GUILDFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

At an extraordinary meeting of Guildford Borough Council held at Millmead House, Millmead, Guildford on Wednesday 26 February 2014.

*The Mayor, Councillor Diana Lockyer-Nibbs
*The Deputy Mayor, David Elms

* Councillor Richard Billington
* Councillor Melanie Bright
Councillor David Carpenter
* Councillor Adrian Chandler
* Councillor Mark Chapman
* Councillor Sarah Creedy
* Councillor Graham Ellwood
* Councillor Zöe Franklin
Councillor Steve Freeman
* Councillor Andrew French
* Councillor Matt Furniss
* Councillor John Garrett
Councillor Christian Gilliam
* Councillor David Goodwin
* Councillor Lizzie Griffiths
* Councillor Murray Grubb Jnr.
* Councillor Angela Gunning
* Councillor Gillian Harwood
Councillor Jayne Hewlett
* Councillor Liz Hogger
Councillor Christian Holliday
* Councillor Philip Hooper
Councillor Gordon Jackson

Councillor Jennifer Jordan
* Councillor Monika Juneja
* Councillor Julia McShane
* Councillor Bob McShee
* Councillor Nigel Manning
* Councillor Stephen Mansbridge
* Councillor Anne Meredith
* Councillor Mrs Marsha Moseley
* Councillor Nikki Nelson-Smith
* Councillor James Palmer
* Councillor Terence Patrick
Councillor Tony Phillips
* Councillor Mrs Jennifer E Powell
* Councillor Caroline Reeves
* Councillor Iseult Roche
* Councillor Tony Rooth
* Councillor Pauline Searle
* Councillor Paul Spooner
* Councillor Nick Sutcliffe
Councillor Keith Taylor
* Councillor Neil Ward
* Councillor Jenny Wicks
Councillor David Wright

*Present

CO106 – APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors David Carpenter, Steve Freeman, Christian Gilliam, Jayne Hewlett, Christian Holliday, Gordon Jackson, Jennifer Jordan, Tony Phillips, Keith Taylor and David Wright.

CO107 – LOCAL CODE OF CONDUCT: DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

There were no disclosures of interest.

CO108 – MAYOR’S COMMUNICATIONS

There were no Mayor’s communications.

CO109 – PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

As the respective petition organisers had been informed that public speaking at this extraordinary meeting would, subject to the Council’s approval, be limited to seven speakers for each petition, the Council

RESOLVED: That Public Speaking Procedure Rules be suspended to enable the speakers listed below to address the meeting.
In accordance with Public Speaking Procedure Rule 1 (c), the following persons addressed the Council in relation to Item 5 on the Council agenda: Petition from Residents of Effingham regarding the Mole Valley Green Belt Review (see Minute CO110 below):

(1) Arnold Pindar  
(2) David King  
(3) Lois Driscoll  
(4) Tim Harrold  
(5) Susan Morris  
(6) Vivien White  
(7) Roland McKinney

The following persons addressed the Council in relation to Item 6 on the Council agenda: E-Petition – Strategic Housing Market Assessment (see Minute CO111 below):

(1) Robert Burch  
(2) Dr Peter Shaw  
(3) Ben Paton  
(4) Helen Jefferies  
(5) Fiona Curtis  
(6) Roland McKinney  
(7) Nick Norton

(The webcast showing the contributions from each of the speakers may be viewed here, timed at 00:15:19)

CO110 – PETITION FROM EFFINGHAM RESIDENTS REGARDING THE MOLE VALLEY GREEN BELT REVIEW

In accordance with Public Speaking Procedure Rule 1 (d) and the Council’s petition scheme, the petition organiser Ms Jane Buckingham made a statement to the Council in support of her petition (signed by 325 people who lived, worked or studied in the borough) and an identical e-petition (containing a further 243 e-signatories).

The petition had asked the Council:

“to recognise the wishes of Effingham residents of maintaining the Green Belt between Effingham and Bookham when Guildford Borough Council is consulted on the Mole Valley Green Belt review.”

The e-petition on the Council’s website provided further information as follows:

“Mole Valley is undertaking a Metropolitan Green Belt review, which could move the boundaries and protection of the existing Green Belt to allow new housing development to take place. The Bookham review has been delegated to a local forum, Bookham Vanguard, and it impacts Effingham residents as it could close the strategic gap between our villages and result in the loss of existing green space and wildlife habitat.

As Effingham residents, we believe it is important to protect this area of Green Belt and maintain a strategic gap between Bookham and Effingham.

We are strongly against any proposals that would result in closing or diminishing the existing gap and call on Guildford Borough Council to recognise the wishes of Effingham residents when the council is consulted on the Mole Valley Green Belt review”.  

Before commencement of the formal debate on this petition, the Council
RESOLVED: That Council Procedure Rules be suspended to allow the Lead Councillor for Planning and Governance, Councillor Monika Juneja, to speak for up to ten minutes in moving the respective motions in response both to this petition and the petition referred to in minute no CO111 below.

The Lead Councillor for Planning and Governance, Councillor Monika Juneja proposed and the Leader of the Council, Councillor Stephen Mansbridge seconded the following motion for the purpose of the Council’s formal response to the petition:

“The Council RESOLVES:

That its formal response to this petition is as follows:

1. The Council thanks the signatories to the petition from Effingham residents, and the organisers who have brought this matter to their attention. We recognise the deeply held concerns and strength of feeling about protection of the Green Belt between Effingham and Bookham.

2. The Council is well aware that one of the purposes of the Green Belt is to ‘prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another’.

3. The Council wishes to reassure the petitioners and residents that it has made no decisions itself about the future of the Green Belt within our borough. We are, however, in discussion with Mole Valley District Council (MVDC) about this and other issues, as part of an ongoing process of co-operation between neighbouring authorities through the development of our local plan.

4. The Council is well aware that the National Planning Policy Framework (paragraph 83) requires that Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in “exceptional circumstances” through the preparation or review of the Local Plan, and this applies to both Guildford and MVDC. In its response to the MVDC Green Belt Boundary Review Consultation, the Council will remind them of this.

5. The Council will also urge MVDC to ensure that even if any amendment is made, there should continue to be a defined and defensible boundary between the two settlements. We shall also encourage MVDC to review all the sites within their review and not wait, producing more uncertainty, until the Guildford Draft Local Plan is published, as is suggested by the consultation.

6. The Council will forward the petition to MVDC and urge them to respond to it appropriately, but recommends that the Petitioners also present their concerns and wishes directly to MVDC before the Consultation period closes.”

Following the debate on the petition and the proposed response to it, and before the vote was taken thereon, Ms Buckingham exercised her right of reply on the debate.

At the request of Councillor Monika Juneja, supported by four other councillors, a recorded vote on the motion to adopt the formal response to this petition as set out above was conducted pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 15 (d).

The Council

RESOLVED: That, by 37 councillors voting in favour, one voting against and no abstentions as recorded below, the motion setting out the Council’s formal response to this petition, as set out above, be adopted.
Councillors voting for the motion:
Councillor Richard Billington
Councillor Melanie Bright
Councillor Adrian Chandler
Councillor Mark Chapman
Councillor Sarah Creedy
Councillor Graham Ellwood
The Deputy Mayor, Councillor David Elms
Councillor Zöe Franklin
Councillor Andrew French
Councillor Matt Furniss
Councillor David Goodwin
Councillor Lizzie Griffiths
Councillor Murray Grubb Jnr.
Councillor Angela Gunning
Councillor Gillian Harwood
Councillor Liz Hogger
Councillor Philip Hooper
Councillor Monika Juneja
The Mayor, Councillor Diana Lockyer-Nibbs
Councillor Nigel Manning
Councillor Stephen Mansbridge
Councillor Julia McShane
Councillor Bob McShee
Councillor Anne Meredith
Councillor Marsha Moseley
Councillor Nikki Nelson-Smith
Councillor James Palmer
Councillor Terence Patrick
Councillor Jennifer Powell
Councillor Caroline Reeves
Councillor Iseult Roche
Councillor Tony Rooth
Councillor Pauline Searle
Councillor Paul Spooner
Councillor Nick Sutcliffe
Councillor Neil Ward
Councillor Jenny Wicks

Councillors voting against the motion:
Councillor John Garrett

Reason for decision:
To provide the Council’s formal response to the petition in accordance with the adopted Petition Scheme.

(The webcast debate on this item may be viewed here, timed at 01:01:58)

**CO111 – E-PETITION – STRATEGIC HOUSING MARKET ASSESSMENT**

In accordance with Public Speaking Procedure Rule 1 (d) and the Council’s petition scheme, the e-petition organiser Mrs Susan Parker made a statement to the Council in support of her e-petition.

Councillors noted that when this e-petition closed on 19 February 2014, a total of 1,200 e-signatures had been received.
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The e-petition had called on the Council:

“to prepare a new SHMA and reject the consultant's draft report as inadequate”.

The e-petition on the Council’s website had provided further information as follows:

“The consultant’s report is unsound as the foundation for a draft SHMA. It contains errors, subjective assessment and manipulated data, and so needs to be redone. It is subject to challenge.

Guildford needs an objectively prepared SHMA which is proportionate and realistic, meets proper requirements and will not be overturned, and will be useable in the context of the Local Plan. We therefore petition the councillors to prepare a new SHMA as soon as possible in consultation with community groups and parish councils.”

The Lead Councillor for Planning and Governance, Councillor Monika Juneja proposed and the Leader of the Council, Councillor Stephen Mansbridge seconded the following motion for the purpose of the Council’s formal response to the e-petition:

“The Council RESOLVES:

That its formal response to this e-petition is as follows:

1. The Council thanks the signatories to the e-petition about the draft SHMA Report, and the organiser who has submitted it, and recognises that it justifies a full debate under the Council’s petition scheme.

2. In order to adopt a sound Local Plan the Council must follow lengthy prescribed statutory procedures, as well as following the guidance provided by the National Planning Policy Framework 2012. Paragraph 47 requires the Council to demonstrate a 5-year deliverable housing supply, which is linked to the likely need in the borough.

3. The Council’s consultants are a well-known professional firm, engaged in work of this nature regularly throughout England, and established as a business for over 90 years. The draft SHMA Report has analysed data about the likely need from reputable and reliable sources.

4. The Council has held stakeholder engagement exercises for elected members (16 January), all the Surrey Councils, developers, planning agents, housing associations and the Home Builders Federation (27 January), and Residents’ Associations (3 February). A Senior Planning Inspector for the UK, Keith Holland, was amongst those took part on 16 January, and has had an opportunity of feeding back any concerns to G L Hearn.

5. The Council does not disagree with the major part of the e-petition, in that it recognises that the Borough needs an objectively prepared SHMA, which will be an important piece of evidence upon which the Council’s Local Plan policy will rely - once it has been formulated.

6. The e-petition asserts that the SHMA contains errors, is subjective and manipulates the data; however, no evidence was submitted with the e-petition in support of this assertion, but we recognise that formal submissions received in response to the SHMA consultation have questioned the accuracy and objectivity of the SHMA. All submissions will be properly considered by officers and our consultants to ensure that the final SHMA contains no factual inaccuracies and is sufficiently robust. We
cannot agree with the e-petitioners’ view that the SHMA ‘will be subject to challenge’ and that we should immediately discard it, not least because such action would also be premature as the Report has yet to be finalised.

7. The sentiments expressed will be fed back to the consultants in finalising their Report, so that the e-petitioners’ views are properly taken into account. The Council appreciates the concerns held by the petitioners, whilst being unable to agree with them or take the action requested.”

In moving the motion, the Lead Councillor reminded councillors that the Draft SHMA that G L Hearn had produced identified the level of objectively assessed housing need for the borough over the plan period. This was not the number that the Local Plan would adopt but it did form the basis for the consideration of what that number should be. The draft SHMA had identified a range of between 671 and 800 dwellings per annum as the need in the borough taking into account all the factors that the relevant guidance required us to.

The Council noted that all comments received following the recent public consultation on the draft SHMA would be referred to G L Hearn for a response. In the light of the consultation responses, G L Hearn would also review the draft SHMA and make changes to it where appropriate.

The Lead Councillor had also commissioned a review of the draft SHMA by independent statisticians to ensure that it provided a sound basis for the identification of the objectively assessed housing need. This review would examine the robustness of the methodology, provide a verification of the calculations and statistical analysis, strengths and weaknesses and the key areas of challenge, conformity with the National Planning Policy Framework together with the comments that the petitioners had provided. Following this independent assessment, the Council should be able to rely on the final SHMA and other local plan evidence to help inform the level of accommodation to be provided over the plan period up to 2031.

Following the debate on the e-petition and the proposed response to it, and before the vote was taken thereon, Mrs Parker exercised her right of reply on the debate.

At the request of Councillor Monika Juneja, supported by four other councillors, a recorded vote on the motion to adopt the formal response to this e-petition as set out above was conducted pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 15 (d).

The Council

RESOLVED: That, by 36 councillors voting in favour, two voting against and no abstentions as recorded below, the motion setting out the Council’s formal response to this e-petition, as set out above, be adopted.

Councillors voting for the motion:
Councillor Richard Billington
Councillor Melanie Bright
Councillor Adrian Chandler
Councillor Mark Chapman
Councillor Sarah Creedy
Councillor Graham Ellwood
The Deputy Mayor, Councillor David Elms
Councillor Zöe Franklin
Councillor Andrew French
Councillor Matt Furniss
Councillor David Goodwin
Councillor Lizzie Griffiths
Councillor Murray Grubb Jnr.
Councillor Angela Gunning
Councillor Gillian Harwood
Councillor Liz Hogger
Councillor Philip Hooper
Councillor Monika Juneja
The Mayor, Councillor Diana Lockyer-Nibbs
Councillor Nigel Manning
Councillor Stephen Mansbridge
Councillor Julia McShane
Councillor Anne Meredith
Councillor Marsha Moseley
Councillor Nikki Nelson-Smith
Councillor James Palmer
Councillor Terence Patrick
Councillor Jennifer Powell
Councillor Caroline Reeves
Councillor Iseult Roche
Councillor Tony Rooth
Councillor Pauline Searle
Councillor Paul Spooner
Councillor Nick Sutcliffe
Councillor Neil Ward
Councillor Jenny Wicks

Councillors voting against the motion:
Councillor John Garrett
Councillor Bob McShee

Reason for decision:
To provide the Council’s formal response to the e-petition in accordance with the adopted Petition Scheme.

(The webcast debate on this item may be viewed here, timed at 01:26:19)