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I've lived in West Van all of my life. I'm 60. This article characterizes how West Van has become over the last five to eight years.

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'All local government should be abolished'

It doesn't matter who's in charge, says **Rod Liddle**. Once elected, a local council automatically becomes self-important and incompetent

A charity called Help for Heroes, which raises money for wounded British soldiers, asked Portsmouth City Council for a £500 donation towards a proposed 'fun day'. The council declined the request, saying that to have given money 'could cause offence to ethnic minority groups living in the community *who may also have experience of injury/ violence due to the war*'. They're my italics, by the way, not the council's. It's just that it made me laugh so much that wine shot out of my nose and my girlfriend thought I was suffering a seizure or an embolism and so I felt moved to endow it with emphasis and thus grandeur.

For connoisseurs of this sort of thing, it is a classic of its kind — fabulously stupid on so many different levels that it is almost impossible to know where to begin. You could write a 20,000-word dissertation solely on the deployment of that slash between the words injury and violence; on the terrible confusion occasioned in the cretin who wrote it when faced with the choice of 'and' and 'or'. You could write even more about the use of that word 'community' which, when spoken by the monkeys who use such meaningless language, is betrayed by an exaggerated stress on the second syllable: 'commMYUUUUUnity'.

Portsmouth City Council later apologised and decided to bung the charity some money after all and said that an 'error of judgment' had been made. Maybe, chaps, but you gave us all a laugh (well, all except for the injured servicemen and their families, I suppose). And it was more grist to the mill for those of us who, like me, wish to see all local government abolished forthwith.

We have taken this notion of decentralised democracy too far, and now we have a vast hierarchy of incompetent, competing bureaucracies — all of them dissatisfied with the menial stuff they have to do and all of them showing contempt towards the people who pay their wages. In the week of Portsmouth council's stupidity, a district council in Wensleydale decided that some of its residents would henceforth be required to drive a mile and a half with their wheelie bins if they wished them to be emptied. For about 96 per cent of residents, the only purpose of district councils is to empty



LIDDLE BRITAIN

the bloody bins — something which these days most do only once a fortnight, thus for the average resident charging something like sixty quid for every collection. In Wensleydale they won't even do that any more — they've become too important to do the stuff they're meant to do.

In Dorset a district council has decided to charge residents £1,000 if they wish to build an extension to their homes — a lucrative decision which, we are told, may prove attractive to other district councils. No consultation, no by-your-leave, just a flat fee of one thousand quid if you think of improving your home. The council in question has said that it will spend the money on 'transport improvements for the commMYUUUUUnity'. But their involvement in transport matters is close to negligible and largely taken up by devising schemes to thoroughly annoy car drivers. Speed bumps, diversionary measures, traffic lights calibrated so that they are always red for half an hour, even at two in the morning.

And it's no use saying that this is local democracy in action and if you don't like it you can always vote out the controlling party. Well, I mean, you *can* say that, and it would be true — but when have you ever heard of a new administration abolishing an ad-hoc revenue-raising measure when it impinges on only a tiny percentage of residents? And the chilling thing about local councils is that it really doesn't matter who is in charge: once ensconced via the popular vote, they become suffused with the self-importance of elected office. They become appalled at the lack of power they have and usually set

about grabbing some more. It was not a surprise that one local council used surveillance techniques introduced to combat terrorism in order to spy on dog owners whose might have befouled a pavement. They genuinely believed they were entitled to do that. Nobody, not even James Purnell, not even those women columnists who write a column a week about their empty, benighted lives in the national newspapers, feels quite so self-important and undervalued as the councilors and employees of your local district council.

Then there's Dudley Borough Council. A year or so back, it decided to reject the planning application for a big new mosque in its town centre, a decision which this week has been reversed by a Department of Environment planning inspector. Now, you may think of all the things we are short of in this country, mosques are not among them. In the West, but here's a case where local councilors raised the money firstly to buy the (contaminated) wasteland and then the dosh to build the thing itself. Further, the mosque would have an attached community centre which would be open to all the people of Dudley, no matter what their faiths, for meetings and the like. There were even to be kitchens where non-halal meals might be prepared for the pork-munching kufr infidel. No public funding would be involved in the construction of the mosque and the place would employ more than 100 local people.

The council opposed the application — it said — 'sound' planning grounds. That's not what it looks like; it looks like it opposed the application on the less sound grounds of spite and racial prejudice in response to a campaign whipped up firstly by the BNP and secondly by Ukip. The council claimed that they wished the land to be used for 'local jobs', despite the fact that this is precisely what the mosque would provide and that secondly, if that were the case, they shouldn't have flogged it to the Dudley Muslims in the first place. There are objections to the size of the mosque's minaret (it's 65 feet high, well below the height of the local church spire). Now the council is saying that the government's decision is the end of the matter and that they will follow the proposal every step of the way. No matter what you do; whether you are an injured serviceman or a British Muslim — one way or another your local council will have it in for you.