

Email to the Chair of The Environment Select Committee of Surrey County Council and copied to all members of the Committee 1st April 2019 at 8:48am

Dear Cllr Lake,

Following my earlier e-mail, which I trust you received OK, I must bring up the subject of Cllr Witham's self confessed rant on Feb 22 as, apart from it hugely backfiring in terms of the negative public reaction to it, it contained at least one important factual inaccuracy.

I am not part of the Save Newland Corner campaign, but have recently come to know John Oliver and Sally Blake through my opposition to the parking charge scheme and our common concern about the damage being caused to the countryside and environment by the policies of the council, invariably involving the Surrey Wildlife Trust.

I have found them to be honest, thoughtful and very knowledgeable about the countryside. They care about it and had clear and **sustainable** ideas for the management of Newlands Corner. They were at the meeting on Feb 22 and to see them portrayed as ignorant, thoughtless and self centred individuals was difficult to watch without a feeling of repugnance, particularly as they had no right to respond and had to sit there silently and be harangued.

But that is my personal feeling and is not important here. What is important is the comments Cllr Witham made concerning the proposed Friends of Newlands group and which formed a key part of his rant. He stated

"Some while ago, the Newlands Corner Group did propose to look at a Friends Group, but would only consider setting it up if Surrey County Council dropped the idea of car parking charges. They prepared a plan that had not considered a number of legal issues and Surrey asked them how they were proposing to cover those. Then, of course they backed off and stopped talking about that."

The first part is completely true, the second part is completely false. I already understood that to be the case, but asked John and Sally to send me the full e-mail communications the putative Friends Group had with various Council members. The correspondence is quite lengthy, but I attach the final three e-mails of that correspondence which demonstrates that what Cllr Witham said in the second part was not true.

I found it extremely disturbing that Cllr Goodman could laud Cllr Witham's rant so highly as he surely had to have been aware of what had transpired. But that is nothing to the fact that the Countryside Group Manager, who was the main Council respondent in the e-mails and was present at the meeting, did NOT correct Cllr Witham at the time.

Cllr Witham was not part of any of these correspondences, so where did he get his information? Somebody must have provided him with it. As such, while I found his manner and tone inexcusable, he may well have held his view in good faith.

I would, therefore, ask the committee to request Cllr Witham apologise to those who were involved in the putative Friends of Newland Corner Group and correct his statement accordingly. As his statement was made at committee, and made public by webcast which is still available to view, it is only right the apology with correction is included as an agenda item at the next meeting. It will then be minuted and the correction to his original statement will formally be on record.

Kind regards

Dr Nigel Saunders