

# The sad story of 72 Bolle Road

**How the Conservatives treat their constituents in Alton.**

**This is the true story of how Patrick Burridge, the Cabinet Member for Planning, made a nice profit on a planning application for an infill development without caring about the effect on the safety of the school children at Butts School, Bolle Road, Alton.**

**And of how, when the neighbours complained, the Council covered it up, and rewarded Mr Burridge by promoting him to be Deputy Leader of the Council, and then decided that he should have the honour of being the Proposer for Mr Damian Hinds, the Conservative candidate for East Hampshire in the General Election on Thursday.**

**Please read on and let us know what you think – and let the Leader of the East Hampshire Conservatives know what you think as well.**

Patrick Burridge (*pictured right*) is the East Hampshire District Councillor for the Council's Downland Ward which is just to the west of Alton Town. He is the Chairman of the Council's North Planning Committee, the Chairman of the Council's Development Policy Panel, and the Council's Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development. Councillor Burridge has held these positions for as far back as the records show on the Council's website, which is back until February 2002 so far as the North Planning Committee is concerned. There is not much about planning that Councillor Burridge doesn't know.



For many years Patrick Burridge has lived in Beech with his wife, Anne, and was a founding member of Beech Parish Council back in 1999 and stayed on the Parish Council until 2007. He and his wife had run a business together which included property investments. Together they jointly own a number of properties which they let out. There are six of these in Alton. Sadly in around 2006/2007 Patrick and Anne Burridge had marital difficulties which resulted in the start of a separation. Perhaps that is why Patrick Burridge resigned from Beech Parish Council and his place was taken by Anne in May 2007.

Fortunately Patrick and Anne remained sufficiently good friends to continue to do property investment together, and Anne Burridge went enthusiastically to training programs so that she could be quite sure how she had to declare her interests when making planning applications.

In the meantime, Billy Pearson was still living at 72, Bolle Road where he had lived since 1963 (the house to the left of the photo).



The access from Billy's house went directly into the entrance to Butts Primary School, which had been there since before 72 Bolle Road was built. Back in the early 1960s there weren't so many cars about, but Billy was always very careful when he drove in and out

with his car to look out for the children tripping in and out of school. And he put up a nice little wall to stop them doing too much damage to his garden.

Sadly Billy died just before Christmas 2007 without any close relatives because his wife, Olive, had died some years earlier and they had no children. Olive had a previous marriage so Billy did have a step grand-daughter, so Billy had someone to leave his house to and to remember him.

Billy's executors then put the house on the market and Anne Burridge took a look at it. She told Patrick that she had found a property which she could use as temporary accommodation and which she considered had the potential to be a good long term investment. Patrick agreed but thought the best way to make money out of it would be to knock down the garage and utility room and build a nice new house where they had been. You could then concrete over Billy's front garden and put in parking places for four cars.

The only problem was whether you'd get planning permission, and whether you could persuade the Highways department that four cars driving in and out of the access to the school wouldn't upset the parents of the children going to and from school.

But fortunately, on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2008, Patrick Burridge was speaking about Development with the Head of Planning Services, Mr Daryl Phillips, on housing matters at the Community Forum meeting in Horndean, so he therefore had a chat with Mr Phillips who agreed that he would take a look at the property. Mr Phillips did look at the property and was able to tell Councillor Burridge that he agreed it did have some development potential but, just to make sure, his Planning Development Manager, Chris Murray, made an inspection, and he also agreed. Chris Murray is now Head of Planning Services. Mr Phillips said this was all fine because any member of the public can get pre-application advice, however he seems to have forgotten that the public have to pay for this advice, and they don't usually get it from the Head of Planning, or that Council officers are not meant to do special favours for members of the Council.

Of course Patrick Burridge had to think about the Highways Department, but fortunately Mr Graham Oakley, the Head of Highways at EHDC, was quite happy to take a look and, apparently, said there was no problem. Unfortunately, Mr Oakley has not answered the Freedom of Information request

about his role in this happy affair, so we don't know whether he charged Patrick Burridge for his advice.

Anyway, Patrick and Anne Burridge went ahead and bought the property *jointly* on 22 July 2008, as they had previously done with the other six properties in Alton. Patrick and Anne Burridge also took out a *joint* mortgage on their house in Beech to finance their purchase.

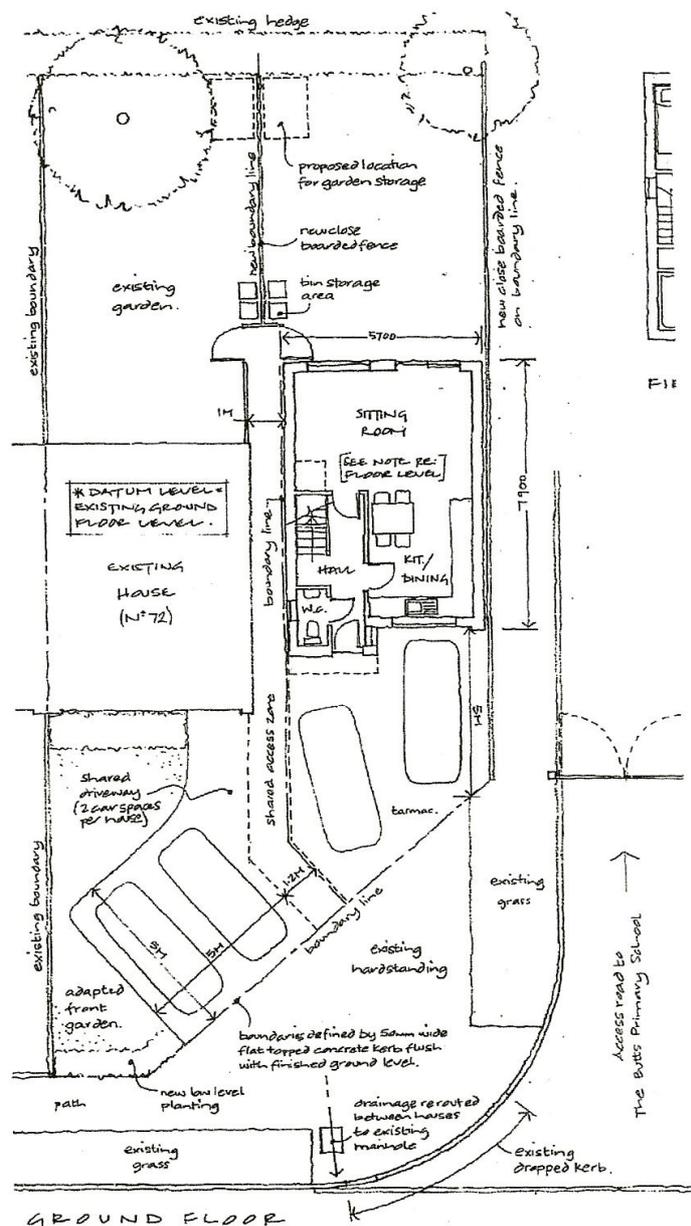
In order to ensure that there is complete transparency, councillors have to declare any properties they own or rent on the Council's Register of Interests. If a Councillor obtains a beneficial interest in a new property it should be declared to the Council's Monitoring Officer within 28 days. However Councillor Burridge forgot that he had to do this.

Shortly after Mr and Mrs Burridge acquired the property, builders came and demolished the small wall dividing the small front garden of the property from the pavement. Then Anne Burridge sent a letter to her neighbours saying that she was intending to modernise and redecorate the house, and had employed an architect to draw up some plans.

Some neighbours went to meet Mrs Burridge and she showed them some architects plans to demolish the garage and build a two-storey detached dwelling house adjacent to No. 72 Bolle Road, and to replace the garden with parking spaces for four cars (*see layout to right*).

The next day Anne Burridge submitted a planning application through an agent. When you make a planning application you have to reveal the names of all the owners of the land affected, but the agent submitted a Certificate of Ownership which stated that Anne Burridge was the sole owner, and the fact that Patrick Burridge was a joint owner was conveniently not on the Council's records.

The head of Planning, Mr Daryl Phillips, then supervised the site visit, a visit which would not have taken place had there not been 27 letters of objection



and a decision by Alton Town Council to refuse the application. He recommended that permission be given for the development, somewhat overlooking the problem that the Chairman of the Planning Committee had bought the property on *his* assurance that planning permission would be likely to be granted.

But there was a further strange twist to the tale. The application came to the Noth Planning Committee meeting, chaired by Patrick Burridge, on 20 November 2008. At the meeting was Mr Phillips' report recommending permission for the application, which stated that "This application is included on the agenda as it has been submitted by a close relative of a District Councillor" but it did not state that the property was jointly owned by Councillor Burridge.

So what happened at the meeting? Well when the item came up Councillor Burridge said, as he left the meeting, that it was his wife's application. He made no mention at all that he was the joint owner of the property. If he had done so most of the members of the Committee would have had to declare a prejudicial interest as friends or close colleagues of Councillor Burridge and would have had to leave the meeting also. So the Application would have had to be referred to another Committee or even another Council to be decided.

But none of the Members of the Committee withdrew, even those who knew Anne Burridge. Some of the members of the Committee even made a number of 'funny remarks' about the application, such as that the parking spaces may be used for bicycles not for cars. Patrick Burridge is known as a keen motorcyclist (*see right*). The application was passed unanimously by the Committee and Anne Burridge rushed out of the meeting with her agent, roaring with laughter.



Some of the shocked and affronted neighbours then checked the position at the Land Registry. To their astonishment they then found that 72 Bolle Road was jointly owned by Councillor Burridge and his wife.

Since then for months on end various residents of Bolle Road corresponded with the Council in an attempt to complain about what occurred. In early January 2009 a complaint was made to the Council's Monitoring Officer that Councillor Burridge had contravened the Council's Code of Conduct. She did not even acknowledge the letter until the matter was referred to the Leader and Chief Executive of the Council, and then wrote at the end of February 2009 saying that she was not satisfied that the complaint showed any breach of the Code of Conduct and therefore would not refer it to the Standards Committee.

Following further correspondence the matter was eventually referred for external investigation. That took just seven months, but by then the Council's Monitoring Officer had found a helpful external investigator. Perhaps it was only a coincidence that this lady had been the Director in charge of planning at the neighbouring local council (Waverley Council) which had employed the previous Head of Planning in East Hampshire immediately after he had been forced to resign following evidence that he had deliberately falsified the planning performance figures to obtain

grants from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. Councillor Burridge was, of course, the Cabinet Member in charge of Planning when this occurred, and so was presumably asked for his opinion as to the suitability of the former Head of Planning to be employed by Waverley Council.

It then took the external investigator five months to carry out her investigation even though it only gave her time to interview two witnesses, Patrick Burridge and Daryl Phillips. However that was quite sufficient for the Investigator. Based on the evidence of Councillor Burridge and Mr Phillips, the Investigator was quite satisfied that Councillor Burridge had not, in his dealings with officers, used or attempted to use his position as a Councillor to improperly confer on or secure for himself, or any other person, an advantage or disadvantage. But she did feel that there had been a technical breach of the Code of Conduct, which could be dealt with by Councillor Burridge undertaking some training.

This report was somewhat conveniently published on 13 November 2009. It had to be delayed until then because the Council had an extraordinary meeting on 9 November 2009 at which the Council's Solicitor, who had appointed the Investigator, was presenting a Report to the Council proposing that Councillor Burridge should be elected as Deputy Leader of the Council. As indeed he was. It would have been a little embarrassing if the man proposed to be Deputy Leader of the Council had just been found guilty of a breach of the Code of Conduct, even if it was only a "technical breach". But perhaps not quite as embarrassing as the why the *previous* Leader of the Council had been forced to resign from his position to create the vacancy.

And so the Hearing of the case against Patrick Burridge was rushed through for 10 December 2009, on a day when the Complainants couldn't get to the Hearing, but they wouldn't have been allowed to speak anyway, and they might have had difficulty finding where it was happening because it took place behind locked and closed doors. However, for those inside, the Hearing was very exciting. The Investigator was asked no questions at all, and Councillor Burridge was asked just one question, "Did he plead guilty to the technical offence of forgetting to declare that he was the co-owner of the house?" This question was asked by Parish Councillor and Standards Committee member Ian Robinson, a magistrate and school governor who for some reason thinks he is called "I P DALY" when he signs in at Parish Council meetings in Greatham.

Anyway, Councillor Burridge did say that he pleaded guilty to the technical offences, but to nothing else, and he was very sorry, and wouldn't do it again. So the three members of the Standards Hearing Sub-Committee went off to have a cup of tea while they considered their decision as to what the penalty should be, and to ask Parish Councillor Ian Robinson if it was time for him to go to the toilet. Then the Sub-Committee came back, and the Chairman announced that Councillor Burridge must write a letter of apology to the absent Complainants, and copy it to the Chief Executive, the Monitoring Officer, and themselves. So then they typed out the letter for Councillor Burridge to sign and put it in the post. The Council even paid for the stamp.

The Monitoring Officer then wrote a very nice letter to the Complainants saying that Councillor Burridge was very sorry about the technical offence, but the matter was now closed. There was absolutely no grounds to think that presenting a false Certificate of Ownership or misleading the Committee about the true position could possibly be an offence of dishonesty under sections 2 or 3

of the Fraud Act 2006, or that there had been any possibility of a conspiracy to obtain a planning permission, and certainly no chance of a case of misfeasance<sup>1</sup> in public office. Incidentally, the Standards Committee findings in the matter were published in the Petersfield Post on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2009 and not in a newspaper local to Councillor Burrridge's ward.

And so Mr and Mrs Burrridge now have a planning permission worth perhaps £50,000 - £100,000, and the children going in and out of Butts Primary School will have the opportunity to develop their skills at dodging cars driving in and out of the entrance to their school. When one of them gets injured or killed, no doubt the Council will apologise.

But perhaps not ... There was a decision of the Standards Board on 22 January this year when a Councillor in the Isle of Wight was suspended as a councillor for six months because he had sought improperly to influence a planning decision for a friend by his contact with a senior planning officer. He was found guilty of bringing his office as Leader of the Council, and the council itself, into disrepute.

Perhaps Councillor Patrick Burrridge is different because he was only Chairman of Planning when he forgot to mention that he co-owned the house, even though he was paying the mortgage, and he wasn't Deputy Leader at the time.

But if you think not please let the JAC Party know by sending us an email. You might also like to tell the Leader of the Council, Mr David Parkinson, whether you agree with his view that what Patrick Burrridge did was "just a technicality", although that's not what we would call it!

But most importantly you might like to write to the Chief Executive of East Hampshire District Council to ask if she might like to intervene and refer the matter to an independent inquiry, or even to the police, to see if things have been done legally and properly. Perhaps we might yet be able to prevent an accident waiting to happen, and stop two Councillors making lots of money at the expense of our children's safety.

And, finally, you might like to ask Mr Damian Hinds what he thinks of the actions of the man who has proposed him as the Conservative parliamentary candidate for East Hampshire.

**Or is it all just a game, where nothing matters any more except making money?**

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<sup>1</sup> misfeasance is an action against the holder of a public office where the office-holder has misused or abused his power