GUILDFORD BOROUGH

Ash Neighbourhood Plan

Strategic Environmental Assessment Adoption Statement

19 November 2026

1. Introduction

1.1. The Ash Neighbourhood Plan ("the Plan) was "made" (adopted) on 16 November 2026. See Guildford Borough Council's ("GBC") "Ash Neighbourhood Plan Decision Statement (Decision to Make the Plan)" for details. The Plan and other documents can be found at https://www.guildford.gov.uk/article/27109/Neighbourhood-planning-in-Ash.

1.2. The draft Plan was subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment ("SEA") for the reasons set out in GBC's "Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitat Regulations Assessment Screening Report and Determinations" document. Ash Parish Council accordingly produced a SEA environmental report.

1.3. In accordance with legislation, the Plan was subject to an examination and then a referendum, at which it achieved a positive result and became part of the Guildford Borough Development Plan. Under Section 38A (4) and (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, GBC was then required to "make" (adopt) the plan unless doing so would breach, or would otherwise be incompatible with, any legal obligations or any of the Convention rights within the meaning of the Human Rights Act 1998. The obligations include European obligations such as those pertaining to SEA.

1.4. Under regulation 16 of The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 ("the SEA regulations"), when adopting a plan or programme that is subject to SEA, GBC must publish a statement containing the particulars set out in regulation 16(4). This document sets out those particulars under the following headings.

2. How environmental considerations have been integrated into the plan or programme

2.1. The Plan includes a number of policy measures to protect the natural, historic and built environment including:

- directing development to built up areas and brownfield land,
- design principles that preserve heritage assets and the character of built-up and rural areas,
- conserving biodiversity, habitats and green infrastructure networks,
- climate change adaptation and mitigation measures,
- protecting community, social and economic assets,
- measures to support sustainable travel.

2.2. The Plan was prepared by Ash Parish Council with regard to the National Planning Policy Framework, which sets a broad range of requirements that collectively guide plans to

sustainable outcomes including through how they address environmental matters. The examiner later considered how well the Plan aligned with the NPPF and recommended a number of amendments to improve conformity, which GBC incorporated into the final version of the Plan. This process ensured that environmental considerations were integrated into the Plan.

3. How the SEA environmental report has been taken into account

The preparation of the plan

3.1. The Plan proposal was "screened in" for SEA at an early stage, and as a result the possibility that the plan could lead to SEA significant adverse environmental effects was considered throughout the drafting process.

3.2. The SEA report identified a framework for assessing each proposed policy against SEA objectives across seven themes (see page 10 onwards in the SEA report). For each theme, the significant effects of the draft Plan on the environmental baseline were predicted and evaluated, taking account of the criteria presented within Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations.

3.3. The SEA Report concluded "The ANP [Ash Neighbourhood Plan] is anticipated to result in beneficial effects across all SEA themes, with significant beneficial effects anticipated for Biodiversity, Community Wellbeing, Historic Environment, Landscape, and Transportation. These benefits are supported by a combination of spatial planning, design-led policies, protection of local assets, and promotion of sustainable travel and infrastructure. No significant adverse effects are anticipated from policies in the ANP."

3.4. The report was produced during the drafting phase, before the Plan was consulted upon and finalised, and therefore an opportunity was provided for the report's findings to influence the plan. The finding that the draft policies would not lead to significant adverse effects was taken into account in the production of the draft submission version of the Plan.

3.5. The Plan was subject to an examination which considered legal compliance, including with SEA obligations. The examiner states: "The Environmental Report of June 2025 concluded that there would be no significant harmful effects from policies in the Ash Neighbourhood Plan. Having read the SEA Screening Opinion, November 2024, the Environmental Report to accompany the Regulation 14 version of the Plan, June 2025, and the SEA and HRA Screening Report and Determinations January 2026, I support this conclusion." The recommendations and specified modifications set out in the examination report took the SEA report into account and accordingly did not recommend modifications for the purpose of compliance with the SEA regulations.

The decision to make the plan

3.6. GBC took the conclusions set out in the SEA report and the Examiner's report into consideration when deciding whether to make or refuse to make the Plan. The environmental report's conclusions indicate that there were no SEA reasons to refuse to make the plan so, in accordance with legislation, the plan was made.

4. How representations from statutory consultees and other respondents were taken into account

4.1. The three SEA statutory consultees (Natural England, the Environment Agency and Historic England) were consulted on the SEA report (as well as at earlier screening and scoping stages, as required by legislation). Natural England replied to confirm that, based on the report, "significant effects on statutorily designated nature conservation sites or landscapes are unlikely." This information was provided to the examiner and accordingly informed the examiner's recommendations and modifications to the Plan.

4.2. The SEA report was made publicly available during the post-submission (regulation 16) consultation on the draft Plan. The comments from this consultation were provided to the examiner to consider in drafting the examination report. A comment from a developer objected to elements of the SEA report. The examination report considers this representation in several places and so demonstrates that it was taken into account in drafting recommendations for the final version of the Plan.

5. The reasons for choosing the plan or programme as adopted in the light of other reasonable alternatives

5.1. Section 4 of the environmental report sets out details of the reasonable alternatives that were considered in the drafting of the plan, and the reasons for choosing the alternatives that were taken forward. The Plan does not allocate sites so the identified options were focussed on policy direction rather than site-specific growth scenarios. However, a detailed appraisal of two potential options for the Plan's local gap policy were evaluated:

- Option A – on land to the north of the disused railway
- Option B – on land to the south of the disused railway

5.2. While Option B performed more strongly across the identified SEA themes, Option A was chosen because it performed more strongly on the heritage theme, and this was considered to be a locally important factor. Alongside this, the land covered by Option B already received protection through other policy mechanisms, so the land was unsuitable for the local gap designation.

5.3. The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 allows GBC two options: a) make the plan, or b) refuse to make the plan. Given the SEA report and examination report both conclude that the plan will not lead to significant adverse effects, there is no SEA reason to refuse to make the Plan.

6. The measures that are to be taken to monitor the significant environmental effects of the implementation of the plan or programme.

6.1. The SEA report notes: "It is anticipated that monitoring of effects of the ANP [Ash Neighbourhood Plan] will be undertaken by Guildford Council as part of the process of preparing its Annual Monitoring Report (AMR). No significant negative effects are considered

likely in the implementation of the ANP that would warrant more stringent monitoring over and above that already undertaken by Guildford Borough Council."

6.2. GBC agrees with this and as a result will factor in the impacts of the Plan's policies into its existing monitoring regime rather than establish a discrete monitoring programme.

7. Adoption documents

7.1. A copy of the Plan and the relevant adoption documents may be viewed and downloaded at: https://www.guildford.gov.uk/article/27109/Neighbourhood-planning-in-Ash. Please use the following contact details for enquiries, or to obtain a copy of the adoption documents by email or post:

- Email: planningpolicy@guildford.gov.uk
- Post: Planning Policy, Guildford Borough Council, Millmead House, Millmead, Guildford Surrey, GU2 4BB
- Phone: 01483 505050

7.2. The following charges will be levied for printing and mailing documents (2nd class, prices for the 2026/2027 financial year):

- The Ash Neighbourhood Plan: £18
- The Decision Statement (decision to "make" (adopt) the plan): £7.50
- The SEA Adoption Statement (this document): £7.50

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