

FOI Request received 27.01.15

Dear Rebecca,

FoI Requests

We are concerned that SPC is continuing with an unnecessary and counter-productive regime of secrecy regarding information which we believe should be in the public domain. Please treat this email as a five separate requests for production under the FoI Act - or much preferably for publication on the SPC website in accordance with the Local Government Act 1972 and the ICO Publication Scheme for Parish Councils

1 Minutes of Extraordinary Meeting 11 November 2014

The Council has refused to publish these minutes even though it has issued a press release describing the substance of the decision and it has distributed a leaflet to many, but by no means all, residents telling us that twelve of fifteen councillors attended and reporting the substance of the decision. We can see no good reason for withholding the official minutes which would reveal to all interested members of the public which councillors attended and what the voting majority was as well as the official record of what was decided.

We note that s228(1) of the Local Government Act 1972 gives the electorate an unqualified right to inspect the minutes of the Council. In fact there is a criminal penalty under s228(7) for refusing inspection.

The ICO Publication Scheme for Parish Councils requires that minutes be published on SPC's website.

2 Minutes of Extraordinary Meeting 19 August 2014

Nothing other than the agenda for this meeting has ever been made public and now even the agenda document has been removed from the website - effectively removing all public trace of this meeting.

Please see what is said at 1 regarding the LGA1972 and regarding the ICO Publication Scheme.

3 Minutes of Extraordinary Meeting 11th August 2014

Please see what is said at 2 above.

4 Agenda Items and Minutes on the SPC Website

We have previously made the point that agendas and minutes are two sides of the same coin and that the latter often cannot be understood without referring back to the former. See 5 below for examples of this. We thought this had

been accepted but have noticed that all the agendas for the full council meetings prior to September 2014 have recently been removed from the website and all minutes of the full council prior to June 2013 have also been removed.

Similarly, committee minutes have been removed for pre-July 2013 and agendas have been removed so that they are available for even shorter periods (varying with each committee).

One effect of this removal of agendas, coupled with the policy of not publishing the relevant part of, or in the case of confidential meetings, any of the minute, is that matters such as 1, 2 and 3 above disappear altogether from any public record and items such as 5 below become very difficult for the public to keep track of.

The ICO Publication Scheme lays down the minimum which should be on the website (current and previous years) which is thus no longer being complied with. Also, once uploaded it clearly is against the spirit of openness to remove them, and so ordinarily one would expect a growing archive going back many years.

We ask that all the removed records be restored to the website as that avoids the need for numerous FoI production requests – the reason for the Publication Scheme in the first place being to reduce the need for such requests.

5 Confidential Items of Business

During the period of the skatepark project there was a significant number of occasions on which the press and the public were excluded from meetings of the parish council and its committees. These are shown in the minutes as having been "Confidential" items, however without the agenda documents it is now impossible for the public to know to what items of business these records relate.

Accordingly there is a whole series of matters where there is no public record either as to what was discussed or what the decision was. While it might have been appropriate at the time to hold the discussions in confidential session we think it very unlikely that in most cases it was necessary for the decision itself to have been kept from the public and even less so now that the skatepark and the issues about the village green status have been resolved.

Accordingly we ask for copies of the agenda documents relating to the minutes in the schedule below – though as we have said, it would be our preference that they are just uploaded to the SPC website where they once were.

We also ask for SPC's written record of what was decided for each of these items.

Please see what is said at 1 above regarding the LGA1972 and regarding the ICO Publication Scheme.

Schedule of Minutes having Confidential Items of Business

8th February 2011	F & GP	Item 15.	Subject unknown
8th March 2011	F & GP	Item 14.	Subject unknown.
3rd May 2011	F & GP	Item 14	Subject unknown.
4th October 2011	F & C	Item 14	Subject unknown.
22nd May 2012	Play Fields	Item 13	Subject unknown.
6th November 2012	F & C	Item 18	Subject unknown
5th February 2013	F & C	Item 16	Subject unknown
13th May 2012	Annual	Item 18	Subject unknown
7 th May 2013	F & C	Item 16	Related to the village green status of the MPF and to the judicial review. Neither of these items is still current. Furthermore Mr Ian Alexander (spouse of Cllr Alexander) published immediately after this meeting on the skatepark supporters' Facebook site the claimed figure for the JR legal costs which had just been discussed in the absence of press and public, so it appears that there was a selective leak rendering withholding from everyone else the official record of the information even less justifiable.
6th August 2013	F & C	Item 18	Subject unknown
25th February 2014	Play Fields	Item 12	Subject unknown
8th July 2014	F & C	Item 16	Subject unknown

Thank you very much.