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News Reading & Berkshire News West Berkshire Council

Residents forced to pay West Berkshire Council nearly 90k over paperwork mistake for planning applications

Maria Dobson and Roger McCabe were both ordered to pay fees after incorrectly filling in paperwork before development began

NEWS By [Hannah Roberts](#) Reporter
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Maria Dobson has been unable to finish the work on her house after she received a £20k fine for a mistake on her planning application (Image: Berkshire Live / Darren Pepe)

A mistake on planning applications has led to two West Berkshire residents owing the council almost £90,000 in fees. The duo have been in a fiscal dispute with West Berkshire Council for more than five years.

Maria Dobson and Roger McCabe were both ordered to pay fees after incorrectly filling in paperwork before development began. The mistake led to the council charging them with the [Community Infrastructure Levy](#).

Maria, who was charged around £20,000 with interest, says that it seems the "council is not accountable to anyone". Meanwhile, Roger, who was charged around **£60,000** with interest, feels like he's in "no man's land" now, as the fee is still being disputed more than five years on.

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The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is a planning charge payable to the [council](#). Planning authorities can choose to set up the CIL charge in their area and it can sometimes be revoked. When developments are eligible for CIL exemption, a form must be completed before development, otherwise, the full CIL charge could be payable. Maria was ordered to pay the full charge as her form was missing from the paperwork.

She said: "The hurtful thing is they could have told us that a form was missing and they chose not to." A similar thing happened to Roger who was renovating a [pub](#); he was told that he had made a mistake on section 7 of the form, which led to a charge of around £64,000.

The pair were both charged, despite the council admitting that if the paperwork had been correct both Roger and Maria would not have had to pay CIL at all. During a West Berkshire Council meeting, Councillor Jeff Brooks posed a question: "If both of these applicants had filled in all their paperwork correctly, would those properties have been zero-rated according to CIL?" Councillor Hilary Cole answered the question and said: "The simple answer is yes."

LOADING

Maria Dobson in her loft extension in her home in Kintbury, near Hungerford, Berkshire (Image: Berkshire Live / Darren Pepe)

Roger says that he now has "no money" as he lost a lot of it renovating the pub, which he says "is the worst thing" he ever did. He described the process of dealing with the council as "ridiculous" due to the bureaucracy he has been subjected to, which has had him "talking to about eight or nine different agents or planning officers". He said he's also asked for the council to take him to court, but this has not yet gone ahead. Maria has already paid her charge while the council is still pursuing Roger for the £64,000.

A spokesperson for West Berkshire Council said: "The two cases quoted are different - one is an extension to a property and the other is the conversion of a public house into six flats. In both cases, the developer was represented by professional agents and architects and in both cases the developer failed to submit the

"As with all legislation, there is ultimately made complaints to them badly. All of the appeals action is being taken against the

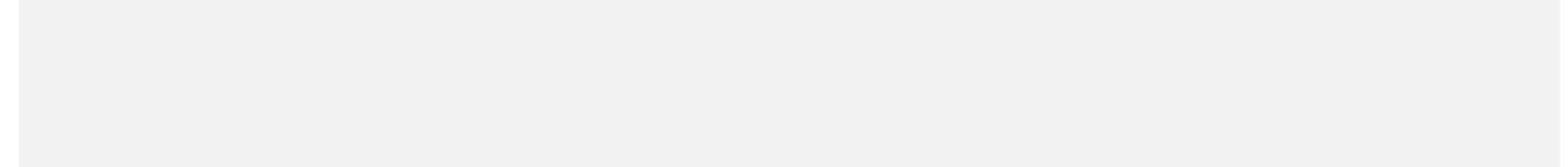
"However, we are still pursuing Demand Notice against Mr McCabe

the council that work was starting. The initial demand notice was issued in July 2018 and, after years of appeals, investigations and complaints, all of which Mr McCabe has lost, he still refuses to pay."

Councillor Richard Somner, Executive Member for Planning, Transport and Countryside at West Berkshire Council, said: "The unpaid CIL Demand Notice for Mr McCabe has accumulated over the last three years. Due to the circumstances surrounding this case, the council has given Mr McCabe every opportunity to appeal the council's decision and settle the debt, but after three years, the council must draw the matter to a close and must enforce the debt.

"I can reassure the residents of West Berkshire that, following all the reviews into the way the Community Infrastructure Levy is operating in West Berkshire, the council has put in place systems to ensure that a CIL debt does not remain outstanding for as long as this again."

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