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**COMPLAINT AGAINST COUNCILLOR MICHAEL NEWMAN  
IN RELATION TO HIS REPRESENTATION AND ACTIONS CONCERNING THE  
Chapel - Glebe Land, Acorn St. Hunsdon Planning Ref : 3/12/1440/FP which  
was approved at the Planning Control Committee on Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> November  
(reference 5d)**

**INTRODUCTION**

I wish to register a complaint against Mike Newman Councillor regarding his conduct in public office in connection with the above planning application approved at Planning Control Committee on 7<sup>th</sup> November as evidenced by the video recording of the proceedings. I objected the proposals and I am of the view that Councillor Newman did not fairly represent both sides in this matter.

Councillor Newman gave a biased and partisan view of the application in favour of the application from the start of his presentation. He did not appear to reflect the views of the residents of Hunsdon in a balanced manner and did not acknowledge the strength of feeling against the proposal. He did not weigh up the pros and cons. He appeared not to have read the many submissions he received about the planning application and did not refer to them.

Councillor Newman declared at the planning meeting that his wife was a member of the church, whereas he was not. Councillor Newman failed to disclose that his wife is in fact an officer of the church, being a church warden and member of the PCC, which made the application and therefore his wife was in fact an applicant in this matter and had stated publically on a number of occasions her strong support for the proposal.

Councillor Newman had been asked to stand aside in view of an apparent conflict of interest, but declined to do so on the basis that a conflict of interest only related to financial matters. He had stated in public at a previous meeting that he would take a balanced view of the matter and would not be influenced by his wife's views and position in the church. This appears to lack veracity given his performance at the committee meeting of the 7<sup>th</sup> November.

Councillor Newman misrepresented the concerns in Hunsdon regarding the building of the proposed chapel. He drew attention to a public meeting in Hunsdon regarding the previous application for a Chapel where there was a 50/50, he briefly referred to the recent Parish meeting where the view was 90/10 against but failed to refer to the fact that the number of written submissions to the planning officer was in the ratio of 70/40 against.

In view of Councillor Newman's biased representation of support for the proposal and lack of proper consideration of all the issues he has been seen to act inappropriately and unfairly in public office.

Mr Newman misrepresented the support for a chapel replacement in the parish plan as a final document whereas it is work in progress. The document he referred to supports a replacement for the existing chapel and not a development of a faith facility with a large community facility on that specific site.

Although he addressed one aspect of the conclusion of the officers report relating to the compensatory amenity land he did not address the other and main issue of the scale, design

and appropriateness of the building or make reference to what the exceptional reasons were for the building on agricultural land or the need for a building of this size and place in replacing a much smaller building and having additional facilities as outlined by the planning officer.

Councillor Newman did not raise the concerns expressed about the lack of safety for children in respect of the compensatory amenity land.

The further concern is that Councillor Newman's views will have influenced his fellow Councillors in his role as a local Councillor for the area presenting them with a biased and inaccurate view in advising them about the application, leading them to making their decision.

Mr Newman should have registered a general interest in this matter and stood aside.

It is my contention that Mr Newman has broken the Councillors code of conduct and should stand aside as a Councillor and should have nothing further to do with the setting of any conditions in respect of this development.

It is of relevance that Hunsdon Parish Council passed a "vote of no confidence" in Councillor Newman at their meeting on the 19<sup>th</sup> November 2012.

#### **EHDC STANDARDS FOR COUNCILLORS**

Councillor Newman appears to have breached the East Herts Councillors Code of conduct (East Herts District Council (Code of Conduct Essential paper b) in the following areas:

**SELFLESSNESS:** Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends.

In demonstrating such a partisan attitude Councillor Newman appears not to have acted in the public interest with the suspicion that his aim was to achieve material benefit for his wife in the form of provision of a new chapel for which she was in effect an applicant.

**INTEGRITY:** Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might seek to influence them in the performance of their official duties.

Councillor Newman has not been seen to be acting fairly and has brought the officer of Councillor into disrepute by appearing to favour his wife's views and position in the church above those of Hunsdon residents.

**OBJECTIVITY:** In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.



Councillor Newman did not present an objective view critical of the officers report and did not address all the relevant issues in the conclusion to the officers report.

**ACCOUNTABILITY: Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.**

Councillor Newman has not been accountable because he has not made his views on the application clear to his constituents or acknowledging that he had a conflict of interest which might affect his judgement as demonstrated at the Parish Council meeting of ....Did not make views known prior to the meeting. Not seen to be fair and balanced. Had been asked to stand aside on this issue in view of interest but did not.

**OPENNESS: Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.**

See above

**HONESTY: Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.**

Mr Newman did not fully declare the interest that his wife had in the application in that she is an official of Hunsdon PCC who made the application. Mr Newman stated purely that she was a parishioner whereas as an official and member of PCC she was in effect an applicant.

**LEADERSHIP: Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.**

By his actions Mr Newman has failed to support the principles in the code of conduct

**Championing the needs of residents – the whole community and in a special way my constituents, including those who did not vote for me - and putting their interests first.**

Mr Newman has not demonstrated that he has put the interests of the majority of his constituents first in this matter.

**Exercising independent judgement and not compromising my position by placing myself under obligations to outside individuals or organisations who might seek to influence the way I perform my duties as a member/co-opted member of this authority.**

Councillor Newman appears to have allowed himself to be unduly influenced by the views of his wife as an applicant in this matter which is demonstrated by his perceived lack of fairness and balance to his presentation and comments.

**Listening to the interests of all parties, including relevant advice from statutory and other professional officers, taking all relevant information into consideration, remaining objective and making decisions on merit.**

Councillor Newman appears not to have made his decision on merit does not appear to have balanced up the pros and cons.

**Providing leadership through behaving in accordance with these principles when championing the interests of the community with other organisations as well as within this authority.**

Councillor Newman has therefore failed to provide leadership and has not championed the interests of the majority of the community

**CONCLUSIONS:**

Councillor Newman has failed his constituents in this matter and I have no confidence in him  
Councillor Newman should have no further involvement regarding the Chapel particularly in relation to any conditions made pending an investigation of his conduct.

