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Exclusive Brethren 'meddling' in council affairs

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A NSW council will use money from a secretive religious sect to appeal against a court decision allowing a sex shop to go ahead, says an adult industry association.

The Flirt Adult Store won an appeal against the Lithgow City Council's refusal to grant it development approval to set up shop in the town's main street.

Mayor Neville Castle said council was considering appealing the Land and Environment Court decision to the Supreme Court.

But, the chief executive of adult industry group Eros Association, Fiona Patten, has accused the council of allowing the controversial religious group the Exclusive Brethren to bankroll its appeal.

Ms Patten today said the council had "severely undermined" its independence by saying it would accept money that many would view as "tantamount to bribery".

At a policy meeting earlier this month, council announced it was considering appealing the Land and Environment Court decision and a local businessman then offered to pay for a barrister.

Council investigations found there appeared to be no impediment to the local authority receiving such a donation, Mr Castle said.

Mr Castle said he did not know whether the businessman was a member of the Exclusive Brethren.

He said the council's general manager, Paul Anderson, discussed the funding possibility with "the people" behind the offer last week.

But Ms Patten said she was sure the money was coming from the secretive sect.

"Everyone knows that it is the Exclusive Brethren who are behind this offer and that it is a religious sect trying to buy influence and favour for its moral agenda," she said.

Mr Castle says the council opposes the sex shop on planning grounds, not on moral principles.

"So if anybody else was willing to fund an appeal it'd be based on the same (planning) lines," Mr Castle said.

The Exclusive Brethren is said to boast about 40,000 members worldwide - many based in New Zealand and Australia - and has been accused of underhanded campaigning against the Greens at the 2004 federal election and subsequent state polls.

Comment was being sought from the Exclusive Brethren.

- AAP