

COUNTY COUNCIL

19 JULY 2017

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

QUESTION FROM MR MIKE CUNNINGHAM

I refer to the call by Prime Minister Theresa May for an early adoption of British Values, without, naturally, any strict interpretation of those woolly words. I also refer to the call by the new Ofsted Chief Inspector, Amanda Spielman for 'the promotion of so-called 'British values' (which) will be determined by individual inspectors, adding, "there isn't a prescribed translation of it, so schools will have to work it out".

I would ask the Council if they would agree with the Ofsted Chief Inspector when she backed her Inspectors' view that a private North London Jewish School for little girls aged between three and eight years old; should be marked down by Ofsted for declining to give pupils a full understanding of 'British values'; inclusive of an ultra-liberal ethos and strictures of the acceptability and practice of Homosexuality, Lesbianism and so-called Gender Identity; or would they agree with me that small girls and small boys, at County Durham schools with either a religious ethos or none, should be allowed to play, learn and prosper without some heavy-handed Ofsted Inspector ensuring that 'their' interpretation of those same 'British Values' are rammed into those children's' innocent and beautiful minds?

RESPONSE

Council would agree with, and fully accepts the guidance from the Department for Education (DfE) that the purpose of promoting British values in schools is to ensure young people leave school prepared for life in modern Britain.

QUESTION FROM ALDERMAN BEN ORD

Can I ask for a full report on the latest position regarding the "Festival Walk" Shopping Mall, in Spennymoor town centre. The flat roof, 1960's buildings are outdated and an eyesore, which spoils the whole appearance of the High Street, in Spennymoor. Whereas Spennymoor has become more attractive than most other towns in SW Durham, with improvements to the High Street Shops, the Lidl store and JD Weatherspoons, the public have been waiting years for "Festival Walk" to be demolished and replaced with the connection of the High Street with traditional shops, leaving spare space to the rear caused by the reduction in the number of shops. I would support extra FOC car parking, however, plans to move an existing store onto the site should only be considered if other new shops are included in the plans.

Due to online shopping and out of town shopping alternatives, these new shops may have to be phased in. This should remain the No.1 Regeneration for Spennymoor. A town with a growing population due to new house builds, which has produced extra Council Tax receipts. I would ask for "Festival Walk" to be given a bigger slice of the cake, either from the Regeneration budget or from the Council reserves.

RESPONSE

Can I thank Alderman Ord for his question, as he will be aware securing a sustainable future for Festival Walk has long been a priority for the Council, but with the changing patterns of shopping which we are seeing nationally, we are also clear that there needs to be strong developer and retailer support for any redevelopment to be successful.

Last year the Council took the decision to spend £600,000 to support the regeneration of Spennymoor Town Centre by agreeing to purchase and demolish a section of Festival Walk, before creating a new town centre car park.

This was a bold first step from the Council in the hope that it would help secure private sector investment. Since then, Hellens Group have confirmed that they will be the developer of the remainder of the site; they will demolish a large part of the existing shopping centre to create a site for a large new retail unit and then improve the rest of the site and refurbish and lease the remaining units. Aldi have confirmed they will occupy the new unit providing an improved store for the town and they will re-let their current Spennymoor store.

The latest position is that officers are continuing to work with the technical teams of all the parties involved and anticipate that an appropriate set of planning applications for the demolition, clearance and redevelopment of the site will be made in the very near future.

Both Hellens and Aldi are keen to engage with local residents to set out their plans for the site and we will continue to encourage them to link with the Area Action Partnership amongst others in promoting opportunities for consultation as part of the planning process.