

The Chairman's Report

Dear Guildford Society Members

This past year has, as predicted, been another challenging one for Guildford and the Guildford Society. The coming year may well be a make-or-break year for Guildford, and your Society had better be ready for everything that will be thrown at us.

During the last year, the Guildford Society has formally become a Registered Charity, and at the AGM we are proposing to take the next step to become incorporated as a CIO (Charitable Incorporated Organisation). This will allow us to raise funds more effectively, operate with a more professional persona that is more resonant of the role we are actually undertaking, and, crucially, it will enable us to become, should our members agree in due course, a suitable body to adopt some of the community powers (for example, the right to build, right to operate and right to acquire assets of community value) as set out in the 2011 Localism Act.

Looking forward, this next year will see the submission of the Local Plan - a critical step for the Borough and, apparently, the be-all-and-end-all for the Council.

We continue to see great efforts by Councillors and Officers to advance the rerouting, and even tunnelling, of the A3 past or under Guildford; and we note the work being undertaken to increase rail capacity, routes and stations in the Borough. Much of the work the Council is doing falls more typically onto the plates of other agencies and organisations, and the workload (and funding) Guildford Borough Council has taken on for us, is phenomenal.

I would not usually use my annual report to criticise Councillors or the Council at large, but, I fear for the town centre in the shadow of these big initiatives. All the signs are that Councillors Spooner and Furniss are prepared to sacrifice the town centre as a price for focusing on the Local Plan and the A3 – maybe one project requiring substantial funding is more than enough to manage at any one time. It is hard to fault the amount of work, but it is likely that the Guildford Society will have to step up more vocally and in a more organised way (in the absence of an elected Town Council or an approved Neighbourhood Forum) to represent the heritage and future of the Town Centre. We are not going to be quiet, and we absolutely must keep reminding our Council leaders to look to the town.

Broadly, we endorse the Guildford Vision Group plan for the much wider pedestrianisation of the town centre, with the reconnection of the High Street and the river, and the creation of great public spaces and places.

The Guildford Society has a very different remit from that of the Guildford Vision Group, which is focused on a regeneration project. We have seen, with the launch of its master plan and fly-through model, that, in the five years since our Society was an integral part of launching GVG, the thinking has moved on, the ideas have firmed up, and the plan appears to have delivered on the evolving vision. Much hard work has been done - entirely voluntarily - by so many people, and the Society has remained close to the process. At some time, we will need to look to the detail in GVG's big picture, and I hope our positions will remain substantially aligned.

In the meantime, we have seen an uneasy relationship developing between the Council's planning officers and the Councillors on the Planning Committee, to the extent several applications have been refused against officers' recommendations, leading to a lot of resource being used up in preparing for appeals by disaffected developers. This has led to the "professionalisation" of the Planning Committee at

the hands of (or at least recommended by) Councillors Spooner and Furniss, resulting in the "loss of democratisation" of the planning process as the Society sees it.

This brings extra significance to the analysis carried out by John Wood each year of the interventions and outcomes of the sterling work of the Planning Group (see their report for more details) which is so vital going forward. Over the past two years we held two very successful and objective meetings in respect of the Solum planning application. With the emasculation of the democracy of the Planning Committee, the Society may have to hold similar sessions for other major applications on a regular basis.

[We urgently need new members of the Planning Group and funding to help us do the job we thought we had elected Councillors to do](#)

We welcome the latest changing of the guard at Guildford Borough Council, with James Whiteman stepping up as the new Chief Executive, and Tracey Coleman several months into her appointment as the Director responsible for development and planning. James takes over from Sue Sturgeon, and we thank her for her leadership. Tracey takes over from Neil Taylor who left the Council several months ago.

We very much regretted the loss of Neil, as he showed that he understood the sometimes-uneasy peace between officers on the one hand, and communities and their point-in-time-elected representatives. Neil knew how many thousands of hours and reserves of professional skills were being deployed to try to help solve issues for the good of all and he was keen to have as many public and community resources as possible working towards a common goal.

On behalf of the Guildford Society, I very much hope and trust James and Tracey will engage fully with us, with the Residents' Associations and with GVG (among many other community groups) to understand our points of view, our passion and our commitment of time and resources. I hope we can reinforce with them that we are a force for good, and that a conversation with the Society is never a wasted one.

I would like to add a special message to Councillors Spooner and Furniss. We are not your enemies. We may not have been elected, but we do keep in more regular touch than many of your Councillors with residents and residents' groups. We do have a sense of the needs and priorities of Guildford. We are not trying to derail the Local Plan – we have tried to be as objective as possible. We all want what is best for the Town and Borough, and we will continue to argue for a proper hearing and debate on the various options that have been presented.

This year will see plans brought forward (again) for the North Street site. With that will come some hard decision for the Society.

Our Local Economy Group has identified that Guildford does not need the amount of retail space envisaged in the Council's brief and, presumably, in the developer's proposal. What is more, the direct economic advantage of retail activity rather than offices or residential, is insignificant. The work the Local Economy Group is doing gives us very useful background and demonstrable objectivity to our representations and objections.

Our Transport Group is wrestling with all manner of Council proposals for a Sustainable Movement Corridor, relocation of the bus station, new stations, new road layouts, etc. We continue to be dismayed at the poor quality of background information, and the well-meaning but perhaps single-minded leadership of Councillors Spooner and Furniss. One of the major challenges we are being asked to accept on trust is that we will be able to facilitate a 40-50% reduction in current levels of peak hours traffic in the town through modal shift (getting people out of their cars and walking, cycling or getting public

transport). We have highlighted shortcomings in the reports from Arup, and we have decried the consultation on the bus station.

All the while, we continue to try to protect and enhance the environment, the conservation areas, Listed Buildings, iconic views and all other parts of our heritage, whilst trying to direct developers to create future icons for Guildford. We struggle with the imposition by the Council of a Design Panel that has no roots or grounding in Guildford – with the outcome that we can expect any-town architecture that does not solve our immediate and very local problems.

Despite all of the work, the knowledge and the experience of our teams, we regret that our voice is not listened to when all we get is a three-minute slot at a Council committee meeting.

[We urgently need help with our social media and website to ensure that our voice is heard more widely and to help us to grow the Society in the coming years](#)

There will be an opportunity to hear from the chair of the Design Panel at the next in our successful autumn series of Architecture Lectures [date please Gillian].

Our membership is, by and large, stable but we need to be attracting new members – especially young professionals, as many of the current members were young professionals once upon a time!

All the work of your Society is donated by a handful of volunteers. We urgently need more, and I am especially indebted to them as I try to juggle a rather-more-than-full-time job with being your Chairman.

I would especially like to thank Gillian Cameron, who continues to be the rock and chief organiser of so much that we do, and Barry Williams, who has stepped in on numerous occasions for me, but who now feels the time is right to step down from the Executive at the AGM.

Two other stalwarts of the Executive Committee, Manni Nathoo (Honorary Treasurer) and Chris Blow (Chair of the Transport Group and convenor of the four Knowledge Groups) will also be standing down at the AGM and not seeking re-election. I thank them both for all they have done for the Society and for me during my period as Chairman.

Ahead of the AGM, therefore, we will be looking for nominations for several key positions:

- Honorary Treasurer
- Chair of the Planning Group
- Chair of the Transport Group
- Chair of the Social & Membership Group (Social Secretary)
- Web and Social Media Leader

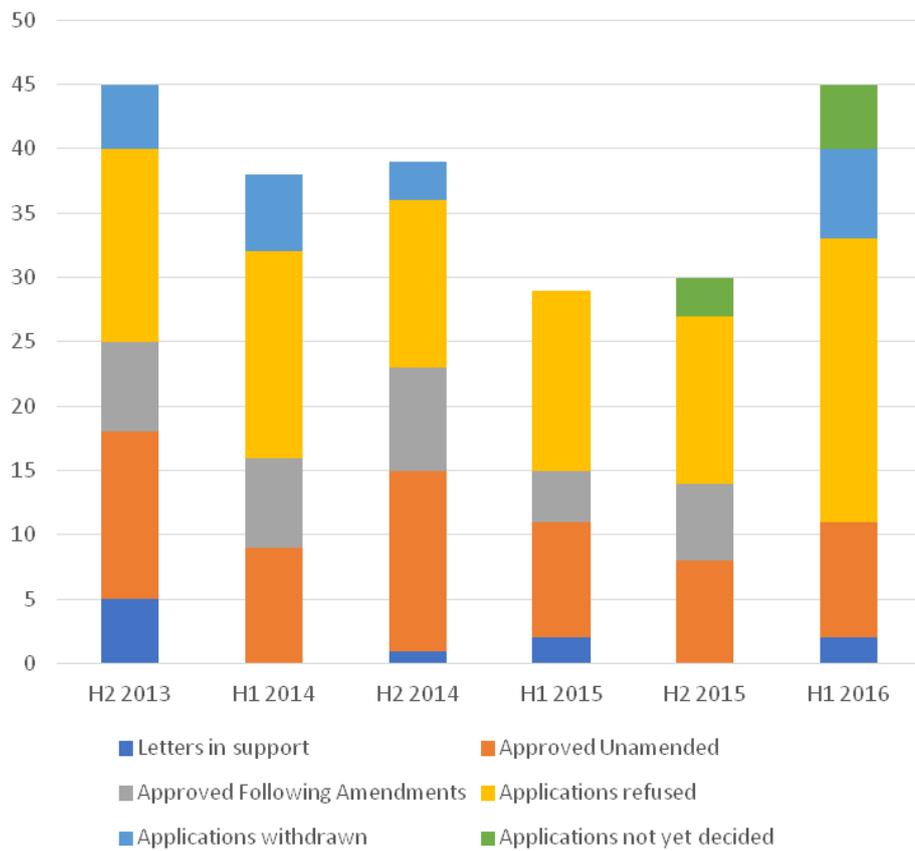
Above all, thank you, our supporters, without whom Guildford would be a poorer place. Please continue to support us, spread the word and please help us when we need to raise funds to protect and enhance what we love about our beautiful town.

Julian D S Lyon MBA FRICS
Chair of the Guildford Society

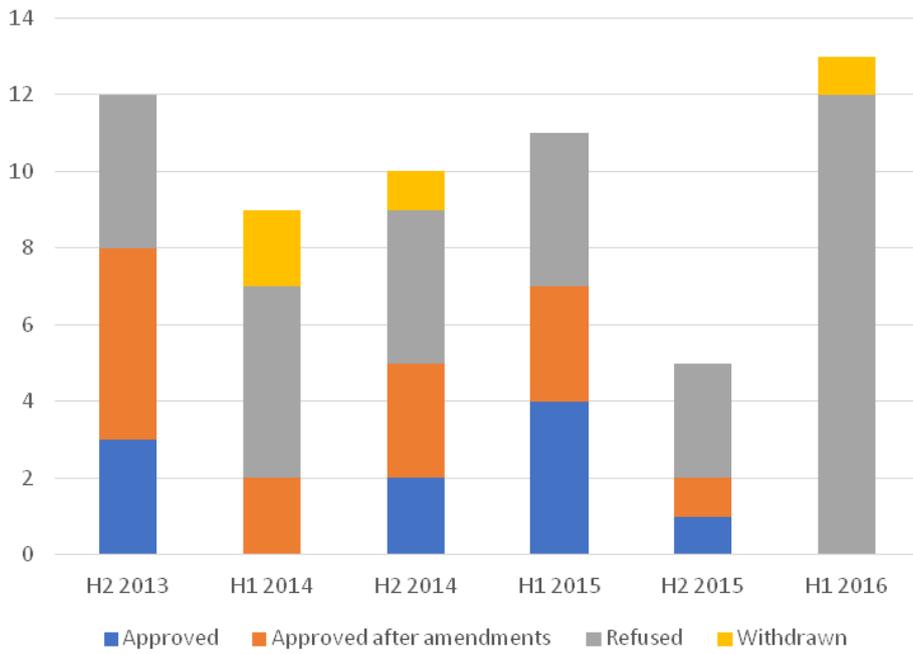
Total Applications 2013-2016



Outcomes of Representations 2013-2016



Letters about Signs



Representations where Refusals were Appealed

