

2.0 A Profile of the Borough

2.1 This Chapter identifies the Borough's general character and planning issues which the Plan needs to address.

Introduction

2.2 Guildford Borough is situated in the south-western part of Surrey some 30 miles from Central London and 45 miles from the South Coast. It is bordered by Waverley Borough to the south, the District of Mole Valley to the east, by Elmbridge, Woking and Surrey Heath Boroughs to the north and Rushmoor Borough (in Hampshire) to the west.



Fig. 2.1 Guildford's context within Surrey

2.3 The Borough of Guildford is Surrey's most populous District with a population of approximately 129,000. The two principal urban areas are the town of Guildford and in the west of the Borough the urban area of Ash and Tongham.

2.4 Approximately half the Borough's population live in Guildford Town, a thriving county town with an attractive historic core and a wide range of commercial, retail and leisure facilities. The University of Surrey is located in the town while the Guildford Cathedral is a dominant landmark. The town is situated in a valley at a point where the River Wey cuts through the North Downs. This has been a significant influence in the town's historic development.

2.5 Ash and Tongham have a population of approximately 17,500 and are mostly residential in character. Ash has a local shopping centre and some small industrial estates.

2.6 The countryside of the Borough is extensive and contains a number of villages, isolated areas of housing, long established businesses, farms and woodland. The landscape is generally attractive, and exceptionally so in the south of the District of which the North Downs forms a part.

2.7 Four major roads pass through the Borough. The M25 enters the Borough briefly at Wisley at its junction with the A3. The A3 runs from north to south through the Borough and provides road links to both London and the South Coast. The A31 runs along the top of the Hogs Back and joins with the A331 Blackwater Valley Road at the western end of the Borough.

2.8 The Borough is well served by rail with direct lines to London, Portsmouth, Reading and Gatwick.

Planning Designations

2.9 Outside of the urban areas most of the District is designated as Green Belt. The detailed boundaries were established in the Guildford Borough Local Plan 1987. A small area of countryside in the west of the Borough lies beyond the outer edges of the Green Belt and is valued for its landscape quality and opportunities for informal recreation.



Fig. 2.2 Green Belt

2.10 The southern part of the Borough lies within the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), with further areas designated as an Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV) (figure 2.3).

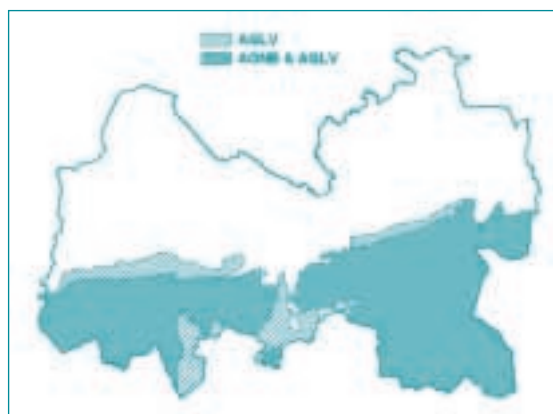


Fig 2.3 Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Area of Great Landscape Value

2.11 On the western edge of the Borough lies the Blackwater Valley strategic gap, which retains the open character of the valley, and where increased recreational opportunities are promoted.

2.12 The Borough has a rich and varied architectural heritage with over 1,000 listed buildings and 38 Conservation Areas.

Planning Issues in Guildford Borough

2.13 The attractiveness of the Borough and its close proximity to London means that historically there has been continued pressure for development. In the past the Borough Council has sought to strike a balance between meeting the development needs of residents and business while protecting and enhancing the Borough's environment. An essential element of this has been the control of development in the Green Belt.

2.14 Since the early 1980s significant new housing development has taken place in the urban areas, although the population has only risen slowly. At the same time the employment base of the Borough has expanded as commercial development has taken place. Guildford Town Centre has reinforced its position as a shopping

centre of sub-regional importance with a number of major shopping developments. Other significant changes include the continued expansion of the University of Surrey on Stag Hill and the nearby development of the Royal Surrey County Hospital and Surrey Research Park.

2.15 Road traffic and congestion has increased significantly and is probably the greatest issue of environmental concern to local residents.

2.16 It is anticipated that development pressures will continue during the period of the Plan. The challenge facing the Borough Council is to ensure that essential development which supports and enhances the quality of life enjoyed by the Borough's residents is achieved without compromising the environmental qualities which make the Borough such an attractive place in which to live and work.

Population and Housing

2.17 The population of the Borough is broadly stable at around 129,000.

2.18 The number of dwellings in the Borough increased from 49,821 in 1991 to approximately 53,000 in 2002, most of which were accommodated in the urban areas. The requirement for new dwellings imposed by the Surrey Structure Plan has decreased from a peak of 492 dwellings per year between 1978 and 1991¹ to an annual rate of 200 between 2001 and 2006².

2.19 During the Plan period the proportion of the population over 60 will increase from 20% to 21%.

2.20 The availability of affordable housing is a particular issue in Guildford. Housing is generally expensive; in June 2002 the average price being asked for a three bedroomed semi detached house was £191,000 - an increase of 14.8% from March 2001³.

¹ Surrey Structure Plan 1980

² Surrey Structure Plan 1994

³ House Prices in Surrey, Surrey County Council June 2002

The Local Economy

- 2.21 During the 1980s the Guildford economy saw significant growth and restructuring. There were fewer jobs in the manufacturing sector whilst there was a significant increase in service sector jobs.
- 2.22 In the early 1990s Guildford was hit by recession but in the mid to late 1990s there has been further economic growth. In this period the service sector continued to grow whilst the manufacturing sector declined further reflecting the trend of the 1980s. Growth sectors gap include Information Technology, Transport and Communications, Business Services and Public Services⁴.
- 2.23 Between 1981 and 1991 there was a total increase in jobs in the Borough of 10% that has resulted largely from increases in office development but also from increased part time work and more efficient use of floorspace. This trend has continued through the 1990s. Most employment development was achieved on existing sites rather than through greenfield releases.
- 2.24 Unemployment in Guildford Borough has always been relatively low. In the Guildford and Aldershot Travel to Work Area, unemployment fell from a peak of 7.7% in January 1993 to 0.9% in June 2002.
- 2.25 The rural areas of Guildford make an important contribution to the economy. Over 25%⁵ of Guildford's jobs are located in the rural wards. Most notably these jobs are in the Construction Sector (38.5%), Agriculture, Manufacture and Utilities Sector (34%) and the Leisure Sector (36%). Employment in agriculture has declined. Between 1986 and 1996 the number of jobs in this sector fell from 1,321 to 687⁶.

⁴ Surrey Economic Audit 1996
⁵ 1991 Census Special Workplace Statistics
⁶ MAFF Survey

Shopping

- 2.26 Guildford Town Centre remains the focus of retail activity in the Borough and in recent years it has strengthened its position as a regional centre. This has been largely due to its distinctive and attractive environment and the continued investment by retailers in new and refurbished shops. The total retail floorspace in the Town Centre increased by 13% between 1981 and 1995, with a significant reduction in convenience shopping compensated for by a 42% increase in comparison goods floorspace and a 49% increase in service floorspace such as banks and building societies.
- 2.27 Outside the Town Centre additional retail floorspace has been provided by two superstores and also by retail warehousing along Ladymead to the north of Guildford Town Centre. In recent years, suburban and local centres have experienced increased vacancy rates and a reduction in the numbers of units largely due to changes in shopping patterns and increased competition from larger shops. The number of village shops has also declined.

Movement

- 2.28 The last few years have seen significant growth in road traffic in the Borough reflecting increased car ownership, greater mobility and falling use of public transport. Car ownership in Surrey is significantly above the national average and is forecast to grow, while use of the bus and train, walking and cycling are declining. Figure 2.4 below shows the journey to work patterns between 1971 and 1991.

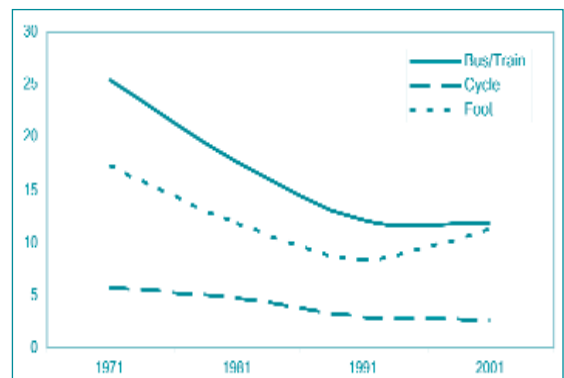


Fig 2.4 Journeys to work undertaken by bus & train, bicycle and on foot

2.29 Commuting patterns in Guildford have always been complex, with traditionally many people travelling out of the Borough to work. However the increase in jobs in the Borough and greater mobility has resulted in increases in in-commuting of 19.4%, between 1981 and 1991. At the same time out-commuting continued to increase. The concentration of schools, public and private, and of institutions of higher and further education, particularly in the inner areas of the town, complicates the peak hour traffic patterns.

2.30 The result of these trends is increased congestion, poor accessibility into Guildford Town Centre and deterioration in the quality of the environment. In rural areas road traffic has also increased with resultant damage to environmental quality. Guildford's location in a gap in the North Downs means that a significant amount of through traffic is funnelled throughout the town centre adding to congestion problems.

Recreation and Tourism

2.31 Guildford Borough is a sub-regional focus for recreation and arts with facilities such as the Spectrum Leisure Centre, Yvonne Arnaud Theatre and the Guildford Civic Hall. In addition there is a range of facilities that attract visitors and tourists including the historic centre, a number of historic properties and places of interest, attractive countryside and picturesque villages. The Royal Horticultural Gardens at Wisley in particular attracts over half a million visitors a year. There is however an acknowledged shortage of provision in hotel accommodation and tourism plays an important part in the local economy.

2.32 A survey of open space undertaken as part of the review of the Plan revealed that most parts of the urban area have a shortfall of open spaces, including children's play areas, compared with National Playing Fields Association standards.

2.33 Demands on the Borough's countryside for recreation has increased in recent years. While this has helped to diversify

the rural economy it does raise concerns about the impact on the environment. Traffic is a major issue but other pressures include noisy sports, horse related development and golf course provision.

The Built Environment

2.34 Much of Guildford's built environment is of a high standard both in the Town Centre and the outlying areas. This contributes to the quality of life for Guildford residents and is also important in the promotion of the economy of the Borough. The protection and enhancement of the built environment is therefore given great priority.

2.35 However, there are areas within the Borough where the environmental quality is not so good. This has arisen due to a number of factors, many of them not connected to the planning process directly, but they are exacerbated by development, particularly housing which pays little regard to the character of the local area. Some of the Borough's smaller shopping centres also suffer from a poor or mediocre environment. Within Guildford Town Centre it is acknowledged that some of the commercial development, which took place in the 1970's and 1980's, is too big and out of scale with the domestic townscape which is characteristic of Guildford.

2.36 Road transport and particularly the demands of the motorcar can have a dramatic and often damaging effect. Transport planning is often concerned only with highway safety and the design and planning of highway improvements can often be insensitive.

The Natural Environment

2.37 The Borough contains areas of exceptional landscape beauty as well as a wealth of natural habitats - not only Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's) but also areas of county and national significance for nature conservation.

2.38 There is limited knowledge about what changes to the quality and diversity of the natural environment are taking place, although national trends show a continued decline.

2.39 While many areas of landscape and natural importance are protected and enhanced by restrictive policies and good management it is clear that poor management techniques and developments have started to erode the landscape quality of some parts of the Borough.

2.40 Guildford has significant tree cover - however much of the Borough's woodland is neglected or may be managed inappropriately reducing its value and leading to long term decline. The same applies to hedgerows, coppice woodland and non-woodland trees⁷. River Valleys also add significantly to local landscape character and the conservation value of the Borough's natural environment. The River Wey flows through a wide floodplain. The River and its tributaries (including the Tillingbourne) support many sites of county and national importance for nature conservation. The River Blackwater is a very important open and ecologically valuable corridor passing through a heavily urbanised area and continuous efforts are underway to improve riverside access and enhance the local environment.

Air Quality and Water Quality and Flooding

2.41 The character of Guildford Borough is such that there are very few large-scale industrial operations that are potential sources of pollution. Air Quality problems in the Borough are primarily due to traffic.

⁷ The Future of Surrey's Landscape and Woodlands 1997 and Surrey's Countryside Strategy 1997

2.42 The River Wey and Blackwater River are the two main surface water sources in the Borough. The Environment Agency has identified water shortages and potential flooding as key issues in Surrey - but these are mostly concerns in the east of the County. However, flooding from rivers throughout the Borough, particularly the River Wey in Guildford, will be an important issue when considering development proposals. The River floodplains are a natural resource and will need to be protected and where appropriate restored. Water Quality in the River Wey and Tillingbourne is good, but fair or poor in the Blackwater River ⁸.

Community and Education Facilities

2.43 Guildford has a wide range of education and community facilities serving the Borough's residents. Of particular note are the University of Surrey, Guildford College and Royal Surrey County Hospital.

2.44 Assessing the adequacy of community and education facilities is quite difficult although there is no obvious shortage of major facilities. There are few opportunities to provide new facilities, particularly at the local level, because prevailing land values tend to favour other uses, particularly residential and commercial development.

Summary

2.45 Guildford Borough has much to be proud of in terms of a strong local economy, generally high quality environment, and a wide range of shopping, cultural and recreational facilities. (One of the main aims of the Local Plan is to protect and enhance these assets.)

⁸ Thames Environment 21: The Environment Agency Strategy for Land Use Planning in Thames Region (draft) July 1997

- 2.46 However there are pressures that the Plan also needs to address - these include the damage done to the environment by traffic, the threat to greenfield sites and the deterioration in the natural environment. The lack of affordable housing for many of the Borough's residents remains a major concern. The quality of new development is not always as good as it should be while most parts of the Borough are short of open space.