

To: Croydon Parish Council

From: The Co-Chairs,
Croydon CLP Implementation Group

3rd June 2019

Dear [REDACTED] Croydon Parish Council

For the May meeting of the PC we provided a paper which had already been seen by the IG membership. This paper contained proposals for changes and clarifications in regard to the workings of the IG, and also in regard to its relationship with the PC. It also included some thoughts on the future beyond the natural life of the IG. We think you will not be surprised to learn that we are most unhappy at the apparently antagonistic, bordering on hostile, atmosphere which very quickly erupted at this meeting. The attitude exhibited by a minority of councillors certainly appeared to be less cooperative than had previously been the case. It might perhaps have been reflected upon that all present at that meeting were, in truth, self-appointed apart from, to a degree yourself as elected Chair of the PC, and to some degree ourselves as elected by the IG.

[REDACTED] was not present at the meeting but we have worked very closely together since the inception of the IG and this response is jointly from the two of us as Co-Chairs of this community group. We two have discussed at length the events of the May PC meeting and it is with disappointment that we feel we must now write in these terms.

Our expectation was that there would be discussion of the practical steps proposed in our paper, but as things turned out, apart from some useful discussion about the proposed changes to the Terms of Reference (TORs), there was no further constructive discussion. In fact, [REDACTED]'s personal view was that the IG had fulfilled its initial remit and that the PC should itself now take on full responsibility for progressing the village plan. However, since the PC has chosen not to grasp that nettle, we were as one in jointly sending our alternative proposals to the PC. Our proposals were made primarily to deal with unjustified, yet repeated, criticisms of the actions of the IG, albeit from a very few residents.

One of these voiced criticisms relates to accusations of a lack of openness and accountability. Councillors already know that the CLP resulted from the most extensive consultation exercise in the recent history of this village. The IG was subsequently formed in accordance with external advice, entirely openly, and in the full knowledge of the PC and with no restriction on membership. The IG has endeavoured to work closely and cooperatively with the PC, even to the extent that it has had a permanent PC presence (initially two councillors) ever since its inception in January 2016. The IG has reported openly both to the PC itself as well as to the wider community through PC minutes, various newsletters and updates. We two have personally fed reports to virtually every meeting of the PC over the past three years. Successful communication systems have been set up by the IG, the village website (which had lapsed) has been re-awakened; these efforts have been in direct response to one of the key findings of the CLP itself which was a perceived lack of open communication at that time! It is, therefore, both galling and ludicrous to continue to hear criticisms being levelled (by a very few) about a lack of openness and transparency whether about housing developments or anything else.

The other voiced criticism, to an extent understandable, relates to the extreme fear within some minds of housing developments in Croydon. Unfortunately, to our minds, these fears have translated in to a search for local targets at which to aim criticisms and anxieties, however unjustified. We are aware of instances where we have been accused, again by a very few individuals, of "exerting influence". The first related to contacts with a local landowner, others to contacts with Hill and later on Hillson. In all cases these contacts were purely and simply either in response to incoming requests to speak with the IG, or as outgoing enquiries on progress relating to proposals which were known to be being contemplated. With the PC having decided that it would be inappropriate for itself to have these contacts, it was clearly agreed with the PC representative on the IG, as well as through our reports to the PC, that this was a suitable role for the IG. The IG has had no substantive meeting with any developer or landowner without (ourselves!) insisting on PC presence, so accusations of secrecy and lack of openness are unfounded. The proposed clarifications contained in our paper were offered expressly to make it abundantly clear that the IG does not have any direct decision making role in this area. The TOR also make clear that further public consultation would have in any case taken place had it ever become necessary as at one time happened with the proposal by Hill which was put to an open village meeting. This would have happened again had any subsequent proposals materialised. As the name suggests, and the TORs make clear, the IG has operated solely to implement the declared wishes of the residents of Croydon. The IG has had no other agenda than this.

To our minds, the treatment meted out at the last PC meeting fell short of what we consider to be acceptable behaviour towards representatives of this relatively large community group, and especially so given the effort expended to maintain a close relationship with the PC and the Community. We two have been involved with village life for a very long time and accept that tough skins are at times required, however, we feel we cannot now go forward without a clear statement that the Parish Council accepts the IG has operated within its Terms of Reference, in a transparent and open manner, that there have been no hidden dealings with any landowner or developer, and finally a commitment that future dealings with the PC will return to a cooperative spirit. In some ways it is not for us to say, but we feel that the PC needs to clear its own collective head about its stance towards the IG; beyond that any additional expression of support would be a bonus.

None of the above is in any way meant as a criticism of the council as a whole, nor of you in your role as Chair of the PC, either during the meeting, nor while performing the linking role with the IG which to our minds you have carried out in a professional and constructive manner.

We are sorry to have to write in these terms and we look forward to receiving the Council's response.

Sincerely

 Co-Chairs, Croydon CLP Implementation Group
3rd June 2019