

DEFAMATION COMPLAINT AGAINST BRILL PARISH COUNCIL
NOTICE OF SUCCESSFUL SETTLEMENT

For over a year our society has been awaiting final closure of our dispute with the Parish Council.

Happily, we are now able to report that, prior to court action, the present council has settled our claim for costs accrued in our pursuit of a public apology and recognition of the council's failure to act appropriately on our formal complaint.

To recap, former councillor Derek Turner read out a prepared defamatory statement at the March 2021 parish Council meeting accusing our society's board members of financial impropriety. The statement was unquestioned by fellow councillors Mark Dickinson(chairman), Jules Newman, Andy Fisher, Jeremy Cadle, Gareth Hamilton and the clerk Lesley Shaw.

Our society immediately wrote an official letter of complaint and within days our chairman met with Mark Dickinson in a genuine effort to bring prompt closure to these false and slanderous allegations. We requested that the Council either produce substantiated evidence of the allegations or admit its error and issue a public apology.

No action was forthcoming.

Moreover, a month later at the Parish Council published the full text of Derek Turner's prepared statement in its meeting minutes without comment. Molly Buggy, the acting chair, concluding statement was *"we are all agreed then to leave it in their [BVCH] court"*.

At this point it became clear that the Parish Council had no intention of pursuing our complaint in an appropriate manner and we sought legal advice. Our solicitor wrote reiterating our complaint and made clear the Council's responsibility for any costs incurred clearing our reputation.

Four months later, in August 2021, after further meetings and correspondence, a full public apology was forthcoming; however the council refused to pay the society's legal costs (even after we made a generous offer to cover these in part). As a result BVCH issued a 'Final notice before court procedure' in March 2022 and at the subsequent Parish Council meeting the decision was made to meet our legal costs in full. (£2295)

We should like to reiterate that this dispute could have been settled amicably, at no cost whatsoever, had the Council acted on our initial complaint in a proper and competent manner. We are pleased that the Council has now implemented a formal Complaints Procedure, which, had it been available a year ago, would have given the councillors guidance in appropriate handling of a serious complaint.

This brings to a close an unpleasant and unnecessary period. We now look forward to a more amicable working relationship with the members of the entirely new council in assisting them with the continuing management of the Common.

BVCH Board.
May 2022