

## **Planning Group Annual Report 2016-17**

The active members of the Group are John Baylis, Gordon Bridger, Ian Macpherson, Amanda Mullarkey, David Ogilvie, Martin Taplin, Anthony Umney and John Wood. Julian Lyon kindly acts as nominal Chairman of the Group so as to achieve representation on the Society's Executive. (The Group has had no active Chairman since the 2011 AGM.) John Baylis acts as Secretary for the Group. Andrew Muntun is on the circulation list of the Group as of last August.

### **Outcomes**

John Wood has prepared summaries of the outcomes of the letters we have written to GBC about planning applications received during July – December 2015 and January to June 2016. The summaries have been placed on the Planning section of the G Soc website. They make very interesting reading.

### **Solum's proposals for the mainline station**

The Society's campaign against Solum's proposals ran throughout 2015/2016.

In March 2016 Solum lodged with GBC a document they had procured from Maddox, namely a 'Planning Review' of their application 14/P/02168. This Review sought to justify, policy by policy, that the application complies with all national and local planning policies and hence concluded that "the development should be approved in accordance with the presumption in favour without delay". We prepared a lengthy and detailed repost, policy by policy and sent it to GBC on 10th May.

The Solum application went to the GBC Planning Committee on 29th June with a recommendation for refusal. The recommendation was unanimously agreed.

In December 2016 Solum launched an appeal but have lodged no documents since January and, as at the time of writing, no date for the inquiry has been fixed.

### **Local Plan**

Amanda, Martin and I made contributions to the Society's response to the proposed Submission Local Plan, June 2016. We concentrated on Gosden Hill Farm, the need for review of the Plan after five years and on Saved but not Superseded 2003 Policies.

I followed up the latter issue with and Paul Sherman, GBC Development Management Team Leader (Majors), and he responded: "A recent Court of Appeal decision has confirmed that, where Local Planning Authorities are unable to demonstrate a five year supply of housing land (as Guildford can't) that all policies "relevant to the supply of housing" must be considered to be out of date. Nearly all policies affect the supply of housing and this includes policies which seek to protect open spaces, the Green Belt or existing townscapes. Where policies are out of date the NPPF advises that the weight to be afforded to them is determined by the level of conformity with the NPPF, the greater the consistency, the greater the weight we can attach to the policy. Ultimately this is a judgement for the decision maker and this will often involve a number of other considerations. We will always need to give significant weight to the NPPF and in particular the requirement to deliver sustainable development." He added that: "the 2003 LP policies will carry more weight than the (2016) emerging LP policies."

GBC has just made available its draft proposed Submission Local Plan, June 2017. The second regulation 19 public consultation will be during June – July 2017, to be followed by regulation 18 consultation on Development Management Policies during June – July 2019.

### **Consultations with Developers**

Pegasus had failed to consult with the Society prior to their submission last May of 16/P/00923, for redevelopment of the Plaza site on the Portsmouth Road, to which we had very strongly objected. The

proposal was for massive blocks of assisted living accommodation. To quote a few of our words "The proposal is definitely too high. It frequently references the two blocks of flats, Mount Court and Bishops Court on the Mount, which are universally abhorred in Guildford and are regarded as very unfortunate examples of the architecture popular at the time when they were built: a mistake never to be repeated." Cllr Spooner took up the lack of consultation with Tim Dawes and our wish to be consulted was made known to Pegasus. We also wrote to Tim concerning the failure of Connaught House Holdings to consult with us on 16/P/01168 (see below). This week Pegasus have contacted us asking for a meeting to discuss revised plans.

The Connaught House application proposed adding two floors to the office building situated between Alexandra Terrace and 'G Live' with a frontage onto the Epsom Road/London Road mini roundabout. We objected that the new upper floors are not stepped back nearly enough and that the design was clumsy. The Case Officer recommended approval. Local Cllr Nils Christiansen referred it to the Planning Committee meeting on 12th October. Chris Blow spoke at the meeting: and the application was refused. The developer resubmitted, 16/P/02557, and we met with him on in January and acknowledged the improvements made. However, that reinforces a general concern we have that permitting high buildings can result in the 'raising of the (height) benchmark' thus making it difficult to refuse subsequent unacceptably high developments on nearby sites. We therefore on these grounds continued to object. It is still awaiting decision.

### **North Street**

GBC Executive received a paper in Sept. concerning North Street. There was no word about future public consultation in the paper. The paper signals over 47,000 sq m retail, over 44,000 sq m housing and over 5,000 sq m of food and drink, which implies very intensive development. The amount of development is significantly more than that expressed in Policy A6 of the 2016 Submission Plan (North Street. It is unacceptable that we and the general public may learn nothing in advance of a planning application which M&G then believed they could submit between June and September 2017. There is a risk of ten storey blocks being proposed for the town centre as a 'fait accompli'. I wrote to Sue Sturgeon on 11th December 2016 urging the Council to encourage M&G to consult with us. She replied on 19/12/2016 and I responded to her on 01/01/2017. On 15/02/2017 I wrote to Tracey Coleman to ask what progress had been made. She responded positively but there has been no word from M&G. Given recent press articles that John Lewis will not proceed with any new stores beyond three already envisaged, it seems unlikely they will come to Guildford. The whole North Street scheme may be back in the melting pot.

### **GVG Presentations**

Subsequent to the GVG presentation on 1st February, John Rigg lent us a copy of the 103 page Leonard report and members of the Group met to study it. On 17th February the Surrey Ad published a letter from us supporting GVG's proposals.

### **Changes to the modus operandi of the GBC Planning Committee**

Gordon wrote a powerful letter to the Surrey Ad expressing strong concern about proposals to reduce the size of the Committee and about restrictions with regard to Councillors expressing their views. The proposals have yet to go to the Council.

### **Letters from the Group**

The Group continues to meet every three weeks at the Council offices. During the year April 2016 to March 2017 the Group wrote about 60 letters to GBC on a wide range of individual planning applications, mostly in the town's urban area. Items of note included:

1. The GBC application 16/P/001290 for 160 dwellings on the Guildford Park Road Car Park. We approved in principal the development of this site for the proposed use, however we objected to the design and layout because the car park and apartments make an almost continuous wall of

development up to seven stories high about 220m long. They form on a slightly smaller scale but on higher ground a wall of development similar to that proposed by Solum. There is no specific provision for the possibility of a second road crossing over the railway linking York Road to Madrid Road. The design and colouring of the car park and apartments is not in keeping with Guildford's palette of materials: these were subsequently amended. The application was approved by the GBC Planning Committee in November.

2. We objected strongly to Fox's application 16/P/01687 for a huge grey new showroom for Jaguar and Land Rover on the present site. We argued that it failed to provide a design which is appropriate for this important 'gateway' to Guildford. The application went to Committee in March and two of us spoke; it was however approved.

3. We made further comments on 15/P/02284, the proposal for 134 dwellings by the cathedral on Stag Hill. Members of the Group also attended the meetings in the tent in front of the cathedral where the Dean and the developer presented the proposals. The application was refused by the GBC Planning Committee on 15th February.

4. We objected to several applications for blocks of flats generally on grounds of over-development. Examples are:

16/P/01880 for nine flats at 178-184 London Road,

16/P/01886 for 14 flats at Alvaston, Clandon Road, on the corner with London Road. The site abuts two Conservation Areas. Amended plans have been submitted.

16/P/02070 for 14 flats at 13 Lower Edgeborough Road. The density proposed is 100 dpha which is very high for this residential area of loose-knit housing.

5. We expressed several reservations about 16/P/02433, St Mary's Church, and its proposal to remove the existing north porch and install a replacement porch and adjoining single storey extension. St Mary's Church, dating from the 11th Century, together with the churchyard makes a very significant contribution to the historic character of the town. (The application has been withdrawn pending discussions with Historic England who wrote a highly critical letter.)

John Baylis 11<sup>th</sup> April 2016