



## STUDLEY PARISH COUNCIL

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### Statement following recent newspaper article and Facebook comments

The Redditch Standard recently published an article headed "Latest resignation a blow for Studley Parish Council", which concluded with the statement "The Standard was awaiting a response from Coun Summers at the time of going to press."

The Chairman, Cllr Colin Summers, has been asked to comment. The following are the six questions asked and Cllr Summers' reply.

1. You've lost six councillors this year - are you being just careless or have they a genuine gripe?

As you know, the role of parish councillor is voluntary. Councillors come and go. It is an excellent way of serving our community, not just for those of us in Studley, but across the country where there are upwards of 10,000 local councils, all with volunteers doing the best they can. Our term of office is for four years and then we can either call it a day or put ourselves up for re-election. Although the election is called every four years, and the most recent was in May 2019, we have not actually had any contest for all council seats for a long time although there was a by-election in 2017 for just one place. From this you can guess that some members will have served for longer than the single 4-year term and it would be quite reasonable to expect a turnover of members under these circumstances. Carelessness and gripes don't come into it. Turnover can be considered a natural progression within councils.

2. Paul Beaman says the PC has 'forgotten who it was there to serve' - what is your take on that statement?

The council's purpose is to represent the residents and businesses in the parish, to provide appropriate services, such as the playing fields, footpath lighting, allotments, cemetery and so on, and to improve our environment where possible. This is very much at the forefront of what we do, and we try to do it to the best of our ability.

3. He says there's been an increase in meetings held in confidence - what's the reason for this?

All the parish council's meetings are held in public and even when the country was in lockdown, the law was changed for 15 months to allow us to continue to do that by holding open, public meetings online. The only reason part of a meeting will not be open to the public is if the council has to discuss anything to do with staff, with legal issues or when discussing contracts. Since there has recently been a change within the council's administration team, we have been obliged to close some of the meetings to the public in order to discuss staff-related issues.

We would prefer not to have to close the meetings at all, but as you will appreciate it is not acceptable and totally contrary to the council's role as a responsible employer to discuss anyone's health, earnings, family or personal circumstances in public.

Even though the meeting may have to be closed to the public and the details of discussion are confidential, the outcome of any discussion or any decision arising therefrom, is reported in the council's minutes which are published online. The council aims to always operate openly and transparently. You may have noticed the agendas and minutes of our committees are now published online as well as the agendas and minutes of all the council meetings.

4. Sandra Crofts cites 'sustained and constant animosity, antipathy and mistrust' aimed at her as well as rudeness and a lack of common courtesy - is she mistaken or is her claim accurate?

Thank goodness every one of us is different otherwise where would we be? Some people are optimists, whilst others are pessimists. We also live in a free country where we are free to say what we like. If one person says something they believe to be true, then generally we are tolerant of that point of view even if we disagree with it. This is called democracy. I have always found Sandra to contribute constructively at meetings and personally, I have not witnessed any unpleasant behaviour directed towards specific council members and Sandra had never brought to my attention anything untoward.

Members were not aware, until her resignation, that she had any such issues, and it is unfortunate that she has chosen to air this in public instead of raising her concerns with me and council colleagues.

5. She speaks of a 'corrosive atmosphere' which you as chair have failed to deal with. Why is that?

As with my response to question 4, this is the first time I have heard of any reference to a 'corrosive atmosphere'. Had it been brought to my attention then of course, as Chairman, I would have taken steps to investigate.

6. Finally, how do you as chair intend to re-build trust in the parish council after six resignations?

As for my answer to question 1, there is a natural progression within councils. The country has undergone a profound change over the last 18 months, and it should be no surprise to anyone that this is affecting us all in different ways. Studley is not the only council undergoing these sorts of changes as we all reassess our lifestyles and what we hope to achieve in our lifetimes.

The council will continue to strive to do its best under the same difficult circumstances that we are all experiencing nationally and globally. At Studley Parish Council we will continue to represent our residents and businesses, we will continue to provide the services we are committed to providing, and we will continue to bring about improvements where possible. We might not shout about it, but we are here, in the background, just getting on with our job and we look forward to doing it as best we can.

Now that Paul and Sandra have stood down, we currently have two vacancies and I invite anyone who is interested in the wellbeing of our local community, and would like to be part of the team, to consider taking on the role of parish councillor. The act of making a difference is very rewarding, and we provide a comprehensive induction programme for new members who will be encouraged to join committees that best suit their skills and abilities.

This council values the positive contribution of all councillors, both past and present, and from the many messages of thanks and support that are received in the parish council office, I know that the parish council is appreciated for the work it does and I look forward to working with my colleagues around the council table to ensure that will continue.

Cllr Colin Summers  
Chairman, Studley Parish Council  
31<sup>st</sup> August 2021

End

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