



RIVERSIDE RESIDENTS NEWSLETTER

22 JANUARY 2021

ANOTHER STEP CLOSER TO HIGH-RISE HELL FOR STAINES?

Spelthorne Borough Council voted yesterday evening in favour of recommendations to approve budget funds to build tower-block developments up to 15 storeys high in Staines. This despite voting unanimously last month to call on the Council's Cabinet for a moratorium on all high-rise developments until a Task Group reviewing the so-called Staines Masterplan completes its work. The Cabinet meets on Monday next week to decide whether to impose a moratorium.

The proposal for the Council to approve significant budget allocations for several new developments attracted a spirited four-hour debate by Councillors, several referencing their concern about tower block proposals and that not enough had been done to consider the views of residents.

The Council voted yesterday evening to approve £46.45m for the redevelopment of Thameside House, South Street (146 flats in 15 storeys) and £77.7m for the Oast House and Kingston Road car park (330 flats in 15-storeys). £8m was approved to develop plans for a 15-storey development of the Tothill car park for 250 flats. All three sites are owned by the Council. Several high-rise developments on or close to the riverfront are in the Council's current Staines Masterplan that would turn Staines into a mini-Woking of tower-block shoe-box flats. A planning application for two tower blocks (13 and 15 storeys) on the Old Telephone Exchange and Masonic Hall site in Elmsleigh Road is expected to be considered by the Council's Planning Committee soon.

Council Leader John Boughtflower said no-one wanted to see Staines burdened by tower block developments. He also committed to the Cabinet creating a cross-party committee to review all projects before any money is spent on them. Several other councillors shared our Coalition's concern about what Cllr Veena Siva (Staines) referred to as the "high-rise hell" implicit in the proposals. Cllr Vivienne Leighton (Shepperton Town, and chair of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee) cautioned that "what we agree for a budget tonight is what we agree to deliver." Cllr Michele Gibson (Riverside and Laleham) said "the sums we allocate should relate to what residents want" and she put forward a spirited opposition to high-rise developments in the town. Cllr Joanne Sexton (Ashford North, a long-standing Staines resident) said of the high-rise proposals "diabolical without consulting residents in the first place!" Cllr Chris Bateson (Staines South and proposer of the moratorium motion at last month's Council meeting) said he couldn't support the kind of high-rise developments proposed. Several councillors expressed concerns about the impact of whether the tower blocks in the pipeline could be sustained by the town's infrastructure: roads, parking, schools, medical services, etc. Cllr Tom Fidler (Halliford and Sunbury West) said it was important there was "closer control" under a Councillor-controlled body to deliver something positive for the community.

"While allocating the capital funds does not necessarily mean the money will be spent, we are extremely concerned that putting the funding allocation into a budget is potentially a big step towards the proposed high-rise developments becoming a reality," says a spokesperson for the Riverside Residents Coalition. "Much was made during the debate that there would be cross-party control on whether specific developments are approved, regardless of budget allocations. What is really critical now is that the Cabinet decides on Monday to impose the moratorium called for by the full Council last month, and that the wording of the moratorium is explicit, unambiguous and binding."

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