

First, I accept that my behaviour at the Parish Council was wrong. I was upset that the Chair would not permit me to ask further questions when the subject of branding Burscough as the 'Home of the Whooper Swan' was being discussed. Mr. Brooks had been permitted to make a presentation to the council. I felt extremely strongly that Mr. Brooks had made some claims that were at least misleading. However, I should not have reacted in the way that I did; I agreed to apologise and remained in the meeting.

Secondly, I totally disagree with the comments made by Mr Brooks regarding the meeting I attended at Martin Mere. His comments are full of misrepresentations.

To start with, not only do I not have any animosity towards Martin Mere, I have over the years worked to assist them. I attach two files cx 1 and cx 2; this is a document I wrote in 2009, and the branding of Martin Mere at Burscough Bridge station arose from a meeting I organised between Martin Mere and the marketing people of Northern Rail. Other benefits accrued to Martin Mere from this meeting, including Northern Rail promoting Martin Mere on their website. Also, the tourism development people at Sefton Council were promoting Martin Mere as a day out for visitors to Southport. During these activities. Martin Mere was represented by Victoria Fellowes. I have enjoyed a good working relationship with Victoria for many years.

The invitation to attend the recent meeting at Martin Mere came in the form of a phone call from Victoria, to discuss tourism development – seemingly a natural continuation of this working relationship. No mention was made over the phone of any other person being involved, but on arrival Victoria told me that Mr. Brookes would also attend. I remember having a brief moment of hesitation even then, because of previous experience with him.

The meeting started with Mr. Brooks laying out the proposal to brand Burscough as the Home of the Whooper Swan. I told him I had two concerns.

First, I felt he was overstating the potential benefit to the businesses of Burscough that visitors to Martin Mere could bring. He referred to a study commissioned from Lancaster university that proved the point. I mentioned that I had seen a study from Lancaster university on a similar theme (I did not claim it was the same study, because I am not certain), and the study I had seen included quite a large geographic area. While I could not recall the full geographic area, it certainly included Southport. Mr. Brooks was clearly upset when I suggested that the per person spend by visitors in Burscough would be only a fraction of the figure he had presented to the parish council.

Second, I mentioned that I would not be the only person that believed that promotion of Burscough could better be served through the heritage of the Leeds and Liverpool canal. I told him that some years ago, I was involved with others, including members of the parish council, with a proposal by British Waterways to brand Burscough as 'England's Canal Town'. Mr. Brooks was very dismissive of this as not being unique, but claimed that his proposal would be unique. I did not continue this matter, because it was obvious to me that Mr. Brooks was not willing to listen. My position is that neither proposal is unique.

On the matter of threatening to shoot geese, perhaps this is a case of attempted humour going wrong. There are quite a lot of people in Burscough who have been saying this for some years. Indeed, someone sent me a link to a website advertising shooting trips. All I can say is that Mr. Brooks seems entirely devoid of a sense of humour. Anyone who knows me at all knows that I am a strong supporter of animal welfare, and totally against all forms of hunting.

At the end of the meeting, I walked to the exit of Martin Mere with Victoria. I remember clearly commenting to her that Mr. Brooks had been rather aggressive throughout the meeting. Our discussions were, I believe, extremely amicable. I made a particular point of congratulating her on her new family member. You have told me that you have interviewed Victoria – I would really hope she gave you a more balanced view of the meeting than that provided by Mr. Brooks.

One final point about the conduct of both myself and Mr. Brooks during this meeting. Since the meeting was held in a public space – the café at Martin Mere – I think I know enough as to not draw attention to our disagreement in such a setting.

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