



## Notes of Guildford Residents Associations Meeting on 10 December 2020

(Meeting held via Zoom)

**Chair:** Amanda Mullarkey

**Notes of meeting:** Jennie Kyte

### **Present:**

Amanda Mullarkey	Cranley Rd Area RA (CRARA)
Jennie Kyte	Holy Trinity Amenity Group (HTAG)
Richard Jarvis	Tyting Society
David Thorp	Tyting Society
Keith Meldrum	Merrow RA
John Baylis	Guildford Society
Alistair Smith	Guildford Society
Sue Hibbert	Abbotswood Central RA
Jim Rattray	Chantry Wood RA
Martin Dowland	Save the Hog's Back
Emma Shaw	Downsedge RA
Beverley Mussell	Westborough Broadacres & District RA (WBDRA)
Karen Stevens	Compton Parish Council
Janet Ashton	Perry Hill RA
Peter Watts	Friends of Stag Hill
Esther Parry	Friends of Stag Hill
John Harrison	St Catherine's RA
Fazia Carter	

### **Apologies:**

David Bird	WBDRA
Bob McShee	Wood Street VA
Donna Collinson	Stoke Next Guildford RA
Jane Vessey	Downsedge RA

Amanda Mullarkey opened the meeting and welcomed those attending.

The notes of the last meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> February were approved.

AM said that two important issues to be discussed at the meeting were the two national consultations and two Guildford consultations, which would have impacts for Guildford.

Richard Jarvis and the Co-ordination Committee had prepared the responses for GRA to the ‘Changes to the Current Planning System’ White Paper and to the ‘Planning for the Future’ consultations. We received advice from Neil McDonald, GRA’s housing number expert and RJ liaised with Guildford Society. RJ reported that the Government is outlining new proposals to simplify the planning system, increasing housing targets and the number of affordable houses. The proposals could mean that Guildford would be obliged to increase its housing target. There would be more centralisation, less local influence and more national standards to comply with. The outcome of the consultations is uncertain.

Alistair Smith of Guildford Society told the meeting that there were 40,000 responses to the ‘Planning for the Future’ consultation. There had also been recent changes to Permitted Development Rights so it is possible to add two floors to a building without the need for planning permission.

**The next GRA meeting:** AM informed the meeting that an AGM was due. The members present agreed to defer the meeting until the spring of 2021. Housing numbers could also be discussed at the meeting.

It may be possible to have a face to face meeting in 2021, but at present RAs are dealing with Covid restrictions. Also ready for a March/April meeting, the shared values of GRA will be refreshed in an updated Aspirations Paper.

**Action – Co-ordination Committee**

Niels Laub, Chair of Abbotswood Central RA, asked through Sue Hibbert whether RAs could become more involved with GRA responses to consultations. It was suggested that RAs should send their comments to the Co-ordination Committee as soon as possible when a consultation is published. The Co-ordination Committee is guided by the Aspirations Paper when preparing responses to consultations.

**Accounts:** Jim Rattray was thanked for his work on the accounts. He replied that bank statements were sent to the committee monthly, £900 was in the kitty and an audit was carried out in the spring each year. AM said that GRA had kept the subscription to £15.

**Subscriptions:** AM thanked all members that had paid for 2020. Those that have not yet paid were urged to do so. AM added that Neil McDonald did not charge for the advice which he had given recently about government changes to the planning system and housing numbers.

**Membership of the Co-ordination Committee:** Tim Harrold has decided to stand down from the Co-ordination Committee and received enormous thanks for all the work which he has done over the years. He first founded and chaired the East Guildford Residents Association (EGRA) and was succeeded by Graham Hibbert, who recruited RAs and Parish Councils from across the borough and expanded EGRA into the GRA of today.

AM asked for approval of the meeting for the addition of two new members to the Committee, John Harrison and Fazia Cater. John is from St Catherine’s RA, while Fazia, formerly chair of CRARA, has recently moved within the borough and is at present participating on an individual basis. The meeting approved their membership of the Co-ordination Committee..

**A3:** RJ reported that the scheme to improve the A31 and A320 was not included in the Government’s latest programme of major road investments (RIS2). This has serious implications for several of the strategic sites in the Local Plan. GBC will be carrying out a study to update the traffic evidence that

supported the Local Plan, reporting probably in 2022. But there is concern that developers will go ahead with developments without the A3 improvements in place.

Karen Stevens of Compton Parish Council reported that she had received information from Highways England contained in a document which states that three sites, Gosden Hill, Blackwell Farm and Slyfield cannot be taken forward without the A3 improvement. She will circulate the document when it is approved.

**Action - KS**

The planning application report for the M25 junction with the A3 is being finalised and will go to the Secretary of State in the New Year.

AS reported that Wisley Airfield developers, Taylor Wimpey, have commissioned their own traffic survey for the end of January, as they are not certain that studies carried out by GBC and SCC are adequate.

**Strategic Development Framework SPD:** Very few changes were made to the recent Strategic Development Framework following consultation, but changes to national planning policy may necessitate changes.

**Development Management Policies (DMPs):** The first consultation on DMPs was carried out in the summer. A second consultation (Reg.19) is scheduled for 2021. However, if the Government acts on its proposal for changes to the planning system, the scope for local policies will be much reduced.

**Weyside Urban Village (Slyfield development):** It was suggested that the buffer along the Wey corridor should be set further back, as it is proposed that a road (part of the Sustainable Movement Corridor with general traffic) would now run alongside the river. Green strips had been added to the development, but at the expense of the development being closer to the river edge.

Keith Meldrum reported that the Burpham Neighbourhood Forum was concerned about leakage from the old sewage works after the site has been taken over for development with potential to harm the River Wey.

**Wisley Airfield:** AS said that the proposed development is very close to the road and that high buildings are built near to the ridge. He questioned the sustainability of the development, given that it is totally car based.

**North St development:** AM attended an online presentation on North St, which took place before the GRA meeting. She reported that height was a key issue and that the bus station would be smaller with stands on Leapale Rd. The proposals show development lower on North St with six storeys and higher behind with perhaps thirteen storeys. There were options on style, but bulk and massing were also a problem. AM explained that there was to be less excavation than in the previous proposal in which a large hole was to be excavated in the middle of the development. The public were invited to a webinar on North St on Monday 14<sup>th</sup> December. *(Note added after meeting: The webinar has been recorded and is available on the developer's website: [www.northstreetregeneration.co.uk](http://www.northstreetregeneration.co.uk))*

**Casino:** RJ who dealt with the Casino application on behalf of GRA reported that planning permission for the development was refused by GBC and the developers have since appealed. The developers claim that the grounds for refusal were inadequate and that the height of the building could be lived with. There will be an opportunity to follow this up with a statement to the Planning Inspectorate in January.

The meeting agreed that GRA should reiterate its objection for the appeal.

**Action - Co-ordination Committee**

**Guildford Economic Regeneration Programme (GERP): Town Centre Masterplan project**

Cllr John Rigg is leading the Masterplan for the Town Centre. GBC has appointed a team of consultants that will soon begin work on the first phase of the preparation of a masterplan for the town centre. We look forward to the opportunity to engage with stakeholders in the process.

**Surrey Hills – prospects for AONB extension and National Park:** Natural England is due to consider incorporating the Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV) into the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Consideration is being given to creating more National Parks and there could be merit in the Surrey Hills becoming a National Park. The meeting agreed that GRA should support this.

AS suggested that Guildford could obtain Government funding under the Green Parks initiative.

**Cllr Joss Bigmore, Leader of the Council, was welcomed to the meeting to speak, followed by a Question and Answer session.**

He told the meeting that he was elected Leader of the Council in May and by agreement with the Lib Dems would serve as leader for two years, after which the Lib Dems would take over. He added that there were twenty-three major projects when he was elected which have now been prioritised. Guildford is in the evidence gathering phase for the Town Centre project and expert consultants have been appointed. The proposal for a Unitary Authority for Surrey has been dropped, but is likely to come back later. He believes that there is room for boroughs to work together. There are eleven boroughs in Surrey (and 600 councillors).

He reported that the Borough had achieved a phenomenal amount to get through Covid. Since becoming Leader, he had learnt a lot about Guildford and was shocked that there was a difference of eight years life expectancy between north and south Guildford.

As a result of Covid the Council will face a substantial deficit of £2 million in their budget this year and £4.4 million in 2023-24. During the Covid restrictions GBC has received less income from car parking and leisure (Spectrum). £6 million needs to be taken from reserves for Covid. The council will need to reduce some of its non-statutory services and there is at present a survey on the GBC website to ascertain residents' views on their priorities, as to which services must be kept and which could be cut. Council staff had already been cut from 680 to 510-520 to make savings. For example did we want to prioritise the museum, the Arts, or have our bins emptied only every three weeks. JB asked GRA to advertise the survey amongst its members. **Action – Co-ordination Committee**

**Government Planning Changes:** JB reported that Kent's MPs had written a letter to the Minister for Housing, Communities and Local Government objecting to the Government's housing number changes, which will result in large numbers of additional houses being built in the south east. The changes are now to be reconsidered. He said that Cllr Rigg had also written to every MP along the A3 about the A3 improvement through Guildford being dropped, but did not have the same success.

## Questions and Answers

RJ raised the issue of the loss of the A3 improvement scheme and how it will affect the Local Plan. It will have a huge impact on traffic with 200 more houses per year in the next Local Plan review, using the new way of calculating housing numbers in the White Paper. Even if the White Paper made the Local Plan redundant, the same would apply to a new Local Plan. It would be a bad outcome. JB said that the Council will be studying the transport evidence, and that there will be a mandatory 5-year review of the Local Plan. *(Added note from JB today – 16 Dec – that Government may be u-turning on the housing algorithm.)*

KS stated that the Local Plan was based on flawed and imperfect evidence and should be reviewed. JB pointed out that the Local Plan has been found sound by the Examination Inspector and after the election GBC had consulted an expert who told them that there were no further steps that they could take. He added that each of the developments had to go through the normal planning process at which objections could be raised.

**National Parks:** AM enquired about the Surrey Hills becoming a National Park as R4GV had promised to pursue this before the election. She asked if this could be put forward at the time of the next National Park review. JB responded that because of other priorities no action had been taken on this issue, and that the pros and cons of a National Park still had to be studied. AM asked if this could be pursued when the opportunity arose.

**Height of buildings:** Jennie Kyte of HTAG expressed concern that there were insufficient safeguards against over high buildings being built. JB replied that the Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) on Views offered some protection of defined important views, but that the Development Management Policy could be strengthened. However, some flexibility of building heights was necessary to allow developments, such as North St, to be viable and to take place, and also to allow for a bus station and public spaces. JK also pointed out that massing was important.

JB said that the development of North St was being undertaken by a consortium including the Berkeley group which has a reputation for high class development. A fly-through model will be available in February (called Vu-City). JB further added that the topography could support different heights at different points and that we needed to be open-minded, but nothing is decided on heights and any planning application will have to go through the planning process. Development will bring more residents to the centre of Guildford, which will support Guildford's retail and restaurants. He also mentioned Guildford Park Rd and Bright Hill as other sites which were soon to be developed with housing.

**Development Management Policies (DMPs)** will go through a second consultation and Examination by an Inspector will take place in 2022.

**Unitary Authorities:** AM asked about a unitary authority with shared services only. She further said that GBC needed to consult early to find out residents' views.

JB stated that the pros and cons of the different options ranging from just sharing services up to a full unitary authority for Surrey needed careful consideration. There needed to be a balance between economic savings and the need for proper accountability to residents. For example, sharing some services such as waste made economic sense but others, such as planning, needed to keep regional authority. Discussions with other councils were needed and any changes needed to be taken in small steps. He believed that one large unitary authority for Surrey was too large, but three unitary

authorities could be appropriate. There could be a case for a single unitary authority for Guildford, Woking, Waverley and Surrey Heath.

JB agreed that it was important to formulate and communicate our views before the Government pursued any reforms.

AM closed the meeting and warmly thanked Cllr Joss Bigmore for speaking to the meeting. She said that GRA would be pleased to take up his offer to meet further. **Action – Co-ordination Committee**