

11 Ayleswater, Watermead, Aylesbury, Bucks,
HP19 0FB
Tel: 01296 395211
noreen.shardlow@watermead-pc.gov.uk
Website: www.watermead-pc.gov.uk



WATERMEAD PARISH PRESS RELEASE

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Watermead Crematorium

The Parish Council was advised by BBC 3 Counties Radio late yesterday afternoon that Westerleigh Limited had issued a press release containing various false allegations and/or insinuations regarding the conduct of the Chairman and Parish Council and alleged omissions by them. This constitutes a slur upon the reputation of the Parish Council, its officers and members. The manner in which the Westerleigh statement has been promulgated appears to have been intentionally contrived to inflict reputational damage upon the Parish Council, its officers and members, with the intention of discrediting and undermining by association the entirely legitimate and properly advanced criticisms of Westerleigh's development and the contention of the Parish Council, on proper planning grounds, that it should not be granted retrospective permission to legitimate it.

The Parish Council's solicitors have, this morning, written to Westerleigh demanding an immediate retraction of their public statement and an apology for their letter to the chairman.

Westerleigh's statement includes the following false statements and /or insinuations:

1. Westerleigh refer to past vandalism to the crematorium building in terms insinuating that the PC is aware of such occurrence(s) and should have publicly condemned them. If such incidents have occurred, as claimed, we are entirely unaware of them and so have not had opportunity to condemn.
2. The tone and content of the letter is disingenuous and patronising. If there have been past criminal or antisocial acts then Westerleigh should have protested about them at the first opportunity and not belatedly now and we would have welcomed them sharing their concerns with us so that we could put out a message condemning and repudiating them, as we are now doing.

3. It is claimed that the windows of the crematorium were damaged by vandals as part of 'a campaign of intimidation by opponents of the crematorium which has been running for several months'. Watermead Parish Council has opposed the development entirely on legal and planning grounds and has no knowledge of any such campaign. Unless they are in communication with the perpetrators of this action this claim is pure speculation on their part, but in any event the press release is a transparent attempt to smear the PC by linking it to the actions of others, unknown to it and over which it has no control, or influence. The PC has absolutely no knowledge of any such campaign, and has used only legal routes, via the High Court, to stop the crematorium. Planning permission was quashed by the Court of Appeal on three strong legal arguments and Westerleigh completed their building without planning permission. The PC would neither encourage or condone any unlawful or even discourteous or uncivil action, and would, unprompted, have criticised and sought to deter it if it came to their attention, which it has not, until now. If such actions as are alleged have been perpetrated by persons unconnected with Westerleigh or the PC then it is not anticipated that anything the PC says will have any influence over them, but we are happy to make our position clear to the world in case it might.
4. In recent months Watermead Village in general has been subjected to a large amount of vandalism. There has been attempted and successful car theft and during December the fencing to the Memorial Garden was ripped out, plants trampled and the Christmas Tree in the Piazza was damaged with the lights being ripped off the tree and bulb covers removed and thrown around the area. The Police are aware of this increase in anti-social behaviour, which, seems to be a growing trend, not confined to Watermead.
5. We have no knowledge of the behaviour towards a member of Westerleigh staff that they allege has occurred. They do not provide details of the funeral attended, or its location, nor of person alleged to be the 'Watermead resident'. Any such incident is appalling and reprehensible and is condemned by the PC, as it would be by any citizen.
6. Contrary to the impression that their letter appears contrived to foster, the PC has received no communication in the past from Westerleigh about an 'increasing tide of violence' or anything of the kind. The Parish Council's signage has been removed on several occasions, its parking cones stolen, vandalised, and removed and we frequently suffers the result of anti-social behaviour ourselves. We have not sought to insinuate that this is directed by Westerleigh; sadly it is a reflection of current society.

The statements regarding the 'hard-hitting letter' been sent to the Parish Chairman at the time of the press release are misleading and the quotes from it are a slur. The PC does not have a Facebook page. It is untrue both that the chairman 'has followers', and that we have incited arson and other violence. The Parish Council is an elected public body. Legal action to prevent the crematorium has been taken by agreement of Parishioners.

-ENDS-

See below notes for Editors

NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. Westerleigh's planning application was made after Bierton Crematorium was approved. Westerleigh received permission (from AVDC not the Secretary of State) and immediately attempted to stop Bierton, less than 2 miles away, their competition. At Judicial Review they succeeded in stopping Bierton on technical environmental grounds, but these were subsequently met and permission given to Bierton, currently being constructed for opening during 2018.
2. WPC were unsuccessful at Judicial Review in having planning permission quashed. They subsequently received permission to appeal; this Court of Appeal hearing in November 2016 resulted in the Judgement, which quashed Westerleigh's application. They continued to build, without planning permission, despite being asked not to by AVDC. The legal grounds on which the Appeal Judgement was given were not 'technical, nor minor'.
3. The revised application was provided to AVDC by Westerleigh, however it was a re-hash of original documents, and the planning authority requested further information from them. The Parish Council has submitted an extensive objection, with its own sequential test and legal opinions to follow. It has also confirmed that the Department for Local Government and Homes will review the case, in the event that AVDC recommends approval. The committee hearing date is not yet confirmed.

For further information please contact

Sue Severn on 01296 336575
or Noreen Shardlow on 01296 395211