

Good evening

I know that decisions on planning applications are not subject to oversight or review by cabinet. I am not here to ask you to intervene in that process. What I am asking for is fair and equal treatment under the law.

We run a small local artisan business, making and selling products from our market stall in the Guildhall Market. This is exactly the kind of business that markets are historically for.

The intransigence of council officers has caused us three years of stress, inconvenience, and wasted time. All the time we have spent on fighting this case is time we have not been able to invest in our business.

All the time that Council officers have put into persecuting us is a waste of public money. How can it be expedient or in the public interest for council officers to expend in excess of 50,000 pounds in pursuing us?

The stall is located just inside the Grand parade entrance. The universal reaction when people come into the market from that direction is to say how nice the stall looks. When we explain to them that planning officers object to it because in their view, it is too enclosed they are shocked, and immediately draw comparisons with other stalls close by. They are even more shocked when we explain that stalls that are more enclosed than ours are deemed by planning officers to be perfectly acceptable.

All officers, including those in Planning and Property Services, are first and foremost employees of the Local Authority, public servants bound by the law and by all the authority's own policies and procedures. One key feature of all of these policies is the commitment to fairness. It is found in the Code of Conduct, itself the Council's statement of the seven principles of the Nolan Committee on Standards in public Life, and in the Planning Enforcement Policy, which is in turn, compliant with the government's enforcement concordat.

Fairness is a key freedom in any democratic society, and it is the role of those elected to hold to account those employed as public servants.

We have been singled out by planning officers, treated unfairly in comparison to other traders, and held to different standards than the council applies to itself. For example, it has not applied for Listed Building consent for the 500,000 pound project to create the Guild co-working hub from the former one stop shop in the Grade 1 Listed Guildhall. How is it fair or reasonable to pursue us when the Council itself refuses to comply with the law?

This petition calls upon you to ensure that Council Officers comply with the law, published council policy, and good practice, in particular by

investigating why we have been treated differently to other stallholders

investigating why the council would not follow its own complaints procedures

and investigating why the council will not take enforcement action in accordance with its own policy.