



2nd May 2018

The Planning Inspector
Johathan Bore
C/o Chris Banks Solutions
64 Lavinia Way
East Preston
BN16 1EF

Dear Sir

Guildford Local Plan – Comments

First can I say that I wish to remain on your database and kept informed of developments concerning the Guildford Local Plan. (In accordance with the GDPR requirements).

Your Program Office, Chris Banks, has sent me links to various documents relating to The Guildford Local Plan and just yesterday I received three files concerning *Matters and Issues*. I have read through these documents and the following notes cover some of the points raised and others which you may find of interest. I have grouped them under heading hopefully similar to your own topics. I hope that some of what follows will help in your inquiry. I have known Guildford since 1958 and because I live on the western side of the town I have an interest in the area close to where I live, particularly the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty which forms part of The Hogs Back.

Guildford Borough Council's lack of transparency

Guildford Borough Council (GBC) has been less than co-operative with us the public during the consultation and quite rude and bullying to us at public meetings. At one public meeting they even stopped a lady (Mrs Elliot) mentioning anything to do with the university! (The latter is a large land owner as you will be aware. This incident is still available to view on the GBC website.). I have a letter and an email from two GBC CEOs refusing to answer letters from me on the housing need calculations. At last GBC are being confronted over their proposals and have to actually give answers to you, unlike when we asked questions. In many instances they are trying to stick to their guns but I don't doubt that you will form your own views and they will not pull the wool your eyes! They seem reluctant to compromise reading between the lines. They still have their hidden agenda. PTO

The University of Surrey its students and housing.

The section on the University (Para 7 of your questions) is interesting. One overriding feature of this is that compared to some other university towns, Guildford is a small town in its geographical size. Just because other University Towns do something does not mean that GBC has to follow suit as inferred in their reply to you when you questioned them earlier in the year. Guildford's housing need figures are being distorted by the 1800 or so houses of multiple occupation and rented to students.

I knew Guildford before the university was here and operational. Over the years, and more so recently, it has started to dominate the Town in terms of getting its own way with the council and in the number of houses that are occupied by students. One residential estate built in the 1960s, Guildford Park Avenue, has 150 houses. It was a very nice residential estate but now 90% of it is let to students in houses of multiple occupation. It is not a very nice looking area now. Another older estate, Ashenden Estate' has gone the same way. Houses that come on the market are snapped up by investors with the intention of letting to students. I could list numerous roads that are in a similar state. The area to the rear of Guildford Railway Station has also become rundown through housing lets. One real concern is that the more houses that are built in Guildford the more will be let in this way, being bought by investors. This is something that I think that you should seriously consider. Currently some of these landlords are from abroad and own multiple houses. With the recent links between GBC the University and China this could get a lot worse. It is something that must be borne in mind during your investigation into this Local Plan. I don't think that anything can be done to stop this buying up of properties. GBC makes reference to the buy to let market continuing *as is*. It might not because of a change in the tax rules that cause a drop in profits for the investors/landlords. It is noticeable that at present some houses are up for sale that would have been lets in the past! This is unusual at this time of year.

When reading part 7 of GBC's reply to your questions the University want to limit their construction of new accommodation for students because of the reluctance of some students to live on campus. In larger Towns like Oxford and Cambridge this might be OK, but Guildford is a small town and is currently being ruined in the area where I live, close to the University, by the high proportion of student lets. The area is becoming run down. Somehow a very high proportion of students must be encouraged or forced to live on campus. I believe this happens at some other universities. It is very noticeable that at the present time that there are a lot of "*Let*" signs up on houses in this area as though there are too many houses being used for this purpose at the moment. Unusual at this time of year.

This high proportion of student lets is spoiling/changing the local community. There is a lack of families and very few children in this area. This does not bode well for the future. Some 1800 house are estimated to let in this way. These should in my view be available for families to buy. A figure of 45% of students living in normal housing is quoted. When you consider that there are in excess of 10,000 students at the university this could mean somewhere in the region of 5,000 students using housing that could be available to families. Maybe the housing need figures are being seriously skewed because of Guildford's size and the presence of The University. This establishment does not help now having its own organisation to take on properties bought as investments and letting them out, charging the students and passing the money on to the owners of the property. This is a relatively recent development.

The University is currently building student accommodation and from the front of my house I can see the cranes that have been involved for many months. **I believe this is being done because the University authorities know that your inquiry is coming and want it to be seen that they are doing something to avoid criticism!** This accommodation should have been built many years ago and it is no coincidence that it is being built now. GBC have not forced the University to do what they promised many years ago. I have recently been in correspondence with the Vice President of The University, Greg Melly, and he tells me that **they are currently building 1150 units for students.** I don't expect these figures would have been taken account of in the calculations GBC used for their housing need figures. Many of us believe those figures are already far too high and vested interests have come into play. We cannot prove that because as you already know GBC would not give us details of how the housing need figures had been arrived at even after FOIA requests. The University want to make massive profits from the sale of Blackwell Farm to developers once planning permission has been granted. This is Green Belt land and some in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. GL Hearn have a vested interest in Development and GBC can see a huge increase in their Council Tax take and other subsidies. Money could be driving the housing need figures but we cannot comment on this through lack of transparency on the part of GBC. Why have we been denied this information that we have paid for in terms of consultancy?

The Green Belt and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

In respect of the Green Belt it is good to see that you are asking questions, particularly about *Special Circumstances and the extension of the Research Park*. I cannot see any special circumstances in respect of the Green Belt and AONB as mentioned above. Blackwell Farm is a case in point. In this respect I sincerely hope that you look very closely at the real *housing need* figures because if they are too high we shall be losing some very special land and maybe ruining our countryside for no good reason other than greed. Another consideration is **recent changes since the Guildford Plan was originally formulated.** Brexit rears its head and we have already seen a drop in the immigration figures. Immigration plays a big part in the housing numbers required. (Something like 300,000 a year net, entering the Country). My understanding is that our indigenous population is reducing. Projections used in the calculations may now have changed. Certainly online shopping will have affected the need for the number of retail premises some of which you clearly appreciate could be used for housing where appropriate. A new development in the Town has just opened. *The Tunsgate Quarter*. I doubt that this will be a success because of the changing retail scenario and believe that this was a mistake and maybe a vanity project by certain Councillors.

Traffic and its impact on future development.

(Much of my working life was spent in connection with traffic management some of it working in The Chief Constable's Office. I spent many years liaising with both Surrey County Council Highway and local district councils all over the county of Surrey).

In relation to the traffic in this area I have hundreds of photographs that I have taken over the past three years and some video footage, mainly of the A3, A31 and affected side roads. One video shows how it can take 30 minutes or more to get from the A31` Puttenham junction to the roundabout near Tesco's store during the morning peak period. I cannot send any video files online because of their file size, but will post some on a DVD when I email this letter. These will give a true picture of what most mornings are like on the A31 Hogs Back and

approaching the area of Blackwell Farm where it is proposed to build 1800 houses and no doubt many more in the future. (A figure of over 3,000 was originally proposed). I know that you say that you have already made some site visits. It is probably unlikely that you have travelled from Farnham to Guildford along the A31 during this busy period. This footage was taken on 18th October 2017 and also includes the A3 from the A31 junction to the roundabout near the Tesco Store. Video clips are in 3 minute duration. A lot of these hold ups are caused by traffic trying to access Gill Avenue adjacent to the hospital. It bottle necks at this point and **this is the access road that will give access to any development at Blackwell Farm and an extension to the University Research Park.** Drastic improvements need to be made here and I understand this road was built to a substandard specification and work on it would cause severe problems to The Royal Surrey County Hospital. The foundations may need strengthening and it needs widening. This road is privately owned as is the road leading from this to the Park and Ride car park. **Is a private road acceptable for a large housing estate?** Two of the photographs that I attach with this email do show an **ambulance trying to get through the queuing traffic** and you will from the timing of the photographs see this vehicle is stuck for more than a minute at this point alone and so would have suffered a longer delay even with its blue lights and horn going from either A3 or A31 with traffic queueing two abreast on the dual carriageway. I have other photographs of ambulances in this similar situation. **In the event of a major incident the RSCH is the major incident hospital for this area. There are now many daily flights out of Farnborough Airfield flying directly over this area. Many more houses in this area will have an impact on traffic and emergency access to this hospital.** Other photo's show severely congested traffic on a normal morning. It is not good and a lot more housing is going to make it a lot worse unless some sort of drastic steps are taken in respect of the infrastructure around this. **Is there adequate planning for this. The lead councillor for GBC has said in a public meeting that no development should take place until the infrastructure is in place. This must be guaranteed.**

On Thursday 19th April, merely as a point of interest I did a traffic count in Gill Avenue using a tally counter. This road runs past the hospital and accesses The Surrey Research Park, owned by the University. There are proposals in the Local Plan to extend this Research Park. Traffic in the area which is now very heavy during the morning peak period and is the main cause of traffic tailing back onto the A3 and A31 Hogs Back, sometimes for many miles on both roads. I counted the traffic from 07:30 to 08:30 hours that was not accessing the hospital and going towards the Research Park with the following results:- 288; 296; 275; and 305 in each quarter hour period. A total of 1164 in the hour. **Traffic was flowing at saturation point** and was not helped by pedestrians crossing the road. Many cars slowed to let them cross. There is no controlled pedestrian crossing at this point. The slowness of this traffic causes a build-up of traffic back onto the A3 and the A31 Hogs Back. After my traffic count I walked back to the roundabout near Tesco and photographed traffic still queued on the northbound slip road leaving the A3. I will attach some photographs. This traffic would have mainly been accessing Gill Avenue and would have flowed in a similar manner to my above figures for at least another half hour. The implications for an extended Research Park onto the Green Belt are clear. Is it really necessary? The University has plenty of its own land for this purpose. More traffic and longer queues on A3, A31 and local side roads unless some serious improvement to the infrastructure takes place in advance of any extension of the Research Park or housing. Gill Avenue bottlenecking causes large queues on residential side roads that are used by commuters. I see this daily other than during the summer holiday period. BBC Surrey's fifteen minute traffic news from 0700 hours every morning will confirm the long tail backs.

I hope that you find the above information useful and I shall be interested to see your findings when your inquiry is complete.

Yours sincerely,

Graham Richings