

Dear Stephan

I have today resigned as a member of the Conservative Party and will now sit on Wealden District and Crowborough Town Council as an Independent.

I was made aware in March that I may have declared the wrong type of interest at a planning meeting. I believed that I had a Prejudicial Interest as it could be deemed that I have more of an interest than other residents in the town in a particular application. Before the meeting in February, I contacted the Wealden Monitoring Officer asking her advice as to whether or not I could speak as a member of the public at a meeting if I had a prejudicial interest and if I could stay in the meeting to listen to the discussion. The Monitoring Officer advised that I could speak as the ward member but must leave the meeting once I had spoken. I followed this advice. The application was deferred at this meeting.

Before the planning application could be referred back to committee, I was contacted by the Head of Planning to say he thought the Monitoring Officer may have changed her advice to me and that I should contact her again. I did this (although I would have expected her to contact me to let me know her change of advice). On contacting the Monitoring Officer again, She then advised that I have a Pecuniary Disposable Interest (which means that I have a financial interest) and that I could not speak as the ward member at the second meeting. Whilst I could have spoken as a member of the public, all those spaces had been taken. I was also advised that I should not have been responding to or corresponding with any residents who contacted me on this matter. I was bewildered as this does not allow me to do my job as their Councillor and represent their views. At the second meeting which I did not attend and did not speak the committee voted to refuse the application.

I was then informed that a complaint had been received from the applicant's solicitor stating that I may have infected the objectiveness of the decision making process of the committee by speaking at the first meeting. This despite the fact that I had told the committee I was prejudiced with regard to the application. I asked for a copy of this letter and was given it on the basis that I did not publish or share it more widely. I fully expect this letter or parts of it to be released to the press in the next few days.

This application was then referred back to the committee yet again in July. A press release was issued which whilst not naming me inferred that this was because of me. An Internal review was conducted at Wealden and given to the Standards Committee and no action has been taken. I have all along been happy to defend my position and actions based on the advice given to me. I have never hidden the declaration that I made at the initial meeting and have spoken publicly to many people about this.

I am aware that one of my fellow Conservative Councillors is unhappy with this situation and is seeking to follow my every move to see if I can be reported for anything else. I attended the Town Council Planning Meeting on 26th October to give an update on another matter under Any other Business. Before the Chair asked me to speak another Councillor jumped in and said he wanted to talk about this planning application. I immediately called out that I would need to declare an interest. The Chair pointed out that they were not going to discuss it but put it on the next agenda. This is all that was said and is reflected in the minutes. There was no time for me to leave the meeting as the item had been dealt with. I have today received a call from the Conservative Leader of the Council complaining that I did not leave a meeting when I had a prejudicial interest. This call follows nine months of similar calls regarding meetings I have attended and what I have said or done. I have, at all times, since becoming a Councillor tried to act on behalf of the residents in my ward with integrity and representing their views to the best of my ability. This to me is not the way to treat a fellow Councillor and I therefore find myself resigning from the party.

Kind Regards
Cllr Kay Moss