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Former Thanet council leader faces four counts

The trial has started of former Thanet Council leader Sandy Ezekiel, accused of four counts of misconduct in public office concerning the purchase of property.

The 59-year-old, of Crow Hill, Broadstairs, is alleged to have committed the offences between September 22, 2009, and February 24, 2011.

Also charged is Philip Emanuel, 64, of Laleham Gardens, Margate, who is accused of aiding and abetting the alleged offences.

The charges concern two adjacent properties in Margate's Old Town, close to the seafront.

One, 12a King Street, is a derelict shop, while the other is council-owned 12b King Street, a Grade II-listed two-bedroom semi-detached house

Ezekiel, charged under his first name of Maurice, is alleged to have willfully misconducted himself while in public office by the improper use of confidential Thanet District Council information in respect of the sale of 12b King Street, Margate, to manipulate the purchase price to his own advantage.

The second charge alleges that he improperly and dishonestly bought the property by using Philip Emanuel as a 'front man' and failed to disclose that he was the true purchaser.

The third charge alleges that Ezekiel asked that enforcement proceedings be brought against the owner of 12a King Street, a man named Alan Douglas, to persuade him to sell the property. Effectively, this procedure meant that Mr Douglas would have been under pressure to carry out expensive renovation to the property if he did not sell it.

The fourth charge alleges he failed to disclose his interest in 12b King Street to the council or Mr Douglas until after the sale had been agreed.

Opening for the prosecution, Alisdair Williamson told Maidstone Crown Court: "This is a case about the improper use of the office of local councillor in order to secure the purchase of two adjoining properties.

"The first defendant was at all times a councillor on Thanet District Council, moreover he was leader of the council for a significant period.

"The second defendant is the first defendant's close friend. Mr Ezekiel hid behind Mr Emanuel in order to buy 12b when he was leader of the council and then he hid behind Mr Emanuel to buy 12a after using his influence to ensure the owners of 12a were persuaded to sell."

The trial before High Court judge Mr Justice Andrew Nicol continues.

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