

Compton Parish Council Local Plan Sub-Committee Report - January 2024

GBC Joint Executive Advisory Board (EAB) meeting - Local Plan Review

Guildford Borough Council held an EAB meeting on December 4, during which Cllr George Potter, Lead Councillor for Planning, outlined details of the Local Plan review process. He emphasised that this five-yearly statutory review was separate and distinct from updating and changing the Local Plan. The outcome of the review would determine whether an update of the Local Plan was required, and if so, what form the update would take and which aspects of the Local Plan needed updating. A full Council report on whether an update is needed will be tabled on February 21, 2024. If it is decided to update the Plan, a decision on the parameters of the update will be reached in mid- to late-spring 2024.

In deciding whether to update the Local Plan, Planning Policy Manager Stuart Harrison stated that the Council would consider:

- changes in national policy (eg the new Levelling-up and Regeneration Act (October 26, 2023); the revised NPPF in the light of the new Act; and new guidance on the new Standard Method of calculating housing need, expected to be published in spring 2024);
- economic changes that may impact viability of policies within the Local Plan, eg policies related to retail and employment space; and
- new social, environmental or economic priorities, eg climate change and biodiversity policies.

Mr Harrison said that, given the above, he believed an update to the Local Plan was likely.

Mr Harrison went on to state that the updated plan would be required to adopt the new standard method of calculating housing need, which – based on current guidance – would result in an uplift in housing supply in Guildford from 562 homes pa to 779 homes pa. Although he pointed out that this new figure could be challenged as part of the examination process, GBC would need to provide exceptional reasons for a lower figure.

Finally, Mr Harrison stressed that until any updated Local Plan is ratified, the existing Local Plan remains the primary consideration in determining planning applications, and that due weight must be given to its relevant policies.

Solar Farm

The planning application for the solar farm on the slopes of the Hog's Back at Chalk Pit and Wildfield Farm (spanning Compton and Worplesdon parishes), which was tabled in December 2022, has neither been presented to GBC's Planning Committee nor has it been withdrawn. The Local Plan Sub-Committee is concerned that the application may have been left in limbo to deter the land from being included in the revised National Landscape (formerly AONB) boundary. The Sub-Committee has, therefore, written to Natural England

for clarification as to whether land for which planning permission has been sought, but not granted, will be given the same consideration as land which has no such planning application.

The Sub-Committee understands that there are significant problems with the application for the solar farm, which would probably result in the application being rejected. These relate to the access road from the A31 (particularly the steep gradients) and the alternative sites document, which the planning officer has stated was “not robust”. (The landowner has extensive university buildings, a business park, and over 20 ha of surface car parks, all of which would be more suitable for solar panels than the land it has put forward.)

GRA meeting

The Local Plan Sub-Committee attended an online meeting of the Guildford Residents Association on November 21, 2023. The key issues discussed were as follows:

i) The AONB boundary review. It was noted that there would be no further announcements from Natural England on the Surrey Hills AONB (now National Landscape) boundary review until February 2024, when it was anticipated that the outcome of the AONB boundary review would be published.

ii) The Weyside Urban Village (Slyfield industrial park) - The GRA highlighted problems with regard to the proposed detailed planning, such as the road running alongside the River Wey, the positioning of the tallest buildings in the most exposed places, close to the river; and the lack of screening from the river. Members were concerned that these examples of poor design would set the standard for other strategic sites.

iii) Lack of sewerage capacity. The members noted that there will be no capacity for additional sewerage until 2027. This will have an impact on the delivery of strategic sites.

iv) London Road Cycle Scheme. The members voted for the GRA to oppose the London Road Cycle Scheme on the grounds that it reduced capacity on the roads. It was reported there is a possibility that Sustainable Movement Corridor (one of the infrastructure requirements for Blackwell Farm and other strategic sites) may not be pursued by GBC.

v) 20 mph zones. A member reported on the successful implementation of a 20mph scheme at Stoke Park, and suggested that other areas of the borough put forward such schemes. It was felt that Cllr Angela Goodwin was keen to see more villages adopt 20mph.