

On 11 September 2019 you made the following request: -

"Subject: FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST

I am writing to request from Steyning Parish Council, the following information to which I am entitled under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Please send me:

- 1. Copies of all emails and correspondence, including attachments thereto, between Squires Consulting and Steyning Parish Councillors Rodney Goldsmith and Paul Campbell (including that sent under personal email addresses), relating to the Local Green Spaces proposal for the Steyning Community Plan (Neighbourhood Plan). This is to include all versions/changes of texts and assessments for the 'tranquility' scores for the sites known as Bayards Field and Sweetland.*
- 2. Copies of all emails, including attachments thereto, relating to the same Local Green Spaces proposal between Cllrs Paul Campbell, Cllr Rodney Goldsmith and Cllr Christine Young and between these councillors and the residents [REDACTED] and Ms. [REDACTED]. As above, this is to include emails sent via the Steyning Parish Council email addresses and/or private email addresses. This is to include all versions/changes of texts and assessments for the 'tranquility' scores for the sites known as Bayards Field and Sweetland.*

I would like the above information to be provided to me as electronic copies."

Your request has been dealt with under the EIR.

REFUSAL

Grounds

Your request is refused in its entirety. The Council relies both jointly and severally on: -
Regulation 12(4)(b). The request is manifestly unreasonable,
Regulation 12(4)(d). The request relates to material which is still in the course of completion, to unfinished documents or to incomplete data; and
Regulation 12(4)(e). The request involves the disclosure of internal communications.

Further and in the alternative, your request is refused in part in reliance on: -
Regulation 12(4)(a). The request relates in part to information SPC did not hold when your request was received.

Your request is also refused under Regulation 12(5)(g). Disclosure would adversely affect the protection of the environment to which the information relates.

Public Interest Test

1 re 12 (4)(b)

The public interest in not disclosing outweighs any interest in disclosure. The public interest in maintaining this exception lies in protecting SPC from exposure to an undue burden on the Clerk and on councillors and to an unjustified level of distress and/or irritation in handling the information request arising from the nature of much of your dealings with SPC; including the hosting and moderating of the "Steyning PC Watch....Keeping an Eye on the Parish Council" Facebook site with its many inappropriate postings, your refusal/neglect to serve on any SPC committees,

and your incitement on the Facebook site of other inappropriate FoI requests. SPC is satisfied in this case that those factors outweigh the public interest in any limited extent to which disclosure might help to promote transparency and accountability of public authorities, greater public awareness and understanding of environmental matters, a free exchange of views, or to more effective public participation in environmental decision making. Weighed against all the information already published and in the public domain, the withheld information would contribute nothing of substance to any of these factors.

2 Re re 12 (4)(d), (e) and (g)

a) "The chilling effect". SPC is satisfied that disclosure of discussions and superseded draft documents would inhibit free and frank discussions in the future, and that the loss of frankness and candour would damage the quality of advice and deliberation and lead to poorer decision making. This is not in the public interest.

b) "Safe Space". SPC is satisfied that premature public or media involvement would prevent or hinder the free and frank exchange of views or provision of advice and, would also tend to prejudice or undermine decisions made. This is not in the public interest when the neighbourhood plan is still in the process of being developed and so the issues remain live.

If you are dissatisfied with this decision that you may make representations to SPC under Regulation 11 (review); and if you remain dissatisfied you should consider the enforcement and appeal provisions referred to in Regulation 18.

The Information Commissioner is at the ICO

<https://ico.org.uk/make-a-complaint/official-information-concerns-report/official-information-concern/>

The ICO will normally expect the internal review process to be completed first.

Approved by the SPC FoI Panel

5 March 2020