**VONEUS issue**

I’ve received two complaints about the piece I wrote in The Record about Voneus. One from Keith Risk and one from Beverley Cressman.

I will address Mr Risk’s complaint which covers the grounds that Beverley’s complaint raises.

He complains about my use of the word “Polish” as he claims it is inappropriate and insulting. It happens to be factually correct, I am told that the contractors were Polish. I discovered it for myself when I remonstrated with them for digging up the verges and village green in Badgers Lane. Unfortunately, for both the sub-contractors and residents it meant that they couldn’t communicate with me as they didn’t speak English. In fact, the work carried out by Glenevin, the main contractor, as was terrible as the work carried out by the sub-contractors. The inference that my description was somehow derogatory is an inference drawn by others, not by me. I also think that for both of the complainants to infer that the word “Polish” is an insult is, in fact, insulting to the proud nation of Poland.

Mr Risk says that my assertion that the contractors were responsible for any damage was without foundation without first confirming the relationship with the main contractors. My piece does not say that I lay the blame for the damage on the sub-contractors, I merely say that the work was of poor quality. That, again, is a correct statement. I called for a meeting with Voneus and their contractors and WCC and SDC on 22nd December during which Voneus confirmed the relationship with Glenevin, their main contractor, and the sub-contractor.

The damage caused by Voneus’s contractors was extensive. I fielded numerous complaints from residents who had drive ways dug up, who were without water because of damage to the water main, who were without internet because the cables had been dug up, who couldn’t access their properties because the road was dug up and whose walls were knocked down by the contractors and many are still waiting for the damage to be put right.

But you’re right to complain about me because I’m governed by a code of conduct.

Mr Risk complains about my use of the word “targeted” and describing their behaviour as “abysmal”. Again, I was reporting factually. The work done in the village – erection of poles, digging trenches, generally installing infrastructure – is done under Permitted Development Rights. This means that they do not have to seek permission. The right goes back many years to the days of the GPO monopoly when the GPO could come on to your land to erect telegraph poles. However, with that right comes an obligation to inform and consult. To inform the LPA and to consult with residents. Neither of these things Voneus did. You have just heard that they are now “informing” the LPA about 148 poles AFTER having erected them. In the 22nd December meeting Voneus put the complete lack of consultation down to an oversight which they said would not be repeated. They have now repeated just that oversight in Brailles, Sutton under Brailles, Whatcote, Oxhill, Kineton and Radway and probably other villages as well. It is clear that Voneus had no intention of consulting with residents, this was made clear in the 22nd December meeting. That is abysmal behaviour and shows an utter contempt for residents of the village.

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Mr Risk goes on to say that it appears that Voneus have apologised and that we should have fully investigated before making any further claims about them. The facts speak for themselves, they are repeat offenders. I have talked to many of the Chairs of our neighbouring PCs and their behaviour is repeated in those villages. The claims I have made about their behaviour are founded on the facts, not supposition and are the subject of extensive correspondence with Voneus.

Mr Risk questions why I sought compensation from Voneus and how I calculated that compensation and why there are no minutes regarding the compensation. Of course, he is absolutely right to point this out.

In the meeting on 22nd December I had the opportunity to try to rescue something from Voneus’s vandalization of the village and I took that opportunity. I suppose I could have told Voneus that we’d get back to them and invite them to just carry on digging the village up. But I didn’t. I was attempting to look after the interests of the village residents, many of whom had complained about Voneus’s behaviour. My calculation was that £10,000 was about right, it equates to something less than £20 per household. I suppose I could have done the responsible thing and written a paper, calculated the value of losing broadband for 30 hours, losing water for over 24 hours, not being able to move into your newly acquired house because the drive was dug up etc., presented that to the PC at our next meeting, and debated exactly what we should do. But I didn’t, I took the opportunity, while we had Voneus and their contractors in the same room as us, WCC and SDC, to try to win something back for the village.

Mr Risk wonders how such compensation would have been paid out. Quite simply it would have been paid to the PC and would therefore have reduced the Precept by about 28%.

Mr Risk thinks that the PC’s response has been inappropriate, ill considered, and without proper authority. If by trying to look after the interests of residents in the face of a corporation that is, at its own admission, hell bent on “winning a village ahead of its competitors”, I am guilty of those things, so be it. But I will not apologise for trying to look after the interests of residents, nor, I believe, will the many residents who have complained to me and other Councillors about Voneus and their contractors, expect me to apologise.

How many of you have lodged a complaint with Ofcom about Voneus, how many have complained to SDC or WCC and how many have complained to the Secretary of State about this matter. No, it is far easier to target me and the PC, we are such an easy target for complaints. Some people seem to make it their life’s work to constantly complain about their Parish Council. Well perhaps we should just revert to cutting the grass and taking care of the dog mess, but even that might attract complaints.

Is it any wonder one Councillor has already resigned and that 4 of the remaining 7 Councillors are standing down in April. It becomes quite tiring to be criticised for trying to look after the interests of residents by people who should know better. It is very easy to be an armchair critic and to complain about people who voluntarily give up huge swathes of their own free time to do this job.

The easiest thing would be for me to resign, clearly for some people my sense of what is right and wrong and my desire to look out for the interests of village residents is not sufficiently politically correct, my criticism of a company that holds the village and its residents in utter contempt is somehow “inappropriate”. I believe that view is not shared by the majority of residents, but the minute I think that is not the case you will be free to find a new, more acceptable Chairman.

But you’re right to complain about me because I’m governed by a code of conduct, ………………but, my detractors are free to say whatever they like in criticising me.