

## **MINUTES FORP EMERGENCY MEETING 14<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2023**

PRESENT: Sian Ellis-Thomas, Lesley Powell, Matt Norris, Ben Skingly, Teresa Henstridge, Mike Alden.

Apologies: Carol Hall, Claudia Collins, Campbell Hutchison

In March 2023 FORP (via Chair and Vice Chair) started making enquiries about the long term maintenance of the tennis courts. The courts had already been inspected by Knowle Tennis Club and deemed hazardous due to moss growth that could make them slippery much of the year. BCC have stated that due to the national defunding of parks to make them zero cost there are no funds to resurface the courts. We have literally received the last tennis net in stock and there are no plans for BCC to purchase more. Chair Sian Ellis-Thomas (SET) and Vice Chair Lesley Powell (LP) felt it was time to see what options were available for renovation, maintenance and sustainability.

Lesley Powell (LP) and Sian Ellis-Thomas (SET) spoke with Mr Wayborn Chair the Knowle Tennis Club and were told about the Parks Tennis Model. They then spoke to the Lawn Tennis Association and Wesport who run the model successfully in three parks in Bristol. After speaking to these two organisations they then approached BCC Sports dept, the third element of the model. The aim was to further investigate the suitability of the tennis model for Redcatch Park. Councillor Gary Hopkins (GH) found out about FORP talking directly to BCC and was very unhappy. SET informed GH on May 27<sup>th</sup> that we were information gathering and that we were looking at two options for the tennis courts and he would be informed if we decided to support the consultation.

The model was explained in detail to the FORP Committee on 26<sup>th</sup> May and a vote had been taken 8/1 in favour of supporting the consultation and model as a viable solution for the park

On May 27<sup>th</sup>, SET informed GH that FORP were supporting the Tennis Model consultation.

We had no further contact from GH until Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> June when he published his Knowle Community Party Newsletter. In this newsletter there were several factually incorrect and misleading statements. There was no mention of the benefits of the scheme or that FORP were supporting the consultation. It was very negatively biased and undermined BCC and by omission, FORP.

LP & SET sent three emails between Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> June and Monday the 5<sup>th</sup> asking for a correction and retraction. GH did not reply. LP called him on Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> and after a very hostile interaction where he stated SET should never have contacted BCC of her own volition, he hung up. (No resident or member of a community group is obliged to ask permission of their local councillor to contact BCC about anything)

GH did not send any other correspondence to FORP on the matter, but continued to wage his own campaign of misinformation, contacting a neighbouring councillor and the chair of the tennis club among others.

LP and SET further explained the detail and chronology of GH's activities in regard to his opposition to the Tennis Model consultation.

The FORP committee then discussed this at length and agreed it was clear the pre-emption was an attempt to undermine FORP and the consultation process and GH's actions

amounted to bullying and misogyny, especially as this is not the first time SET & LP had experienced this kind of behaviour from GH and that they have witnessed this behaviour at first hand to other women in KNPG. It was a deliberate misrepresentation of the facts and the events and the order in which they were occurring. Ignoring his constituents and failing to issue any corrections to his newsletter further compounded his actions. The FORP committee discussed what the potential ramifications of a formal complaint would be. SET and LP said that they knew it would be difficult as GH is known for being a bully when challenged, but that they were confident they could withstand any blowback. SET & LP explained that a press release would also be sent out as this was an important issue for the whole community to know about and they did not have high hopes of a positive outcome from the council complaints procedure.

**The vote to proceed with a formal complaint against Cllr Hopkins was carried unanimously by those present.** The committee members not present were sent all details and asked for their votes ,all were also in favour of proceeding.

**All committee members supported a formal complaint being filed.**

**A copy of the full complaint was sent to the committee** (this contains the KCP newsletter copy and FORP comments thereof)