

Vision background

New councillors may not be aware of the vision being referred to.

Back in the summer of 2021, the then Leader (Cllr Nichols) and Deputy Leader (Cllr Sexton), wanted to explore the possibility of a visioning exercise being undertaken in respect of the Local Plan. At that point, a report was being considered on a revised strategy by the Environment and Sustainability Committee (13 July 2021). At that meeting the committee resolved:

To agree the revised strategy for the new Local Plan to meet our housing need by releasing a small amount of Green Belt, reducing the impact on Staines by not including an additional allocation, including opportunities to reduce some building heights in Staines if this is the outcome of the Staines Development Framework consultation and allow for more family homes with gardens to be built.

Alongside agreeing the revised strategy, members of the Committee also resolved:

That they would benefit from independent support and advice on the formulation of a strategic vision for the borough.

- a) To undertake an exercise of member engagement focused on developing a shared understanding and/or their role in formulating the Local Plan.
- b) To develop a shared vision for the borough that is endorsed by a majority of members.
- c) To appoint a suitably qualified external advisor to facilitate members in formulating the vision.
- d) To incorporate the vision into the Local Plan documentation by no later than the end of October 2021.
- e) Once the vision has been agreed it will be used to review existing policies and inform future ones

A request was subsequently received from the Leader that a direct appointment be made to Catriona Riddell Associates to facilitate that vision. The Leader advised:

(1) they wanted to create something that councillors could own against which the emerging Local Plan could be assessed

(2) there was 'currently' no member led vision of the plan – the only vision was to meet government-imposed housing targets

(3) all advice to date had come for one source (i.e., officers) and councillors needed a second opinion

(4) councillors needed an opinion that would present a genuine alternative perspective so they could be sure they had considered all the options

(5) it was agreed that any vision would be tested with officers before it was finalised to create a vision that can form the basis of a sound plan (and that councillors expected officers to defend their position where they felt it necessary)

(6) a vision was not just about housing numbers but should reflect aspirations for infrastructure, biodiversity, or social gain.

APPENDIX B

The direct appointment was made by the Chief Executive, under delegated powers, in early August. The entire process was member-led. The report and recommendations were provided to the then Leader and Deputy Leader. Officers were given the chance to comment on the draft and worked with the then Deputy Leader on a revised vision the professional planning team were comfortable with. It was then passed back to councillors to undertake further internal consultation before a final version was agreed by the councillors.

A motion was put to Council on 9 December 2021 stating:

“There has been real concern amongst residents and councillors about the lack of a Vision for Spelthorne. To create one, three important Visioning sessions were held and the councillors attending worked hard to produce a Vision. An opportunity has been given to all councillors to review it and it has also been checked by officers to ensure it is sound. I therefore move that:

Council incorporate the Vision into the new Local Plan and from the next meeting of the Local Plan Task Group use it to review existing policies and inform future ones.”

The motion fell and the vision was not therefore used in the way originally envisaged.

Final Vision and Strategic Objectives for Spelthorne

OUR VISION

Spelthorne is a high-quality place to live, work and do business, with significant natural environment assets and an excellent location on the edge of Surrey and next to London, providing access to a wide range of different centres and services.

We want our residents to be proud of Spelthorne.

We aim to maximise the potential of all that the Borough has to offer, meeting our changing development needs over time whilst ensuring that this is sustainable by taking every opportunity to reduce our carbon emissions and therefore our impact on the planet; improving the overall health and wellbeing of our communities and environment; and delivering high quality places and services.

To do this we will be:

- **Inclusive**, ensuring that our decisions and actions reflect the diverse needs of our communities and that all have the opportunity and the ability to engage with the Council on an ongoing basis.
- **Efficient**, prioritising our resources to focus on the things that will have the greatest benefit for all of our residents and exploring opportunities for joint working and sharing skills, expertise and experience with other local authorities.
- **Collaborative**, working more effectively with our residents and local stakeholders to achieve our shared objectives for improving Spelthorne as a place to live, work and do business, and for enhancing public services across the Borough.

OUR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

To achieve our Vision and provide a framework for all our policies and priorities for the next five years, we will focus on six overarching Strategic Objectives:

Strategic Objective 1: Improving the quality of our places

We will improve the overall quality of Spelthorne as a place to live, work and do business by meeting our development needs as far as possible within the context of our Vision for sustainable growth, ensuring that new development is delivered in the right places, supported by the right infrastructure, reflects the character of our distinct communities and improves the overall quality of our built and natural environment.

Why is this important?

Planning is one of the most important roles the Council has, shaping how Spelthorne as a place looks, feels and functions. If we get this right and ensure that new development is in the right place, is properly supported by the right infrastructure and is high quality and well designed, it can significantly enhance what the Borough has to offer. If we get this wrong, it can have a disastrous impact on the lives of our residents and on our businesses, irreversibly damage our natural environment and significantly reduce our ability to address the immediate and increasing challenges arising from Climate Change.

It is vital therefore that we strive to deliver sustainable development across the Borough which meets the needs of our residents in a way that enhances the overall quality and function of our towns and villages, does not compromise our valuable open spaces and reduces our carbon emissions. It is also important that we build resilience into the way we plan for the future so that we can respond to, as yet unknown, external economic, technological and other changes which are often beyond our control, as has clearly been demonstrated through our recent experiences with the Covid Pandemic and flooding.

The spaces between buildings play an important role in how a place feels and functions and can actively help improve the wellbeing and safety of our communities. High quality 'public realm' can also have a direct impact on the viability of our town centres, encouraging people to visit because of the overall experience, not just the retail offer. It is therefore vital that we improve the quality of our public spaces across Spelthorne but especially in the more urban settings such as our town and neighbourhood centres.

How will we achieve this?

- We will ensure our new Local Plan and Staines Development Framework provide a robust basis for meeting the development needs of our residents by:
 - delivering high-quality, well-designed buildings that maximise the use of existing brownfield sites and reflect the character of the diverse communities across the Borough.
 - ensuring all new development contributes towards reducing our carbon emissions.
 - harnessing the wide-ranging benefits of our natural environment.
 - improving the overall quality and accessibility of our green and open spaces.
 - increasing opportunities for active travel and use of public transport options; and
 - supporting high quality, resilient and versatile high streets.
- Through our Development Management function, we will ensure that all proposed new development contributes towards meeting our Vision and Strategic Objectives, working

proactively with applicants to ensure that proposals are good enough to approve, not bad enough to refuse, challenging applicants on the quality of the proposals where necessary.

- We will work with applicants to maximise the potential from developer contributions, challenging the evidence presented where necessary (especially on viability), ensuring that all opportunities are taken to deliver the infrastructure and wider benefits that new development can offer.
- We will proactively engage with the development industry and other stakeholders to develop a shared understanding of what 'good and healthy' development looks like in Spelthorne and what is needed to deliver this and to manage the impact of the Permitted Development on the viability and character of our centres.
- We will ensure that the height and design of developments are sympathetic to the character of the local area including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, as set out in the NPPF and where necessary place a height restriction on buildings in certain locations to reflect the prevailing character of the local area. For example, within zoning in Staines it is unlikely that buildings higher than 10 storeys would be acceptable. However, we will implement a robust design-led approach to assess the justification for any deviation from this and ensure that any proposals support wider objectives.
- We will invest in new and innovative approaches to planning, especially where this leads to a clearer understanding for our residents around what is being proposed, what it would look like and how it would function (e.g. use of 3D images and other digital technology).
- Our approach to supporting sustainable development will be inclusive and fair to all our residents, ensuring that all places feel invested in with improvements for all our diverse and distinct communities.
- We will maximise the potential of our own land and assets to contribute to meeting our Strategic Objectives, helping to deliver the right type of housing to meet our needs (especially affordable housing) and improving our natural environment assets to increase access and maximise the wider benefits, particularly in relation to the health and wellbeing of our residents and reducing our impact on Climate Change.
- We will explore all opportunities to improve the public realm across Spelthorne, starting with an initial review of town centres, with a view to ensuring that all spaces are attractive, accessible, safe and contribute to improving health and wellbeing and reducing our impact on the planet (e.g. more open spaces and urban gardens, focal points, benches, less use of concrete, water fountains).

Further resources and information

[National Model Design Code - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

[Better neighbourhoods \(urbed.coop\)](https://urbed.coop)

[Design and Conservation Panel - Cambridge City Council](#)

[Useful healthy place making resources | Town and Country Planning Association \(tcpa.org.uk\)](https://tcpa.org.uk)

[The 20-minute neighbourhood | Town and Country Planning Association \(tcpa.org.uk\)](https://tcpa.org.uk)

[Livewell Development Accreditation | Essex Design Guide](#)

[Development Management Challenge Toolkit | Local Government Association \(pas.gov.uk\)](https://pas.gov.uk)

[Services for large developments | Building control for large developments | Thurrock Council](#)

[Peer challenge and remote peer support | Local Government Association \(pas.gov.uk\)](https://pas.gov.uk)

[Surrey Development Forum](#)

[Third report on local authority housebuilding published | The Bartlett School of Planning - UCL – University College London](#)

[UK's #1 3D smart city design & planning platform | VU.CITY - VU.CITY. The Smart City Platform](#)

[How can digital planning better support healthier place-making? – Digital Task Force for Planning \(digital4planning.com\)](#)

Strategic Objective 2: Maximising the value of our natural environment

We will protect and, where possible, improve our high-quality natural environment assets, recognising the critical and multi-functional role these play in terms of providing leisure and recreation opportunities; improving the mental and physical health and wellbeing of our residents; enhancing the quality, feel and function of places; and reducing our impact on the rate and scale of Climate Change.

Why is this important?

Spelthorne has a rich and diverse natural environment, with its extensive rivers and reservoirs and green spaces, which are cherished by both our own residents and those that live in surrounding areas. This makes a significant contribution to the overall quality of life in the Borough, supporting improvements to the physical and mental wellbeing of our residents and playing a key role in addressing the immediate and increasing challenges around Climate Change.

It is therefore vital that we invest in these areas, taking all opportunities to improve overall quality and provision, and working with local communities, partners and landowners to invest in nature recovery and increase accessibility to those areas that are not fulfilling their potential.

How will we achieve this?

- As part of our response to the Climate Emergency we will develop a clear framework for managing and investing in our green spaces and water resources, working with partners to ensure that we have shared objectives in terms of the role these play in building resilience to Climate Change, improving the health and wellbeing of our communities, and providing opportunities for active travel and for recreational and leisure activities.
- We will limit the impact of development on Green Belt and green spaces, protecting them for the health and well-being of residents, wildlife and generations to come. A full cost-benefit analysis will be carried out as part of our local plan process to ensure that the overall integrity of the Green Belt (both within Spelthorne and in relation to the wider strategic purposes of the Metropolitan Green Belt) is maintained. No changes to the current boundary will be considered unless it can be clearly demonstrated that the benefits (exceptional circumstances) such as meeting our housing need, including affordable housing, are likely to significantly outweigh the environmental costs, as required by national policy. Our Vision and strategic priorities for Spelthorne will help to frame the factors considered through this process. Once the extent of the Green Belt has been set through the local plan, we will look to landowners to maximise the potential of our Green Belt to support delivery of our corporate objectives of improving the health and well-being of our environment (nature recovery) and our communities (especially in terms of access to green spaces).
- We will work with our local communities and landowners to enhance these areas in terms of improved accessibility, nature recovery and amenity value, maximising the benefits of even the smallest place for our communities.
- We will work with the Surrey Nature Partnership to develop a strategy for enhancing the biodiversity of our Borough, opening up opportunities for nature recovery, including 'rewilding' sites that continue to play an important Green Belt function but are limited in terms of their wider values and contribution to our Strategic Objectives.
- We will work closely with our partners, especially Surrey County Council and the Environment Agency, to explore all potential opportunities for improving the use and accessibility of our rivers, and reducing flood risk through the River Thames Scheme

Further resources and information

[Surrey's Greener Futures Update - August 21 \(ddlnk.net\)](#)

[Surrey Climate Commission |](#)

[Biodiversity Opportunity Areas | Surrey Wildlife Trust](#)

[River Thames Scheme - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

[Habitat Project - Greening Surrey's urban spaces - Surrey Hills Arts](#)

[Smartscape \(scotscape.co.uk\)](#)

[Oxford City Council and Grosvenor: developing and NHS-healthy new town | Local Government Association](#)

[Discover Surrey Transport Plan to Have Your Say – Commonplace](#)

[Issue details - Local Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan \(LWCIP\) - Spelthorne Borough Council](#)

Strategic Objective 3: Improving our connectivity

We will improve our overall connectivity around Spelthorne and with the wider area, providing a wider choice in terms of active and sustainable travel, recognising the key role Spelthorne plays in supporting London’s economy, and in providing access to Heathrow Airport. We will explore opportunities to make Spelthorne a leading borough in terms of digital connectivity, reducing the need for our residents to commute and therefore our carbon emissions, and consequential improvements to their overall health and wellbeing.

Why is this important?

Spelthorne’s proximity to London, Heathrow Airport and the Motorway Network provides residents with excellent transport connections to a range of centres and services, as well as to wider national and international destinations. However, being part of Surrey means that it does not receive the same transport investment and opportunities (via TfL) as adjoining London Boroughs, despite Spelthorne’s strong functional relationship with London and with Heathrow Airport. A more integrated approach to improving our connectivity across administrative boundaries would help Spelthorne realise its full potential as a place to live, work or do business, and would help shift transport solutions away from car dependency with wider benefits to local communities in terms of movement around the borough, health and wellbeing and building resilience to Climate Change.

The impact of the Covid Pandemic has significantly changed the way many of our residents live and work and our how our local businesses operate, with much more reliance on digital connectivity than ever before. Continuing investment in this will help to address the stress of daily commuting for many of residents, building business efficiency and reducing our carbon emissions. It is therefore vital that we improve all aspects of Spelthorne’s connectivity and not just transport, providing more support for flexible working across the Borough.

How will we achieve this?

- We will continue to work with Surrey County Council, the Surrey Future Steering Board and other partners to escalate our case for including Spelthorne within TfL Zone 6 for travel and ensure that improving rail connectivity (in terms of services frequency) is a priority within the Surrey Infrastructure Plan and Surrey Rail Strategy.
- We will work with Surrey County Council to improve the overall transport connectivity across Spelthorne by agreeing shared outcomes from the new Local Transport Plan and Spelthorne's Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan.
- We will explore opportunities to support our residents in working flexibly and maximising the potential of digital connectivity, for example through the provision of shared office space and hubs.
- We will continue to work with our partners of the Heathrow Strategic Planning Group to ensure that Spelthorne gains the maximum benefits in terms of the Borough's connectivity as a result of Heathrow Airport's planned expansion programme.

Further resources and information

[Discover Surrey Transport Plan to Have Your Say – Commonplace](#)

[Issue details - Local Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan \(LWCIP\) - Spelthorne Borough Council](#)

[The Surrey Rail Strategy - Surrey County Council \(surreycc.gov.uk\)](#)

[Surrey Future - Surrey County Council \(surreycc.gov.uk\)](#)

[Heathrow Strategic Planning Group :: Home](#)

Strategic Objective 4: Improving the health and wellbeing of our communities

We will take all opportunities to enhance the overall health and wellbeing of our residents, ensuring that they have fit and healthy homes, good access to open spaces and clean air, and an environment that provides a safe place to live and move around in.

Why is this important?

Through our roles and responsibilities as a council, we can directly influence the quality of life of our residents. Ensuring they have access to suitable, good quality housing and open spaces;

improving the quality of the air they breath; and providing safe and pleasant routes for cycling and walking can all contribute significantly to improving the health and wellbeing of our residents. It is vital therefore, that every action we take should be considered in terms of its impact on the physical or mental health and wellbeing of our communities, and proactively changing our approach where this does not result in a measurable improvement.

How will we achieve this?

- We will ensure that our planning and building control functions maximise the opportunities to increase provision of affordable housing to meet our needs and to improve the quality of new and existing housing in terms to providing healthy and sustainably constructed homes.
- We will seek opportunities to improve air quality and mitigate against the impact of poor air quality by maximising the potential from our natural environment and green spaces, increasing tree coverage, especially in urban areas and along main roads.
- We will work with local communities and landowners to bring back into use and improve the amenity and health value of open spaces that are not currently accessible or open to the public.
- We will review our public spaces and pedestrian routes along main roads to ensure that they provide safe, healthy and attractive environments, ensuring that all the different needs of our communities are taken into account (e.g. wheelchair access, areas around schools, use of prams).
- We will proactively assess all our policy and funding decisions to consider the impact on health and wellbeing of our communities (i.e. through Health Impact Assessments) and make clear what actions we will take as a council to ensure positive impact.
- We will use our own land and assets to contribute to the meeting the housing needs of our residents.
- We will use our own land and assets to support the delivery of affordable homes where this can be achieved without compromising our other strategic policies and priorities and where it is financially prudent to do so. We will also explore opportunities to purchase additional brownfield sites in order to contribute to affordable housing supply and therefore help meet the needs of our residents as set out in the most recent Spelthorne Strategic Housing Market Assessment.
- We will encourage sufficient space between main carriageways and residential developments, so that any development is further away from main traffic carriageways, in order to mitigate the effects of air quality health issues related to traffic emissions for both residents and pedestrians

Further resources and information

[Campaign: The Healthy Homes Act | Town and Country Planning Association \(tcpa.org.uk\)](https://www.tcpa.org.uk/campaign/the-healthy-homes-act)

[RTPI | Enabling Healthy Placemaking](#)

[Healthy Placemaking Report.pdf \(designcouncil.org.uk\)](#)

[Health Impact Assessment Tools: Simple tools for recording the results of the Health Impact Assessment \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

[PHE Healthy Places - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

[A rapid scoping review of health and wellbeing evidence for the Framework of Green Infrastructure Standards - NEER015 \(naturalengland.org.uk\)](#)

Strategic Objective 5: Engaging with our local communities

We will engage more effectively with all our local communities across Spelthorne in a way that is inclusive, with the same high value placed on meeting all of their distinct and different needs, and responsive, demonstrating how we have listened and responded to what we have heard.

Why is this important?

It is vital that all residents across the Borough feel that they have had an opportunity to input into how services are delivered and how the Council's priorities and policies reflect the diversity of needs and the different perspectives of its residents. This is particularly important in how we shape Spelthorne as a place, with early and ongoing engagement with all of our communities a priority in the local planning process and in the design of new development. This is also particularly important because it is a key part of our Council Constitution.

How will we achieve this?

- We will develop a new (corporate) approach to engaging with our communities, with dedicated resources focused on ensuring that this is proactive and inclusive and can be maintained on an ongoing basis. This should also maximise the potential of new and innovative approaches to engagement, especially through digital tools and social media platforms.
- We will prioritise those places and sectors within the community that feel less represented or included and explore ways of improving engagement, ensuring all of our residents feel that they have been involved and/or have been equally represented as we develop and deliver our Vision and Strategic Objectives.

- We will make sure any formal public consultations carried out as part of our planning functions has a clear response so that all our residents and stakeholders know how their views have been taken into account and influenced the outcome.
- We will explore opportunities for working more collaboratively with partners, especially Surrey County Council, to align and streamline our respective consultation processes, helping to avoid confusion and maximise the benefits and outputs for residents.
- Adhere to the 'purpose' of the Council Constitution Article 1

Further resources and information

[Government announces 10 councils to test the use of digital tools in planning process - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

[Sefton Borough Council– Strengthening consultation through partnership working | Local Government Association](#)

[Blueprint - Winchester City Council](#)

[Brighton & Hove climate assembly \(brighton-hove.gov.uk\)](#)

[Role of Community Champions networks to increase engagement in context of COVID-19: evidence and best practice, 22 October 2020 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

[Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: State of the Borough Report | Waltham Forest Council](#)

[Get involved | Waltham Forest Council](#)

Strategic Objective 6: Collaborating to improve service delivery for our residents

We will work more effectively with Surrey County Council, neighbouring authorities and other strategic partners by collaborating on ways to improve service delivery across Spelthorne on behalf of our residents and businesses and to help achieve our Vision and Strategic Objectives.

Why is this important?

The Council has significant responsibility in terms of service delivery for our residents and in helping to shape Spelthorne as a good place to live, work and do business. But there are a number of services and functions that directly influence Spelthorne as a place which are the responsibility of others, especially Surrey County Council. The decisions of our neighbouring local authorities, both in Surrey and London, also impact on how Spelthorne functions and what is offered to our residents. Ensuring that we work positively and on an ongoing basis with our strategic partners is therefore essential if we are to achieve our Vision and Strategic Objectives.

How will we achieve this?

- We will work with Surrey County Council to review and improve how the Spelthorne Joint Committee works to ensure a more integrated approach to service delivery for our residents and to agree some shared outcomes based on our Vision and Strategic Objectives.
- We will work collaboratively with Surrey County Council and other strategic partners to develop a potential County Deal which aims to provide a more integrated and efficient service delivery for our residents and increases the overall investment in Spelthorne as a place.
- We will host an annual meeting with our neighbouring authorities to share current work priorities, explore opportunities for joint working and share experience and good practice.