

Statement

- MRS ROSEMARY SCOTT

**RE: DISCIPLINARY PROCEEDINGS
AGAINST COUNCILLOR DAVID LEAL-BENNETT**

STATEMENT OF ROSEMARY SCOTT

1. I am a resident of Hitchin, having lived in Hitchin and the surrounding area all my life. I am a solicitor employed by a large commercial law firm in London. In addition I am a member of Hitchin Town Hall Ltd ["HTH Ltd"].
2. I have known Cllr Leal-Bennett for a number of years in a personal capacity. Although I was not acting in my professional capacity, as a member of HTH Ltd I was asked to, and was happy to, provide assistance with the project involving the development of the Town Hall.
3. I considered the redevelopment of the Town Hall, and the proposed partnership with NHDC to be a cost effective way of protecting and maintaining a community asset for Hitchin, that would otherwise have been lost.
4. In my view it is important for a town like Hitchin to preserve its historical buildings in close to their original form and for their original use, rather than simply redeveloping into more flats or shops, leaving the original building as little more than a shell. I also consider that it is important for the local community to have a space that could be used for a variety of uses, such as plays, concerts, wedding and parties. The proposed redevelopment of the Town Hall ticked all these boxes.
5. It is my belief that Cllr Leal-Bennett also viewed the redevelopment of the Town Hall in a similar way, and that he felt that it was very important that Hitchin had a Town Hall that was of use and value to the whole town. I also know that he felt that the redevelopment of the Town Hall should be carried out with as little cost as possible passed on to the tax payer.
6. Throughout my involvement with Cllr Leal-Bennett in relation to the Town Hall project, he was committed to securing the very best outcome for Hitchin and the Town Hall, as were all the other directors and those involved in HTH Ltd.
7. As I understand it, it is the function of the elected members of the council to challenge and question the officers. I have no doubt that this is what Cllr Leal-Bennett did, however much the officers did not like being challenged and questioned. As a local resident I do not want the unelected officers of the council to take whatever action they like, in the belief that the elected members will simply "nod through" whatever course of action they propose.
8. In addition, I am aware that it has been alleged that Cllr Leal-Bennett had a conflict of interest as he had a pecuniary interest in HTH Ltd. I would like to point out that HTH Ltd was not intended to be run as a commercial company in the normal sense. It is a

company limited by guarantee and a registered charity. As far as I am aware any profits would have simply been reinvested into the company and not returned to the shareholders and directors.

9. Finally, I have always found Cllr Leal-Bennett to be a man of great integrity, with a deep commitment and desire to do what is best for Hitchin and its people, including standing up and pointing out what he considers to be inappropriate actions and asking questions others would not.
10. I would not dispute that he can be direct and forthright, however, in my experience his attitude is no different to what is very often seen, and rightly accepted, in a commercial environment. There is nothing improper about it, rather it appears that some officers have simply taken exception to being taken to task and ask to explain their actions.

I confirm that this statement is true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

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Rosemary Scott

