

## THE PLANNING GROUP

### **Report on the letters the group has written to Guildford Borough Council about planning applications submitted during the period 1 January to 30 June 2015**

*During 2014 the Planning Group has consisted of John Baylis, Gordon Bridger, Amanda Mullarkey, David Ogilvie, Martin Taplin, Anthony Umney and John Wood. Ian Macpherson has been invaluable as a corresponding member.*

The Planning Group has continued to meet every three weeks at the Guildford Borough Council (“GBC”) offices.

During the first 6 months of 2015 there were 1,199 planning applications recorded at GBC. We sifted through these applications and looked in detail at 87 of them over this period. The Group wrote 29 letters to the Head of Planning Services on a wide range of individual planning applications.

The most applications in a single category we wrote about was about signs, mainly hanging or projecting, in and around the High Street Conservation Area. We wrote 11 such letters (10 in the previous six months) either because we considered they were too large (there is a general presumption that the maximum size should be no larger than 600mm x 600mm) or because the proposal was that they should be internally illuminated (GBC policy precludes such illumination in this area). The officers in GBC agreed with us most of the time and thus, of those 11 applications, 4 were approved, 3 were approved only after amendments were made to the size and/or illumination to accord with our concerns and 4 were refused.

Of the remaining 18 applications to which we made comment 2 were letters in support, 9 refused, 4 were approved, 1 was approved only after amendments were received to satisfy our objections and 2 have not yet been decided. Five appeals were submitted against the 13 refused applications and, of these, so far 2 appeals have been dismissed and the other 3 have not yet been decided. This shows a good record of decision making by GBC on the applications where we wrote objecting to the proposals – not too many of those refusals have been challenged and where they have been, the record of those decided by an Inspector so far in the period under review has been wholly against the appellant.

During this period there have been only two significant planning applications made which I feel need to be brought to the reader’s attention. The first one was **15/P/00012: Land at Wisley Airfield**. See the main comments below. Since then an amending application was submitted in January 2016 and the planning group are considering that new application at the time of writing this report.

The second application was **15/P/00381: Guildford Methodist Church, Woodbridge Road, Guildford** and our comments on that can be read below on page 6. The previous application for 27 one and two bedroom flats after demolition of the church was refused and appealed. The Inspector agreed with our and GBC's view that not enough affordable homes were proposed and the appeal was dismissed. This application for 25 one and two bedroom flats was not sufficiently different from the previous one and little attempt had been made to take account of the Inspector's reasoning in refusing the previous application. GBC have refused to approve the second application and an appeal has commenced against that decision. It is hoped that the new Inspector will dismiss the appeal on similar grounds because if it is allowed a dangerous precedent could be set for the level of affordable homes to be set aside in the larger developments.

Senior officials at GBC have told us again recently that the case officers at GBC do take our letters into consideration and they find our letters very informative which helps them to make their judgement on a particular application. However, they do not always take the same view as us. Nevertheless, we believe we do make a difference because where applications are approved we find that the majority of applications are not approved without subsequent amendments to the original application being made or conditions are attached to the planning consent.

The details of our letters follow below and if any reader wishes to look at any of the applications, the plans, the design and access statements, the officer's report to the planning committee and the decision notices they can find all the information required at <http://www2.guildford.gov.uk/publicaccess/search.do?action=simple> Type in the application number, click "Search" and click on "Documents" when the Summary page has been loaded. You will then be able to click on the information you are seeking and it usually downloads a pdf document.

## **PLANNING APPLICATIONS between 1 January to 30 June 2015**

### **15/P/00012: Land at Wisley Airfield, Hatch Lane, Ockham, GU23 6NU**

This proposal was for outline planning permission for the phased development of a new settlement of up to 2,100 dwellings, a school, health facility, a local centre etc incorporating associated infrastructure.

This site is one of the four Strategic Sites in the draft Local Plan and it is in the green belt, albeit significant parts of the site are previously used land and are laid to concrete. The appropriate approach to realigning the boundaries of the Metropolitan Greenbelt is through the medium of the Local Plan – exposed thoroughly to public scrutiny in a way that the treatment of planning applications to the Local Authority do not begin to facilitate.

We therefore objected on the formal grounds that approval should not be considered until the revision of the draft Local Plan is published – indeed the application was premature. We were concerned that this development may be too large to be assimilated as a housing scheme and yet too small to be a viable new community. We were concerned that the linear nature of the proposed development, whilst broadly following the alignment of the runway, will not contribute to a cohesive community; will spread the visual impact from

its surroundings and, therefore, will have a substantial adverse impact on the openness of the Greenbelt which is not demonstrably outweighed by the benefits of consenting to the proposals.

We also pointed out that a key part of the evaluation of whether this site is suitable for it to be included in the Local Plan will be an assessment of issues relating to access and transport. Wisley Airfield is located in a rural area relatively remote from other settlements such as Woking and Guildford. The evaluation will need to consider the extent to which bus services and cycle routes to neighbouring towns and railway stations can realistically be achieved in order to ensure that, in terms of transport, a sustainable development can take place such that the traffic generated by this major development will not have an adverse impact on the character of the surrounding area.

*(This application has 745 documents uploaded onto the relative GBC webpage. It is not surprising it has not yet been decided. The date for determination has been extended to 24 December 2015 but even this date has passed. An amending application has been submitted in January 2016)*

#### **15/P/00018: Richmond House, Millbrook, Guildford, GU1 3XJ**

The proposal was for a change of use from a house (Use Class C3) to seven self-contained serviced apartments for short-term paying guests (Use Class C1) and included a two storey extension and other alterations.

The property is in a flood risk category 3(a) zone, the highest category of flood risk. It is allowable for present permanent occupants to be accommodated within such a zone but this proposal was wrong in principle. Such temporary guests will be exposed to flood dangers and cannot be expected to be practiced in how to avoid them. We considered that the application should be refused.

*Refused)*

#### **15/P/00025: 91 Haydon Place, Guildford, GU1 4LR**

We considered the proposal to change the use from commercial to residential to create four 2-bed dwellings was not in character with the existing building and was of poor design. The GBC Supplementary Planning Guidance on Residential Extensions, September 2003, specifically states that flat roofed extensions will rarely be acceptable (para 3.8) because, like this one, they can detract from the character of the main building. The extension will be adjacent to York Road, an important town thoroughfare, and will be in full public view. The Society had objected to two earlier applications and we noted that the number of proposed flats had been reduced from six to four. However, we still considered this proposal comprised over-development of the site and it provided no external amenity space for the occupants of the flats.

*(Approved on 3 March 2015. Our letter was dated 1 February 2015 but it was only uploaded to the webpage on 30 November. It was therefore not mentioned in the Officer's report which was dated 27 February 2015. Nevertheless it seemed that the Officer agreed with our contention about the poor design because amended plans were received which gave the extension a normal pitched roof.)*

**15/P/00029: Footbridge adjacent to Guildford Fire Station, Ladymead, Guildford**

We objected strongly to this application for a large 3,600mm x 1,800mm blatant advertisement on the footbridge by the fire station. It is a tacky eyesore which would set a horrible precedent for Guildford. We considered the proposal certainly does not respect the interests of public amenity (Policy G8 of the Local Plan).

*(Refused. Again, our letter dated 1 February was not uploaded onto the webpage until 30 November and the Officer's report made no mention of it. Nevertheless, the Officer agreed with our concerns.)*

**15/P/00032: 94 High Street, Guildford, GU1 3HE**

We considered the proposed size of the hanging sign: 800mm is too wide in the cobbled High Street. In addition we had strong reservations about the proposed lettering on the upper floors of the building, the 'Wedding Ring World' and 'Rolex'. As far as we are aware there is no precedent for recent lettering on upper floors of buildings in the High Street.

*(Part approved and part refused. Our letter dated 1 February was only uploaded to the webpage on 30 November so again the Officer's report did not refer to it. Nevertheless, the part refused was both the projecting hanging sign and also the lettering on the upper floors.)*

**15/P/00104: Land rear of 106, Stoke Road, Guildford, GU1 1HB**

We considered this proposal for a new dwelling and garage near the war memorial was unattractive and out of place. We felt the design was ugly and made worse through the use of an inappropriate combination of materials (namely, flint, stone and wood cladding). In addition, the proposed detached garage is unattractive and will dominate the attractive existing lodge cottage. Finally, because of the proximity of the proposed development to the existing Yew tree (which is protected by a TPO), we are very concerned that the tree could be adversely affected by the proposed development. In short, we considered this development would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area.

*(Refused. We do not know whether the Officer recommended refusal for the same reasons as us because the report and decision notice has not been uploaded onto the webpage. An appeal has been dismissed. The inspector agreed with our points and, indeed, referred to our representation in his report – unusual!)*

**15/P/00168: Barratt House Chestnut Avenue Guildford GU2 4HF.**

This was a proposal to redevelop the site to deliver 14 new homes. We said the proposal was an overdevelopment and had a lack of clarity. We felt it should be withdrawn and resubmitted to show how levels will be managed. It was interesting that the applicants admitted that in a pre-application discussion with the Local Planning Authority the officers were concerned that the proposed massing and quantity of the units were too big. In addition the proposed dwellings at the rear of the site were identified as needing further spacing to deliver sufficient space and openness between the units.

The Society was not convinced that the concerns expressed by the officers had been overcome in the submitted scheme. In support of that concern the Society saw no cross sections through the site and given the significant change in level between Chestnut Avenue and Sandy Lane, this reinforced our concerns.

On a positive note, the Society supported the inclusion of a footpath along the eastern side of the site linking Chestnut Avenue with Sandy Lane. We noted that this is a feature sought and supported by local residents and we recognised the benefits in enabling people to avoid having to walk on the main road. Provision of this footpath should be a condition in any consent that is granted in order to protect the position in the event of the site being sold on.

*(Approved. The case Officer did not consider the proposed level of development was excessive, nor out of character with the area and as such would not result in an overdevelopment of the site. The Officer's report commented on our suggestion that the provision of the footpath should be imposed as a condition by saying "A condition requiring the provision of the footpath would not meet the tests set out in paragraph 206 of the NPPF 2012. Our fears have been realised because after receipt of approval the applicants submitted an application for non-material amendment to remove the footpath. Fortunately, this was refused as a non-material amendment, although the decision letter dated 21 September 2015 suggested they apply for a variation of condition 2. No such variation has yet been submitted.)*

**15/P/00170: 35 – 39 North Street Guildford GU1 4TE.**

We objected to proposed signs, especially their internal illumination and we suggested that in our opinion the signs should be halo back lit. Internally illuminated signs create an image that is brash and out of character with Guildford's historic image.

*(Approved. As the use of internally illuminated signs is not contrary to policy on a site outside a designated Conservation Area and there are other examples in the area, the case Officer was minded to approve the application.)*

**15/P/00192: Sainsbury Superstore, Clay Lane, Guildford, GU4 7JU.**

The frontage to the existing Sainsbury store comprises areas of glazing contained within an otherwise brick and tile structure. This application proposed the addition of a structure on the front of the store for a Timpson's retail outlet which we considered to be of garish and with a tacky design which would be incompatible with the existing building. This proposed development would, if approved, set a poor precedent for similar proposals at other stores.

*(Approved.)*

**15/P/00235: 151 High Street, Guildford.**

This was a proposal for various signs including two internally illuminated suspended light pockets. We objected to these on the grounds of their proposed size and internal illumination at this important listed building in the heart of the historic High Street. We noted that the GBC Guidance for Advertisements and Signs says that 'illuminated signs

of any description will not normally be appropriate in the cobbled part of Guildford High Street or on listed buildings'. If this extends to internally suspended signs then all the proposed illuminated signs fall foul of this guidance.

*Part approved and part refused. Our concerns were in the latter category and the Officer agreed with us.)*

**15/P/00246: 248 High Street, Guildford, GU1 3JG.** We could not support the proposed Chelsea Building Society signs on grounds of size and internal illumination. Our concern related to the projecting sign which (at 850 x 850) we considered to be too big. We also objected to the proposal that the projecting sign should be internally illuminated.

*Approved, but only after amending plans were received which satisfied our concerns.)*

**15/P/00345: 80 Epsom Road, Guildford.**

This proposed redevelopment comprised twelve flats (previously approved) and the extension and conversion of an existing rear coach house to form a two bedroom bungalow. We considered the bungalow would be a 'back land' development of the kind repeatedly refused on appeal in this area. The general grounds are that such development is out of character with the area (Type 5 in the Residential Design Guide) and does not respect building lines. Furthermore we judged that the reduction in the amenity space for the twelve apartments, required to provide a plot for the bungalow, was unacceptable. The loss of parking spaces would, as far as we could see, result in no visitor parking. The application does not comply with the GBC 2006 Vehicle Parking Standards.

*(Refused and appeal dismissed.)*

**15/P/00348: Peacock Wood, Lido Road, Guildford.**

This application sought consent for 1 totem display board at the entrance to Peacock Wood and 1 totem display board on Stoke Road. We objected to the cluttered effect which would be created by the proposed sign at Stoke Road traffic lights in combination with the existing GBC noticeboard there. The lights are a major gateway to Guildford town and the adjacent verges should be pleasant uncluttered green spaces.

*(Approved. The case Officer did not agree with us on this occasion.)*

**15/P/00381: Guildford Methodist Church, Woodbridge Road, Guildford.**

This was a resubmission of an application to erect a part three storey, part four storey building comprising of 25 (previously 27) one and two bedroom flats with a basement car park following demolition of the existing building. We had objected to the previous application. In addition to the affordable housing issue where we considered the proposed contribution to be trifling, we objected again on other grounds, especially the proposed density of 139 dwellings per hectare which we considered to be far too high, demonstrating that the development represents an over-intensive use of the site.

If the affordable housing provision is allowed we considered that most applications for blocks of flats on brownfield sites in the Borough will make similar claims, which will significantly damage the chances of the Council meeting its needs for affordable housing and it would prevent provision of housing expressly to meet local need. We can see no special circumstances warranting departure from the usual 30% requirement (proposed to be increased to 40% in the withdrawn draft Local Plan). Finally, we considered the proposed parking (which is an issue in this area of the town) is insufficient.

*(Refused, principally on the lack of sufficient affordable homes being provided. The previous application had been refused and appealed. The inspector also agreed the lack of affordable homes was the main reason for refusal and he made the point that if the developer has paid too high a price for the site, such that the viability made it necessary to reduce the number of affordable homes, then that is the developer's fault. An appeal has commenced.)*

**15/P/00401: Founders Studio, Guildford School Of Acting, Millbrook, Guildford.**

This proposed a mixed use development comprising seven residential units and two retail / commercial units following demolition of existing building. The design was modern and we made it clear that we were not at all opposed to a high quality modern design. It is the height, and the bulk and massing of the proposed building which we found objectionable. We noted that it is almost certain that the application would be refused as the case officer had written to the developer to this effect.

*(Refused. Appeal commenced.)*

**15/P/00568: 15 Harvey Road, Guildford, GU1 3SG**

The proposal was for the construction of 2 four bedroom semi detached houses following demolition of the existing dwelling house. We could not support this application because we felt it was an over development of the site and thus out of character with the area; the rear gardens at 8.2 to 8.4m long are too short; and the one parking space shown for each house is insufficient for houses of this size.

*(Refused. The council agreed with our views.)*

**15/P/00604: The Pirbright Institute, Ash Road, Pirbright**

This was an outline application for partial demolition of existing buildings and redevelopment of the site to include up to 40,000 sq metres of floorspace for a research laboratory campus. It proposed major development in a rural area within the Metropolitan Green Belt and thus is in conflict with Green Belt policy: it would need to demonstrate "very special circumstances". We wrote that we do not wish to express a view as to whether the application should be approved or refused. However, we considered that at the outset of the examination of this application, rigorous investigation needs to be made of the case for approving such a major development such as to justify setting aside the prima facie conflict with Green Belt policy.

*(This application has not been decided.)*

**15/P/00613: Bellerby Theatre Site (Waitrose), Leapale Lane.**

This proposal was for the signage for the Waitrose store and car park, about 75 signs in all. We objected, firstly because the application does not show exactly what is proposed and where all of the signs are. We were very concerned about the proposed 5 metre high totem sign which we considered should not be approved in this town centre location which is partly bounded by the town centre Conservation Area. The totem should certainly not be illuminated. We also objected to the proposed three 5.8 metre-high banners.

*(Approved. GBC did not agree with our concerns and ours was the only letter recorded on the website from third parties.)*

**15/P/00663: Onslow House, Onslow Street**

We had no objection in principle to erecting a free-standing art sculpture within the town to commemorate Alan Turing who lived in Guildford. We were however unhappy with both the location and the design. The installation is sited too close to the carriageway of the busy Onslow Street. In terms of design, the binary code to be displayed on the artwork is a direct transfer from the last line of the Government's apology of 2009 which stated: "You deserve so much better". Not only is there a need for the installation to provide an explanation of the binary code display but we considered that the surrounding artwork deserves something better and less fussy.

*(Approved)*

**15/P/00676: 143 High Street.**

We objected to the design and materials of the new signage and fascia proposed for this grade II\* listed building as we considered that the proposal to use acrylic letters and logo was an inappropriate material which would diminish the quality and integrity of this building which is located in the heart of the High Street.

*(Approved after amending plans received showing the fascia to be white painted timber with which we had said we would be happy.)*

**15/P/00699: Bar, 16 Park Street.** We objected to any form of flashing or intermittent lighting of the proposed signage.

*(Refused because of the height and size of the advertisement. Amended plans were received agreeing that there would be no flashing or intermittent lighting.)*

**15/P/00740: 151 High Street: alterations and signage**

The drawings seem to indicate that the transoms and mullions, i.e. the glazing bars, to the three windows and the glazing above the door will be removed. If that is the case we would object to the removal of the glazing bars as this would damage the quality of the exterior of this listed building.

*(Approved, following confirmation that the glazing bars will not be removed.)*



**15/P/00795: 66 High Street: signage**

We did not like the proposal to internally illuminate the new fascia sign. We noted that at present there were two internally illuminated LCD promotion screens located within the retail space, but we were not sure whether they were the ones applied for. The screens show relatively subdued “moving colour displays”, to quote the D&A statement, and we agreed they do “not have an adverse impact on the street scene”. However the screens could be used to show over-bright, garish or rapidly moving images and could be positioned closer to the High Street, all of which could detract from the character of the High Street. We have raised this issue of the use of LCD screens before and have noted that it is not covered by the present Design Guidelines for Advertisements and Signs.  
*(Refused)*

**15/P/00923: Pavement Area outside 66-68, High Street**

We had no objection to renewal of application 05/P/00067 for the provision of a sausage cart in the High Street. However we would object to any extension of hours or days and we would object to any approval being made permanent. In our view, any approval should be time limited in order to cover all eventualities and to avoid an unwanted precedent.

*(Approved for a further 5 years. Our letter was not referred to in the Officer’s report dated 21 July 2015 and our letter was only recorded on the website on 30 November 2015.)*

**15/P/00984: Royal Surrey County Hospital, Egerton Road**

Clearly the Society is in support of the provision of improved medical facilities at the Royal Surrey County Hospital. However, both the design and the location of this proposed development gave cause for comment. It is located in a very prominent position on the frontage to main service approach road to the Hospital. We considered that a combination of the prominence of the proposed building together with the intention to use white rendered/copper clad walls will result in a building which will be rather brash and incompatible with the general style of the original hospital building. We would much prefer buildings whose external materials and structure were compatible with the existing main hospital buildings and better integrated with them. Rather than making a rather selfish 'statement' of individuality, it would be better if they harmonised with the existing, and such harmonisation could even assist with satisfactory further extension in the future.  
*(Approved. The Officer’s report considered our concerns but concluded that the use of render and copper coloured cladding would add visual interest to the building and would represent a visual enhancement over the existing appearance.)*

**15/P/00989: 18-20 Slyfield Industrial Estate, Mercedes signage**

We objected to the size and height of the proposed signage on the frontage to Moorfield Road. We considered the proposed 6 metre high totem sign and the three 8 metre high

'flag' poles to be incredibly tall and over-dominant. This application should be refused as being contrary to the Council's approved Design Guide for the Slyfield Estate.  
*(Part approved and part refused. Our objections were considered but it was felt that the proposals were no worse than many existing signs on the Slyfield Estate. The part refusal was over another sign with which we did not object. The applicants have appealed against this refusal.)*

**15/P/00997: Robin Hood pub: demolition and redevelopment with seven flats**

This proposal represents a gross over-development of the site. Furthermore, we considered that if the site is to be redeveloped it should be part of an overall development with the adjoining Bright Hill car park. The car park is identified as a potential redevelopment site for housing in the draft Local Plan July 2014 and previous Council papers.

*(Refused. Appeal commenced)*

**15/P/01000 and 01001: 11-12 Friary Street (Nandos): frontage and signage**

We did not like the proposed large 'cold cathode' (neon) heart shaped sign on the Phoenix Court frontage. This neon sign is considered to be inappropriate in the town centre in terms of its design and illumination. (The submitted drawings also showed a design with the words "Love is what you want". It is not clear if this is proposed as part of the signage but, if it is, we wrote that we would object).

*(Whilst the application was approved our objection related to one sign. This heart shaped sign was removed from the application.)*

**15/P/01002: 17 Warwicks Bench: new brick boundary wall.**

The Society is opposed to the creation of gated environments around existing dwellings. We therefore objected to this application for gates and a high wall. The wall would also be out of character with the local area. The wall would set a highly undesirable precedent for fortress Guildford should it be repeated around our residential streets. If it were repeated on the other side of Warwicks Bench valuable views would be lost.

*(Refused)*

**DECISIONS ON APPLICATIONS PREVIOUSLY REPORTED BUT NOT FULLY RESOLVED AT THE TIME OF REPORTING**

**14/P/01729: Land in the rear garden of 5 Maori Road Guildford**

The proposal was for the erection of a two storey x four bedroom detached dwelling with detached garage following demolition of existing garage and outbuilding. The Society would not welcome the necessary widening of Cross Lanes for a considerable distance with the resulting loss of mature trees and historic amenity of this ancient lane.

*(Refused in March 2015. Appeal dismissed.)*

**14/P/02109: Howard of Effingham School, Effingham:**

We objected to this proposal to build a new school and dwellings on green belt land contrary to the saved 2003 Local Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework. No very special circumstances had been put forward to justify this development in the Green Belt. We particularly objected to the Effingham Lodge Farm site for it is also outside the Settlement Boundary. We noted that the Brown's Field site is within the conservation area and part of the site is an area of High Archaeological Potential. In our view this proposal was premature and should await the adoption of the new Local Plan.

*(This application has still not yet been considered.)*

**14/P/02168: Guildford railway station, Station View**

This is probably the biggest planning application ever to be considered by GBC. We had had several meetings with Solum prior to this submission and we were very disappointed with this application. Eventually the application was unofficially withdrawn and new plans were submitted in November 2015. Our response to the amending scheme and the progress of the application will be reported in a later review. Nevertheless more information and a press release are on the Society's website at <http://www.guildfordsociety.org.uk/hot-topics.html>. The Society, supported by Guildford Residents Association, hosted an evening of discussion on 13 January 2016 to allow residents to obtain a wider view of the proposed development. It will be well worth your time to read and listen to the audio feed of the meeting.

**14/P/02254: The Clockhouse, 140 London Road and 72 Boxgrove Road, Guildford**

The Society welcomed the revised design for the erection of assisted living and extra care accommodation for the frail elderly including car parking which we considered to be much improved from the earlier application which was refused and dismissed on appeal. We welcomed also the intention to set back the building from the frontage to the Boxgrove roundabout which helps to reflect the existing open character of the site and its surroundings. We did, however, make the point that the earlier application, which proposed a building of 5,888 sq m, was dismissed on appeal in part because it was considered to represent an overdevelopment of the site. This application proposed an even larger building - of some 6,000 sq m to replace an existing building of 1,695 sq m - to comprise a total of 54 flats (25 x 1 bed and 29 x 2 bed) as well as extensive communal facilities.

We were very concerned that 31 car parking spaces shown to be provided on the site layout plan (note: not 37, as stated in the application) would be seriously inadequate to meet the combined parking demand arising from the residents of the 54 flats, their visitors and the significant number of staff who will be employed.

We also pointed out that it is the policy of the Council to achieve more 'greening' of the approaches to the town - a policy which we fully endorse - and, because of the prominent position of this site facing the roundabout on London Road, we considered that more of the frontage of the site should be set aside for landscaping rather than used for car parking. We recognised that this would reduce the number of car parking spaces based on

the existing layout but this simply reinforced our view that the proposals represent an overdevelopment of the site.

*(Approved after amended plans were submitted. Not all our concerns were considered unacceptable. For example, a car club is to be provided and it is felt this will reduce the need for residents to have their own car on site. In addition a comprehensive landscaping scheme has been requested.)*

John Wood

February 2016