

## STATEMENT FRONT COVER

Case Ref: 5240335/3

Name: Mr William Friend

Position Held: Witness

Contact Address: East Northdown Farm  
George Hill Road  
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Kent  
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Contact Tel:

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I William Friend declare that this statement is true and accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Signed..... Date.....

wilkin chapman  
golden  
solicitors

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## STATEMENT of William Friend

1. I live at East Northdown Farm, Margate. Together with my wife, Louise, we operate a horticultural, farming and commercial property business from these premises which includes a plant nursery. We also have similar interests in Staffordshire. I am the grandson of James Irvine Hatfield who originally owned a significant amount of property in Margate, this included Northdown House, Northdown Park and the Coach House. In 1937 my grandfather sold Northdown Park, with the house, coach house and other buildings to Margate Borough Council for a peppercorn sum with various restrictive covenants protecting its use for public enjoyment.
2. I understand that Wilkin Chapman Goolden Solicitors have been appointed to investigate a complaint that has been made to the Standards Committee against Councillor Johnston in respect of her failure to declare appropriate interests in matters relating to the Coach House, Northdown Park.
3. After my grandfather disposed of some of the property to the Council the remainder that was retained was my farm, known as East Northdown Farm, which was rented out to tenant farmers. My father inherited the property from my grandfather and continued to let the land to the tenants. Whilst my father owned the property he lived in the Midlands.
4. In about 1950, my father and his sisters gifted the land surrounding my great grandfather's family chapel (already gifted to the diocese) to Canterbury Diocese. It was decided that the parish church of Holy Trinity, bombed during the war and near the centre of Margate, would be better rebuilt at Northdown, to better serve the community. The new Holy Trinity church was built adjoining the Victorian chapel of

St. Mary's. My father and his sisters remained in constant touch with the parish throughout their lives and have been particularly proud of the success of the church and its buildings in serving the needs of the local community – in marked contrast to the Thanet District Council's use of the Northdown House and associated buildings.

5. My father also owned 3 residential properties at East Northdown, across the road from the farm house; East Northdown Cottage, East Northdown House, and Lawn Cottage. These properties were vested in Maud Friend for her life, coming 'back in' to my grandfather's estate on her death. From 1966 Lawn cottage was retained as our second home, he visited regularly to attend to his affairs locally. In the 1970's Thanet District Council wished to demolish Northdown House, it being a drain on Council resources. My father campaigned for this decision to be reversed, citing the obligations within the covenants that the property must be laid out and 'maintained for ever' by 'Margate Borough' - now Thanet District Council. In 1982 my father sold Lawn cottage and East Northdown House. Both properties were subject to covenants that they should be used as single private dwellings and granted express rights of way for this purpose. East Northdown House was sold to the current leaseholder of the coach house.
6. By the early 1980's East Northdown Farm was being farmed as part of a large horticultural and arable farming enterprise. In 1985 the partners in this enterprise decided to cease farming and gave notice that they were giving up the tenancy. The farm, at this time, was owned by a family trust. My father's wish was that one of the family should resume farming the farm. It was agreed that I would purchase the farming business, if the tenant would continue for a short period whilst the capital was raised and the business transferred over a managed period. I had studied agriculture at University and was primarily interested in starting a horticultural business, whereas my two brothers were interested in dairy farming. I undertook to move to Margate in October 1985 to take over the farm business on my own account in June 1986.
7. It was in the summer of 1986, that problems started with the Council's tenant at the Coach House. It was clear to me and my father that the tenant believed he could ignore the conditions of his tenancy and the covenants imposed on the property when my grandfather transferred it to the Council, and the covenants of East

Northdown House and access road imposed by my father. In April 1986 the tenant wrote to my father seeking to purchase 'East Northdown Cottage', together with the roadways. This land formed the last part of my father's 'retained land' benefiting from the covenants on East Northdown House. In the letter the tenant wrote that if he was unable to buy the cottage 'the repercussions for your son (William) will be endless'. There began a long series of complaints by the Council's tenant against me. His initial complaints against me in the early 1990's related to planning permission for my farm shop. Allegations were made to the police, The Law Society and other agencies against my father, his solicitor, against the Leader, Chief Executive and Chief Planning Officer of the Council. All these allegations appear to have been in 'retaliation' against mine and my father's wish to see the covenants benefitting the 'retained land', over the use of the coach house, road and East Northdown House upheld. My MP wrote to the Chief Executive in approximately 1990 over policies being 'pushed' by the Coach House tenant that would have prevented the establishment of my farm shop and nursery. In 2005 the leaseholder launched a further claim of adverse possession on a parcel of my family land, and for rights of way to it for redevelopment. He sent a letter to me warning that he would make renewed allegations against my property interests, but that if I wanted these allegations to cease 'all you have to do is to co-operate.' These allegations continue unabated to the present day. The relevance of the current complaint against Councillor Johnston is, firstly, the fact that the Council's tenant has been a prominent member of the local Conservative Association since 2005 and for some of the period in the 1990's was a Conservative Councillor on Thanet District Council. Secondly, it is that this complaint fits into a pattern of such complaints that stretches back to the start of the Coach House lease in 1986 against those seeking to see implementation of the covenants.

8. Whilst my own natural political affiliation is with the Conservative Party, the fact that I was in dispute with a prominent member of the local Conservative Association made it difficult for me to receive fair representation from my own ward councillors, who were members of the Conservative Group. It was during the Council investigation of the Coach House tenant's allegations against me in 2006-7 that I was recommended by my ward councillor's to approach an opposition councillor from an adjoining ward. The Labour Group recommended Councillor Johnston to me as a councillor who might be willing to represent my case. I also turned to my (Conservative) MP who

wrote on several occasions that he did not feel I was being treated fairly. The allegations were all thoroughly investigated by Thanet District Council, but officers were reluctant to draw a final line under the allegations as the leaseholder still had a complaint pending to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) against the officers conducting the enquiries. These could not be put to rest until 2009 when a counter complaint by me, with the support of my MP, was made to the LGO, who was then able to look at matters from a more balanced perspective.

9. My first significant contact with Councillor Johnston was in connection with a petition that was raised in 2008 which objected to the Council's proposals to sell Northdown House, Coach House and other buildings in the park for redevelopment as apartments. The house is part of the property formerly owned by my grandfather. I once again contacted, and was supported by, my local Member of Parliament who wrote to the Leader of the Council stating that in his view the covenants were valid and precluded the legal sale of the buildings within the park. Councillor Johnston was one of a number of people involved in organising a petition and collecting signatures against the sell off and re-development of the buildings in the park. After the consultation process by the Council, and the petition had finally successfully stopped the Council selling the house and buildings, Councillor Johnston and others who had been involved with the petition came to our house for a meal round the kitchen table.
10. I believe it was merely Councillor Johnston's support for my case in upholding the validity of the covenants that resulted in her being referred to the Standards Committee.
11. Other than that occasion I had not met Councillor Johnston socially until she invited my wife to be her Mayoress when Councillor Johnston was elected Mayor of Margate. This was in May 2011.
12. Since my wife took on the role of Mayoress I have not socialised with Councillor Johnston, I have never been to her house. We have no social connection through mutual friends. As far as I am aware we have no common interests other than the interest in seeing that Northdown Park and my grandfather's former property is maintained as he intended when it was transferred to the Council, and a more general interest in working for good causes, the regeneration of the area, and the upholding of fair and just local government decisions.

13. The first time I met Councillor Johnston's husband was at a recent Mayoral function.
14. The only other contact I have had with Councillor Johnston that may be considered to be social, was when my wife and I were attending the funeral of a local individual who was known to many people in the area. As we were attending and we were aware that Councillor Johnston does not drive we offered to take her to the funeral.
15. I have no financial interest in any of the property my grandfather transferred to the Council. My only interest is to try to ensure that my grandfather's wish that the property be maintained for public benefit is upheld by Thanet District Council.
16. Whilst I do not share Councillor Johnston's political views I believe she is a courageous individual who works very hard to represent the views of the local people. It is clear she works in the best interest of Margate and its people, it is for that reason that I have been in contact with her and not for any social connection or any other relationship.

Signature..... Date.....