

Comments - Draft Guildford Economic Strategy 17-2-2023

Scope. We have read the report as covering the borough of Guildford with a passing reference to greater collaboration on certain aspects with Waverly. The report appears to be Guildford Town Focused.

Passivity

The report comes over as a very passive document. The Economic Development Action Plan it is replete with phrases such as Work With, Review....., Explore.... This is unfair BUT the whole document needs to be more **action** orientated to take one example:

Collaborate with partners such as Surrey County Council and Enterprise M3 to explore energy efficiency improvement programmes that could be introduced to residential and commercial properties.

o This could be schemes similar in design to London-wide programmes RE:NEW for housing stock retrofitting and RE:FIT for non-domestic public buildings and assets.

Should it be:

Engaging with partners e.g. Surrey County Council and Enterprise M3, to identify and introduce energy efficiency improvement programmes that can be introduced to residential and commercial properties.

o We can learn from schemes similar to London-wide programmes RE:NEW for housing stock retrofitting and RE:FIT for non-domestic public buildings and assets.

The Action Plan needs review to remove actions that are a continuation of what is already happening into either a section related to on-going enablers, or they are upgraded to provide a very clear target

Linkages

The report is very limited on how Guildford interacts with other major centres in the locale.

London (the elephant in the room)

Guildford is dependent in part on London with high levels of business links and a high proportion of the community commuting as a regular part of the working week. A better understanding on the impact of London is required for example is the low level of Finance & Insurance jobs actually not an issue as we have large numbers working in the city?

London Commuters may also have large impacts on Property Prices, numbers of Microbusinesses (freelancing Consultants).

Post-Covid with a rise in at least partial working from home will there be a demand for more generous housing space, local business shared space in villages as well as the Town Centre, and increased demand on small local retail centres (e.g. Snooty Fox Café appears to do well in Shalford)

One of the economic measures used in the report is Gross Value Added (GVA) figure for various areas and occupations. Broadly F&B and Retail have fairly low GVA's and areas such as Manufacturing, IT a higher value. GVA figures are normally developed by looking at employment in an enterprise and calculating a value add from inputs and outputs of the organisation. Like many commuter towns Guildford has a lot of external GVA e.g., a banker in the City of London with contribute to the GVA of London as the organisation is based there. GVA is often used to consider infrastructure projects and other government investment. Guildford does need to keep its GVA as high as possible to attract investment. The town needs to be configured to attract more high earning organisations. The report notes that earnings from working in Guildford are below average income at a household level, it would interesting to calculate the lost GVA to other areas.

There should be a section on Commuters their needs and economic impact.

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Other Centres

Do we need to understand business linkages and opportunities across the LEP M3 area and with centres such as Oxford and Cambridge?

Academic

It is notable that Oxford and Cambridge University have now formed the ARC Universities Group www.arcuniversities.co.uk with 9 participating academic institutions. Should there be a discussion with University of Surrey to look at links in the LEP M3 region and maybe also including University of Sussex etc.

Rural Centres in the Borough.

The strategy should recognise that the rural area around Guildford Town has a number of economic developments e.g. emerging drinks industry (Wineries, Brewing, Gin Distilling which although small also provide F&B opportunities), cycle shops and hire, and small scale Professional Services (Architects). Should Guildford be viewed as being at the centre of a linked network of smaller centres which interact with the Town? If this is accepted this has implications for Transport, Communication Technology and Planning. Note one of the Asks in the report is • *Improved physical connectivity between different 'nodes' across the borough (inc rural areas)*

Productivity: Boosting Enterprise, Clustering and Innovation

The report makes reference to:

Extend GBC's new Salesforce Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to all departments to enhance our 'front door' with businesses (Anchor).

o This will help ensure our communications are joined up and that every interaction with businesses is informed by previous communications – this is crucial for us to come across as a 'business friendly' council.

Although technology can help it is not obvious from the report that the council has people and skills to engage effectively with businesses, and also manage information effectively. A computer system will not solve issues with manpower, and skills. Is the system going to be shared with partner organisations e.g. transfer of contact information to the Research Park etc?

Business Sectors

Grow – Health

We comment on the Life Sciences sector in detail under *Professional Scientific and Technical*.

The report doesn't recognise the requirements to manage Health effectively placed on local government. We offer the following comment on the Health system which we believe needs to be reflected in any economic strategy:

Good Health and Social care has an economic advantage as is evidenced by people not disadvantaged awaiting operations and treatment.

Since 2013, Local leadership for public health has been 'at the heart of the new public health system. Upper tier and unitary authorities will have responsibilities to improve the health of their populations, backed by a ring-fenced grant and a specialist public health team, led by the director of public health. How GBC fits into and influences this is not clear for the good of Guildford.

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Local authorities are required to embed new public health functions into all their activities, tailoring local solutions to local problems, and using all the levers at their disposal to improve health and reduce inequalities. They must develop a local public health system, based on localism, democratic accountability, and evidence.

Supporting local political leadership in improving health will be the director of public health and his or her team. The director of public health will be the lead officer in the local authority for health, and a statutory chief officer. They will champion health across the whole of the authority's business, promoting healthier lifestyles and scrutinising and challenging the NHS and other partners to promote better health and ensure threats to health are addressed'.

Achieving integrated [health and social] care

The Local Government Association envisages a “whole system” approach in taking actions forward, involving system leaders, health and social care commissioners and providers, front-line professionals, local communities and local people. By applying these actions, local partners will be able to focus on three key elements:

- the delivery of person-centred coordinated care – i.e. the core objective of integrated care
- the building of local “place-based” care and support systems
- system leadership for integration.’

The delivery of integrated care (ICS) is the principal policy driver.

It continues, ‘ensure that integration maintains a focus on outcomes – integration is not an end in itself; it is a means to better health and care support, better health and care outcomes and better use of resources.

Proactively shape the new ICS governance structures so that health and care integration, shifting resources to prevention and community services, and tackling health inequalities will be top priorities.

Where there is more than one council with social care responsibilities in the ICS, ensure there is effective collaboration between councils and between health and wellbeing boards.

Integrated care boards – where there is more than one council in the ICS, it may be helpful to propose more than one local government board member to provide a wider range of knowledge and perspectives. The local government member or members should establish effective two-way communication with health and care leaders in all councils and with health and wellbeing boards.

The Guildford wards of Stoughton, Stoke and Westborough are amongst the most deprived in Surrey: life expectancy is significantly lower for men and for women compared with other wards in Guildford.

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Grow – Finance and Insurance

Although we are below the regional average for Finance and Insurance is this really a high-quality Growth Sector. The signs are this sector is rapidly moving to on-line retail platforms for Banking, Share Dealing etc. It is also likely that AI technology will impact the more mundane back-office functions in the finance sector. There may be an opportunity to provide FinTech using the IT skills in the borough.

Retain – Information and Communication

It is noted that a recent report from Savills anticipates that the number of data centres will need to increase by almost 2.5 times, through the construction of more than 3,000 data centres, in the UK. Is this a consideration for Guildford?

Retain - Professional Scientific and Technical

The Society would argue that the *Life Sciences* sector needs to be looked at as a special sub-group in this category.

Firstly, the report misses the expertise at the RHS which has a newly re-energised and re-housed Horticulture Science centre.

The University of Surrey is in the process of setting up a Medical School. Pirbright on the outskirts of the town which is a world class centre of Virus research particularly focused on Animal Health currently employs circa 400 staff. The University also has a Vet School, and we also have Noel Fitzpatrick.

Although outside the borough, Syngenta, the biggest Agricultural Chemical company in the world, has its largest Global R&D centre in Bracknell.

London is developing a three lifescience Hubs including one at Waterloo although these are a threat, they can also be viewed as an opportunity for collaboration and as a market for a supply chain that could be based in Guildford see London's increasing Life Science Sector.

<https://www.guildfordsociety.org.uk/LifeScLondon.html>

An opportunity related to Health care.

Local innovation happens most easily and often opportunistically when a combination of new factors come together at the same time. Global medicine will change more in the next five years than at any other time in its history. Doctors who graduate from the new medical school will have learned skills that will be unique to their cohort. The list of combinatorial innovations will see exponential growth. Here are some of the new technologies

<https://www.proclinical.com/blogs/2022-4/top-10-new-medical-technologies-2022>

<https://digital.nhs.uk/>

What innovation also needs is a skilled, curious and entrepreneurial population, all of which are present in the one-mile radius of the RSCH, Research Park and across Guildford as a whole. All of these capabilities and services are emerging across world health care systems and the NHS. But they also need a traditional health care system which is ready to participate. There are many opportunities.

There are also leverageable health care resources at the hospital, the Jarvis Centre, GP practices. Guildford also has a strong private health care capability, the Nuffield Health Guildford, adjacent to the RSCH, for example. But the potentially most important contributor

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could be the new medical school <https://www.surrey.ac.uk/news/university-surrey-announces-new-medical-school/>

This is a real opportunity for Guildford and local stakeholders should seize the moment.

Note Science, Technologies and Skills in Healthcare are transferable across other Life Science sectors. IT skills used in the Games industry are also of use for Visualisation etc.

Retain – Retail

Savills have reported on two issues facing the Retail space market. 1. 1.4bn Sq/ft of the retail estate in the UK will need improvements to meet the requirement to hit Grade B EPC rating by 2030 (noted in the Guildford Economic Strategy). Most of this space is in smaller older units. This may place pressure on older units to retire from the market or be redeveloped.

A Financial Times Article 25-11-2022 refers to Savills predicting that up to 25% of the retail space in the UK could be surplus to requirements by 2030.

Both the above trends could have a big impact on Guildford as many of our shops are in the Heritage High Street and are difficult to bring to modern standards.

Savills have also highlight how Oxford Street is evolving rapidly over the last 5 years, which may have some pointers for Guildford.

The analysis reveals the extent of potential in the conversion of former retail space to offices, which Savills says would account for 72% (960,000 sq ft) of new office space available on the prestigious address, as the street evolves into a truly mixed use offer.

Savills says the strength of Oxford Street as an office location is defined by a strong amenity and cultural offer, along with unrivalled accessibility, boosted by the recently opened Bond Street Elizabeth Line station, and abundant green spaces on rooftops, Royal Squares and Parks.

Are there lessons for Guildford?

The recent report for the North Street Development (also produced by Savill's) on retail demand, in Guildford, has forecast that the floorspace up to 2034 (i.e. over the plan-period) is 1,506 sq. m (gross), but increasing to 4,112 sq. m (gross) up to 2036. This compares against the same figure of 43,645 sq. m (gross) that was estimated to be required up to 2034 in the LPSS 2019

Does there need to be a strategy of where potentially a lower area of shopping in the Town Centre, with economic impacts, has to be recognised?

Recognise supporting and declining sectors

There is much talk of priority sectors but there also needs to be recognition of support businesses e.g. Hardware Suppliers for Computing, Additive Manufacturing for Prototyping.

There are also businesses that are at risk of decline. An example is the garage sector where a decline is possible due to the advent of electric vehicles with reduced maintenance needs – Slyfield could look very different in a decade.. Note: We are lucky to have a Tesla Garage they are a rare occurrence.

The Green Economy

The backing material to the report devotes slide 24 to the opportunities available from the Green Economy. It should also highlight that the University of Surrey is very actively working in this area, launching an Institute for Sustainability at the end of last year and could act as a real catalyst for local businesses in this area.

The Society notes that recent PWC Green jobs Barometer (December 2022) highlights the rapid growth in job and opportunities related to managing sustainability and Climate Change. The Southeast is experiencing this growth better than the rest of the UK. Is Guildford participating in this activity?

See Green Jobs Barometer 2022 [Green Jobs Barometer 2022 \(guildfordsociety.org.uk\)](https://www.guildfordsociety.org.uk/green-jobs-barometer-2022)

Office Space

Two of the 'asks' identified by consultees included

- *Provision of more flexible, high -quality and accessible business space*
- *Introduction of new commercial uses into the town centre and around the station*

The report notes that:

"our existing commercial space offer could also better meet the changing demands of businesses in our priority growth sectors. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, and the rise in hybrid working, higher-value office-type occupiers are increasingly demanding high-quality and flexible space close to public transport nodes and vibrant town centres. Our office stock does not align with this:

- *Only 5% of our office stock is classified as 'high quality' versus 47% in Reading, 35% in Crawley, 30% in Cambridge and 20% in Milton Keynes;*
- *Nearly all of our major office clusters are located away from our main train station and town centre (e.g. Surrey Research Park, Guildford Business Park, London Square, Cathedral Hill and Guildway Office Park); and,*
- *Most of our office stock is large floorplate stock available on long and inflexible lease terms, particularly space located close to the town centre (e.g. Ranger House and Bridge House).*

Although the strategy sets targets to increase high quality space to 20% within 5 years there is no plan on how this is to be achieved, particularly in the Town Centre. There is mention of developing offices at Slyfield – hardly walking distance from the Station.

A major issue is that could Guildford is too late, if you are setting up a Business accommodation is available in Reading, which has good communications etc. The report has no sense of urgency on this matter (the accommodation mentioned in Shaping Guildford's Future is years away). Should part of the Guildford Park Road be reallocated for Offices. Is effort required to bring forward a plan for the west side of the station or even consider development in Policy A3.

Upgrading our Physical and Digital Infrastructure

The report identifies many issues with the Transport infrastructure but statements starting with Work Proactively, Continue to work, don't inspire confidence that anything will be done. It is noted Guildford Station West and East were both identified in the 2013 Economic Plan and nothing has happened since!!

We do need fast action on Transport matters e.g. a more understandable Bus Service, reinstatement of the Park and Ride services, etc.

There are some quick wins e.g. re-opening the tunnel (the lights are still on!) between Walnut Tree Close and the western leg of Woodbridge Meadows. Advancing the plans to connect the Guildford Business Park to the University by a pedestrian bridge.

We would support the development of a Guildford Travel Card to cover Buses, Bike hire, Local Trains and Parking. We need to learn from Freiburg.

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Place: Town Centre Offer

The report at Para 3.41 states: *We understand the challenges our town centre faces and have already started developing plans to support its regeneration through our Shaping Guildford's Future Programme, which has received input from thousands of residents and businesses.*

The Shaping Guildford Future exercise has evolved into developing 4 Sites along the river connected by an enhanced riverside. Whilst valuable it is not clear it is actively working on the issues faced by the rest of the Town Centre apart from the desire to create an Area Action Plan to cover the whole of the Town Centre.

Does there need to be a short to medium term plan to guide how the current town centre develops. There may be a case to support conversion of shops to offices etc, but this needs to be done in a planned manner.

The report proposes that: *Consider any proposals to re-purpose the Friary or other town centre assets for a leisure, health and fitness hub, taking advantage of 'new' leisure concepts entering the marketing and the rising importance of wellbeing to consumers.* The Town has already in our view missed the opportunity to create a stunning 'new' leisure concept with the redevelopment of the Debenhams building on a prime site (also see visitor economy).

Another missed opportunity may be in progress. The proposals to pedestrianise North Street are part of the rejected North St Scheme. Whatever the future of the North St Scheme there does need to action to create better environment in North Street which can complement the High Street. Maybe as a commercial centre rather than Retail centre but with Office space. The Society has proposed that a SPD should be developed for North Street.

Retail & Leisure Needs Assessment this requires urgent updating. GBC at present appears to be relying on developer studies e.g. for North Street Application to guide development.

Design

Finally, we also need to support good design, including the Town Centre, across the borough and new building techniques. Attractive and interesting places have considerable economic value. Just as an example the office building with the lowest carbon footprint in the UK just consented in Manchester.

Guildford should aim for interesting design as an example Lewes have a interesting area under consideration at present.

[Lewes – Eco Friendly Regeneration \(guildfordsociety.org.uk\)](http://guildfordsociety.org.uk)



Bruntwood rep

Visitor Economy

Guildford needs to have a more exciting offer.

Whilst it is obvious that the private sector may have difficulty in making a case for investment it is notable that with some public investment to kick start Guildford could improve its offer. Guildford needs to have an ambition to create new attractions in the centre e.g. Interpretation Centre/Education Centre for the North Downs, re-imagined museum, or an equivalent to the Woking Lightbox. etc.

As noted in the report experiential leisure is a new trend emerging in the US.

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For information: the highest profile of these is the Area 15 in Las Vegas, which now houses a multitude of attractions and events including Meow Wolf's Omega Mart (an immersive art exhibit with secret bar), a selection of virtual reality experiences and an indoor zip line (We could have done a lot with Debenhams!). Other examples include the likes of City Winery, an intimate music and events space accompanied by locally sourced food and wine, which now has 12 sites throughout the US, and New Arts District, a new AI powered experience soon to open in New York. The draw that an Experiential Leisure offer can bring to a town can be huge and can create significant uplifts in footfall in the locale. Could something be developed with the local games industry?

It would be worth looking at how attractions in other towns e.g. Making a destination in Folkstone [Making a destination in Folkstone \(guildfordsociety.org.uk\)](http://guildfordsociety.org.uk) helping the local economy.

The Strategy might comment on the feasibility of for example:

- Creating a AONB Interpretation and Travel Centre
- Bike hire Schemes to travel from the centre to villages with return transport by bus or train
- Sort out a high-grade museum – the ambition for this seems to have stalled.

The proposals for the visitor economy appears to lack ambition.