

GUILDFORD RESIDENTS ASSOCIATIONS

Notes of Guildford Residents Associations Meeting on 25th March 2021

draft

(Meeting held via Zoom)

Chair: Amanda Mullarkey

Notes of meeting: Fazia Cater

Present:

Amanda Mullarkey	CRARA
John Harrison	St Catherine's RA
Richard Jarvis	Tyting Society
Keith Meldrum	Merrow RA
Fazia Cater	
Andrew Strawson	Merrow RA
Douglas French	Send
Bob Bromham	HTAG
Jennie Kyte	HTAG
Sue Hibbert	Abbotswood Central RA
Bob McShee	Wood Street VA
David Thorp	Tyting Society
Ian Durrans	Tyting Society
Alistair Smith	Guildford Society
John Baylis	Guildford Society
Jane Vessey	Downsedge
Chris Jubb	Ganghill
Jim Rattray	Chantry View
Martin Dowland	Beechcroft Drive and SHB
Karen Stevens	Compton PC and SHB
Roscelyn Connor	Friends of Stag Hill
Peter Watts	Friends of Stag Hill
Anthony Jacques	Onslow Village RA
Beverley Mussell (part)	We BDRA
Janet Ashton	Perry Hill

Apologies:

David Bird	WBDRA
Donna Collinson	Stoke Next Guildford RA

Amanda Mullarkey opened the meeting and welcomed those attending.

1. Minutes and matters arising

The notes of the last meeting on 10th December were approved.

AM declared an **interest** arising from her work with the Boundary Commission, and that she would not make any comment in relation to the merits of different options in the review of borough council boundaries or any possible future change relating to Surrey County.

2. Recent activity

1-5 The Quadrant/Casino site: a success for GRA and all others who had objected to the latest proposal for this site. In particular, early in the Inquiry, AM alerted the Inspector to the significant problems with the application including serious flood safety issues. The Inspector noted the concerns and went on to find that there were so many flaws that he would require a new application to be submitted. As a result, the applicant withdrew the application. It remains to be seen whether future proposals for this site will address height as well as flood planning issues.

Weyside Urban Village: this is a major planning application for one of the strategic sites in the Local Plan. GRA had recently submitted a response highlighting several objections (available on our website). AM highlighted the need to protect and enhance the River Wey, and that the proposed alignment of a section of the main access road to the site alongside the river near the entrance to the site is not acceptable. She also mentioned the importance of trees for screening, and concern over the housing density. The new Local Plan includes provision for substantial buffers along the boundary of developments and it is concerning to see a Council promoted application failing to satisfy this adequately.

3. Issues for discussion

Garlick's Arch: the latest updated application for this site for up to 500 houses has been submitted and the closing date for comments is 12th April. GRA submitted a response to the initial application over a year ago (issues raised: inadequate green buffer, no landscaping, no supporting infrastructure, no costing of under-grounding pylons).

Douglas French noted that the cumulative effect of various iterations of the same plan were that residents were suffering from despondency and felt that their comments were not being heard. Residents' concerns continued to centre on urban character of the proposals, and lack of infrastructure (transport, sustainability etc)

Alastair Smith from Guildford Society noted that the issue was likely not with the Planning Department as he was aware that Planning Officers were in fact also finding the developer/designers difficult to deal with. Residents should therefore continue to voice their objections.

AM suggested that GRA submit a further response, along the lines that we are thankful for changes in height but that concerns remained: inadequate buffer (still not substantial), housing still too dense, lack of infrastructure (including cumulative impact of various developments), inappropriate character. There was general agreement to this action.

Action – Co-ordination Committee

Wisley Airfield: the proposals for Wisley are in development, and there have been on-line consultations by the developers Taylor Wimpey (see www.wisleyairfield.com). AS informed the meeting that the developers are expected to release a traffic report shortly.

Richard Jarvis noted that the M25/A3 Junction 10 decision is expected by the Secretary of State for Transport in May. As was reported at the December meeting, SCC+GBC will be analysing the consequences of the omission of a scheme to improve the A3 in Guildford. All agreed that traffic data and A3 improvements were issues that needed to be kept on GRA agenda.

Action – Co-ordination Committee

Ward Boundaries: AM asked how many from the meeting were aware of this topic. From a show of hands, it appeared quite a few.

The following was noted:

- GBC has 48 councillors and the Council's preference is to keep the same number. The consultation will review how the number should be allocated
- Criteria for distribution being: 1. Electoral equality (i.e. similar number of electors), 2. Community identity, and 3. Effective and convenient local government
- RAs and Parish Councils could play a strong part in influencing the decision
- The Strategic Sites for example could affect wards
- Consultation offers opportunities to consider whether wards should be split along urban or rural identities.

Bob Bromham pointed out that Holy Trinity currently has 3 councillors, when it had previously had 2. It was noted that the review will look up to five years ahead – i.e. to 2027.

County Council Elections: election day is 6th May. In the past GRA has prepared a set of Expectations to send out to the candidates. AM summarised the suggestions for our expectations for:

- Infrastructure
- Green buffers
- Car redundancy and affordable public transport
- Not urbanising green space
- Harvey Road Adult Learning Centre (preserve as a community asset)
- Recycling
- AONB

It was proposed that a flood scheme for Guildford should be added to the Expectations.

A number of points specific to transport were raised by the meeting:

- a walking strategy should be added to the transport item
- school travel plans should be added to the transport item.

There was considerable debate about the principle and methods of charging for parking at SCC countryside areas. AM suggested the expectations document just mentions urbanisation of countryside with no mention of parking.

Local Authority Organisation: SCC's proposal for a unitary authority for Surrey (for example, as in Buckinghamshire) had been paused for the time being. The 11 district/borough councils in the county agreed that they are not in favour of a single authority for the county and commissioned a study by KPMG which reported in December 2020. In the preferred option Guildford would be combined with Woking and Waverley, and this is what GBC has adopted as its preference, should a reorganisation be triggered by government.

Also the Council has resolved to explore greater partnership working with Waverley BC.

RAs would need to comment early enough to influence the outcome. RA's needed to be mindful of the implications of the full-merger option. For example, the next local plan would be for the whole area, and there would be other implications such as for waste services.

Sue Hibbert registered worry that although a larger body would provide cost savings, it would lack proper accountability to local issues felt by residents.

4. Cllr John Rigg was welcomed to the meeting to speak followed by questions and answers

Cllr Rigg holds the Major Projects portfolio on the GBC Executive.

JR began by stating that the short-term priorities for GBC were framed by the Covid-induced financial difficulties which are likely to be felt for the next few years. Covid had severely impacted parking revenues (typically accounting for a 1/3rd of total annual revenue) revenue from leisure activities (e.g. GLive)

JR then discussed the several major projects currently underway.

North Street Regeneration: JR noted that the development would involve 3 stages of consultation. As part of stage 1 (when initial ideas were presented by the developer), over 1000 replies were received. These had been fed-back into revised iterations of the plan which JR believes is now good. The developer would in due course make an informal presentation of the plans to GBC and then also to the wider community. JR said he was happy with the consultative approach taken by the developer.

In response to DF's question on the proportion of retail space, JR confirmed that the plan was now primarily residential.

AM reiterated GRA preference for the bus station to remain in its current location. JR noted that although he could not divulge the detail, he felt that GRA would not be disappointed.

With regards to AM's query on height and bulk, JR noted that if the costs of relocating the bus-station were taken away then the need for excessive height to make the investment viable was also much reduced. Planning officers were also pushing for appropriate bulk and height configuration.

Debenham's Site:

JR added that he had asked Native Land (owner of Debenham's site) to follow the same consultative approach as the North Street developer. One of JR's big frustration when he was part of Guildford Vision Group was the lack of consultation., and he is keen to ensure that consultation is effective.

AM noted her concern that in their presentations, Native Land were not explicit enough on the trade-off between height and footprint. As such this represented a danger that residents could express a preference for a particular design footprint without realising that it came attached with a much higher building.

JR explained that Native Land had paid £20m for the site, and therefore would likely want some height, and it was unrealistic to expect a future building to be lower than the existing one. He added that RAs and residents should write in to express their views. The details are to be found at

www.stmaryswharf.co.uk. Native Land had already met with Guildford Society, Guildford Vision Group and HTAG.

Town Centre Master Plan

JR explained that a team of consultants has been appointed to work on the development of a plan for the town centre, and the firms involved are very experienced and capable. The team has sat with developers of the North Street and Debenham's sites.

JR believes that Guildford needs some radical thinking to be applied to the town to equip it for a successful future. This includes improving the environment and reducing the impact of traffic. The plan will look ahead to 2040.

The first phase of the work is concerned with assembling key basic information on matters such as details of existing infrastructure.

On a question from Janet Ashton regarding the Town Master Plan and whether it included a vision for attracting more diversity into Guildford, JR explained that this was envisaged through affordable housing as well as a mix of housing types.

Weyside Urban Village: JR commented that this was a "great" project and although not easy, it was a "brave" project that aspired to create riverside homes on a brownfield site.

On a question from AS on what solution was being offered to allotment holders who were being asked to move, JR explained that the new alternative site being offered was in fact far superior to the existing one in nearly every respect. There has been extensive consultation. Some allotment holders were however still holding the project back.

AM set out GRA's concerns that the road should be set back from the river. GRA were also concerned that a commitment from the Inspector that there would be a substantial tree buffer along the River Wey did not appear to have been followed. JR asked AM to send him the Inspector's comments so he could follow up. With regards to the issue of the location of the road, JR noted that there are several factors to be taken into account, including the position of a major sewer. He suggested we make contact with the GBC project manager, Michael Lee-Dickson.

Action – Co-ordination Committee

Ash Road Bridge: good progress is being made on this scheme which will remove the delays to traffic caused by the existing level crossing.

Sustainable Movement Corridor: JR explained that the current focus was on the SMC West section. Approval for the scheme has been received from SCC and Highways England, but not yet from the University, who own a piece of land that is needed. Discussions are continuing. JR referred to interest in exploring further routes ensured the corridor mirrored where people wanted to travel. AM welcomed this, reminding him that GRA's preference is for a star or flower-shaped pattern of routes rather than a single sinuous "snake".

Questions and Answers

Development Contribution: AM asked if GBC would be relying on S106 until CIL was in place. JR explained that he did not hold the planning portfolio and so could not speak to the timetable. He is finding that Section 106 agreements are working satisfactorily at present, and absence of CIL, S106 should be used. AM added that GRA were concerned that A3 improvement issues

were not being addressed. JR noted that he felt that S106 legislation was “very good” and worked effectively on big schemes, but it was the smaller in-fills that were probably being missed.

Flood Scheme: AM asked whether there would be consultation on flooding and Town Master Plan. JR explained that for the Town Master Plan, phase 1 would involve drafting of a holistic plan. This would then be taken to the GBC Executive and then also to the wider community. In addition, each significant area (such as floods, parks) would be given to special focus groups made up of key stakeholders. Currently, Arup is looking at the flood options (on behalf of GBC) with the Environment Agency and their consultants.

Sustainable Movement Corridor: Keith Meldrum asked whether there would be a master plan for the SMC. JR said that GBC has been focusing on the SMC West around the University and work on the rest of the SMC has been deferred. He hopes that there will be a progress report on the whole of the SMC by the end of the year. JR also said that there is an excellent report on cycle ways available on the Council website.

Cathedral Development: Peter Watts said a proposal for 130 dwellings was being brought forward and asked for views. AM suggested that this important issue should be taken up outside the meeting in order to finish on time.

AM closed the meeting and warmly thanked Cllr John Rigg for his time and helpful participation.