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Is Woking being woke?

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Flying the Palestinian flag outside civic buildings “does nothing to help those suffering in the Middle East and risks deepening divisions here at home” said the leader of the Conservative opposition group at West Surrey Council.

The flag has been displayed outside Woking Borough Council to mark Palestine National Day on November 15.

The authority said that this was done as an expression of solidarity, but Councillor Jane Austin said that residents expressed anger at the gesture and labelled it as virtue signalling.

She has called on the new West Surrey Council to keep its sites “free from political statements on divisive international issues.”

Cllr Austin said: “I head from many residents over the weekend who were deeply concerned about Woking Borough Council’s decision to fly the Palestine flag.”

She added: “We all feel enormous sympathy for innocent people caught up in war and conflict, wherever they are in the world.

“Council buildings belong to the whole community, and councillors have a responsibility to consider how decisions like this affect the people they represent.

“In my view, this decision does nothing to help those suffering in the Middle East and risks deepening divisions here at home at a time when antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred are both serious concerns.”

“Woking Borough Council faces extraordinary financial challenges in its final few months.

“Residents rightly expect it to bring communities together and focus on the everyday business of local government, from collecting the bins to making timely planning decisions.”

Cllr Ann-Marie Barker, leader of Woking Borough Council is also a member of the West Surrey executive – which will take over services from April 2027.

Woking, she said, was a diverse borough, and the council was proud to support all members of its community, regardless of their faith, creed or background.

Cllr Barker said: “Throughout the year, we recognise and mark significant occasions, including Holocaust Memorial Day, Remembrance Sunday and other moments of remembrance, reflection and solidarity. We will continue to stand by those values and by our commitment to supporting and respecting all communities.

She added: “We stand by our decision to fly the Palestinian flag to mark Palestine National Day on November 15 as an expression of solidarity with those suffering, and we stand equally firmly by our commitment to a Woking in which all communities are treated with dignity and respect.”

The leader of West Surrey Council, Councillor Paul Follows has been approached for comment.

Chris Caulfield Local Democracy Reporter

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Woking Borough Council flew the Palestine flag (image WBC/Facebook)

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