

A reprimand by the town mayor

Sir, – Last Thursday at its final meeting before the installation of the new mayor in May, I asked what active measures Farnham Town Council is taking to ensure the people of Farnham don't lose their Memorial Sports Ground in its present location to any use other than sports and the purposes for which it was intended and set out in the Deed of Gift.

I expressed my cynicism in regard to publicly-owned land and buildings, for I've watched with increasing dismay as our local council appear to have disposed of nearly all our most treasured possessions in the centre of town, delivering them into the hands of developers, caving into their demands to remove any conditions requiring the provision of community facilities within the new developments.

I referred to the fact that with the latest proposals to overturn the covenants in connection with the Memorial Sports Ground Deed of Gift, our mayor recently expressed her view that the sports ground, would be "an ideal site for housing", adding that she didn't believe "the covenants are insurmountable (ie those covenants protecting the use of the ground for recreational and sporting use)" finally adding "and I hope it's going to succeed".

I suggested that Waverley Borough Council might also attempt to use their powers to appropriate the land under some useful legislation called 'Appropriation for planning purposes'.

This is a complex area of legislation, but it can be used to show that land is deemed to be surplus to requirements by demonstrating, or attempting to demonstrate, that it is no longer required for the purposes for which it was used immediately prior to the appropriation.

In relation to this, I asked councillors to note that at the most recent full council meeting of the borough council when the feasibility study for the Weydon Lane landfill site was being discussed, the leader in waiting and councillor for Upper Hale said:

"We know that in Farnham and across the borough we have a great shortage of recreational space."

Expressing my surprise at the seemingly inconsistent and apparently conflicting views with those expressed by our own mayor, I asked "but isn't this the same council that seeks to sell off our Memorial Sports Ground for building"?

Lastly, I added that in exploring options to remove Farnham Town FC to Weydon Lane, it seemed to me that the borough council is trying to show that the Memorial Ground is no longer required for the purposes for which it was used immediately prior to any appropriation and can therefore be deemed to be "surplus to requirements".

I finally received an answer to my question together with a public reprimand from the mayor about what active measures Farnham Town Council is taking to ensure we do not lose the Memorial Sports Ground.

The mayor replied: "I shall refer your question to Strategy and Finance."

It transpires that the next Strategy and Finance committee meeting will be on June 7 and the committee's response won't be available until the next full meeting of the town council on June 10 which will be after the initial demolitions to the Memorial Hall and the start of the Gostrey Centre extensions.

And the reprimand?

The mayor admonished me firmly and informed the assembled company that the views she had expressed were those in her role as a borough councillor.

Well, call me old-fashioned, but when the *Farnham Herald* attributes the views that the sports ground would be "an ideal site for housing" to the mayor of Farnham, are we seriously to believe that this is a different person from the borough councillor and the county councillor who can then hold differing views on matters concerning her constituents merely based on which of the three hats she might be wearing?

Triple-hatted and triple-faced, a situation in which the tricorn hat must seem invaluable.

It might have all been vastly amusing had the subject not been quite so serious.

It also begs the question of what other councillors actually think and whether they are interested in what their constituents actually want.