

See my (George Ferguson) responses in red:

Dear George,

I am currently writing a piece regarding the sale of the Port Estate's freehold to the Bristol Port Company, and would be grateful for your comments on the following.

There is evidence that your party Bristol 1st refused a £2000 donations from the Bristol Port Company in the run up to the 2012 mayoral elections. Why was that so?

Yes – I did return a £2000 donation to the Port Co, as I felt that it was inappropriate to accept funding from a company in which the City Council has a shareholding and that I might as Mayor have to take decisions about the future of the port. **Interestingly as a result of a third party FOI request it was revealed that £2000 had also been donated to Marvin Rees, Labour candidate, who chose to keep the donation.** Incidentally Bristol First is only registered as a party in order to be able to use its logo on the ballot paper. It is a party of one!

- Project Victoria was mentioned in the Mayor's Forward plan and alleged to refer to the plan to sell the freehold of the Port before any public announcement. Why was it kept under a coded name?

The idea of a coded name did not come from me, but is a normal Council device where commercial confidentiality is required to avoid compromising a best deal for the city.

- Considering your previous connections with the owners of the port in your capacity as a former member of the Merchant Venturers Society, would you consider there was a conflict of interest in proceeding with the sale of the Port?

No – Firstly I did not sell the port. This was sold by the then Labour administration in 1996 on a 150 year 'peppercorn' lease taking it to 2141 by which time it will probably be under water! All we recently sold was a virtually worthless residual freehold for a staggering £10m. No third party would consider buying such an investment for more than a low 6 figure sum, and the 'marriage value' was valued at approximately half of what was achieved. I only had one interest and that was to strike an excellent deal for the city, which we did, with best professional advice. We retain our 12.5% share in the company which has much greater value and continues to bring us an annual income exceeding £1m.

- The dates of two meetings between you and representatives of the Port are in the public domain. None of them have been minuted. Why is that so?

I have many un-minuted meetings with people in all fields, charitable, diplomatic and business – there is nothing unusual in this. I was accompanied by an officer of the Council in both cases.

- In light of the fact that you proceeded with the sale of the Port despite a large majority of Councillors objecting to it, do you consider the current mayoral system to be democratic?

Of course. The Mayor is elected by the whole Bristol electorate in order to make informed decisions. The Councillors are elected by their wards to represent the people of their wards. I select the best from across the Council to serve as Deputy and Assistant Mayors on my cabinet and take their views fully into account.

