

Witness Statement of Councillor Balwinder Dhillon

I, Councillor Balwinder Dhillon, was elected in June 2004 (Upton Ward, Slough) of Town Hall, Bath Road, Slough, SL1 3UQ will say as follows:

1. On 31st October 2007 I received a call from a Mr [REDACTED] a resident of Sussex Place. Mr [REDACTED] was concerned that, amongst other things, trees belonging to Slough Grammar School were overhanging the School Boundary and causing interference to the street lighting on the footway leading from Sussex Place into Lascelles Park. Mr [REDACTED] was also concerned that the roots of the trees were making the surface of the footway uneven.
2. I do not know Mr [REDACTED] personally; however, I have been elected by local people to deal with issues such as the one presented to me by Mr [REDACTED]. I asked Mr [REDACTED] to put his concerns in writing; however he was most insistent that I visit him at Sussex Place to look at the trees and the problems they were causing.
3. On the same day that Mr [REDACTED] had telephoned me (31st October 2007), I met Mr [REDACTED] at the Junction with the footpath leading to Lascelles Park (at the rear of Slough Grammar School) to investigate his complaint. The trees on the boundary of Slough Grammar School were in fact overhanging the boundary and blocking the street lighting and the footpath was uneven due to the roots of the trees. I took several photographs, some of which I exhibit as Exhibit BD/1.
4. I immediately called Mr Alex Deans, Principal Highway Engineer of Slough Borough Council to ask him to arrange for a site visit to address Mr [REDACTED] concerns. Mr Deans advised me that Mr Phillip Copeland, the Council's Tree Officer had already confirmed to Mr [REDACTED] that the Trees were the responsibility of Slough Grammar School. Following my telephone call to Mr Deans he passed the relevant information on to Mr Bill Farmer and Mr David Kilby by e-mail. I attach a copy of this e-mail as Exhibit BD/2.
5. Having been a Councillor since June 2004 and through my other casework within the last 3-4 years, I am well aware of Council processes. I appreciate that once a complaint has been made officers must carry out a site visit and make a land registry search before they can either carry out remedial works (if it is the Council's responsibility) or give notice (14-28 days) to the person responsible before carrying out the works and recharging the cost.
6. Being aware of the process I knew that it could take some time before Mr [REDACTED]'s concerns were remedied. This concerned me as I think it is important to protect members of the public (especially disabled people) and to allow them to use the footpath with proper street lighting and to protect the reputation of Slough Grammar School. Therefore, I thought that I would speed the process and inform the school of the problem.

7. I took Mr [REDACTED] to the Slough Grammar School because I thought that it would be easier for him to explain the situation first hand to the head teacher and school organisers. I do not personally know Mr [REDACTED] and at this point I was not aware that there were any disputes between Mr [REDACTED] and Slough Grammar School.
8. I attended Slough Grammar School to see the head teacher Mrs Lenton in person in my private capacity not as a Councillor, to inform her of the problem so that she could address it sooner rather than later. I didn't introduce myself as a Councillor at the School because I am well known at the school due to my frequent visits to the school over the past 2-3 years in relation to Slough Grammar School's planning application for 96 flats and other private matters.
9. The receptionist at Slough Grammar School asked Mr [REDACTED] and myself to take a seat but she also informed us that Mrs Lenton was not in School that day. We were told by the receptionist that the school was aware of the problem with the trees.
10. The school secretary insisted that Mr [REDACTED] and myself should still present our concerns in writing to the school, even though the receptionist had said that the school was already aware of the problem. I questioned why the school had not taken any action in relation to the trees if they already knew about the problems.
11. I expressed my concerns about the trees and this may have upset some of the staff. I could sense some strong resistance from the school staff. I now know that this is because Mr [REDACTED] is banned from the school due to some child protection issues; however I was not aware of this at the time.
12. Mr [REDACTED] and I were told to leave the School premises and to make an appointment or write to Mrs Lenton with our concerns. Consequently I wrote a letter to Mrs Lenton on the same day. In the letter I apologized in case I had offended any members of staff because there seemed to be some resistance upon my visit; I now know this to be because Mr [REDACTED] is banned from the school premises. I exhibit this letter as Exhibit BD/3.
13. I spoke to Mrs Lenton on the telephone on 1st November 2007 and explained the purpose of my visit to the school on 31st October 2007. Mrs Lenton questioned why I had brought Mr [REDACTED] to the school and explained that he was banned from the School premises. I explained to Mrs Lenton that I was not aware of any of Mr [REDACTED]'s dealings with the school and explained that I would not have brought Mr [REDACTED] to the school if I had known. I wholeheartedly apologized to Mrs Lenton in case I had offended any of her staff by taking Mr [REDACTED] to the school with me. Mrs Lenton accepted my apology.
14. I strongly refute the allegation that I harassed Mrs Lenton's Secretary and that I made remarks asking her if she spoke English. I have had previous dealings in a personal capacity (with some animosity) with Mrs Lenton's Secretary; I

have known her for at least 15 years and therefore I am well aware that she can speak and understand the English language.

15. I also refute the allegations that I harassed the School Governor and abused and harassed the Assistant Head Teacher.

16. I did not make an appointment to visit the school and I admit that this was wrong. If there are any future problems in relation to any school I will go through my Group Leader and make an appointment with the school.

17. I have already tendered my unreserved apology to Mrs Lenton in case she felt offended by my visit to Slough Grammar School with Mr [REDACTED]. I exhibit this letter as Exhibit BD/4.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true,

Signed.....
Councilor Balwinder Dhillon

Dated.....*5th Feb 2008*.....

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FW: footpath linking south of Sussex Place adjacent to Slough Grammar School

From: Deans Alexander (Alexander.Deans@slough.gov.uk)
You may not know this sender. Mark as safe | Mark as unsafe
Sent: 09 November 2007 15:16:51
To: Balwinderhillon@hotmail.com

Dear Councillor Dhillon,

A copy of the email to the Parks Department (below), as discussed.

Alex J Deans
Principal Engineer
Highways Development
Town Hall
Bath Road
Slough
SL1 3UQ

Tel 01753 87 5636
Fax 01753 87 5660

-----Original Message-----
From: Deans Alexander
Sent: 31 October 2007 13:30
To: Kilby David; Dicker Nigel; Farmer Bill
Cc: Yu Sing-Wai; Riaz Kashif; Wheeler Jacqui; Mann Ken
Subject: RE: footpath linking south of Sussex Place adjacent to Slough Grammar School

Importance: High

Please see below.

I received David Kilby's out of office until the 15 Nov 07. Can you please pass this to someone to deal with in his absence.

Thanks,

Alex J Deans

Principal Engineer

Highways Development

Town Hall

Bath Road

Slough

SL1 3UQ

Tel 01753 87 5636

Fax 01753 87 5660

-----Original Message-----

From: Deans Alexander

Sent: 31 October 2007 13:24

To: Kilby David

Cc: Yu Sing-Wai; Riaz Kashif; Wheeler Jacquil; Mann Ken

Subject: footpath linking south of Sussex Place adjacent to Slough Grammar School

David,

As you are aware the above footpath is not a highway nor a public right of way and I have been informed that you are responsible for its maintenance.

The resident of [redacted] Sussex Place Mr [redacted] Councillor Dhillon and now [redacted] are concerned about the following-

1. The uneven surface of the footpath
2. Obstruction of street lights from trees emanating from the school grounds
3. One flickering street light
4. One damaged gate

All defects I understand are towards the northern end of the footpath.

Could you please contact Mr [REDACTED] on 01753 [REDACTED] and let him know what action you intend to take, if any. He would like a site meeting to discuss.

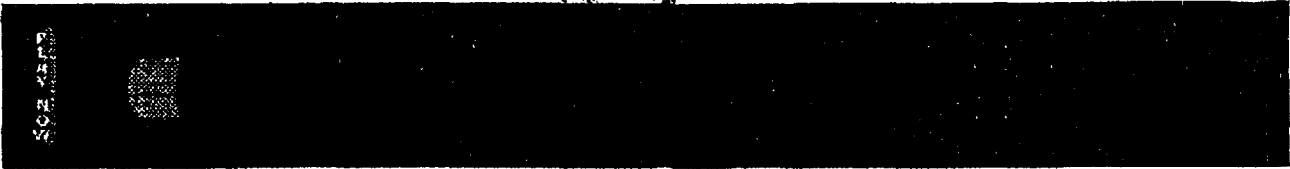
Thanks,

Alex J Deans
Principal Engineer
Highways Development
Town Hall
Bath Road
Slough
SL1 3UQ

Tel 01753 87 5636

Fax 01753 87 5660

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Overhanging Trees Lascelles footway

From: **Oliver David** (David.Oliver@slough.gov.uk)

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Sent: 13 November 2007 10:50:55

To: balwinderhillon@hotmail.com

Cc: Dicker Nigel (nigel.dicker@slough.gov.uk); Farmer Bill (Bill.Farmer@slough.gov.uk)

Good morning

Further to your request last week about the overhanging branches from trees within the Grammar school grounds causing interference to the street lighting on the footway leading from Sussex Place into the Lascelles Park .

The Highways and Street Lighting Department have investigated this complaint and have written to the head teacher of the grammar school requesting that these trees are cut back to stop interference to the street lighting .

The person dealing with this issue is Mr. Keith Beasley

Regards

David Oliver

Environmental Services

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31 October 2007

Mrs M Lenton
Head teacher
Slough Grammar School
Lascelles Rd, Slough

Dear Mrs Lenton

I would like to apologise if I offended any of your staff by attending your school without an appointment.

This morning, I was approached by Mr [REDACTED], [REDACTED] Sussex Close, off Sussex Place, Slough who wanted to meet in person. He raised a number of issues:

Rear of your school (Slough Grammar) playground fence which joins Sussex Place, in junction with the footpath entrance to Lascelles Park

1. One of the school trees' branches are over-growing, over the public footpath and the boundary of Sussex Close, blocking street lighting, which needs trimming by your own tree surgeon.
2. Your trees roots have gone underground into the footpath, causing a hazard to road users (i.e. disabled people).
3. Your rear metal gate, near metal fence on Sussex Place is open all the time and should be kept closed after school hours, to stop unauthorised people gaining access.
4. Rear wooden fence is broken and needs to be repaired.
5. There is lots of graffiti near the rear power station, in the school boundary, which needs to be cleaned up.

I will be most grateful if you could address these problems at your earliest convenience.

I have every confidence in your ability as a successful head teacher and the local magistrates to do your best in dealing with these issues.

Once again, I apologise if I offended any of your members of staff earlier.

Kind Regards

Cllr Balwinder Dhillon
Upton Ward Councillor

Cc: Cllr Geoff Howard and Mrs Angela Bess
Chair of governing body at Slough Grammar School

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Cllr Balwinder Dhillon
67 London Road,
Slough, SL3 7RS
Tel: 01753 525303

3rd January 2008

Mrs Margaret Lenton, Principal,
Slough Grammar School,
Lascelles Road, Slough

Dear Mrs Lenton,

Unreserved Apology

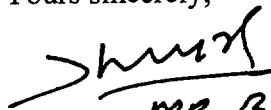
My Group Leader, Cllr Dexter Smith, has discussed with me at length the detail of the concerns you raised in making your complaint about my conduct in bringing a resident, Mr ██████████ Sussex Close, to your school on 31st October, without prior appointment. I now understand that Mr ██████████ had previously been asked to leave school premises after a serious incident raising child protection concerns; I was totally unaware of this at the time when I was thinking I could mediate on what he told me was a dispute about some school trees.

I unreservedly apologise to you and your staff. I can see with the benefit of hindsight that this situation must have put your staff in a very difficult position, which they were trying to deal with diplomatically but firmly. In view of this experience I think it would be better in future if I went through the formal route of contacting the school to arrange an appointment before visiting; and I definitely won't be bringing any unannounced guests with me.

I am so sorry for any distress I have caused; please accept that this was entirely unintentional on my part, and I will not be putting myself in such a situation again.

May I take this opportunity to wish you and all at Slough Grammar my very best wishes for 2008.

Yours sincerely,


MR B. S. DHILLON
SBC Councillor for Upton Ward