
29 August 2012

Cllr Tony Rooth
Leader of the Council
Guildford Borough Council
Millmead House
Millmead
Guildford GU2 4BB

Dear Tony,

Yesterday evening Guildford Vision Group (GVG) held a very well-attended public meeting. Around 160 residents came, plus nine councillors and Anne Milton, MP.

The purpose of the meeting was to explain to our supporters and others present the very damaging and limiting consequences that may arise from the premature adoption of the North Street Development Brief (NSDB) and the Interim Town Centre Framework (ITCF), together with approval of Waitrose's planning application.

The three items share a common thread – a completely inadequate response to the combined effect on traffic and movement around town.

We understand that traffic studies are planned by SCC at the behest of the Council, including options to deal with the A3, the town centre network and the gyratory system. All three planning matters about to come forward for decision and/or adoption do not at this time reflect or benefit from the outcomes of these studies. The overwhelming mood of our meeting was that the decision cart was being put illogically ahead of the evidence horse.

We also claim that public consultation has been overwhelmingly inadequate in these three cases, especially where a supermarket with 168 surface parking spaces is in prospect, a major increase in retail space is envisaged, and where the ITCF continues to focus primarily on sites rather than people. The ITCF specifically excludes a bridge across the railway line – the latter aspect is a key change to the 2003 Local Plan that has come about without the implications being made explicit.

Our presentation went on to demonstrate exactly how the Bellerby site changed from one suitable for housing to one for mixed use and - at the last minute – suitable for a supermarket, and then immediately marketed as such, and for no other use, by your agent.

We believe it to be an abuse of the planning process in a situation where the Council is both landowner and planning authority, and guided by its adviser, Cushman & Wakefield, that faces its

own conflict of interest as it is known to act for the John Lewis Partnership, owners of Waitrose.

The ITCF, while a much improved document from its predecessor, still lacks a vision that embraces and inspires all parties. It clearly lacks the involvement of professional masterplanners, something that GVG continues to press for. Our meeting identified other significant inadequacies in the database for these key planning matters that severely undermine their credibility.

Therefore we urge you and your Executive colleagues to withdraw the NSDB & ITCF, and for the Council to defer the Waitrose planning application. The 'interim' period should be used to gather and assimilate comprehensive, up-to-date data. There should be further proper consultation, with extensive community engagement, so as to arrive at an ambitious vision and a clear set of priorities for the town.

In the meantime, we particularly welcome your appointment of Councillor Palmer to the Lead Town Centre & Transport role. Councillor Palmer has already shown he is prepared to listen and we sincerely hope this is the beginning of a meaningful dialogue as he gets to grips with his vital brief.

In view of the importance of this matter, I am copying this letter to all councillors and to the Chief Executive. We will also place it on our website and make it available to the media.

GVG remains committed to its single purpose – to see the involvement of professional masterplanners in the creation of a visionary plan for our town that fits it for its role as the major regional hub, and that secures its lasting future.

Yours sincerely

G D Bland
Director
Vision for Guildford Ltd

cc. Mr D Hill – Chief Executive, Guildford Borough Council
All Councillors