

Compton Parish Council Local Plan Sub-Committee Report - September 2020

Review of Local Plan

As previously reported, Compton PC has requested a review of Guildford's Local Plan on the grounds that a key piece of road infrastructure on which several strategic sites depend (the A3 widening) will not go ahead in the foreseeable future.

In response to our request, Council Leader Caroline Reeve stated that the Council would (in conjunction with Surrey County Council and Highways England) review its transport evidence base to "investigate the consequent cumulative impacts of approved development" and "to determine whether the proposed transport measures or additional transport measures could mitigate the cumulative impacts of development traffic on the A3".

Various other borough councillors expressed concern that a review would risk increasing the number of houses which the borough is required to provide overall. However the new planning white paper does allow for housing numbers to be reduced to take into account constraints, such as landscape and traffic (see bullet point 3 below).

Cllr Colin Cross is considering the implications of a Local Plan Review.

FOI re A3 widening scheme

A Freedom of Information request by Fiona Curtis has suggested that a GBC Officer gave misleading information to the Planning Inspector at the Public Examination of Guildford's Local Plan. The Officer stated that an A3 improvement scheme had been developed, which had been assessed as meeting Highways England's value for money criteria, and which has been assessed as being buildable. The FOI request has revealed that no statement was made to the officer in question in relation to the deliverability of the scheme.

This finding is significant as it means that participants in the Examination were deterred from discussing the implications of the A3 improvement scheme failing to go ahead (or being scaled back) by this false assurance from the Council.

It is also possible that this statement by the Officer influenced the Inspector's decision-making in relation to the soundness of the Plan, especially as the NPPF clearly states that all development schemes need to be deliverable at the time of the Examination, and those sites which were dependent on the A3 being widening clearly were not deliverable (contrary to what the Inspector was led to believe).

The Local Plan Sub-Committee (on behalf of Compton PC) will call on GBC to conduct a formal investigation into how the Officer came to make this statement.

Planning White Paper

On August 6, the Government's published its White Paper *Planning for the Future*, which proposes the following changes:

1. A new approach to land categorisation, whereby local authorities would be required to divide all sites in their area into one of three categories: "protected", "renewal" and "growth". In "growth" areas, developers would be given automatic planning permission, without having to wait for council approval (although they would still need to secure reserved matters permission in accordance with a locally drawn up design codes); areas of "renewal" (potentially all urban land) would be considered with a "permission in principle", with checks being carried out; and "protected" land (including green belts, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and heritage sites), would continue with the existing planning process. Some commentators have voiced concern about the quality, density and types of homes delivered under these changes.
2. The role of local authority planning committees is to be limited, with a move towards a more standardised, rules-based process and the delegation of detailed planning decisions to planning officers (where the principle of development has been established).
3. Housing numbers for all local authority areas is to be centrally set. The figures would be based on levels of unaffordability, so more expensive areas would be given higher targets. Given the imposition of a top-down target, local authorities would no longer have a duty to co-operate with each other over the drawing up of local plans. Numbers would take into account the presence of constraints on growth, such as green belt, but there is no explanation of how this would be carried out.
4. The existing system of developer contributions is to end. Section 106 agreements would be scrapped, while the existing Community Infrastructure Levy is to be replaced by a nationally-set levy on development value. The levy would be paid at the point of occupation, requiring local authorities to pay for and deliver any infrastructure needed upfront. Councils would be allowed to borrow against future levy receipts to fund this. This is a particular concern in Guildford, where it is likely that the large infrastructure schemes which underpin the local plan would be unable to proceed ahead of development and might never happen because they may not be deemed economically viable.
5. Public involvement in local planning is to be expanded by digitising the service to allow easier public access to planning documents and by encouraging public engagement earlier in the process.
6. Local authorities would be given a statutory period of 30 months in which to write a new-style Local Plan.

AONB boundary review

A petition has been launched by a private resident calling on Natural England to urgently undertake the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) boundary review. An independent landscape architect (appointed by Compton, Worplesdon and Wanborough parish councils) has evaluated Blackwell Farm and the surrounding area and concluded that it meets the AONB criteria and merits inclusion within the new AONB boundary. This is the

only detailed study of this area of the Hog's Back. Guildford Borough Council has ignored this evaluation in developing its Local Plan, but former Guildford MP Anne Milton forwarded it to Natural England on behalf of the three PCs. It is therefore in Compton PC's interest that the Natural England review goes ahead quickly.