



Preserving and enhancing the approaches to Central Guildford – a position paper by The Guildford Society

Setting the Scene: A Brief Analysis

Guildford's position as a 'gap town' has endowed it with a complex set of access roads and railways. The roads and railways leading directly into The Town centre are used to access different parts of the Borough as well as connecting to towns and villages outside Guildford. Although Guildford town centre is the destination for several thousand people every day, people also travel across the Borough to access the University/Research Park/Hospital zone, to work in the suburban office parks and nearby towns, or to attend schools throughout the Borough and beyond. Further, Guildford's location means it also attracts significant through-traffic including cars and numerous HGVs. The need to cross the River Wey has resulted in many of these routes converging on the frequently grid-locked gyratory. The surfaces of many of these highways are no longer in good order.

The approach roads into the Borough of Guildford tend to be through greenbelt, agricultural land and villages which provide an attractive entrance into the Borough by road. Development in the late 19th century through the mid-20th century has meant that this network is now substantially fixed. Several of these roads are also cross-country 'A' roads with a single lane in each direction with only occasional dual carriageways. These factors limit the scope for expanding capacity and varying use.

Within the Borough, the road layouts of the various wards/neighbourhoods were developed in the late 19th century and were well established by the 1930s creating a network that is also fixed at the local level and inadequate for modern needs. The widths of roads in residential areas as well as along main 'A' roads are not fit for purpose today. However with adjacent land generally having been developed and in established ownership, there is little scope to change this today.

This trend has continued into the 21st century with new roads within The Town generally being a single lane in each direction with inadequate space for car parking. This has contributed to the significant levels of congestion experienced by motorists during the rush hour when parked vehicles, often unloading goods, partially block a portion of a lane of traffic. In many roads near schools when one traffic lane is fully occupied by parked vehicles, dropping off or calling for children in the mornings and afternoons sometimes brings car movements to a standstill.

This paper's purpose is not to set out the Society's position on how the existing highway and rail networks should be changed; this is the work of the Society's Transport Group. It does however set out the Society's position on how those existing routes should be improved to provide a positive visual experience for residents and visitors when arriving and leaving The Town.

Improving and Enhancing the Approaches to Guildford

The Society's position is that it is vital that the approach roads to Guildford make a positive statement about Guildford's success, culture, heritage and aspirations for the future. In particular:

1. The major routes into and out of The Town should have an absence of pot holes. They should have a wearing course and structure that is durable and of a high standard. Variants should be progressively applied to all roads in the Borough. Surrey County Council's five year £100 million "Better Roads Scheme" to relay the worst roads in the County, with resurfaced roads having a 10 year guarantee¹ is a positive development.

¹ Surrey Matters, Autumn 2013

2. Major buildings on principal approach roads should be of high architectural merit. The impression made by such buildings should be a consideration when granting planning permission for new development sites with the intention of creating landmark buildings. These should also have regard to the environment in which they are located, be kept in good order and minimise any impact on The Town's skyline. Site hoardings should be kept to a minimum and be decorated to blend with their surroundings, including being painted with a representation of the obscured building as is done in historic towns across Europe; plain or advertising covered hoardings should be discouraged.
3. To provide positive first impressions of Guildford, the Society's position is that approach road roundabouts and verges be greened and planted to a high standard. General advertising should not be permitted. However where a planting scheme has been sponsored, a modest board is acceptable, provided that it is of standard size and format, its contents are in good taste and it is maintained in good order. The planting rather than advertising must dominate.
4. Well designed signage suitable for all users should follow a clear hierarchy of needs and apply a consistent style which has been developed following public consultation. The extent of information and directional road signage should be useful to users without dominating the environment. Redundant road signage should be removed.
5. Improvements to the pedestrian experience in The Town should include renewal and upgrading of pavements, provision of small landscaped spaces and planters. There should be a presumption in favour of removal of pedestrian protection barriers except where a balanced risk assessment has established the need for retention on grounds of pedestrian safety. Where appropriate, footpaths should be opened to use by cyclists.
6. Street furniture should be well designed, suitably sited and apply consistent styles, developed in consultation with the public. There should be different ranges of street furniture (benches, planters, lighting and bins) for rural and urban locations. Street furniture should also include public art, particularly sculpture, reflecting The Town's strong tradition in the arts.
7. In order to improve pedestrian links between the rail station and The Town there should be a pedestrian corridor including a river crossing from the vicinity of Guildford Station at Walnut Tree Close to Bedford Road or Onslow Street to serve people accessing The Town as well as Guildford College, businesses and residential areas to the north of York Road.
8. Measures to improve the Traffic flow within The Town should be smooth and include:
 - a) Traffic light synchronisation and monitoring of traffic hot-spots with CCTV.
 - b) Rules regarding loading and unloading of goods vehicles on roads, particularly prohibiting stopping and unloading of trucks during peak hours on the gyratory.
9. Both rural and urban approach roads should be suitable for all road users. Wherever possible, cycle paths should be created using green verges and be separated from roads. Also cycle paths through open spaces, for example, adjacent to redundant rail lines provide an attractive and safe alternative and could link villages to The Town. Installation of adequate cycle lanes in urban areas is more difficult but where possible should be created both within existing roads as well as providing off-road paths. Safe space should also be made for pedestrians so they do not feel threatened by other road users.
10. Rail passengers arriving in Guildford should experience clean, modern station facilities. There should be well sign-posted, at-grade pedestrian access to all The Town's key facilities and attractions as well as good interchange facilities for other transport modes.