

Compton PC – Local Plan Sub Committee Report – March 2023

GBC Motion

On February 8, Guildford Borough Council (GBC) passed a motion that resolves that as part of a Local Plan update 2024, it will investigate:

- a. whether there are exceptional circumstances that would enable the return of allocated, but as yet undeveloped, countryside sites to Green Belt status and how to effect this; and
- b. the possibility of reducing the local housing need figure according to the Standard Method, as well as the housing allocation number for each allocated site not yet brought forward, in light of Guildford-specific issues relating to high student numbers and significant environmental constraints.

The motion was proposed by Cllr Nagaty of the Guildford Greenbelt Group and seconded by Tim Anderson of R4GV.

Solar Farm

The Compton PC 's objection to the application by SSE Energy Solutions for a solar farm on the northern slopes of the Hog's Back spanning Compton and Worplesdon parishes has been submitted to GBC.

Following the deadline for comments on this planning application (March 1), it has been announced that the land in question (at Chalk Pit and Wildfield farms) has been included in the latest proposal for the extended Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) boundary. This means that the land has been assessed by an independent landscape architect as of very high quality and meeting AONB criteria. The Local Plan Sub-Committee plans to write to GBC officers highlighting this fact, which lends weight to Compton's objection.

AONB boundary review

The consultation on the proposed extension of the Surrey Hills AONB was launched on March 8. The consultation closes on June 13. There are going to be two local 'drop-in sessions': one at the Guildford Institute on March 27, and the other at St John's Centre, Merrow April 18.

The boundary proposed by NE excludes Blackwell Farm. The consultation document states that: "Whilst the land covered by the Blackwell Farm allocation/access was considered to meet natural beauty criterion and is consistent with land further west, it nonetheless has been excluded due to the development allocation."

Following advice from Stephen Rudd, who is coordinating the boundary review on behalf of Natural England, the Local Plan Sub Committee plans to update and resubmit its earlier commentary. The Committee will add a request that land, such as Blackwell Farm, which is deemed to merit AONB status, but which has been allocated for development, could be made AONB at a later stage should that land be deallocated because the housing/infrastructure has not come forward. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to

revise the boundary and it seems a shame that areas of high-quality landscape should be excluded from the AONB if they are possibly going to be removed from the local plan.

In the light of the recent GBC motion (see above), the Local Plan Sub-Committee also plans to write to GBC to request that Blackwell Farm is removed from the next iteration of the Local Plan. The fact that both Natural England's landscape architect and the landscape architect commissioned by Compton and Worplesdon PCs both consider Blackwell Farm of AONB quality, together with the fact that none of the proposed traffic mitigation (upgrade to Tesco roundabout, the new West Guildford rail halt and A3 widening) has been delivered, could provide an exceptional circumstance for its deallocation.

GRA meeting

The Local Plan Sub-Committee attended a meeting of the Guildford Residents Association (GRA) on February 7. The meeting focused largely on what the GRA would be asking for in the run up to the next local election. The members agreed on six key demands:

- Stop tall blocky buildings ruining character and views in Guildford.
- No development without infrastructure.
- River Wey to be cleaned up with a green pathway along each bank.
- Take better care of wildlife and natural beauty of the Surrey Hills.
- Housing to meet needs, not coffers.
- Repair the breakdown in communication with the community.