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# At last... West Berkshire Council U-turn over 'morally wrong' CIL charges

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A former district councillor said she feels vindicated this week after West Berkshire Council finally righted a "moral and ethical" wrong.

It was back in 2019 that the Newbury Weekly News first reported how former council leader Gordon Lundie accused his own authority of allowing a Lambourn builder to unwittingly face financial ruin.



Claire Rowles

Roger McCabe, the developer of The Malt Shovel pub in the village, was exempt from having to pay a £60,000 Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) to the council – so long as he filled in the right forms before a deadline.

But the council never warned its constituent he was about to become liable by default.

That left Mr McCabe legally obliged to pay the council the sum or risk going to prison if he couldn't.

Subsequently, in a similar case, Maria Dobson built an extension to her Kintbury home and would have been exempt from CIL payment if she had known how to fill in the forms correctly.

She ticked the exemption box, but failed to do the rest of the paperwork correctly – and was then landed with a £20,000 bill from West Berkshire Council.

Now, after many years – and a change of regime at the top – the district council has done a u-turn.

Ms Dobson and Mr McCabe's case was championed by former Conservative district councillor Clare Rowles, who branded the situation "morally and ethically wrong".

She was subsequently publicly humiliated.

Last December this newspaper reported how Mrs Rowles was stripped of her committee roles by former Conservative district council leader Lynne Doherty.

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The step was taken after Ms Rowles was told she may have been involved in a conflict of interest stemming from a council ethics committee meeting in January, at which she had championed her constituents' – Ms Dobson and Mr McCabe – case.

Nothing came of it – but Ms Rowles did not seek re-election, and told the NWN this week her treatment at the hands of former Conservative leaders was largely responsible.

She said: "It was incredibly stressful, if I'm honest.

"The complaint against me was vexatious and related to the CIL payments issue.

"It had a huge impact – but I might go back one day.

"Meanwhile I'm just so pleased that this has happened.

"Jeff Brooks (Lib Dem, Thatcham West) kept banging this particular drum after I left, so credit is due to him, too.

"And thanks to the NWN for keeping it in the public eye.

"It's just a pity this couldn't have been sorted out years ago.

"But it shows that, if you believe in a cause and fight for what is right, it's worth it in the end."

Human Interest Hungerford Newbury Newbury Reporter

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