



Preserving Guildford's vistas, roofscapes and skyline – a position paper by The Guildford Society

Overview

Guildford has been bestowed with a stunning natural location, located as it is in the heart of the North Downs in the River Wey Valley and this topography has created particularly fine sight lines. As the historical county town of Surrey, Guildford's development has created a number of historic buildings of local and national significance that have created an iconic skyline. Together these have combined to form a key component of The Town's heritage.

It is the Society's position that these skylines and sight lines be protected for the benefit of current and future generations against damage by development in The Town. As it is impossible to list every sight line and skyline of heritage value in Guildford, developers should demonstrate that there is no significant impact on these by any proposed development.

Vistas within Guildford town centre

Guildford is frequently called a gap town "and probably owes its location to the existence of a gap in the North Downs where the River Wey is forded by a path commonly known as the 'Pilgrims' Way'" between Winchester and Canterbury¹. It is also located on the coaching route between London and coastal towns such as Portsmouth, which was a catalyst for creating much of the iconic architecture in Guildford today.

On both sides of this river valley there are steep and significant hills, the Mount leading to the Hogs Back to the west, and Pewley Down (with the Castle at its base) and St Martha's Hill to the east. Both sides of the valley are wooded and the existing trees are a significant component of these views and consequently require careful maintenance.

The principal sight lines which this has created are as follows:

- ▶ Looking down from the top of the iconic High Street, across Town Bridge over the Wey to The Mount and the original Pilgrims Way green lane drovers' road winding its way over the Hogs Back towards Winchester.
- ▶ From The Mount one can look up the High Street with its granite setts, half-timbered and Georgian buildings and the exceptional 17th century Abbots Hospital, Holy Trinity Church, 16th century Royal Grammar School which form a unique cluster of listed buildings with the Guildhall and John Aylwards' clock projecting over the street.
- ▶ From above Tunsgate Arch a short lane approaches the Castle Gardens and at its centre the splendid Norman Keep, an ancient monument from the 12th century.
- ▶ From the Keep and its surrounding mount, the view South across the Surrey Hills is outstanding.
- ▶ To the west of The Town, one looks across central Guildford towards Maufe's 20th century Cathedral which towers over most other buildings in The Town.
- ▶ Looking east from The Town across the Wey valley to the rear of the fine terrace of listed buildings on Quarry Street with the Castle behind and Semaphore Tower above.
- ▶ The narrow lanes leading off on either side of the High Street such as Angel Gate which form part of Guildford's county town vernacular.

¹ Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guildford>

- ▶ The rooflines formed by the listed buildings and more recent developments on High Street, Quarry Street and Chapel Street.

However the rooftops of many buildings are strewn with plant and radio transmitters and these should be suitably obscured by sensitive architecture whilst retaining functionality.

The skylines to the east and west heading south from the town centre are dominated by green hills which are peppered by individual homes of character built to a low plot density which were constructed principally in the first half of the 20th century. These have contributed to the characteristic appearance of these hills.

These views are considered to be key features of Guildford's cultural, historical and natural heritage and should be secured in perpetuity.

Vistas in the Surrey Hills and Greenbelt

The Town's location within the Surrey Hills provides many views both adjacent to The Town and further afield that are extraordinary. Much of the Surrey Hills and the North Downs are already protected as they are in the rural Greenbelt and are designated as AONBs and SSSIs.

Along the A248 between Shalford and Albury, spectacular views in all directions can be seen from and to the pinnacle of St. Martha's Hill, with its 12th century church reputed to have served as a resting stop along the Pilgrim's Way; this site also features several Neolithic and Megalithic artefacts some of which have been dated to 3500 BC.

The Hogs Back is a narrow elongated ridge that stretches from Guildford to Farnham. At a height of 154 metres above sea level it provides exceptional views:

- ▶ To the north of the Borough's towns and villages such as Normandy, Tongham and Ash and on clear days to London including Canary Wharf, The Gherkin and Heathrow Airport.
- ▶ The views to the south of the Weald are unspoilt and much of this area has been designated as AONBs as well as SSSIs.

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ANNEX – PHOTOGRAPHS OF KEY VISTAS

Vistas within Guildford town centre



Looking towards the West Hill from the High Street



The same view a bit further up the hill at the Guildhall.



View of the Cathedral and the University site from West Guildford



View from Bright Hill towards Guildford Cathedral

Vistas in the Surrey Hills and greenbelt



View from the South looking up towards St. Martha's Church