



GRAPPENHALL AND THELWALL PARISH COUNCIL

Council Office, Bellhouse Lane, Grappenhall, Warrington WA4 2SG

Janet Richards, Clerk to the Council/Responsible Financial Officer

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13th November 2018

Mr Geoff Weston
Chairman of the Friends of Grappenhall Heys Walled Garden
9 Moore Avenue
Thelwall
Warrington
Cheshire
WA4 2JN

Dear Geoff

Re: Unlocked Fire Doors Incident on Sunday 28th October

Whilst we appreciate you bringing the matter regarding the unlocked fire doors incident to our attention (via the Clerk to the Council), the manner in which it was dealt with by Mr Hugh Kingston (ex Friends Visitor Warden) on the day, was not acceptable. We have requested and received independent statements from both Ape Bars and Ian Sinclair (Visitor Warden) as to the exact events that took place on the 28th October – which do not concur with the version of events communicated to both yourself and the Clerk, by Mr Kingston.

Upon further investigation into the matter, it appears that there was no legal breach at all. Having consulted the most recent Building Regulations (2010) for Fire Safety in relation to public buildings, the minimum number of escape routes for a public room with a maximum capacity of 600 people is 2 EXITS. Both these exits must be a maximum travel distance of 45 metres from any place within the room. This has been confirmed with Lloyd Evans Pritchard Architects, who were involved in the design of the glasshouses as part of the HLF Project for the Walled Garden.

The Community Room at the Walled Garden complies with the above, as during Fridays/Saturdays/Sundays when Ape Bars operate the café, there are ALWAYS a minimum of 2 exits. One exit being the front entrance and the other entrance being the kitchen back door, which is always open when Ape Bars are operating the café. The side doors (which were closed for a matter of minutes on 28th October), are 'in addition' to the fire safety regulations requirement, and therefore NO BREACH took place.

The only occasions when the side doors become legal 'fire doors' is when the café is closed/locked, and hence the back door is locked, therefore ceasing to be an alternative means of escape should there be a fire. Despite this, Ape Bars will always open the side doors to provide additional fire escape when they are operating the café, and have procedures have been put in place to ensure this always happens in the future.

After all the discussion we have had with the Friends over the last year, we are extremely disappointed by the unacceptable manner in which this matter was dealt with at the time. It caused a distressing situation for Ape Bars and the Visitor Warden in front of café customers.

The matter could have been resolved instantly by Mr Kingston if he had well manneredly offered to open the doors for Ape Bars.

The matter however, was further exacerbated by the challenging and confrontational telephone call that Mr Kingston made to the Clerk to the Council (Janet Richards) on 8th November.

The working relationship between the Friends and the Parish Council/Ape Bars has been further damaged by this matter. If our co-operative arrangement is to go forward, the Friends must take responsibility for the actions of their members. This also must include preventing Friends Executive Committee members from putting untrue/malicious posts on Facebook, which is hugely damaging and unnecessary.

We would remind you, as with all Public Bodies, that the Parish Council operates a zero tolerance policy with regard to workplace abuse. Notice of this will now be erected at the Walled Garden to attempt to prevent any further reoccurrence of such a situation.

Any matters arising from this letter can be discussed at the Liaison Meeting on Monday 19th November at 7:30pm.

Yours faithfully,

Elaine Welborn

Councillor Mrs Elaine Welborn
Chair of Grappenhall & Thelwall Parish Council