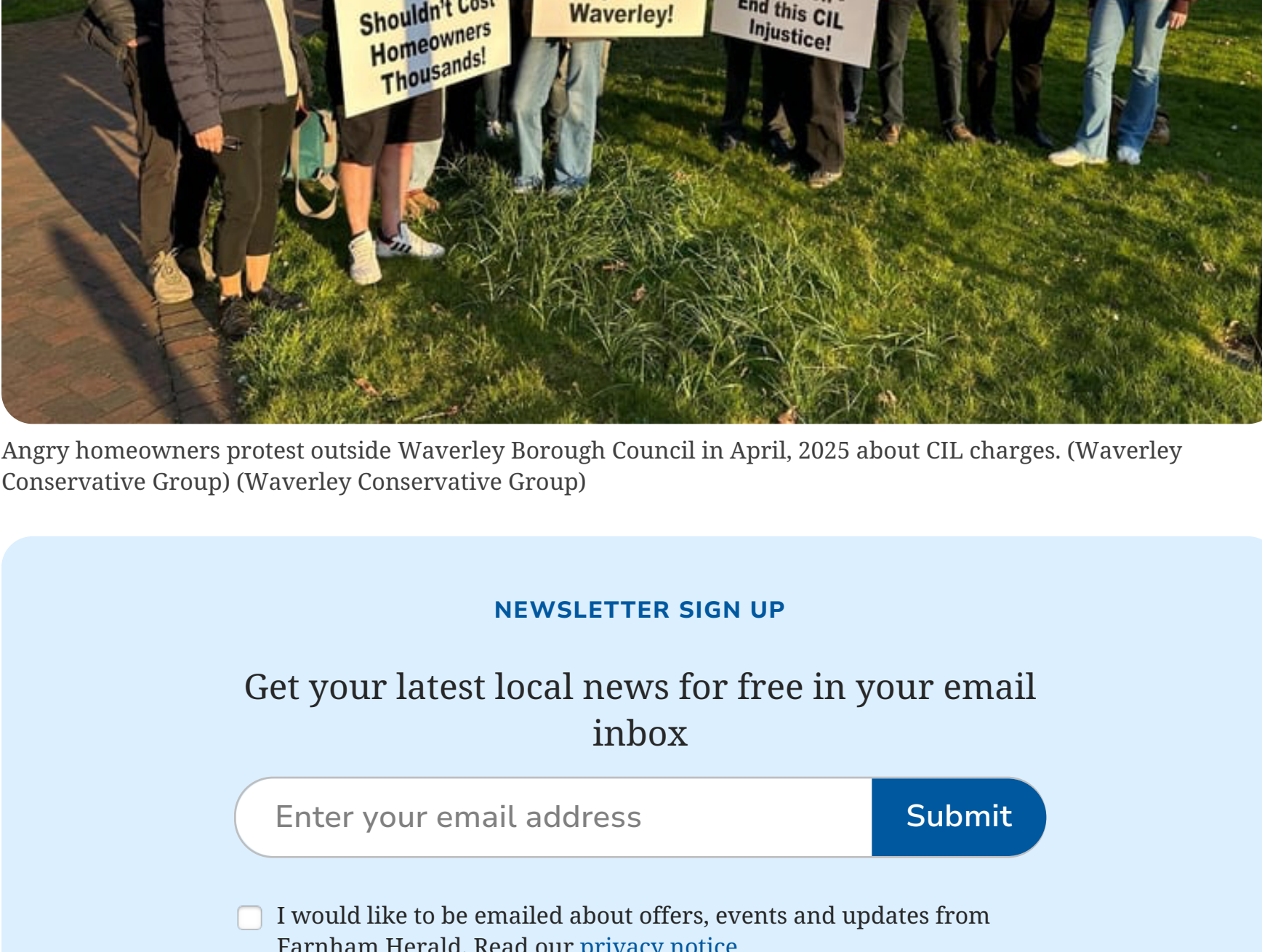


NEWS

# 'You wouldn't treat a dog this way': Waverley residents battle huge CIL bills

By Hugo Berger | Regional editor |  
Thursday 24th April 2025 3:47 pm  
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Angry homeowners protest outside Waverley Borough Council in April, 2025 about CIL charges. (Waverley Conservative Group) (Waverley Conservative Group)

When Steve Dally applied for planning permission to carry out a home extension on his home bungalow, he had no idea the project would lead to years of legal turmoil – and potential financial ruin.

A dispute over the planning application has now left him owing £70,000 to Waverley Borough Council under the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).

But Mr Dally of Godalming is far from alone. In Waverley, more than 20 homeowners across the borough are facing CIL bills ranging from £40,000 to £235,000 – for a charge that many other councils don't even impose on individual householders.

The CIL is a charge local authorities can apply to new developments, intended to raise funds for infrastructure such as schools and transport to support new homes and businesses.

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Steve and Caroline Dally have appealed against a £70k charge from Waverley Borough Council. (LD/RS)

While many local councils limit the levy to large-scale developers, Waverley applies it to homeowners too – unless they successfully apply for an exemption. If that exemption is incorrectly filed or missed, the full levy becomes due.

Mr Dally says Waverley Borough Council administration has shown “no compassion” after a planning application triggered the charge and he wasn't granted exemption.

“You wouldn't treat a dog this way, you really wouldn't,” said 65-year-old Mr Dally.

He explained that he applied for planning permission in 2019 and it was granted. But two months later, after Waverley adopted the CIL, small design changes were made – such as bricking up a back door and changing a flat dormer to a pitched, tiled roof. Another planning application was submitted, but rejected by the council.

“We should be automatically exempt from CIL anyway because the extension is less than 100m<sup>2</sup> of additional space,” he said.

Mr Dally accuses the council of pursuing money “relentlessly” from homeowners, without making allowances for common sense or intent.

“There's been no compassion or discretion for homeowners who don't understand the complex situation. We challenged and queried them, but they're completely inflexible.”

In neighbouring West Berkshire, by contrast, £200,000 has been refunded to homeowners charged the CIL during home improvements. The council there described the charges as “disgraceful” and introduced a review process for affected residents.

At a Full Council meeting in January this year, Waverley councillors adopted a resolution to allow discretionary reviews for CIL cases – but only for a limited window, between June 1, 2025 and May 31, 2026. The council said it was “very important to examine the West Berkshire Council model” and seek solutions for residents unfairly impacted.

But Mr Dally remains sceptical, criticising the council's refusal to act sooner.

“We've got a Post Office scandal here – a public body given powers without considering the impact on the people they're pursuing. That's why it's immoral,” he said.

“It was supposed to be a tax on developers to pay for infrastructure where they build, not on homeowners.”

Mr Dally lives just 300 yards from the Guildford border – where the local council has not adopted the CIL at all.

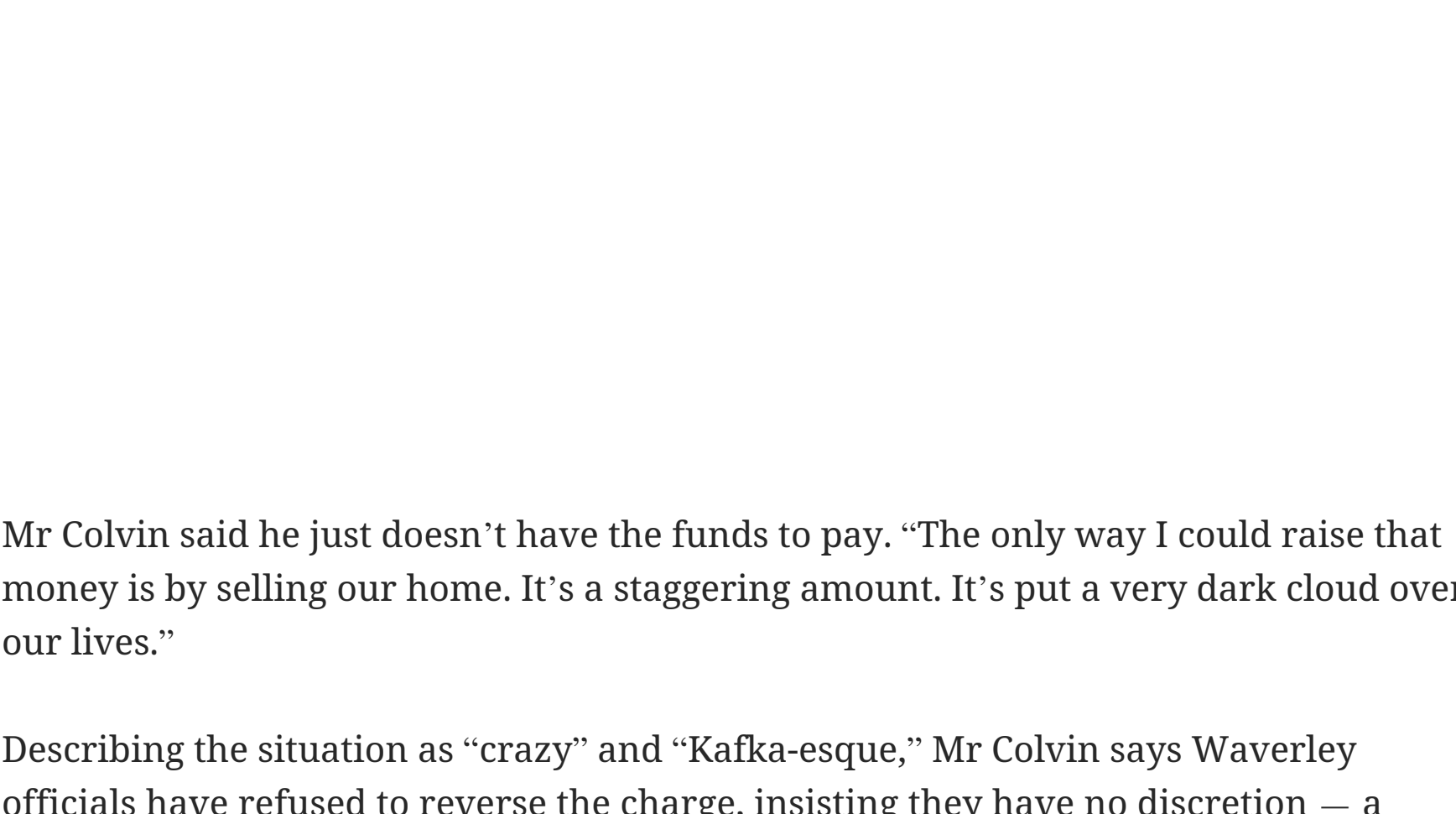
“It was entirely discretionary for councils to adopt it and Guildford didn't,” he said. “If my house was just down the road, this conversation wouldn't be happening.”

A former company chief executive, Mr Dally says the situation has taken a huge emotional and financial toll.

“We've received letters threatening seizure of our home and even imprisonment. How would councillors feel if it happened to them?”

“This was supposed to be our dream home in retirement – we were going to sit back and enjoy it. Crumbs, it's been nothing but a liability.”

Ian Colvin, from Haslemere, is facing a similar ordeal. He may be forced to sell his home after being hit with a £93,000 CIL bill due to what he describes as a minor paperwork oversight.



Ian Colvin of Haslemere is facing a £93,000 Community Infrastructure Levy charge from Waverley Borough Council. (Ian Colvin)

Mr Colvin, who received planning permission in 2021 for a loft extension on his 1970s bungalow, said the project was a “pretty standard upgrade” with no real impact on infrastructure. But a missing form – CIL Form 2 – submitted by an agent later revealed to have no professional qualifications, triggered the full levy.

“We filled out the forms before even demolishing a single brick,” said Mr Colvin. “But in that process, one form – a really simple one – was missed. And suddenly we were told we had a liability of £93,000.”

Mr Colvin said he just doesn't have the funds to pay. “The only way I could raise that money is by selling our home. It's a staggering amount. It's put a very dark cloud over our lives.”

Describing the situation as “crazy” and “Kafka-esque,” Mr Colvin says Waverley officials have refused to reverse the charge, insisting they have no discretion – a claim he disputes.

“This is completely wrong. They do have the ability to withdraw a CIL notice. So why are they saying otherwise? Is it deliberate, or do they just not know the facts?”

While the council has committed to reviewing CIL cases starting in June, Mr Colvin fears the process may be a “sham”.

Despite mounting financial pressure, he has not yet paid the charge – which he fears is accruing interest.

“Our next step is to sell the house. We've lived here for nine years. Me and my wife – we're now in a state of constant worry.”

He added: “CIL is a tax on developers – homeowners have a full exemption from it. Councils have complete discretion to make this right, and Waverley just won't.”

The issue has caught the attention of Jeremy Hunt, MP for Godalming and Ash and former Chancellor, who has written to the Government urging urgent action.

“My constituents have told of severe distress and trauma caused by receiving a demand for a huge sum of money requiring payment on short notice,” Mr Hunt wrote.

“Some have had to sell their homes in order to pay the CIL, to the council under the threat of repossession or imprisonment. This is becoming a major injustice – and one that urgently needs addressing.”

Residents have previously staged protests outside Waverley Borough Council's headquarters, and the issue remains a recurring item on council meeting agendas.

Mr Colvin remains determined to keep public attention on the issue.

“We need to keep the pressure on Waverley to do the right thing – and to follow through on what they promised.”

Back in Godalming, Mr Dally is also standing firm, arguing that Waverley's CIL charges are disproportionately high.

“Waverley's CIL charge is five times that of West Berkshire. In West Berkshire, that levy would've been about £15,000. I still would've been miffed, but I tell you what – there's a big difference between £15k and £70k.”

He and others affected are not backing down.

“We're going to keep fighting until Waverley changes its mind. I've put every penny into this, and then you get hit for £70,000 – it sucks up every spare penny we have.”

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