

# Councillors fight over advancing local plan

## Royal Borough: BLP voted through to next stage as one councillor resigns

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**THE TEMPERATURE** was not the only thing that got tempers fraying on Monday night, as Royal Borough councillors voted 33-10 in favour of proceeding to the next stage of the Borough Local Plan (BLP).

Tensions boiled over as more than 200 residents squeezed into the Desborough Suite in Maidenhead Town Hall to watch councillors clash over the planning document – and one Conservative councillor resign the party whip.

The BLP is a planning blueprint which will run retrospectively from 2013 to 2032 and unites development policy for a range of areas, including housing, retail, employment and leisure – and councillors were asked to vote the plan through to the next part of the process, called Regulation 19.

The audience contained many frustrated residents who had signed a petition calling on councillors to postpone the Regulation 19 stage to allow for further consultation.

At the time of the meeting it had attracted more than 1,600 signatures.

Cllr Derek Wilson (Con, Oldfield), cabinet member for planning, presented the document to councillors. He said the plan could only move 'forwards not backwards' and warned if the Royal Borough did not have a plan, the Department of Local Government and Communities would step in.

He said the plan retained 81.5 per cent of existing greenbelt in the borough, and currently people could not get houses.

"I know this may be unpopular for some of our residents but this is happening in every borough up and down the country as the population increases.

"We must do something to address the lack of provision."

Cllr Simon Werner (Lib Dem, Pinkneys Green) drew applause from the crowd when he pointed out a lack of infrastructure in the plan and criticised the six-week consulta-

**SPEED READ:** A stormy and bad-tempered extraordinary council meeting saw the Borough Local Plan voted through to the next stage of its progress. Opponents said it was flawed and there had not been enough consultation while supporters warned it was the best way to provide homes and protect the greenbelt.



**CLASH:** Conservative Cllr MJ Saunders (left) and Liberal Democrat Cllr Simon Werner exchanged strong words over the BLP.

tion period which ran over Christmas.

He said: "I appeal to you – stop it and stop it now.

"Engage with your residents, get involved with the action groups, build an infrastructure plan that supports our building plans, and consult fully on the proposals."

Cllr Ross McWilliams (Con, Cox Green) spoke passionately about the need for affordable housing and said the local plan was a 'glorious way' to right a wrong. He said: "The current situation in London and the South-east is quite absurd, particularly in the Royal Borough where the average house price is £633,000.

"If we don't agree to this there will be no houses going forward in the pipeline on the scale we need to provide people like me and my generation the chance to buy somewhere."

In a surprise move, Cllr Derek Sharp, (Con, Furze Platt) broke ranks to speak out against the plan, saying the council needed to 'revisit the mechanics'.

"We were elected to serve our residents – the residents who live here and voted us in. We were not elected to serve persons who might want to live here in the future at the expense of those who already do," he said.

At the height of the meeting,

Cllr Claire Stretton (Ind Con, Boyn Hill) said 'enough is enough' and resigned to join the independent councillors, saying council leader Simon Dudley's 'autocratic style' had led her to resign.

She said: "Cllr Dudley has stated publicly it was a free vote, but he also told residents the cabinet must vote collectively, supporting his position presumably. He also made it quite clear which way he expects them to vote.

"We have seen colleagues who have taken an opposing view to the leader, in what should be a confidential and safe voting environment, be shouted at and dismissed from their cabinet positions.

"I can no longer support what has been going on since Cllr Dudley took over the leadership 13 months ago, nor am I prepared to any longer.

"I therefore say enough is enough, this has to stop and it is with deep regret I'm forced to resign from the Conservative Group."

Cllr Dee Quick (Con, Clewer East) offended the audience with her speech when she dismissed their views and said they were in the minority of residents – despite 27 parish councils and community groups signing an open letter to the leader urging the council to postpone the plan.

She said: "People don't go into local politics for personal wishes of power.

"It's great that there are so many residents here this evening, it is good when people wish to engage.

"Unfortunately you have to accept that you are possibly quite a small minority of residents in this borough."

Cllr Asghar Majeed (Con, Oldfield) spoke out against the plan, calling it a 'developers' charter'.

He said: "Our residents are not against building, not against affordable housing, not against young members like Cllr Ross getting their foot on the property ladder.

"They just want a BLP which will complement the RBWM and keep the character of our towns and villages. Let us not dismember this character from the towns and villages we know and love."

Cllr MJ Saunders was one of the last councillors to rattle the public – and his fellow councillors.

He said: "A lot of our neighbouring councils believe we should be taking more of their housing and thus exceed 100 per cent of our need.

"Apparently Cllr Werner believes these are nice people who we can have jolly nice chats with. What planet is he living on?"

Cllr Werner demanded an apology and urged the councillor to stop making personal attacks.

At 10pm, a vote was taken and councillors voted 33-10 in favour of the BLP proceeding to the next stage.

Councillors Malcolm Beer (Ind, Old Windsor) – Paul Brimacombe (Con, Cox Green) – Wisdom Da Costa (Ind, Clewer North), Charles Hollingsworth (Ind, Pinkneys Green), Asghar Majeed (Con, Furze Platt), Derek Sharp (Con, Furze Platt), Julian Sharpe (Con, Sunninghill and South Ascot), Claire Stretton (Ind Con, Boyn Hill), Leo Walters (Con, Bray) and Simon Werner (Lib Dem, Pinkneys Green) voted against the plan proceeding to the next stage.