

APPENDIX ONE

THE COMPLAINT LETTER

**TO: The Monitoring Officer
 Dacorum Borough Council**

1st August 2023

Dear Sir

COMPLAINT AGAINST COUNCILLOR BARLOW, DACORUM BOROUGH COUNCIL

I write to make a formal complaint in respect of the gross disrespect and sheer rudeness which Councillor Barlow regularly exhibits to the planning officers of this Council.

Councillor Barlow was first elected to the Council at a bye-election in June 2019 and I come across him regularly in his capacity as a member of the Council's Development Management Committee (DMC).

There is a bit of a history to this in that, before he was elected, Cllr Barlow was a major supporter and active campaigner for a scheme for the relocation of Hemel Hempstead Football Club to a new stadium to be built on a green field site in the Green Belt on the outskirts of the town. DMC opposed that scheme on the grounds that there was no justification for this development in the Green Belt.

Cllr Barlow was then, and still is, a prominent supporter of Hemel Hempstead Football Club and of the relocation proposals. Although he was not the applicant, he made very considerable demands for information in respect of the planning case officer's grounds for objection to the proposal, which the Planning Department were not always able to meet to his satisfaction. He also led a campaign for a petition in favour of the proposal, during the course of which he made very public and disparaging statements about the Council and particularly about the Council's Planning Department and its officers. When the planning application went to appeal, following its refusal by the DMC, he repeated these comments at the public inquiry held in relation to the appeal and suggested that the DMC's opposition was based on the Planning Department being "anti-football" and not wanting to see the local football club grow in size.

In the run up to the June 2019 bye-election, Cllr Barlow based his campaign substantially on his frequently expressed views that the Council's Planning Department was responsible for preventing the town from getting a decent football club, and he stated on a phone-in programme on local radio that the Planning Department was "a load of dead wood nimbies" who were holding the town back and would need to be cleared out once he was elected as a Councillor."

Since his election Cllr Barlow has made no secret of his feelings about the Planning Department. I have had a couple of dealings with him on planning applications within his ward and found his manner rude and disdainful towards me and I know that the Head of Planning has received complaints from other staff in the Planning Department, but the DMC meeting on 28 July 2023 was the first time I had had any public dealings with him since his election.

I attended the DMC meeting in July to present a report on behalf of the Head of Planning who was unable to attend in respect of reserved matters relating to the mixed private and affordable residential development scheme at the former Civic Centre site at the northern end of Marlowes. As you know Homes 'R' Us bought the site from the Council and are now keen to build out the residential scheme. DMC had previously approved a design brief for the Civic Centre site redevelopment which made it clear that the Council would require any residential development to be of a high quality in terms of design and materials which complemented its town centre location and its close proximity to the Old Town. The designs which Homes 'R' Us have submitted are reminiscent of the brutalist architecture of the 1960s and are no more than several oversized grey concrete blocks which do nothing to enhance the appearance and character of the town centre.

At the DMC meeting in July I introduced the Head of Planning's report on the scheme, expressing regret that the applicant had not taken up the advice set out in the design brief for the site. I referred the Members of the Committee to the recommendation of the Head of Planning that the application be rejected but that a small Sub-Committee be appointed to meet the applicant in order to explain the Council's reasons for seeking a high quality of design in this location.

At this point Cllr Barlow stood up and said (I paraphrase) that this was the Planning Department which very nearly cost Hemel Hempstead its football team, had cost the Borough thousands of jobs over the years, and which will ensure that the Civic Centre site remains empty waste land for years to come.

He then asked me directly, not through the Chair, to justify my existence by telling the Committee where I proposed to locate the thousands of new homes required in the Borough over the next 10 years if I was going to block any sensible town centre scheme by insisting on a design brief which was commercially unviable.

Before I had a chance to reply Cllr Barlow stormed out of the room saying that he had more important things to do than waste his time listening to "any more excuses from a load of planning plebs who could not appreciate decent modern design".

The remaining DMC Members in the room accepted the Head of Planning's recommendation unanimously and agreed to seek a meeting with Homes 'R' Us and their professional advisers.

Subsequent to the July meeting, I raised the issue of Councillor Barlow's conduct with Councillor Grey, the Chairman of DMC and said that I felt that it was unacceptable and a breach of the Code of Conduct. He replied that Councillor Barlow was a colourful character and that I would have to get used to it. Councillor

Grey didn't think a quiet word from him or the Leader was going to change him. I then spoke to the Council's Monitoring Officer, who advised me that I could make a formal complaint to the Standards Committee.

Accordingly, I now make this formal complaint that Councillor Barlow's conduct at the DMC meeting of 28 July 2023 was a breach of the Council's Code of Conduct in that he treated me, and by inference all members of the Planning Department, with disrespect, implying that we were not professionally competent and that we put our own personal aesthetic preferences above professional standards and our duty to the Council.

Yours faithfully,

Susan House,

Senior Planning Officer
Dacorum Borough Council