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Dear

First, let me introduce myself. I am the West Sussex County Councillor representing Felpham.

The reason I write to you is my interest in the purchase of the Blake's Cottage in Felpham. Some while ago Rachael Searle contacted me seeking to find out what the County Council could do to assist in the purchase of the Cottage. I immediately saw the benefit of this project as I have always been of the opinion that communities should celebrate the historical personalities who have a link to the place they live.

Right from the start I was sold on this project and made enquiries at County Hall seeing where we could go with this. I sent an email to Louise Goldsmith, the Leader of the Council to see if there was any interest in supporting this project. We are not members of the same political party but surprisingly she did come back to me and was very enthusiastic about showing support.

Meetings followed with Tim Heath and Rachael Searle in attendance and an application for funding was submitted to the Members' Big Society fund. The application was successful and the Blake Society was awarded £10K towards the purchase of the cottage.

It was great news to learn that the Cottage had been purchased on the 21st September 2015 and I joined in with the celebrations. However, I now learn of some very disturbing news as to plans for the future of the Cottage and how the Trust is behaving. It is not what I wanted to hear.

It is my understanding that an independent Trust was set up by Tim Heath, Chairman of the Blake Society in order to purchase the Cottage and manage it in the future. I also have learned that the aims of the Trust have changed somewhat since becoming involved.

Prior to the purchase, I had a lengthy telephone conversation with Tim Heath and made it clear to him how necessary it was to work with the community on this project. There were many hurdles ahead and he would need the goodwill from the residents in Felpham if he was to succeed. I also made it clear that it would be advisable to have local representation on the Trust. Our aims had to be in harmony. It is clear to me having seen communications and listening to others that he has not heeded what I had to say.

I was keen to see local publicity. Knowing that he had a plan in place to make a national announcement I did advise that some local press coverage would be appropriate to which he gave me a clear indication that he was happy for me to contact the local newspaper. A press release was sent and the local paper did cover the story. I now learn that he was saying how unhappy he was seeing that the 'cat was out of the bag'. Now I do not know what game he is playing but I was given a clear indication from him that it was OK to contact the local press. These are not games I am prepared to play and Tim will soon learn that I am not a person to play around with.

Now this brings me on to the funding. The County Council awarded the Blake Society £10K of public money towards the purchase of the cottage. The fact that an independent Trust has been set up

concerns me. I was under the impression that this was all being done under the umbrella of the Blake Society but it seems to me that this is not the case at all.

Most Societies or organisations will normally have a Constitution particularly where there is a Chairman and Officers in place. This allows for a process for the election of Officers and puts into place a framework for the Society to operate in. What I would like to know is there an adopted Constitution for the Blake Society? If so could I be supplied with a copy of the Constitution.

Presuming the answer is yes, or even if there isn't a Constitution, I would like to know how the Chairman is adopted by members? Presuming there is a formal election of Officers, normally at an Annual General Meeting, AGM, can you supply me with a copy of the last AGM so I can satisfy myself that Tim has been appointed within a legal framework? I ask this as it appears to me that the Blake Society is nothing more than a one man band with one person making all the decisions without reference to others.

The big problem for me is the setting up of the Trust and how that came about. I was led to believe that the Trust was set up with the blessing of the Blake Society. To support this I need to see minuted reports of meetings where this was all decided and by whom. It would be normal for a Chairman to be authorised by Officers of an organisation before proceeding with any action such as this.

Now you may wish to tell me to mind my own business as I am not a member of the Blake Society. My concern is the use of public money and the part I and the County Council have played in funding the Cottage. If it is the case that there are irregularities then we will be duty bound to follow this up and take whatever action is available to us. I fear the reputation of the County Council and myself will be subject to comment by the wider public we answer to if we have in fact participated in a project that is seen to have not been administered properly.

I understand that there are tensions in existence and that communications between Tim and others are not as good as they should be. My concern is that the proper processes may have been bypassed by Tim in his ambition to take control of the Cottage. I see that he has in the main been working in isolation from others in the Blake Society as well as those in Felpham.

In my dealings with Tim I have made it clear to him that I see the purchase of the Cottage fitting in nicely with other arts schemes being considered locally and regeneration projects in the area. He has accepted that in conversation and I was under the impression we were all headed in the same direction. Of course it is fair to say that this was not the only reason I and others came on board. We wanted to save the Cottage for the Country and recognised the importance of Blake. After all we all sing the words to the Hymn Jerusalem.

I was very disappointed when I read a reply of his to a resident in Felpham where he dismisses many of us in very uncomplimentary terms suggesting we do not share the vision and have nothing to do with the Trust. Considering the times I have met with him and the conversations we have had I am very angry at how he now views me and others.

I think you get the idea of where I am coming from. The paper trail now has to be investigated to see if there are any irregularities. I am not content to sit by and see £10K of public money being used in a way that was not made clear to me at the outset. It seems to me that the stumbling block is Tim Heath who has not endeared himself to many. With this in mind I am concerned at the damage this could all do to the project. If I and the County Council are to withdraw support this will send out a message and may impact on further fund raising putting the future of the Cottage in jeopardy.

Without the goodwill in the community behind the project it is unlikely there will be support particularly if changes are to be made requiring approvals.

I do not wish to tell you how to run your Society but in my experience there are processes that can be followed if there is a Chairman damaging the smooth running of the organisation. Providing there is a Constitution in place it may be that an Extraordinary General Meeting, EGM, could be called in order to deal with the problem. That is up to you. I am sure members of the Blake Society would be keen to see how decisions were made in respect of setting up the Trust. Are they happy that Tim has done this putting the Blake Society at arms-length with no say what so ever in determining the future of the Blakes' Cottage in Felpham whilst funding it?

I would be very interested in discussions with you.

Kind regards,
Graham Jones
West Sussex County Councillor for Felpham