

Guildford Vision Group ('GVG') and The Guildford Society ('GSoc') Statement of Common Ground - DRAFT

30th April 2018 – reference the Guildford Borough Council Submitted Local Plan ('SLP') for the Examination in Public to be conducted by Planning Inspector Jonathan Bore from 6th June 2018

Purpose

This document is prepared to enable GVG and GSoc to express their agreed positions in advance of the forthcoming Examination in Public.

Common Ground:

Generally:

1. Guildford Borough Council ('GBC') has submitted its SLP for Examination in Public following a series of consultations since 2013 including:
 - a. 2013: Issues and Options Consultation
 - b. 2014: Regulation 18 Consultation
 - c. 2016: Regulation 19 Consultation
 - d. 2017: Regulation 19 Consultation
2. GBC has had several iterations of plans for Guildford Town Centre including:
 - a. 2012:
 - b. 2013: Interim Town centre Framework
 - c. 2014: Town Centre Vision
 - d. 2015: Town Centre Master Plan ('TCMP')
 - e. 2016: Town Centre Regeneration Strategy, adopted Jan 2017 ('TCRS (2017)')
3. The TCRS (2017) will inform bids for resources in the Council's capital programme for the period up to 2021-22.
4. Both GVG and GSoc agree that the Submission Local Plan ('the Plan') fails to provide a positively-prepared plan for the town centre.
5. Both groups agree that, in respect of the town centre at least, the Evidence Base appears to have followed the Plan (as a means of seeking to justify the original approach) rather than the Plan being solidly evidence-based.

6. Both organisations agree that the SLP should include a comprehensive, positively-prepared strategic master plan for the town centre.
7. Both groups decry the absence of a strategic master plan in the SLP for the town centre as a whole, and for large-scale sites and groups of proximate sites in the town centre.
8. Both groups are disappointed at the poor level of public engagement since the dissolution of the Local Plan Forum in early 2015, ahead of Local Elections.
9. Both groups regret the Council's decision to delay publication of and consultation on the Development Management Development Plan Document beyond adoption of the Plan.
10. Both groups call for main amendments to the Plan to include:
 - a. A more comprehensive evidence base of infrastructure deficits in the town centre;
 - b. A more detailed assessment of the capacity of brownfield sites to accommodate development without compromising the heritage of the town and views to and from the surrounding hills and countryside;
 - c. A clear connection between housing and infrastructure delivery;
 - d. An assessment of the impact of the release of Green Belt sites on the regeneration of key areas of brownfield sites in the town centre (NPPF (2012) Paragraph 80: Green Belt purpose 5 which is: *"to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land"*)
11. Both groups agree with the key ambitions that emerged from the TCMP (although not limited to the seven points set out in the TCRS (2017) p9):
 - a. A new Community riverside park
 - b. New pedestrian and cycle routes
 - c. Downgrading the gyratory
 - d. Sustainable transport modes
 - e. Housing sites balanced with other more traditional town centre uses
 - f. A thriving town centre
 - g. Protecting and enhancing Guildford's townscape and character
12. Both groups also agree with the other themes (TCRS (2017) p9):
 - a. Pedestrianisation
 - b. More sustainable travel
 - c. Modal shift from reliance on the private car (*although both groups do not expect this to be a panacea for the current infrastructure problems and may not be enough to manage the increased traffic from new developments within and outside the borough*)
 - d. Development of the riverside

13. Both groups agree the GBC Objectives set out below (from TCRS (2017)):

- a. Economic
 - i. Enhance the vibrancy of Guildford Town Centre
 - ii. Promote and create an investment friendly environment
 - iii. Improve traffic flow and infrastructure provision
 - iv. Ensure schemes are sustainable and do not lock future development potential
- b. Social
 - i. Link the Town Centre to the train station
 - ii. Improve on the existing leisure offer, appealing to younger generations
 - iii. Assist in meeting Guildford's housing demand
 - iv. A 21st century town
- c. Environmental
 - i. Open up the River Wey and improve connections to the river
 - ii. Create an enhanced and more positive public realm
 - iii. Reduce the concrete environment atmosphere
 - iv. Ensure schemes are sustainable and do not lock future development potential
 - v. Create and foster high quality design
 - vi. Protect the town's heritage and overall feel
 - vii. Respect existing townscape at the street and roof level

14. Both groups recognise the weaknesses expressed in TCRS (2017) p18:

- a. Traffic congestion during peak hours and uncertain travel conditions significantly interfere with business and private life
- b. Limited supply of homes
- c. Low supply of affordable housing not meeting the needs for Town Centre living or the Town centre share of housing supply
- d. Lack of suitable accommodation to meet the needs of the business community and end-users
- e. Economy based around the service and public-sector employment which needs to be diversified and start-up space provided
- f. Vacant and historic areas of the town not offering marketable accommodation and inadequate floorspace provision for shops and offices deterring users

15. Both groups also recognise the threats in the TCRS (2017) p18:

- a. Insufficient affordable housing provided to meet local need and demand potentially having a detrimental impact upon local businesses, local economy and resident population
 - b. Lack of development guidance and promotion of viable land discourages investment and development;
 - c. Lack of investment in infrastructure, particularly in the A3, leads to businesses relocating elsewhere
 - d. The skills mismatch in the borough continues to widen resulting in greater numbers travelling into the borough from long distances creating a shortage of economical employees
 - e. Increasing competition from other centres and London, may leave Guildford behind;
 - f. Failure to diversify the borough's economy may make the local economy vulnerable to future decline in service and public sectors.
 - g. Physical constraints – e.g. flooding, ground contamination
16. Both groups note the Guildford Economic Strategy 2013 – 2031 identifies that ‘...the borough experiences high levels of traffic congestion in the town centre and on major routes during peak hours. This is a concern for local businesses and residents.’
17. Both groups recognise that there are no safeguards in the SLP for the ambitions of TCRS (2017), because TCRS (2017) is aspirational and has no planning status.
18. Both groups believe that the GVG Master Plan (attached at appendix 1) is considered in greater detail and resolution than either TCMP or TCRS (2017) and would form a good basis for master-planning the town centre.
19. Neither group is aware of any other town or City where a group of private individuals with professional backgrounds have taken it upon themselves to develop a detailed plan for its town centre despite obstructions and limited engagement from the Local Planning Authority.
20. Both groups believe there would be scope to incorporate the GVG Master Plan into this SLP as part of a group of main amendments (including adequate provision for consultation), and that the SLP would be much the better for a positively-prepared strategic plan for the town centre.

Guildford Vision Group

27 April 2018

