

GVG Update

August 2017



The £3mill 10 year Local Plan – Does it Deliver?

We've just submitted our detailed comments on the latest Local Plan draft. You can find our comments on our website at www.guildfordvisiongroup.com. They make interesting reading. The Draft Local Plan can be found on the Council's website.

It's been the third opportunity to comment on the Council's draft since it started life ten years ago. A protracted and expensive exercise (believed to be costing £3m for consultancy) has produced a Plan that is lacking in many crucial elements. It has little aspiration or vision for what Guildford, especially the Town Centre, could be like by the middle of the century.

A Proper Plan Is Vital

Surveys repeatedly show the infrastructure deficit is cramping business plans and making the town centre less pleasant.

An agreed Plan is vital for Guildford. It unlocks government funding, allows informed decisions to be made on planning issues, and identifies critical infrastructure investment necessary to enhance the town's prosperity and attractiveness.

Sadly, we fear the Local Plan is set to fail the town centre. Although there are some nuggets of hope and progress, the latest Plan just isn't ambitious enough when it comes to the centre.

No Policy Is No Policy

GVG is all about creating a wonderful town centre, the very heart of our borough, and making it safe, vibrant, sustainable and attractive. Remember the six goals we set ourselves for the centre. It is by these that we have judged the Local Plan:

1. Wider pedestrianisation of the town centre
2. Exciting new public space and a reinvigorated riverside
3. Redirection of traffic away from the town centre
4. An integrated road and rail hub
5. More town centre housing
6. A new bridge for a better East-West link

The Town Centre must be properly planned. There are major components missing, e.g. agreement with Highways England on improvements to local road network. In its latest draft Local Plan the Council is

relying just on piecemeal development, supported by a Town Centre Regeneration Strategy it hasn't actually adopted as policy!

Councillors must be questioned as to why they approved the Plan draft if its proposals won't determine the path of either planning or planning applications in the centre. An unambitious, piecemeal Plan is insufficient to address current failures or to ensure our town is fit for the 21st century.

Town Centre First

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is very clear on the role which town centres have to play in the growth of boroughs:

'Local planning authorities should plan positively, to support town centres to ... create attractive, diverse places where people want to live, visit and work.

.. and plan to meet the needs of main town centre uses in full ... adopting a 'town centre first' approach and taking account of specific town centre policy.'

GVG struggles to discern any 'town centre first' or policy approach by the Council and believes Guildford will be the poorer as a result.

GVG has developed a master plan that it believes should be properly considered as a contribution to a more comprehensive and sounder plan for the town centre.

We want to make our robust case and to facilitate this GVG has engaged PRP, a respected planning consultancy, to help us scrutinise the local plan, judge its contents against other towns and to make fair representations. PRP has also marshalled our contribution to the Reg. 19 consultation just closed.

Some Examples Of Where The Draft Local Plan Fails:

a) North Street – A Centre For Tomorrow, Not Today
GVG left the area out of its masterplan on the basis that a scheme was about to be announced. The Local Plan has a very ambitious target for new retail space of 41,000sq metre, the planned volume for the North St site and almost half as much town centre retail space as exists today. So all our new retail eggs will be in one North St basket.

But our main concern is that retail is changing dramatically due to on-line retailing, nowhere more so

than the US where department stores, retail chains, and malls are in serious trouble. We lead the US in online retailing so are we heading for a North St fall before the scheme has got off the ground?

M&G and GBC have some interesting designs for their new mall on North Street, but should it be a much more mixed development – commercial, retail, leisure and housing in a mix that introduces attractive public realm and community assets? Guildford lacks modern attractive commercial space. Maybe this is part of the answer for North Street.

b) Housing to Help, Brownfield Best

The Council's draft Local Plan misses a timely opportunity to bring much needed housing to the centre in a proper joined-up, brownfield plan to the detriment of the Green Belt.

GVG believes that its comprehensive, carefully constructed and co-ordinated masterplan can deliver, for example, around 2,000 more homes in the town than the amount set out in the draft Local Plan. That would save either Blackwell Farm or Wisley.

Our housing proposals are sensitive to their setting, draw on sustainable criteria and redress one of the most crucial challenges for our town. Our masterplan puts brownfield first and development in a safer, more attractive riverside environment.

c) Our Crossing – We're Cross

Our new East/West crossing hardly merits a mention in the Local Plan. This is despite earnest arguments for it in the two previous consultations and the overwhelming support for it – 90% plus - at the two public meetings we held earlier this year. We have the supportive opinion of well-qualified professionals and organisations.

Meanwhile the pressing need remains to tackle growing congestion and record pollution and accidents in the heart of our town.

Our crossing enables so many benefits – wider, safer and healthier pedestrianisation, better cycleways, and a revitalised railway station and hub/interchange with buses. It brings great public space along the river, with an open market and new green spaces.

d) What the Local Plan leaves out

The Draft Plan is striking in what is left out, including potential development areas in the centre. Some areas are needlessly divided. Developing the east and west sides of station separately doesn't make sense. The

Plan is silent on any real detail on key infrastructure, eg roads, flood defences and renewable energy.

Let's Talk

Despite the best efforts of a number of people, we struggle to have sensible conversations and debate with Council Leaders over the good ideas in our masterplan. Indeed there is a reluctance to allow officers and others to talk to us. This reluctance now seemingly extends to County Council officers.

As part of the process to develop and approve a Local Plan, it is a statutory requirement for the Council to consult. GBC appears to be failing to meet this requirement.

It is ridiculous that we should have to turn to Freedom of Information and other statute-backed requests for key information. Aren't we all on the same side?

We apologise to the Council if they find our proposals too challenging or radical but we believe there is a need for interrogation of the direction of travel proposed by the Council and its leaders.

No one should doubt our conviction that something must be done to reinvigorate our town centre. Guildford is the regional hub. It should be a centre of growth and progress. As we fall short in our plans, other centres are getting ahead while our outlook is currently just further deterioration. This is simply not good enough. We should be hungry for progress.

The Next Steps

The GVG Steering Group continues to meet weekly in pursuit of its goals. We hope to be more active via social media to ensure we meet as wide an audience as possible. We do welcome feedback from you and all in the community.

We would like help on funding or fund raising, expertise in social media or professional skills in the built environment. In turn, we hope you will spread the word about our masterplan for the town centre. We need as much support as we can muster so we really can make our masterplan yours.

Our website www.guildfordvisiongroup.com has full details of our masterplan plus a very exciting 'flythrough' of the core of the town <http://guildfordvisiongroup.com/2017/02/guildford-vision-group-fly-through-video-of-new-plans-for-guildford/> It shows what might be achieved via a joined-up plan. You can contact us at by email: action@guildfordvisiongroup.com