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9<sup>th</sup> August 2012

Ms T Haskins  
Planning Policy Manager  
Guildford Borough Council  
Millmead House  
Millmead  
Guildford GU2 4BB

Dear Ms.Haskins,

#### **DRAFT NORTH STREET DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT BRIEF**

##### **1. Background**

The town centre area immediately to the east of the Friary Shopping Centre bordered by the Friary, Leapale Road and North Street ('the Core Property') and largely owned by Hermes and your Council constitutes a 'Major Approved Development Site' in paragraph 9.62 of your Council's Local Plan for which the Council adopted a Design and Development Brief in September 2003.

Subsequently your Council granted outline planning permission for a comprehensive mixed use development of the Core Property comprising 25,135 sq.metres of commercial floor space including community spaces, 170 residential units and a new bus station. This planning permission was renewed under reference 09/P/02043 and, if all matters reserved by that permission are approved, remains capable of being implemented until at least October 2015.

##### **2. Draft Brief**

So the proposals in the Draft North Street Design and Development Brief 2012 published last month represent a step change by enlarging the Core Property to include Dominion House, Leapale multi-storey car park and 12-14 North Street to create a 2.5 hectare area of significant change. No commitment is made to a new bus station, yet alone community spaces and housing, but a compelling need emerges for the first time to create 41,000 square metres of retail floor space on the Core Property so as to render a 20,500 square metre department store viable on land above Leapale Road of which the predominant owner is your Council.

Increasing the retail floor space in the town centre by more than 65% is likely to have a substantial and prolonged impact on existing retail traders, on the character of this historic county town and on the demands placed on its already inadequate infrastructure. In consequence we believe the draft Brief is a development plan document which requires to be submitted to the Secretary of State for independent examination.

##### **3. Community Involvement**

We would have expected these proposals, which will affect everyone who lives or works in the town, to warrant far more publicity and to result in a great deal more consultation and engagement than has been undertaken. No more than lip service seems to have been paid to the Council's Statement of Community

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Involvement adopted in July 2011. There should have been leaflets, public displays, focus groups and a great deal more all of which should have continued during the consultation period.

Limited community involvement preceded publication of the draft Brief that we do not see reflected in its contents. Adequate consultation following publication has been eroded by the Brief being put out for consultation in the run up to the school summer holidays. Disappointingly the lessons arising from consultation on the draft Town Centre Masterplan over the Christmas and New Year have not been learned.

#### 4. Evidence Base

As a pressure group who are campaigning for an holistic approach to master planning the town based on best advice you will well understand our concerns at the evidence base which has informed the draft Brief.

It is apparent from page 12 of the draft that the Council cannot deliver a comprehensive masterplan without further traffic and transport studies. Whilst these have now been commissioned the results are not yet available. They, and any subsequent externally commissioned reports that may need to supplement them, are key to establishing the mix and quantum of uses not only on this site but at the Bellerby Theatre site, the proposed foodstore gateway referred to in the draft Brief, also owned by your Council. The traffic assumptions at the Bellerby have already been shown by two leading firms of traffic engineers to be fundamentally flawed.

In his report to the Executive in October 2011 explaining why the 2003 Brief should be revisited the Council's Head of Economic Development said that the preparation of a new Brief afforded the Council the opportunity to establish whether "current and emerging economic factors will support the longer term regeneration of the site". We see nothing in the Brief to indicate that the impact of the continuing recession, which has led to several shops in and around the High Street closing, or the dramatic rise in internet sales and home delivery have caused the underlying growth assumptions to be revisited or a current retail floor space audit to be undertaken.

Indeed you have confirmed to us in writing that the 'guiding' and 'highly relevant' North Street site development commercial advice 2012 referred to on page 14 of the draft Brief which calls for an aggregate 61,500 square metres of retail floor space does not exist as a document and is no more than verbal advice given by Cushman & Wakefield to Studio Real. We suspect the delivery of 61,500 square metres of retail floor space on this constrained 2.5 hectare site adjacent to the Town Centre Conservation Area can only be achieved if building heights intrude on the unrivalled long views to the countryside enjoyed from the town.

#### 5. Transparency

The draft Brief announces that its principal purpose is "to provide a clear steer to prospective developers on the form of development considered most appropriate for the site". It is difficult to see how a clear steer can be derived from the draft Brief when key planning policies have yet to be published and no guidance is given on important aspects of the development or the planning gain to be delivered to the community.

The draft Brief informs us that the draft Local Plan Strategy will not be put out for consultation until the autumn of this year, and we are aware the Interim Town Centre Framework being finalised by Studio Real will not be published for adoption before the end of the month. The Council's Strategic Parking Strategy is also stated not to be due for completion until September 2012.

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There is nothing in the draft Brief that addresses the external remodelling and integration of the adjoining Friary with the new retail floor space or puts definition into the size and location of any replacement bus station facility. We remind you the proposal to close the existing bus station adjoining the Friary led to the presentation of a 2600 strong petition earlier this year with the Council's then preferred alternative location in Bedford Road being universally condemned. Planning gain, unlike the 2003 Brief, warrants no mention.

Finally we are aware that confusion has been generated by the Site Boundary plan on page 7 of the draft Brief showing the incorrect location of Norwich House. There is also an absence of any reference in the text of the Brief to the site being enlarged to include the mis-described 12-14 North Street where HSBC, Mothercare, Argos and other retailers are now trading.

#### 6. Conflicts of Interest

The Council is in the unusual position of being both the freehold owner of the Friary Centre, owner of key elements of the 2.5 hectare site and the local planning authority for the combined areas.

There will inevitably be conflicts between what the Council's external property advisers recommend and what the local planning authority consider can be supported based on an impartial application of existing planning policy. There is a widespread perception that the publication of supplementary planning documents is being used to deliver disguised outcomes favoured by the Council as landowner to the disadvantage of other landowners and the wider community.

Directing the foodstore requirement to an edge of centre site owned by the Council and allocated for housing in the Local Plan has reinforced that view. The announcement that the Council's Chief Executive is to speak at the British Council of Shopping Centres Annual Conference next month with Alistair Parker of Cushman & Wakefield and Jeremy Collins the Property Director of John Lewis has done nothing to dispel that impression even though Mr.Collins is no longer participating.

#### 7. Conclusions

The inadequate evidence base and incomplete nature of the proposals do not form a basis for an intelligent response to be made to the Brief, particularly when a number of new and relevant planning policies will only be published after the consultation period closes.

In those circumstances we invite you to confirm that the draft Brief will not be taken forward to adoption.

Yours sincerely,

Vision for Guildford Ltd.

cc. Anne Milton MP  
Mr D Hill, Chief Executive  
Mr T Rooth, Lead Councillor  
All Councillors