

FORWARD PLANNING

Editor Nikki Ackerley explains why she feels compelled to join the Guildford Vision Group in order to protect the town's future



Guildford: the good, the bad and the...congested? Photos by Guildford Borough Council

I know I am courting controversy but I feel Guildford is at a crucial point in its history if its future prosperity is to be assured. The traffic comes to a standstill most days – and not just at rush hour – especially around the station area and Walnut Tree Close. We have to do something to stop Guildford's slow decline; businesses are already talking about leaving, shops are shutting with indecent haste and there is an increasing number of eyesores that spoil the historic character of our town.

Woking and Guildford are poles apart in their architectural styles, yet both have their merits. Last month I highlighted Woking's £4.6m plan to revamp Commercial Way. New Central, the flagship development by Barratt, is the second of three parts of a jigsaw that is now forming an impressive gateway to Woking from Guildford and the south. In difficult economic times, this stunning regeneration has taken place through sheer determination by Woking Borough Council and Barratt to facilitate a sustainable development without compromise. All the car parking is underground; Tesco Express has already opened. The development, whether you like high-rise or not, is aesthetically striking and makes a positive impact.

I'm not suggesting we simply copy it; Guildford has a different heritage and needs a different architectural approach but I do not have faith in the current plans

for our town. We do not need another surface car park (with 168 spaces) in a prominent place in the centre of town; we need to lose these kinds of eyesores, especially those by the river.

While I, like many others, would really welcome Waitrose – and John Lewis – here in Guildford, I do not believe that The Bellerby Theatre site is the correct location, visually or for the traffic chaos it will create. Too far from the main

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shopping centre, it would add little to aid the much needed viability and vitality of North Street. The same traffic concerns apply to any future redevelopment of the railway station, which could have even more crucial impact on traffic flows if not devised as part of a bigger picture.

Let's pause; get a traffic plan in place and get master planners to devise a sustainable plan that will shape our town for the next 50 years. After all, the course of the A3 has been completely redirected in recent history; so why not Guildford's traffic system? There is no quick fix solution so, in the short term, I believe

there are some comparatively inexpensive traffic measures that could be taken that would ease the current congestion while we get our act together.

We need Guildford Council's emphasis on the town centre to be extended to take in the University, the Royal Surrey Hospital, the Research Park and the Cathedral; these are highly important to Guildford and yet you'd think they were separate places; they too suffer from a ludicrous and congested traffic system. The master plan should also extend to Ladymead and ideally to Slyfield. Guildford is the sum of its parts not just its high street, great as it may be.

Woking is a vibrant and prospering town that is benefiting from steady and consistent transformational measures which still continue. All councils need to work proactively with developers, with land owners, with the local community and consult with appropriate experts to determine a better course for their town.

That's why I have decided to actively support The Guildford Vision Group – a collective of concerned residents some of whom also own businesses in the town.

We all love Guildford, we all want Guildford to thrive but what is happening now is knee jerk planning; once it's done we can't go back and we'll have to live with the consequences.

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