

Questions from members of the public

Question 1 – Andrew McLuskey

(received 1/10/22 at 20:53)

“Can the Leader explain why, given the multiple calls on its resources here in Spelthorne, the Borough has lent 10 million pounds to Thurrock Council?”

Question 2 – Nigel Rowe

(received 7/10/22 at 18:09)

Statement of context

In the vicinity of Staines, there are significant ground water flows through gravel and sand substrates for more than a mile either side of the river. The foundations of buildings create a barrier to the flow of water through these substrates, inhibiting flow rate, exacerbating water table levels, and increasing flood risk. The taller a building is, the deeper its foundations are required to be, and the greater their effect as barriers to water flow. Every new development further increases the flood risk. It is widely accepted that most of Staines and much of its hinterland is already deemed to be at high risk of river/fluvial flooding. According to an Environment Agency scientist at the recent Eco Fayre in Egham, if people knew then what is known today, it is highly unlikely a town would have been established where Staines is sited.

Question

“Is there anything in the above statement that members of the Committee believe to be untrue or unreliable, and to what extent are members of the Committee concerned about increasing the already problematic risk of flooding in Staines by adding a significant number of tall buildings with deep foundations?”

Question 3 – John De Pear

(received 8/10/22 at 20:04)

Statement of context

The Introduction to the Local Plan says that it meets the requirement for “a strategy to make sure that there is infrastructure in place to support existing and future residents, with a delivery plan that sets out how this will be achieved and funded”.

Question

“Do Members of the Council agree that, for this to be true, the key infrastructure providers and consultees would need to have modelled the impact of 5,440 new homes in Staines and the consequential 50% increase to the town’s population. Are Members aware that this has not happened at all in the case of some providers (and found wanting in others), and do Members accept that the Local Plan cannot be sound because of this?”

Question 4 – Lynda Fuller

(received 9/10/22 at 19:23)

Statement of context

According to a recent independently conducted survey (with 620 participants), support for limiting the height of new developments in sensitive areas of Staines is overwhelming: “very important” within 50 metres of the river (95%), “very important” in the Staines Conservation Area (95%), and “very important” immediately next to existing residential areas (87%). 90% believe there should be NO exceptions to the zoning restrictions. Less than 2% believe the Local Plan meets the “local housing need” or “successfully balances the economic, social and environmental needs of Staines and the wider area”. Only 5 of the 271 respondents to the survey who had also participated in earlier Council ‘public consultations’ on options being considered for the Local Plan believe their views were listened to.

Question

“Do Council Members accept these findings and believe more account must be taken of residents’ views on the development of Staines, and do Members accept that the zoning arrangements do not offer anything like enough protection for sensitive areas?”

Question 5 – Graeme Lock

(received 10/10/22 at 08:31)

Statement of context

In the Local Plan policy on managing flood risk, there is reference to flood planning and would-be developers are directed to the Government's personal flood plan. However, the cumulative impact of nearly 5,500 new homes in Staines (mostly in tower blocks of flats) on the risk to people and property, and the implications of flooding, will need to have been fully evaluated in relation to mass evacuation routes and flood plans for Staines in particular.

Question

“Where is the evidence that emergency response staff have been consulted and concur that such massive growth in new homes and population in such a high-risk area as Staines can be safely accommodated? Are Members aware that an Environment Agency scientist said (in relation to flood risk) at a recent Eco Fayre that “if people knew then what is known today it highly unlikely that a town would have been built where Staines is located”, and do Members challenge this assertion?”

Question 6 – Kath Sanders

(received 10/10/22 at 11:59)

Statement of context

The strategic documents published for the Regulation 19 Local Plan give at best a mixed picture for Spelthorne. All roads appear to lead back to the Sustainability Appraisal (SA)

which is where the strategic balancing of economic, social and environmental objectives should be evident in a logical and consistent way.

Spelthorne has chosen 12 sustainability objectives.

Notwithstanding the difficulties of a largely qualitative assessment, the Local Plan appears to be heavily weighted in favour of economic and, to a lesser degree, social sustainability objectives. This is apparent from Tables 12 and 13 on policies and site allocations respectively - basically, housing development wins out above all else.

Yet in Table 14 of the SA (under Section 7.3) it admits, in the overall scores, that the Reg 19 submission version is expected to have minor adverse cumulative effects on flood risk, pollution and water.

The pendulum has demonstrably swung too far and critical environment objectives are the clear losers even if all Local Plan policies can be fully implemented (see Question 2).

Question

“Paragraphs 7-9 of the National Planning Policy Framework are at the heart of achieving sustainable development and the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) is the accepted tool for balancing economic, social and environmental objectives in “mutually-supportive ways”.

Ignoring any subjective bias in the weighting, the SA appears to claim in Section 7.3 that “overall, the Regulation 19 Draft Local Plan is expected to have a positive effect against all [12] sustainability objectives”. Yet it contradicts itself in Table 14.

Will the Council now admit that there isn't an equitable balance overall between the economic, social and environmental objectives of its Local Plan?”

Question 7 – Kath Sanders

(received 10/10/22 at 11:59)

Statement of context

Continuing on from my first question, it is, in any event, highly unlikely that the Local Plan policies will be enacted to their fullest extent, given the emerging issues around viability of at least some sites and questions around the suitability and availability of land,

Failure to deliver yields on particular sites or certain allocations altogether, will raise the spectre of the release of more Green Belt sites to make up the difference as we have already seen in the Stage 3 Assessment, only published on 22nd July and 11th August 2022. The approach to Green Belt in the Local Plan after all is now even less of a strategy and more akin to it being viewed as just making up the difference.

No Green Belt site will be safe. It may be comforting to think that only a small amount will be released this time and the rest will be spared. However, Green Belt has become the defacto balancing figure and pursuit of Green Belt in Spelthorne will be relentless.

Evidence of this can already be seen in recent property deals - e.g. the sale of the Angle Property site in Sunbury to Bellway Homes announced on 28th April (just after April's E&S meeting) and Danescroft's acquisition of the freehold interest of 51 acres of Green Belt land at Sunbury Golf Course in October 2021, citing the rationale "the property offers

significant asset management potential, as well as the medium to long term prospects of promotion through the local plan".

Question

"The National Planning Policy Framework clearly states that local circumstances SHOULD be taken into account (para 9) and NPPF policies on Green Belt and flood risk CAN provide a strong reason for restricting the "overall scale" of development in the borough (para 11b).

Yet the Council has repeatedly said it has to meet the government "housing target" which patently does not consider at least two significant constraints at a strategic level.

Does the Council now accept that, strategically, the Local Plan makes Spelthorne's Green Belt more susceptible to development, regardless of it being "weakly-performing" or "strongly-performing" under their own definition?"