

Statement

- MR MATT STEPHENS

**STATEMENT FROM CHAIRMAN OF HITCHIN AND
HARPENDEN CONSERVATIVE ASSOCIATION MATT
STEPHENS**

For the Chairman of the Disciplinary Panel for David Leal-Bennett
– NHDC

Dear Sir,

1. I am Matt Stephens, Chairman of Hitchin & Harpenden Conservative Association since Nov 2014.
2. I have known David-Leal Bennett since 2013 when I became actively involved in the Association.
3. I stood as a Prospective Member of Parliament for Don Valley in 2010. I run a small consultancy business and regularly work with senior Executives from companies including Allied Irish Bank, ASOS, Britvic, CITI Bank, RSA Insurance, Stonham and Action for Children.
4. I have recently been selected as the Harpenden West District Councillor for the forthcoming St Albans District Council (SADC) elections in May 2016.
5. I am aware that Councillor Leal-Bennett is the subject of a disciplinary hearing with regard to two complaints made against him; i) he is alleged to have breached the Council's Code of Conduct and ii) it is further alleged that he breached the Member Officer Protocol of the Council. I present the following statement as a record of my evidence.
6. Being Chairman of the Association enables me to see the performance of Councillors from across two District Councils, NHDC and SADC. I can honestly say that I see Councillor Leal-Bennett's performance as a Councillor as superb and an example to others – I hold him in high regard. This is not only because he is a superb political campaigner, but also because he represents his constituents extremely well – demanding high standards of himself and others.
7. As a fellow businessman I respect his business achievements, ability and experience and the skills from this

he has brought to his role as Councillor. I believe his business background gives him a relentlessness to pursue the right outcomes regardless of the challenges or opposition. To those who have always worked in the public sector, it can be perceived, but is not, as pushy, challenging and confrontational. I know this from first hand experience of working with clients in both the public and private sectors. In a corporate environment Councillor Leal-Bennett would be applauded for his relentless focus on getting the best outcome for Hitchin with regard the Town Hall.

8. As Chairman of the Association I am aware of the Hitchin Town Hall difficulties. I'm not involved personally so won't comment on the details. However, I will say that from my understanding on the issue of the NHDC Officers' advice that Councillor Leal-Bennett's directorship of the Town Hall Trust was a pecuniary interest. I understand that is it is for a Councillor to decide, after taking onboard any advice they receive, whether they have a conflict of interest.
9. This whole issue of the Town Hall has shown Councillor Leal-Bennett at his best - acting to bring transparency, challenging poor decisions and representing the voters of Hitchin Highbury on this vital public matter.
10. I have been utterly disappointed to see such an effective, transparent and passionate Councillor treated in this way. It has reflected terribly on all involved.



Chairman of Hitchin and Harpenden Association

Matt Stephens
30th December 2015

