



ACTION TO SAVE ST. JOHN'S HOSPITAL Party

The Action to Save St. John's Hospital Party
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Operation Magnetise-Statement by Cllr. Gordon Beurskens.

After my statement on this site of 16th. July, news reached me about the planning matters this case was supposedly about. At the risk of provoking further knee-jerk reaction in the absence of a case, the following is an update.

The Procurator Fiscal has recently engaged in the precognition of witnesses before reaching a decision on proceedings. My view of the timescale of this cannot be translated into readable form, except to say it is despicable. After almost three years, and in the run-up to the 2012 local elections, they are finally making their moves.

This case is predicated on "evidence" from Council planning officers whose integrity has never been openly questioned. But evidence is now available that clearly shows that far from being impartial, they are more conflicted in their roles than those whose credibility they have sought to destroy. A recent Freedom of Information request has provided evidence that 7 planning officers in the Council have 9 declarations of second jobs between them. And all of them are related to planning or planning and property consultancies.

Where Council officers have stated in evidence to various investigations that they found my dual role as a consultant and a Councillor "complex" and "difficult", it seems they've had no such problems with their own dual roles, or those of their colleagues. And with them, there is no scrutiny or governance beyond trust, and in view of the evidence, trust is not something they have earned. Their Code of Conduct states that the potential for conflicts of interest must be avoided. But they can't even be identified, because their anonymity is assured by the terms of the Data Protection Act!

I have no difficulty with anyone having second jobs. But when they have the effrontery to point the finger at others, whose declarations are reproduced for public scrutiny, while they hide behind legislation, the system is badly in need of review.

And what of the recent revelation that one planning manager, who is understood to have been a key witness interviewed on several occasions by police, has been reassuringly advising SNP councillors of his lack of recall? The Council is satisfied that the officer concerned was only making a "general observation on the impact of the passage of time". No-one seems the least bit interested in informing the police or Crown Office that their star witness is so concerned. But when it comes to his dealings with me, his recall of the minutiae is, I understand, incredible.

I have called on the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive to provide explanations for the continuation of this hypocritical attack on elected politicians. While one now admits that he is "clear in his own mind that Alex Linkston lied" at the start of this process, the other is now in charge of defending that same system. So what chance truth? And as for the Provost's office, the stench of hypocrisy is familiarly cloying. After all, it is occupied by someone who moved heaven and earth to prevent the former Chief Executive and planning officers being investigated.

I have also recently discovered that matters with which I was charged in April 2010 were, as I always said, nothing to do with me. I now know that in evidence given to the police the same day colleagues admitted to being the "senior councillors" behind certain activities. So why was I charged, and yet those guilty by their own admission, were not?

Public confidence will only be restored in the planning system when the rules apply equally across all areas. But the fair application of the rules has never been a quality for which this Council has form. The contemptible double standards behind this case are matched only by the gutless cowardice of those who could and should have dealt with it long before now. But then it was never in their vested interests to do so.