



REVIEW OF GUILDFORD TOWN CENTRE MASTERPLAN

Representation by the Guildford Society
January 2012

Allies and Morrison
Urban Practitioners



Cover picture Guildford clock
Inside cover River Wey

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Appendix 1: Workshop with Guildford Society

Appendix 2: Comments from the Planning Group of the Guildford Society



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1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to provide a coherent response to the draft Guildford Town Centre Masterplan as prepared by Guildford Borough Council in December 2011.

The Guildford Society is grateful for the opportunity to comment on the Council's draft document and would be delighted to meet with officers and Members to discuss our feedback.

In order to facilitate a swift response to the consultation draft, the Society has appointed Allies and Morrison Urban Practitioners (AMUP), a practice of masterplanners with skills in planning, urban design and architecture.

AMUP has reviewed the individual comments of members of the Society and our detailed planning and transport group responses with a view to distilling a single response to the Council. This process also included a stakeholder workshop, attended by more than 80 people from a range of societies, amenity, and other stakeholder groups which has assisted the Society in prioritising key themes and recommendations for consideration by the Council in future drafts of the document.

The Guildford Society would like to take this opportunity to promote a broader and more open approach to the preparation of the Masterplan in the spirit of the emerging Localism Act which seeks to encourage greater involvement of community groups. The Act will make provision for the preparation of Neighbourhood Plans and the Society feels strongly that there should be a closer and more open and transparent relationship with the Council in preparing the Masterplan.

It is considered that a robust masterplan would have the added benefit of substantially increasing the value of property assets within the town centre, and one of the roles of a masterplan is to provide clarity and certainty and to be part of the development dynamic.

Our response has been structured as follows:

- Our strategic response to the draft masterplan including a recommended series of actions to be taken forward through the Masterplan and associated strategies (section 2);
- An initial appreciation of Guildford as a place with a view to identifying some of the key principles which should form the cornerstones of an ambitious vision and masterplan for the town (section 3); and
- A precis of our detailed comments on the masterplan in relation to process, status and content (section 4).

This main response is supported by the following appendices:

- A write-up of the Guildford Society Town Centre Masterplan workshop which informed this response on Tuesday 10 January 2012 (Appendix 1); and
- Comments from the Planning Group of the Guildford Society (Appendix 2).



2. STRATEGIC RESPONSE TO THE GUILDFORD TOWN CENTRE MASTERPLAN

Guildford - position and issues

Guildford is the principal town of one of the most prosperous counties in England. Set within a natural gap where the River Wey cuts through the North Downs the town has remarkable topography. Open countryside can be viewed from High Street and the centre of the town can be reached easily on foot or bicycle along the banks of River Wey and its Navigation.

Guildford's strategic position has always made it the centre for transport links. The narrow valley which the town straddles is a major north-south corridor for water, rail and road traffic. And it is from this unresolved conflict between these transport corridors and the civic and commercial imperatives of a functional, attractive town centre that many of Guildford's problems stem.

Apart from its historic fabric and natural environment, Guildford enjoys other considerable advantages. First, it sits within a large and wealthy natural hinterland. It has few serious retail competitors. Reading and Bluewater are over an hour's drive away and Farnham, Woking, Basingstoke and Aldershot are considerably smaller. The nearest comparable shopping centre is Kingston. Guildford's competitive advantage is the quality of the town centre, its walking environment and the depth and variety of its shopping, services and cafe environment.

A second significant advantage is the compactness of the town centre. It is not only easy to walk around the main shopping areas, but also to walk to nearby residential neighbourhoods, through a network of attractive lanes, alleyways and courtyards.

With its proximity to London (Waterloo 40 minutes) its University, schools and science park, Guildford is an attractive location for businesses, particularly in the technology, research and development and HQ office markets that cluster to the west and south-west of London on the M25, M3 and M4 corridors.

And yet there are significant problems here that are surprising given the inherent advantages of the town.

First there is the severance and dislocation caused by the traffic and its associated infrastructure. This is most apparent in the gyratory which separates the town centre from the railway station and the river. Traffic severance is also apparent elsewhere. The over dominance of the car in the town centre has resulted in a fracturing of the urban fabric, for example around North Street and the separation of the High Street from the area around the theatres, the river and the castle. The lack of a co-ordinated intermodal traffic strategy is also evidenced in the inadequacy of the bus station. Guildford, as a transport interchange does not appear to be working as effectively as it might. Inappropriately sited surface car parks on key sites along the River Wey complete the impression that the balance between pedestrian and motor vehicle needs to be addressed.

The second significant issue is around the quality of the public realm and the built environment. Although the town centre is compact and has a fine grain network of pedestrian routes, wayfinding is difficult. This is not a problem of the signage (which could be improved), rather a problem of how one reads the urban fabric and navigates the town centre. The route from the railway station to the High Street is particularly uncomfortable. The river which should be a major asset is all but invisible. Guildford requires a coherent urban design strategy to unite its separate elements into a town centre that is more than the sum of its parts.

Figure 1 Guildford in a regional context

The final major issue is around the design quality. Recent developments in the town centre, over the past 25 years, are almost without exception, mediocre. They are indistinguishable from the architecture in many other places in the South-east that lack the historical importance of Guildford. This is mirrored by the poor overall quality of the public realm, its disparate materials, haphazard design and poor upkeep. In short Guildford has not aspired to the level of design quality that it might have expected and a consequence of its real economic competitiveness is likely to be compromised.

A strategy not a Masterplan

Any masterplan requires three essential criteria to be in place if it is to be successful:

1. Control of the land.
2. Certainty of funding.
3. Long term legislative framework.

The first two of these are rarely in place and in consequence many public sector led masterplanning exercises fail.

Tactical masterplans, in contrast, focus on what can be achieved, and contain a clear implementation strategy, including phases and temporary uses. What is proposed below is an outline framework for action for Guildford to allow it to address some of the issues identified above.

A robust masterplan is based on thorough research and a series of baseline reports which typically cover property and commercial issues, landscape and townscape, transport and public realm and sustainability. The existing masterplan does not appear to be based on the type of research one would normally associate with a masterplan for a town centre of Guildford's importance and also for the duration of the plan period.

Right View across Guildford towards the cathedral

The proposition

There is an overriding imperative to address the traffic problems of the town centre. A thorough traffic study is required in order to look at mid to long term solutions to:

- The levels of through traffic.
- Reductions in traffic entering the town centre.
- Vehicle speeds.
- Existing road infrastructure and geometries.
- Parking, including park and ride.
- Interchange between modes of public transport and the requirements and location of the bus station in relation to the railway station.

In parallel with this a series of smaller scale design studies and proposals should be developed. The sequencing is flexible and can, to an extent, be opportunistic depending on available funding. Each proposition would require a detailed study and a carefully phased implementation plan.



A Twelve Point Action Plan

1. A well researched masterplan

Prepare a very robust and thoroughly researched masterplan with extensive stakeholder input and consultation.

2. Detailed modelling

Undertake thorough and extensive traffic studies and transport modelling and research about the future role of Guildford's economy and its role in the region and beyond.

3. Connect the High Street to the River.

Redesign the end of the High Street and introduce a shared surface crossing to link it to the River Bridge.

4. Improve pedestrian routes.

Map and carry out small scale improvements to the network of lanes, alleyways and courtyards. Improve signage. Promote small scale commercial activities on backland sites. Remove impediments and barriers

5. Insist on good design.

Set up a Guildford design review panel (along the CABE model) to provide effective design advice on all new developments. Appoint a "Design Champion" in the council.

6. Improve pavements.

Produce a simple and robust streetscape design manual (base on TfL or English Heritage models). Produce a "surfaces plan" and implementation programme based on skewing routine maintenance programmes over a 10 year period. Audit and rationalise street furniture and reduce unnecessary signage, guard rails, etc. Agree all streetscape proposals through the design panel.

7. Develop new public spaces.

Remove surface car parking from key sites along the River Wey.

- Site 1 – soft landscape.

- Site 2 – hard landscape to form a civic square with some small scale leisure developments (cafes/restaurants).
- Site 3 – Theatre Square, open up River and landscape for performance/event space with some small scale infill development.

8. Improve wayfinding.

Produce a detailed urban design study to "knit" the town centre together through a series of small scale, interventions (ref Bankside Urban Forest). Design simple interventions to link North Street and The Castle more closely to the High Street. Calm traffic at key points on the gyratory. Address north-south routes along the River.

9. Develop a network of green spaces

Overlaid with improved cycling/walkway routes along the River Wey. Extend the green grid to link back into residential areas.

10. Promote infill development on key sites.

Seek small scale development opportunities, particularly around North Street and in the courtyard areas at the back of the High Street, Promote smaller, specialist, independent retailers. The range of uses on the town centre should be extensive and should include a mix of specialist and other retail uses, office, tourism and visitor attractions, the evening economy, cultural and residential uses. Small scale high quality retailing is particular suited to Guildford.

11. Promote residential development in the town centre.

Consider key town centre sites for housing. Promote mid density residential development close to the station and on riverside sites to the north of the town centre. Consider the potential for student housing.

12. Choreograph the town.

Develop a programme of temporary and seasonal events to utilise underused sites in the town centre including markets, kiosks, stalls, events, installation art and festivals. Open up small scale site opportunities for temporary use, aimed at local entrepreneurs.

3. CORNERSTONES OF THE MASTERPLAN

The Masterplan puts forward an improvement strategy for the town centre comprising four strands – development, environmental improvement, town centre management and sustainable living. The focus and emphasis is placed squarely on the development strand with 25 sites being identified across the town centre.

The Guildford Society believe that too much emphasis has been placed on the redevelopment of key sites – many of them Council owned – and that the Masterplan fails to clearly articulate a high level overarching vision for the town centre which seeks to address directly the town's key opportunities. Giving serious consideration to the opportunities there might be to improve the town's relationship with the River Wey corridor and create better pedestrian links between the commercial core of the town and the station are both high level objectives that transcend the benefits of redeveloping any individual site. All the sites already identified in the Masterplan have an important role in delivering these primary objectives – either directly or indirectly. But it is the lack of higher level primary objectives which undermines the Masterplan and this is the Society's principal concern.

Guildford is already a successful town and its strengths and assets are well documented. However, the town centre is under increasing pressure from competing centres and retail locations. As a regional shopping centre, the town competes with other large towns and cities in the south east including London.

It is the quality of the experience of using the town that the Society believes will determine its long term success. By focussing on improving the quality of the experience of using Guildford, an improved town centre will benefit existing residents, businesses and visitors alike.

We are concerned that the Masterplan, as currently conceived, lacks focus and a sense of priority. The four strands of the improvement strategy are generic and lack any reference to Guildford as a place. The River Wey is Guildford's principal environmental asset. The relationship between the town centre and the river corridor has been eroding for many years. This relationship is at its weakest in the very heart of the town centre. We believe the Masterplan should confirm that improving the relationship between the town and the river is its primary objective. Other issues such as improving the links to the railway station, giving more priority to pedestrian as well as more strategic objectives including the strengthening of the town's position in the retail hierarchy are all addressed by this primary objective.

Key issues to be addressed

There are a number of key issues which we feel need to be addressed in progressing a masterplan for Guildford, as follows:

1. Strategic context

The town of Guildford has many different areas of activity and investment. The University and the Research Park have attracted significant levels of inward investment in recent times that has played a very significant role in strengthening and broadening the town's economic base. The Society believes the Masterplan is too focussed on the retail economy and would benefit from taking a wider perspective. In particular, we believe the river corridor north of the town centre offers a range of strategic opportunities for delivering improvements to the river environment and delivering housing growth that could help meet local priority housing needs.

Figure 2 highlights the key nodes of investment and commercial activity which underpin the town's economy. The core retail area of the town centre is just one of these areas. Other key nodes have tended to develop along the A3 corridor and include the University and its affiliated Research Park; the Hospital which is a major employer in the town; Slyfield Industrial Estate for which an AAP is currently being prepared; and the office and retail parks located immediately south of the A3 corridor. As the terrain levels out north of the core town centre, the river and rail corridors create new opportunities for investment (see Figure 3). Low grade employment uses currently occupy a string of attractive riverside sites north of the town centre. The uplift in values released from their redevelopment for housing and other higher value uses could make a significant contribution to delivering the core objectives of improving the quality of, and access to, the river corridor in the town centre.

2. Open masterplanning

We welcome the preparation of the Guildford Masterplan, but we feel the emergence of the localism agenda presents an opportunity for the Council, the Guildford Society and other key stakeholders in the town to work much more closely together in articulating a shared vision for the town.

3. Experiencing Guildford

The quality of the experience of visiting and using Guildford is central to its continued success. The masterplan should seek to deliver ambitious improvements to the town centre environment that will attract ongoing investment.

4. The River Wey

Guildford's primary environmental asset should be the central thread along which all proposals are connected. The Bridge Street Gyratory has created an environment that gives priority to vehicular traffic to the detriment of the town centre environment and experience. The gyratory may not even be fulfilling its role as a traffic distributor.

5. A cycle of investment

The masterplan should act to attract on-going investment to secure the well-being of the town.

1. Historic town centre
2. University of Surrey
3. Surrey Research Park
4. Royal Surrey County Hospital
5. Slyfield Industrial Estate
6. Cathedral Hill Office Park
7. Ladymead Retail Park

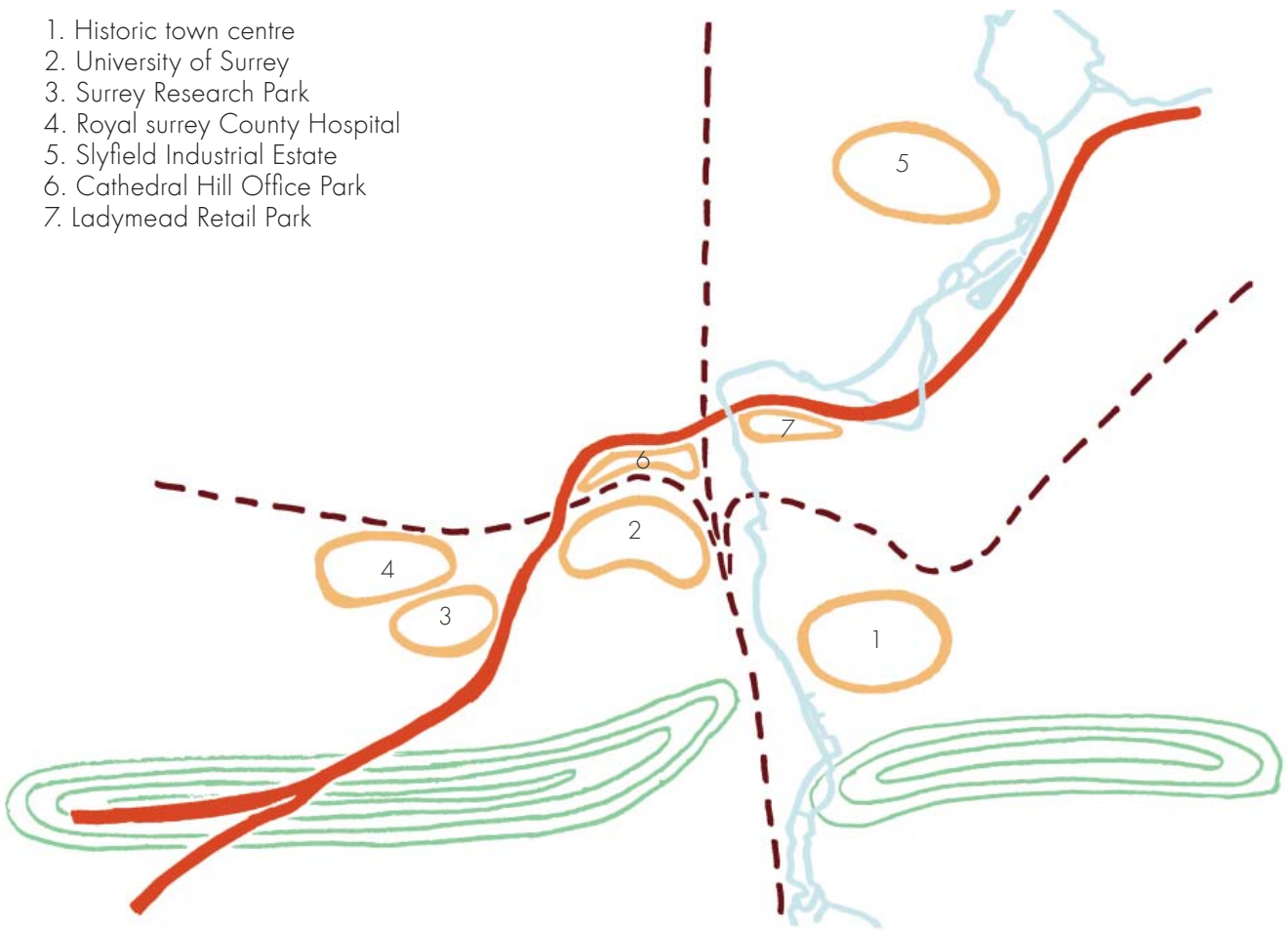


Figure 2 Key nodes of investment and commercial activity

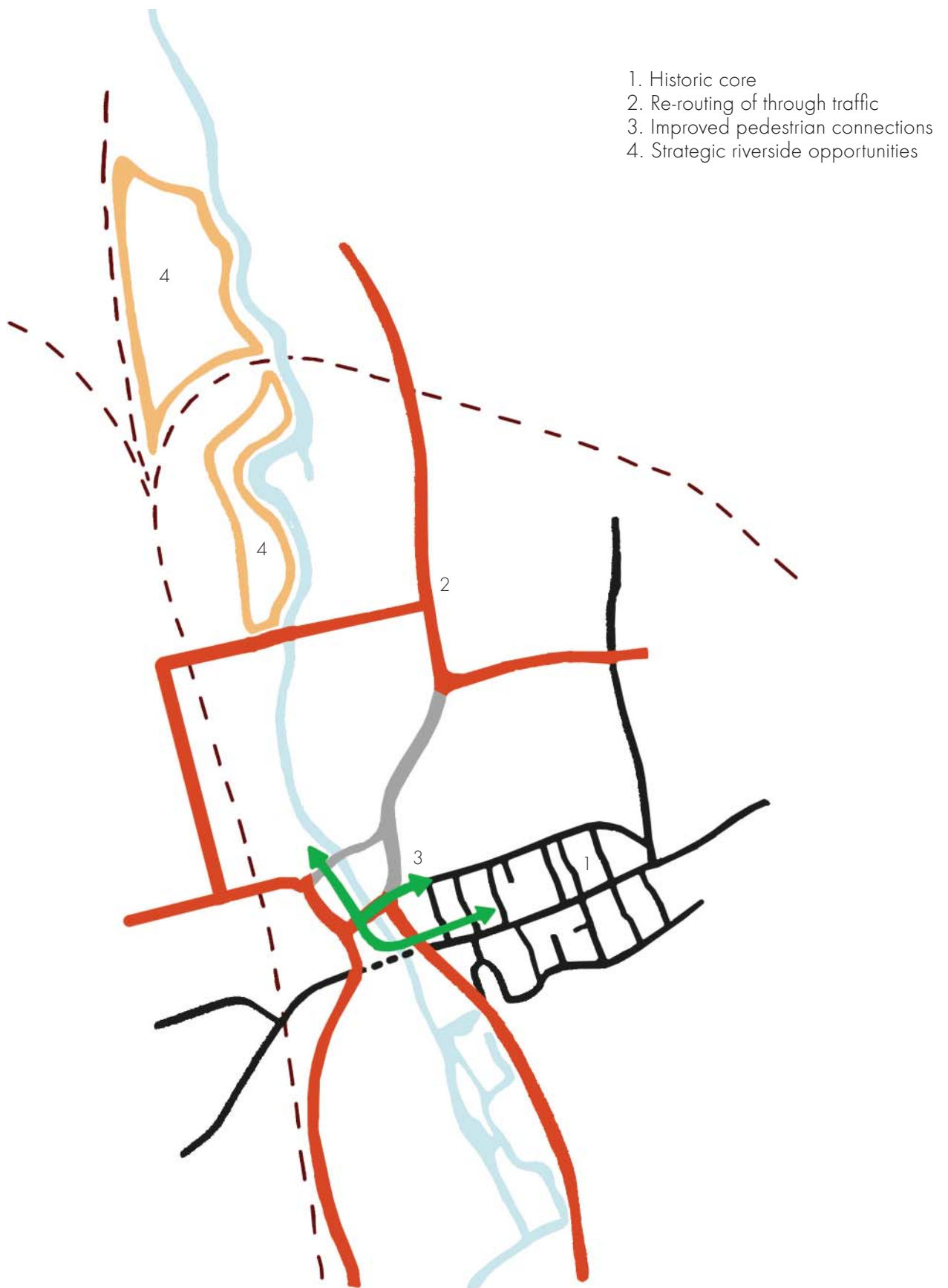


Figure 3 Town centre opportunities

Guildford town centre concept plan

Figure 4 seeks to identify the priority issues and opportunities that the Guildford Society believes the Masterplan should seek to address:

1. High Street – is the historic core of the town centre and, despite its constraints given its topography and sensitive historic fabric; a High Street address remains the most prestigious retail address in the town. High Street is the town's principal destination - pedestrian connections to this historic route are therefore key to the success of the High Street. High Street is truncated by the A281 Millbrook which presents a major barrier between the town centre and the river corridor. As a result, High Street bridge is an underused piece of town centre infrastructure.

2. North Street – is less sensitive, particular on the north side. However the series of lanes and alleys connecting North Street with High Street is one of the key attractions of the town and provide floorspace best suited to smaller independent traders. There is a major opportunity to expand the quality of the range of shops through the expansion of the Friary Shopping Centre and the Society welcomes and supports this opportunity. However, this retail expansion should not be the overriding objective of the Masterplan.

3. The river corridor – is the town's largest open space. Its open aspect to the south narrows in the more urbanised approach to the town. North of Millmead the river presents a series of opportunities, some major and some minor, to improved spaces and places – linked by a continuous riverside walk/path.

4. Improving links towards the station - extending High Street south across Millbrook and over the bridge would provide a radically improved pedestrian experience, would far better connect the river to the town centre, would raise the profile of the former Farnham Road bus station car park site and would help improve the linkages between the town centre and the station.



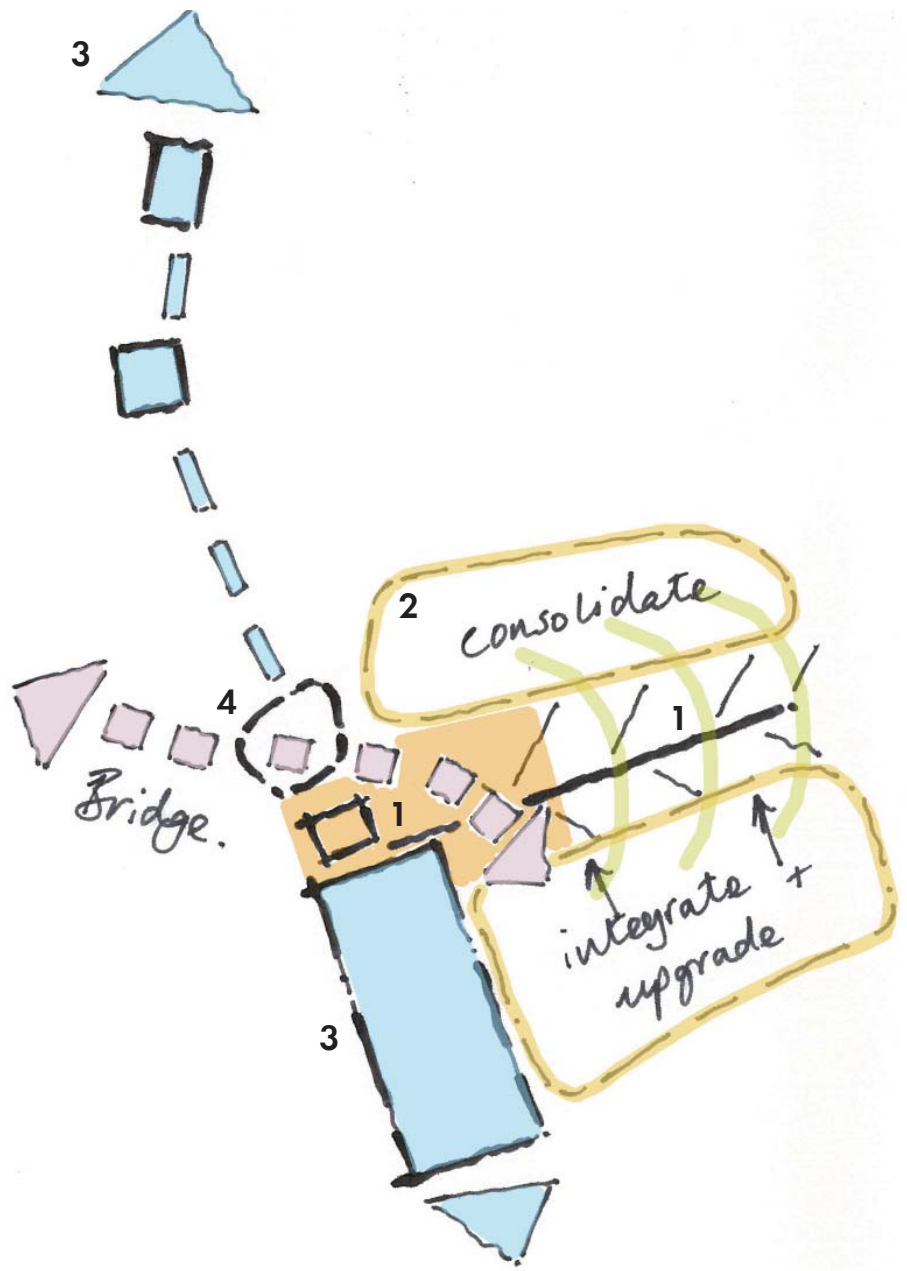


Figure 4 Town centre concept plan

Thoughts on some of the key moves

Placing greatest priority on improving access to and the quality of the river corridor, the following sequence of plans outline some initial thoughts and ideas. The costs and benefits of these interventions should be tested through the preparation of the masterplan.

Note

We acknowledge that these ideas will be difficult to implement. However, we feel it is this central ambition that is lacking in the draft document. This we feel, is one of the draft Masterplan's principal weaknesses - in the longer term there must be a means to remove traffic from Onslow Street.



A. Historic principles - much of 18th Century Guildford remains intact, with key surviving axis including High Street and North Street. The relationship between the town centre and the river corridor is more direct and accessible.



B. Guildford today – like every other historic town, there has been a need for the town to provide infrastructure to ensure the town is connected. Accommodating the exponential growth in vehicular traffic has resulted in greater priority and more space being allocated to roads. This has eroded the relationship between the town and the river and resulted in High Street and North Street being severed from the station gateway by a highway gyratory.

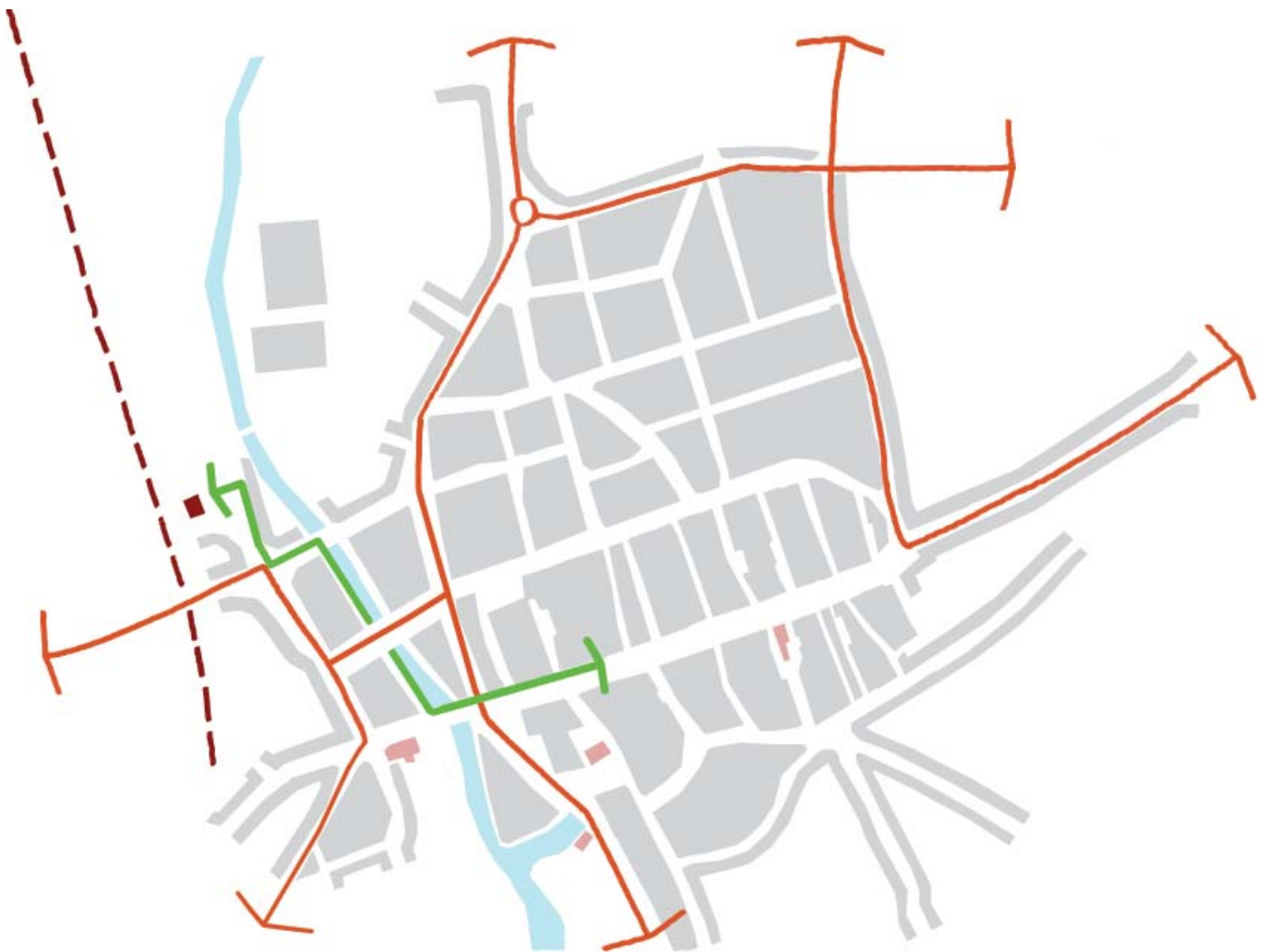
C. Can the gyratory be unpicked? The gyratory denies the town centre a significant stretch of its riverfront. This is a major strategic issue which the masterplan fails to consider, investigate or question. Radical improvements to the pedestrian environment have been delivered in higher profile and, on the face of it, more constrained environments. Oxford Circus, the epicentre of London's retail environment, now benefits from a new X style pedestrian crossing arrangement which gives far greater priority to pedestrians than ever before. Exhibition Road provides access to some of London's largest and highest profile cultural attractions. The road is being transformed into an entirely shared space. There are a number of approaches that should be considered in Guildford - some more pragmatic, some more ambitious:



i. Downgrade Bridge Street - a far stronger connection between the town centre and the river corridor is enabled through the downgrading of Bridge Street and the rerouting of all through traffic over a 2-way Friary Bridge. This would liberate the Electric Theatre site and its outside space and facilitate a new high quality pedestrian route to the station.



ii. Upgrade High Street bridge - the role of High Street bridge could be considered in delivering a radically improved river corridor. Whilst the concept plan highlights the opportunity to pull High Street across Millbrook in order to deliver a much improved connection between High Street and the river corridor, in the longer term, the gyratory could be completely unpicked through the reuse and upgrading / widening of the High Street bridge.



iii. Reinststate Friary Street - The Friary Street retail block at the southern end of High Street and North Street is not identified as an opportunity site. However, this development creates a very hostile car-based environment on its riverside/Millbrook edge. Reinstating Friary Street as part of the local street network would create the opportunity to present positive edges to the river in this lost part of the town centre.



iv. New station link road - In the longer term, the Guildford Society is aware of the major opportunity to redevelop the station and its environs and the aspirations that Network Rail/Keir partnership have in this regard. As with all other town centre development sites, the delivery of this major development opportunity should be considered in the context of delivering major improvements to the town centre environment. The feasibility of a new link road that crosses both the river and the railway thereby removing the need for the gyratory should be considered in some detail. Whilst there would be many challenges to such an approach, the benefits should carefully be considered in view of the contribution such an investment could make in improving the town's position in the retail hierarchy.

4. PRECIS OF COMMENTS ON MASTERPLAN

There is a major concern that, as currently drafted, the Masterplan does not set an adequate context for the future planning of Guildford town centre. As set out in chapters 2 and 3 above, the Guildford Society strongly recommends that the Masterplan is re-cast to articulate a clearer and more aspirational vision for Guildford. This vision should be supported by a clear identification of themes, objectives, guidance and interventions which capture the ambition for the area. Fundamentally, this requires far greater emphasis on the area's unique character in relation to the historic environment, townscape assets, landscape setting, views and the overall urban design context. There should be detailed research about Guildford's future economic and social role - what does the town centre need to enhance its role.

Process

The Guildford Society acknowledges the engagement and consultation which has been undertaken to date. In addition to consultation exercises associated with the unadopted Area Action Plan for Guildford, the Council arranged a Guildford Masterplan Public Engagement Day on 23rd June 2011.

There is, however, a general concern that local people, stakeholders and Public Amenities Groups such as the Guildford Society have not had an adequate opportunity to feed into the evolution of the Masterplan in a meaningful way. The current consultation process is a case in point, with many stakeholder groups finding it challenging to mobilise and prepare coherent representations to the draft during a consultation period which has straddled the Christmas and New Year's break.

More widely, the Guildford Society would like to take this opportunity to promote a broader and more open approach to the preparation of the Masterplan in the spirit of the emerging Localism Act which seeks to encourage greater involvement of community groups. The Act will make provision for the preparation

of Neighbourhood Plans and the Society feels strongly that there should be a closer and more open and transparent relationship with the Council in preparing the Masterplan.

Status and relationship with the Local Development Framework

Page 1 of the Masterplan states that the content of the document "reflects the draft Guildford Town Centre Area Action Plan and the responses to the consultation on that plan". In addition, it notes that the document has been prepared in a similar process to that of a supplementary planning document. In addition to consultation, the Masterplan has also been subject to Habitats Regulation Assessment, Strategic Environmental Assessment, and Equalities Impact Assessment screening.

The Masterplan states the following in relation to status and materiality:

"On adoption by the Council, the masterplan will be a material consideration in determining planning applications. The suggested uses for sites will be given appropriate weight in pre-application advice and in determining planning applications. However, it will not have statutory status as part of our Local Development Framework (LDF). Once a Local Plan/Core Strategy is in place, anticipated to be in 2014, the masterplan is likely to form a part of the statutory framework."

"Sites allocated for development by the 2003 Local Plan will remain until superseded by the new Local Plan/Core Strategy or the Site Allocations and Development Control Policies Development Plan Document (DPD). Where a site is allocated by the Local Plan and the masterplan suggests different uses, it will be for either the Council, or in the event of an appeal, the Planning Inspectorate, to determine how much relative weight to give to each document. The development plan status of the allocations will be weighed against the masterplan as an adopted Council strategy based on more up-to-date government policy and evidence studies."

These extracts highlight the inherent complexities, if not dangers, of bringing forward non-statutory masterplanning guidance in advance of the adoption of Development Plan Documents in the Local Development Framework.

Although the exact status and eventual material weight of the Masterplan is ambiguous, the Guildford Society recognises that this is an inevitable outcome of the current plan-making system. However, the absence of an adopted Core Strategy, up to date site allocations and Development Management policies places even greater onus on the Town Centre Masterplan to define a coherent, place-centered vision which draws on sound economic evidence, detailed movement analysis and a sensitive appreciation of urban design and heritage context.

As it stands, the document reads as a proxy for the Site Allocations DPD but lacks a thorough spatial narrative and vision, elements that would otherwise be dealt with comprehensively in the Core Strategy, and amplified in other DPD publications. Although the document will not be subject to Examination in Public, we would expect the Council to adopt an equivalent, albeit less onerous, self-assessment of soundness to ensure that the document is fit-for-purpose as a tool to steer proposals and manage development.

It is anticipated that the Council intends to cite the Masterplan as part of the evidence base for the Local Development Framework, as well as a material consideration in assessing planning applications. As such we believe it is in the interest of the Council to ensure that the elements highlighted in this submission are addressed as this will help to avoid protracted debates, objections and appeals on future Development Plan Documents and planning decisions on key sites.

Précis of detailed comments

Appendix 2 provides a comprehensive summary of our detailed response to the draft Masterplan as currently drafted.

Notwithstanding our overarching concerns, the following bullet points capture the main points arising:

1. Approach to drafting

Some parts of the report require further editing and honing to achieve a consistently professional voice. The Masterplan should play a key role in encouraging investment and the document should set the right tone and impression for Guildford.

2. Vision and objectives

As noted above, the vision statement requires careful interrogation and re-drafting alongside the objectives to ensure that the guidance in the Masterplan is framed by an appropriate set of priorities and themes. The vision statement should have far greater resonance with detailed strategies and guidance in the report, including the chapter on delivery. The vision statement should be supported by a very clear hierarchy of plans sitting under an overall spatial strategy. Key plans should be prepared to illustrate the movement strategy, public realm strategy and key development sites. It might also be appropriate to articulate guidance for tall buildings on a plan and to prepare an indicative roof plan Masterplan to steer development.

3. Approach to sites

Although the plan identifies a series of potential development sites, there is insufficient definition of the collective opportunity presented by individual sites, and a lack of strongly worded principles to steer development proposals. The Masterplan should provide clear urban design principles and indicative

uses for key sites and provide a clear indication of their potential contribution to the realisation of a wider vision (and by extension, the potential to contribute to infrastructure delivery). The Guildford Society has concerns about the approach identified on a number of sites including the railway station, Waitrose and Bedford Road car park. As noted above, access to the river and station should be embedded throughout the Masterplan, and it is vital that the site guidance facilitates these objectives. Detailed comments for individual sites are set out in Appendix 2.

4. Infrastructure, transport and environmental opportunities

Linked to the general approach to sites, there is insufficient detail on how infrastructure and environmental improvements will be achieved and delivered. Congestion is a major issue to be addressed and further studies should be undertaken to inform the Masterplan. The Masterplan requires far greater clarity on proposals to enhance walking routes and proposals to improve the physical environment of streets and spaces.

5. Transport and movement

Specific analysis is required to set a clear context for a comprehensive package of proposals and strategies related to car parking, highways, pedestrian and cycling, station accessibility and public transport.

6. Commercial context and retail strategy

The Masterplan does not reflect on existing floorspace or projected trends in retailing which should be a major factor in the future positioning of Guildford. In general there should be greater emphasis on improving the experience of shopping in Guildford, and less reliance on the expansion of retail floorspace which lacks justification. In addition, some amendments to primary and secondary shopping areas is recommended.

7. Analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

The SWOT analysis needs to be re-visited with a clearer and more consistent criteria, and a tighter set of conclusions. A number of elements require clearer identification, particularly the need for enhanced pedestrian connections from the railway station to the town centre. As identified above, interventions for the station area and central town centre, including the gyratory, should be informed by a hierarchy of fundamental design moves.

8. Boundary definition

The boundary for the Masterplan requires careful definition. In general terms, the Guildford Society would recommend a broader boundary for the study to ensure that functional linkages with wider destinations are fully integrated into the plan and opportunities for town centre enhancement, for example the station and University.

9. Townscape quality

The identification of townscape areas is welcomed, although a number of references require review – for example the conflation of the 'Historic Core' with the 'Commercial Core' and the ambiguous definition of historic spaces. In general, the Masterplan needs to provide a firmer steer about the Council's expectation for high quality development, sensitive to character and historic values.

10. Embracing the River

The identification of the River Wey as an asset is welcomed, and the Guildford Society is keen to promote a more explicit focus on the enhancement of the river corridor within the Masterplan.

11. Coherent delivery strategy

The Masterplan suffers from a lack of details in relation to delivery and implementation. More specific details such as dates, sense of relative priority and delivery mechanisms / responsibility.

Right Images of Guildford town centre



APPENDIX 1: WORKSHOP WITH THE GUILDFORD SOCIETY

Overview

This note summarises feedback received at the Guildford Town Centre Masterplan Workshop which took place on Tuesday 10 January 2012.

Attendees

More than 80 people attended the workshop (see attendance list following the write up).

Introductions

Michael Jeffery, Chair of Guildford Society welcomed attendees and provided an introduction to the workshop. John Rigg, resident and member of the Civic Society highlighted the desire to prepare a coordinated representation to the recently published draft Guildford Town Centre Masterplan by Guildford Borough Council. Antony Rifkin and Anthony Benson of Allies and Morrison Urban Practitioners explained the workshop format which is summarised as follows:

1. To establish and prioritise the key elements of the Vision and Objectives for Guildford.
2. To highlight the best and worst things about Guildford.
3. To identify the key elements of a strategy for Guildford.
4. To distil the main opportunities for the town centre and the masterplan.

Right Images from workshop event on 10 January 2012



GUILDFORD TOWN CENTRE MASTERPLAN WORKSHOP

Themes and objectives **"OPEN" GUILDFORD**

SHOULD UNDERPIN THE VISION AND OBJECTIVES FOR GUILDFORD

- River Wey corridor - improved relationship between river and town
- Historic character - preservation and enhancement of the town's heritage assets
- Improvements to movement network - carefully consider the balance between competing modes of transport
- Creation and economic development - attracting new investment across all sectors
- Supporting growth - improving the range of shops in the centre
- Improving the visitor economy - focus on attracting more visitors and meeting their needs
- Any others? **RESIDENTIAL, CULTURE, SUSTAINABILITY, OPPORTUNITIES**

Rank each of the above... (1 being the most important)

10 JANUARY 2012
Alles and Martin Urban Practitioners
GUILDFORD CIVIC SOCIETY

Handwritten notes:
 BUS STATION INTERCHANGE? - LOOK CONNECTIONS -> BUS STATION DE AS PART OF A
 CONCERN - LACK OF VISION?
 TOWN - RESI AS PART OF PLAN !! @ LINE WAY @ CHANGES
 OF FUTURE
 @ TED MUCH PROFESSIONAL
 @ CLIMATE FUTURE !!
 @ ENVIRONMENT AND B
 @ SOCIAL & ECONOMIC



1. DISCUSSION

What should underpin the vision and objectives for Guildford?

Attendees had a detailed round table discussion to brainstorm the most important elements of a vision and objectives for Guildford. In doing so, they also highlighted the best things about Guildford and things that could be improved.

The discussion is summarised briefly as follows:

- **Bus facilities** – careful consideration is required to ensure good connections to bus facilities. Potential for the bus interchange being arranged as conventional on-street stops in preference to a new bus station was highlighted.
- **Vision** – general concern for the lack of vision in the masterplan.
- **Vibrant mix of uses** – support for residential uses in the town centre. Opportunities also exist to enhance the evening economy. The town centre needs to work for different activities and different groups of people at different times of the day.
- **River Wey** – make more of this asset.
- **Employment opportunities** – promote the breadth of the local economy.
- **Transport and traffic issues** – viewed as a constraint to the expansion of the University.
- **Vibrancy of High Street** – recent development has spoilt the character of the town centre, development should be of a Listable quality in the future!
- **Too much emphasis on retail** – this is an outdated model and a supermarket would be a mistake.
- **Cultural assets** – make the most of existing assets and promote new ones including a flexible multi-purpose community and cultural centre.
- **Sustainability** – the masterplan should make specific and genuine reference to environmental sustainability.
- **Open Guildford** – Guildford should be accessible, as a place in its own right, but also in terms of institutional openness.
- **Traffic** – Guildford is the 8th worst town for traffic in the UK according to a recent survey. The centre needs to be more open for pedestrians with tree-lined spaces and avenues and priority for public transport over private vehicles. Traffic needs to be “moved out”.
- **Pedestrianisation** – thought should be given to extending the pedestrianisation scheme (as referenced in the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan) and using other techniques such as shared surfaces in appropriate locations.
- **Gyratory** – the gyratory has a major negative impact on the town centre, constraining north-south and east-west movement.
- **Distinctiveness** – Guildford must avoid being a “could be anyway” place or “clone town”.
- **Transition areas** – the location of the town in a valley and the historic development of the settlement has produced a compact town centre.

The quality of the transition between the town centre, surrounding residential neighbourhoods and the countryside beyond should be a priority, with initiatives to green the corridors that traverse these transitional areas.

- **Planning for young people** – it is important that the masterplan makes provision for the future needs of young people in Guildford.
- **Scale of growth** – there is a need to quantify the scale of growth that is envisaged in the town centre.
- **Historical development and Unique Selling Point** – There should be an emphasis on the historical success of Guildford and the reasons for growth. Themes 1 to 4 will continue to be instrumental, but the masterplan must consider the future role of the town in relation to (v) and (vi). Although these are important, some participants suggested that these latter activities may have peaked. Others were keen to emphasise that the University and Business Park, and shopping will continue to be important to the long-term prosperity of the town.
 - i) Proximity to London for commuting
 - ii) Good schools
 - iii) Location adjacent to fine countryside
 - iv) The town's culture and heritage
 - v) University and Business Park
 - vi) Regional shopping role



Right Photographs of town centre

2 VISION AND KEY THEMES

Vision

“Guildford - open for business, leisure and living.”

The “Open Guildford” concept was suggested by an attendee at the event and received a positive response from other participants. “Open Guildford” could form the basis of an overall vision, in relation to the type of place Guildford should be, and the means by which the Council and stakeholders engage and collaborate.

Themes

The group distilled eight principal themes which should form the basis of the vision and objectives for Guildford town centre. These were prioritised as follows:

1. MOVEMENT FRAMEWORK

There was consensus that major opportunities exist to enhance the movement network and reduce the impact of traffic on the town centre. Interventions to enhance connections and improve the pedestrian experience will play a key role in transforming Guildford. Connections between the station and town centre are particularly important.

2. THE RIVER WEY CORRIDOR

The River Wey should have a far greater presence in the town centre, and adjacent spaces and sites in the river corridor should be carefully planned to make the Wey more accessible and take better advantage of the river’s potential to generate development value.

3. SUSTAINABLE GUILDFORD

The Masterplan should place sustainability at the heart of proposals and incorporate a genuine commitment to the incorporation of social, economic and sustainability principles and initiatives.

4. OPEN GUILDFORD

There was a general desire to promote “open” Guildford, a motif which underlines a desire to promote Guildford as a more open place in every sense of the word; openness to visitors, businesses and investors; a more accessible place for pedestrians; and a commitment to a greater spirit of joint working between the Council and civic / amenity groups such as the Guildford Society.

5. QUALITY OF PLACE

Attendees highlighted the importance of preserving and enhancing the town’s assets including the historic environment and the dramatic setting of the Wey Valley. The Masterplan should provide a clear framework to steer proposals to ensure that new development produces a high quality townscape and public realm which preserves and enhances the town’s heritage assets.

6. VIBRANT GUILDFORD

Attendees highlighted a need to make Guildford town centre more vibrant, taking advantage of its compactness by encouraging a greater mix of uses in central Guildford. There is a desire for the town’s cultural offer to be expanded as part of this.

7. THE RETAIL EXPERIENCE

There is a strong consensus that the experience of shopping in the town centre needs to be carefully nurtured. This is considered to be a product of the six objectives above, as their implementation would play a key role in improving the experience of visiting Guildford. The consensus was that the creation of new retail floorspace would be detrimental to the town centre.

8. GUILDFORD ECONOMY

The Masterplan should adopt a coordinated approach to the growth of the local economy, particularly in relation to the University of Surrey.

3 WHAT SHOULD BE THE KEY ELEMENTS OF A TOWN-WIDE STRATEGY FOR GUILDFORD

A. Positioning

Attendees indicated that fundamental direction and decisions are required to steer the direction of the masterplan including the following:

- What is the University Business Plan? Are there wider interventions required to facilitate the aspirations of the University?
- What role will the town centre have in the future? How do we plan for future retailing trends? Environmental and transport improvements which improve the shopping experience are considered more important than additional retail development.
- What are the needs of employers? Most employers recruit within an hour's travel time from Guildford.

B. Strategic movement network

Transport and movement issues are considered to be extremely important. Participants indicated the need for a comprehensive movement framework drawing on appropriate traffic survey information. Participants indicated that the following components should be included:

- **Strategy for pedestrian and cycle movement in the town centre** – considering shared surface options in appropriate locations.
- **Comprehensive traffic strategy** – considering options for “moving” or reducing the level of traffic in the town centre, and addressing access issues to the A3, A31 and A281.
- **Bus strategy** – consideration of alternative bus stopping arrangements (e.g. conventional on-street stops on North Street, rather than developing a new bus station on a valuable riverside site).
- **Station strategy** – ensure that the station continues to be convenient for commuters and pedestrians walking to / via the town centre.
- Liaison with University and businesses to establish a town wide **Green Travel Plan Framework**.

C. Other strategies and guidance

The following elements were highlighted by attendees:

- **Building height and views guidance** including reference to key views, vistas and skylines to ensure that development does not have a negative impact on the valley setting.
- **Economic strategy** – facilitating and supporting entrepreneurialism.
- **Landscape and Green Infrastructure Strategy**;
- **Infrastructure requirements** – physical and social requirements;
- **Townscape and heritage strategy** – to ensure that heritage assets are preserved and enhanced.
- **Urban design and sustainable design principles** – to promote high quality development and steer proposals for key sites.

WORKSHOP ATTENDEES

Name	Member	Guest
Anne Buckley	✓	
John Walker	✓	
Bernie Parkin	✓	
John Short	✓	
Thelma de Chezal	✓	
GARY MONRO		✓
John	✓	
Anna Hummel		✓
Marilyn Splan	✓	
Brian	✓	
S. Kirkland	✓	
J. Dean	✓	
J. Baylis	✓	
Doug Scott	✓	
J. Newman	✓	
A. Atkinson		✓
A. UIMNEY	✓	
G. "	✓	
R. V. JOHNSTON	✓	
B. J. J. J.	✓	
C. C. de Chezal	✓	
R. K. K.	✓	
L. P. P.		✓
Malcolm Sinclair	✓	
ANDY WHITE		✓
Stephen Marriott		✓
G. G.	✓	
STEWART MORGAN	✓	
Annabel Agace		✓
David Rose		✓
Martin Giles		✓

Name	Member	Guest
JULIAN LYON		✓
<u>J.P. McKel</u>	✓	
Maurice Barton	✓	
Oly Wallace		✓
Gerald Reed	✓	
Michael Owen		✓
Jan Fricler	✓	
Dud Ogilvie	✓	
Michael Geffery	✓	
Gillian Cameron	✓	
Maureen Rivett	✓	
Joan Butler	✓	
Auntie Eastle	✓	
Eric Eastle	✓	

<u>NAME</u>	<u>email address</u>	<u>Member?</u>
STEPHEN TO		
STEPHEN WRIGHT		No
Peter Slace		Yes
Heather Bromham		Yes
Bob Bromham		Yes
David Stokes		Yes
Richard Sinker		No
Bibhas Neogi		yes
Sally Dewey		yes
Alan Dewey		yes
Martin Taplin		yes
David Britton		yes
Roger Jones		Yes
Ron Johnson		yes
John Rigg		Yes
John Banante		No
Tommy Walker		Yes
Margaret Walker		Yes
Graham Hibbert		Yes
Sue Hibbert		Yes
Helen Leigh		Yes
Amanda Mullarkey		yes
Julian Lyon		

Patrick and Jean Robson

Joe + Mary Palmer, G. S. member -

Jean Wenn Gfd Socy

Ann Kay Johnson "

Harold Young "

Claudette O'Kuffe "

Ken O'Kuffe "

Salon Hill "

Jim Allen - Buxfham C.A.

Response of the Guildford Society to the Guildford Borough Council draft Town Centre Masterplan

1. Introduction

1.1 The 'Introduction' to the Town Centre Masterplan (TCM) commences by identifying that "Co-ordinated redevelopment of key sites alongside infrastructure and environmental improvements are needed in the town centre" The general view of the Society is that whilst the Plan may set out policies for individual key sites there is little in terms of clearly-formulated proposals for infrastructure or environmental improvements and, furthermore, apart from being included as aspirations within the 'Opportunities' listed for the 25 sites, there is little or no indication as to how these proposed infrastructure or environmental improvements are expected to be achieved.

1.2 The comments of the Society follow in accordance with the order in which matters are dealt with in the document.

2. The Vision

2.1 The 'Vision' section of the TCM sets out a number of statements. The Society considers that whilst these statements are laudable and are to be supported the Vision has significant short-comings.

2.2 There is no vision in the TCM with regard to infrastructure and transport apart from the statement that it will be improved. There is nothing in the Plan to show how it will be improved apart for the possibility of some minor tinkering to the existing inadequate gyratory system. There is no analysis of the existing infrastructure and transport to enable appropriate solutions to be designed. e.g. no origin and destination traffic survey data, no O & D pedestrian data, no retail and land use floor space analysis and no assessment of what will be the impact of the growing trends in internet shopping (currently 11% of all shopping and growing) and how this and the 30% increase in floor space proposed for the Friary will affect the High Street. Without major improvement to roads and car parking we can add all the floor space we like but people will not be able to get there. Park and ride will have no effect on through traffic which contributes substantially to Guildford's traffic congestion.

2.3 The vision statement is too broad and lacks explicit reference to achieving high quality design and exceptional development standards in this very special historic and landscape context. The vision should also be accompanied by a broad spatial plan which is an important omission.

2.4 The lack of an overarching spatial plan is compounded by the absence of the following strategic elements:

- Public realm strategy and plan

- Movement strategy and plan

2.5 The vision and objectives does not appear to be underpinned by economic analysis. This is a key gap which should also be assessed in relation to site selection and viability.

3. Objectives

3.1 This section seems to be superfluous. With slight modification the boxed Vision Statement can say it all. As it is the Vision Statement and Objectives repeat each other, and the Objectives are incomplete as a simple check between the two quickly shows.

3.2 As with the 'Vision' section of the TCM the Society considers the Objectives are laudable and are to be supported. However, the Plan lists every strength and weakness that can be thought of and does not seek to give them weight. It is impossible therefore to identify which are perceived to be the key issues for the town centre. It should separate policies and projects and indicate which are most important.

3.3 The most serious development problem for the town is traffic and traffic congestion. Yet, as the comments on lack of vision point out, this issue is effectively ignored except for references to the need for further studies. The geography and topography of the town limits options. This Town Centre Masterplan should be presenting solutions not proposing further studies.

3.4 The Society considers the TCM should give much more attention to what the Society considers to be a key deficiency in the town – namely that of the need for the safe and convenient movement for pedestrians.

3.5 The 'Objectives' of the TCM are stated as helping the Council to "...achieve the vision for the town centre in 2030." Objective 3 of the Plan sets out the need "...to improve streets ... making it easier, safer and more pleasant to move around the town."

3.6 The objectives do not focus sufficiently on improving Guildford as a place, or safeguarding what is special. There is a sense that these objectives could apply to any town as they lack any sense of context.

4. Analysis

4.1 The SWOT analysis should be subdivided into its four components. For example, it is not immediately clear where the strengths end and the opportunities begin. The opportunities listed are a subset of those given in the main body of the report: many of them are detailed and site specific. They are admirable, but on what basis was the selection made? Every development site listed in the Masterplan is an opportunity. The whole section needs re-writing in a less amateurish manner: the opportunities should be generic, like the listed Strengths. A specific comment: the road links are not 'great'.

4.2 Again, the weaknesses and threats should be separated. The list of weaknesses is quite good. The list of threats is very deficient. How about adding: economic uncertainty, growth of on-line shopping, competition from nearby towns, failure of major foreseen developments to proceed (Westfield, Solum etc), lack of infrastructure funding from County and National budgets to name but a few.

4.3 'Opportunities' needs to place a much greater emphasis on improved pedestrian links, especially between the railway station and town centre. Here we have a current major weakness and major opportunity: hence the idiocy of joining strengths to opportunities.

4.4 The 'Analysis' section of the Plan acknowledges (as a number of 'Weaknesses') that the steeply sloping streets "...makes getting around on foot difficult for some" and that it is "difficult for pedestrians to navigate around the town." The Plan is peppered with references to the poor environment for pedestrians (as in the section on 'Historic spaces' where reference is made to the "High volumes of through traffic (which) create barriers to pedestrian and cycle movement, and poor pedestrian environments, such as along Bridge Street." Thus the Plan recognises the generally poor environment of the town for pedestrians and recognises the need for improvements but the Plan makes no specific proposals for improvement.

4.5 The Society sees the need to improve pedestrian movement as a matter of key importance which the Plan should address. Nowhere is that more in evidence than in the present route taken by pedestrians between the railway station and the town centre where the achievement of an attractive and safe pedestrian connection between the railway station and the town centre is urgent and crucial and should be one of the primary issues to be addressed as part of this Town Centre Masterplan. But it is not.

4.6 In his 1987 book "Guildford: Town Under Siege" Russell Chamberlin pointed out how the Royal Fine Art Commission, in its letter to the Borough Council of December 1974, urged that "... thought be should be given to providing good pedestrian access to this (Friary) site ... since this is the main pedestrian route to the railway station". He (Chamberlin) went on "The crowds today scuttling through the murderous three-way traffic at this (Bridge Street/Onslow Street) juncture have good reason to wish that thought had indeed been given to this problem." Almost 40 years on, nothing has been done to improve the situation. And yet, as we stand, the Borough Council still does not seem to recognise the seriousness of the problem and, indeed, through its proposal to relocate the present bus station the Bedford Road, it appears that the Council is about to make the situation for pedestrians a whole lot worse.

4.7 The proposal to move the bus station to Bedford Road is at an early stage but it is clear from the TCM that this proposal is intended to be pursued. But if this proposal is to be pursued, the need to create a safe, convenient and attractive pedestrian route to provide for pedestrians walking between a (Bedford Road) bus station, the railway station and the town centre shopping area is of critical importance.

4.8 Page 40 of the TCM talks about “Making better places through environmental improvements” with ten important principles for placemaking in the town centre including “celebrating arrival – create a positive first impression” and the general aim of achieving a centre that is pedestrian friendly. The Society is of the view that the continued absence of a safe and attractive route for pedestrians between the railway station (plus possibly a bus station at Bedford Road) and the town centre shops is a major shortcoming which fails to ‘celebrate arrival’ or make a ‘positive first impression’. Indeed, in our view a continuation of the present situation seriously undermines the desire of Guildford to be perceived as a destination of quality.

4.9 With plans for a new railway station currently being prepared; with Bedford Road as the possible site for the new bus station; and with the prospect of more shopping as part of a major development on the area of North Street/Leapale Road/Commercial Road, the Borough Council must recognise the critical need to create a good pedestrian link and not let this opportunity slip by.

4.10 The TCM recognises, in the Section relating to the railway station, that “opportunities for routes between the railway station and the town centre **are to be explored**” (our emphasis). But nothing specific is proposed. The TCM refers to the investigations which have taken place to improve the gyratory but, nothing specific is proposed. The TCM identifies an “Enhanced Gateway” at the bottom of North Street but nothing specific is proposed. And, finally, Onslow Street (from Bedford Road to the bottom of North Street) is identified as “a placemaking priority” but, (aside from the absurdity of envisaging that the heavily-trafficked Onslow Street could ever be a ‘place’ of any quality) again, nothing is proposed.

4.11 In the absence of any specific proposals to secure specific improvements - surely a key ingredient of a ‘Masterplan’, we conclude that the TCM is seriously deficient. If ever there was a matter which needed to be positively addressed as part of the Town Centre Masterplan then this is it.

4.12 In the absence of anything specific, the Society is left to conclude that not only are there no clear ideas about what might be possible but that the Plan contains hollow words and there is no serious intention on the part of the Council to secure any meaningful improvement for this issue of key importance.

4.13 The analysis section lacks a clear structure or purpose. In addition to the points raised above, the Masterplan lacks a clear summary of previous consultation and how this had informed the strategy.

5. Boundary The Town Centre Masterplan defines the boundary of the historic town centre and its immediate environs. The Society considers that for a number of key considerations – notably in respect of traffic and the economy – the study area should include a wider area, to the north and north-west of the town centre, embracing land west of Woodbridge Road to the former by-pass (now the A25), the Cathedral, Surrey University and the Hospital/Research Park.

6. Primary shopping area and shopping frontages

6.1 The Plan proposes a massive increase (33%?) in retail floor space. The justification for this increase is not shown in the Plan. Questions are raised about whether such a large increase is the right policy for the town given the current economic situation and future patterns of retailing.

6.2 The Society considers that the map of the primary shopping area (on (un-numbered) page 10) requires amendment in that we consider:-

6.3 The north end of Haydon Place contains so few shops that it does not justify its designation as a secondary shopping area,

6.4 Those sections of the upper High Street and the frontages to London Road and Epsom Road should be defined as secondary shopping areas. We recognise that there is a large percentage of units not in retail use but we are concerned that to remove the designation of these areas as shopping frontages will have a detrimental impact for prospective investors and tenants.

6.5 The frontages to Commercial Road, Woodbridge Road and Leapale Lane are, quite patently, not shopping frontages. If the Plan considers (as it does) that the area north of North Street to include Leapale Road and Commercial Road is suitable for shopping this should be provided for as a statement in the text of the Plan.

6.6 The frontage to both sides of Friary Street should be shown as primary shopping frontage (at present they are without designation).

6.7 Tunsgate Square should be shown as primary (not secondary) shopping frontage.

6.8 It seems inappropriate to focus on the detailed issue of town centre frontages at this point in the document. In addition to the insertion of more strategic spatial plans, environmental and public realm issues should be identified in advance of frontage guidance.

7. Townscape areas

7.1 Historic Core We question how the areas north of North Street (including The Friary) can be justified for inclusion as part of the Historic Core. It would appear that, in the context of this Plan, 'Historic Core' means the core of the commercial centre of the town and should therefore perhaps be re-named "Commercial Core". This area also includes important open green spaces: the cricket ground and the Castle grounds.

7.2 Transition areas The Society notes the description of transition areas in the town as being "Their mixed use/residential environment provide a quieter, pleasant atmosphere within the town centre." We simply observe that the 'quieter, pleasant atmosphere' of

Haydon Place and College Road may soon to be shattered by the arrival of a Waitrose Supermarket. (See the Society's comments in respect of Site 19 (Bellerby Theatre).

7.3 The Commercial area description should surely mention the railway station, much the largest of its components.

7.4 Historic spaces The Society disagrees with the plan shown on (the un-numbered) page 14 showing the Debenhams Store, areas within the Gyratory and the area of Bridge Street and Bedford Road as 'Historic spaces' when they are not 'spaces' nor do these areas accord with the definition of such areas within the Plan (as being areas "retaining a sense of seclusion from the lively town").

7.5 River We are pleased to see and entirely endorse the statement in the TCM that 'The River Wey navigation is a valuable asset for the town centre'. We regret that for many years the value of this feature has not been recognised and, as a result, opportunities for enhancement and access have frequently been lost. (See also our comments in respect of Site12 (Former Farnham Road bus station).

7.6 To make the TCM more positive the sentence "Where appropriate, public access along the river is to be provided as a continuous river walk ..." should be replaced by "Every opportunity should be taken to secure a continuous river walk with public access along both sides of the river..."

7.7 The Society agrees with the statement that the Millmead footbridge is important to the functioning of Millmead Lock and, in particular, we fully endorse the statement in the TCM that the present temporary footbridge at Millmead Lock is in urgent need of replacement with a new bridge of suitable design. The Society urges the Council to encourage the National Trust to secure its early replacement.

7.8 The river should be the focus of the masterplan and the treatment of public spaces along it and removal of traffic from its banks should be one of the key spatial objectives of the masterplan.

8 The Strategy

8.1 The 'Strategy' for the future improvement of the town is stated to have four discernable strands:-

"Making places better through:-

1. development,
2. environmental improvements,
3. town centre management, and
4. sustainable living.

Comment

8.2 One of the key issues raised in the ‘Vision’ section of the TCM is the desire to improve the town centre through “improved infrastructure, in particular transport... with improved public transport facilities” and by achieving reduced peak hour traffic.” No mention of these important aspects of the ‘Vision’ is contained in the ‘four discernable strands’ in ‘The Strategy’. The achievement of improvements to secure a reduction in traffic congestion and/or improvements for cyclists and pedestrians is predicated on three proposals. Firstly, the stated intention to promote an additional Park and Ride facility on the west side of the town centre at Manor Park; secondly, on an intention to remove/reduce the amount of contract/long term car parking spaces in the town centre (through the redevelopment of council-owned sites); and, thirdly, on a general intention to “... encourage improvement in pedestrian, cycle and public transport accessibility in considering (planning applications) for the redevelopment of town centre sites”.

8.3 Whilst these intentions may be commendable, the Society takes the view that in the absence of any specific proposals for infrastructure improvements, these statements, in themselves, will have no meaningful impact on achieving a reduction in the problem of traffic congestion in Guildford. In our view, a substantial reduction in the impact of through traffic on the town centre is of critical importance and new infrastructure is required to achieve that objective. This is a central issue for the town centre which the Town Centre Masterplan fails to address.

8.4 ‘The Strategy’ also sets out the Council’s position in respect of the North Street/Leapale Road/Commercial Road site (Site 18) which notably includes the intention to remove the requirement, contained in the presently-approved development brief, for a bus station to be retained on this site as part of any redevelopment in order to allow more shopping floorspace. The Society’s comments on this matter are covered in the comments set out in respect of Site 18 (below).

8.5 The Society notes, on page 21, the statement that the Council is to submit a planning application for a bus facility at Bedford Road. When (a) the bus station proposed for Bedford Road has a significantly reduced operating space from that currently available on the location adjacent to The Friary and (b) Bedford Road is seriously less convenient in terms of location for pedestrians wishing to access the town centre, the Society questions how the Plan can conclude that this “... smaller facility than the current bus station ...will operate more effectively and efficiently.”

8.6 An additional strand should be “making better places through high quality design and landscape”.

9. Site specific policies

9.1 The ‘Introduction’ to the Town Centre Masterplan states “Co-ordinated redevelopment of key sites alongside infrastructure and environmental improvements are

needed in the town centre to ensure that it remains a lively, attractive, economically robust and environmentally sustainable place”. The Society supports that statement but considers that the policies and proposals for the individual sites will not achieve that objective in that, in general, they contain no proposals to secure specific infrastructure or environmental improvements. This concern is reflected in the following comments and those made below in respect of the individual sites.

9.2 As with earlier plans, this Town Centre Masterplan simply provides a series of planning guidance in respect of a number of key sites within the town centre. There is no over-arching policy (certainly none in respect of highway infrastructure) and no coordinating proposals or strategy for improvements for pedestrians and cyclists which could be the subject of achievement through the proposal (on page 20) that “In the consideration of the redevelopment of town centre sites, the Council will encourage improvements in pedestrian, cycle and public transport accessibility.” The sites section makes no reference to any strategic spatial plans and the relationship with the vision and objectives. There should be design guidance for each site, in terms of urban design principles, development and landscape.

9.3 Site 02 A, B, C (Guildford Railway Station) The TCM says:-

“Proposals could also enable improvements (to be made) to the wider area around the station **possibly** (our emphasis) to include the strengthening of pedestrian routes to and from the station.”

9.4 This is weak wording. The Society notes (and agrees) with the statement, in Appendix 1 page 18, that “Guildford Railway Station ... does little to announce its presence in the town centre as a key point of arrival and departure.” On this issue the TCM should have clear proposals in place showing how an improved inter-connection for pedestrians between the railway station and the town centre could be achieved and the TCM should say, as a matter of policy:-

“The proposals for major development at the railway station should be linked to improvements to the wider area and should, as a key component, provide for the creation of a safe and attractive route for pedestrians to and from the town centre.”

9.5 We note that the “Local Plan allocates the Railway Station site for a mixed use development that could include offices, residential, hotel, leisure, retail (primarily food), improved transport interchange facilities, including retaining existing levels of commuter parking”. The Society is concerned about the traffic implications of so much potential development at the station.

9.6 The TCM should make reference to the need to strengthen the Farnham Road bridge over the railway, and identify the opportunity to enhance it with a new pedestrian footway on its southern side.

9.7 Site 03 and 04 (Jewsons warehouse site and 1 and 2 Station View) The Society considers that there should be a proposal to reserve within the site a footpath/cycle path alongside the railway. This will facilitate pedestrian/cycle movement between the University via Yorky's Bridge and the railway station to avoid the need to walk or cycle along the narrow and busy Walnut Tree Close.

9.8 Site 09 (Bedford Road Car Park)

One of the major (and most controversial) proposals mentioned in the Plan is the intention by the Executive Committee of the Council to seek planning consent for the bus station to be relocated to Bedford Road. The views of the Society in respect of the proposal to relocate the bus station onto this site have previously been set out under the 'Analysis' section of this report (paragraphs 4.5 to 4.9) which set out the Society's serious concerns on the important issue of Pedestrian Movement. The Society is also seriously concerned about the wider traffic implications of locating a bus station at Bedford Road – not only in terms of traffic congestion in consequence of accommodating bus movements onto and off Onslow Street but for the safety for all road users. In this connection we draw attention to the reference in the TCM (Appendix 1, Page 11 of the TCMP) that "The highest number of traffic accidents relating to shunts in the one way system and pedestrians at road crossings occur at the three crossing points of the junction of Onslow Street with Bridge Street".

9.9 This proposal also needs to be considered in the context of two issues raised in the TCM .

9.10 Firstly, page 5 of the TCMP sets out an 'Analysis' of the town centre and identifies (as a 'Weakness') that:-

"Main shopping streets slope steeply down to the river... This gradient makes getting around on foot difficult for some people, and also difficult to walk up/push a pushchair or wheelchair."

9.11 Secondly, one of the 'Objectives' of the TCM (page 4) is:-

"...making it easier, safer and more pleasant to move around."

9.12 Judged against these two considerations the proposal to relocate the Bus Station to Bedford Road is deficient in two respects. Firstly it relocates the Bus Station from its present centrally-located position (part way up the steep slope) to a much less favourable position at the 'bottom' of the slope. Secondly, as presently conceived, the proposal not only makes no provision to make it "easier, safer and more pleasant to move around" but it requires pedestrians to cross Onslow Street 'at grade'. As a result the situation for pedestrians is made desperately worse as a result of requiring them to use unsuitably-narrow pavements and exposing them to the noise and danger from the heavily-trafficked Onslow Street.

9.13 It is important that proposals for the future of buses serving the town centre are considered in more detail. Such investigations may result in other options being explored such that the current intentions of the Council will be revised. However, the position of the Society is that if the Council continues to promote the relocation of the bus station to Bedford Road, it is of critical importance that the proposals must, as an integral part, provide for the achievement of a safe, convenient and attractive route for pedestrians walking between a Bedford Road bus station and the town centre shopping area.

9.14 In order to assure this, the Plan should state that any planning application for a new bus station at Bedford Road is contingent on the application providing for a permanent 24 hour new pedestrian way through the Friary from the new bus station to North Street. Without such assurance the Society would oppose any planning application for a new bus station at Bedford Road.

9.15 Site 10 (Bridge Street) The Society considers the policy for this site should identify the opportunity for enhanced value as a result of this area forming a comprehensive development with Site 10 (Bedford Road).

9.16 Site 11 (the open area in front of the Electric Theatre) The Society considers that this site is not large enough to accommodate more development in the form of a bar/pub or café/restaurant. Any reduction in the size and extent of this open area will adversely affect its townscape value. The Society considers there is the opportunity to enhance this riverside site by the introduction of some tree planting

9.17 Site 12 (the former Farnham Road bus station) We are not opposed to some small-scale development – perhaps to provide restaurants and/or cafes - but we consider the emphasis should be on creating an attractive open space as a way of enhancing this important area of riverside land.

9.18 Site 14 (Guildford Plaza) The Society is very concerned that this large and important site remains undeveloped. The Society considers this site to be ideal for a housing development and we consider the Council should use its powers and influence to unlock this site for development.

9.19 Site 15 (Debenhams)

The Society supports the statement in the Plan that the existing Debenhams building is “particularly bulky and monotonous”.

9.20 Site 16 (Millmead House and Old Millmead) The Society notes that this site is identified as a potential site for housing. Whilst not disagreeing that, geographically, this site is suitable for housing, the Society considers that if the Council Offices are to be relocated this should only be to a location which is suitable and accessible for the people of the Borough.

9.21 Site 17 (Millbrook Car Park) The Society is opposed to the “Opportunity” for this car park being an “Extended/decked car park”. In the view of the Society the development of a decked car park would interrupt important local views and generally be seriously detrimental to this area of open land adjacent to the river.

9.22 Site 18 (Land bounded by North Street/Leapale Road and Commercial Road) The Society notes the intention in the Plan that “the existing 2003 designed development brief for this site is to be reviewed early in 2012”. The Society has no objection to the concept of a revised brief particularly if it seeks to produce a redevelopment scheme in keeping with the character of Guildford as an historic town. But the Society considers it critical that any proposals should incorporate and/or retain important planning benefits for the town which were secured as an agreement under Section 106 of the Planning Act. The new development brief should insist that any planning application for an extension to the present Friary must include a permanent 24 hour new pedestrian way through it from the railway station/proposed new bus station to North Street. Without such assurance the Society opposes the new bus station. [Note; Item 6 of the GBC Exec on 5.1.12 asks for funding for consultants to prepare the new brief: public consultation on draft brief timetabled for 10 April to 25 May.]

9.23 Site 19 (Bellerby Theatre) The Society objected to the Planning Brief, agreed by the Council in 2011, which proposed that this area be made available for a supermarket. We took the view that this is an unsuitable site for a supermarket in that the requirements of access, servicing and provision of adequate customer car parking will be incompatible with the geographical constraints of the area. In the Town Centre Masterplan, Site 19 forms part of a “Transition Area”. Such areas are defined as being “areas with a mixed use/residential character which provide quieter, pleasant atmosphere within the town centre”. The Society remains of the view that this area is inappropriate for locating a supermarket. A supermarket here will destroy the “quieter, pleasant atmosphere” which the Plan recognises is a characteristic of the present area. The Society considers the area should be used in a way which accords with the Plan’s designation of the area as a “Transition Area”.

9.24 Site 20 (BT Telephone Exchange) The Society agrees that this is a potential development site (if the telephone exchange equipment could be reduced in size).

9.25 Site 24 (Bright Hill Car Park) The Society acknowledges that this land has long been identified for redevelopment with housing in recognition of a desire to recreate its historic use. However this site performs an important role in providing much-needed town centre car parking and any proposals for redevelopment with housing needs to be accompanied with clear proposals to mitigate the loss of car parking space, preferably by using the levels of the site to provide underground car parking.

9.26 Site 25 (Adult Education Institute, Sydenham Road) The Society whole-heartedly endorses the proposal in the Plan that these existing buildings be retained for community use and we support the identified potential for further community/education uses.

10. Making better places through environmental improvements

10.1 Pages 40 to 56 of the Plan set out policies and proposals for improving the town centre through environmental improvements. On this aspect the Society endorses much of the content of Appendix 1 of the TCM which relates to the history of the town and covers many issues which the Council must take into account in the future planning of the town.

10.2 Whilst the Society supports all that is said in this section of the Plan, there are shortcomings in important respects. For example, one of the “ten important principles for placemaking in Guildford town centre”, as set out in the Plan, is “Celebrate arrival – create positive first impressions...” and, under “Legibility and sense of place”, “Provide a centre that is pedestrian-friendly, readable, convenient and accessible.”

10.3 The Society would agree that a prime objective of the Plan should be to reduce the amount of traffic in the town centre and hence redress the balance between vehicles and pedestrians. We consider that the only satisfactory long term solution is to enable traffic, particularly through traffic to avoid or bypass the town centre. This will require very substantial new infrastructure. The Plan should state this and put in place some long term objectives. In the first instance, studies should be carried out to determine the most cost effective solution, with a target delivery date of say 2014. Implementation could be phased with a first phase to be completed by 2030. The Plan should be bolder in its demands for funding from county and central government: there is nothing to lose by so doing. Demonstration of vision often achieves surprising results (the Watts Gallery refurbishment is a good local example).

10.4 The Society makes the point many times elsewhere in this response that a key place where people arriving at the town should be able to ‘celebrate arrival’ and experience, as they walk to the town centre, “...a (town) centre which is pedestrian-friendly” is the railway station. But this Plan contains no specific proposals for achieving any improvement in the quality of the pedestrian route between the railway station and the town centre. The Society is left with the clear conclusion that there is a wide gulf between these stated aspirations for the town centre, as set out in the Plan, and the actual desire and ability of the Council to secure the achievement of such aspirations.

10.5 The plan on page 42 of the document shows the ‘Historic core’. This plan identifies Onslow Street, the eastern side of the gyratory and the north end of Millbrook as a “placemaking priority area”. What does this mean? The Society not only questions what this means but asks what meaningful improvements in ‘placemaking’ can possibly be achieved given the very high volumes of traffic which uses these ‘A’ class roads. This plan also shows four locations for ‘improved connections’ across Onslow Street (at the junctions with Bedford Road and at Bridge Street), over the gyratory (in the area between the North Street and the Electric Theatre) and Millbrook (at the Town Bridge). Page 43 of the Plan states how improvements to these ‘crossings’ will “...seek to redress the relationship between the footway and the carriageway, and create a more inclusive environment.” Without the Plan demonstrating how, in physical terms, ‘improved

connections' can be secured across the busiest 'A' class roads which bisect the town centre, the Society remains entirely sceptical of the value of these ideas. Furthermore, the three west-east 'improved connections' on the western side of the Historic Core map end up on the outside of the present Friary. All they demonstrate is that the Friary at present blocks the route from the station to the town centre: without modifications to the Friary there will be no improvement. The Plan should say this.

10.6 This said, the Society strongly supports the environmental improvements proposed in the 'Historic Core' text, including decluttering (pp43-44).

10.7 The Plan also identifies "Enhanced Gateways". Aside from the Plan not being clear on just what this means, the Society notes (and agrees) with the statement (in Appendix 1 page 18) that the "Guildford Railway Station ... does little to announce its presence in the town centre as a key point of arrival and departure". We consider the town centre side of the railway station should be identified (on the plan on (un-numbered) page 45) as an 'Enhanced gateway' and the Plan should show specific proposals for securing a truly enhanced pedestrian facility to take pedestrians on a route free of conflict with traffic into the heart of the town centre.

10.8 The northern of the two 'improved connections' shown on the 'commercial Quarter' map again ends up outside the present Friary. We are strongly in favour of such a route, but it is useless as proposed. It requires a commitment from Westfield to enable the route to continue as a permanent 24 hour route to North Street. The Plan should say this.

10.9 The High Street, paved with setts and footways of York Stone, is an important feature of the historic town and needs to be maintained. Elsewhere within the town centre the possibility of 'introducing integrated streets and shared surfaces' should be investigated. There are plenty of examples now of removing kerbs to enable this (e.g. Exhibition Road in Knightsbridge, London).

Page 40

A number of points require clarification or re-drafting:

- The principles should be more specific to Guildford - it would be helpful to insert both a schedule of the special areas of public realm and landscape in Guildford and their character and design proposals for how these can be improved, street by street. This section should explore the uniqueness of Guildford and the fact the town sits within a context where there is close proximity to residential uses and a fantastic landscape setting.
- Placemaking also relates to urban design and not just to the public realm and specific urban design guidance should be added to the Masterplan.
- As noted above, the public realm section needs to respond to an overall spatial plan which forms the foundation for a public realm strategy. This section could also benefit from appropriate references to good practice and inspiration from elsewhere.

Page 41

The guidance needs to be set in context with a clearer relationship to the vision and objectives. It is recommended that the PRIAN reference is accompanied by an illustration. It is suggested that the proposals for the gyratory are accepted in the short term, with more comprehensive options for the re-routing of the road network considered in the longer term. The Masterplan would benefit from a bespoke design guide for the riverside.

Page 42

The plan on page 42 needs to be improved – some aspects are not clearly marked (e.g. the red area). In addition, the views from North Street (and other locations) are not shown.

Page 43

First paragraph – careful consideration is required in relation to the promotion of street trees. Although there are benefits in greening urban areas in this way, careful analysis needs to be undertaken to ensure that views to the countryside are not blocked.

Middle column - living walls or mosaics are not considered to be appropriate in Guildford and these measures could detract from the place. The preference should be the creation of active frontage rather than mitigation of blank facades and inactive frontages.

Final column - the use of logos can add to street clutter and may not be suitable. The use of “heritage” street could result in a pastiche design. It is recommended that the Council consider a more contemporary street furniture design as this can enhance an historic environment.

Page 44

Further consideration about the planting and landscape strategy for North Street is required. Our view is that the public realm should have a simple with a high quality surface and minimal clutter. English Heritage streetscape guidance strongly recommends clutter free, simple street design - see Shrewsbury as an example. It would also be helpful to have further information about the type of lighting columns being considered. In our view, these should be of a contemporary design.

Second column - There is a concern about the installation of more signs as this would generate further clutter.

Second para - Increased space for pedestrians - The second para should commence with a guidance statement which sets out a coherent strategic approach for the removal of traffic, whilst allowing servicing. It should then set out guidance for the design of streets and pavements, with appropriate design guidelines and specifications. We do not recommend the universal segregation of cars, pedestrians and cyclists in central Guildford. With the exception of the High Street, the historic street environment provides an appropriate setting for a shared surface strategy. This section should also consider the

introduction of a Historic Core Zone which would remove the need for yellow lines and street signs.

Page 45

This plan is unclear and key views from High Street and North Street are omitted. The phrase “Placemaking priority area” should be defined more clearly.

Page 46

First column:

The objectives set out in this section are generally welcomed, however there would be merit in making specific reference to the PRAN proposals as short term measures. In the longer term, consideration should be given to the removal of the gyratory with traffic re-routed from the historic centre. A clear strategy needs to be set out to achieve this.

Second column:

It is recommended that a design brief is prepared and options put forward. Further consideration and justification is required in relation to the proposed materials.

As highlighted in the main submission, the masterplan document should provide explicit reference to diagrams and design guidance including principles on development, landscape, public realm and movement strategies which should be the four pillars of the masterplan. Without clear strategies, the statements as currently drafted could be challenging to implement.

Page 47

The phrase high quality is welcomed

The use of paving waymarkers requires consideration as these can be expensive to introduce and maintain and may add to visual clutter. The image on page 47 is inappropriate for Guildford and would detract from the historic context and should be removed.

Page 48

This plan does not appear to relate to any strategic objectives and highlights the need for a comprehensive spatial strategy and inset plans.

Page 49

Third para: shared surfaces are not necessarily appropriate for residential streets.

Second column:

There may be merit in considering alternative materials to asphalt.

Third column

Second para:

The document should encourage use of a simple colour.

Final para. – The Masterplan should seek to give greater priority to pedestrians. This final statement on page 49 is potentially contradictory as there may need to be a negative impact on vehicular traffic capacity to realise the objectives of the Masterplan.

Page 52

The guidance under the Historic Spaces heading relates to public realm and sustainability principles rather than issues of historic value. It is recommended that this section makes greater reference to character assessments drawing on national policies and guidance. In general references to design should be more detailed and appear earlier in the document in a more comprehensive manner.

Whilst the objective of the cantilevered walkway could have advantages, it would have to be designed carefully and should be considered in relation to the network of public routes that this forms part of. Consideration of cost issues is also required.

Page 53

Further guidance is required in relation to street furniture. This part of the document refers to the inclusion contemporary artistic elements. It is recommended that this approach is considered in other locations as well. The approach to public art needs to be carefully considered to ensure high quality design.

Page 54

The plan and key require clarification.

Page 55

Further detail is required to articulate the spatial location and principles associated with these general statements.

Column three:

It is recommended that the 'natural assets' reference is explained in more detail, to clearly identify the individual assets and make reference to their significance.

Page 57

First para

It would be helpful to define a clearer framework and outline principles and issues to be addressed by a potential BID scheme. The mechanism for considering feasibility and future implementation should also be identified.

In addition to BIDS and markets strategy, it would also be helpful to provide similar guidance for the evening economy, retailing, leisure, recreation and other activities.

11. Delivery

11.1 Section 5 of the TCM is headed 'Delivery'. This section is very weak, with hardly any firm plans with dates. Here one would expect:

(1) A set of prioritised items essential to fulfilment of the Vision, followed by a set of non-essential but desirable items.

(2) Target timescales with the assumed means of delivery for most of the items.

(3) Inclusion of many of the items described in Section 4 - Strategy. In particular:

(a) The 11 Council owned development sites, and other sites where essential to the Vision.

(b) Many more specific schemes relating to each of the headings used in 'Making better places through environmental improvements', namely:

- New street furniture
- High quality pocket spaces
- New green networks of open space and connections
- Tree planting
- Enhanced lighting
- Increased space for pedestrians
- Traffic calming without adversely affecting network capacity

(c) Statements of specific cases where CPOs may be used to achieve essential items.

As highlighted above, it is extremely important that the delivery table sets out a more convincing and comprehensive set of details, particularly in relation to timescales and means of funding.

11. Appendix 1 on page 13 The Plan headed "Arriving and getting around" should be corrected to show Onslow Street, Park Street and the whole of the Gyrotory system as "Main vehicle routes".

12. Appendix 1 Heritage and Streetscape The Society fully supports this section of the Plan and, in particular, those parts which refer to the Council's aspirations to remove clutter and to repair and renew paving.

13. Final Thoughts

13.1 In re-reading the draft TCM one is struck by the lack of overall vision. This is brought home with particular force in Section 5 'Delivery' (see para. 11 above).

13.2 The difficulty is the draft TCM does not contain a vision sufficiently thought out to enable a list of priority items and their date order to be identified. The TCM is not a 'Masterplan' in the usual sense of the word. The CABE document 'Creating successful Masterplans' is very instructive in this regard. The TCM ignores many of CABE's precepts – the need to look 'even decades' ahead, for 'up front strategic thinking', to be 'visionary' and 'fully integrated', and perhaps above all to express the Plan in three main elements (ref Box 10 of the document):

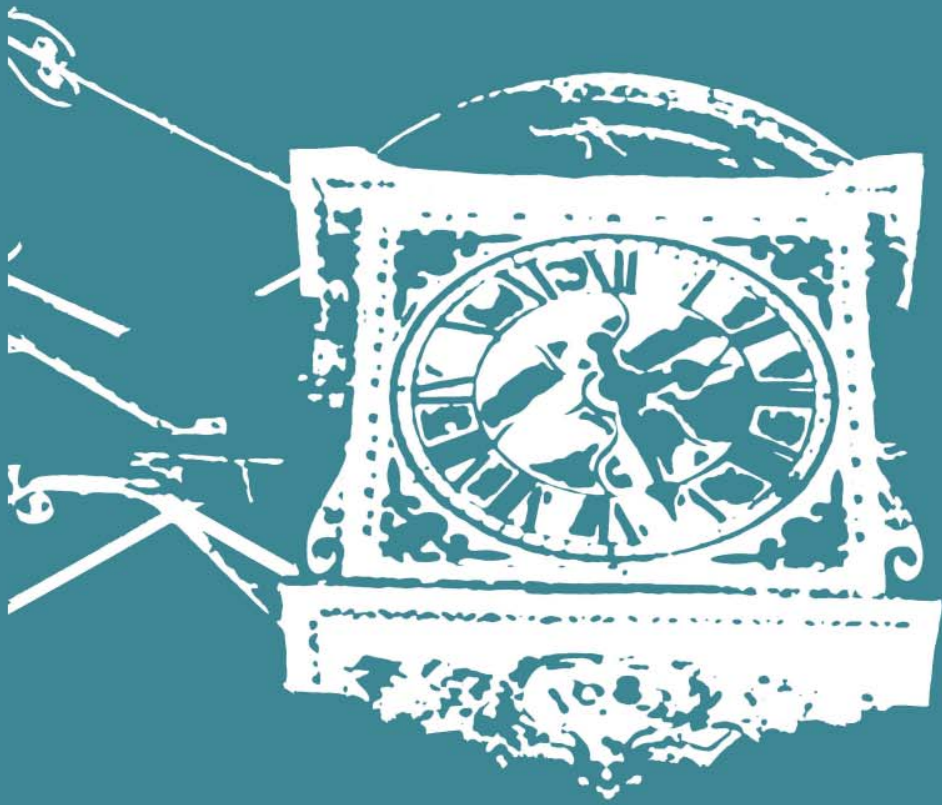
1. A Strategic Framework which 'may consider a much wider area than the Spatial Masterplan'.
2. A Spatial Masterplan.
3. An Implementation plan.

The Society urges the Council to review its Town Centre Masterplan both in respect of identifying a strategic vision for the town centre and in respect of the concerns raised by the Society about the many points of detail.

The Guildford Society

20th January 2012





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