

# 3 LOOKING BACK



# ORIGINS

“The town of GUILDFORD, which (taken with its environs) I, who have seen so many, many towns, think the prettiest, and, taken all together, the most agreeable and most happy-looking, that I ever saw in my life.”

William Cobbett, *Rural Rides* 1832

Guildford is the oldest town in Surrey and remains its largest. The town grew up in a gap in the chalk hills, cut by the River Wey between the Hog’s Back to the west and Pewley Hill to the south-east. The first settlement may have been on the west side of a fording point on the Wey but the eastern settlement including the high street and St Mary’s Church is of at least 9th century origin.

The comb street pattern is typically Saxon; the high street running down to the bridge, with narrow alleys (gates) leading from it. Two roads developed parallel to the High Street – Upper and Lower Backside (later North Street) to the north, and Castle Street to the south.

Guildford is the only town in Surrey to be listed in the Domesday Book of 1086. It soon became a place of high status: a borough with its own royal charter, a market and license to mint coins. Further prestige came with the establishment of a Dominican Friary down at the river. Apart from the market, the town’s wealth was generated from cloth weaving and finishing, and from quarrying the chalk quarries for building stone and lime.

The town was defended by its Norman Castle, positioned as a vantage point along the Wey valley. The stone keep is 12th century and replaced an earlier timber structure, built on a massive mound (motte). The town was not walled, but would have been contained by an encircling ditch. The castle today still offers a good view of the valley but also of the roofs over the lower town.

Some of Guildford’s earliest buildings still stand in Quarry Street, including St Mary’s Church. Other than St Mary’s and the castle, the town’s most venerable monument is the Tudor Grammar School which still exists in the High Street.

Bishop Abbot Hospital was built in 1619-22 and was founded by George Abbott, Vice Chancellor of Oxford University and former Archbishop of Canterbury. It is a grand brick building, laid out akin to an Oxford or Cambridge College complete with triple tier gatehouse that would have been a powerful landmark from the start. It is comparable in style and function with the slightly earlier Whitgift Hospital in Croydon, but is on a much grander scale.

## INDUSTRY AND GROWTH

The River Wey was canalised in 1653, making it one of the first rivers in Britain to be made navigable. The Wey Navigation linked Guildford to Weybridge on the Thames providing a major opportunity for businesses. By the 18th century Guildford was a prosperous market town, with many timber framed houses rebuilt or fashionably refronted in brick.



The final cattle market on North Street, 1896



Lifeboat day on the High Street, 1904



## 20TH CENTURY GUILDFORD

Holy Trinity, a Georgian church, is positioned at the head of the High Street. By this time North Street was wider than the High Street and was home to the main market. The Friary was demolished after the Dissolution in the 17th century and later replaced by a mansion that took the name The Friary.

The Cattle Market was located in North Street until 1896. Granaries were built along the river, with associated activity at the flour mills, and breweries and the Corn market.

The railway came to Guildford in two phases: first, the main line from Waterloo to Portsmouth (SWR) in 1845, followed by the looping suburban line to London Road and on to Epsom (1885) carried over an impressive brick viaduct, to the north of the town, now known as Seven Arches.

The town gasworks was situated by the river, north of the former Friary, with Moon's timber yard by the bridge, both in business until the 1960s. The town expanded with commuter housing – brick villas in and around London Road, especially after the railway station opened.

The town continued to grow in the 20th century; changes were marked by the Cathedral (1936-66), conservative in style but magnificently positioned above the town on Stag Hill. In the 1960s Surrey University grew up at the foot of the cathedral. Dennis Engineering is an important employer for many decades, making cars, coaches, fire engines and lawnmowers.

In the 1960s and 1970s the town suffered from heavy traffic and thereafter severance effects of roads built to deal with it.

The Yvonne Arnaud theatre opened in 1965, replacing a theatre that had burned down. The new building was designed by John Brownrigg and imaginatively situated at the old Mill Pond and bordered by water, trees and grass. The theatre was listed Grade II in 2012.

Shopping centres and multi-storey car parks were built and in some cases rebuilt during the 1960s-1990s, including the Friary and Tunsgate malls.

The High Street has a unique historic character with six Grade I Listed buildings as well a host of Grade II\* and Grade II Listed Buildings, four Scheduled Ancient Monuments and a Listed Park and Garden. These assets form an important legacy which requires a careful strategy of protection and enhancement.



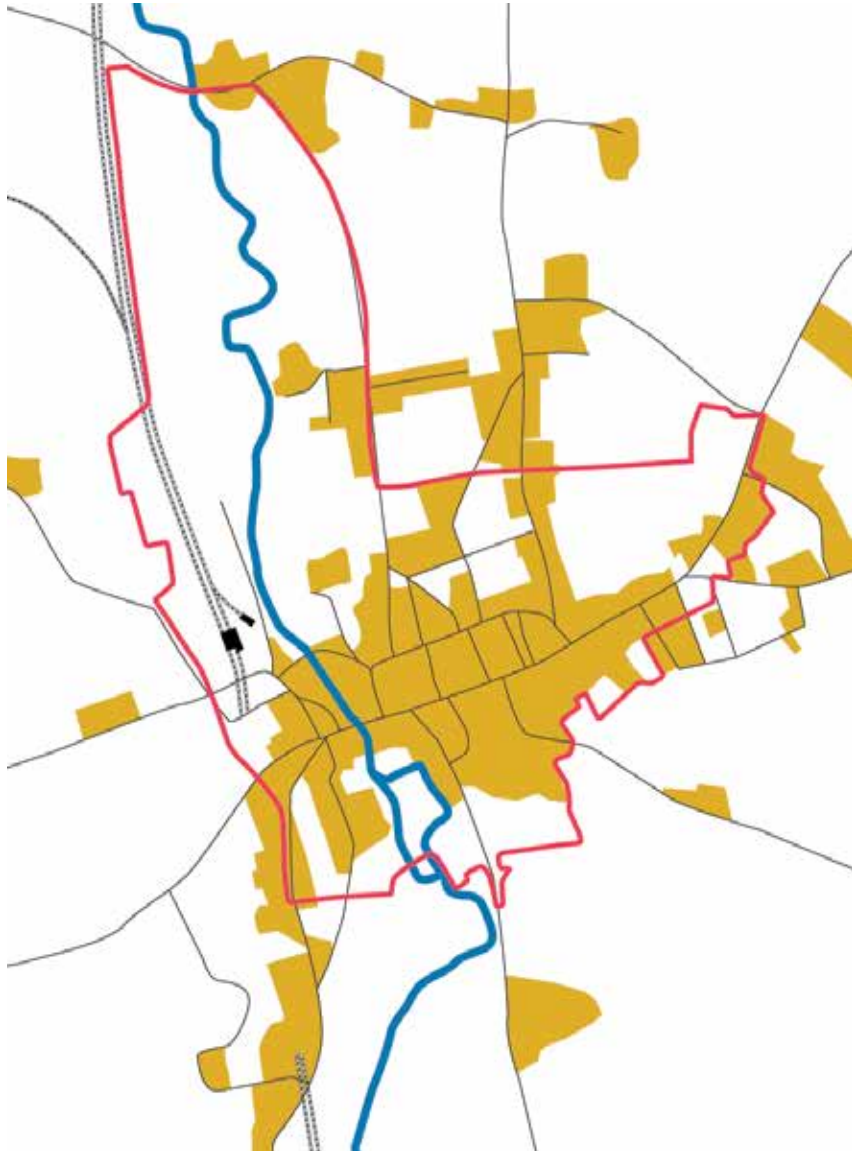
High Street from Town Bridge



The High Street

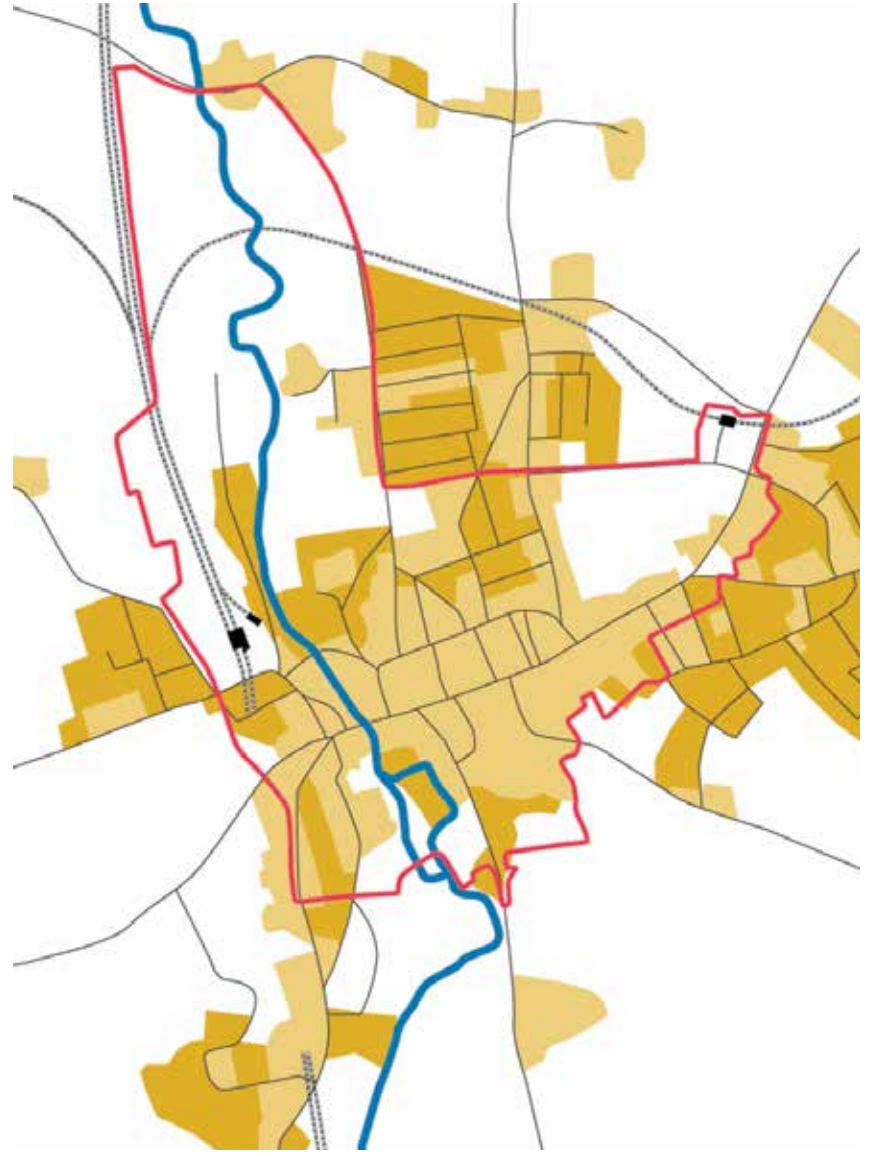
# HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The following plans illustrate the incremental development of Guildford. The darker shade of yellow highlights the additional extent of development in comparison with the previous plan. The lighter shade of yellow shows the extent of the built area during the previous era for ease of reference.



**1873**

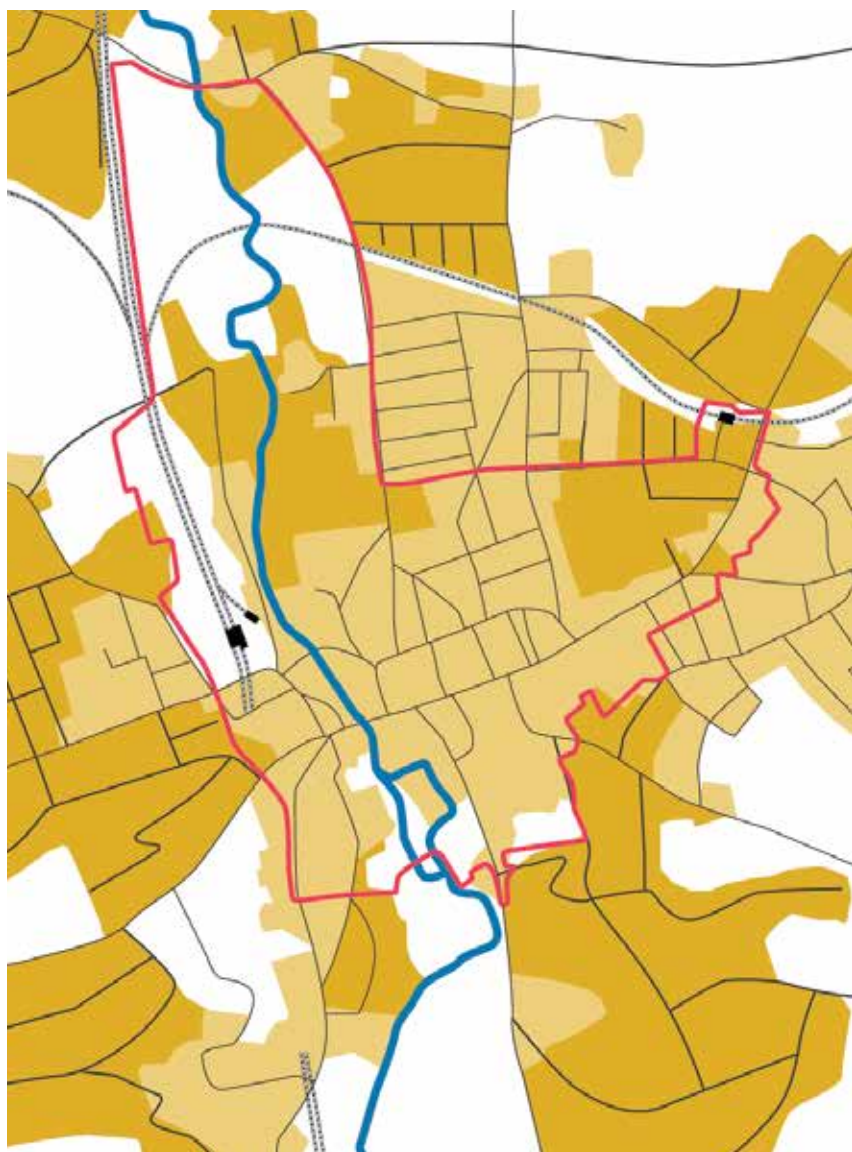
Guildford's historic form as a compact town was still evident in 1873 with the spine of the High Street predominating and contrasting with the Wey Navigation as it meanders northwards to the Thames. The London to Portsmouth railway had reached Guildford in 1845 and its northern section can clearly be seen, but the section south of the station was concealed in a tunnel. The spur of the North Downs line to Alresford can also be made out, curving west around Stag Hill. Industries present at this time include the Friary Brewery and the Royal County Hospital is visible to the west of the town, on Farnham Road. To the east of the town, the junction of London Road and Epsom Road can readily be identified. The workhouse at Charlotteville, south of Warren Road is present.



**1897**

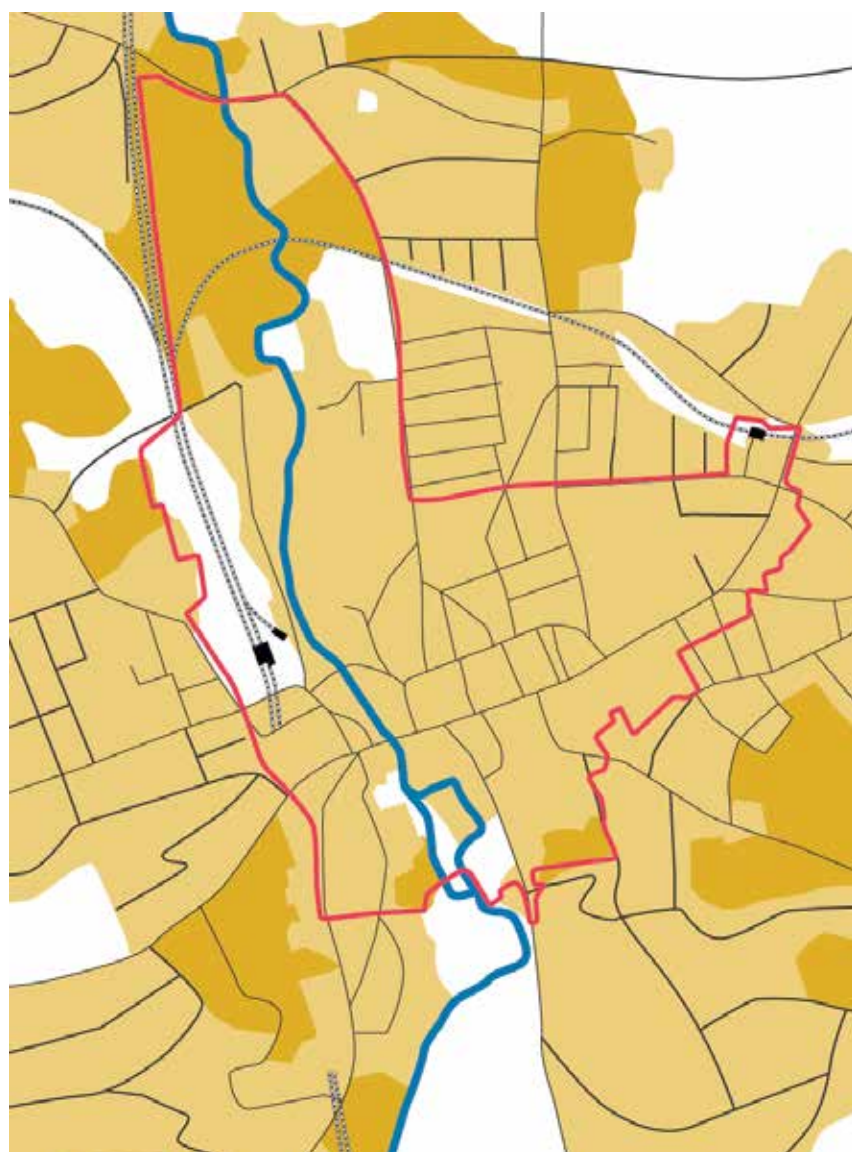
By 1897 the town had filled out noticeably, its growth having been given a boost by the opening in 1885 of the London and South-west railway and the station at London Road. The Stoke Fields are substantially complete and there is further housing development around the County Hospital. To the north of Guildford, development is also taking shape at Stoughton, and an isolation hospital has been built to the north of the Alresford railway junction.





**1934**

Guildford continued its steady growth in the first decades of the 20th century, spreading in all directions. To the east of the town, low density villas and detached houses are proliferating on avenues on both sides of Epsom Road and also to the south of the Castle around the former chalk quarries on Pewley Hill. To the west, the bypass has been built, wrapping round Stag Hill, and there is new housing at Onslow Village. The Cathedral had been commissioned and its foundations on Stag Hill can be seen. The Dennis Engineering works was built in 1919 at Woodbridge Hill, having moved from a more constricted site in the town centre, one of the town's main employers through most of the 20th century.



**1975**

By 1975 the shape and character of modern Guildford can readily be traced; large new buildings in the town centre in the form of shopping malls, multi-storey car parks and office blocks. To the east, the campus of the University of Surrey has been built next to the Cathedral, by this date Guildford's principal landmark.

There is extensive housing growth to the east and west of the town, but crucially certain green wedges are preserved, maintaining the interplay between town and country. These include the long view down the High Street towards the Hog's Back, and south from the castle up the Wey valley. Merrow Downs have also been safeguarded. The eastern section of the Guildford bypass crosses Stoke Park.



# VIEWS

Guildford is situated in a dip of the North Downs, caused by the River Wey. This creates a number of long views which creates a distinct sense of landscape setting within the town centre. The hilly topography results in a variety of dramatic views and vistas, both within the town and also into and out of the surrounding landscape. The town centre is nestled in a wooded valley between the Mount leading to the Hog's Back to the west, Pewley Down, with the Castle at its base and St Martha's Hill to the east.

Much of the landscape to the south of the town centre is designated as the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Any new development 'should not result in the loss of important views to or from the AONB' (Para. 10.25, Guildford Local Plan Policy RE5, 2003).

Within the town centre, the Jellicoe Roof Gardens is a Listed Park and Garden.

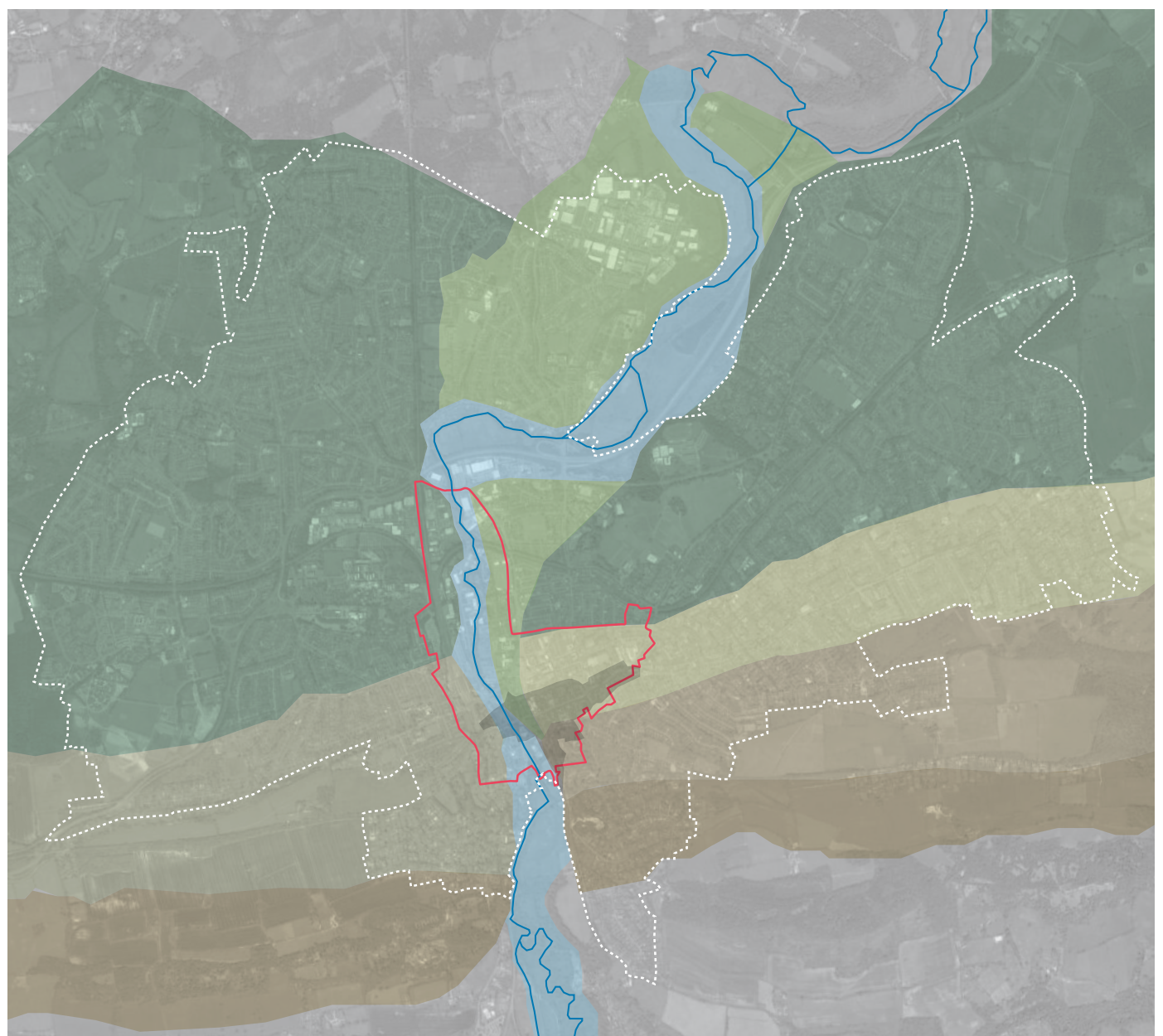
Areas of high ground benefit from long views across the town and wider landscape which include:

- Guildford Cathedral;
- Bright Hill;
- Pewley Hill (including Semaphore House, itself a landmark) and South Hill;
- The Hog's Back; and
- Long views from High Street and North Street.

Significant landmarks in the town centre include:

- The castle on higher ground to the south of the town centre; and
- Booker's Tower.

These landmarks provide key focal points in long views from the town centre and surrounding landscape. It will also be important to consider the views from these historical landmarks, situated at higher points in the landscape.



Rural-urban fringe landscape character areas from Guildford Landscape Character Assessment (2007) by Land Use Consultants

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| — Study Area Boundary  | ■ Rydeshill-Fairlands and Clandon fringe ICAs |
| ■ Green Belt boundary  | ■ Slyfield fringe ICA                         |
| ■ Braboeuf Manor / Mount and The Chantries Local Character Areas | ■ Lower, Upper and Guildford Wey fringe ICAs  |
| ■ Merrow Downs Local Character Area (ICA)                        | ■ Historic Town Centre core ICA               |
| ■ Hog's Back and Clandon Open Chalk Farmland ICAs                |   |



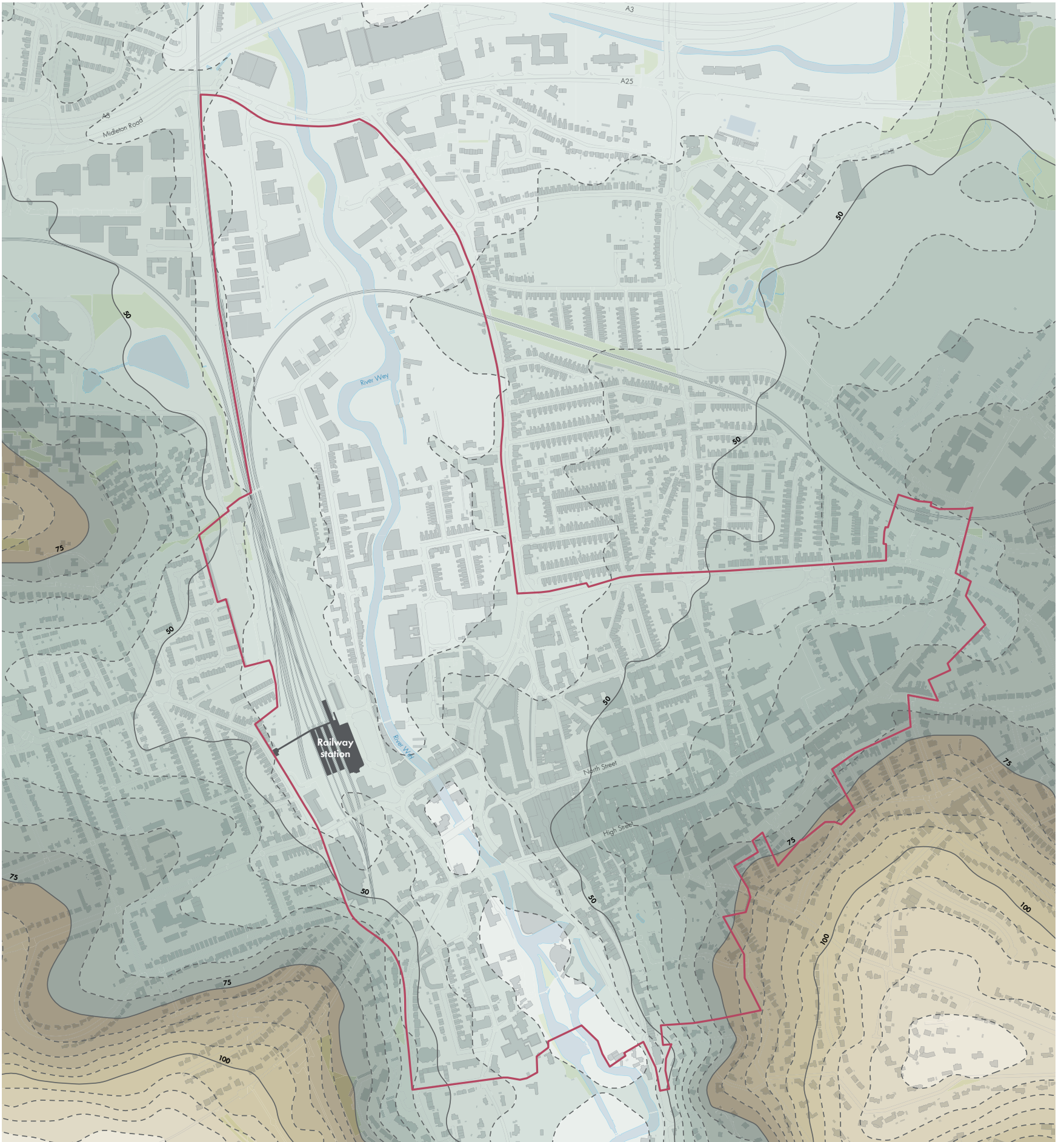


Illustration of topography around Guildford



# TOWN CENTRE LANDSCAPE

The landscape character of Guildford town centre is defined by its location in the North Downs, in the valley of the River Wey. This topography is an important factor in the character of the town centre and has been instrumental in shaping the way that the settlement developed. The key feature is the steeply sloping high street which was laid out rising up from the ford over the River Wey. This was where the Saxon town developed, adjacent to, and above the floodplain of the river.

Significant topography in the town centre includes:

- The hills present in High Street, Castle Hill, Pewley Hill and South Hill;
- Man-made undulating topography in Racks Close and the gardens surrounding the castle;
- The flattening out of the land to the north of the High Street at the Royal Grammar School;
- The drop in level towards North Street from High Street;
- The quarry pits, created during excavations for chalk, visible from York Road and Dene Road; and
- The river corridor and associated flood plains extending north and south of the town centre providing flatter land used for industry and the railway line.

This topography has established a set of views, vistas and townscape qualities within the town centre which include:

- Views down the High Street, across the river crossing, to The Mount with its fields and trees to the west of the town centre;
- Long views down North Street;
- From the Old Town Bridge along the River Wey in both directions;
- From Quarry Street over the River Wey and its water meadows;
- Into and out of the castle grounds;
- From the residential suburbs off Sydenham Road and Bright Hill northwards over the town;
- Along the narrow streets and alleys leading off the High Street;
- Along the railway line from the London Road railway bridge to the cathedral (west) and trees (east); and
- Views of the town opening up from the River Wey footpath from Godalming including St Catherines, the Castle and across Shalford Meadows, Quarry and Pewley Hill.

In order to preserve the character of the town centre and conservation area views and vistas should be maintained and enhanced, giving significant consideration to new proposals on prominent or elevated sites in order to assess their impact.

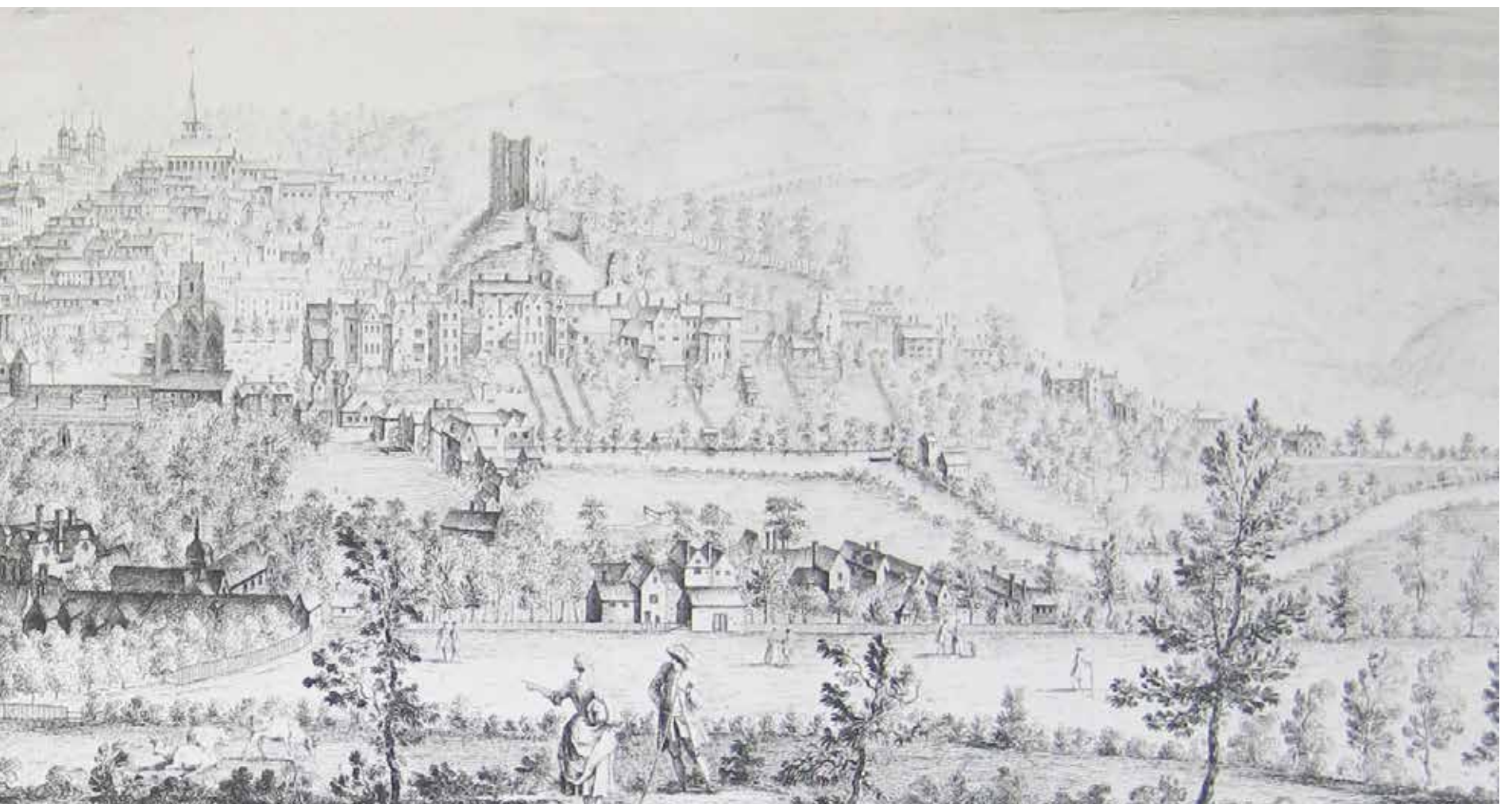


A prospect of Guildford, c. 1738





Guildford today



# OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

Guildford benefits from a number of distinctive historic features and an attractive landscape setting. However, the study area also contains a number of less positive spaces and environments which would benefit from regeneration. A number of buildings from the 1970's disfigure the town centre.

- The area between the station and the retail core has a particular concentration of negative frontage on very large footprint buildings, which has a significant impact on the legibility of this key route.
- Areas around the courts and police station lack clearly defined patterns of frontage.
- Improved green spaces including Millmead, Castle Grounds and Racks Close.
- The Bishops Court and Mount Court towers are visible from the High Street to the west of the Clock Tower and have a negative impact on this key view.
- Much of the northern river corridor and station area lacks frontages and defined streets.
- The gyratory is a major blight on the central part of the River Wey, constraining the growth of the town centre and preventing good linkages to the station area.
- The historic cobbled section of the High Street could be enhanced.





Examples of poor quality urban environments in central Guildford

# KEY MESSAGES FOR THE MASTERPLAN

Guildford is defined by its historic evolution and distinctive landscape and topography. These assets, both natural and built form are a lasting legacy for the town. They form the cornerstone of the plan for central Guildford. The masterplan focuses on opportunities to strengthen, re-discover and re-align Guildford in response to the town's special character and historic assets.

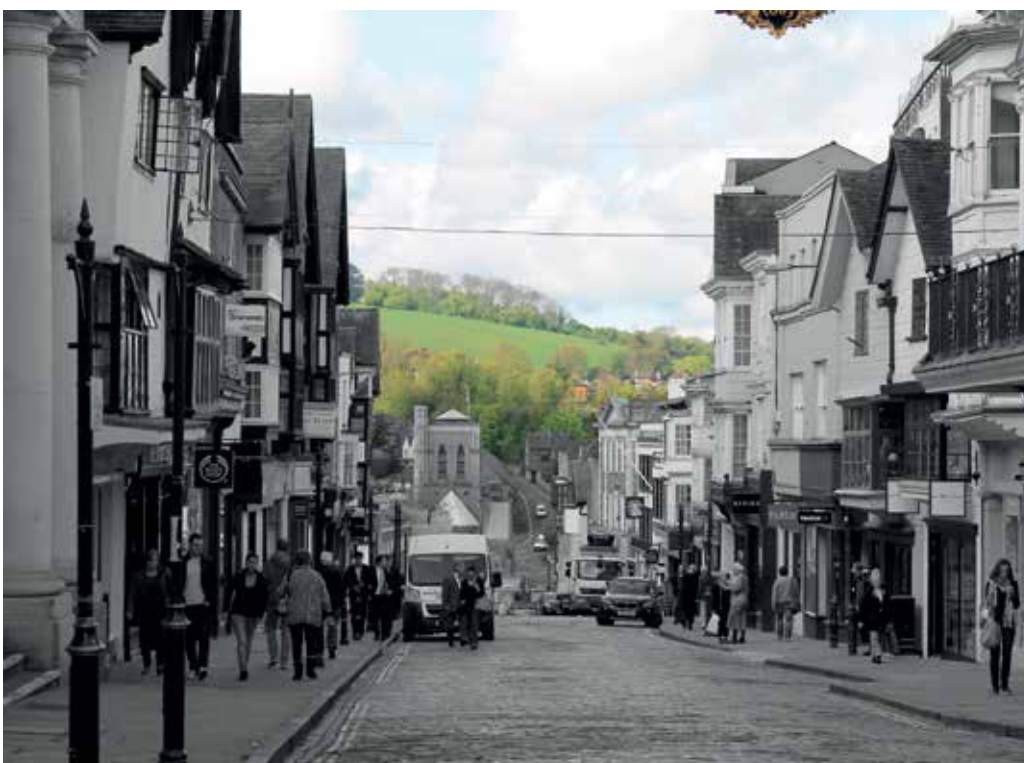
The masterplan responds to Guildford's unique historic context and heritage assets. The adjacent plan highlights the location of the statutory assets including listed buildings and conservation areas, and non-statutory assets such as locally listed buildings and buildings of townscape merit as defined by the Council in respective appraisal documents.

The concentration of historic buildings and special townscape character in the core town centre is striking, and it is important that the overarching development strategy responds to this context. There is a major opportunity to establish a landscape-led approach to the River Wey area to create a more coherent identity and character.

The 1738 prospect on page 24 describes a romantic view of Guildford's distinctive townscape and landscape. This resonates with the contemporary image that many residents and visitors have of Guildford. In that context, views are critical elements within the plan, and it is vital that building heights, scale and massing are considered in this context.

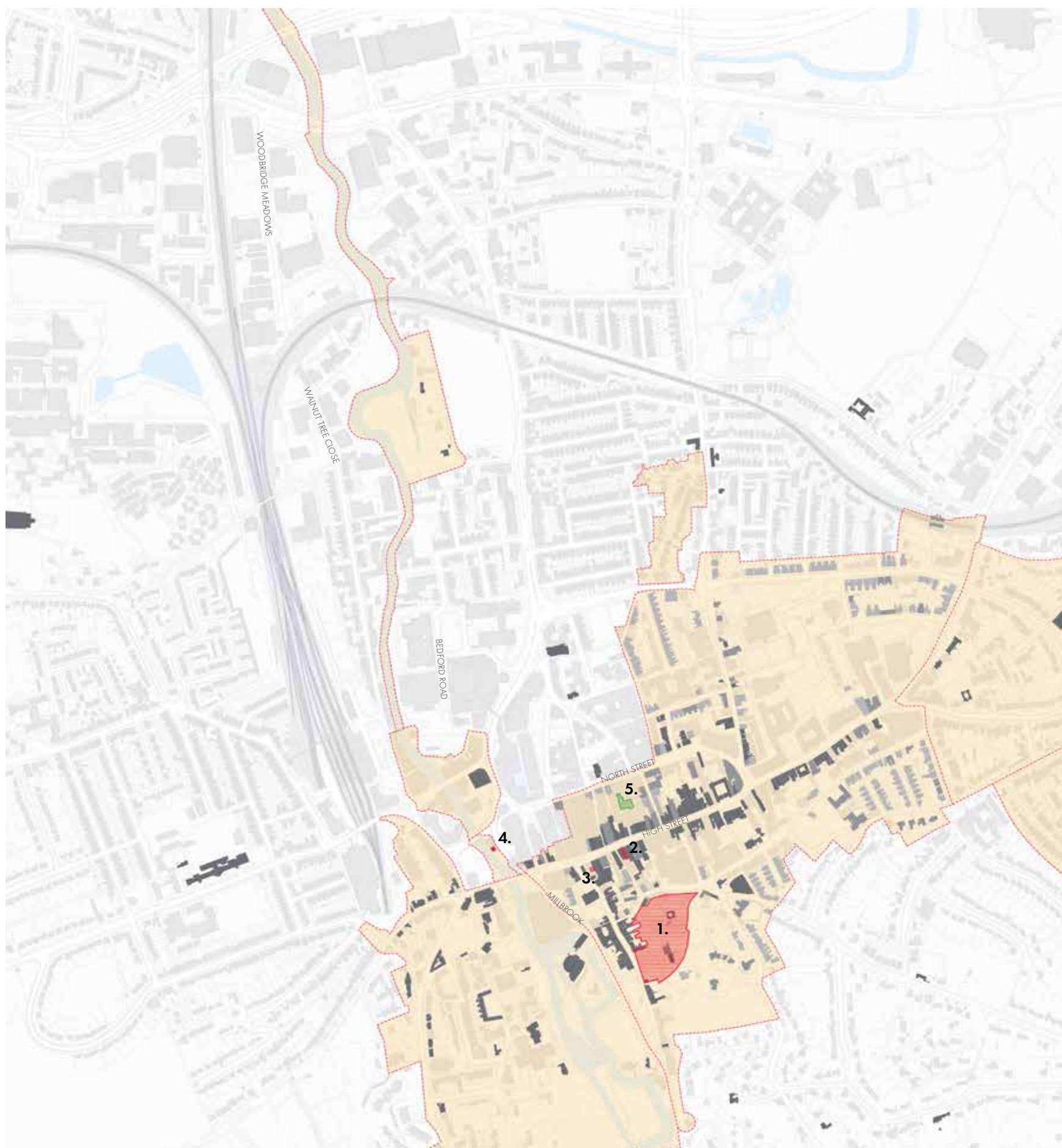
The adjacent plan highlights the impressive concentration of Listed buildings, locally listed buildings and buildings of townscape merit in central Guildford. In addition, the presence of a Listed Park and Garden (the Jellicoe roof gardens as noted previously) and four Scheduled Ancient Monuments, highlights the need for a very sensitive strategy for the town centre in support of the existing Conservation Area designation.

In that context, the masterplan focuses on fine grain opportunities for public realm enhancements including improvement of cobbled areas as shared surfaces to support the wider strategy of pedestrian improvements.



Proposals should carefully consider the impact on Guildford's distinct landscape setting





**Heritage assets**

- Listed buildings
- Locally listed buildings
- Buildings of townscape merit
- Conservation Area

- Scheduled Ancient Monuments
- 1.** Guildford Castle
  - 2.** Medieval undercroft at 72/74 High Street
  - 3.** Medieval undercroft remains at 50/52 High Street
  - 4.** The Treadwheel Crane

- Listed Parks and Gardens
- 5.** The Jellicoe Roof Garden



