

THE PLANNING GROUP

Report on the letters the group has written to Guildford Borough Council about planning applications which we considered during the period 1 January to 30 June 2019

During this period the Planning Group consisted of John Baylis, Amanda Mullarkey, John Harrison, David Ogilvie, Martin Taplin, Peter Coleman and John Wood. In addition Ian Macpherson has been invaluable as a corresponding member.

Abbreviations:

GBC: Guildford Borough Council
AONB: Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
AGLV: Area of Great Landscape Value
NPPF: National Planning Policy Framework
HTAG: Holy Trinity Amenity Group

The Planning Group meets every three weeks at the GBC offices.

During the period under review there were a potential 1,281 planning applications we could have looked at. We sifted through these applications and considered in detail 84 of them. The Group wrote thirty seven letters to the Head of Planning Services on a wide range of individual planning applications. Unusually eight of those letters were in support of an application but in our letters we made suggestions as to how we thought they could be improved. Seven of them were approved and one was withdrawn. In some of the applications our suggestions were considered.

Of the remaining twenty nine applications eight were approved as submitted, six were approved after amending plans were received and those plans usually took our concerns into account, another one was withdrawn, thirteen were refused and, at the time of writing, one application had not been decided. Five of the refused applications were appealed. Two appeals were upheld, one appeal was dismissed and the remaining two have not yet been decided.

Any reader who wishes to see how this six month period compares with previous periods should look at the "Summary of Outcomes" which follows the appropriate report on the Society's website at <http://www.guildfordsociety.org.uk/planning.html>.

Whilst the planning case officers at GBC do generally take our letters into consideration naturally they do not always take the same view as us. However, we are pleased to report that nineteen of the twenty six applications where a decision had been made

were either refused or alternatively were only approved following subsequent amendments to the original application to take account of our objections.

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> . Type in the application number at the bottom of the page that opens, 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.

During this six month period under review there were a number of applications to which attention should be drawn to the reader. Two of these are 19/P/00023 on page 5 which relates to 28 units in Normandy and the other is the four Chinthurst Farm buildings on page 7.

Also on pages 7 - 9 are five Prior Notification applications each for a telephone kiosk in very prominent positions in North Street and High Street in the centre of Guildford. As you will read we put forward strong reasons why the applications should not be considered permitted development. We did good research and also found that the Westminster City Council had won a High Court case for similar structures. All applications were refused and the appeals were dismissed.

The final application which demands especial attention is the Burchett's Farm Barn application on pages 9 - 12. This caused considerable controversy not only from the Society but also from many interested members of the public. The application was refused but the Inspector upheld the subsequent appeal.

PLANNING APPLICATIONS we considered from 1 January to 30 June 2019

18/P/02209: 50-52 Chertsey Street, Guildford, GU1 4HD

This proposal was for the conversion of a restaurant, kitchen and staff bedrooms on first and second floors to form four flats (2 x bedsit, 2 x one bed) and three bedrooms of staff accommodation. We noted that this application appeared to be similar to 17/P/00111 and thus we continued to object. We had noticed an increasing number of planning applications for very tight and cramped accommodation and this application is one of the most cramped we had seen and should be refused. We were concerned that we should not be creating future slums in Guildford.

(Approved. To be fair to the case officer he did consider our objections. The Council has no adopted standards for internal room sizes. However, when compared to national standards three of the flats do meet the minimum requirements and one is only 4 sq mtrs short. There are no national or local standards for the size of staff accommodation but all of the bedrooms are above the national requirement of 11.5 sq mtrs for a double bedroom. In considering the staff accommodation it is noted that two of the units only

receive light from rooflight windows but as these units are intended to be used as ancillary accommodation for the restaurant workers who are working late shifts they are not intended for long term use. On balance the officer considered that the impact on the amenity of future occupants would be acceptable.)

18/P/02226: Bishops Nissan of Guildford, Walnut Tree Close, Guildford

The application site occupies an extensive area of land with a long frontage to the River Wey. At the time of the application there was an over-arching expectation in the Local Plan that all new development will be of “high quality design” and there is the specific requirement for all developments to “integrate well with the natural, built and historic environment” and that proposals should “respond meaningfully and sensitively to the site, its characteristics and constraints...”

This application proposed four blocks of development for students which, for the most part, were in excess of five stories high. We considered it failed to meet the essential policy requirements of the Local Plan, particularly as the overall height was out-of-scale with the general pattern of the existing buildings in this area of Walnut Tree Close and, if built, it would result in a serious over-development of the site. The Society has long expressed the view that new development with a frontage to the river should not exceed 3 ½ stories. The ‘Artists Impressions’ which formed part of the submissions indicated well our concerns about the oppressive nature of what was proposed on this site which is situated directly across the river from the National Trust land at Dapdune Wharf.

Clearly the issue of flooding would be a key matter in the consideration of this application. In particular, the occupants of residential development need to be protected and any suggestion that students are somehow considered to be less vulnerable than other categories of people in bedroom accommodation should be resisted.

Whilst the Society’s principal objections related to the height and design of what was proposed, the Society felt that more land along the river frontage should be set aside for public access to help form part of an improved riverside landscaped strip.

We were also of the view that additional student accommodation should be located within the campus of the Surrey University and not on sites such as this which we feel would be better developed with a form of residential accommodation which can meet the more general housing needs of the Borough. These proposals for student accommodation provide no element of ‘affordable housing’.

(Approved, but only after amending plans were received reducing the heights of the buildings which in turn reduced the number of units proposed to 361.)

18/P/02373: Pizza Express, 237 High Street, Guildford

We considered the proposal to install an illumination strip along the whole of the fascia on both the main and secondary frontage of the pizzeria was detrimental.

(Approved, following receipt of amending plans reducing the length of the illuminated strips.)

18/P/02381: 9 The Court, Buryfields, Guildford

We did not object to this application but we urged the Council to be satisfied that the proposed conversion will have no adverse impact on the special architectural character of this listed building.

(Refused as it was considered that the works would have an adverse impact on this listed building.)

18/P/02387: Boxgrove Court, 144 London Road, Guildford

We considered these proposals for a three storey building containing six two bedroom flats, taken together with the new development already under construction, represented an overdevelopment of the site. We were concerned that the new block of flats brought development too close to the boundary with the Ambulance Station. In addition we preferred the elevations of the building to be in brick, instead of the proposal for the whole of the building to be white-painted render.

(Refused but the appeal was upheld [allowed]. During the appeal the applicant produced amending plans which the Inspector accepted.)

18/P/02391: 1 & 2 Ash Grove, Guildford

We strongly objected to this application which sought consent for an over-intensive development of 88 student accommodation units on an unsuitability located site at the far end of a residential cul-de-sac of conventional detached houses which, in turn, is accessed only through a commercial/industrial estate. We objected to the horrendous design and layout because what was proposed was a large, angular development, both out of scale and out of character with the neighbouring dwellings. The unsuitability of this proposed development was further compounded by its location which is very close (and well below) the level of the busy A3 trunk road and immediately adjacent to the Guildford to Reading railway line. We considered it important that the Council and Highways England should examine whether an approval of this development so close to the trunk road might prejudice opportunities for road improvement.

Notwithstanding the above objections we were also mindful that for the occupants of the houses in this cul-de-sac, the nature of this development would be likely to introduce noise and disturbance – from both people and traffic servicing the development – which would be generally incompatible with the existing character of this residential road.

(Approved. The plans caused considerable controversy, such that amending plans were submitted in April 2019. These plans reduced the number of units to 79. Highways England were only concerned about the effects street lighting might have on the A3 and thus a condition was imposed that they had to be satisfied before any occupation of the units.)

18/P/02454: Roughts Farm, School Lane, Normandy

This was an application for a new vehicle access to this development. The application suggests that the proposed access road is a disused grassy farm track in harmony with the open Green Belt countryside. That view is confirmed by reference to Google Earth.

However, the proposed roadway would introduce an unwarranted element of urbanisation and once created it could lead to pressure for further development on the open land on either side of the roadway. The application site already has adequate vehicular access from School Lane, and the proposed quantum of building could be redesigned so as to allow this access to serve the whole site.

(Approved. Essentially the development is to demolish the existing buildings on the site and build new ones. The impact of the new access is not considered to be detrimental to the openness of the Green Belt. This new access is considered a benefit to the local community as it will direct traffic away from the nearby primary school. The case officer commented that if an application was put forward for any development either side of the new access road then it would be considered on its own merits.)

18/P/02458: Waitrose, York Road, Guildford

We objected to this application for a freestanding digital display unit because it is capable of dynamic content which can include animated content and image sequencing. We have commented before that large modern bright LED screens can be highly intrusive and that moving or rapidly changing images are not acceptable. The GBC guidance predates this technology but it does state that intermittent illumination should be avoided.

We noted that the Application Form stated that the illumination will be static. We would be satisfied if the applicant confirmed in writing to the Council that this will indeed be the case, and that the display will be changed infrequently, say not more than once an hour.

(Approved. The case officer was entirely comfortable that the display would be intermittent; changing approximately every 10 seconds and that it could include animated content. It was found to be acceptable because its location would be away from the public highway and within the Waitrose premises. The Council's Conservation Officer raised no concerns to the erection of the display unit in this location.)

19/P/00023: The Elms Centre, Glaziers Lane, Normandy

This was an outline application for the erection of 28 dwellings. An earlier application (17/P/02326) for 30 units was refused and we did not think this revised application overcame our previous concerns and thus we objected again. Our principal reasons were because the site is in the Green Belt and it was not a designated site in the then Draft Local Plan; the site is of high archaeological importance; access to the site is poor and the 2 storey pitch roofed houses will reduce the openness of the Green Belt to a greater extent than the existing buildings. We considered the proposal to be an example of fragmented and sporadic development in the Green Belt that is the antithesis of proper planning.

(Approved. Since our letter of objection the Local Plan has been approved. In addition, the NPPF has introduced a new point (g) in paragraphs 145/146 which states that the limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land would be acceptable if it would not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt and where the development would contribute to meeting an identified affordable

housing need within the area of the Local Planning Authority. This site is re-using previously developed land and the development would provide 11 affordable units. Also the Heritage Conservation Group have reassessed their previous identification that the site was in an Area of High Archaeological Potential. They concluded the previous development of the site would have removed any significant archaeological remains that may have been present and thus they removed this classification. The case officer's report makes interesting reading and it is well thought through.)

19/P/00027: Clockbarn Nursery, Tannery Lane, Send, Woking

We noted that this site was included in the Local Plan with an allocation of 60 dwellings. This application is for 75. Because the Inspection of the Plan with respect to housing need is still unfinished, with a resumed public hearing later this month, we considered this application to be premature.

(Approved. There were 146 letters of objection which meant that the application was considered by the full planning committee as the case officer recommended approval. To be fair to him he continued to have many meetings with the applicants [Bewley Homes Ltd – a well known and respected developer] after the initial application was submitted and there were three sets of amending plans submitted as the discussions continued. The Local Plan was adopted on 25 April 2019 prior to some of the revised plans being submitted. Policy A40 specifically took this site out of the Green Belt. Although the plan gave an indication of 60 units that number is an indication only and it is not a maximum. This is another instance where the case officer's report makes interesting reading and it is well thought through.)

19/P/00069: 6 Lower Edgeborough Road, Guildford

We considered this application for a block of seven flats did not overcome the objections we raised on the previous application 18/P/000857. Indeed the impact on the street scene is even worse because the width is the same and the proposed ridge line is even higher than the earlier application. We considered the height needed to be reduced from four to three storeys in order to achieve acceptable elevations. We were also concerned that there will be overlooking of Sheldon Court from windows on the south east side of the proposed building and that the application was a wholly inadequate response to the severe strictures in the Officer's Report on 18/P/000857 regarding the damaging impact on the Conservation Area.

(Refused. Whilst the case officer agreed with our objections his first reason for recommending refusal was that he did not think there was sufficient justification for the current building to be demolished because of its significance in the conservation area.)

19/P/00072: Skin Spirit, 228 High Street, Guildford, GU1 3JD

Whilst we did not object to this application for the repainting of the shop front, together with new signage and trough lights, we wrote about the proposed internal alterations to this listed building to emphasise that it was important the Design and Conservation Officer should give close attention to this application so that any features of architectural interest which give the building its attractive character are retained.

(Approved. It was confirmed in the officer's report that none of the proposed alterations would have any impact on the internal historic fabric of the building.)

19/P/00133: Tormead School, Cranley Road, Guildford

We did not feel this proposal for advertisements along the railway line was acceptable because this section of railway is rural in character and the structures would add unwelcome visual intrusion. We were concerned that, if permitted, other businesses might seek to adopt the precedent to advertise on other trackside locations.

(Approved)

18/W/00142 Building C, 18/W/00143 Building D, 18/W/00144 Building E and 19/W/00002 Building I, Chinthurst Farm, Chinthurst Lane, Bramley

The first three applications were seeking permission to change the planning designations from storage and distribution to residential and the last one was from office to residential.

These applications are Notifications for Prior Approval. We could find no details of the construction of the buildings in the documents submitted with this application. From Google views, the buildings appear to be modern agricultural barn-like buildings completely unsuitable for residential use. They would require reconstruction rather than conversion. We think the applications should be refused. We suggested that the applicant looks at the site holistically and comes up with a long-term comprehensive plan.

(Approved, despite 42 letters of objection including one from Shalford Parish Council. The case officer noted that as this application was a prior notification application the material planning matters that can be considered are set by the General Permitted Development Order 2015 as amended. This meant that other normal planning considerations under a full planning application such as policies of Local Plan, Green Belt, impact on heritage assets, ecology, impact on AONB/AGLV or impact on neighbouring amenity could not be considered under this application. The planners' hands are tied with these Prior Notification applications. There is very little they can do and thus in most cases these applications have to be approved. In this case the applicants now have residential use [C3] which they might not have received had full planning applications been submitted. We consider this is a fault in the system.)

Prior Notification for the Installation of an electronic communications apparatus comprising a telephone kiosk pursuant to Class 16 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015.

19/P/00151: Junction of Commercial Road and North Street, Guildford, GU1 4EH

19/P/00152: Outside Cafe' Nero at Junction of North Street and Market Street, Guildford **19/P/00153:** Outside Barclays Bank 19, North Street, Guildford, GU1 4AG

19/P/00154: Outside 193, High Street, Guildford, GU1 3AW

19/P/00155: Outside The Friary, North Street, Guildford, GU1 4YT

We strongly objected to all five applications because:

- We did not believe that they qualify as permitted development. Prior notification is therefore inadequate and full applications would be required.
- We believed the design and siting of the structures are contrary to policy.
- We objected to the advertisements
- We were concerned about the data that these devices might harvest from the general public without its knowledge or consent.

In support of our objections we pointed out the Technical Specification included with the application is branded JCDecaux which describes itself as the “number one outdoor advertising agency”. The application was made by In Focus Public Networks Ltd. Companies House showed this company has three directors. Each director is also a director of JCDecaux. The companies share the same registered address being the JC Decaux UK HQ. Companies House also recorded the nature of the business of In Focus Public Networks Ltd as advertising agencies. We therefore concluded that these applications were for advertisements.

We pointed out that the Council was no doubt aware of the recent High Court judgment in favour of Westminster City Council in relation to applications for similar structures when it was held that the kiosks were for a dual purpose of communications and advertising and so should not benefit from permitted development rights. We believed these slightly different structures from a different applicant were *primarily* advertisements.

The structure is unnecessarily large for communications purposes, or certainly so for communication by telephone. The proposed sitings are typically perpendicular to the highway and adjacent to it where they will be an impediment to pedestrians and a distraction to motorists. Consent should only be contemplated for smaller structures placed discreetly against a blank wall. Clearly the size and proposed siting of these structures is to maximise their advertising potential. We believe them to be totally unacceptable visually and physically.

The technical specification document shows a 32 inch TV screen on one side which is or has potential to be a moving ever-changing electronic advertisement of the most distracting nature and we would object to this. On the other side however is potential advertising space of around 2.1 m x 1.2 m. This is very much downplayed but one must expect sooner or later a desire on behalf of the operator for this to be a TV screen for animated or other moving advertisements which being so highly distracting are overly intrusive and totally out of place in Guildford. The Technical Specification promises that the unit will be capable of “contents storage: periodic local update and storage of the contents to feed the display loop avoiding any rupture of the broadcast...” this is not going to be some poster glued on every few months.

The structures are clearly expensive and so the anticipated revenue must be commensurately high which implies the need for highly assertive advertising of the sort we consider particularly harmful. If this type of structure were ever permitted it would likely be subject to regular updating as technology improved both physically but more significantly of the operational software controlling its functions, which would be

particularly difficult for the planning authority to monitor and enforce any limitations. Accordingly the proposal should be rejected at the outset.

Public telephones are no longer necessary. Telecommunications companies have campaigned hard to remove them and it is now accepted that they are not necessary given the penetration of mobile phones. In any emergency a passerby is likely to have a mobile phone and be able to summon assistance even if the affected person does not have one; and a passerby will be close at hand not a few hundred yards away as might be these contraptions. There really is no requirement for them.

As a society, we are only just becoming aware of surveillance capitalism [see book of that title by Shoshana Zuboff] i.e. the exploitation of human experience as free raw material for hidden commercial practices by the use of data, often from mobile phones. Google, on launching its Street view initiative claimed of public spaces “people don’t have the same expectation of privacy as they do in their homes.” Hence perhaps the nationwide rush to install these contraptions in public places.

These will clearly be “smart” structures whose capabilities can be enhanced remotely by software update as technology develops. For example, the technical specification boasts that they will soon be rolling out a pedestrian count facility which will help to set rents and advertising rates. But will they merely count? These capabilities go far beyond those of a public telephone or an advertisement. Technical experts have found that Street view “payload data” included names, telephone numbers, and credit information, passwords, messages, emails and many other things. Not for nothing have these types of structure been described as Trojan horses.

When considering these applications we impressed upon GBC that they should very clearly understand the extent of any smart functions and the uses to which the public’s data will be put. This however will be very difficult. For example, two University of London scholars looked at the data use policies of Nest, which is a Google owned company providing innocuous-sounding Wi-Fi enabled domestic thermostats. They found that the interrelationship between their terms of service and the connected devices and apps, each with its own terms and conditions, was such that one would need to review a thousand legal agreements to fully understand the implications. We do not believe the planning authority has the resources to do this but, in any case, we do not believe it should authorise this type of potential commercial surveillance of its residents without doing so, and therefore they should not be permitted.

(Refused and appeals dismissed. The Inspector took notice of the High Court judgment in the Westminster City Council’s case that these types of structures served a dual purpose of communications and advertising and therefore could not be considered under the permitted development regulations. The Inspector’s report was one of the shortest we have ever seen!)

19/P/00167: Wanborough Business Centre, West Flexford Lane, Wanborough

We objected to this application for a change of use and for the construction of eleven houses because we were concerned about creeping development in a greenbelt location. The local plan now includes significant green belt site allocations calculated to

meet 140% of the latest assessed demand so development should be focused there save in exceptional circumstances. This was not such a case.

(Refused and an appeal is now running. Interestingly there were 17 letters of objection but 15 letters in support.)

19/P/00178 and 19/P/00179 (Listed Building Consent): Burchatt's Farm Barn, London Road, Guildford

This application was mainly for a change of use from D2 (assembly and leisure) to D1 (non-residential institution). The current D2 use is a rarity, particularly for buildings of this size which should be retained. The property is substantially fitted out with kitchen and lavatory facilities appropriate for this use. Its unusual historic character adds to its appeal as an arts and leisure venue. It adjoins the town's principal public park making it uniquely suitable for a range of leisure activities associated with sports clubs and outdoor leisure. It would also be suitable for private hire for use, for example, for weddings and birthdays.

These opportunities are valuable in building and sustaining a community notwithstanding that it is often difficult to run such facilities on a commercially viable basis. Accordingly there is a very long-standing tradition of public subsidy towards the types of organisations that use D2 accommodation, whilst much such accommodation is provided by charities, philanthropic, and not-for-profit public bodies demonstrating that its value lies in non-commercial terms.

It is for reasons such as this that the local plan includes a special policy T2 that provides that "the loss of arts and entertainment facilities will be resisted unless equivalent facilities are first made elsewhere or where it can be demonstrated that the retention of the facility has been fully explored without success, or the site is unsuitably located..."

We are aware that the property has been marketed through a commercial estate agent but we do not believe this satisfies the "fully explored" requirement. We believe the council has allowed its understandable desire for sound finance to trump its obligation to fully explore retention because it has only explored retention on the basis of unrealistic financial hurdles.

We believe that the location is appropriate since it is only a short walk from the Spectrum and park-and-ride car parks which provide both public transport connectivity and car parking, particularly in the evenings when the park and ride is either underused or closed. This proximity is cited by the applicant in paragraph 5.5 of its Planning and Heritage Environment Statement.

The location for D2 use is further enhanced because this is a small agglomeration of non-commercial uses for which potential synergies exist which do not exist for D1 use.

In conclusion, "Opportunities for providing new arts and entertainment facilities are limited and sites are often difficult to find. It is important therefore that existing sites are not lost and when one use ceases, the land or buildings are, *wherever possible*, retained for another arts or entertainment use." This statement is lifted from 14.11 of the local plan, with our emphasis added. We believe that retention is perfectly possible. The policy does not incorporate any viability considerations. We believe granting consent would be in breach of this provision.

For good measure, the local plan continues with similar provisions in CF2 to resist the loss of community buildings or uses. Point 3 of that policy recognises that such uses can be poor neighbours; the fact that this is not a constraint in the instant case is a further good reason to retain the D2 use here.

The plan continues at 15.9 and 15.1 to emphasise that due to the “shortage and difficulty in obtaining premises for community uses it is considered important to seek to retain those uses when it is reasonable to do so.” The plan then continues to discuss issues around alternative provision as justification for a change. There is a clear implication that loss of these types of D2 use is predicated on a suitable alternative. This is not being offered here. We believed granting consent would similarly be in breach of these local plan provisions also.

Listed Building Consent

Policy HE2 provides in paragraph 1 that a factor in granting consent is safeguarding the preservation of the building. That does not apply here since the building is in good repair and owned by a responsible financially sound organisation.

The second leg proviso is that any works do not damage or detract from the features or special architectural or historic interest of the building, its character, appearance or setting.

We believed that the proposed alterations will detract from the features and special architectural and historic interest of the building and its character and internal appearance.

The proposal is to construct two cellular rooms to the right hand side of the entrance lobby, each with a ceiling. The photograph included with the applicant’s planning and heritage environment statement clearly shows that the character of this listed building is its open nature as a barn, with a vaulted ceiling and timber Queen Post Truss structure being of particular interest. It is not clear what is intended above the proposed ceiling, probably a void. That is an unsympathetic and totally contrasting alteration that will substantially detract from the open character. The appearance will be of a utilitarian box structure shoved in at one end, with an ugly void above which will go uncleaned and gradually gather dust and dirt and become increasingly unsightly. If the partitioning extends to the ridge then the proportions will be even more compromised and there will just be a big blank gable wall.

We believed the proposal was insufficiently clear as to the proposed works but in our opinion any cellular offices within this listed barn would so substantially detract from its character as to make them unlawful.

Policy 11.10 specifically states that “the subdivision of any large volume of interior space, for example in churches, barns or entrance halls, will be resisted if these alterations would affect the internal character of the building.” In our opinion the proposed alterations would affect the internal character. We noted the absence of the words “substantial, significant, or material” for example in this provision. It simply says affect. It is clear that a deliberately low threshold of detracting was provided for which in our view both the stud and sail partitioning breach.

Conclusion

It is clear to us that the design, proportion and scale of the barn are perfectly suited to use for public assembly: for use by a host of local societies and clubs providing valuable services but generating modest incomes from art exhibitions to yoga classes, as well as for private and commercial receptions, amateur and smaller commercial theatre, performance and entertainment functions. These amenities are a vital and defining feature of a thriving and civilised community. It was in the knowledge that premises for these uses may not be commercially viable that the property was gifted to the council, and in the expectation that community uses would continue.

The current use is probably the only one which will maintain the characteristic open nature of the barn and therefore the optimal one. The D2 use ensures that it is available to be enjoyed by the maximum number of people. The proposed D1 use will attract members of the public but possibly in fewer numbers and for a purpose irrespective of the character rather than incidental to it as is the case for D2.

The council, as owner, has marketed the property as a single entity on a long-term commercial basis, whereas the demand is short-term and at rates reflecting the not for profit nature of typical users. The owner may wish to dispose of the property outright, rather than manage short-term uses as might be the case, for example, for a village hall, but this cannot be taken as lack of evidence of a D2 demand.

Accordingly, we believed the change of use from D2 to a commercial D1 should be resisted by the planning authority because the policy requirement to demonstrate a lack of demand for D2 has not been met. As in many planning decisions the fact that the current use may be less profitable, or even a liability, relative to an alternative use is not a factor that should be taken into account. We considered it would set a poor precedent if consent were granted for financial imperatives against the presumption to retain the existing use and a perceived broad demand for it.

Any argument that the proposed commercial D1 use is less commercial than some other uses might be, or that being health oriented it is somehow more worthy than other commercial enterprises might be is not relevant either.

Finally, the proposed alterations would adversely affect the character of the property and should not be permitted irrespective of the use.

(Refused but the appeal was upheld [allowed]. This application has caused considerable controversy and reactions from the general public. There were 86 letters of objection received but 44 letters in support. The case officer recommended approval but the planning committee refused it.)

19/P/00241: B & Q, Europa Park Road, Guildford

These banners appear to be similar to two included in application 18/P/02138 to which we also objected. They would disfigure the area, where considerable effort has been made with landscaping to produce an attractive and harmonious street scene; they would also be a distraction to motorists.

(Refused)

19/P/00243: Guildford/Cricket Club Woodbridge Road sports pavilion, Guildford

We supported this application for a new seating stand, but we considered that the rear of the stand will appear unsightly adjacent to the conservation area. We recommended that a condition should be attached to any approval that the rear of the stand be constructed and planted as a green wall.

(Approved. Whilst the case officer did report that we had written she merely stated we had said “No objection” and no mention was made of our suggestion. The report made no comment on this aspect and the approval did not contain the condition we suggested. This was disappointing.)

19/P/00267: Kernel Court, Walnut Tree Close, Guildford

We could not support this application for an amendment to planning approval 18/P/01155: the existing permission is already an overdevelopment of the site. The proposed increase in co-living accommodation by a third from 85 to 113 units is an unacceptable increase in density for this site. There is no commensurate increase in the communal living areas available for residents that provide shared facilities including lounges, kitchens, etc.

(Approved. The principal change to the previously approved planning consent was the increase in the height of the co-living block at the front of the site from 4 to 5 storeys. However, the overall increase in height is only 550mm due to internal alterations to the design of this block. The case officer considered this application to be a minor amendment [!].)

19/P/00406: Footbridge Linking Guildford Business Park and University, Guildford

In principle, we welcomed this proposal which will provide a footbridge/cycle route over the Guildford to Reading railway line. However, we had a number of reservations. Firstly, the design of the proposed new bridge appears crudely engineered and is unattractive. Secondly, we noted the intention for the bridge to be open only during University campus opening hours: it should be open for use 24 hours a day. Thirdly, we emphasized that the design of the bridge should satisfactorily relate to the design of the current application on the adjacent land for the purpose-built student accommodation (19/P/00407 below).

(Approved. Whilst the case officer said we supported the proposal and that we had reservations as to the design and the times when it would be available for use, no further consideration about the times of opening was mentioned. This was disappointing.)

19/P/00407: Plot 5, Guildford Business Park, Guildford Business Park Road, Guildford

We strongly objected to this application for a seven storey student block of 360 units which we considered to be over-large, totally out-of-scale and inappropriate to its setting. We also objected to the adverse impact which the proposals will have on viewpoints from both the south (e.g. locations such as Pewley Downs, Bright Hill, and Guildford Castle) and certain closer views from the north. From various viewpoints the excessive height of the proposed development will seriously intrude on the profile of

the Cathedral. Any redevelopment of this site should be no greater than the height and bulk of the approved office scheme.

(Refused)

19/P/00420: Service Station A3 Northbound, Ripley By-Pass

We objected to the provision of additional retail floorspace in a new two storey building as not only will it create an out of town shopping facility but, importantly, it will detract from the principal purpose of a road-side service station. Furthermore it will inevitably make the service station more intrusive in the landscape which is designated as Green Belt. There are no very special circumstances to warrant use of Green Belt for this development. The proposed use of bright green polyester coated for the elevational treatment reinforces our concern that this proposal is unacceptable.

Finally, the application appeared to make no provision for charging points for electric vehicles.

(Approved with a condition that the external materials need to be submitted to the LPA for approval prior to any commencement of construction. Ripley Parish Council also objected to the development on Green Belt issues. The case officer went to great lengths to advocate the necessity to provide improved roadside service area facilities for the busy A3 trunk road for which there is an identifiable need. It was acknowledged that the provision of electric charging points as part of the development would be desirable but this has not been requested by either Highways England or the County Highway Authority. The applicant (BP) has an ongoing commitment to rolling out electric charging points but it was not felt it was something that would be reasonable to be secured by condition.)

19/P/00481: Allen House Pavilion, Eastgate Gardens, Guildford

We welcomed this proposal to refurbish and use the former bowling club building as a café.

(Approved)

19/P/00536: Allen House Lodge, Chertsey Street, Guildford

We considered the mishmash of signage proposed would be unattractive and would be to the detriment of the character of this attractive brick built Lodge building.

(Refused. GBC agreed with our comments.)

19/P/00542: Millmead Island, Millmead, Guildford

This proposal was for the construction of a fish and eel pass channel on Millmead Island including earthworks, formation of an inlet structure (concrete and piling), installation of a fish pass, installation of two new footbridges, landscaping works and fencing.

We supported the application but we had some reservations. Millmead Island is an attractive and much visited recreation area within easy walking distance of the town centre and therefore any alterations to it need to be done with great care and sensitivity and any fencing should be kept to a minimum. Indeed, children will want to paddle in

the stream. We urged that this should not be discouraged and under no circumstances should additional fencing be erected to prevent access to the edge of the stream.

(Approved)

19/P/00606: Land north of Poyle Road, Tongham

We objected to this application for 75 dwellings because the site is not allocated for housing in the new GBC Plan. The sites allocated in the Plan make ample provision for the housing required by the Plan and there is no justification whatsoever for allowing greenfield development on unallocated sites such as this.

(Refused)

19/P/00617: Guildford Railway Station, Station View, Guildford

Whilst we did not object to the proposal, from the information contained in the package of documents we could not understand the number of parking spaces to be provided by this application for a temporary decked car park. Upon further enquiry we were given to understand that Network Rail had advised that a reduction of 80 spaces from what is currently available is acceptable. We recommended that GBC should assess the adequacy of this provision and enforce what is required through an unambiguous condition. The present car park does get almost, if not completely, full at times.

We were also concerned with the structure and appearance of the temporary car park. We considered that its visual impact will much depend on the surface treatment of the galvanised steel. A black or dark green finish would be very much better than bright shiny raw galvanised steel. We urged GBC to raise this with the applicants and request an unobtrusive surface finish for the structure.

(Approved. Although the applicant did consider finishing the structure in a black or dark green colour this proved to be cost prohibitive. As it would be in place for a relatively short time it was deemed that it would not cause any permanent harm to the character or appearance of the area.)

19/P/00647: 157 High Street, Guildford

This was a Listed Building Consent application for limited repairs and renovations. Whilst supporting the application we remarked that flues should permit some ventilation and not be blocked off, and should have a ventilating cap to inhibit damp. We suggested: the surveyor ought perhaps to check this.

(Approved. Whilst our letter was uploaded well before the officer's report it was stated that there had been no third party comments received.)

19/P/00705: Diocesan House, Quarry Street, Guildford

This was a Listed Building Consent application to include demolition of a 20th century extension and replacement with 2 semi-detached dwellings. We objected to the treatment of the windows of the south elevations of proposed new buildings and pointed out that to be compatible with the neighbouring listed buildings the windows should have glazing bars.

(Withdrawn)

19/P/00756: 42 Recreation Road, Guildford

We did not object to this application for 12 new homes but we did recommend that in all new housing developments, electrical charging points should be provided at all car parking spaces that are separated from their associated dwellings.

(Withdrawn)

19/P/00839: Land to the rear of Littledene, 2 Guildown Avenue, Guildford

We objected to this application for a large new house because its height will be excessive and higher than any of the previously permitted houses on this side of The Mount; it will be overdevelopment of this site, being the first to be seen on this side of The Mount after the graveyard; it will make an excessive impact on views looking up The Mount and it will impact adversely on the skyline.

(Refused but an appeal is now running. Our objections were the principal reasons for refusal.)

19/P/00840: 50-52 Chertsey Street, Guildford

We objected to this application for the repositioning of the main entrance door and windows to create a front terrace. The proposed works, to recess the frontage at ground floor level, will neither conserve nor enhance the character of the conservation area and could set an unfortunate precedent. Furthermore we did not consider this to be a suitable location for external restaurant seating due to traffic volume, noise and air pollution.

(Approved. We were the only party to comment on the application. The case officer pointed out that outdoor restaurant seating is not uncommon in the town centre and users are not usually seated for long durations. Due to these considerations the application did not warrant refusal on the basis of noise and air pollution and, following approval, the matter can be investigated and controlled under Environmental Health legislation.)

19/P/00846: City Point, 67 Sydenham Road, Guildford

We were concerned that the proposed 5m hanging banner was excessively large and it will neither conserve nor enhance the town centre Conservation Area. It would set a precedent which, if widespread, does not bear thinking about.

(Refused)

19/P/00853: 22 St Omer Road, Guildford

This was a prior notification for the demolition of the existing dwelling. The application was accompanied by the layout associated with planning application 18/P/01174 for 3x5 BR houses that was refused and was, at the time of our letter, subject to an appeal. This implied that the proposal to demolish the existing property was to facilitate the proposed development. The application was therefore premature.

(Approved. The appeal mentioned above was dismissed. A subsequent application 18/P/01724 for 2 houses was approved. For this application, because the site is not in an

environmentally sensitive area and the demolition works are relatively small, it was deemed that prior approval was not required.)

19/CON/00023: 81 Commercial Way, Woking

This was a consultation application for a 39 storey block in the centre of Woking standing apart from the blocks of up to 34 storeys now being built. We decided to write a comment via the Woking planning website on the Woking application PLAN/2019/0611. We noted that the height and bulk of the building proposed would be greater than that of any of the high buildings under construction in Woking. These buildings are in a single cluster and make a distinct and contained intrusion on the skyline as seen from many points near Guildford. We objected to the creation of a second cluster as an unwelcome further intrusion on the skyline. If there is to be a second cluster, we consider that it should be subservient to and lower than the present one, and that no building in Woking should exceed the height of the North Downs ridge near Guildford, which is approximately equal to the height of the highest buildings in the present cluster. We also objected to the proposed internal lighting of the upper floors as it would be very visible from Guildford after dark.

(Awaiting decision. GBC have also written objecting because of the views to the skyline.)

19/W/00038: 4 Pannells Court, Guildford, GU1 4EU (Prior notification)

We recognised that this is a prior notification for a conversion from office to a small first floor flat, but nonetheless we were concerned that the complete lack of any detail of what is proposed could lead to a substandard dwelling as regards, for example, light, amenity and access.

(Refused)

DECISIONS ON APPLICATIONS PREVIOUSLY REPORTED BUT NOT FULLY RESOLVED AT THE TIME OF THE LAST REPORT

18/P/01565: Tunsgate Square Shopping Centre, 98-110, High Street, Guildford

We have been consistent in our view that in the interests of retaining historic character, hanging signs in the central 'cobbled' section of the High Street should be no greater in size than 600mm x 600mm. This application seeks consent for two hanging signs for "Tunsgate Quarter" each of 600mm x 800mm. We recognised there is a case for two signs but remained of the view that each sign should be no greater than 600mm x 600mm.

(Refused)

18/P/01568: North House and South House, Albury Road, Guildford

We objected to this application for a block of 20 flats on environmental grounds and because of the absence of a firm commitment in respect of affordable housing. The Design and Access Statement stated the "amount to be determined". This is not

acceptable. The application is for market housing and as part of this development there should be provision on this site a minimum of 6 affordable units.

We also considered this proposed development over four floors to be one floor too high. We felt there was a need to introduce more planting along the frontage to Albury Road.

(Refused and appeal commenced. The case officer's report makes interesting reading about the contribution required for affordable housing. The Local Plan now requires a 40% contribution and this would therefore mean 8 units should be designated affordable. The problem here is that the applicant is McCarthy and Stone and the development is specifically aimed at the older person and the development would include communal internal and external facilities. This is considered to make the provision of affordable units impractical. It was therefore considered that in this case a payment in lieu would be appropriate and GBC calculated that a payment of £1.76m would be required. The applicant had produced a Financial Viability Assessment to show that a payment in lieu would not be financially viable. It was considered by McCarthy and Stone that a maximum of £20,807 could be offered. The Council did not accept this and so commissioned their own independent viability assessment which concluded that there would be a minimum surplus of £530,773. It would seem that the two sides could not agree and therefore the application was refused, not only on these grounds but also by reason of the excessive scale, height and bulk of the proposed building, the poor form and design etc and that the development would result in material harm to the character and appearance of the site and immediate area. It will be interesting to see what conclusions the Inspector comes to.)

18/P/01668: 1-5 The Quadrant and The Casino Nightclub, Onslow Street, Guildford

We objected to this application for a 14 story building in the strongest possible terms. It proposed a development which was grossly excessive and completely out-of-character with Guildford both in terms of its enormous height and the way in which it overhangs the boundaries of the site. Even in comparison with the massive Solum development, this proposal is far too high and it will have a serious adverse impact on views from both within and across the town centre and from viewpoints outside the town including the Surrey Hills AONB.

The use of extensive glazing on the elevations of parts of the upper floors would not only be incompatible with the historic character of the town but, in the hours of darkness, light from this glazing will cause light pollution and result in the structure standing out in an inappropriate way.

In addition to other uses the development proposes 10 floors of student housing. We considered these student units will be provided with inadequate communal facilities and that many of the units are substandard as they will only receive natural light from a totally inadequate light well. Given the amount of student accommodation currently being constructed or proposed in the area of Walnut Tree Close we are very much concerned that a further increase in student accommodation as proposed in this application will lead to an imbalance in the nature of housing in the area. A further deeply troubling concern is the juxtaposition of a considerable amount of student

accommodation in such close proximity to a casino and nightclub. That specific concern is in addition to our view that, in principle, we consider a Casino to be an inappropriate use for Guildford Town Centre.

We also commented forcefully on inadequate bike storage in the basement and on serious risks from flooding.

(Refused and an appeal was commenced. A long way down the track the appellants withdrew the appeal and in September 2019 the council made a costs application against the appellants. It will be interesting to see the outcome.)

18/P/02261: Wren Kitchen, Woodbridge Road, Guildford

We objected to this application for signage because the graphics are extremely large and are purely advertisements that do not identify the occupants of the building. The size would be a dangerous distraction to motorists and they may also set a precedent that would add to the littering of the approaches to Guildford and be detrimental to the character of the area. They would disfigure the building and reduce the light designed to enter it. Some time previously we objected to a large advertisement on the opposite side of Woodbridge Road for similar reasons. That proposal was refused consent by GBC and the Council should continue to resist large advertisements that would have an adverse effect on the townscape.

(Refused)

John Wood

February 2020