

Council – 10 December 2020

Item 20 - General Questions and Responses

1. Question from Councillor Ian Harvey

“Can the Leader please confirm that all matters are on track for the transition to the Committee System, as per Council Resolution of 30th July, and that this will indeed come into effect from the Annual Council Meeting in May 2021? If not can he please explain why not?”

Response from Councillor John Boughtflower:

“Thank you for your question, Councillor Harvey. As you will note from the update report to Council on this matter, the change to a Committee system of governance is on track and progressing well. I would like to put on record my thanks to officers for their efforts in facilitating this in such challenging times.”

2. Question from Councillor Richard Barratt

“Evidence has been provided to me that a Councillor and others have potentially breached environmental rules in that they used land at Napper's Paddock Wheatsheaf Lane for which they are responsible to store trade waste and rubbish to the detriment of the local environment. When directed to remove it by council officers they chose to burn it on two occasions (10th and 13th November 2020) causing pollution, explosions, risk to the wildlife and environment leading to the unnecessary call out of the Surrey Fire brigade.

Local residents are deeply concerned at this alleged action by a local councillor and have complained. Apparently, the action was aggravated by alleged claims told to the fire brigade claiming they had an environmental licence to burn the waste.

1. Does the leader consider that this action is in breach of the policy recently issued by Spelthorne Borough Council declaring a climate emergency?
2. Does the leader consider this has brought the council into disrepute?
3. Does the council condone such behaviour by a serving borough councillor?
4. What action does the council intend to take, bearing in mind the unnecessary additional cost to the fire brigade and the environmental catastrophe that occurred, due to the actions of this councillor?”

Response from Councillor John Boughtflower:

“Thank you for your question Cllr Barratt. The Environmental Health Team are currently investigating a matter regarding waste at Wheatsheaf Lane, Staines-upon-Thames and as this is still ongoing no further information can be provided at this time to ensure that this investigation is not compromised.

There has been speculation that this investigation involves a Councillor. If this is the case, then this person would have been acting in a private capacity and not whilst acting as a Councillor. In such circumstances the Council's Code of Conduct is not applicable.”

3. Question from Councillor Ian Harvey

“Can the Leader please confirm that his administration remains implacably opposed to a single Surrey Unitary Authority which would result in the dissolution of Spelthorne and the potential loss of income, services and assets to this Borough. I ask this due to the very close links between his “administration” and that of Surrey County Council, at the highest levels, who are known to still be pursuing the Single Unitary Surrey plan. A simple “Yes we remain opposed” or “No we are not opposed” will suffice.

Response from Councillor John Boughtflower:

“Thank you for your question Cllr Harvey. As I’m sure you are fully aware, at the Council meeting on 24th September I put forward a number of motions, the first of which explicitly stated *‘In response to SCCs recently publicised proposal, this Council strongly opposes a single Surrey-wide Unitary Authority’*.

At that meeting this administration, together with Councillors from across this virtual chamber, voted unanimously against Surrey County Council's proposals for a single Unitary Authority covering the county's 1.2 million residents. Our position on this has not changed. We will always do what's best for our residents and remain strongly opposed to a single Unitary Authority for Surrey.”

4. Question from Councillor Ian Harvey

“In an article in the 25 October 2020 edition of the Observer newspaper LibDem Member Cllr Lawrence Nichols described Spelthorne as a “rotten Borough”. Regardless of whether you accept the Wikipedia or the Blackadder definitions of “rotten Borough” most people will interpret this as an extremely derogatory insult on both those democratically elected in Spelthorne, including our MP, and also Officers and all residents of the Borough. Does the “leader” agree with Cllr Nichols, and if he agrees with him, how does he feel about leading a “Rotten Borough”?”

Response from Councillor John Boughtflower:

“Thank you for your question Councillor Harvey. No, I do not agree that this is a ‘Rotten Borough’. Spelthorne is a Borough we can all be proud of and I am honoured to be its Leader.

Councillor Harvey may also wish to note that Private Eye listed Spelthorne as a rotten Borough, in relation to its decision to give WeWork an 18 month rent free period, in its edition number 1527 during his time as leader.”

5. Question from Councillor Ian Harvey

“Can the “leader” please advise with regard to Community Infrastructure Levy, since 26th June 2020:

- The sums paid out
- The sums formally committed to projects
- Projects and sums currently under consideration but not yet formalised

Response from Councillor John Boughtflower:

“This Administration is committed to ensuring infrastructure is delivered to meet the needs of our communities, including schemes to improve healthcare, education, recreation and active travel in the Borough. In order to consider how the CIL funding should be spent, I wanted to set up a new Task Group to review and make recommendations on bids. There has been a delay as I have had many new task groups to organise but I’m pleased to say the governance arrangements are nearing completion and we hope to have the first meeting of the Task Group soon. I should point out that the previous administration took over a year to get make its own changes to the way the task group was constituted and still hadn’t agreed on it by the time I took over as Leader. As a result only one meeting took place, with the bid agreed by the Spelthorne Joint Committee in March 2017 for the Wider Staines sustainable transport package and none since then, although no further bids were submitted until August 2019.

In terms of the sums paid out, there have been no CIL payments or sums formally committed to projects since 26th June 2020. In terms of projects and sums currently under consideration but not yet formalised, a CIL Bid was submitted in August 2019 as I previously mentioned from Surrey Highways for the A308 Corridor Phase 1 Congestion and Active Travel Improvement Package. Surrey are requesting CIL funding for 50% of the scheme costs so approximately £5million over the 5 year programme. This is the only formal bid so far although we are aware that there are others being developed currently. As part of our work on the Infrastructure Delivery Plan to support the new Local Plan, we are actively engaging

with infrastructure providers to support them in submitting further bids for consideration.”

6. Question from Councillor Ian Harvey

“The Leader is to be congratulated on surviving for almost six months. Could he please enumerate what he believes his administration’s significant tangible achievements have been in this period?”

Response from Councillor John Boughtflower:

“Thank you for your question Councillor Harvey.

Since March this borough has been facing the biggest threat the country has ever faced in peacetime, dealing with the effects of COVID-19. Like all areas of the UK, the consequences of this pandemic have hit our local communities and businesses very hard. In these unprecedented times, our focus has been, and continues to be, to respond and recover from this horrible pandemic, ensuring that our residents, business and workforce have the support they need to get through this incredibly difficult time.

During this period, it has also been important to reflect on the Council’s priorities going forward and as part of this process we have been actively engaging with our residents through monthly meetings with representatives from Residents’ Associations across the Borough. This has given us a much greater insight into the key issues affecting them and what support they want from the Council.

I have introduced Task Groups which involve more working together and openness - proving the members have a voice to represent their residents by working together. Something very lacking in the previous administration.

Over the next couple of months I will be sharing with all Councillors the results of the work we have been doing behind the scenes to put this Council in a better position to tackle the issues that really matter to our communities, which will include a greater focus on the delivery of much needed affordable housing and a greater emphasis on tackling climate change.

Also, I am proud to say the committee system will come into place at next year’s Annual Council meeting, which will be a new beginning for Spelthorne and finally close a door on the style of the previous administration.

So much more than surviving!”

7. Question from Councillor Bernie Spoor

“Would the Portfolio Holder for Planning agree that as the Bugle Nurseries site has had two applications rejected by the Planning Committee on the grounds of green belt, but the local community want the development to go ahead as it clears the industrial use and mess currently there. And given that any submission to the Secretary of State is rejected would the Portfolio holder ensure that the enforcement team, or whoever is best suited, at SBC take action by instructing the owners, Angle Properties, to return the site to as near as possible its Green Belt appearance?”

Response from Councillor Tony Mitchell:

“Thank you for your question, Cllr Spoor.

As you will be aware, Green Belt is a spatial designation (not a visual amenity classification). So, I’m afraid it’s not relevant to talk about a ‘Green Belt appearance’. Not all land within the Green Belt is ‘green’ and free of development. However, it can still perform one of the five functions of green belt (check unrestricted sprawl, prevent towns from merging, safeguard the countryside for encroachment, preserve the setting of historic towns and assist in urban regeneration). The Bugle Nurseries site is a case in point. Whilst the industrial area is built upon it is still within the Green Belt.

I am assuming you are in fact asking if the uses can cease and the buildings demolished and for the site to return to an open space. I am afraid that the existing buildings and commercial uses have been in existence for many years and are immune from any planning enforcement action (buildings become immune from enforcement action after 4 years and uses after 10 years). Consequently, it is not possible to take action to remove the buildings and uses and return the site to a ‘green appearance’ as you suggest.”