

Spelthorne Local Plan 2022 - 2037

Examination in Public - Written Statement

Main Matter 6: Staines-upon-Thames (Policy SP1)



Spelthorne Takes Shape

5 May 2023

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Abbreviations:

BID – Business Improvement District
IDP – Infrastructure Delivery Plan
NPPF – National Planning Policy Framework (2021)
NPPG – National Planning Practice Guidance
SDF – Staines Development Framework
SLP – Spelthorne Local Plan
SPD – Supplementary Planning Document

Key Evidence:

Policy SP1 – Staines-upon-Thames
Retail and Town Centre Study Update (2018)
Annual Retail Survey
Open Space Assessment (2019)
Staines Development Framework SPD (to be adopted with the Spelthorne Local Plan)
Strategic Land Availability Assessment (2021)

Is the area strategy for Staines-Upon-Thames justified by appropriate available evidence, having regard to national guidance, local context?

- 1.1 Yes, the area strategy for Staines-upon-Thames in Policy SP1 is justified by appropriate available evidence, having regard to national guidance and local context.
- 1.2 The NPPF in paragraph 86 a) sets out that planning policies should 'define a network and hierarchy of town centres and promote their long-term vitality and viability'. In setting out the spatial strategy contained within the Local Plan, a hierarchy of centres has been included which seeks to ensure that development appropriate to the scale and character of the centres is directed to the most suitable areas. Staines-upon-Thames is Spelthorne's largest town centre and sits at the top of the hierarchy in retail terms so it features first in the spatial policies of the SLP. The two policies that follow also broadly recognise the respective positions of the settlements they address within the hierarchy.
- 1.3 Not all areas of the Borough feature within the spatial policies as those policies reflect the areas that will be the focus of development growth. For example, Sunbury Cross is included within Policy SP2 as there will be significant opportunities here in terms of housing allocations, retail, transport improvements and infrastructure. By contrast Lower Sunbury does not as it is a small village centre, mainly within a conservation area, and has limited further development potential so it does not warrant inclusion. Areas of the Borough not falling within the geographic boundaries of the spatial policies will be managed through other non-place specific policies in the SLP on the relevant development type.
- 1.4 The boundary for Policy SP1 is the Business Improvement District (BID), thereby providing clarity to those using the document. This corresponds with the boundary used to define the scope of the Staines Development Framework (SDF).
- 1.5 Staines is a sustainable, urban town centre with good transport links and significant opportunities for additional development. Spelthorne Borough Council owns large areas of the town, including the Elmsleigh Shopping Centre and adjacent car parks, so it has a major role to play in delivering future growth alongside a placemaking function. These opportunities include housing, community services, retail and infrastructure, which are reflected in the respective allocations. Many other sites have come forward from private landowners, including a major redevelopment at Two Rivers.

- 1.6 With the quantum of development expected to be delivered in Staines and at high densities, it was decided a masterplan approach should be considered and this concept was first consulted on at the initial Regulation 18 Issues & Options stage. This was later developed into the Staines Development Framework, which is discussed further in the response to the next question, and additional background information is available within Topic Paper 1: Spatial Strategy and Topic Paper 2: The Journey of our Local Plan (TOP001 & TOP002).
- 1.7 The NPPF says at Para. 125: ‘Area-based character assessments, design guides and codes and masterplans can be used to help ensure that land is used efficiently while also creating beautiful and sustainable places. Where there is an existing or anticipated shortage of land for meeting identified housing needs, it is especially important that planning policies and decisions avoid homes being built at low densities, and ensure that developments make optimal use of the potential of each site.’ The Council has taken this approach with Staines as an area where densities should be optimised as it is well served by public transport. The SDF will be a guidance tool to ensure higher densities can be achieved without detracting from the character and amenity of the town.
- 1.8 There have been representations made throughout the consultation stages of plan preparation that raise concern over the quantum of development anticipated in Staines. The Council recognises that some residents are resistant to change and that recent developments have been unpopular, visually and for their impact on traffic, parking and infrastructure. It has been explained that these developments have and will continue to come forward with or without an up to date Local Plan. Recent appeal decisions in the town have demonstrated this, where the lack of a 5-year housing land supply was cited as weighing in favour of granting permission. Staines has a large number of development sites that are capable of being delivered at high density and this is the reason a large proportion of our housing need will be met through the allocations in the town. Under national policy it would be unsound to resist granting permission in urban, sustainable locations where development is expected to take place. There are no overriding reasons to resist future growth in Staines. Evidence on transport, infrastructure and air quality demonstrates that future planned development can take place without significant adverse effects, subject to mitigation and provision of further services to support the growing population (TRN001-004A and INF001-002).
- 1.9 What could damage the future of Staines is for development to come forward in an unplanned manner, which is the current position. Adoption of the SLP, supported by the SDF, will provide a blueprint for how the town will grow over the life of the Plan and ensure the necessary infrastructure can be delivered with it.

- 1.10 The SLP strategy makes this point clear through Policy SP1 under the various sections. ‘Strategy’ sets out why Staines is a key focus for growth in the Borough. ‘Infrastructure’ deals with services, infrastructure and flood risk to ensure future development is delivered with appropriate support for a growing population, including existing residents and businesses. ‘Retail and Leisure’ establishes Staines at the top of the retail hierarchy in the Borough, encouraging further opportunities for shopping, leisure and culture whilst promoting mixed use schemes that include community facilities that bring additional footfall to the town. ‘Character’ sets out the protections for the conservation area and limitations on heights and densities in the more visually sensitive locations in the town, which is the overarching policy but supported by additional guidance in the SDF to set out where these locations are and what limits should apply.
- 1.11 There is then a further section on opportunities that the policy promotes around transport, tall buildings, leisure, the River Thames and climate change mitigation. These are also dealt with under other policies but are also relate directly to the placemaking principles for Staines.
- 1.12 After further consideration, a change to the text at Para. 6 of the policy is suggested to the Inspector. The submission version of the SLP states “New development in Staines is likely to be high density in suitable locations within the town centre to maximise efficient use of land but will be expected to achieve high quality design in accordance with the Framework”. The Council suggests the word ‘maximised’ be replaced with ‘optimised’ to better align with Para. 125 of the NPPF (plus other references in the NPPF to ‘optimise’ or ‘optimising’ at Paras. 107, 130 and 141).
- 1.13 During the Regulation 19 consultation, seven responses were received regarding Policy SP1. A summary of the comments made and the Officer responses can be found on pages 35 - 40 of the [Officer Responses to Representations and Suggested Changes for the Inspector](#) document. Many comments made in respect of Staines related to the overall spatial strategy for Spelthorne and were responded to under Policy ST2: Planning for the Borough.
- 1.14 Surrey County Council and Runnymede Borough Council (the neighbouring authority across the River Thames) both supported the policy and its approach, the hierarchy of the town, the development opportunities the policy will support, and the scope for further improvements to public transport links.
- 1.15 Concern was raised by individuals and community groups over the impact of new development on infrastructure, to which the response made reference to the Infrastructure Delivery Plan that demonstrates appropriate infrastructure will be delivered to support growth of the town.

- 1.16 Comments were made both in favour of and objecting to the 'zoning approach' at Policy SP1 (7). The response to the objection explains the need to grow Staines in a sustainable manner that respects existing character and more sensitive areas of the town, whilst not overall limiting growth opportunities. There was also objection to including an 'exception' to the zoning policy. Officers explain in response that a rigid approach to heights and densities would not result in a positive, sound policy as there will be justifiable reasons for deviation and this should be reflected.
- 1.17 The Environment Agency provided detailed comments on the wording of the policy, which are largely accepted by the Council and some of their recommendations are suggested as Main Modifications for the Inspector's consideration.
- 1.18 A further suggested modification is proposed as a result of the representation from Surrey Wildlife Trust in respect of opportunities for riverside improvements to support biodiversity.

What is the status of the Staines Development Framework and has it been or will it be subject to independent examination?

- 2.1 The Staines Development Framework (SDF) will be adopted as a supplementary planning document and has been through the relevant stages for SPD preparation, including public consultation. It does not require examination and is capable of being adopted upon adoption of the Local Plan with no further stages necessary. It has been included as a core document for the examination as it is intrinsically linked to the Local Plan so it will assist the Inspector and the examination.
- 2.2 The Local Plan sets out the policy bases and approach for the application of the SDF, consistent with the overall approach contained in PPG ID:61-002-20190315. The PPG advises that all plans should be as focused, concise and accessible as possible. PPG ID:61-008-20190315 sets out the role of SPD. They should build upon and provide more detailed advice or guidance on policies in an adopted local plan.
- 2.3 Policy SP1 sets out 11 policy paragraphs addressing Staines-upon-Thames. Amongst them are paragraphs 1, 6 and 7 which deal with the strategy (1) and character (6 and 7).
- 2.4 Paragraph 1 sets the overall policy basis noting that Staines will be a key focus for housing, employment and retail development. It provides for the more detailed guidance building upon that foundation to be provided by the Framework. Paragraphs 6 and 7 provide more policy requirements as to how that overall strategy will be carried forward whilst protecting the character of Staines.

- 2.5 Paragraph 6 makes provision for preservation and enhancement of Staines, whilst recognising that new development in suitable locations will likely be of high density. Such development will, nevertheless, be expected to achieve high quality design in accordance with the SDF (and consistent with national policy). Positive policy support is provided for proposals which protect and enhance the local character of the area.
- 2.6 Paragraph 7 makes provision for the SDF to contain guidance about more sensitive character areas, and for that to be done by the application of height and density limits. For the plan policy to be effective, paragraph 7 has a policy requirement of expected compliance with that more detailed guidance but leaves room for departure in cases which are robustly justified. The plan policy gives specific inclusionary examples of when such justification may arise.
- 2.7 The reasoned justification to Policy SP1 makes clear at paragraph 5.3 that the SDF will be adopted as an SPD *“to guide decision making, supporting the Local Plan and this policy”*.
- 2.8 Policy PS2, which addresses place shaping, makes further policy provision in relation to the SDF, stating that it will provide site specific guidance on the design of larger and tall buildings.
- 2.9 Accordingly, the role of the SDF is made clear both by the terms of Policies SP1 and PS2 themselves, which contain the policy approach to be taken forward, and by the reasoned justification.
- 2.10 It is against that backdrop that, given the detail and complexities of the planning position in Staines, the SPD provides the more detailed advice and guidance which builds upon the policy principles established by the Local Plan.
- 2.11 Consistent with the above approach, section 1 of the SDF contains an introduction. Paragraphs 1.1 and 1.3 identify the purpose of the document to provide (detailed) guidance. The Planning Policy Context is set out in paragraphs 1.5 – 1.9. Paragraphs 1.5 and 1.7 provide that:

“1.5 The Development Framework has been prepared to build upon and provide more detailed guidance on the emerging Spelthorne Local Plan’s policy for Staines-upon-Thames and is intended to be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), alongside the Local Plan, thereby forming part of the statutory planning policy framework for Spelthorne

1.7 Local Plan policy SP1 details the policy position for Staines-upon-Thames, recognising it as a key focus for housing, employment, and retail growth in the Borough. The Development Framework SPD will sit beneath and provide guidance to help implement policy SP1.”

- 2.12 The SDF goes on to set out Policy SP1 and the reasoned justification for that policy. Paragraphs 1.8 and 1.9 explain how the SDF ties in to relevant paragraphs of the NPPF.
- 2.13 Paragraph 1.11 continues to reinforce the point that the SPD provides guidance and cannot (and therefore does not) seek to introduce new planning policies but that, once adopted, it will function as an SPD and be a material planning consideration. In line with that approach, paragraph 1.20 sets out the structure of the SDF by reference to its Chapters, noting Chapters 5 and 6 as follows:

“Chapter 5: Development Framework Strategies – a review of the structure of the town, guidance on massing and density, movement and access and public realm priorities

Chapter 6: Design for Urban Living – principles to inform the development of new homes in the town centre.”

- 2.14 The detailed guidance contained in the 7 chapters of the SDF following the introduction all fall to be applied consistently in implementing the policy framework set out in Policies SP1 and PS2, and recited in the SDF itself. Accordingly, the SDF serves the purposes identified for supplemental planning documents in the PPG.

Does the area strategy for Staines-Upon-Thames show how it will contribute to the achievement of the SLP’s overall housing requirement of at least 9270 new homes/retail and leisure provision and its timescale for delivery within the plan period?

- 3.1 Yes. As set out above, development opportunities arise in Staines as the largest town centre in Spelthorne. This is recognised in Paragraph 1 of Policy SP1. A significant proportion of the urban housing supply will be delivered in Staines, which is understandable and sound given the availability of sites, the potential for higher density buildings and good public transport links.
- 3.2 Extensive work has been undertaken to identify sites which would be suitable and to ensure that this is done to minimise harmful changes to the character. In particular, the Council has responded to concern from local residents over the impact of new development on more visually sensitive character areas in the town, including the riverside and the Conservation Area. The policy includes a ‘zoning approach’, with detail provided within the SDF guidance, where heights and densities should be limited. The yields set out in the site allocations assume policy compliance for proposed developments falling within the zones to ensure the overall housing supply is deliverable. There is also further policy provision on tall buildings at Paragraph 9.

- 3.3 The status of Staines within the Borough’s retail and leisure hierarchy is established in Paragraph 4, which provides positive policy support for new development opportunities that contribute to growth of these sectors, with further detailed guidance set out in the SDF. The spatial policies for the district centres also reinforce and maintain Staines’ position at the top of the hierarchy. Some of the allocations include opportunities for mixed use, especially to the ground floor where footfall should be encouraged. Recognising a shift away from traditional high street retail, these opportunities include community uses. This has the added benefit of co-locating retail with community facilities so that residents and visitors can access shops and services as part of a single visit, reducing the need to travel. Furthermore, improvements to public transport, sustainable travel, open spaces and public realm delivered through this policy and with additional detail in the SDF enhances the placemaking benefits of the SLP.