

## **Council – 25 February 2021**

### **Item 16 - General Questions supplement**

#### **2. Question from Councillor Chris Bateson**

The long-standing position of Spelthorne Council was to oppose Network Rail's proposal to permanently close the railway crossing at Moor Lane on safety grounds, as clarified in a Council press release prior to the commencement of the Enquiry.

Two-thirds of the way through the proceedings, the Council performed a complete about-turn and dramatically withdrew its opposition to permanent closure and before all objector's presentations had been heard. This decision was reached by a select group of Officers and a Deputy Leader at very short notice.

How we ended up in this situation is of concern to both Councillors and residents of the Borough. In turn, this decision has damaged the Council's reputation within the local community. In the light of the Council's apparent failure to adequately prepare its case, by contrast to National Rail's defence, what financial cost has been incurred by our Authority?

#### **3. Question from Councillor Lawrence Nichols**

The number of housing units proposed for the Oast House site at the Extraordinary Council meeting on 21st January was significantly different from the number indicated in the Cabinet paper approved in March 2019. What was the process followed to authorise this change and why has the Council chosen to spend over £1.2m on planning the development of this site without a revised Cabinet approval of the change or any public consultation?

#### **4. Question from Councillor Tom Fidler**

The timeline and public information on the Local Plan is not reflecting the current status. When can residents expect the website to provide an accurate timeline and updated account of the Local Plan process?

#### **5. Question from Councillor Helen Harvey**

The Leader made the following statement in a press release 10<sup>th</sup> February 2021:

'I specifically asked for a consultation exercise to be undertaken so that residents could give us their views on the future of Staines...'

I was surprised to learn that Cllr Boughtflower thinks that he was the one to have the bright idea to consult with the public over the emerging Staines Development Framework formally known as Staines Master Plan. This is not the case.

As part of the preparation of a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) it is a standard formal requirement that public consultation exercises be carried out. Indeed, in June 2020 all Staines Councillors and other cross-party Councillors were sent a document entitled 'Consultation Strategy' where the proposals from our consultants for this consultation exercise were summarised. Furthermore, I personally attended a meeting in June, which was minuted, where the methods and approaches for the consultations were discussed in detail and in particular with regard to COVID-19 restrictions.

In view of this it is incumbent on Cllr Boughtflower to immediately issue a press release putting the record straight and apologising for misleading the public.

A Spelthorne council press release on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2020 stated that despite COVID-19 restrictions the Staines Master Plan was expected to be ready 'early in 2021' and other documents I have seen say by March 2021. Clearly according to the press release of 10<sup>th</sup> February 2021 this date has slipped by many months. Can the Leader inform Council and residents as to why this project; which is to provide an important support document for our emerging Local Plan, has been so delayed and can we be updated of the current Local Plan and Staines Development Framework timetable with key milestone dates? Our residents' groups need to be kept informed so that they can plan and coordinate their responses should they wish to make formal representations to the Ministry.

## **6. Question from Councillor Ian Harvey**

At the 21st January Extraordinary Council Meeting to discuss Spelthorne property projects Cllr Boughtflower you proposed SIX separate motions that would transfer responsibility to a "Project Board" that would be a subcommittee of a new Policy and Resources Committee that itself will not come into existence until after the transition to a Committee System in May 2021.

A separate report submitted that night stated that the interest cost alone of any delays is £9100 a week. Thus the minimum delay as a result of this is 19 weeks, at a direct cost of £172,900.

Having proposed motions to facilitate multi-million funding to these projects, you then proceeded on some of the motions to state that you had not yet made up your mind whether or not to support those motions that you yourself had just proposed. This does not suggest a very strong leadership or decision making ability, or indeed commercial acumen. Please can you justify your actions (or indeed inactions)?

## **7. Question from Councillor Olivia Rybinski**

In October 2020 there was a very serious and unlawful leak of a very confidential document to journalists and this led to significant press interest.

As Councillors we should abide by the Code of Conduct and not work to bring the Council into disrepute. This type of one sided journalism causes residents to feel unsettled as they have not been given the full picture.

Questions about this leak were asked in full council and we understand only four councillors (Cllr Boughtflower, Buttar, Mitchell and Nichols) had access to this document. At that time Cllr Boughtflower condemned the leak and assured Council members that this was indeed a serious matter and would be investigated, yet we are yet to be updated on the matter.

Can you now provide councillors with an update as to the progress of that investigation?

#### **8. Question from Councillor Amar Brar**

Since the Leader is now supporting the Arora Hotel Complex development, can the Leader provide Council with an update as to any interactions, such as phone calls or meetings he has conducted or attended with Arora group during the past 6 months, and does he agree that we as a borough are indeed highly privileged that in such difficult economic times that Arora were still able to take a long term view and agreed to invest approximately £185m in our borough bringing a much needed boost to the planned regeneration of Staines, local jobs, an increase in visitors and to grow our economic prospects?