

## **JOINT RESIGNATION LETTER FROM STRADBROKE PARISH COUNCIL**

**15<sup>th</sup> August 2020**

**FROM: Councillors Don Darling, Stuart Gemmill, Dennis Merrit, Peter Smith & Pam Cane**

**TO: The Clerk and Councillors, Stradbroke Parish Council**

Dear Clerk and Councillors

### **Reasons for Joint Resignations:**

1. Following the circulation of the Chairman's email of the 11<sup>th</sup> August, 2020, outlining his version of events with regard to an informal written complaint made against the Stradbroke Sports and Community Centre, we, the above named Parish Councillors, feel with regret, that we have no alternative but to tender our joint resignations with immediate effect. The Chairman's threat to "more formally deal with this matter" would lead to an obvious conflict of interests for us and we have therefore come to the decision that we no longer wish to serve under a Chairman whose mode of operation appears to be that of confrontation. We genuinely thought that matters were improving between the PC and SSCC, but apparently not. We have made every effort to contribute, in our various ways, to the business of the council. Don has made a particular effort to try to restore harmony and promote a good working relationship by meeting with James on various occasions to find a way forward. We therefore feel we will serve the community more effectively from outside of the PC. We offer sincere apologise to those residents who voted us onto the PC and to those remaining Councillors whose workload will inevitably increase.

2. We refer to the informal written complaint against SSCC claiming bullying of the PC representative on the committee. It's a great shame that James didn't choose to share with you the two actual documents that relate to this incident, ie his Informal Complaint + Jane Merritt's response, so that you could make an informed opinion for yourselves regarding the situation. The PC representative joined the SSCC committee in May 2018, so if there was a question of bullying, why didn't the representative step down in May 2019 and allow one of the newly elected councillors, who were already Trustees and knew the workings of the committee, take over the position? The uncalled for remark made about the PC representative by a Trustee at the SSCC May 2019 meeting was met with an immediate rebuke by Jane and other Trustees. The receipt of this informal complaint has caused Jane great stress and anxiety, and she offered to resign as Chairman, but received a resounding vote of confidence from the other Trustees.

3. The Monitoring Officer's ruling that James had not breached the Code of Conduct was irrelevant. James submitted the complaint personally, not as PC Chairman, and the MO had no jurisdiction to make a judgement on this matter. However, in April 2015, the MO did find that James had breached the Code of Conduct by not treating others with respect and possibly bullying.

4. If this complaint was submitted in a personal capacity, why did it state at the bottom of the complaint James Hargrave, Chairman of Stradbroke Parish Council? Why were the Clerk and another parish councillor included in some of the correspondence? Why was the PC Microsoft Teams system used for a video meeting with Jane?

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5. At the PC meeting 10<sup>th</sup> August 2020, there was an Agenda item under Clerk's Report referring to the SSCC's request for possible proposed plans for the Community Centre to be removed from the PC website. Eventually, as a result of this request the informal complaint was raised against the SSCC. We expected James to give a statement regarding the informal complaint, but he chose not to.

6. As this item was on the Agenda, Don Darling tried to raise this issue of removal of the plans from the PC website on a personal basis in the Public Forum. He was forcefully instructed by the Clerk to be very careful, and to stop speaking. He was denied the opportunity to express his opinion. We are regularly reminded about treating Odile with respect, but it should be noted that mutual respect is a two way process.

7. The PC meeting of 10<sup>th</sup> August appeared rushed, the council gave the impression of being ill prepared and the meeting had to be terminated before all the agenda items had been discussed. There seems to be an endless stream of policies and documents produced by Odile, some of which appear repetitive with duplicated material. This increases the workload of the Clerk to an unacceptable level, and maybe this situation should be reviewed.

8. During the recent Pandemic, whilst the swimming pool / gym were closed, the running track and allotments were a lifeline to many residents in Stradbroke. These facilities were only available due to the efforts and funding by the Stradbroke Health Trust. By forcing the Trust into a position where it had no option but to hand over the Lease, the PC has jeopardised possible funding of facilities such as these in the village. The Trust was also instrumental in donating land and encouraging a local farmer to introduce 2 additional village footpaths. With the money already wasted on legal / professional fees together with the proposed huge expenditure on the Health Centre, it's unlikely that the PC will be in a position to fund any similar health related facilities.

We would remind Councillors of the 'Chairman's welcome' at the PC meeting of May 2019, which was directed to all councillors, existing and new, and included phrases such as: "put aside differences / try to work together / need to set a good example and show we can disagree without becoming personal / we all need to behave better and where necessary apologise for past mistakes / bring this unpleasantness to an end / if we can work together rather than putting our energy into fighting each other into doing constructive things, that would go a long way." Ironically, within three months of joining the PC, four new councillors had Informal Grievances raised against them. A meeting was suggested but never arranged, a statement of concerns was supplied by the Clerk and the councillors were instructed not to respond to the concerns raised, so were not given the opportunity to reply.

We would request please that this resignation letter be displayed on the PC website. There have been a large number of resignations from the PC over the past few years and maybe the council should reflect on this matter. Reading those resignation letters might give an insight into what has gone wrong, but unfortunately those letters don't appear to be on the website.

We wish the parish council well in it's future endeavours.  
Kind Regards

Don Darling, Stuart Gemmill, Dennis Merritt, Peter Smith, Pam Cane