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'We were charged £38k in planning fee mix up'



RUTH PITT | Mr and Mrs Pitt received a £38k charge for a planning mix up

Katy Docherty-Warren
BBC News, South East

13 February 2025

A couple said they were threatened with prison by Horsham District Council (HDC) unless they paid thousands in fees meant for large-scale developers.

Ruth Pitt, from Horsham, was charged £38,000 for a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) for her self-build home when she missed an email.

She said the council has refused to reimburse her for the charge, which is used to fund things like new roads and facilities when companies are building housing developments.

HDC said it would not comment on individual cases but said it acted in line with the legislation.

The couple began building a downsized home in 2020, but the week they received planning permission in December, Mr Pitt was diagnosed with dementia.

At the same time Mrs Pitt missed an email which said she needed to inform the district council when they had started their build.

She then received a demand for £38,000 for getting the paperwork wrong and threatened with seizure or prison if she did not pay.

Mrs Pitt said: "I actually couldn't believe it when I opened the email - it made me feel physically sick.

"We were already under pressure to keep our project under budget and then we get this huge demand out of the blue with very draconian measures to collect it.

"If I'd committed some sort of serious crime or had a misdemeanour, I could appeal against that but I cannot appeal against the CIL - they will not allow an appeal."

Horsham District Council said: "We can't comment on individual cases but it's important to recognise the council must consider any CIL matters in accordance with national legislation.

"There are areas of the legislation where the council has no discretion to make a different decision if due process wasn't followed."

'National scandal'

But leader of West Berkshire Council Jeff Brooks said he has reimbursed residents who were accidentally charged.

He called CIL charges for homeowners up and down the country "a national scandal" and said HDC are "wrong".

Mr Brooks said he has emailed Martin Boffey, the leader of HDC, and offered to show him how they paid people back.

A retired couple from Godalming were given a £70,000 CIL charge after they replaced an existing house extension.

Independent planning consultant Alex Bateman said the complicated exemption process is "tripping a lot of people up".

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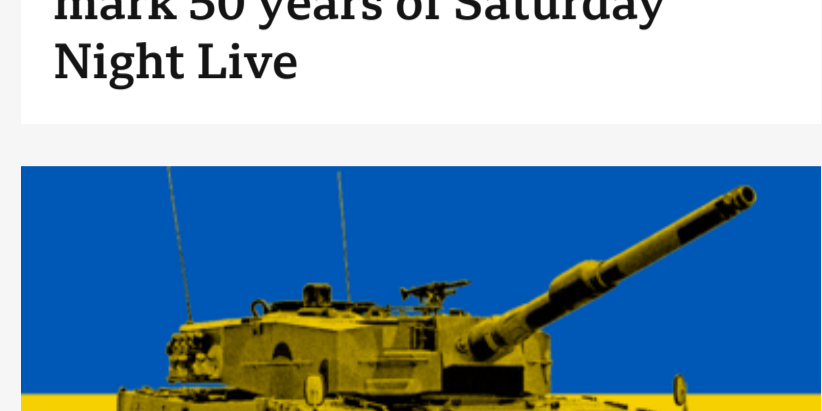
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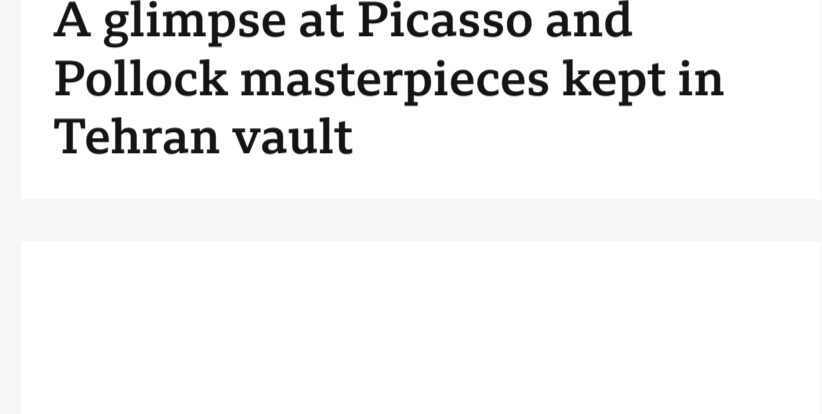
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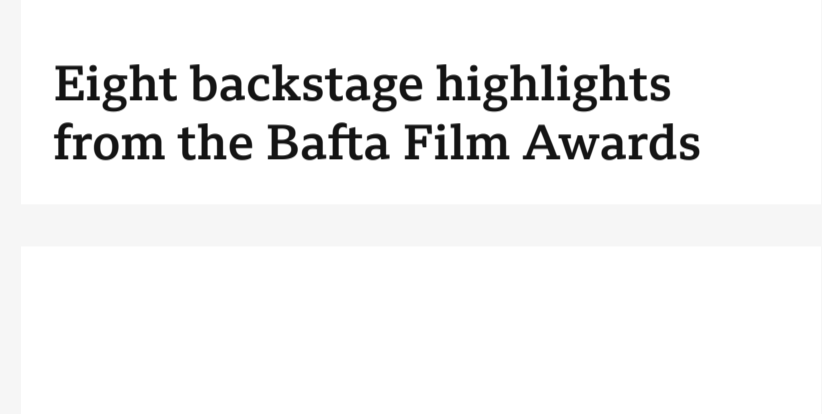
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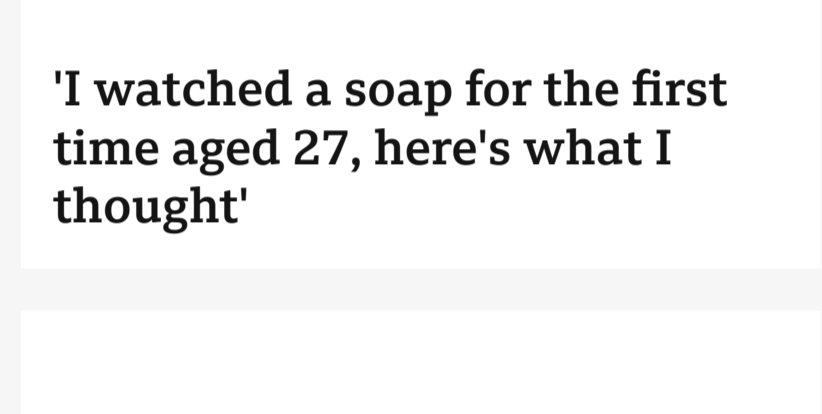
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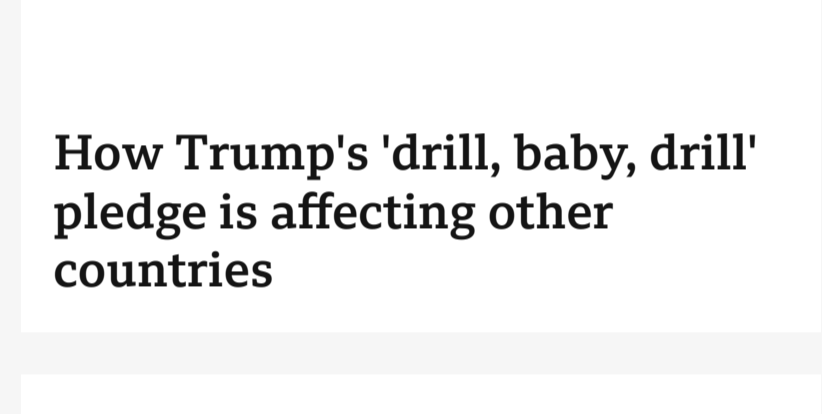
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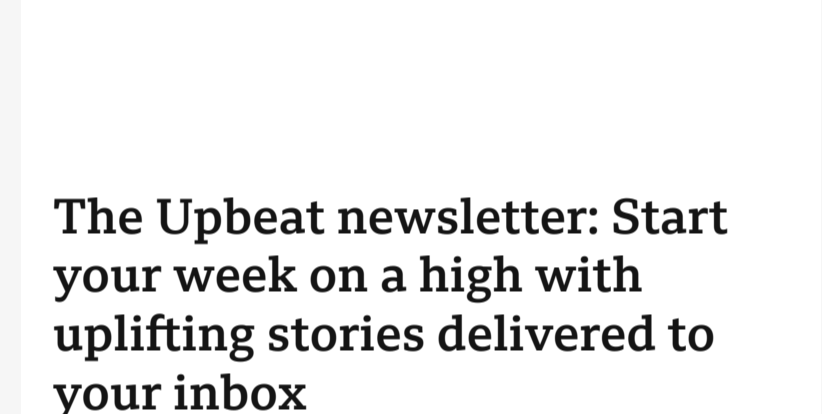
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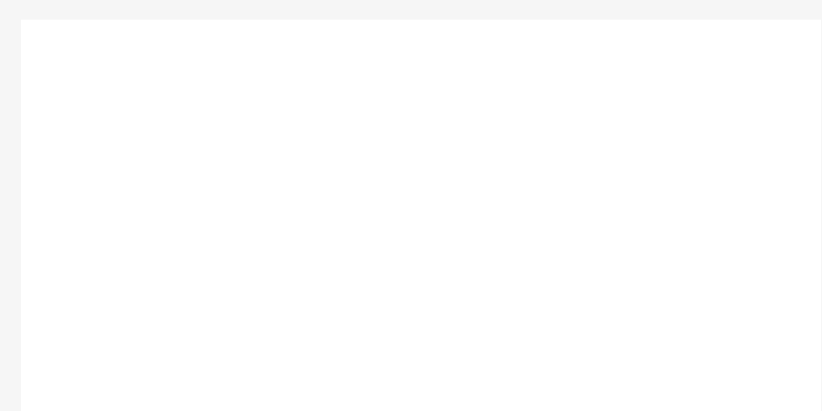
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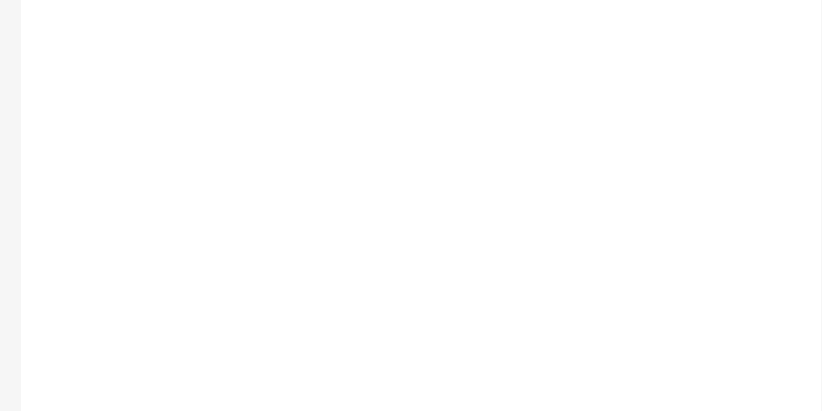
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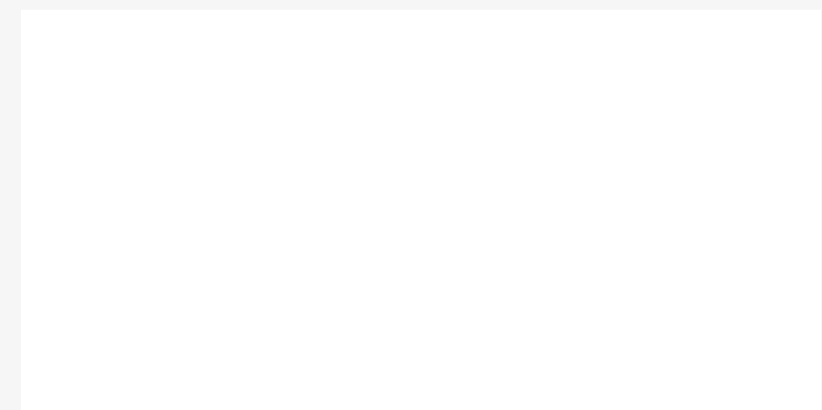
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