

Kathy Stevenson
Flood Risk Officer
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5 February 2021

Dear Ms. Stevenson

Thank you for your interesting letter of 2 February.

I shall address the issues you raise below, but my first comment regards you copying your letter to Louise Milnes, COYC Planning Officer, Ward Councillor John Galvin, and Bishopthorpe Parish Council. This can have no object but to attempt to discredit me by publishing falsehoods. If you actually have any valid reason for having copied to these people, please do let me know what it is.

I am setting out below what actually happened on 21st January, quite how or in whose mind this turned into your lurid account, I cannot imagine. You may not have been aware that I was taking photographs, but I have used them to illustrate my account.

On 21st January, I was walking down Chantry Lane to my neighbour's house, The Chantry. On the way, I was taking photographs of the works which were taking place. Of particular interest to me was the fact that your contractors had used chainsaws to cut through the rails of the paling fencing to get to the trees which they intended to fell. (You will recall, of course, that one of the conditions of your planning permission is that this fence will be re-instated along the top of your floodwall. That is clearly impossible now, and so the very first operation on site has put you in breach of your conditional consents).

I am glad that I did have my camera with me because I was able to record the scene as it was on 21st January. Here is a photograph as I started to walk down the Lane. You can see that I am on the outside of the contractor's fencing.



The barrier fence is clearly visible. It ends in a dog-leg and a group of workmen can be seen standing there. The walking route is open to allow access to The Chantry. I walked down the lane and past

the end of the barrier and past the workmen at a safe distance who said not one word to me as I passed the end of the barrier to gain access to The Chantry. The mechanical digger at the end of the road had stopped its operation by the time I got there. Not one word of warning or concern was uttered as I walked past the group, they merely watched me as I walked by, nor did I say anything to them.

Here is a photograph of the scene at the end of the barrier. The machinery is stationary with its grab resting on the ground.



The route to both The Chantry and riverside path is open and unfenced, although a pile of unused panels can just be glimpsed behind the white van. The river can be seen approaching across the old churchyard in the distance (which I took a picture of), and there is no barrier between my standpoint and the machinery, or to the riverside path, or into The Chantry.

At no stage did I “make my way through” a barrier and the men show no signs of concern at my presence.

I then began to retrace my steps back to my home and it was at this point that the first words were spoken by anyone. One of the workmen walked up to me and aggressively said something to me to the effect that I needed to get out of the way for my own safety. When he said this, he was very close to my face and was talking directly at me from a distance of about a foot. I was not wearing a mask, and neither was he.

Because, I was justifiably alarmed about this, particularly, as you say, “within the context of a global pandemic”, I asked him to get out of my way and let me pass. He told me that he would only move “if I asked him nicely”. I was rather unimpressed by this rather belligerent comment and the fact that he had not allowed me to get past, which is what I wanted to do, and so I sarcastically answered, “all right, get out of my way nicely”.

That is the sum total of the verbal exchange which occurred on that day. It must have lasted about five seconds. He stepped back and I was then able to walk home.

You accuse me in your letter of having been “physically intimidating, threatening and abusive” I was none of those. I am aghast at, but slightly flattered by the notion that at the age of 74 I could be seen to be “physically intimidating” by eight young and fit workmen.

If the area to which I had access was, indeed, dangerous, it should have been properly fenced off (the fencing to achieve this was on site), or the workmen at the end of the barrier should have warned me of any danger before I walked past them. As you will see from the photographs, they paid me no attention at all.

As you choose to lecture me on the dangers of the global pandemic “where social distancing and consideration for others is so important”, I should draw your attention to the photographs which clearly show a total disregard on the part of your contractors for social distancing and to the fact that not one of them was wearing a mask, including the one who chose to speak directly into my face.

The only photograph I have in which any of your contractors was actually facing me shows this.



Given the above, I see no need for me to modify my behaviour. I have never abused, nor do I intend to abuse your staff and contractors, and I have never come into the working area, so your kind request is entirely unnecessary. Your unpleasant and empty threat to involve the Police is ridiculous, and clearly intended to intimidate.

“Clearance of vegetation”

On 22nd January, this huge container lorry equipped with tree shredder stood in Chantry Lane for five hours reducing whole trees to wood chips with deafening din next to occupied residential properties with home working and home schooling trying to take place inside. This is the reality of what you mean by vegetation clearance, considerate contractors, and the welfare of the public. Do not in future shred large whole trees next to residential properties on this scale. Dispose of them in this noisy way off-site. I might then well believe you have any concerns at all for the well-being of your “customers”. I should mention here that on 22nd January I had no contact with your contractors and the only thing I did outside was to take this photograph.



You have elected to copy your letter to me to a COYC case officer, a Ward councillor and to the local parochial parish council. For consistency I have done the same with this rebuttal. The lessons for you to learn are to ensure in future that your contractors define working areas properly, wear face masks and maintain social distancing at all times, not use antisocial methods of waste disposal (vegetation clearance) or ignore statutory planning consents. It is an actual and automatic criminal offence for them to have demolished part of a listed building (the curtilage of Bishopthorpe Palace) without unconditional consent. I understand that was the situation on 21/01/2021.

Yours sincerely

Russell Wright