

## **Guildford Borough Council Leader addresses Parish Council on Guildford Local Plan**

The January Meeting of West Clandon Parish Council was addressed by Councillor Paul Spooner, the new leader of Guildford Borough Council and Councillor Matt Furness, the lead on Infrastructure and Environment.

The Chairman welcomed Councillors and residents to the meeting and introduced members of the Parish Council. He then invited questions from residents some of whom had provided questions in advance.

1. *When was the Local Development Scheme under section 15 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2014 published or last amended , when was the latest up-to-date information on the Scheme including the timetable for publication of the plan documents published and how can these be obtained?*

Councillor Spooner responded that the Local Development Scheme was approved in Sept 2015 and is available at [guildford.gov.uk/LDS](http://guildford.gov.uk/LDS). Hard copies are also available although there is a charge. It can however be reviewed at the reception desk in the council offices in Millmead.

*When is the next draft likely to be published?*

Councillor Spooner explained that they were currently working with ward colleagues on site allocations and infrastructure. Sites will go into the public domain between March and late May with a further consultation on the Plan from June through the summer.

*Almost without exception talking with a large number of people residing in the Surrey villages there is absolutely no appetite at all for expansion and further commercialisation within the Guildford area. The Council appears hellbent on pursuing the opposite and with no apparent recognition of the existing inadequacy of infrastructure which today already causes hardship with transport, schooling and health. Please would the Council better represent the wishes of the people it currently serves?*

Councillor Spooner responded that it depends on who you talk to and there are many opinions. In the Town Centre, for example, growth is an expectation. In some of the villages the Parish Councils are asking for growth. In some other areas they want nothing touched. There is therefore a problem in getting the balance right with so many different views. The Council try to do their best going through all the responses to the consultation including those from Parish Councils and various pressure groups. The Guildford Society and the Guildford Vision Group have a different agenda to the GGG but it is not true to say that no-one wants any growth.

Councillor Matt Furness added that Guildford are not the highways authority but they have hired their own transport planners and are advising Surrey County Council using the SCC simulator model and factoring in all the proposed sites as a worst case. There will be a further consultation later in the

year taking account of both strategic and local considerations.

*Would you agree that traffic around Guildford is a nightmare?*

Yes but we are working with the Highways Agency (England) who are developing a road widening scheme around Guildford. Junction 10 at Wisley on the M25 will also have to be fixed.

*What are the alternative site options for the proposed schooling previously planned behind West Clandon station?*

Councillor Spooner responded that the school site consultation is taking place with ward members. The Wisley promoters have suggested a school on that site. This is a live planning application which limits comment that can be made at this stage.

*What is the situation with the late submission to develop Clandon Golf site?*

Councillor Spooner stated that currently there is no application although a presentation was made. As far as he was aware there has been no further activity on this site.

*A depiction of the Dunsfold airfield development is available for viewing; can the same now be made available for the Gosden Hill Farm development?*

Probably no as there is as yet no live application unlike at Wisley and Dunsfold.

*Is there now a schedule for public publication of a Guildford Redevelopment plan?*

Councillor Spooner first clarified that the question referred to the town centre development and then confirmed that the Town Centre Master Plan has just been through public consultation and that the Council are reviewing the responses. This will go forward following the Town Centre development process. The vision document was well received and the consultation has been broadly positive. A delivery team has now been set up and a budget approved. Guildford has published many plans in the past with few results to show for it but the Council are now focussed on achieving some short term wins and implementing plans in the longer term.

The questioner commented that there are major concerns seeing parts of the Town Centre demolished and nothing happening.

Councillor Spooner responded that the Council is engaged with M&G and an announcement will be made in the next month.

*We have heard that it is planned to restrict traffic passing through Guildford. Would this be diverted through Clandon?*

Councillor Furness responded that they are developing a 'drive to not drive through' policy developing both park and ride and car parking facilities on the approaches to the town centre to encourage parking on the access routes. 8 out of 10 live projects in the Major Project Unit are transport related.

Chris Dean asked about suggestions on the Guildford Borough Council website suggesting that through traffic would be prevented from passing through the Town Centre. There appeared to be only two alternatives through Compton and West Clandon. These roads could therefore be forced to take additional traffic.

Councillor Furness admitted that there are concerns about some options. One would have restricted traffic using a bus gate which did not go down well. That said the Council felt it had to reduce traffic through Guildford and was looking at a number of options including 'capturing' traffic before it goes through the centre with the aim of a 10% reduction overall through small interventions.

*What steps are being taken or have been taken to keep under review, pursuant to section 13 of the Act, the effect of potential developments under the Local Plan on the level of traffic on the A247 in West Clandon? On the Cuckoo Farm site proposals there was no mention of traffic and it became apparent that SCC personnel were wholly unaware of the traffic issues. When particular sites are considered is some consideration given to the traffic issues?*

Councillor Spooner said he agreed that traffic was a serious concern. As the Council looks at firming up the development sites they are looking at the transport plan with a firm enough model so that everyone can understand how the conclusions are reached. The plan will not be sound unless they have that level of confidence.

Councillor Furness added until the exact sites are known they cannot say anything specific but we will know in the next couple of months.

The questioner observed that the selection of sites should be made in the light of the traffic effects and Councillor Spooner replied that they have the impact of modelling undertaken in 2013. This is what officers use in presentations to members. The County will model more comprehensively at a later stage. If these models don't work he agreed they would have to come up with alternative proposals. There is however an objectively assessed need of 693 housing starts from the G L Hearn analysis. This can be met in a variety of ways. In selecting the best ways of meeting this figure the transport assessments are critical.

The Council are undertaking an unblocking exercise on the A3 to reduce rat running through the centre and to clear access to the town and the smaller communities.

*There is a conflict between development needs and the Green Belt covering 89% of the borough. It has been reported that, since the issue in July 2014 of*

*the draft Local Plan guidance has been given by the Secretary of State on what may constitute "exceptional circumstances" within paragraph 83 of the National Planning Policy Framework and "very special circumstances" within paragraph 87. What exactly is this guidance and how can a copy be obtained?*

Councillor Spooner offered to provide the link to the appropriate website and explained that assessing need is only the first stage. Council should then take account of any constraints which indicate that development should be restricted. On that basis he had been to see the Secretary of State to seek further clarification and understood that they were required to meet the objectively assessed housing need and balance this with a duty to protect the green belt. As a result they had adopted a revised 'traffic light' approach to assessing the sensitivity of green belt sites and revised site proposals focus only on those assessed as green.

Chris Dean asked for clarification as to what constituted constraints in this context as much as been made on comments from the Council that 693 is not the final number which will be included in the Plan. What is the process of applying constraints and will the process be transparent?

Counselling Spooner responded that they are working with a company chosen by the inspectorate. It is therefore a question for national government. In terms of transparency and process the Council will have to demonstrate that their decisions are reasonable. He confirmed however that the rationale for constraints in the plan will be available. He added that it was unlikely that the actual build out will be less than the objectively assessed number as builders want to keep the prices high and 5 year supply expectations will be difficult to meet. The reality is that planning applications will go through at a lower number and build out will be significantly less than the needs based assessment in the Plan.

A resident commented that the Council should have the ability to set a time limit on planning permissions granted. Councillor Spooner stated that there is a three year time limit at present but there is also an argument that they could start penalising companies who fail to start construction but they would not like to do that. Even areas which favour growth do not want see 'super-fast' growth.

The Chairman asked for views on the proposed development at Newlands Corner.

Councillor Spooner replied that they are awaiting information and he thought there was a pre-application going through at present. GBC cannot control the parking issue and the Borough have expressed disappointment. It was not thought likely that some of the more enthusiastic ideas coming forward would be progressed.

A resident commented that the fundamental problem with the Local Plan is the concept of perceived need. In practice it was about 'wants' rather than

'needs'. The vast majority of demand is due to inbound migration which knocks back to a government which believes that developers should be encouraged to build where they like, in the SE of England. What needs to happen is for local conservatives to talk to central conservatives and say this is unacceptable to allow private enterprise to build on green belt. It comes back to policy and we do not need 13,000 houses. Local councillors should stand up to national government in a stronger fashion.

Councillor Spooner suggested that the problem we have stem from a national government where the inspectorate has been instructed to take an approach and we are being browbeaten in that if we do not deliver the right to put a local plan together will be taken away from us. The government has indicated that they will take all the work which has been done so far and produce a plan without further consultation. Some will argue this is a good thing but the threat exists. The other issue is the new homes bonus with suggestions that Guildford Council will gain financially from the development. From 2016 however it has been announced that this will not apply in future which will cost the Borough at a time that it is coping with expenditure cuts.

The resident offered support and suggested residents could write directly to the Prime Minister if that would help.

Councillor Spooner said they are watching what happens in Waverly which has had their plan rejected twice. Waverly have decided not to take any growth and are taking a stand. If they succeed GBC will rethink but the advice they have from Barristers and DCLG is that this won't work and they will have a local plan determined for them.

A resident reported that he had heard that the government is encouraging Councils considering reducing speed limit from 30 to 20mph and asked whether this can be done here.

Councillor Furness replied that he would be happy to look into this with a note of caution that if the police object there would be a problem.

A resident noted that at the speed limit increases to 40mph on Clandon Road. Councillor Furness replied that this is a matter for the Highways Authority and an assessment is made on health and safety grounds. Any review will take a couple of years.

Councillors were asked if it would be good idea to downgrade the road to a B road to reduce the number of lorries coming through.

Councillor Furness replied that the Council has started in Shere with a HGV reduction programme. Downgrading a road in Surrey is however virtually impossible. Declassification would not work in this case as most HGVs use car sat navs but he would look into it.

A resident asked what would constitute the exceptional circumstances which could lead to development in green belt. It was explained that this could

include proposals for improvements to road junctions, hospitals and schools.

A resident asked if the need for school and healthcare as well as transport was considered when the viability of development was assessed. The response was yes in all cases as would be apparent when the next version of the plan is published. On some health issues they were awaiting a response from the CCG.

There was some discussion on the proposals at Wisley. In particular if a school is built there how will children get there? Councillor Spooner responded that one of the assessment criteria is sustainability and one of the conditions set for Wisley would require them to reinstate the bus service in perpetuity.

The transport strategy will come out in March with two new rail halts at Merrow and Park Barn. Council Policy is to encourage sustainable travel.

A resident noted that in respect of the Plan itself there is a shortened planning period. Councillor Spooner agreed that this was the case but that this was justified as there is very little change from the previous version and therefore the consultation period is sufficient and complied with legislative requirements. Previous and any new comments will be published in due course.

The Chair of East Clandon Parish Council commented that when the transport policy and revised plan come out they will comment at this stage.

A resident asked if there are any plans to undertake a strategic review of public transport in the Guildford area. Councillor Furness reported that SCC did a review two years ago and Guildford lost services. At present however every bus service in Guildford is commercially viable in contrast to most other services in the county. SCC conducts such a review and there are no plans to cut services further.

Councillor David Reeve asked how constraints would be applied. Councillor Spooner responded that they would be applied at both Local Plan level and site level as there are a different set of requirements at both.