

Appendix C

Dear Paul,

I hope this email finds you well and I apologise for the slow reply which is due to analysing the relevant data and information sent combined with time availability as a volunteer.

Nevertheless, I thank you for your detailed response to the questions I raised at the last meeting of the STRA Executive Committee when you and Gerry Ansell very kindly attended.

STRA refutes ALL accusations made by the Councillors who are no longer in office. The STRA Executive Committee past and present have ALWAYS acted in the interest of the community. The STRA Executive team are all volunteers who volunteer their time, knowledge, and experience FREE OF CHARGE to improve Sudbury Town for the community. We understand STRA is a voice and platform for the community which we take very seriously with a view to Sudbury Town as whole.

As always there are two sides to an argument Paul, and STRA was never given their opportunity to explain. So I am going to take this opportunity to respond to few of your points mentioned in your email. I felt this is important because it definitely seems that the Council have been given a one-sided argument which could be deemed to be biased.

A few Examples to illustrate the point:

Concerns raised by Councillors (no longer in office)

You explained that up until 2018 you and the Council had no concerns regarding STRA. However, in late 2018 to early 2019 officers were made aware of number of issues with the forum. We would like to confirm that these issues have been raised by Ward Councillors that are no longer in office.

As you know, STRA is a non-political organisation and the people of our area choose by vote who will be on the Executive Committee. Whilst we are independent and non-political, our membership is open to local Councillors, and as agreed, we meet the legal requirements.

Removal of an Executive Committee Member

You raised concerns about the alleged removal of an executive member in a manner inconsistent with the constitution. In October 2018. An ex-Councillor of Sudbury Ward informed the STRA Executive Team, at the time that the STRA Treasurer had recently been appointed to a senior position in a local political party. Numerous requests were made of the STRA Treasurer to make full disclosure of the recent political appointment at an Executive Committee meeting, to enable an open discussion regarding how to avoid any conflict of interest. The Ex-Treasurer refused to disclose their recent political appointment at the meeting and voluntarily resigned. So no one was pushed or forced out of STRA. The person in question voluntarily resigned from the post within STRA. The Chair of STRA, at the time, resigned in sympathy with the ex-Treasurer.

STRA is non-political and non-religious and we take this very seriously. No one requested for any resignations, the resignations were voluntary.

Seeking to address the concerns at the time

You have noted in your email to me that to seek to address the above matters, council officers, some local residents, local councillors, Renu and [redacted] as representatives of the STRA Executive team, and STRA's legal representatives attended a meeting at Brent Civic Centre on 2nd August 2019. At the meeting, a draft Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was circulated.

STRA Executive Team's understanding is that the proposed MOU was initiated by Brent Council and you conveyed this to a solicitor STRA had instructed at the time.

Council Officers were keen for Renu and [redacted] to consent to the MOU at the meeting, which would have been contrary to the requirement of the Quorum of STRA's Constitution.

Renu indicated that STRA's Executive Committee would need to consider the MOU and meeting proposals before STRA could commit to any response.

The basis of the MOU was that you had received certain complaints and to avoid exploring these matters in detail, Brent Council proposed an MOU. Renu conveyed this to the STRA Executive, who were concerned about the sudden change in attitude of Brent Council towards STRA and were keen to explore the complaints in depth. It is on this basis that the full STRA Executive Team asked to meet with you.

At the first meeting of you and the STRA Executive Team on 05 September 2019, you explained that you had received no complaints directly and that Ex-Councillors had raised concerns with you. You shared with the STRA Executive Team that you did not know the details of the complaints. We had a useful and purposeful meeting and it was agreed to set up a meeting between the STRA Executive team and the three Sudbury ward councillors so that we could work through their concerns to a positive conclusion.

Ex-Councillors unable to meet

This led to several meeting dates being set and changed and eventually a meeting was agreed for 11th February 2020. Due to the lack of availability of the Councillors, STRA had to cancel the meeting.

Ex-Councillors have been unable to meet the STRA Executive Team to date and are now no longer in office.

No follow up by STRA / No follow up from Councillors

STRA Executive Team refutes there has been no follow up initiated by us.

The basis of the MOU, as stated above is alleged complaints from three ex-Councillors. The STRA Executive Team has repeatedly agreed to meetings dates, in order to gather information regarding the alleged complaints and resolve them. The councillors cancelled the meeting dates, which were mutually agreed on several occasions. The ex-Councillors have unfortunately neither provided any information directly to the different STRA Executive Teams from 2019 to date nor met in person. The said ex-Councillors have attended all STRA AGMs and many General Meetings from 2019 to date. However, they have not made any attempt to share information with the STRA Executive Team, to enable us to address their concerns.

Outstanding MOU

The basis of the MOU was the complaints raised by ex-Councillors. As the Ex-Councillors have not shared any information with STRA and have been unable to meet with STRA's Executive Team for 3 years, there can be no justification for an MOU. The MOU remains unjustified.

The Present and the Future

I have sought to redress the imbalance in information provided to you. Having said that, however, Paul that was in the past and I am about the present and the future.

We are well known in Sudbury Town and all members of the community are truly welcome. STRA is non-political as well non-religious. Membership is FULLY inclusive and is open to ALL with no discrimination or bias.

You and Gerry Ansell attended our AGM, which you found to be positive.

As I mentioned it's about moving forward and it's about the present and future. We are keen to take your advice from our meeting regarding the inclusion of Councillors. As a result of the changes of boundaries in the London Borough of Brent, STRA will invite ALL 10 Councillors to STRA meetings.

We are always keen to maintain a very good working relationship with Brent Council and wish to continue to do so.

VOICE of the Community

We look forward to completing the Forum Renewal Application while meeting the criteria as STRA wishes to continue to be the Volunteer VOICE of the Community.

Relevant Changes

Since our recent meeting, the STRA team has been very busy and active in implementing and creating relevant changes which incorporate suggestions made in that meeting such as:

- A 24hr complaint procedure on the STRA website
- Creating detailed questionnaires for the Sudbury Community
- Leaflets relating to the Public Consultation
- Drop off boxes within Sudbury Town
- Reviewing the new ward boundaries
- Attending meetings with Chiltern Rail
- Attending meetings at Wembley Stadium regarding the Sudbury Community
- Setting dates for a Sudbury Town Public Consultation
- Hand delivering the Public Consultation Questionnaire and Leaflet
- Using multi-media for the Public Consultation
- Knocking on doors and explaining the purpose and relevance of the Public Consultation

As you can see Paul, STRA is taking its responsibilities seriously and wants to continue to be an active VOICE of the Community. STRA wishes to continue to have a GOOD working relationship with the Local Council and be a relevant part of the BIG team.

STRA will always seek Council support now and in the FUTURE.

Contact Person – Name and Number

At the last meeting with you, there was a suggestion that a contact person at Brent Council and phone number would be provided to STRA as this would be so useful. It was also agreed that the contact name and number would be used by two STRA designated representatives.

I am looking forward to leaving the past behind and moving on to build a positive future with you and the team.
Regards

STRA Vice Chair