

Witness Name: Ms Suzanne Palmer

Statement No.: WITN0224_01

THE POST OFFICE HORIZON INQUIRY

EXHIBIT WITN0224_01/1

18 Echo Friday January 26 2007

School's building mix-up

A SPORTS throwing circle and protective cage for discus and other throwing events at FitzWinmore School, in Rayleigh, has been built in the wrong place, but may not be moved.

The area was installed as part of a multi-use games area when the school gained specialist sports school status.

The cage around the circle was intended to give protection to owners of adjacent properties and other users of the school playing field. The equipment was agreed for the northern boundary of the site, but was actually built midway along the eastern boundary.

Essex County Council's development and regulation committee will be asked to agree it staying in the same place.

Worker insists money was not for her use, but business means Postmistress guilty of 'borrowing' £15k

By JO BOWLING

A POSTMISTRESS siphoned off almost £15,000 to keep her business running, a court was told.

Suzanne Palmer got into trouble after a snap audit uncovered false entries in the books for the Grange post office, in London Road, Rayleigh.

The jury at Southend Crown Court was told she had admitted "borrowing" the money to fill up the cash machine in her shop and improve the business's cash flow.

But she has denied three counts of false accounting, insisting she always intended to pay the money back.

Prosecuting, Stephen John said: "Over a period of time, she dishonestly falsified the

accounts of that post office in order to cover up the fact she was using Post Office money for the purposes of the retail side of the business, which she ran at the same premises.

"It is not suggested Suzanne Palmer intended to keep any money for herself, which is why she is not being charged with theft.

"The fact the Post Office would get that money back in due course at a time which was convenient for her is, the Crown says, neither here nor there."

Mrs Palmer, from Station Road, Rayleigh, was appointed sub-postmistress in 2005 and signed a contract promising to keep an honest account.

But after auditors uncovered the discrepancies in three weekly records from January and February last year, she admitted in a police interview she had been doing the same thing for weeks, possibly months.

One way she allegedly cooked the books was by over-stating the number of Scottish or mutilated notes taken over the counter.

She is also accused of taking home thousands of pounds from the sale of scratchcards, periodically writing cheques to pay the Post Office back. After she was charged, she paid back the Post Office all the money outstanding, which by then totalled £14,700. The trial, which is expected to finish today, was delayed after a juror recognised her from school.

Planning the lights

SOUTHEND seafront traders will meet next week to look at their options for this year's summer illuminations.

Roger Fisher, chairman of the Southend Seafront Illuminations and Business Association, said some of the set pieces along Marine Parade had been damaged during last week's gales and were being examined.

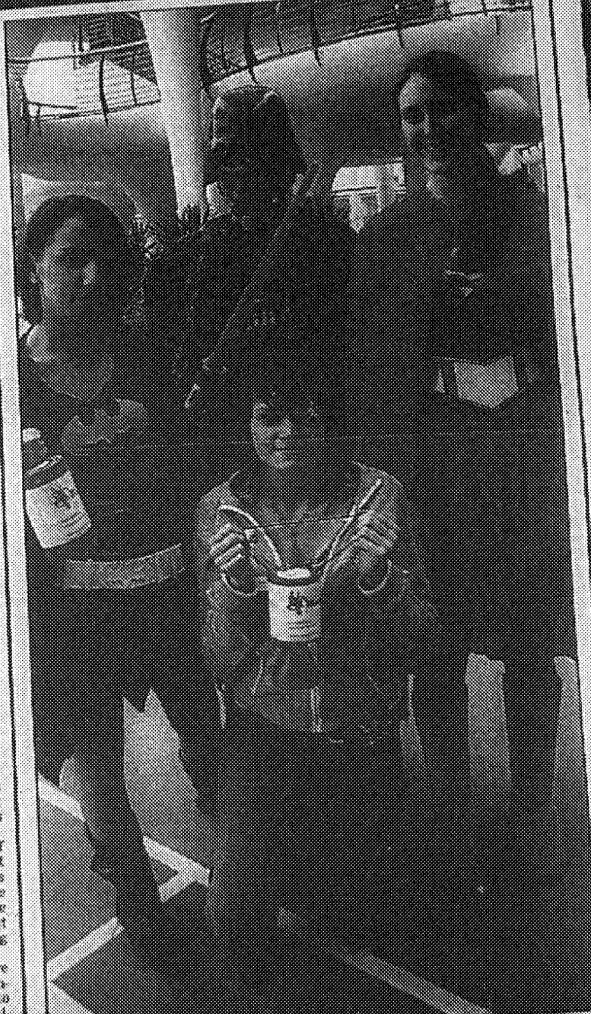
Mr Fisher said: "We are heartened by the fact the council has decided to continue to give £20,000 towards the illuminations for this year. There were concerns this would be cut as part of the council's budget given the financial situation."

He said the seafront traders would consider what they could do with the amount of money available.

Mr Fisher added: "Unfortunately, Southend is not Blackpool where the council spends more than £200,000."

"If we had more money available then we could do a lot more."

Super powers join forces



■ In the spirit - Juliette Connell (Batgirl), Rob Lane (Darth Vader), Laura Botter (Supergirl) and Hayley Scott

STUDENTS dressed up as superheroes to raise money for mental health charity Mind.

A group of BND public services students from South East Essex College, in Southend, decided to reach for the stars and hit the High Street dressed as Batgirl, Supergirl and Darth Vader.

They were asked to organise a

fundraiser as part of their course's employment key skills section. Laura Botter, 17, from Wickford who dressed up as Supergirl, said: "We learnt it is really important to work as a team, whether you have super powers or not."

Rob Lane, 17, from Westcliff, who dressed as Darth Vader costume, added: "We certainly got some funny looks."

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