

Questions from members of the public

Council – 24 February 2022

Question 1 – Nigel Rowe

“Surrey 2050 has a long history. It seems clear from reading the documentation, the Surrey Interim Local Strategic Statement and Minutes of meetings of the EM3 Joint Leaders Board that decisions and commitments on the future development of Staines were made a very long time ago, based on proposals by or with the acquiescence of Spelthorne Borough Council to the Surrey Joint Leaders Board and Surrey Future Steering Board. The then Leader of SBC (Cllr Ian Harvey) was a member of the Surrey Joint Leaders board at the time. SBC’s Chief Executive was and still is a member of the Surrey Future Steering Board. The Council’s apparent long-standing commitment to EM3, to Staines as a ‘Step Up’ town, and to the Longcross-Staines-Heathrow corridor has major implications for how the town will develop and the need for a significant increase in its population. When does the Council plan to explain all of this to residents of Staines? Surrey County Council Leader Cllr Tim Oliver says it is important Surrey 2050 is something done “with” and not “to” the affected communities. Spelthorne Borough Council has a constitutional requirement “to work in partnership with residents to make Spelthorne a place where people are fully engaged, and to encourage the active involvement of the community in the decisions that affect them”. The community is surely entitled to know what ‘vision’ the Council has committed to for the future development of the town; how this vision will impact on the town’s amenity, townscape, skyline and character; and how the Council intends to deal with the high demands of its infrastructure requirements (schools, medical services, utility supply, road access to the town, etc)? Network Rail is mounting a drop-in exhibition and consultation on its plans to rebuild the Iron Bridge and has invited residents across Staines and on the other side of the Thames. Given such an exercise for such a comparatively minor undertaking, does the Council agree that it should mount a major drop-in exhibition and consultation over a few days to inform the residents of Staines on the planned dramatic transformation of the town and, if so, when can we expect it to happen?”

Question 2 – Nigel Rowe

“As we understand it, there are two routes to securing a lower housing ‘target’ for the borough. One would be for Spelthorne to present the Planning Inspectorate with a Local Plan supported by a compelling case that justifies a departure from the national standard methodology. The other is to persuade the relevant government department to make an exception for Spelthorne and apply a different methodology to this borough. Does the Council believe the case it has put to Kwasi Kwarteng MP in response to his offer last summer to assist the Council in its endeavours to secure a lower number is compelling and persuasive, and, if it does, why has it steadfastly refused to pursue the first option via its Local Plan and instead opted to rely on the government making an exception for Spelthorne?”

Question 3 – Nigel Rowe

“Why has the Council not yet published a summary (called for by the Environment & Sustainability Committee last October) of the findings of its public consultation last summer on the future development of Staines, what conclusions has the Council drawn from the findings of the consultation, and why has it not committed to take any account of

these findings/conclusions in its development plans for the town? To simply state that the consultation will inform work on the Local plan means nothing if there is not clarity on the conclusions the Council has drawn from it and those aspects it accepts must be accommodated.”

Question 4 – Nigel Rowe

“A large proportion of flats in new high-rise tower blocks are often bought by buy-to-let investors or overseas buyers, some apparently happy to let them remain unoccupied while the value of their investment grows or simply as a depository for their funds. This is already happening in Staines, with flats in new apartment blocks being advertised worldwide. Does the Council agree it should insist that developers allocate a high/defined number of flats in any new tower block development for sale to owner-occupiers only and, if the answer to this is ‘yes’, will it seek urgently to overcome whatever obstacles there are to achieving this?”

Question 5 – Nigel Rowe

“The chair of the Environment & Sustainability Committee, who is also chair of the Local Plan Task Group, some time ago proposed a zoning approach for new developments in Staines. This would restrict the height of new developments to defined limits close to the river Thames and adjacent to existing residential areas. This was enthusiastically welcomed by residents and embraced by the Staines Development Framework Task Group. What is the current status of this proposal, and can we be assured it will be enshrined in the new Local Plan and strictly adhered to?”

Question 6 – Kath Sanders

“Thank you very much to Cllr Beardsmore for the answer to my question in December about the 2021/22 Green Initiatives Fund and how much of the £747k had been allocated as of 30th September 2021. It was also good to see the information on the bidding process discussed at the Environment & Sustainability meeting on 18th January 2022 (Item 11/22).

Please would it now be possible for residents to get a further update as to how much of the £39k Green Better Neighbourhood Grant element has been allocated as of 31st December 2021 and what further progress has been made in terms of utilising the remaining funds this year (or whether agreement has been reached to rollover and potentially add to the Green Initiatives Fund in the next fiscal year)? Thank you.”