



RIVERSIDE RESIDENTS NEWSLETTER

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TOWER BLOCKS ARE COMING TO STAINES BUT DOES IT HAVE TO BE 'HIGH-RISE HELL'? Spelthorne Council must demand more of developers and of itself

Staines will be transformed over the next decade or so into a very different kind of town. Key decisions have already been taken and it is already beginning to happen. What is missing is a vision for the town beyond plans for a significant increase in its population and mostly tower blocks of flats mainly to house new residents.

But does it have to be the 'high-rise hell' residents currently fear, the town peppered with tower blocks even in sensitive locations, and architecture of new developments that is uninspiring or out of character? Right now, at the very beginning of the intended transformation of the town, the Council has a unique and time-limited opportunity to be imaginative and bold in setting out a clear vision for what Staines will look like and feel like for those who live and work in or visit the town. There must be clarity and a plan for the 'Staines of the future' to rival the other small/mid-size towns along the Thames. What will the town provide for the community in terms of social, recreational and cultural opportunities and activities, new schools, medical services and other critical infrastructure? Will it protect, enhance and give prominence to its various heritage assets and not least its prized riverfront? Will it respect the town's existing residential areas? Will it meet the actual local need for affordable housing and family homes, not just tower blocks of tiny flats mostly for incomers?

"A key aspect of this is whether the Council will set the highest standards for the design and materials of new developments to ensure the architecture, streetscape and skyline of tomorrow's Staines will be something the community can be proud of and that others will admire," says a spokesperson for the Riverside Residents (Staines) Coalition. "An inspired vision for Staines, and a determination to implement it, would help local residents adjust to and accept what is in store for them and the town. But for this to happen, the Council must be bold and clear about the standards it demands from developers in terms of quality of design and materials. It can't just go along with whatever developers decide to bring to the table because their interest is in what they can deliver for their shareholders not for the residents of Staines. The Council should make a start by setting a high benchmark on design, materials and sensitivity to location for developments it is entirely responsible for, ie those where it is the developer such as Thameside House."

"We hope the Council will engage seriously with the community in these important areas that will contribute so much to defining what the town will look and feel like," continued the spokesperson. "It won't be enough for the Council to present the community with a fait accompli and then pretend to have a consultation on it. The Council must meet its constitutional obligation 'to work in partnership with residents to make Spelthorne a place where people are fully engaged, and to encourage the active involvement of the community in the decisions that affect them'."

Riverside Residents (Staines) Coalition – a working group of seven 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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