

Enterprise and Business Committee Inquiry into Town Centre Regeneration

Evidence from David Lloyd Owen

Dear Sir / Madam,

Re: Enquiry into the regeneration of town centres / Ymchwiliad i adfywio canol trefi

In my experience, one of the impediments to town centre regeneration is the abuse of the legal system to prevent councillors from carrying out their role in appraising planning policy.

In my case, as a former Mayor and a current Town Councillor for Cardigan, I spoke against a poorly conceived plan for a supermarket in the town. Five years on and the construction work to date shows just how badly sited the project is. I spoke in my capacity as a professional ecologist, trained to doctoral level with Chartered Geographer and Chartered Environmentalist status. I found out during the planning meetings how poorly conceived the work was and the officers present were unable to present adequate responses to my enquiries. At the start of the two meetings, I was broadly in favour of the proposed scheme, but due to their inability to understand the basics of hydrography, let alone applied geomorphology I felt morally obliged to object to the proposals.

As a result, I was referred to the Ombudsman on, as they advised me, 'allegations of corruption' by an ex-councillor with what appears to have been support from at least one other councillor who for various reasons supported the scheme.

I was meant to be corrupt because I was an unpaid director of a local community scheme as well as being an unpaid councillor. I was charged as being corrupt because as a trained professional I freely gave my time on a pro bono basis to the betterment of the town centre.

As a professional, this meant I endured the vexation that comes when the local press had a field day being able to allow the abuse to be aired. Even the protagonist boasted to other councillors that 'it is a long shot' and inevitably, I was cleared on all counts, but had to waste a lot of time dealing with these offensive allegations.

The legislation was meant to be about preventing corruption. Instead, it is used as a method of stifling learned criticism.

This might appear an odd response, but I feel it is central to involving people who have something to offer our towns, who have been driven away from doing so.

I have withdrawn from public life as a result of this, as have many others. We are at a point where people who wish to contribute to society are subject to personal and professional intimidation unless they adopt the role of uncritical cheerleaders. The legislation, or at least its abuse, needs to be addressed before people with professional experience will feel like contributing again.

Yours faithfully,

Dr David Lloyd Owen
Managing Director
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