



Minutes of the Seaton Town Council Meeting On Monday 21st January 2019

Present

In the chair: Cllr K Beer

Councillors: C Chadwick, M Hartnell, D Ledger, S Read, J Rowland, K Rye, H Sanham, M Shaw and D Squire

Officers: Town Clerk

Public: 9 members of the public were present

181. Election of a Mayor/Chairman

Cllr Sanham proposed Cllr Beer as Mayor / Chairman of Seaton Town Council for the remainder of the 2018/19 Municipal Year

Cllr Rowland seconded the proposal.

There were no other nominations.

The Council **RESOLVED** to approve the election of Cllr Beer as Mayor / Chairman of Seaton Town Council for the remainder of the 2018/19 Municipal Year.

182. Declaration of Acceptance of Office

Cllr Beer read and signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office.

183. Election of Deputy Mayor/Vice Chairman

Cllr Ledger proposed Cllr Rowland as Deputy Mayor/Deputy Chairman of Seaton Town Council for the remainder of the 2018/19 Municipal Year.

Cllr Shaw seconded the proposal

There were no other nominations

The Council **RESOLVED** to approve the election of Cllr Rowland as Deputy Mayor / Deputy Chairman of Seaton Town Council for the remainder of the 2018/19 Municipal Year.

184. Declaration of Acceptance of Officer

Cllr Rowland read and signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office.

185. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Cllr Burrows

186. Declarations of Interest

Cllr Hartnell declared a personal interest as a Councillor with East Devon District Council (EDDC)

Cllr Shaw declared a personal interest as a Councillor with Devon County Council (DCC)

187. Public Question Time

Mr Gary Millar spoke during Public Question Time and made the following statement:

Good evening, I am Gary Millar, the sole owner of The Hat Micropub in Queen Street. I am addressing the issue of Mr. Peter Burrows, the then Mayor and current Councillor on both a local and district level, attacking my livelihood and business.

On the afternoon of New Year's Day, Mr. Burrows had a very public argument about fox hunting with a private individual on the Facebook page "Seaton Views". This escalated into a robust exchange of views between the two protagonists. (Amusingly, both share the same perspective on the matter). Mr. Burrows, who is surely used to the rough and tumble of political debate, took exception to being called a very naughty word. His inexplicable reaction was to use his title of Seaton Mayor to make a direct attack on me, accusing me of being disparaging to the Mayor, and to tell thousands of subscribers to a Twitter page called @SeatonTIC, to avoid my business. On the face of it, this was the official Seaton Tourist Information Centre Page.

This is a grossly stupid response from any public official in any circumstances. You could not make it up.

It is not clear why Mr. Burrows chose The Hat as opposed to the many other local businesses that his detractor frequents. Surely, as a public official involved in my various applications, he would have known who I was?

I do not use social media for anything other than professional reasons. If social media users followed the guidelines given in The Hat including "No nasty opinions" and "Be respectful and remember there are other people around you", the internet would be a kinder place.

Both @SeatonTIC and Seaton Views are ostensibly neutral and exist for the benefit of the people of and visitors to Seaton. However, they are administered by Mr. Burrows which gives him the control over their content. Reportedly, other supposedly impartial social media sites revolving around Seaton are also administered by him. Personally, it disturbs me that a public official has such a domination of information without a clear declaration of interest.

For example – Mr. Burrows selectively deleted his unsavoury exchange on Seaton Views and blocked his detractor from the site. Yet he also closed the @SeatonTIC page entirely, not at the request from the Council as reported, but unilaterally overnight on the 1st/2nd January after legal action was threatened against the then unknown poster. This had two effects – first; we are unable to see how many people viewed his tweet to assess the damage caused. Secondly; imagine the impression given to thousands of potential holidaymakers following what they would reasonable have considered to be the formal Seaton Tourist Information Twitter page – a strange tweet from the town Mayor attacking a local small business, followed by an unexplained blackout.

This cannot be good for either my business nor the image of the town as a whole. Surely, directing subscribers to the official Tourist Information Site would at least have been a productive step.

I would argue that these actions were not a selfless act by Mr. Burrows, or in the interests of myself or Seaton, but a means of covering tracks. A clear case of canting.

I have yet to receive a proper apology from Mr. Burrows. His statement of resignation last week did not make it clear that I was not the person who insulted him, then he justified his actions, and finally boorishly he ended with him giving himself a pat on the back for a job well done. Unfortunately, any apology at this time now sounds hollow.

Mr. Burrows was high profile in his role as Mayor and Councillor on both local and district levels. As such, I view both the local and District Councils legally culpable for his actions, regardless of these being rouge or not. I expect both the local and District Council to do their legal duty and mitigate any damage against me. This includes a full and open investigation of Mr. Burrows' conduct in office, including on social media, and disciplinary or legal action wherever possible. This motion of no confidence, and the complaint to the East Devon Monitoring Officer, is a positive response by the Seaton Town Council.

Despite undoubted damage to my business, the support of my regulars, and other public support helps me believe that moving to Seaton to open up a new and innovative business was the right decision. My sincere thanks to you all and I hope to continue to serve you real ales, ciders and other fine beverage in a friendly environment for many years to come.

There is, however, still much to do from both Councils to support the current small traders and promote the opening of new dynamic, interesting small shops in Seaton. Encouraging visitors to move to the traditional trading area, now called The Cultural Quarter, from the lower end of town is an urgent requirement to start. Regrettably, after a year of trading in Seaton and having contributed in various forums, I have yet to see any concrete or effective steps to this end, by the Council. This is an opportunity for both the Council and traders to reset and have a fresh start.

In conclusion, I would urge all councillors to support this motion of no confidence, what most surprises me is that Mr Burrows has not recognised his position as being untenable and has not resigned already on his own volition.

Thank you for your time and attention.

At the end of Public Question Time Cllr Beer advised the public that the Council could not remove Cllr Burrows from office. The Town Clerk added that the law also did not allow the Monitoring Office to remove Cllr Burrows from office and that it would be down to the electorate through the ballot box at the next election in May.

188. Motions

Cllrs Read and Rye - "This Council condemns the actions of Cllr. Burrows, as behaviour not befitting someone holding public office, and calls for his immediate resignation as a Seaton Town Councillor and EDDC District Councillor. In a personal capacity he posted defamatory statements about a local business on social media but used an official account and referring to himself in the capacity of Mayor. Cllr. Burrows has admitted his actions were unacceptable and that the target of his comments was an entirely innocent party. He has shown he lacks the integrity to remain a Councillor and to represent the people of Seaton and East Devon."

Cllr Read confirmed that he wished to slightly amend the wording of the motion so that it now reads:

"This Council condemns the actions of Cllr. Burrows, as behaviour not befitting someone holding public office, and calls for his immediate resignation as a Seaton Town Councillor and EDDC District Councillor. In a personal capacity he posted defamatory statements about a local business on social media but used an account purported to be an official account and referring to himself in the capacity of Mayor. Cllr. Burrows has admitted his actions were unacceptable and that the target of his comments was an entirely innocent party. He has shown he lacks the integrity to remain a Councillor and to represent the people of Seaton and East Devon."

Discussion took place around:

- The fact that a Working Group was looking at the Council's Social Media Policy and this will include a number of recommendations going back to Council
- Dissatisfaction with Councillor Burrows' statement to the Council, which gave an incomplete account of the incident and was self-justifying.
- Councillors have to comply with the standards of public office and Code of Conduct
- Hopefully this would be the chance for a reset between the Council and the businesses and public
- There being disappointment that Cllr Burrows was not present at the meeting
- The need for a list of all social media accounts that are administered by Councillors
- The need to do as much as possible to bring forward improvements within the town

Cllr Read asked for a recorded vote

The Council **RESOLVED** to agree the motion
(moved Cllr Read; seconded Cllr Rye)

For the motion – Cllrs Beer, Chadwick, Hartnell, Ledger, Read, Rowland, Rye, Sanham, Shaw and Squire (unanimous)

189. Budget and Precept 2019/20

Discussion took place around:

- The Council received no Council Tax Support Grant for 2019/20
- Items that had been added to the budget including Seafront Enhancement Scheme project, Christmas trees and amenities for Seaton
- The budget was held down for 2018/19 with an increase of only 57p

- The increase of £1.94 being lower than the rate of inflation

The Council **RESOLVED** to set the 2019/20 budget at £398,217 and to set the Precept for 2019/20 at £325,917.84, meaning that the Band D total will be £101.60 (an increase of £1.94 or 1.90%)

(moved Cllr Ledger; seconded Cllr Read)

Meeting closed at 6.25pm

Chairman: _____

Dated: _____