
RIVERSIDE RESIDENTS NEWSLETTER

11 DECEMBER 2020

SPELTHORNE COUNCILLORS BACK MORATORIUM ON NEW HIGH-RISE TOWER BLOCK DEVELOPMENTS - ARORA HOTEL SCHEME ALSO CRITICISED -

Spelthorne Borough Councillors of all political parties, including members of the Council Cabinet, voted yesterday evening to recommend a moratorium on all new high-rise tower block developments in Staines until the new so-called Staines Masterplan is finalised. The vote, after a debate with no contrary views put forward, was unanimous (save for abstentions by three Councillors involved in the Arora scheme). The Arora scheme itself also came in for robust criticism.

Based on a motion proposed by Cllr Chris Bateson (Staines South) and seconded by Cllr Jan Doerfel (Staines), the recommendation will now go to the next Council Cabinet meeting for consideration and action.



Cllr Chris Bateson (centre) with members of the Riverside Residents Coalition

In explaining the background to his motion, Cllr Bateson told the Council meeting: *"There is increasing alarm among Councillors and residents alike about how things in relation to Staines are developing ... Our concern is that, as things stand, we have on offer a series of proposed high-rise developments all sited well within a one mile radius, without necessary accompanying infrastructure to deal with very important issues such as traffic, parking, schools and medical services. They would quite simply blight the face of the town and with it destroy its character.*

"We do not want another Woking in our Borough. On specifics, questions also remain, as yet unanswered as to exactly what the Council has tied itself into in respect of the Arora development in Bridge Street; at what cost and if the need becomes apparent what financial penalties could it face if contemplating withdrawing from this agreement. Councillors and residents need to know exactly where we stand on this one".

Cllr Bateson also said: *"The motion presented here tonight is a watered down version of what we wanted to present. It was deemed that the wording first chosen and published was*

such that it jeopardised the Councils position and left it open to a possible legal challenge from developers. The bringers of this motion are less convinced of this argument”.

Our Residents Riverside Coalition applauds Cllrs Bateson and Doerfel for bringing their motion and recognise the strenuous efforts they made over many days of negotiation with the Chief Executive and other Officers to strengthen its wording. We have queried with the Council’s Chief Executive whether the reason for blocking the original motion relates to commitments in the contract with Arora Group, and await a response.

Support from the Council Leader

In a surprise announcement during his Leader’s Statement to the Council, Cllr John Boughtflower (Ashford East) said:

“When I became Leader, I and my leadership team made a number of commitments. We said we were going to be more open and transparent than the previous administration, give residents and Councillors a real voice, and be more focused on the needs of residents. A number of obstacles have been thrown in our path as we have sought to deliver on these pledges, but we are determined to deliver on them”.

“We know there is a great deal of opposition, across the community and in this Council, to Staines becoming a high-rise heaven for developers at the expense of making the town a great place to live, work and visit. We don’t want to become another dormitory town of shoe-box size flats in tower blocks for commuters – an approach that has already permanently disfigured other towns in Surrey and elsewhere. If we need to bring in new outside experts to help us with this, we will. And we will ensure there is a proper full consultation in due course with residents before any new Local or Town Plan is brought to this Council for discussion and final approval”.

Our Residents Riverside Coalition also applauds this timely intervention by the Council’s Leader. The needs and interests of residents appear to have been a low priority and given little if any consideration at all under the former regime when the plans for these ghastly tower blocks were being hatched. Reintroducing the principles of greater democratic accountability and proper due diligence are long overdue and his determination to do this is greatly welcomed.

Arora scheme controversy and anger grows

The controversy and anger among residents over the Arora hotel/apartment scheme for the Bridge Street Car Park site grows with every new revelation about its provenance and the reluctance of Spelthorne Council to be open and transparent about its agreement with the company. From what we currently know, almost every aspect of the project appears to defy any reasonable interpretation of democratic accountability and proper due diligence. The whole thing seems to have been developed in secret by Officers and just four privileged elected Councillors, then forced through without scrutiny and against protestations from other Cabinet members, signed and announced before most of the Council knew anything about it. From what we have been told, it also appears that the agreement could have been modified or abandoned at no cost to the Council up to the day it was signed. Our investigation continues.

Riverside Residents (Staines) Coalition – a Working Group of residents’ organisations serving the interests of some 600 residents on both sides of the river.

Thames Edge Management Ltd
Colnebridge Close Residents Association
Staines Village Residents and Traders Association
Friends of The Hythe
Waterside Place (Staines) Residents Management Ltd

FB: Riverside Residents Staines

Supported by: Staines Town Society
