

Good evening Cabinet.

Tonight I wish to talk about the transfer of land at Bathampton Meadows to the National Trust, and to give the Leader of the Council the opportunity to clear up a bit of confusion around any involvement he may or may not have had in the deal.

In February 2021, the council transferred land at Bathampton Meadows to the National Trust for free. Almost a year later, the Trust announced that it had bought the adjoining piece of land from a company called Deepair Ltd. Both the husband and the father-in-law of the Leader of the Council are directors of Deepair Ltd.

Nothing wrong there.

Expect, that is, when you consult the Decision Note signed by Cllr Richard Samuel in February 2021 that approved the transfer of land from the council to the National Trust. The note is clear that the current Leader of the Council was consulted. But further down the page, the box marked 'any conflict of interest declared by anybody consulted' is, oddly, blank. If both the husband and the father-in-law of the Leader of the Council are directors of Deepair Ltd, surely that would constitute a conflict of interest? Why, then, is that not stated in the Decision Note?

The Leader of the Council has repeatedly claimed that he has nothing to do with Deepair Ltd. In a recent Somerset Live report he said, and I quote: "I have nothing to do with my father-in-law's business, and neither does my husband." However, discussions about the council's potential deal with the National Trust took place at a Bathavon Area Forum meeting in February 2020. At this meeting, the Leader of the Council said, and I quote: "My father-in-law-owns a stretch of the land. The National Trust are in negotiations with him. I'm persuading him gently." Let me restate that: "I am persuading him gently".

There has recently been a flurry of changes to the Leader of the Council's online Register of Interests, with his husband's directorship of Deepair Ltd being stated for the first time earlier this month. Surely this information should have been included on the register at the time the land transfer was undertaken?

I, and many other residents, would appreciate it if the Leader of the Council would tonight clear up this confusion so we can all close the matter and move on. Failing that, I would have no other choice but to support residents' calls for a full and independent investigation.

If any of the statements I have made tonight are factually wrong, I'd be most happy to be corrected.