

BEXLEY LABOUR GROUP PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SIDCUP STORYTELLER CINEMA

Bexley Labour Group has serious concerns about this Conservative Council's lack of due diligence and ongoing monitoring of the previous contract for the cinema in Sidcup.

Despite concerns raised in 2024 about the previous operator's financial viability, there was a lack of urgency from the Council in addressing the company's history and the emerging failure of the contract. We were repeatedly assured that the Council was in dialogue with the operator and that the situation was being actively managed.

In early January 2025 it was confirmed that the Really Local Group (RLG) had gone into liquidation. On 21 January 2025, we were advised that "the Council will now move quickly to appoint a new operator for the longer term and will update further as soon as possible".

At the point of liquidation in January 2025, RLG owed £55,294 in unpaid rent, covering the period from May 2024 to January 2025. No further rental charges were levied during the additional period they continued to operate from January to July 2025.

In July 2025, the Council announced that the premises would close for refurbishment, with a planned reopening in September.

At Public Cabinet in November 2025, the Cabinet Member for Place Shaping wildly attempted to apportion some of the blame for this whole debacle on the Hollywood actors strike that had occurred in 2023.

The venue eventually reopened fully on 2 January 2026 under the new tenure of Castle Cinema, following a soft launch in December.

Cllr Anna Day, Shadow Cabinet member for Places said:

"Despite voicing our concerns about the sustainability of the contract in 2024 when it became evident that there was a problem, we were assured that the Council was in dialogue with the Really Local Group and managing the contract effectively."

This Conservative council's failure to manage this contract properly from the outset, followed by a year-long delay in installing a new service provider, has cost the Bexley council taxpayers thousands of pounds in lost rental income."

Cllr Stefano Borella, Leader of Bexley Labour Group said:

"This disaster is embarrassing for Bexley Conservatives who have been promoting their pet project saying that this has been such a success, when the reality is quite different, in addition their failure to not build any affordable housing by the council's own development arm Bexley Co on the old Sidcup library site on Hadlow Road, which is a disgrace .

Due to a lack of due diligence in the selection of the previous operator, the Council has lost more than £100,000 in revenue, in addition to significant officer time - money that could have been used to mitigate the decision to reduce council tax support for the most vulnerable residents in Bexley."

In October we were advised that a thorough due diligence process had been carried out for the new provider. We welcome the re-opening of the cinema on 2 January 2025 under the new tenure of Castle Cinema and wish the team every success

Film times and ticket booking are available at www.castlesidcup.com and Castle Sidcup opening times are from 9:30am – 11pm

ENDS

Notes to editors

Please contact Cllr. Stefano Borella (Bexley Labour Group Leader.