

The Elms: Open letter to the Mayor of Thame

on february 12, 2015 at 2:44 pm

Dear Mayor,

With the recent revelation that The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) has found Mr Jake Collinge in breach of their code of conduct in relation to his work on the Thame Neighbourhood Plan, we write to request that you formally review the Neighbourhood Plan and specifically propose a motion to remove The Elms from it.

It is public knowledge that Mr Collinge undertook a substantial amount of work on the Neighbourhood Plan despite his ex-employer, on-going major client and landlord Rectory Homes being owner of one of the sites allocated for housing, The Elms. Although you and your council have always insisted he had no input when it came to The Elms, the RTPI have clearly found this claim to be incorrect.

Evidence provided to the RTPI in relation to this investigation includes details about the meeting between Thame Resident Peter Webb, the Town Clerk Helen Stewart and Mr Collinge. Whilst Mr Collinge, you, your council and the Town Clerk have always maintained this meeting did not relate to The Elms, Mr Webb has been entirely vindicated with the verdict. Mr Webb has always maintained the sole purpose of the meeting was to discuss The Elms and Mr Collinge clearly participated in it. We request that you acknowledge this in its entirety and rectify the untruths spoken about the content of this meeting, in particular by Ms Stewart, the Town Clerk who has corroborated, what appears to be, this false statement.

The fact that Mr Collinge was even remotely connected to the construction of a plan which paved the way for his ex-employer and on-going client, Rectory Homes, to receive what is tantamount to a windfall by including a substantial piece of conservation area in approved sites for housing development, is deplorable.

What is even worse though, is that your council and Rectory Homes have issued legal threats to residents of Thame who have dared to raise this issue in public. To these people, we request that you make a full and unreserved public apology for your part in this.

Furthermore, we have analysed the recent financial payments as released on the Town Council website and noted that Mr Collinge was paid at least £12,000 in Q4 of 2014 for his work on the Thame Neighbourhood Plan. We request that a full disclosure of the amount paid to Mr Collinge for his entire work on the Plan is made and request that you do everything in your powers to recoup much of the money paid out, based on the fact that his work has been proven not to be impartial.

When you analyse the ruling of the RTPI declaring Mr Collinge in breach of his professional code, along with other factors including, what appeared to us to be, the withholding from the public and councillors the letter from English Heritage which described any development as "deeply damaging," we are sure that you cannot continue to have confidence in the inclusion of The Elms in the Plan.

Whilst we do not suggest the Plan should be entirely scrapped, the area of concern is clearly The Elms. With recent amendments to the planning application for development on The Elms a minimum

of eight houses already have to be reallocated as per the provision in the Plan. We request that you reallocate all 45 houses across other suitable sites and remove The Elms from the Plan with immediate effect.

We look forward to your immediate action on this issue.

Yours sincerely,

The 2100 members of The Elms Petition Group.

# Thame Town Council



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## Reply To The Open Letter To The Mayor

The Town Council is unable to respond to any statement about a ruling of an alleged breach of a code of conduct because the Town Council has not received any such notification from the RTPI nor can find any such information on the RTPI website.

The Thame Neighbourhood Plan has been intensely scrutinised following continual allegations of malfeasance by Mr Webb and the Elms Petition Group.

South Oxfordshire District Council, Thames Valley Police Fraud Office, The Commissioner for the Freedom of Information and an Independent Examiner have all concluded that there is no case to answer and have subsequently closed all enquiries about such allegations.

As stated last year a change to the Neighbourhood Plan would require a sound planning policy reason, and with no new significant material planning information coming forward since the Plan was made, removing the site would not prevent the owner of the site from developing it.

The Town Council reaffirms the integrity of the process by which the Plan was developed.

Cllr J Matelot Green  
Town Mayor

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