

Statement

7 September 2018



Distinguishing between Mole Valley District Council's investment and regeneration strategies – a letter from Councillor Simon Edge, Cabinet Member for Prosperity

Councillor Simon Edge, Mole Valley District Council Cabinet Member for Prosperity said, "Contrary to Mr Ruck's letter in the 24th August issue of the Surrey Advertiser, the decision to invest carefully in commercial property is entirely driven by the need to generate income to support service delivery for the benefit of our residents. By 2020, further reductions in Government funding currently means that MVDC needs to become entirely self-funding. Councils across the country have been looking at ways of reducing their reliance on central Government funding. One such option - property investment - is, over the long-term, a secure and stable investment.

Mole Valley District Council (MVDC) approved its property investment strategy in 2016, and since then has purchased 5 properties which meet carefully considered criteria representing a total investment to date of £77.24 million including acquisition costs. Details of each investment is published on MVDC's website. Each property is independently valued by a firm of qualified and highly regarded specialist valuers, both on acquisition and subsequently to evidence the value stated in the financial accounts. The valuation for the last financial year did not record a fall in value of those properties.

Owning and operating commercial property is not new to MVDC, having owned such assets for many years. We have an experienced and qualified team who lead our property investment strategy, advised by experienced commercial property lawyers, building surveyors and other specialists as required.

MVDC's property investment strategy should not be confused with its regeneration strategy for Leatherhead Town centre, Transform Leatherhead. Transform Leatherhead led to the acquisition of the Swan Shopping Centre, and more recently 21-23 High Street to support the achievement of the objectives of revitalising the town centre. As Mr Ruck rightly highlights, all expenditure by MVDC uses public money (from various sources) and in implementing the Transform Leatherhead masterplan, the short, medium and long-term financial implications for MVDC are very carefully considered.

Let's not forget that MVDC has, through the Meadowbank stadium in the heart of the town, invested £7 million in Dorking. Not only has this investment resulted in a high quality community facility for the benefit of many of our residents, it has also increased employment in the town centre, and contributed to our visitor economy. This new activity in Dorking town centre provides an opportunity for our existing shops and businesses, cafes and restaurants. Those town centre businesses, through the establishment of the Dorking Town Partnership, are themselves also investing to support and promote Dorking town centre.

We are committed to investing in our parking service and the recent increase in parking charges is essential in order to maintain and improve our car parks. Our parking charges have been held at the very low rate of 60p for the initial hour since 2009 and after nine years, the time had come to bring them more into line with those applied in surrounding areas. With this increase, we will be able to undertake a

complete programme of upgrades in all the car parks we own including: upgrading pay and display machines and investing in electric vehicle infrastructure.

Having carefully reviewed parking charges in other areas, I am pleased to say that we remain competitive, continuing Mole Valley's long held position of providing some of the lowest car park charges in Surrey for residents and visitors.

-----ENDS-----

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