



27 MAY 2022

CONSERVATIVES REGAIN COUNCIL LEADERSHIP ... so what will this mean for Staines residents? ...

A FINAL DAY OF HORSE-TRADING, intrigue and manoeuvrings ended with a single-vote win for the Conservatives in alliance with the United Spelthorne Group at yesterday evening's Annual General Meeting of Spelthorne Borough Council. This political collaboration puts Conservative Cllr John Boughtflower back as Council Leader, replacing Cllr Lawrence Nichols and his Progressive Alliance coalition which last May had brought to an end nearly 50 years of Conservative control. Cllr Ian Harvey, and the United Spelthorne Group he created following an acrimonious departure from the Conservative group two years ago, has been king-maker on both occasions and secured the Mayoralty for him for 2021/22.

Local pundits had said during yesterday that the contest was too close to call. Cllr Boughtflower's 19-18 win over the Progressive Alliance's Cllr Jo Sexton, despite one Conservative Councillor voting for her, may have owed much to a Green Councillor not showing up for the meeting and an Independent abstaining.

So, what can Staines residents expect from Cllr Boughtflower and his Conservative leadership? All eyes will be on three areas with which he is closely associated:

- * Will he support a review of the Local Plan as a follow-up to the letter earlier this week from Spelthorne's Conservative MP Kwasi Kwarteng? This confirmed that the Council can decide its own housing target so long as the Plan is 'sound', taking into account "local circumstances, constraints and the views of local people". The Plan as it stands, calling for a peppering of tower blocks of tiny flats across Staines to accommodate a 50 per cent increase in the town's population, was approved by the Council just a few days before Mr Kwarteng's letter arrived. Cllr Boughtflower was a vocal opponent of high-rise developments in Staines during his time as Leader in 2020/21 and subsequently, and has campaigned for a lower housing target for the borough.
- * Will he follow through on his recent proposal that the Council should create a design group with representation from residents as well as Councillors to advise on design aspects of major new developments like those planned for Staines?
- * Will he make public the report on the investigation he initiated when Leader into the provenance of the highly controversial proposed Arora hotel and apartment complex in the Staines Conservation Area and the contract for it signed by Cllr Harvey for the Council with the Arora Group?

At yesterday evening's Annual General Meeting, Cllr Sue Doran (Labour) was elected Mayor and Cllr Denise Saliagopoulos (Independent Spelthorne Group - ISG) Deputy Mayor. Cllr Tony Mitchell (Conservative) was elected Deputy Leader. Councillors elected to chair key Committees: Environment and Sustainability (Cllr Malcolm Beecher, Green), Economic Development (Cllr Colin Barnard, Conservative), Neighbourhood Services and Enforcement (Cllr Jo Sexton, ISG), Community Wellbeing and Housing (Cllr Maureen Attewell, Conservative), Planning (Cllr Richard Smith-Ainsley, ISG), Audit (Cllr Lawrence Nichols, Liberal Democrat).

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.

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