



Department for
Communities and
Local Government

The Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP

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Cllr Eleanor Jackson
Radstock Town Council

By email:
c/o eleanor_jackson@bathnes.gov.uk

Dear Councillor Jackson,

Flying England's national flag

I was disappointed to read today that you have been instrumental in the decision of Radstock Town Council to ban the flying of the Cross of St George. You have been reported as asserting that the flag is offensive to Muslims and that the flag has been hijacked by the far Right.

This is a spectacular misjudgement by your council. Whatever one's class, colour or creed, the St George's flag is a unifying symbol for England, which is one of the constituent nations of the United Kingdom.

I am pleased to see that Muslim groups have rightly criticised the decision of your council. Indeed, stupid actions like banning the flag just serves to create false misconceptions that certain faith groups "aren't English or British", which extremists then exploit in their propaganda. Rather than helping, your actions and comments have undermined community cohesion in our nation and you have given fuel to hatred, and brought the fine town of Radstock into disrepute.

In May 2010, my Department wrote to principal councils actively encouraging the St George's flag to be flown, such as on national days and during sporting events. Indeed, my department itself routinely flies the flag next to the United Kingdom's Union flag, which in turn is flown in superior position.

Of course, it is not for Ministers in Whitehall to dictate what flags should be flown. The only organisation which forces the flying of flags is the European Commission, which fines people under EC Regulations for not flying the EU flag (a move which makes them look deeply petty). Flying a flag should be a pleasure, not a chore.

This Government has reduced the red tape on flying local, community and national flags to make them easier to fly – including the rainbow flag and local parish flags which you are intending to fly. By all means, please do fly those flags with pride, but I would ask that your council considers its misjudged position, and does its bit to rebuild the harm that you have

done to community relations in our country.

I am placing this letter in the public domain, given the wider public interest.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Eric Pickles". The signature is written in a cursive style with a blue ink flourish on the top of the letter 'P'.

RT HON ERIC PICKLES MP