

to the Guildford Town Centre and Hinterland Masterplan Report 5th draft August 2015 by A&M

1. The report is very welcome and most of the proposals put forward are to be applauded. Specific comments and queries on the plans for each of the six areas are briefly set out in the annex to this note which is mainly devoted to the issue of traffic.
2. Allies & Morrison set out placemaking concepts in their Overview on page 7. The difficulty with approach adopted towards highways and traffic is that it appears not recognise the role that the routes entering the existing gyratory perform in the town's network. These are 'A' roads for a reason and are important for maintaining connectivity in the town. It is surely sensible to acknowledge the broader context of the town centre and the very limited number of routes available to drivers who need to drive across the river and railway. Essentially, there are two main options for getting between the eastern and western halves of the town – the Farnham Road railway bridge and the A25 at the Wooden Bridge. The network operates at capacity in peak periods, so that incidents can cause gridlock.
3. There is, therefore, a balance to be established between the placemaking benefits of a 'healthy approach to movement' and the need to sustain connectivity in the town in the interests of commercial success, and minimising the economic costs caused by longer journey times. At this stage, the planning authority, GBC, and the highway authority, SCC, are not in a position to make an informed decision on the capacity provision that will be appropriate in the town centre. More work is needed before an option can be selected, and a higher level of investment may be justified that is currently being considered.
4. The section of Chapter 4 of the report headed 'A Healthy Approach to Movement' does identify the problem of capacity - "the central gyratory comes under huge pressure at peak hours of the day". However, the masterplan team has identified two preferred scenarios both of which will mean 'significant traffic reductions'. The analysis of the options that was carried out by the GoTCHA consultants, WSP-PB, used 2011 traffic data for morning and evening peak periods. We know that Guildford's population and employment (and schools) will grow substantially over the period of the Local Plan, possibly by 6-700 households a year across the borough. We also know that the surrounding local authorities are planning for significant growth. It is inevitable that traffic will increase. The OGSTAR report for GBC produced by SCC's transport team shows the order of magnitude of demand in 2031. So it is surely prudent to acknowledge that reducing capacity in the town centre by around 50% will not reduce congestion on the approach roads, and is very likely to have an impact on other parts of the road network. Congestion is also likely to extend into off-peak periods.

5. The over-arching movement strategy principles set out on page 42 of the report include 'rethink the gyratory to alleviate congestion'. It is not at all obvious how Scenarios 1 and 2 will achieve this. The analysis carried out by WSP-PB and reported in their Technical Note is 'high-level' and delays are probably understated. In their summary of options assessments (Table 28), WSP wisely do not provide a column with a total of 'scores' for the criteria examined. However, in the Summary Note (produced by A&M with Arup), the 'best-performing' options have been identified quite possibly on the basis of the aggregate points scored. In fact option 3 (preferred scenario 1) is the worst performing option in terms of traffic impact, closely followed by options 7 and 4. A scheme that removed all traffic would also score well. There are of course schemes among the options considered that would reduce capacity by much less than the preferred scenarios.
6. Further analysis is being carried out by the GoTCHA team using 2031 forecasts from the SINTRAM model. This can also take into account the recent announcement by Highways England about the planned improvements to the A3 after 2020. It is surely important to allow the results of this work to inform a decision on the capacity provision in the town centre.
7. A strategy to influence modal choice is essential whichever solution is adopted. Measures to reduce traffic demand are listed in the Summary Note (by A&M and Arup). There is an argument for adding measures to reduce school trips by car to the list. However, the idea of interventions to divert traffic away from the town centre begs the question of what alternative routes exist to divert to? The complement to traffic restraint is good public transport, and it would be helpful to have the proposals for buses developed further in the masterplan report.
8. Surrey CC has put forward a Guildford Town Centre Transport Package for consultation in parallel with the TCMP consultation. The package includes the possible experimental closure of Walnut Tree Close for a period of 18 months. Given that there are proposals in the TCMP for housing and office development in the river corridor, the closure of Walnut Tree Close would further constrain accessibility for residents and workers, including access to the station, and reduce the resilience of the network. As stated in the annex, the idea of changing the alignment of Walnut Tree Close to go under the railway has a lot going for it.
9. In summary, please do not restrict the town centre highway options to Scenarios 1 and 2 at this stage. More work is needed to inform this key decision.

Richard Jarvis

BSc, MS, FICE, FIHT

Annex to RDJ Note

- The Framework (p64) is excellent.
- Core Town Centre
 - key principles (p68) are excellent, but they are not contingent on Scenario 1.
 - there is a case for increasing housing in site AJ and reducing retail
 - what exactly is meant by ‘pedestrian route’? Does it mean ‘no vehicular access’? Are the bottom of the High Street and Quarry Street closed to vehicular traffic?
 - what is the solution for buses in the absence of the existing bus station?
- Bedford Wharf
 - key principles good
 - is there vehicular access to Bedford Road?
 - how do buses fit in?
- Millmead
 - the highways proposals are the subject of the main note
 - the ‘opportunities’ are not controversial
- Station Area
 - the importance of the station and it having good access and being welcoming cannot be overstated
 - the mention of Yorkies Bridge brings up the question of bus access to the University campus
- Walnut Tree Close
 - the closure of Walnut Tree Close would reduce the resilience of the network as well as accessibility for residents and workers to the station and A3, and also affect the routes of buses that might use Yorkies Bridge
 - the suggested realignment under the railway is a good idea
- Woodbridge Meadows
 - key principles are excellent.