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Herald & News

Land sold for new fire base

Spelthorne: Protesters' dismay as cabinet approves sale to county

by **Chris Caulfield**

chris.caulfield@trinitymirror.com

LAND purchased 15 years ago to stop Surrey cutting Spelthorne's fire coverage to one station has now been sold for that very purpose – showing the borough 'does not care about its residents', opponents have said.

Spelthorne Borough Council's cabinet approved the sale of grazing land it owns in Kingston Road, Ashford, to Surrey County Council for an undisclosed fee during a meeting on Tuesday evening.

The site has been marked by the county as the location for a new fire station in Spelthorne and will pave the way for the closure of

the Staines and Sunbury bases.

Speaking at the meeting was Councillor Frank Ayers, leader of the Spelthorne Independents Group, and ward member for Ashford Town.

He said: "The sale of this land to Surrey will only help to facilitate their plans to close the two fire stations and replace them with one station.

"No amount of income likely to be received is worth putting our residents at an increased risk to their persons or property.

"It is time the council, particularly the cabinet, started to listen to our residents' views and acted accordingly.

"If the cabinet members

care at all about our residents, then vote against the recommendation before you this evening.

"If you vote for the recommendation, then you are clearly demonstrating that you don't care about our residents' wellbeing, or their views, and clearly fully support the closure of the fire stations."

Ian Beardsmore, leader of the Liberal Democrat group, echoed Cllr Ayers' condemnation of the recommendations.

He said: "The proposal is 15 years old. The land was bought by Spelthorne in order to stop this happening.

"The only difference between then and now is we have more people, more

traffic and more congestion – more reason to protect our residents.

"It says the land is worth £4,000. How is this a useful contribution? Is there something we are not being told and why are we not being told?

"Surrey and Spelthorne are public bodies that carry out public duties with public money.

"It is a disgrace to say these details are secret."

The recommendation, to secure the unconditional sale of the freehold site to Surrey County Council, subject to valuation advice, was put to the Conservative cabinet by Cllr Nick Gething.

He said the speakers' comments were mere



Earmarked for closure: Sunbury fire station.

'opinion' without 'any statement of fact' and that the council was not in a position to disclose any price as no offer had been received.

He added: "If we purchased the land 15 years ago to fulfil a political agenda, I remember somebody said a week is a long time in politics – then 15 years is an aeon.

"The world has changed," adding, "It's not the position of this council to obstruct a lawfully elected council in its business."

Cllr Tim Evans, cabinet

member for finance, said it was easy for people to oppose the plan but they were 'not in a position to balance the books'.

Shepperton's Cllr Vivienne Leighton said that the county wanted one fire station in Spelthorne and that this deal would ensure it was in the best location.

Deputy leader Penny Forbes-Forsyth added: "This is about the sale of a piece of land, not what goes on it."

The cabinet voted unanimously to approve the sale.