



COUNCIL CONFIRMS BIAS AGAINST STAINES TO MEET HOUSING TARGET

Dumping a disproportionate amount of the borough's housing target on Staines was a deliberate decision when drafting the Staines Masterplan, it emerged at a Council committee meeting yesterday evening. The Environment and Sustainability Committee was debating the Riverside Residents Coalition petition calling on the Council to prevent high-rise developments in the Conservation Area and overlooking the river, and to spread the housing target more evenly across the borough.

The petition had been signed by more than 3,500 residents. All but one member of the committee spoke during the debate, some several times, and the need to reflect the petition's demands in the new town plan was vigorously supported.

"There's no doubt residents and most Councillors don't want high-rise," says Cllr Ian Beardsmore, Chair of the Environment and Sustainability Committee. "The problem is where we are with developing the new borough Local Plan, and up to a few months ago we hadn't made anything like the progress on this that we should have. So in June we reconstituted the Task Group charged with developing the new Local Plan for the borough and created a new Task Group to focus on the Staines element of it. Believe me, these Groups understand the urgency of the task as well as the need to do a thorough job."

"Two other issues, in addition to how the housing target is allocated across the borough, will be front-and-centre as the anti-'high-rise hell' campaign builds," says a spokesperson for the Riverside Residents (Staines) Coalition. "The Council has yet to seize the opportunity to negotiate a lower housing target which Spelthorne's MP Kwasi Kwarteng publicly offered to help achieve a few months ago – let's hope this happens soon! Second, the Council Task Group working on the borough Local Plan was first created 18 months ago. One of its purposes was to revise the Staines Masterplan, among other things to address the opposition to high-rise. If that task had been given the focus, energy and urgency it demanded back then the new Local Plan would be at a stage where high-rise could probably be prevented now. Why didn't that happen?"

About 100 residents from across Staines demonstrated outside Spelthorne Borough Council offices yesterday evening as Councillors arrived for the Environment and Sustainability Committee meeting. The recent announcement by a developer of plans to demolish the Debenhams building to build 14-storey twin-towers of tiny flats has proved a particular flash-point. Council Deputy Leader Jo Sexton addressed the demonstrators and pledged her support for the campaign.

Riverside Residents (Staines) Coalition – a working group of six residents' organisations representing several hundred residents. Supported by other residents' organisations across Staines and the Staines Town Society.