

MINUTES OF THE SPELTHORNE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Council Meeting of Spelthorne Borough Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Knowle Green, Staines-upon-Thames on Thursday, 30 July 2020 at 6.00 pm

Present:

Councillors:

M.M. Attewell	R.D. Dunn	J. McIlroy
C.L. Barratt	S.A. Dunn	A.J. Mitchell
R.O. Barratt	T. Fidler	L. E. Nichols
C. Bateson	N.J. Gething	R.J. Noble
I.J. Beardsmore	M. Gibson	O. Rybinski
J.R. Boughtflower	K.M. Grant	D. Saliagopoulos
A. Brar	A.C. Harman	J.R. Sexton
S. Buttar	H. Harvey	R.W. Sider BEM
R. Chandler	I.T.E. Harvey	V. Siva
N.L. Cornes	N. Islam	R.A. Smith-Ainsley
J.H.J. Doerfel	T. Lagden	B.B. Spoor
J.T.F. Doran	V.J. Leighton	J. Vinson
S.M. Doran	M.J. Madams	

Apologies: There were none

Councillor C.F. Barnard, The Mayor, in the Chair

164/20 Minutes

The minutes of the Council meetings held on 18 June 2020 were agreed subject to the inclusion of Shooting Star Chase as a charity supported by the Mayor in his announcements.

The minutes of the Council meetings held on 25 June and 2 July 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

165/20 Disclosures of Interest

There were no disclosures of interest.

166/20 Announcements from the Mayor

The Mayor announced that he had been pleased to virtually attend the Surrey Chairman's Mayoral civic meeting. Participants had been addressed by the

Lord Lieutenant of Surrey and the High Sherriff of Surrey and encouraged to seek out those who in their charity work have gone the extra mile and deserve recognition in the Queens honours' list.

He had also been delighted to be able to present the Spelthorne Civic Awards to those nominated at their homes, observing social distancing of course, and reported that they were delighted that he had made the effort to do so.

167/20 Announcements from the Leader

The Leader made the following announcements:

““Good evening everyone and welcome to this Full Council Meeting and the first Leader’s Announcements of the new Administration.

My administration wishes to make a clean break with Mr Harvey’s administration and promote a different kind of local politics in Spelthorne - the announcements we will make this evening will evidence this commitment.

I want it to be known that we are no longer a property investment speculator who happens to provide Council services. We are a local Borough Council which is there to serve our Residents; a Council that will help families, the young, the elderly and the needy; a Council that will help protect the environment and our Green Belt. A Council that is there to promote and help grow the local economy; a Council which will provide critical front-line services to all Residents.

Our objective now is to press this Council’s reset button.

We will - where possible - seek residents’ views, listen to what they have to say, and where appropriate incorporate their views into our plans.

This Council will become more aware of our reason for being, of who we are, and how we are perceived by Residents, business, and the public at large.

At the earliest opportunity we will drop SBC’s strapline “Spelthorne Means Business”. We will obviously support businesses where we can – after all they provide jobs, career and growth opportunities for our Residents, and income security - but we will always put “Residents First”.

“Residents First” will be the philosophy which underpins everything we do.

My next announcement is about the Multi-Party Task Group on Governance

I have previously made public my Administration’s wish to establish a Multi-Party Task Group to review this Council’s governance processes and it’s constitution, including whether we should be moving to a Committee-based system from 2021.

All four elected party leaders have accepted invitations to join this group and I look forward to working together. Our first meeting is in the next couple of weeks.

The move to a committee system will be designed by members for the Monitoring Officer to implement after a full member vote within the chamber.

This is a key priority for the new Administration and again signals a clear break from the historic secretive decision-making practices of Mr Harvey. Once established I will report back to Full Council on next steps. Colleagues, please understand, this will be an inclusive process and there will be an opportunity for members to participate in this critical process.

Full details of this group and all the other Task Group will be published in the next few days.

My next announcement is the Multi-Party Property Investment Task Group

Since becoming Leader, I have reflected on the property acquisitions and the concern of Residents and others outside Spelthorne.

As a result of these concerns, I am pleased to confirm that my Administration is inviting the Local Government Association (LGA) to undertake, in the autumn, an independent Peer Review into our corporate finances and property activity.

Please note that Peer Reviews are regularly used by Councils to obtain a constructive and independent perspective to recognise good practice and identify opportunities for improvements. I can provide full assurances that this Council will fully co-operate with the review.

We have listened to concerns raised by Residents, by fellow Councillors, parliamentarians, and professional bodies – including those expressed in the media - relating to the excessive borrowings of the previous Administration.

This new Administration will establish a Task Group to review some of the property investment decisions made by the previous administration. Many of these decisions were taken by a secretive inner cabinet, with Councillors being asked to take or approve decisions at short notice. This is not how things should be run.

We therefore need to fully understand and assess the current and future financial viability of this Investment Portfolio. I will also ask this Group to review the structure of Knowle Green Estates Ltd with a view to it moving away from purchasing properties and instead focusing on the development of housing.

Part of this Group's remit will be to comment on the affordable allocations for schemes which have been proposed by the Council, and to make

recommendations on any changes in policy required to deliver more affordable units under the Council's development schemes.

As part of our Governance Review, we will also look at the membership of the Council's Property Investment Committee. Our objective is to make it more inclusive.

Until these changes are made, and in the interests of openness and transparency, Group Leaders will be kept informed of proposed decisions of the Committee on any major developments. This is an important and positive step forward and a further break with the previous administration.

Let me be clear. This will be a thorough review and investigation showing no fear or favour. This new Administration has nothing to hide.

My next announcement is the establishment of a Local Plan Task Group

I will begin by confirming we have listened to and understood the concerns, worries and frustrations raised by Residents with many of us having supported Residents through the Consultation process.

Although we must form a Local Plan, I would like to assure Residents that we will not be moving forward with those preferred options identified and proposed by Mr Harvey's Local Plan Working Party, as was presented during the consultation.

I have disbanded this Working Party and created a new Task Group that will include cross party members from each of the Borough wards to ensure local concerns and knowledge are considered.

The New Task Group will begin by considering the findings of the consultation and any new recommendations from this, and they will carry out a complete review of the previously identified preferred options, that concerned many Residents.

This will be an inclusive Local Plan Task Group, with cross-party membership and one working elected party member from each ward.

Part of the remit of this group will be to oversee the sensitive subject of the Green Belt and how we can best protect this whilst meeting our legal obligations in developing a new local plan.

My next announcement concerns the Staines Development Group.

In a further signal of our intention to break with the past, I can today announce that the Staines Masterplan Task Group will be renamed the Staines-upon-Thames Development Group. This is not some mere cosmetic change of name – our intention is that the Staines Development Plan group will focus on the Development of Staines, and ALL ward Councillors from Staines Town, Staines South, and Riverside & Laleham will be invited to join this group.

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My next announcement concerns Affordable Housing.

As a Council, we have already started to deliver essential affordable units for our Residents. The new administration strongly supports this approach, but we want to go further. We believe we now have a real opportunity to increase the number of affordable units we deliver from our development schemes, which will align with the Council's policies and set an example to private developers, who unfortunately continue to fail to deliver the number and types of affordable units this Borough so badly needs.

Myself and my Deputy are strong advocates for affordable housing - Indeed it is a view held by many colleagues and I will be addressing this in response to a Councillor question later.

My next announcement concerns Climate Change and the need to fast forward!.

I am pleased to announce that Cllr Bob Noble will become Portfolio Holder for Climate & Environment. He is an advocate of climate change and will appoint the Climate Change Task force within the next week.

The new administration takes protection of the environment for this, and future generations, seriously. Whilst the previous Administration's approach aligned closely with delivering the Government's target of net zero carbon emissions by 2050, we want to take steps to enable us as a Council to meet this target much sooner, so that we can pass on a better legacy to future generations of Spelthorne Residents.

I will therefore be asking the new Climate Change Task Group to meet in the near future to make recommendations as to how we can accelerate this process, with more challenging targets and actions for the Council, which will help deliver zero net carbon emissions for this authority much sooner than the target set by the previous administration.

My next announcement concerns the reopening of Leisure Centres.

I am pleased to confirm that the Council's two leisure centres in Staines and Sunbury will be reopening this Saturday, having been closed for some 4 months due to the Government's restrictions to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

This follows detailed discussions between the Council and the operator of the centres, Sports and Leisure Management Ltd., to agree a one-off financial support package from the Council for this financial year, which will assist SLM to reopen the centres and keep them running during these continuing difficult times.

Our leisure centres provide a range of essential services which help to support the health and wellbeing of our community, and I know that many of

our Residents are desperate to get back to some form of normality and return to the sports and fitness activities they used to do.

In view of the importance of these centres to so many individual people, clubs and schools, it was essential that we get them open as quickly as possible.

My next announcement concerns Surrey County Council's Unitary Bid.

On 21st July 2020, Surrey County Council's Cabinet decided to promote the concept of a Surrey-wide Unitary Authority covering the whole County. This has already led to the dispatch of a letter from the County Council's Leader to the Secretary of State, outlining this intention.

Surrey Leaders, at their meeting on 17th July, expressed their disappointment at not being consulted ahead of the County's decision to push ahead with these actions.

Although it is said that the former SBC Leader, Mr Harvey, supported a Single Unitary Council at a meeting of Surrey Leaders, the new administration does not.

We recognise the principles of localism, many of which are incompatible with a single unitary authority within Surrey. I am therefore instructing the Chief Executive to:

Firstly, urgently investigate alternative forms of Unitary Authorities and the timing of any such reorganisation that may be more advantageous to Spelthorne and its Residents, including any opportunities to collaborate with neighbouring authorities on this issue, and secondly, present such considerations to the September Full Council considering the emerging Government White Paper on devolution (should it be available at that point), if it insists on the establishment of Unitary Authorities, Combined Authorities and elected Mayors.

In the meantime, I have joined other Borough and District Leaders across Surrey in signing a letter to the Secretary of State registering that a Surrey-wide Unitary is not the optimum solution and that we are committed to exploring what would be.

My next announcement concerns Spelthorne veterans.

We owe much to the men and women of our armed forces, and to those who have served our country so bravely.

The Council is supporting a change that will be made to the next Census, which will see a new question added to ask Residents if they have ever served in the Armed Forces. This will give us a better idea of the number of ex-service personnel living in Spelthorne and help us tailor our services for this community.

They gave much for us, and it is important we support them where we can.

My next announcement concerns how we can help build cleaner, greener, and safer communities

We all want to see a Spelthorne which is safe, clean, and green.

The radical initiative we are proposing will bring together drivers and Residents enabling them to work in partnership to create cleaner, greener, safer communities. We must not demonise drivers but instead recognise that we can work together to achieve common and worthwhile aims.

We will support those Residents who wish to see 20mph zones and roads within their communities. Whilst SBC cannot enforce speed restrictions (this is Surrey County Council's responsibility), we can establish 20mph advisory speed limits. We will be encouraging communities on a street by street basis to petition us in support of us introducing 20mph advisory speed limits in their immediate area.

Details for this will be placed on the Council website for Residents to use. Once the official petition form is submitted, and if there is enough local support, we will erect advisory signage.

Whilst we and the Police cannot enforce advisory speed limits, they will send a clear community message to Surrey County Council AND drivers about how they can help us create a cleaner, greener, safer Borough and help us put Residents First.

We need to all make a difference, and this is a start which I'm sure all will support

My next announcements concern specific and heart-warming community initiatives.

SBC has been working closely with Shepperton resident Diana Moran BEM, also known as the Green Goddess, to share her 'Keep Fit and Carry On' exercise sessions on the Council's website and social media.

During the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, Diana was brought back to the BBC after 40 years, with her easy-to-follow exercise sessions for the over 65s and people who find exercising difficult. On behalf of Residents and the Council I would like to thank her for all her hard work, energy and wonderful commitment to our community.

The work of the nationally acclaimed Swan Sanctuary in Shepperton has received a welcome boost thanks to the donation of a veterinary ambulance by Heathrow. The Swan Sanctuary was founded by Dorothy Beeson in the early 1980s and has been based in Shepperton since 2005.

The team are on 24-hour alert, 365 days a year. When a 'swan in distress' call comes in, a local rescue squad is on its way within minutes to provide treatment. If the birds are seriously injured, they are transported to the sanctuary via veterinary ambulance and then assessed. Once a swan has been treated and regains its strength, it is transferred to a rehabilitation pen before being released back into its natural habitat.

The Council has been working with the Rotary Club and 'Painting Our World In Silver' to create activity packs for elderly Residents, who may be feeling bored or lonely as a result of the changes brought about by Coronavirus. Many elderly Residents have been forced to self-isolate during the pandemic and users of the Council's Community Centres have been greatly missing the companionship offered by our Centres.

To help tackle the problem, Cllr Robert Noble set about raising funds and worked alongside the Shepperton and District Rotary Club which together donated £2,000. The packs have been distributed via local groups including the Greeno and Fordbridge Centres, Purple Angels, Shepperton Community Support, community foodbanks and Spelthorne's Meals on Wheels service. On behalf of the Council and our Residents I would like to thank Cllr Noble and everyone involved in this tremendous initiative,

My next announcement concerns the establishment of a cross-party working party.

The Financial Reporting Task Group will be looking at how the Council reports financial information and how this can be made more graphical in reporting and much easier to understand.

My next announcement is to update colleagues and Residents on our response to COVID-19.

The Council continues to play a key role in tackling COVID-19 and supporting our communities through the pandemic. Our role has now moved more from emergency response to recovery, supporting our wider society; assisting with the reopening of our High Streets and issuing the Government Grants which are so hugely important to keep businesses afloat.

We have been paying government grants to businesses affected by Coronavirus and to-date have paid 980 retail, leisure and hospitality grants, totalling £12.7 million; and 109 discretionary business grants worth a total of around £508,000.

Our Economic Development staff continue to look for options to support local businesses at this difficult time and our Community Wellbeing team continues to help those in need, with housing and welfare support. Our officers have also been working to minimise the prospect of a second wave, whilst also preparing for the possibility that this will occur.

Our Environmental Health staff continue to work with Surrey Public Health on the development of the county's test and trace system. The infographics we have published on our website and in the Borough Bulletin outline the sheer scale of support this Council has provided since the pandemic began.

The social and economic impacts of this virus have been immense. We are far from being out of the woods, so as a Council we must remain strong and, above all, focused. Our officers are stretched trying to progress our recovery plans and there are some big-ticket items which we must progress, such as the Local Plan, climate change and now Surrey's bid for unitary authority status.

Whilst these pressures remain, we must be mindful of our corporate capacity, particularly when many of our staff have been fully engaged for some four months without respite. All I am saying to you and our Residents is please be patient with us.

On the subject of our staff I would like to say a huge thank-you to all of the Council's teams who have done so much amazing work supporting our communities during such difficult times. We have all seen so many messages of appreciation from Residents of our wards for the support they've received from this authority.

For many, this has been a lifeline that has simply made the difference between life and death. I would therefore ask you all to take this opportunity to show your appreciation again for the fantastic work our staff have delivered during the COVID-19 pandemic.

My next announcement concerns local democracy and Resident engagement.

Whilst the COVID-19 pandemic has been a cause of great worry and, in some cases, tragic loss for Residents, it has also shown our Borough at its best. The Council stepped up to the plate and our officers and staff were exceptional.

But above all, our community came together. If we are to build a strong connected Council which serves Residents - which is relevant to their lives - we need to involve everyone.

This is why I propose establishing a forum ensuring we engage properly with Residents, to seek their views on what we are doing, and to hear their voice. I am therefore proposing that we establish a Residents Forum to be made up of the Leaders of recognised Residents' Associations (RA).

This will give RA's direct access to Councillors and Officers. We do not want layers of bureaucracy slowing down decision making and frustrating Residents.

We want to ensure we can listen to the concerns and constructive contributions of Residents Associations and act decisively to put Residents First.

People asked what we had been doing in the four weeks since I became Leader.

This ...

We said we would be bold, and we would be different. We said we meant business, and that we would bring multi-party unity to our Council. Outside of dealing with the huge backlog created and left by the previous administration this is what we've been doing. I ask that the majority of the Chamber tonight gets behind these bold new plans for real democracy and do not buy into the spiteful tactics of a few seeking to divide this Chamber again undermining our Residents and your voters. Take this opportunity to join together to bring true democracy to Spelthorne Borough Council!

My final announcement concerns Neighbourhood Grants.

I would like to announce some further assistance to support our communities and help them get back on their feet.

In order to assist Councillors across the chamber with engaging and supporting their local communities, the theme for this year's locality neighbourhood spend will be 'Recovery'.

To assist this process, I am proposing that the sum available for this financial year for all Councillors to spend in their wards be increased to £1,500. I know all of you are anxious to work with your communities and would urge all of you to make the best use of this funding to assist in your localities, in whatever way you can.

Thank You."

168/20 Announcements from the Chief Executive

The Chief Executive made the following announcement:

"Whilst we all feel the profound impact of coronavirus, not just on ourselves, but on our loved ones and our communities, we also have a great deal to be thankful for. For the dedication and professionalism of hundreds of essential workers from this Borough, I want to place on record my personal thanks and heartfelt appreciation to all my fellow colleagues who have worked flat-out for the past four and a half months of this emergency to safeguard our most vulnerable and to maintain the public services our communities rely on."

169/20 Update on the Council's Emergency Response to COVID-19

The Chief Finance Officer provided the following update to Council on the impact of COVID-19 on the Council's Revenue Budget for the current financial year:

“As promised to Councillors at the Extraordinary Council Meeting (ECM) of 21 May when the Council received a detailed report on the initial estimates impacts on the Council’s 2020-21 Revenue Budget, this is a further update on the estimated impact of COVID-19 on the Council’s Revenue Budget. As the impacts of the pandemic become clearer there will be further updates to councillors. We will also highlight COVID-19 impacts in the normal budget monitoring reports which will go to future Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny meetings. For the 2021 -22 Budget we will be looking at how we can provide greater opportunities to scrutinise draft budget assumptions and options, clearly COVID-19 will have very considerable impacts on the 2021-22 and future budgets.

The focus of this update is primarily on the 2020-21 (i.e. current financial year) Revenue Budget. In the autumn the Government will undertake the next Comprehensive Spending Review setting the high level spending parameters for the public sector for the next three financial years for revenue and next four years for capital. These parameters will be very much driven by the financial impacts of COVID-19. This will in turn drive the 2021-22 Finance Settlement for local government, which hopefully we should receive by Christmas, in which we also await to see if the proposals for negative grant, which would hit this council, have been postponed a further year. The Surrey districts and boroughs are taking some expert advice with respect to the option the Government has provided to Councils to choose whether to bear business rates and council tax COVID-19 related deficits in 2021-22 or spread over three years. In a two tier area the impacts are more complex.

This update is based on our most up to date estimates of the financial impacts of COVID-19 on this Council, as we have been updating those estimates in order to submit a COVID-19 financial impacts return to Government required by end of tomorrow. So the Accountancy team have been liaising with service managers across the Council to confirm impacts to date and their latest estimates for the year.

As presented to the Extraordinary Council Meeting on 21 May due to the uncertainties as to how the pandemic may evolve and the scale of economic impacts we have projected a range of estimates from a pessimistic set of scenarios through a mid range “realistic” to an optimistic case. We are using the realistic figures in our returns to Government. The figures are likely to continue to change as the economic impacts on the residents of our borough become clearer. In particular we await to see the impact of the ending of the furlough scheme and the scale of job losses at the airport and in associated sectors. The Economic Development team are drawing together an economic recovery plan whose initiatives and resourcing will draw on funds from the additional retained business rates we set aside after the 2018-19 “100%” Surrey Business Rates Retention pilot.

On the revenue expenditure impacts, we now have much more certainty as to the extent of the expenditure hit arising from supporting the leisure centres re-opening following the support approved by Cabinet on 22nd July. This will

enable our two leisure centres to reopen from 1st August. The swimming pool at Sunbury Leisure Centre requires some repairs so will not be reopening until January 2021 (note the Swimming Pool at Spelthorne Leisure Centre opens on Saturday at same time as rest of the centre). We are aware from confidential feedback from other councils in the south east some with the same operator as us and others with different operators that we have negotiated a relatively less expensive deal for this council than a number of other councils have incurred.

The expenditure on shielded residents has proven significantly less than originally feared which has helped improve our expenditure figures.

The projected range for expenditure COVID-19 revenue impacts is now:

Pessimistic	Realistic	Optimistic
£'000	£'000	£'000
2,121	1,360	1,047

On the income side, as a result of the Government announcement at the beginning of July of a scheme to partially reimburse councils for fees and charges income loss (not including rental loss) our figures have improved since May. The Government scheme deducts the first 5% income from across a council's fees and charges income from a reimbursement of 75% of COVID-19 income loss. This 5% deductible for us equates to approximately £370k. After deducting the 5% the net estimated reimbursement we anticipate on our central scenario is approximately £680,000. This figure is lower than originally anticipated as a result of clarification of the 5% deductible and also as a result of some of our estimated income losses due to COVID-19 having improved on the basis of recent months performance. Not all our fees and charges streams have seen reductions in income as a result of COVID-19, for example Meals on Wheels income has gone up and garden waste income has been maintained.

Excluding impact of potential shortfalls on Elmsleigh Centre rental the overall projected income shortfalls estimates now range from:

Pessimistic	Realistic	Optimistic
£'000	£'000	£'000
3,084	2,019	1,116

It is acknowledged that the scale of the impact on the retail sector of COVID-19 has become clearer. The potential shortfall for the year on Elmsleigh Centre could be approximately £3.3m. However, this can be borne without any impact on the 2020-21 Revenue Budget as a result of cash balances relating to commercial assets which can be used to offset, without reducing the Elmsleigh or the commercial assets sinking funds.

On the commercial assets rentals we have now collected 95.2% of the rent due for the first three months of the financial year and 94% of the rent due for the second three months. This is a much better performance than most other commercial landlords. Of the balance not received yet all but 0.2% is covered by deferral agreement with tenants. We are not anticipating writing off more than 0.2% of the rental income relating to this period at most. Additionally we have been reviewing on a weekly basis our worst case and expected case sinking funds 10 year COVID-19 scenarios. Even on the worst case modelling the £20m of funds we have to date set aside into the sinking funds from a slice of our rental income will be more than enough to cover any commercial rental shortfalls, and therefore to protect the revenue budget and council tax payers from adverse impact. **Therefore we are not assuming any COVID-19 Revenue Budget adverse impact relating to commercial rents.**

Taking into account grant support the net projected range for COVID-19 2020-21 Revenue Budgets is as follows:

		Pessimistic	Realistic	Optimistic
		£'000	£'000	£'000
Net Revenue Budget £12.63M				
Net impact on 2020-21 Budget		8,705	6,678	4,963
As percentage of Net Budget		69%	53%	39%
Less Contributions Received to date				
Government Emergency grant & homelessness SCC		-1,027	-1,027	-1,027
A) Rough sleepers		-9	-9	-9
b) Category A residents		-75	-50	-25
Less use of windfall commercial assets savings to offset Elmsleigh shortfall		-3,500	-3,300	-2,800
Less income reimbursement		-1,164	-679	-192
Less application of contingency within Project Delivery Fund		-500	-500	-500
Net Estimated impact on Revenue Budget		2,430	1,113	410
As percentage of Revenue Budget		19%	9%	3%

In comparison councillors will recall at the 21st May ECM the realistic estimate was £2.2m and the pessimistic scenario was £4.5m. So a realistic estimate of a net impact of £1.1m represents roughly a net £1.1m, improvement, roughly halving the gap, since that report. In turn this means we are now more confident that the upto £2.2m additional supplementary revenue estimate to be funded from reserves approved by Council on 21st May will be more than sufficient to offset 2020-21 Revenue impacts. Therefore currently we are not, subject to the earlier caveats about the uncertainties of predicting future COVID-19 impacts, anticipating a need to be making further requests to councillors for additional use of reserves.

A gap of £1.1m represents 9% of our net Revenue Budget. Alternatively the gap is equivalent to 3% of our total cash reserves.”

There were no comments or questions. It was **Resolved** to note the report.

170/20 Questions from members of the public

The Mayor reported that, under Standing Order 14, questions had been received from nine members of the public. In view of the number of questions and the fact that several related to the Green Belt and raised the same or similar issues, the Mayor directed that similar questions would be grouped together and one response provided to those.

Question from Mr. A. Woodward

"In answer to my earlier question about why Spelthorne Borough Council had not declared a Climate Emergency I was informed that "we do not feel that we must declare a climate emergency in order to deliver meaningful action. We believe in action not words." Could the Leader detail the meaningful actions that have been taken in the first half of 2020 to address the Climate Emergency?"

Response from the Leader, Councillor J. Boughtflower:

"Thank you for your question. The Council sees climate change as an important issue to address in relation to our community and estate. The emergency response on COVID-19 has placed considerable demands on the Council, however, it did not stop us continuing to take actions to reduce our own emissions. We have purchased two electric bikes and two electric pool cars for staff to use, plus two electric vans for use by our operations team. We have also installed a solar array on the West Wing of Knowle Green. In looking at further measures we had solar PV surveys carried out on several more buildings and undertook energy surveys on eight of our buildings to identify energy saving opportunities which we will put to Council to take forward as appropriate. We are currently preparing a tender in conjunction with LASER to ensure our future electricity supply is solely from renewable energy.

On a wider scale we are progressing an on-street Electric Vehicle (EV) charging point trial with Surrey County Council, which will provide 20 on-street charge points in the Borough. We also have a feasibility study being undertaken to assess opportunities for EV charge points in Council car parks.

We actively engaged, albeit remotely, in the development of the Surrey climate change strategy and its proposed actions, which we will now look at in relation to our own estate. Just prior to lockdown a working group on climate change was initiated to drive forward the climate change agenda in the Borough. As I outlined earlier in my Leader's announcements, I am looking to kick-start this working group again, with a view to the Group making recommendations for more challenging targets and actions for the Council, which will help deliver zero net carbon emissions much sooner than the 2050 target set by the previous administration."

Question from Mr. A. McLuskey

'In the light of the Green Jobs Challenge Fund recently established by Government to create new jobs in conjunction with local councils and aimed at improving the landscape - will Spelthorne Council commit to seeking funding from this source to enable extra, desirable elements (such as the

rebuilding of the West Lodge) to be added to the scheme for a historically themed Nature Reserve on the former Lord Knyvett estate in Stanwell?’

Response from the Deputy Leader, Councillor J. McIlroy

“Thank you for your question Mr McLuskey. The Council welcomes the Government’s announcement about a £40m Green Recovery Challenge Fund (which combines money from the Nature Recovery Fund and Nature for Climate Funding). The intention is for the fund to create a broad range of short and long term jobs such as ecologists, surveyors, nature reserve staff and education workers in environment organisations; and support their suppliers.

In its announcement the Government indicates the funding will help charities and environmental organisations to start work on projects across England to restore nature and tackle climate change. It has also made clear it will be inviting organisations to bid for the money (with details in due course). Once the additional information is provided we will be in a better position to understand the funding mechanisms, whether the Council can assist organisations in gaining access to funding and what the detailed criteria are.”

Question from Mr. C. Hyde

“At the Council meeting on 27 February 2020, the Council was asked to consider and respond to a petition which requested “that Spelthorne Borough Council does not release 19 Green Belt areas currently identified in the Local Plan for building or other commercial purposes and to protect the entire existing Green Belt in Spelthorne for generations to come”. The petition had 5,270 signatories when it was received by the Council and the number of signatories has now risen to over 6100. On the basis of a 13:13 Council vote and the Deputy Mayor’s casting vote, the Council voted to support a motion “that the Council notes the petition and keeps the matter under review”. Five months have now passed since the decision to keep the matter under review. What work has been carried out by the Council to take the review forward, what decisions have been reached and, in the event that no decision has been reached to date, when will a decision be forthcoming on the action requested in the petition?”

Question from Mr Hollingsworth

“Can the Council please outline what steps are being taken to defend our Green Belt, local Democracy, and our Finances from gross mismanagement? We as a community, at least 6,000 or so, signed a petition to stop GB development. Since the outset of COVID, it has become even more important for our mental and physical health to enjoy our green spaces. If you are a democratic body, SBC, you will not have this "under review" but listen to our wishes. You may come and go but our GB stays. For future generations.”

Questions from Ms Mulowska

“I understand that the former Council leader Cllr Ian Harvey (during whose time as leader the current draft local plan was developed) believes that a Brownfield First Policy could protect all our Green Belt sites for the duration of the next local plan i.e. for the next 5 years. Is the new administration and Council leadership going to take this to heart and remove all Green Belt sites

from the draft local plan considering the huge amount of opposition to Green Belt release?"

"In July 2016, Spelthorne Borough Council passed a motion stating that 'the Green Belt in Spelthorne is considered sacrosanct'. If this is the case, why then does the current local plan seek to release 19 Green Belt sites including two sites in Stanwell for warehouses?"

Question from Ms Pratley

"Have any of the 19 Green Belt sites been removed from the Draft Local Plan?"

Questions from Mrs Doerfel

Spelthorne Borough Council held a Council meeting on 21st July 2016. In that meeting, 2 Councillors proposed the following motion: "The Green Belt in Spelthorne is sacrosanct. This Council confirms that there is no intention whatsoever to allow development of the Green Belt." Let's call this "the Green Belt motion."

That motion was accepted by the Council to be put on the Council Meeting agenda to be debated and voted upon in the Council Meeting on 21st July 2016.

At the Council Meeting of 21st July 2016, 2 other Councillors proposed an amendment to the Green Belt motion to effectively qualify it in a "yeah, but subject to relevant policies and the Special Circumstances caveats" kind of way.

The Council nonetheless debated the Greenbelt motion and carried it - the result was that the Council "Resolved that the Green Belt in Spelthorne is considered 'sacrosanct'. This Council affirms that it will continue to apply its Green Belt planning policies as laid out in the Local Plan and any relevant PPGs (Planning Policy Guidance) from central government. Any inappropriate development on the Green Belt will only be approved if the applicant can demonstrate acceptable 'Very Special Circumstances' as to why it should be approved"

Cambridge dictionary defines "sacrosanct" as meaning "thought to be too important or too special to be changed."

Even with the amended version of the 2016 Greenbelt motion which was carried, the Council did nothing to actually refuse or amend the wording of "sacrosanct" - what the council did was replace the part of it which referred to no intention to allow development on Greenbelt with the qualification appended to the "sacrosanct" part and eventually carried it.

Cambridge dictionary defines "protect" as meaning "to keep someone or something safe from injury, damage or loss." This is a much lower threshold and standard than "sacrosanct" whose meaning is unequivocal.

In February 2020 the Council was compelled to debate a Petition which asked the Council in summary not to release the 19 Greenbelt sites identified in the Local Plan for development, and to protect Greenbelt in Spelthorne. Despite consensus and speeches that nobody wanted to build on Greenbelt and that it should be protected, the Council voted to merely note the petition and keep it under review.

Given the intervening pandemic and implications of COVID19 which represents a massive change in circumstances and underlines the need for greater environmental protections such that it begs the question whether the current Local Plan remains either current or local, and given the Council is obliged to make good on its resolution regarding the Greenbelt Petition per the February 2020 council meeting:

1. why can't the Council now debate or commit in a Council Meeting as it did in 2016, to protect Spelthorne's Greenbelt, even if such commitment is subject to the same kind of caveat or amendment as the motion in 2016?
2. if the Council can do so, when will it do this and why has it not been done already?
3. If the Council feels it cannot do so, then was it wrong or acting unlawfully when it did so in 2016?
4. Does the Council consider the word "protect" be more restrictively binding than the word "sacrosanct" including if qualified by the caveat which enabled the 2016 Greenbelt motion to be carried?"

Response from the Leader, Councillor J. Boughtflower

"A significant number of questions have been received asking for the removal of all the proposed site allocations in the green belt from the Local Plan (which is currently under review). As many of the questions overlap one another I will set out a single response to cover all the points which have been made. I understand why this is an issue which is close to residents hearts.

Before delving into the detail, I want to acknowledge the petition which now has over 6,000 signatures. It is always positive to see local democracy in action and to hear peoples' views. However, as a Council we also have a duty to consider the wider public benefit (we are a borough of over 90,000 residents). In terms of the Local Plan this is about being able to demonstrate that we can provide the housing, employment, retail and other uses needed for the next 25 years. There are a significant number of legislative requirements set down by central government which the Council cannot legally set to one side. This is the context within which we as a Council have to make our decisions.

It has indeed been many months since the decision of the Council was made to keep under review the potential release of Green Belt sites in the new Local Plan, and I will set out what work has been undertaken since then.

The Strategic Planning team has been analysing the responses to the Preferred Options consultation, which closed on 21 January 2020. The team was then redeployed to the COVID-19 response and work was therefore temporarily paused. However the Consultation Response document has now

been completed ready for Members to agree this for publication. This sets out all the comments made and officer feedback but does not make any decisions on the future direction of the Local Plan.

Other work currently being undertaken relates to housing need and viability. These are important pieces of evidence that Members will be reviewing when deciding on the content of the Local Plan before the next round of consultation scheduled for early 2021. Officers are also compiling an Infrastructure Delivery Plan, which sets out where there are existing deficits in infrastructure such as healthcare, education, highway improvements, and where investment is needed through developer contributions to ensure the sustainable and managed growth of our Borough.

Work has also been progressing on the Staines Masterplan and this will sit alongside the Local Plan, showing how the town will be planned for in terms of housing, retail, employment and infrastructure.

All these work streams and pieces of evidence will be reviewed and responded to by both the Local Plan Working Party, which as outlined in my Leaders Announcements will comprise a cross-party membership of councillors, and Cabinet before any decisions can be made on the Plan, taking account of responses to the consultation. The Green Belt is clearly a key issue but must be reviewed in light of all the evidence on impacts arising from releasing and not releasing Green Belt sites, once this evidence is complete and presented to Members over the coming months.

What isn't possible is for the option of releasing Green Belt to be taken off the table as a point of principle, as we are required by national planning policy to assess all reasonable alternatives to meeting housing need. Whilst developing in the Green Belt will inevitably receive objections from local residents, we are still duty bound to consider that option in light of all the available evidence.

As it stands at the present time none of the 19 potential site allocations in the green belt which were consulted on at the end of last year have been removed from the draft local plan. When we consulted it was made clear that the consultation was not the end of the process. Councillors on the Local Plan Working Party will shortly be considering the responses from the consultation exercise, and using this and additional technical evidence to inform discussions on individual site allocations. It would be premature at this stage for the cross party Local Plan Working Party to make decisions on any site allocations.

In response to a previous motion in 2016 the Council stated that the Green Belt is sacrosanct and no development will be allowed. However the situation has changed between now and then. As a Council we must consider the situation as it stands now. When producing a Local Plan we have to assess all options available to us for trying to meet our housing need in full. One of those options is to release Green Belt in order to meet our need. National planning policy allows for Local Plans to redraw Green Belt boundaries if we have

'exceptional circumstances' for doing so, and this has been established through court cases to include meeting housing need.

We have taken specialist Counsel's advice on the lawfulness of the proposed notice of motion from Cllr Doerfel, which have also referred to the 2016 debate. Counsel has advised that there are a number of legal difficulties with the terms of the Motion which would lead the Council into adopting an approach which is not consistent with the NPPF. There is a statutory requirement to take that guidance into account, and the emerging Local Plan must be consistent with it to be sound. Counsel goes on to state that the proposed motion and/or a vote to adopt it would be 'tainted by legal error', and therefore it would be capable of being quashed in the High Court. The Council cannot follow such a proposal knowing that it would not be lawful. For these reasons we cannot debate the proposed notice of motion as suggested by Mrs Doerfel. This is not to stifle the democratic process as there is already a clear process for the Council to follow, as I have outlined above.

There has been much discussion and two public consultations so far on the new Local Plan and further consultation next year. The process of preparing a Local Plan provides opportunity for anyone to object to any element of it, including specific site allocations. This process cannot be pre-empted by a decision to remove Green Belt sites from consideration and to do so would be unlawful as it is contrary to national guidance on producing Local Plans.

However what I can advise residents and councillors is that we will keep in mind the level of objection to releasing Green Belt sites when taking the Local Plan forward to the next stage. In doing so, we are keeping the matter under review as promised in response to the motion to Council in February.

Question from Mr Hollingsworth

"How, may I ask, will you defend Spelthorne Borough Council's financial position given rental deferrals that have put a hole in the budget, the result of an unwise debt-funded property frenzy?"

Question from Mr. M. Beecher

"How does the Council propose to recover the £4.5 million loss in revenue following the 18-month rent deferral agreed in secret with 'WeWork' and further losses from other rent deferrals?"

Response from the Deputy Leader, Councillor J. McIlroy:

"Thank you for the questions. I will explain later why it is in the interests of council tax payers for such negotiations to be undertaken in private. I do, however, understand the concerns of residents, particularly when they are reading press coverage which is not wholly accurate. It is partially in response to these concerns that the Leader is setting up the Leader's Property Investment Review Working Group to review how we move forward.

In respect of the financial position, I am pleased to report that, contrary to the statement that 'rental deferrals have put a hole in the budget', Spelthorne

Borough Council's financial position is better than many councils impacted by COVID-19.

For the first three months of the financial year the Council has received 95% of the rent due, with all but 0.15% of the balance covered by rent deferral agreements with tenants. Of those rent deferrals, 70% will have been received by 31 March 2021. For the period June to September 2020 we have received to date 93.6% of the rent due, and all but 0.5% of the balance is covered by rent deferral agreements, of which 72% will be received by 31 March 2021. These percentages reflect that We-Work rental due for the March and June quarter days have been received in full.

To be clear - there is no financial hole in the 2020-21 budget. Only around 0.2% at most may end up being written off.

The Council has been extremely prudent in light of COVID-19, and as set out in the Extraordinary Council Meeting report of 21 May 2020, we have taken a number of proactive steps to maximise income. For example we have:

1. Set aside £20m from rental streams to date, to provide a cushion against future temporary drops in rental income, and
2. Updated our sinking fund scenarios to look at worst case and expected case COVID-19 scenarios for the next 10 years.

I can report that even on the worst case scenarios, the sinking fund balances are more than sufficient to ensure no impact from any shortfalls in rental income streams on the Revenue Budget or council taxpayers over the next 10 years. After financing costs and contribution to sinking funds are taken into account, the Council has budgeted for £10m net contribution from its commercial assets in the current financial year towards the cost of provision of services for residents, and we remain confident that this will be the net contribution received.

Reference has been made by one local resident to 'gross mismanagement' of the Council's finances and an 'unwise debt funded property frenzy'. I have already set out the strength of our financial position and our investment portfolio even in the face of COVID-19. It is difficult to see how mismanagement, as referred to by Mr Hollingsworth could lead to an income receipt of over 93% in the first six months of this year, well ahead of the industry average. This authority has a professional team of officers, with an extensive private sector background, who are well used to managing property portfolios of this size.

One of the questions refers to a "secret deal" with a particular tenant. In order for the Council to protect the interests of council taxpayers, it is important that tenants feel able to have early and honest discussions with us as their landlord. If they are facing financial challenges, we need to discuss such matters in a 'safe environment' in order to have the best chance of negotiating deals which best protect the Council's financial interests. It is for that reason

that we have to treat the detail of the discussions as commercially confidential.

With respect to the specific rent free arrangement raised by Mr Hollingsworth, which has been commented on in press as a result of leaked confidential papers, I can confirm that this does not create any financial hole in the Council's Revenue Budget. This will be spread over a number of future periods and can be accommodated through Sinking Fund adjustments without any reduction in the amount of surplus being passed to the Revenue Budget to support the provision of services."

Question from Mrs. C. Nichols

"Covid 19

Nationally published pillar1 and 2 data shows that Spelthorne continues to experience occasional Covid 19 positive cases. Covid 19 will flare up again in the Autumn without effective test and trace, face masks across all age groups in crowded public spaces as well as enclosed spaces, and discipline in following separation distances.

September will present vulnerable residents with a particular challenge when children – the older ones of whom are thought to be a vector for Covid 19 transmission – return to school. This is a particular problem in Lower Sunbury where thousands of children discharge onto Green Street during term time.

Spelthorne has worked tirelessly to help the community through its Support4Spelthorne scheme. However, the Borough Bulletin gives no indication of a role for the Council in emerging local test and trace programmes although this is the level of local government that is very well informed as to where residents are located.

How is Spelthorne working with Surrey's public health department to ensure that residents have regular up-to-date information on where the local flare ups are occurring? When can residents expect to receive an information leaflet on a multi-agency action plan for control of Covid 19 as it applies to Spelthorne?"

Response from the Leader, Councillor J. Boughtflower

"Thank you for your question. Like the rest of the country, Spelthorne will continue to experience occasional COVID-19 positive cases and we will be monitoring those closely through the NHS pillar 1 and 2 data, which we now have access to. Current NHS data at 27 July 2020 shows that in a 7 day testing period of Spelthorne residents there were 753 tests and 3 positive cases.

The Government has proposed a range of measures to prevent flare up of COVID-19 cases, including the Test and Trace programme and requiring the wearing of facemasks in situations where effective 2m social distancing is not possible.

Direction on the NHS Test and Trace programme comes from Public Health England (PHE). In order to support this programme, Surrey County Council's

Public Health team are required to lead on local outbreak planning, and they have published a local outbreak control action plan, which can be found on their website. The [link to this information](#) will be provided in the written response to this question.

Whilst this plan deals with all local COVID-19 outbreaks, it also identifies and prioritises preventative and early intervention measures for key settings such as care homes, schools and other high-risk locations, including specific actions which must be followed in those settings in the event of an outbreak.

There is considerable guidance for schools on how to operate safely in a COVID-19 environment and many of the schools that have remained open during the past few months already have good operating procedures in place to minimise risk. The risks associated with children leaving school at the end of each day would have been considered in this guidance, although it is worth noting that transmission of the virus in the open is reported as having considerably less risk than in enclosed spaces.

The national NHS Test and Trace scheme has continued to evolve over recent weeks, along with the local outbreak plan. Any article in the July Bulletin would therefore have been out of date very quickly. The Borough's role is also still evolving and its exact role in Test and Trace and other functions will be dependent on the nature of any outbreak. In such situations, Public Health England will consider the severity and spread of any outbreak and will, in conjunction with Surrey Public Health, determine the need for an outbreak control team. Our Environmental Health Team has been involved in the development of this plan and will play a key role in controlling outbreaks within certain settings in the borough.

The Local Outbreak plan has a very clear communication strategy specifically tailored to the type of outbreak. The communications approach will include traditional offline channels and networks, as well targeted digital communications to ensure messages can reach residents within a few hours of a notification of a local outbreak. Our communications team have regular meetings with the Surrey-wide communications group so will, as they have done to date, transmit relevant information through Spelthorne's communication channels. It is not currently planned to produce any leaflets locally as the next steps for COVID-19 are still evolving and the overall Surrey Plan has mechanisms in it to ensure effective local dissemination of information for local outbreaks of the virus, including how the multi-disciplinary action plan will work. In the meantime, in order to raise awareness, Surrey County Council has launched a phased communication campaign entitled "Keep Surrey Safe". A specific toolkit for businesses is also due to be launched this week, which will incorporate advice from the Department of Health, including action cards for specific types of businesses."

171/20 Petitions

There were none.

172/20 Report from the Leader of the Council

The Leader of the Council, Councillor J. Boughtflower, presented the reports of the Cabinet meetings held on 8 April, 15 July and 22 July which outlined the matters the Cabinet had decided since the last Council meeting.

173/20 Report from the Chairman of the Audit Committee

The Chairman of the Audit Committee, Councillor L. Nichols, presented his report which outlined the matters the Committee had considered since the last Council meeting.

174/20 Report from the Chairman of the Licensing Committee

The Chairman of the Licensing Committee, Councillor R.W. Sider BEM, presented his report which outlined the matters the Committee had decided since the last Council meeting.

175/20 Report from the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor V.J. Leighton, presented her report which outlined the matters the Committee had decided since the last Council meeting.

Council noted the report subject to the amendment of the reference to the Surrey County Council Parking Task Group which was actually the Spelthorne Joint Committee Parking Task Group.

176/20 Report from the Chairman of the Planning Committee

The Chairman of the Planning Committee, Councillor T. Lagden, presented his report which outlined the matters the Committee had decided since the last Council meeting.

177/20 Appointment of a representative Trustee

In view of the length of the agenda and as this item had previously been listed to be heard at the Council meeting in April which was postponed, it was agreed that this item be brought forward to be heard before the Motions listed as agenda item 15.

It was proposed by Councillor J. Boughtflower and seconded by Councillor J. McIlroy and

Resolved that Matthew Calvert be appointed as a Council representative trustee to serve on the Laleham Charities – Village Hall and Recreation Ground for a further four year period to February 2024.

178/20 Motions

In accordance with Standing Order 17 the Council received four written Notices of Motions.

Councillor H. Harvey moved and Councillor O. Rybinski seconded the following motion:

“This Council resolves to implement a change in decision-making governance arrangements, comprising the cessation of the current Leader and Cabinet model of governance and the implementation of a Full Committee model of governance. This is to be developed during 2020 with a view to the arrangements taking effect at the earliest opportunity, but no later than the commencement of the next Council Municipal Year in May 2021, subject to a legally and constitutionally robust process. The changes are to be led by the Monitoring Officer and the Members Code of Conduct committee and agreed by the Council.”

Councillor J. Doerfel, proposed the following amendment which was seconded by Councillor V. Siva:

“This Council resolves to implement a change in decision-making governance arrangements, comprising the cessation of the current Leader and Cabinet model of governance and the implementation of a Full Committee model of governance. This is to be developed during 2020 with a view to the arrangements taking effect at the earliest opportunity, but no later than the commencement of the next Council Municipal Year in May 2021, subject to a legally and constitutionally robust process. The changes are to be led by the Monitoring Officer and the Members Code of Conduct committee- *debated* and agreed by the Council.”

The amendment was carried and the new substantive motion put to the vote. A recorded vote was requested by Councillor R.A. Smith-Ainsley. The recorded vote was as follows:

FOR (20)	Cllrs Bateson, Beardsmore, Brar, Cornes, Doerfel, R. Dunn, S. Dunn, Fidler, Grant, H. Harvey, I. Harvey, Lagden, Nichols, Rybinski, Saliagopoulos, Sexton, Siva, Smith-Ainsley, Spoor, Vinson
AGAINST (17)	Cllrs ~Boughtflower, McIlroy, Attewell, Barnard, C. Barratt, R. Barratt, Buttar, Chandler, Gething, Gibson, Harman, Islam, Leighton, Madams, Mitchell, Noble, Sider,
ABSTAIN (2)	J. Doran, S. Doran

The substantive motion was carried.

The second motion was proposed by Councillor R.A. Smith-Ainsley who, under Standing Order 28.2, proposed a variation to Council Standing Order 8.3. and moved “8.3 little ‘f’ be amended to prevent the Leader assigning all

the Outside Bodies to his own party as opposed to the councillors best suited to carry out these roles.”

This was seconded by Councillor D. Saliagopoulos and, in accordance with Standing Order 28.2, was adjourned without discussion, to the next ordinary meeting of the Council.

It had been moved by Councillor I. Beardsmore and seconded by Councillor R.A. Smith-Ainsley to suspend Standing Order 5.1 and continue the meeting until the end of the business.

The motion was lost and the meeting adjourned at 9.00pm with the remaining business to be carried over to the next ordinary meeting.