



Drilling starts at fire station site

Ashford: Work begins to assess suitability as Lib Dems say Spelthorne is 'actively' helping SCC ahead of sale

by **Chris Caulfield**
chris.caulfield@trinitymirror.com

THE planned closure of fire stations in Staines and Sunbury gathered pace after Spelthorne Borough Council gave permission for its county partners to begin drilling work on the land.

The news comes ahead of a cabinet meeting on Tuesday June 24, when it is expected that the borough council will sign off the sale of land near the Fordbridge Road roundabout, in Ashford, to Surrey County Council.

This land is the site of a proposed new fire station and if it is found suitable, this will enable the county council to close the borough's two stations and replace them with a single full-time crew and one 'on-call' crew of volunteers at the new location.

The drilling work, which is being carried out to assess contamination levels, has been slammed by Councillor Ian Beardsmore, leader of the



Drilling work has been carried out near the Fordbridge Road roundabout in Ashford, to check for contamination and assess if the land would be suitable as the site of a new fire station.

Liberal Democrat group at the borough council, who says Spelthorne is 'actively' helping Surrey County Council ahead of the sale going through.

He said: "You are what you do, not what you say. As usual, Spelthorne Conservatives say what the public wants to hear then do the opposite behind their backs.

"They are actively helping Surrey with their plans to slash our fire cover. I am disgusted.

"There is no way Surrey can carry out preliminary work on this land without Spelthorne's permission."

His sentiments were shared by Alan Doyle, former chairman of the Lower Sunbury Residents' Association, who said: "The

drilling rig was on privately-owned land but Spelthorne would still have the final decision as to whether they give permission to build a fire station on green belt land."

The drilling is being carried as the county council assesses the site's contamination levels, with a spokesman confirming that excavation was being

carried out by consultants to assess whether the land was suitable.

Roberto Tambini, chief executive of Spelthorne Borough Council, said he understood how this could anger and upset residents, who may feel betrayed that the borough, which had previously said it opposed the closure of its fire stations, was now playing a

central role in their demise.

"The county council has asked our head of assets to carry out exploration drilling for two primary purposes," he said.

"One, to get a proper assessment of the site and two, to look in the ground for any soil contamination."

This is being done with a view to purchasing the land, with the price determined by the level of any decontamination work deemed necessary.

Mr Tambini added: "A report is being prepared for the cabinet meeting on June 24 and it is being recommended to be sold to the county council.

"I respect that people are upset.

"One thing I would say is we won't really be in any position to prevent a compulsory purchase and we won't be in a position to influence the county council's position."

Robert Watts, leader of Spelthorne Borough Council, added: "We are making the best use of the assets that we have in the borough."

INSIDE >



NEWS Fair row is branded 'hysterical' **5**



NEWS Support for 'change' to school uniform **8**



SPORT Swan Brown seeks pastures new **56**