



NEW COUNCIL LEADER BACKS ARORA INQUIRY Spelthorne's new administration will be different

Spelthorne Borough Council has new leadership and a new system of governance ... and the new Leader has pledged support for the independent inquiry into the Arora hotel and apartment development in the Staines Conservation Area.

At the Annual Council Meeting last Thursday the Conservative minority administration was replaced by a coalition of all the eight opposition political groups. An earlier vote (in March) to transfer most decision-making powers from the leader and cabinet members to nine committees, each with responsibility for specific aspects of running the borough, has also come into effect. The membership and leadership of these committees will now be negotiated by all the political groupings for a final decision on 10 June.

"All of this represents potentially momentous change for the Council, the borough and not least Staines," says a spokesperson for the Riverside Residents (Staines) Coalition. "It follows nearly fifty years of Conservative control of the Council and we will be following developments very closely. A priority for us, as part of our campaign against 'high-rise hell' in Staines, will be the independent inquiry into the 14-storey Arora development. The comprehensive and robust terms of reference already announced for this investigation must not be watered down, and to be thorough it mustn't be rushed. Final arrangements for the inquiry were due to be set and announced on Monday last week, but a source close to the outgoing leader tells us this was blocked by the Council's Chief Executive."

"The new administration will be very different and the transition to the far more democratic committee system, harnessing the full range of talents and views within the Council, will take time to bed in. We are very aware that our job is to represent the best interests of the communities that elected us, not political affiliations," says the Council's new Leader, Cllr Lawrence Nichols, co-author of a recent internal review of the Council's past investment policies and practices. "The new administration has a lot on its plate. But we are committed to making sure that the independent inquiry into the Arora hotel scheme, announced some time ago, is undertaken as soon as possible. It is in no-one's interest that this is allowed to drag on any longer than absolutely necessary."

"Residents voices will be heard," says the new Deputy Leader Jo Sexton who was also elected last month to serve as a Councillor on Surrey County Council. "The new Spelthorne administration will act in the interests of all; but I've lived in Staines all my life so I've a pretty good idea what works and what doesn't work in this town ... as well as its vital role within the borough."

Last week's Annual Council Meeting also elected Cllr Ian Harvey, the controversial former leader of the Council, to the largely ceremonial role of Mayor. Cllr Susan Doran was elected Deputy Mayor.

Riverside Residents (Staines) Coalition – a Working Group of six residents' organisations serving the interests of residents on both sides of the river. Supported by other residents' organisations across Staines and the Staines Town Society.

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