

EXECUTIVE – 17 JUNE 2021

NOTICE OF MOTION – CLLR T AZIZ – REVIEW OF THE OPERATION OF WOKING BOROUGH COUNCIL’S PLANNING DEPARTMENT

SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT

Executive Summary

At its meeting on 8 April 2021, the Council referred the following Notice of Motion to the Executive.

Councillor T Aziz

“In recent times, Woking Borough Council’s Planning Department has recommended a number of mega-development planning applications despite having major failures against Woking policy.

While many of the recommendations given were subsequently voted down by the Planning Committee, it should not fall to them to uphold council policy. Decisions such as the football club, Goldsworth Road plans and numerous others which contravene planning policy have resulted in public calling into question the impartiality and independence of the department. It is also not clear what advice was given to developers and if they were given to believe that they had realistic chances of success despite major breaches. Clarity is needed on how these decisions were made by planning department and the extent of contact of those heading the department with developers.

Thus, this council calls for a review of the operation of the planning department of Woking Borough Council, including the steps taken by planning officers to come to decisions where plans which contravened Woking Planning Policy were recommended, advice given to developers and an independent investigation into correspondence and links between LPA and developers.”

Officer Comment

“Following the meeting of Council on 8 April 2021, officers met Councillor Aziz to discuss the intention of the Notice of Motion in detail and in particular the matters raised related to contacts between senior officers and developers and links between the Local Planning Authority and developers. Cllr Aziz confirmed to the Director of Planning that he had no evidence to demonstrate an inappropriate relationship between senior officers and developers.

As a result of the discussions, Councillor Aziz supports an amended form of wording which removes the reference to those officers who head the department but retains the request of the Motion for an independent investigation. The Executive is therefore asked to recommend to Council that the Notice of Motion as set out below, and as amended by Councillor Aziz, is not supported.”

Revised Motion:

Councillor T Aziz

“In recent times, Woking Borough Council’s Planning Department has recommended approval of a number of mega-development planning applications. While many of the recommendations given were subsequently voted down by the Planning Committee, it should not fall to them to uphold council policy. Decisions such as the football club, Goldsworth Road plans and numerous others which have been refused by the Planning Committee have resulted in the public calling into question the role of the planning department. It is also not clear what advice was given to developers and if they

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were given to believe that they had realistic chances of success despite the applications being refused. Clarity is needed on the role of the planning department.

Thus, this council calls for a review of the operation of the planning department of Woking Borough Council, including the steps taken by planning officers to come to recommendations where applications were refused by the Planning Committee, advice given to developers and an independent investigation into correspondence and whether there are any links between the LPA and developers.”

Background Papers: None.

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