

REPORT for CIDAC Panel: Jeff and Sue Green

CIDAC hearing date:	7 February 2024
Year of events:	2013
Employment at time of events:	Owners of Christian Guest House
Issue:	Accused by the EHRC of discrimination after
Was there a legal outcome?	No
Sex:	Male and female
Denomination:	Evangelical
Use of data:	No restriction
Evidence:	

Background: Jess and Sue Green own and run a Christian conference centre and guest house in Llandrindod Wells, mid-Wales. Jeff is also leader of the Welsh Christian Party and served, at the time the events described took place, as a representative of the party on the local council. In 2013 they had been successfully operating the guest house, Highland Moors, for ten years, without any complaints of problems. They had never refused a booking request. They were accepted and respected locally, and, as well as being a local councillor, Jeff was, at the time, mayor of the town. A lot of their business came via bookings over the internet. Their website was, therefore, vital to their business.

Over the course of 2013 they had been following the Bulls' case, where guest house owners in the West country had been subjected to legal challenge for refusing accommodation to a same sex couple. The case had understandably caused Jeff and Sue concern, and they wanted to safeguard their business, ensuring it would continue to be run according to their Christian values. They therefore included on the website the statement, 'Double rooms may be available for married couples'. At no point had they ever received any problems with this policy.

Out of the blue, in November 2013, they received a letter from the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC). The Commission said they had received a complaint that the Green's website included the wording, 'double rooms for married couples may be available', and they had heard that accommodation had been refused at the guest house to same sex couples. The letter further stated that, under the Equality Act 2010, treating a civil partner less favourably than a married person could amount to discrimination on the grounds of *sexual orientation*. It called for any such wording to be removed and for an assurance that no such policy would be operated for the future.

No evidence of the alleged complaint was ever received, and Sue and Jeff thought that, on the back of the Bulls' case, the EHRC had been trawling the internet for similar cases, during the course of which they had come across the Highland Moors' website and initiated the complaint themselves. No Freedom of Information request to ascertain the

facts behind the complaint was ever made, but they approached a human rights' barrister, Paul Diamond, to ask for advice.

In light of the Bulls' judgment, Paul Diamond appears to have thought that there was no point taking their case to the UK courts and advised a direct appeal to the European Court for Human Rights arguing that, as same sex couples seeking accommodation were already well catered for by other establishments locally, the Greens should be allowed to conduct their business as they wished, in line with the principles of their faith. The request to the ECHR was submitted in April 2014

At no point was there any acknowledgment by the EHRC that, as part of a protected group under the terms of the Equality Act (namely, religion), the Greens should themselves have received protection against discrimination. Rather, the EHRC's sole expressed concern was the protection of LGBT rights. In 2013, Jeff says that he believes Christianity/religion wasn't in practice regarded as a protected characteristic under the terms of the Equality Act, and was therefore thought not to merit protection.

The issue was 'resolved' by the Greens, at great expense, getting rid of all existing double beds in the guest house and replacing them with single beds. This necessitated outlay on new beds and bedding, and constructing a new website. They imagined at the time that their business would suffer, but instead it flourished, and today they often find themselves having to turn guests away, because they've no room.

Locally, however, once their case became known, there was a move to impeach Jeff as mayor on the grounds that he was bringing the town into disrepute. The Town Clerk and fellow councillors demanded he stand down. However, Jeff stood his ground and remained in office. Locally, people supported the couple, but in 2017, when he was up for re-election, Jeff faced further hostility and was not elected as county councillor, because some people said the Christian Party was 'anti-gay'.

In 2015, the European Court of Human Rights declined to hear their case, no reason given.

Same sex marriage had been passed by Parliament in July 2013, and came into effect on 13th March, 2014. During that time there was continuing controversy. Judgment was given against the Bulls in November 2013. The letter the Greens received appears to have been sent contemporaneously with that judgment, although there was no reference to that in any of the correspondence received. The coincidence of the timing would seem to raise questions of an ideological drive to promote LGBT rights and silence opposition. The Greens decided to take legal action in an effort to protect Christian businesses, which they realised were coming increasingly under threat.