

Town Council: Why Bother?

Written by John Eager

Monday, 30 May 2011 00:00 - Last Updated Thursday, 03 November 2011 13:55

Addressing the Town Council on Thursday 26th May:

I'd like to begin by quoting from the good book - The Good Councilor's Guide:

"Public participation [in Council Meetings] is encouraged. It means that members of the public can express their views or ask questions in a specified slot during a meeting.... The council will get into difficulty if it doesn't listen to and communicate with its community; if it ignores or antagonises the press; if it doesn't keep its records in order and if it doesn't manage meetings effectively."

I sent an email to the mayor six days ago asking the following questions:

"Was the meeting with Tesco on 17th May minuted by either councilors or Tesco? If it was would the Mayor make these minutes public? If the meeting was not minuted, why wasn't it?

"Why was a Herefordshire Council planning officer not present at the meeting?

"As the leader of Ledbury Council what is the Mayor's view of Tesco's proposal to build a hypermarket that many believe would destroy Ledbury's town centre? Is he in favour of this proposal or not?"

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'I have not received a reply from the Mayor - Is the mayor capable of answering emails? Is he spending too much time in church? Is he discouraging public participation? Is he getting into difficulty with the media?

'He will not answer questions about his secret meeting with Tesco.

'I have since learned that those present at the secret meeting were sworn to confidentiality. By whom? Why?

'Councilor Peter Watts told us last week that the secret meeting merely gave the same information as we have just seen from Tesco over the last few days at the Market Theatre - so why the secrecy?

'Back to the 'good' book - I quote:

"Council meetings must be open to the public except for any parts that deals with sensitive information.... Exceptions are when sensitive issues are discussed (such as legal, contractual or staffing matters) and then the council can agree to exclude the press and public for just that item of business."

'In what way Mr Mayor was your council's secret meeting with Tesco either a legal, contractual or staffing matter?'

Chairman Yeoman refused to allow the Mayor to answer my questions stating that this was a private matter between him and me.

The mayor has still not answered these questions regarding his secret meeting with Tesco.

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What is the point of a member of the public attending a council meeting, asking serious questions about council procedure and perceived irregularities only to met by a determined wall of silence?

Why bother?