

Present: Mayor, Councillor S Gawrysiak  
Councillor Mrs J Bland  
Councillor Miss S Evans  
Councillor W Hamilton  
Councillor Miss L Hillier  
Councillor Miss K Hinton  
Councillor Mrs E Hodgkin  
Councillor Ms L Meachin  
Councillor D Nimmo-Smith  
Councillor Mrs P Phillips  
Councillor I Reissmann  
Councillor D Silvester  
Councillor Mrs J Wood

In Attendance: Mr M W Kennedy - Town Clerk  
Mrs B Walker - Committee Administrator / Minute Taker  
Mrs N Taylor – Senior Committee Administrator / Minute Taker  
Mr C Austin – Town Sergeant

Also Present: 2 Members of the Press  
30 Members of the Public

**67. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M Akehurst, D Clenshaw, and D Hinke. Apologies for lateness were received from Councillor I Reissmann.

**68. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**69. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Mr D Smewing – St Marks Road

Henley Town Council (HTC) is not just being seen by the eyes of Henley residents, the eyes of the whole nation are watching us at the moment. What is said tonight is important; this council just distancing itself from Councillor Silvester's comments is not enough, it needs to make an example for the whole country. That being said, Councillor Silvester should be supported and not attacked as every Councillor has the right to put their point of view forward.

Councillor Silvester's points of view are very 'Old Testament'; Jesus of Nazareth had a different point of view and said 'Love thy Neighbour'. Everybody should be treated equally and there should be no discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation, race or religion.

The floods were more likely to have been caused by climate change and carbon dioxide in the atmosphere – HTC should support climate change.

Miss S Butcher – Belle Vue Road

Started the petition that now has more than 25,000 signatures requesting that HTC force Councillor Silvester to resign. The number of people who have signed the petition shows that we live in a democratic society. The number of signatures on the petition asking for his resignation far outweighs the number that voted for him to be elected.

There is a large gay community in Henley who are all very hurt and upset by Councillor Silvester's comments.

Councillor Silvester was expelled by UKIP and now stands as an Independent Councillor for HTC. HTC should take a vote on asking him to resign.

The good work that Councillor Silvester has done for the town is appreciated by all, but residents no longer want him representing them. Many people struggle with being a homosexual and end up in therapy, some even committing suicide, Councillor Silvester's comments have just made their struggle worse.

Same sex marriage is now legal and should be given full support by HTC, Councillor Silvester needs to take this on board and listen to the majority.

Mr K Arlett – Elizabeth Road

Pleased to see so many people have attended this meeting, but concerned as to why a meeting has been called to discuss a motion when the Council had already published a statement is on the town councils website.

Mr Arlett was advised that the press release on the website was the Town Clerk's response to the number of complaints that had been addressed and sought to clarify the position. The meeting had been called to give the public a chance to have their say and to enable the councillors to debate the matter.

Adrian Denning – Mount View Court

Questioned why the television cameras had been denied entrance to the meeting?

Everybody has a right to be heard, people don't remember the ancient times when there was flooding and the buildings that were made of mud and brick were wiped out, whole towns could be washed away and never rebuilt.

Today's floods are not a big deal – why is the council spending so much time and effort on this matter?

Ms P Isack – Gainsborough Road

Agree with freedom of speech, but everyone at the table represents the town and if homophobic remarks are accepted where will the line be drawn.

Ms L Baxter – Harpsden Road

All views are ok, all input is important, but if Councillor Silvester's remarks had been about ethnic origins then this discussion would not be taking place – everybody must be more tolerant.

Mr D Eggleton – Gainsborough Road

People in positions of authority must be diplomatic.

Mr J Street – Church Street

Full support of Councillor Silvester, David Cameron was wrong to redefine marriage.

Mrs N Street – Church Street

Known Councillor Silvester for a long time, he spoke as a Christian and I fully support his views. Practicing Christians are a small minority and have the right to protect their opinion. What Councillor Silvester said compares to views from both the Christian and Jewish Old Testament.

Everybody at the meeting is emotional, Councillor Silvester has spoken as a Christian, and he has said nothing bad about gay people just expressed his views against gay marriage.

Mrs D Hughes – Perriam Close

Also a Christian and agree with Councillor Silvester's comments, they are not abusive or insensitive; they are from the Old Testament. If we start to let standards fall, society will keep going downhill.

Mrs I Silvester – Luker Avenue

Councillor Silvester's wife, up until recently owned a caravan that was on a site owned by two lesbian ladies who they both loved and respected.

The word of God states that marriage should be between a Man and a Woman.

Ms R Leavy – Benson

There are a wide range of views. Find some of what has been said abhorrent. Just because things are written does not mean that they are not wrong. How are standards falling, Councillor Silvester should be ashamed and has no place in public office.

Ms V Waram – Nettlebed

Formal complainant. Don't think that Councillor Silvester is capable of making an impartial decision in Henley's interest.

The Mayor thanked the public for attending the meeting and advised that now the Councillors would have a chance to speak.

**70. COUNCILLOR DAVID SILVESTER**

Councillor Silvester made the following statement:

*Chairman, Your Worship, Fellow Councillors and members of the public, for a number of years since my retirement I have sought to voluntarily serve the people of Henley. For 12 years I have served in Henley's Oxfam retail shops, for 9 years of this I also worked for the Henley Toy Library with disabled teenagers, together with 6 years with the Torch Trust for the blind, and for 9 years I have run a weekly church group for mainly elderly people. For the last 3 and half years I have been treasurer of the Phyllis Court Tennis Club.*

*Since becoming a Town Councillor in 2011 I have been faithful in attending and taking part in Council Meetings both of this Full Council, and of the Planning Committees and the Recreation and Amenities Meetings, as well as the Townlands Steering Group and Youth Management Committee when*

*time permitted. I founded, and am co-ordinator of the Abrahams Estate Neighbourhood Watch, I am now treasurer of the 60+ Club for elderly people, and have supported from the start the Makins Skate Project, as well as helping a number of other local residents.*

*When I wrote my letter to the Henley Standard on 29<sup>th</sup> December 2013 – incidentally it was not published until 3 weeks later – I in no way wished to embarrass Henley Town Council or indeed UKIP. It was the Henley Standard who added beneath my name ‘Henley Town Council’ and ‘UKIP’.*

*Neither was it my intention to insult the gay community, and I certainly apologise to them if personal insult has been their perception, indeed, a number of them have been my friends or acquaintances over the years.*

*My letter was directed rather at a Government who had sought to change the nature and definition of marriage from that recorded in the National Textbook, the Holy Bible, which has held sway in our Nation since King Alfred 1200 years ago, and probably longer. In doing so I considered that the Government had broken the Coronation Oath entered by Parliament at the 1953 Coronation of the Queen.*

*I have read that I am barmy to connect this breach with the weather. If so I am in good company, a few years back after earlier flooding, some senior Anglican Bishops were recorded by the Daily Mail as saying ‘the floods which claimed 7 lives and deluged thousands of homes, were the result of moral degradation’. Whilst stressing those affected were innocent victims, they claimed ‘the devastation was the consequence of the West’s decision to ignore Biblical teaching, with an arrogant world reaping what it had sown’.*

*In reaching my conclusion that the current floods are connected to Mr Cameron’s change in the nature and definition of marriage, in breach of Biblical teaching. I am simply saying again in essence what these senior Bishops of the National Church said.*

*Rt. Hon Maria Miller has recently championed free speech in relation to the gay presence at the Russian Winter Olympics. I believe in free speech too, and make my democratic protest by writing in the open forum of papers such as the Henley Standard.*

*I would add that I have had enormous support from all over the country, and from overseas. And I have the confidence to stand by every word I wrote in my letter of 29<sup>th</sup> December to the Henley Standard.*

*However, may I add that the Jesus Christ I serve, who died for the forgiveness of sins and rose to give new life, welcomes every possible type of person into his fold, whether straight or gay. All they have to do is to come to him in repentance and faith.*

*Finally, without committing myself to a gagging order, I confirm I shall nevertheless be circumspect over anything I write in future, particularly if it may impinge on the well-being and effectiveness of this Council, to which I am proud to belong.*

Councillors made the following observations:

Two world wars have been fought; we don't know how lucky we are to have freedom of speech.

It would not be appropriate for this Council to insist that Councillor Silvester resign.

In this Country there is freedom of speech and the free press, everyone has the right to their own views, even if everybody else does not agree with them.

The current flooding has been caused by the position of the jet stream.

There are only 12k people who live in Henley so to say that the 25k petition is the majority is wrong – the majority of what?

It is disgusting how Councillor & Mrs Silvester have been treated and what they have gone through.

Peaceful protest is right, but trespass, bullying or bullying via the internet is totally wrong.

Councillors collectively signed up to a set of Policies and Standards including standards of public life; selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.

If a Councillor is found to have breached the code of conduct, the strongest sanction that could be imposed would be to censure / reprimand them or publish the committee's decision in respect of the Councillor's conduct.

Whether Councillor Silvester has brought this Council into disrepute or not, is a matter for the Standards Committee to decide.

The Council Chamber is where ideas should be discussed, not the letters page of the Henley Standard.

If the Henley Standard receive a letter signed Councillor they are obliged under Press Commission Laws to state the origin and political standing of the Councillor so they cannot be held at fault.

Offensive homophobic remarks and comments and fear and hatred generally come from people who are ignorant of all the facts and do not understand, once people understand they generally change their opinions.

It is a great shame that an elected member caused so much offence and had a member of staff in tears.

Whilst we should love thy neighbour, it does not mean that we have to love everything that they say or do.

The electorate will have their chance at the next election in 2015 to show what they feel and whether they want independent Councillors to represent them.

Nobody should be asked to repent for who or what they were born.

Henley Town Council has rightly or wrongly been associated with Councillor Silvester's comments because the Henley Standard added HTC after his name.

We must live in a tolerant society, and no longer ostracise people because of the way they are.

HTC is a non-discriminatory Council - it has to be by law. People are employed without regard to race, religion or sexual orientation in accordance with the law of the land.

The Town Hall is used for Weddings, and in accordance with the law we allow men to marry women, and men to marry men and women to marry women. We are a non-discriminatory, equal opportunity Council.

Free speech is not an absolute right. The UK has laws of hate speech. It is an offence under the Public Order Act 1986 as amended by the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 to incite hatred on the grounds of sexual orientation. Even speaking at the meeting tonight, everyone is subject to these laws as well as others e.g. defamation.

Over recent years attitudes to homosexuality have been transformed in the UK, Councillor Silvester's views hark back to a time of intolerance which have no place in modern society.

Following Councillor Silvester's statement and Councillors comments and observations the Mayor proposed and Councillor Mrs P Phillips seconded the following motion:

that the views expressed by Councillor David Silvester in his letter to the Editor of the Henley Standard, published on Friday 17 January, which were his personal views are not the views of the Henley-on-Thames Town Council and are not Council policy.

Councillor W Hamilton proposed but it was not seconded that an amendment to the motion be made as follows,

that the Mayor of Henley ask Councillor Silvester to formally apologise to those he has offended.

A vote was taken and it was **UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED**

that the views expressed by Councillor David Silvester in his letter to the Editor of the Henley Standard, published on Friday 17 January, which were his personal views are not the views of the Henley-on-Thames Town Council and are not Council policy.

The Mayor thanked the public for attending the meeting, it was noted that there had been a great deal of free speech and a wide range of views with all arguments delivered in a measured and calm manner.

The meeting closed at 8.00pm.