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BUILDER IN £2.5M 'SCAM' PROBE FLIES BACK TO UK

A former Lymington builder hunted by the American Secret Service in connection with an alleged multi-million-pound emigration scam has landed back in the UK.

Derick Coles (62) is being sought amid allegations he has taken up to \$3.5m — about £2.5m at current exchange rates — handed over by clients who believed he would help them with the complicated move to the US.

According to a group of alleged victims, he landed with his wife in Heathrow, via Cyprus, on February 27th where he was apparently met by British police officers.

However, they said neither of them was arrested and they were allowed to go on their way after checks were carried out while they waited in the passport control area.

Mr Coles was spotted earlier this year in North Cyprus where some of his accusers — who include David Farrow, of Colchester, a special constable awarded an MBE for services to the police — flew out to confront him.

They missed him there but on the way back found he was on their flight and asked the captain to call ahead and arrange for the police to meet Mr Coles at the airport.

A British Airways spokesman told the 'A&T': "A flight from Larnaca [Cyprus] was met by police but I'm afraid that we can't go any further than that because of data protection rules."

Bizarrely however, a spokeswoman for the Metropolitan police, whose area covers Heathrow, said they had no record of Mr Coles being spoken to despite the photograph which seems to show him being approached by an officer.

Mr Farrow told the 'A&T' he believed an arrest warrant in Florida, where Mr Coles lived in Sarasota until he disappeared, was due in the next couple of months.



Arrival: Derick Coles (centre) and his wife Elizabeth questioned at Heathrow

Mr Coles' accusers, led by Terry Dunne, are pushing for a warrant to be issued by the US, where the case is being investigated by the Secret Service after being passed up by both the local police and the FBI.

Agent John Joyce told the 'A&T' in January: "I can tell you that this office is actively pursuing this case and I am optimistic that those who are responsible will be vigorously prosecuted for any criminal activity." Hampshire police said they would only look for him if a warrant was issued.

Mr Coles was spotted in Cyprus late last year where he apparently booked into a hotel under the name of Lord Harvey Coles.

A spokesman at Bellapais Gardens Hotel, in the north of the island, said: "Lord Coles, who was alone, stayed with us for two weeks and checked out after the New Year celebrations. He paid his bill in full and said he had enjoyed his time here."

He added: "He said he was writing a book and seemed a very nice man." However, a string of online complaints by about 15 angry customers disagree after they got involved with Mr Coles' firm, New Horizons Group, of which he was chairman.

They were told he would help them with emigration documents, finding property, doing business or exchanging currency — but are now hunting for him after losing contact with him and their money. New Horizons Group's website has also now disappeared.

One claimant is Bharti Patel, from London, who said she and her husband Neil lost \$170,000 (£123,351) after meeting Mr Coles in June last year.

They last heard from him in November and she described the experience as a "nightmare". Mr Coles' past is marked by a string of financial disasters and both he and his wife, Elizabeth, were declared bankrupt in the early 1990s. He began his career as a junior at Lymington builders Tiffins where he worked his way up to become general manager.

The company went bust six months after he and his family moved to Spain in 1975. Yet they returned to the UK within a year and started up Derick Coles Ltd, also based in Lymington.

But in 1988 the property market collapsed and, after failing to secure £3.5m of investment, by 1990 the company was in the hands of receivers. The family fled to the US in 1992 and in 1994 Derick Coles Ltd was wound up owing about £1.6m to a string of creditors.

Mr Coles was a member of the Lymington Round Table and his two sons, Andrew and Jason, both attended Durston Court School at Barton-on-Sea.

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Government allows 200 homes on sports grounds

A developer has won a decisive victory in its battle to build nearly 200 homes on football pitches in Totton and move the two teams to a purpose-built ground on the edge of town.

After a six-day hearing last year, New Forest District Council's refusal of Linden Homes' plans was this week overturned by the government, which leaves only the dwellings' details to be approved before work can begin.

The three-part plan is to move AFC Totton to Little Testwood Farm in Calmore and build 86 homes on its current ground in Testwood Place. A further 102 homes will be built on the former BAT sports ground in Southern Gardens.

The sports and social club will stay there and cricket continue, but Totton and Eling Football Club, currently based at Southern Gardens, will join AFC Totton at the new sports ground in Calmore with three floodlit pitches — one all-weather — and stands and 81 parking spaces.

The secretary of state for communities and local government, Hazel Blears, allowed the appeal on the advice of planning inspector Ruth Mackenzie. Mrs Blears concluded the scheme would benefit Totton sport and not harm the town.

However, Linden Homes was silent about when it might progress with the schemes amid the economic slowdown, and the chairman of AFC Totton, Alan Davis, said on Wednesday he too was waiting for word.

The proposals have split opinion: protesters were joined by New For-

est East MP Julian Lewis and the town council, worried about traffic in Calmore and losing green space. In favour were the football clubs, keen to get improved facilities.

In total the three applications attracted 830 letters in support and 479 against, but there were also two petitions of about 3,000 names objecting. Totton councillor Alan Weeks reacted: "It's a disgrace. The vast majority of local people opposed the plans."

"The only real support came from the sports clubs who were being threatened by the developers. We collected thousands of signatures on petitions but Totton's voice has been ignored."

Coun. David Harrison added: "Once again, the views and decisions of democratically elected councillors have been overturned by a planning inspector appointed by a Labour government which cares nothing about nor understands the town."

He pledged to press the district council to consider legal action to reverse the secretary of state's decision. He added: "If we can't challenge this, we will be losing two very large areas of green open spaces."

On Wednesday, the chairman of the district council's planning committee, Coun. Pat Wyeth, said at its monthly meeting: "These decisions have serious planning implications and the council will have to consider its position."

But AFC Totton chairman Mr Davis said: "We're absolutely thrilled to bits about it. It's a very exciting time."

(Continued on page 3)

Swiss clinic suicide couple had owned Barton hotel

THE MILLIONAIRE couple who died in a suicide pact at a euthanasia centre in Switzerland were well-known Barton-on-Sea hoteliers.

Peter Duff (80) and his wife, 70-year-old Penny, were both suffering from terminal cancer when they ended their lives at the Dignitas clinic in Zurich last month.



Popular: Peter Duff

From 1973 they owned The Red House Hotel in Barton at the seaward end of Barton Court Avenue. At the time they lived in Puddletown, Dorset, and would go to the hotel to meet with staff once a week. Their former accountant of 10 years, Mavis Boreham, described them as a devoted and flamboyant couple.

"They did everything together," she told the 'A&T'. "I was so shocked when I saw the story about them in the Daily Mail. I had so many people who used to work at the hotel ringing me up."

"We were a happy team and there was a good atmosphere. It was a nice place to work."

During their time at the Red House Peter and Penny set up the Watersplash Club swimming pool for guests and visitors. When the hotel was sold to Pennyfarming Homes in 1989 the club was taken on by former hotel bookkeeper Colin Partridge and is today run by his son.

Paying tribute to the couple, who had two children and for the last 12 years had lived in Bath, Mr Partridge said: "They were lovely people to work for."

Peter was suffering from colon and liver cancer while his wife had a rare stomach cancer since 1992 and had suffered a severe relapse after being given the all-clear.

They had reportedly told friends they were moving back to Dorset to spend their final days but instead travelled to Switzerland to end their lives.

Mr Duff was a former director of the wine merchant Avey's and, with Lord Montagu of Beaulieu, founded the Wine Guild of Great Britain.

A memorial tea party for past employees of the Red House Hotel is being organised by Mavis Boreham who can be contacted on 01425 617037.

DISTRICT NEWS

BOLDRE

Man (93) caused death crash

A 93-year-old driver admitted causing a crash which killed a motorcyclist on his first day of retirement. New Forest magistrates heard Boldre man Alfred Ross had turned his Rover onto the A337 at Setley and collided with a Honda bike ridden by Jeffrey Bennett (65) last October. Page 2

BROCKENHURST

Lollipop man licked

Geoff Field was pipped to the post as Hampshire's most popular lollipop man for his work helping Brockenhurst Primary School pupils cross the busy Sway Road. The 73-year-old, who was the New Forest district finalist, was described by headteacher Trudy Cawthra as "a treasure". Page 6

SWAY

Farm shop closure anger

The national park authority has been blamed for the closure of an organic farm shop, with the loss of 10 jobs. NPA planners said they were only enforcing government rules but shopper Coun. Paul Hickman said: "It is a tragedy that Laverslake has been forced to close." Page 8

CHRISTCHURCH

Centre staff's plea to PM

Outraged staff at the Haigstrbury Head outdoor education centre have made a desperate plea for the prime minister to save it from closure. An online petition has been launched urging Gordon Brown to challenge Bournemouth council's decision to shut it after 45 years of offering water-based activities. Page 14

Regular features

Personalia p.8, Townsman p.8, Women's Groups p.11, Sport p.16, p.17 & p.18, Christian Comment p.19, Planning p.20, Letters p.23

What's On

Details of forthcoming local events appear on pages 6, 7, 8 & 9

Eating out

Local restaurant advertising appears on pages 10 & 11



Pupils escape school mini-bus pile up

SEVEN children had a lucky escape when their school mini-bus was involved in a four-vehicle smash on the A337 near New Milton on Monday morning.

The Ford Transit had been taking pupils to Durlston School in Barton-on-Sea when the pile up happened at about 8.25am at the junction of Lymington Road and Lower Ashley Road. It was in collision with a Rav 4, a Renault Megane and a Volkswagen Golf as they travelled in the same direction towards the town centre.

Two schoolboys, a nine-year-old and an 11-year-old, were taken by ambulance to Southampton General Hospital with minor whiplash injuries. None of the other pupils on board the mini-bus, nor the driver, were reported to have been injured.

The driver of the Megane, a 44-year-old woman, was taken to The Royal Bournemouth Hospital with neck pains. A man in his 30s, who had been driving the Golf, was also taken there along with his

passenger, an 18-year-old man. They both sustained minor injuries.

A police spokesman said the Rav 4 driver, a woman in her 80s, had also complained of neck pains but did not need hospital treatment.

Rush road traffic tailed back in both directions while emergency services worked at the scene and the vehicles and debris were cleared away.

Durlston Court's headteacher, David Wansey, told the 'A&T': "We're very relieved that the children are okay, and are very grateful to the emergency services who were there very quickly and were very good. Lots of passers-by were also very helpful."

"As soon as I heard about the accident, I set off there immediately with the busur to communicate with the school and arrange for the parents of the children involved to be contacted."

Mr Wansey added that apart from the pair taken to hospital, all the pupils from the bus had gone into school as normal.

Public hold Parliament and us in contempt, admits MP

Desmond Swayne's outspoken address at charity lunch

THE nation has lost trust in Parliament and MPs were held in utter contempt, according to local member Desmond Swayne who said some people even hated them.

Hitting out at last week's annual charity lunch of New Milton Rotary Club, the New Forest West MP called for the number of parliamentarians to be cut and for their pensions to be reduced.

How could members of Parliament regain the trust of the nation, he asked, as he put forward two suggestions.

"First, we need a significant cut in our numbers; there are far too many professional politicians living on the backs of the British people," he said. "Second, we need a root and branch reform of the parliamentary pension scheme. When the nation is facing a pension crisis, an example must be set by abandoning a scheme that is universally regarded as too generous and too expensive."

"Ordinary people saw that, when the interest of the nation requires,

turkeys really can be persuaded to vote for Christmas, perhaps they will begin to trust the turkeys again."

Trust, said the MP, was the very basis of representative democracy. The majority consented to be governed by, and taxed by, an elected minority because they trusted in the process and in the judgement of those they elected.

They trusted that their elected representatives would take decisions not in their own interest but in the interest of the nation as a whole.

If that trust broke down it resulted in disorder, civil disobedience and a rise in fascist political parties, said Mr Swayne. The history of the last century showed that was especially true in times of economic turmoil.

"You do not need me to tell you that this trust is already breaking down," the MP continued. "Again and again, I am told on doorsteps that all the candidates are the same — in it for themselves and that none of us is to be trusted and whoever they vote for it always ends up the same. Little wonder then that so

many have already given up voting." Mr Swayne said he believed it led to a loss of confidence by Parliament itself and rights that their ancestors fought over generations to achieve were given up.

"We no longer hold the government to account and we have largely given up making the law or controlling supply. Consequently we are increasingly governed by people whom we do not elect and cannot remove."

Last week, the Bank of England began the process of "quantitative easing", which he said was a euphemism for printing new money to the tune of a quarter of the national income.

It was, he warned, "an enormous experiment with unknown consequences. Yet incredibly it took place without a vote or even a debate in Parliament."

"Why have we so lost our nerve?" the MP asked. "The answer is that we know that we do not enjoy our support; that you do not trust us; even that you hold us in utter contempt; that some of you go so far as to hate us."

Chaos as high winds halt new ferries

WIGHTLINK was forced to abandon using its controversial new ferries on Sunday when high winds meant they could not operate within safety requirements laid down by the Lymington Harbour Commissioners.

Passengers were stranded for up to four hours while the company reverted to using one C-class vessel to run between Lymington and Yarmouth.

"A&T reader John Vale said he had booked to return to Lymington on

the 5pm ferry but did not leave Yarmouth until 6.45pm.

He said: "On arrival at the Yarmouth terminal one of the poor ferry employees was having to shout at several cars at once as they arrived, telling them that the new ferries were not running and one of the old ferries was having to do a shuttle to and from Lymington all on its own."

Concerns were raised at Monday's Lymington Harbour Commissioners meeting that the town could be left without any ferry service at all if the new vessels have to be suspended again after licences to use the old ones expired in the next few weeks.

However, harbour master Ryan Wileys said there was already a contingency to shuttle foot passengers by bus to the Southampton and Portsmouth crossing points.

"One would imagine that if [Wightlink] have no other alternative, then that's what they will be doing," he explained.

Under temporary operating rules, the larger ships cannot be used if wind speeds reach 20 knots, gusting at 25.

This limit was put in place as a precautionary measure by the harbour commissioners until all masters and helmsmen have gained sufficient experience of operating the new ships. It will only be reconsidered after further risk assessment and agreement from the commissioners.

Wightlink admitted there had been "teething problems" since the new ships began running on February 25th — prior to the completion of safety sea trials — and it has now amended the spring timetable to exclude some sailings.

Isle of Wight resident Martin Palmer told the 'A&T' that the company had failed to give regular announcements on when or why a sailing was late.

He added: "Ferries are running so late they are cancelled and when they do arrive they are delayed sailing so that Wightlink can effectively

(Continued on page 3)

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Lymington council 'secrecy' criticised

Amenities committee banned public discussion on several issues

LYMINGTON and Pennington Town Council has been forced to defend the number of issues that are discussed in secret after concerns were raised by a county councillor.

Speaking at last week's full council meeting Coun. Adrian Evans referred to the private section of the amenities committee agenda, after its chairman Coun. Paul Hickman gave a report to the full council meeting.

The list of 'secret' items included discussions on the sea water baths, the council's pavilions and buildings, buildings insurance, Lymington sports ground, the Bath Road band stand, the croquet club and the possible employment of a summer entertainer.

The Public Bodies Act 1960, which governs town and parish councils on exclusion from meetings, states that

this should only occur "if publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest or because of the confidential nature of the items being discussed."

Coun. Adrian Evans said: "After listening to the amenities report I noted that if I was attending as a member of the public there were a number of topics discussed in private that I would have been interested to hear about.

"Is this something that is going to happen more and more — the discussion of matters in private?"

The question was met by a chorus of approval from the floor, and in response locum town clerk Malcolm Leatherdale said that deciding where items should appear on the agenda was "not an exact science".

He added: "It is not something we intend to keep going for very long.

My own view is certainly that the fewer matters that are discussed in private session the better. It is not something that we intend to carry on into the future."

At a recently policy and resources committee meeting, chairman Jan Harber asked councillors to vote on whether items scheduled for private session should be discussed publicly.

Members then opted to discuss in public a request from the town's twinning association for the town council to host a reception during an exchange visit from Vitre in France.

However, enquiries by council staff had revealed that the council chamber would be unavailable on the evening the twinning had requested. The committee instead agreed to make a £300 grant to the association so that it could organise an event.

Government gives go-ahead to 200 Totton homes

(Continued from front page)

for the club and we want to get it under way as soon as possible.

"I would like to think that the majority of the town will be well on side with us because I think they will realise it is actually good for them having this brand new facility [at Little Testwood Farm]. It will bring more people into the community and give Totton more exposure.

"The only thing we're waiting to hear from Linden about is what the time frame will be. We would like to think it will be started so that we can begin playing in time for the start of the 2011 season."

AFC Totton won Southern League promotion last season, but cannot progress at Testwood Place without major improvements. The new ground in Calmore would meet standards three divisions higher. Totton and Eling FC are in the lower Sydenhams Division One.

In her decision, Mrs Blears said: "The future of sport in Totton would be well served by the proposed developments and that there would be no adverse impact on open space provision."

Conditions for the three schemes included traffic management and netting at Southern Gardens to protect the new homes closer to the pitch from cricket balls, and 14 restrictions to control noise, floodlights, and landscaping at Little Testwood Farm.

Linden declined to comment when the 'A&T' asked when it intended to submit applications for the details of the two homes schemes. Work on the sports complex can start as soon as a few details have been agreed.

High winds halt new ferries

(Continued from front page)

catch up on the time-table. This leaves travellers who have arrived on time waiting the best part of an hour for the next sailing."

Problems have also been reported with low slung vehicles boarding and exiting the ferry and the previous

Sunday the service was disrupted when a £200,000 Ferrari became wedged on the temporary docking ramp. Staff had to use wooden splints to enable the driver to manoeuvre the car ashore.

However, Wightlink spokesperson Kerry Jackson said the company was addressing problems: "The principal operational issues have now been

identified and we are now in the process of addressing each one in turn in order to improve the efficiency of the service.

"In light of this we are amending the timetable slightly until mid-May, to ease the pressure in this learning phase so we can operate to the maximum efficiency."

Harbour chiefs seek new powers

Lymington Harbour Commissioners are to apply for more powers to regulate Wightlink's new larger ferries in the wake of the furore over their launch before sea trials had been completed — although the process could take at least two years.

Speaking at Monday's meeting, harbour master Ryan Willegers said legal advice had been sought about the commissioners' duties and powers. This had concluded they were currently not equipped to make directions relating to the environmental effects of the W-class vessels in the short to medium term.

"We do not have the powers currently to regulate the operation of the ferries beyond what our current byelaws provide for," said Mr Willegers. "We are not a competent harbour authority in this case, in terms of habitats directions and regulations, so there is no process by which we should or normally would give permission."

As previously reported, the commissioners were outraged when Wightlink decided to put the vessels into service despite being asked not to while discussions with Natural England (NE) continued.

Although acknowledging the

amount of time it would take, Mr Willegers said the commissioners had been advised to apply for a harbour revision order (HRO) to get powers of general direction. This was on the strength of NE's findings that there was a potential for the ferries to damage the environment.

"Nobody knows for sure if the ferries will have an effect," he said. "But if three or four years down the line, through monitoring, they are shown to have an effect, an HRO gives us the tools to deal with it in the future."

"Also for any new plans or projects in the future, we would have the flexibility to be able to respond very quickly without having to go through a two or three-year process. There would be a local consultation process then a new general direction would be issued."

Mr Willegers pointed out that a proposal to allow the government to give the powers to the commissioners without the need for a long process was currently before parliament as a provision of the Marine Navigation Bill. It was agreed that the HRO should be set in motion in case it was not approved.

Mr Willegers predicted a public enquiry would be needed and said Wightlink was almost certain to object because of the impact it could have on its business.

In the meantime, the commissioners' consultant BMT SeaTech, has released its draft phase two report on the new ferries to stakeholders for a three-week consultation.

The report, which concludes that the W-class vessels will slightly reduce overall the level of risk to safety provided certain control measures are adhered to, had been published on the Lymington River Association website but it has since been withdrawn.

After the consultation, a stakeholders' meeting on April 2nd is set to discuss any amendments which might have to be made to the final report. Mr Willegers assured that if BMT did not agree to certain changes, it would explain why.

Harbour commissioners' chairman Peter Griffiths added: "There are lots of words in the document and it is far from perfect, so we are expecting some changes to be needed."

Three arrests after Pennington street fight

THREE teenagers have been arrested after a man suffered serious head injuries in a street fight in Pennington early on Thursday in last week.

As reported in later editions of last week's 'A&T', an altercation erupted at about 12.45am between a small group of men in Millford Road and Elm Avenue.

The 20-year-old victim was rushed to Southampton General Hospital for treatment, but was expected to be allowed home this week.

The detained youths, two 18-year-olds and a 17-year-old all from the Lymington area, were bailed pending further inquiries. They are due to report to Lyndhurst police station on April 21st.

Witnesses and anyone with information should contact Lyndhurst CID on 0845 045 4545 or call Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111.

Commoning history row could lose Lottery cash

A FIERCE row has broken out which could threaten funding for a project to record an oral history of the New Forest's ancient commoning traditions.

The New Forest Trust — a charity which raises money for local conservation work — has been attacked for the "insensitive" way it has handled the scheme by some of the very people whose past it wants to document.

The trust is managing the Commoners' Oral History Project which this year secured £29,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund to inter-

view commoners to record their heritage. But there is anger at the appointment of Bramshaw businessman Denis Shaughnessy to run it.

Critics say that because he is relatively unknown in the foresting community he does not have their trust to send volunteer interviewers into the homes of commoners — some of whom are quite old — to ask questions about their lives.

They also suspect he may lead it in a commercial direction after he recruited Adam Baines, who helped launch the London Eye, and Helen Lloyd, an oral historian who featured in the award-winning BBC radio series 'The Century Speaks'.

Official complaints have been lodged with the Heritage Lottery Fund asking it to insist that a new leader is appointed who is more closely associated with the New Forest's commoning community.

Commoner Jo Ivey has been interviewing fellow commoners for years before the project attracted the new cash but she was turned down by the

New Forest Trust to run the project in favour of Mr Shaughnessy.

Her husband, commoner Peter Whapham, is the East Boldre member of the New Forest Consultative Panel. He attacked the leadership of New Forest Trust chairman Richard Manley.

He said: "His opinion that others, business people, should be appointed is an insult to the commoning community." He called on Mr Manley to resign the trust's chairmanship and his membership of the Commoners' Defence Association (CDA).

Commoner Ann Sevier, who is on the CDA committee, was also concerned: "I think the most important thing is to record as much as we can before the people pass on, people who have memories from the Second World War."

"If we lose this opportunity we have lost it — we will lose the money. They will not give us the money twice, this is the only chance we have to get it right."

Mr Manley, former CDA chairman,

told the 'A&T': "Due to the sensitivity of the issue and the fact that a complaint has been made, until such time that the Heritage Lottery Fund has reported its findings, we are unable to comment."

At the history project's launch last month, Mr Manley said: "We need to spread an understanding of commoning among residents and visitors to the Forest, as well as capturing the memories and know-how of an older generation of commoners while we still can."

The trust's press release last month described Mr Shaughnessy as "a project management specialist with a strong interest in Forest affairs".

The Heritage Lottery Fund confirmed a complaint had been received and it would investigate its concerns within 15 working days.

A spokesperson said: "We will be responding once we have had an opportunity to properly investigate the issues with the grantee." (See letters page 23)



Under fire: Richard Manley