



PRESS RELEASE

Guildford Vision Calls for Pause in North Street Developer Selection – Need to Consider Bigger Picture

Guildford, Tuesday 16th April 2013: At their public meeting last night, Guildford Vision Group (GVG), the group formed to campaign for a professional masterplan for the town, called for a short pause in Guildford Borough Council's process to select a developer for their major North Street scheme.

GBC are set to appoint Lend Lease, the Australian developer, at the Executive meeting next Thursday, 18 April. No development scheme has yet been publicly agreed or consulted on. The schemes submitted as part of the competition are purely illustrative at this stage, according to GBC.

At the meeting GVG will recommend the Executive appoint Land Securities and will back a pause in the selection process to allow discussions with PRUPIM, who are soon to be the new owners of much of the development site.

The property arm of the Prudential, PRUPIM, is on the verge of completing its purchase of the Hermes interests, including the Friary and Dominion House. Hermes was excluded from the developer selection process by the Council. The Officer's report to the Executive suggests PRUPIM is also not going to be involved by GBC in the development arrangements either. PRUPIM is a respected town centre investor, the second largest in the UK, with £15bn assets to its name. It seems that the Council may be relying on compulsory purchase to allow development to go ahead.

GVG believes GBC should pause for 4-6 weeks in its developer deliberations and engage directly with PRUPIM. It must make sense to actively involve the primary landowner.

"GVG is pro-growth and wants to see improvements to our town centre, but Guildford has no current Local Plan, nor an up to date evidence base, by which to judge the impact of major schemes like that for North Street," says John Rigg, GVG chairman and seasoned property professional. "It is a significant shortcoming and leaves the door open for ad hoc planning across the town, with the risk of unintended consequences. And North Street is only one of three significant schemes currently in prospect. There's the foodstore at Bellerby and, coming down the line, the Solum scheme at the station. Hence our call for a masterplan and the involvement of the primary landowner."

At the well-attended public meeting, held at the Millmead Baptist Centre, over 150 residents and other interested parties, including a number of local councillors, first heard an update on GVG activity from leading members of the Group and then, in relation to the North St development, how GVG was concerned that there was no settled template by which the merits of the North St proposals might be judged.

A lack of a settled plan, plus the associated evidence base, also makes it impossible to judge the impact of the three schemes against each other, especially when it comes to key aspects such as traffic congestion and the pedestrian experience.



A masterplan, a step GVG has been calling for, would have helped considerably if the work had got underway a year ago, for example.

GVG is querying the rush to appoint a developer for North St, and for such a significant scheme where there is no planning permission. Indeed, key elements of the brief given to the competing developers had been successfully challenged by GVG last year as unlawful if adopted.

GVG questions the level and appropriateness of the governance that the Council is bringing to its development activities. With no masterplan, GVG believes that too much weight in the current brief is being given to the needs of the John Lewis Partnership. There is not enough consideration to the needs of residents and indeed other retailers in town. The Council also has to properly balance its appetite as landowner and developer with its policing role as planning authority. The two roles do not naturally co-exist and can lead to significant conflicts of interest.

GVG's preferred developer is Land Securities. This follows GVG's scoring of GBC's three shortlisted developers, drawing on the combined professional experience of its team and an objective assessment of the developers' submissions. The exercise was run in concert with representatives from other local bodies, such as The Guildford Society and EGRA, the residents' associations' umbrella organisation.

GVG affirms that all three developers have good credentials but Land Securities has reputation, size, and much more recent, relevant experience. Land Securities has also the appetite and expertise to more fully explore infrastructure funding opportunities – something that GVG believes Guildford should really look to take full advantage of, given issues like congestion and poor transport planning.

There would be an opportunity to develop a wider plan that would sit happily alongside the 2014 Local Plan that is just getting underway.

Many residents at the meeting were adamant that the priority was to tackle traffic congestion. Questions from the floor covered issues such as bus services, the evidence to support the retail space uplift, massing of new buildings, the cost of a masterplan and the time it would take, and the balance between sustainable development and maximum financial return. A number of councillors and GBC officers attended, including Cllr James Palmer. He was invited to speak and he detailed the various actions GBC were taking, in concert with Surrey County Council in the case of traffic. He encouraged people to attend the meeting of the Executive on Thursday 18th April when the Lend Lease recommendation would be considered. He said Lend Lease would be making a presentation to the Executive.

All the meeting material, including slides showing the various developers' ideas, and much more can be found on GVG's website www.guilfordvisiongroup.com

For further information, contact: Yvonka Wilkinson, Vision for Guildford Ltd on 07767 251040.