfaction with the conduct and culture of management at Rotherham MBC. The content of this letter was subsequently approved at the latest Parish Council meeting, 14 July 2015.

It needs to be appreciated that the aforementioned 'enmity' has its origins in two particular issues, namely the proposal to introduce an extension to the Sheffield Supertram system, which would have passed through the parish, and the infamous Bramley Traffic Management Scheme. With regard the former, that aspiration failed miserably, not least due to the exposure of irregularities and inaccuracies in the business case by campaigners; regarding the latter, the scheme was imposed upon the community in spite of overwhelming resident opposition (over 3000 signatures on the petition).

With specific regard to the culture of management then, the following examples will serve to illustrate how members of Borough Council staff are more than willing to misinform, misrepresent and deceive, in order to serve their own purposes.

1) Take for example an incident regarding the Supertram proposals, where a Borough Council officer stated that residents living within close proximity of the route had been consulted about the proposal. This was completely untrue and this 'untruth' was eventually and grudgingly acknowledged by the Borough Council, and my clear recollection was that the officer involved had to submit an apology to the committee concerned.

2) During the opposition campaign to the Bramley Traffic Management Scheme and particularly with regard to the former car parking facility in the centre of the village, which had fronted the local shops for over 40 years, officers asserted that those parking spaces were illegal and defended their decisions in removing them by quoting from the Highway Code i.e. that "it was illegal to park within 10 metres of a junction".

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What the Borough Council officers conveniently omitted from their Highway Code quotation, was that parking within 10metres of a junction is indeed permissible, providing it is within "an authorised parking space". But of course, it suited the officers to misquote the Code

For the benefit of record, those former parking spaces were indisputably 'authorised', because they were a condition of the original planning approval for the parade of shops that they served.

3) More recently, the Parish Council contacted the Borough Council in relation to its desire to plant trees on the central reservation of the A631 Bawtry Road. One of the reasons Borough Council officers refused permission, was by citing a quotation from the Highways Act i.e. "trees can not be planted within 15 feet from the centre of any carriageway".

The honest and true quotation from the Act, should have been that trees cannot be planted "within 15 feet from the centre of a made-up carriageway." Note the correctly quoted term 'made-up', which of course relates only to the metalled surface of a roadway and seeing as how the central reservation of Bawtry Road is itself 27 feet wide, and the made-up carriageway is 22 feet wide, then the legal criteria was easily complied with. But of course, it suited the officer to misquote the Act.

4) In 2005, a report was compiled by a Borough Council officer in relation to a proposed residential development within the parish, which defined a specific pedestrian problem of "the difficulty with crossing Flash Lane" and thereby a recommendation of a condition on the planning approval for the development, as "requiring the installation of a pedestrian crossing" and continues "For information, I do not envisage a crossing costing more than £10,000, say £7,000 for a zebra crossing, £1,000 for installing a road hump and up to £2,000 to overcome any drainage issues."

Thereafter a Section 106 Agreement was drawn up with the developer, which included a pedestrian crossing contribution of £10,000 to be made to the Borough Council, prior to commencement of works on site.

The sum was duly paid by the developer as required, however not until approximately five years later and considerable acrimony between the local community and the Borough Council, and its officers renegeing on their initial stated 'requirement', was a simple dropped kerb facility grudgingly instated at the aforementioned location. So, contrary to the Borough Council's own observations and advice, there is no zebra crossing on a road where children cross to the adjacent playground and where they also cross to go to school, and along which officers had adjudged the need for speed control humps.

5) Let me now describe a situation where officers authorised the removal of a dog waste receptacle from the frontage of the recreation ground in Bramley, which was actioned in a fit of pique after their quotation for grass cutting on the recreation ground was rejected by the Parish Council (the fee quoted was approximately three times that of the accepted quotation from a private operator).

In response to local residents' complaints about the removal of the dog waste receptacle, officers advised that the Parish Council was to blame because it had opted out of an agreement to empty the excrement bins, yet when challenged to provide documentary evidence to support their claim, Borough Council officers could not produce any.

The story does not however end there, because last year Borough Council workmen were observed removing yet another dog excrement bin within the parish and when asked why they were doing so, the workmen explained that it was "something to do with the Parish Council" - they were unaware that they were in fact being addressed by a parish councillor. They then reinstated the receptacle at the front of a resident's home, which is located 170metres from the entrance to the above mentioned recreation ground and where very few residents are seen to walk their dogs.

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Consequently, I wrote an email to Karl Battersby advising him emphatically that his staff's actions did not have anything "to do with the Parish Council" and that he was completely undermining the wishes of the Borough Council's Ward Councillors for the area, who had previously advocated reinstatement of the bin at the frontage to the recreation ground.

Mr Battersby thereafter issued instructions for the bin to be transferred to the frontage of the recreation ground.

6) During the Bramley Traffic Management campaign, a local shopkeeper, Alan Tyler, submitted a formal complaint about a statement made by a senior member of Borough Council staff i.e. the former Director of Economic and Development Services, whereby he had admitted that prior to the design and implementation of the Traffic Management Scheme by his own staff, they had never considered what its impact would be upon the businesses in Bramley village.

This 'failure to consider' was of course contrary to the Borough Council's own Unitary Development Plan, which is why Mr Tyler brought the complaint.

Predictably, the Executive Director vehemently denied the allegation, however Mr Tyler produced a letter, which was signed by the local shopkeepers who were present at the meeting when the statement had been made and all clearly remembered it.

The complaint was 'investigated' by another senior member of staff and only when the above letter was produced, was the claim upheld.

This then led to the bizarre explanation by the Borough Council's Chief Executive regarding a letter sent by his Executive Director, which included and subsequently spawned the local oft-repeated and belittling phrase "he checked it, but he didn't check it thoroughly enough".

7) Lastly, but by no means least, and again relating to the issue of the Bramley Traffic Scheme, when officers issued their plans of the scheme, their illustrated pamphlet displayed trees, landscape features, public benches and decorative paving, none of which was instated during the scheme's implementation. Indeed the scheme was thereafter referred to as the 'Tarmac Tundra'.

Very recently, Parish Cllr Dennis Hardwick has been advised by Ward Cllr Read, that there is no funding available to carry out environmental improvements to the centre of Bramley. However, by way of contradiction, I would advise you that a budget of £60,000 for environmental improvements to the scheme was approved, 30th March 2009, and yet to-date, not one penny of that budget has been spent on improving the state of affairs in the village.

Consequent to all of the above then, just how much credibility do you think the Parish Council and local residents attribute to the advice given to our Ward Councillor, Sue Ellis, when, last year, she was assured by Borough Council officers, that the junction at Bawtry Road/Flash Lane is safe and requires no improvements - really? in spite of several serious accidents at the location?

In conclusion then I would advise you that anything issued by Rotherham Council relating to the parish, is always treated with considerable suspicion and rarely accorded any credence. The clear message from Bramley Parish Council to The Commissioners therefore, is that the culture and conduct of management at Rotherham Borough Council, needs to be radically changed.

Yours faithfully

Robert Foulds  
Clerk to the Parish Council