
RIVERSIDE RESIDENTS NEWSLETTER

6 August 2025

FACING UP TO THE INEVITABLE REALITIES WITH COMMON SENSE AND INTEGRITY ... to resolve a complexity of inherited problems ...

THE NEED TO SOLVE A HUGE PROBLEM IT DIDN'T CREATE has presented Spelthorne's current administration with a knotty dilemma of unenviable alternatives. The borough's financial crisis is deeper and more complex than just its eye-watering level of debt from its greatly devalued commercial property portfolio. It also inherited a significantly higher housing target to contribute to meeting the government's national goal. Overdeveloping Staines with tower blocks of flats looked like a good way to soak up a seriously disproportionate amount of the borough's new housing target and also to generate desperately needed income.

But this superficially attractive fix created two new intractable problems: 1) Increased flood risk from the basements and even foundations, however shallow or deep, of new tower blocks that block the flow of massive quantities of water through the thin gravel layer on which Staines is built. 2) The local housing need is for affordable family homes, not expensive tiny flats. The Council has been slow to recognise both. First, its refusal to date to guarantee it will do all that is possible to prevent new developments adding to groundwater flood risk for others could have generational costs and consequences. This is surely untenable if public accountability and integrity are to be maintained. Second, its resistance to date to building more affordable family homes elsewhere in the borough to spread the burden of the housing target. This owes much to the political difficulties it would create in some of the ten wards that have favoured a focus on the three wards that cover Staines. This too must be confronted and resolved.

"Recognition that the Council must now "reassess what's right for Staines" was a welcome recent declaration by Council Leader, Cllr Jo Sexton, when announcing the collapse of the Council's lease agreement for a massive hotel on the flood-risk 'hot spot' Bridge Street car park site in the town. This reassessment will surely now need to be part of an immediate review of the borough's Local Plan, whether or not the government Planning Inspector accepts the most recent draft", says a spokesperson for the Riverside Residents (Staines) Coalition. "We will now have to see how all this plays out, and keep our fingers crossed that common sense and integrity will carry the day."

Riverside Residents (Staines) Coalition – a working group of six residents' organisations serving the interests of residents on both sides of the river.
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