



HICKLING PARISH COUNCIL
COUNCIL YEAR 2016-17

Chair: Jo Belsten
Vice Chair: Terry Barker
Parish Clerk: Charlotte Hummel
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Request under the Freedom of Information Act
Received 13 June 2016

Materials attached relating to the request:

Letter from 8 parishioners read out at the June 2016 Parish Council meeting

Materials refused:

Names of signatories

18 May 2016

Dear Hickling Parish Councillors,

Further to our letter of 2 May 2016:

Throughout the four years of their dispute with the Hickling Playing Field and Recreation Ground Charity the previous parish council persisted in maintaining that they were having to follow the advice of their lawyers – as if this absolved them of any responsibility for the outcomes and consequences of their actions.

However, we are clear that lawyers only act upon the instructions of their clients: the advice that Hickling Parish Council received from their lawyer depended upon the instructions they gave to that lawyer and upon the information they provided to him/her – the answer you receive depends upon the question that you ask.

With this in mind, we wish to know the following:

The previous parish council claimed that they were advised not to pay over to the HPFRG Charity the final instalment of the Public Works Loan.

- What question/instruction did the previous parish council pose to elicit such advice and who gave this advice?

In December 2012, Hickling Parish Council made a series of allegations including financial misconduct against the trustees of the HPFRG Charity. The then chair of the council announced at a public meeting that she had referred these allegations to the police. In April 2013 the police wrote to the chair of the parish council with their findings: she declined to read that letter out to parishioners.

- In the interests of fairness, we request that that letter be read out at a public meeting – an Annual Parish Meeting would seem to be an appropriate occasion.

In April/May 2013 the previous parish council went to court to seek disclosure of financial documents from the charity. In June 2013 the court ordered that the documents demanded by the council were not relevant to their case or disclosable and awarded costs to the charity.

- Was this application to the court by the parish council in accordance with legal advice?
- What was the cost to the village of this application and the award of costs?

On Friday 1 May 2015 members of the previous parish council went to London to obtain legal advice. They returned to Hickling the same day and promptly agreed to accept an offer of settlement which the charity had made in December 2014, five months earlier.

- What advice were these councillors given that resulted in their agreement to settle?
- And did the advice differ from previous advice?

- How much parish money exactly has the previous parish council's pursuit of their dispute with the HPFRG Charity cost the village?

We reiterate what we stated in our letter of 2 May: after four years of being denied the answers to legitimate questions concerning the motives, intentions and actions of the parish council in its dispute with the HPFRG Charity, we believe that parishioners are owed the truth.

Yours sincerely,

[8 signatories]