



PRESS RELEASE

GUILDFORD VISION STILL SEEKS JUDICIAL REVIEW OF BELLERBY PLANNING DECISION

Guildford: Tuesday, 30 July 2013: Following the news of the former PRUPIM's withdrawal of its application for Judicial Review (JR) of the Bellerby site foodstore planning consent - probably as part of a land deal reached with Guildford Borough Council on the North Street site - Guildford Vision Group (GVG) has been advised to carry on with its JR application.

A GVG spokesman said: "There were originally three grounds for the JR. GVG has demonstrated that the planning process was flawed in two areas as Guildford Borough Council (GBC) has corrected them as a result of our JR application. The case continues on the third ground. We have asked for an oral hearing - to which we are entitled - which will probably take place in October when the arguments can be presented to permit a full JR to take place in due course."

GVG consider that a foodstore with large surface car park on the Council-owned Bellerby site is the wrong use for this housing land on the council's own policies and that a national planning test, designed to put retail uses such as this into the town centre scheme, was misapplied. "Setting aside the country's priority of more houses, including affordable homes, there are better ways to accommodate food shopping in the town centre, not least on the North Street site which the council are keen to develop," the spokesman added.

It is also a clear example of the piecemeal planning that GVG wants the Council to avoid by having a MasterPlan for the town. Opposition to foodstore, parking and additional congestion was supported by local groups at the meeting of the GBC Planning Committee when Councillors voted for consent. The Guildford Society and combined residents' group, EGRA, joined forces to criticise the foodstore plan which only adds to central traffic congestion and ignores the acknowledged housing shortage. The decision just puts increased housing development pressure on sites like Gosden Hill Farm and elsewhere in the Green Belt.

The Councillors' decision took little, if any, account of around 159 separate objectors (vs 109 in support). Those objecting in the three wards closest to the site numbered 120 (vs 52 in support).

It is in the nature of the English legal system that this can appear adversarial. But GVG has no vested interest, remit nor wish for adversarial confrontation. GVG is pro-growth in the town and wider borough, and wants to see a sustainable future for Guildford. It also applauds GBC for moving towards the landowner agreement with M&G and others for the North St development.

GVG's spokesman confirmed discussions had taken place with both Waitrose and GBC with solutions offered by GVG for a compromise (ensuring Guildford's wider town centre will get a proper Master Plan) and that these conversations had generally been civilised and positive. "However," continued the spokesman, "the only formal communications we have received to date have been unhelpful bordering on aggressive."

GVG is, however, a steadfast proponent of good governance in local planning matters. The Bellerby saga does not make pretty reading. It is a tale of convenient interpretations of planning law and regulations. It is very deficient in meaningful consultation with residents, as the site use migrates from housing to a sale to Waitrose. GVG remains concerned that the consent establishes a precedent which is now available to other developers whose goals may not be a better Guildford.

The supermarket plans remove an existing subway - a subway used by many schoolchildren. It introduces a new all-direction traffic light junction half way up York Road where traffic is often at a standstill at peak hours (here the Debenhams pedestrian crossing should serve as an example of the resultant traffic disruption), and the store building as designed is out of character with the town.

Furthermore, the proposed development will have Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) turning out onto Leapale Road - exactly where GBC's consultants have advised the bus interchange should go - and then forced into North Street where pedestrianisation would be preferred. Good planning would, in GVG's view, have seen the foodstore go into the North Street development with HGV servicing through a dedicated loading bay, completely separate from shoppers and other pedestrians.

A professional Master Plan, drawing on the full resources of acknowledged international consultancies, is the sensible, measured route to a well thought-out, fully-consulted vision for our town – a vital regional hub and economic dynamo for the South East. Once-in-a-generation expertise must be brought to bear that does not exist within the day-to-day operations of a busy Council planning department, notwithstanding the council's view to the contrary.

A quality Master Plan can provide a real and repeated opportunity for the people of Guildford to have their say as to what the town, its central areas and the North Street development in particular, should look like over the next 20-30 years. This exercise should be carried out separate to, but alongside, the Local Plan process which will consider the future planning of the entire Borough.

The GVG Spokesman added: "Having a Waitrose and a John Lewis may be a desirable outcome for Guildford residents but it should not replace having a fully-functioning town. GVG believe that these two concepts are not mutually exclusive."

Ends

Notes for Editors

1. Guildford Vision Group (GVG) has formed with the sole purpose of arguing Guildford's urgent need of a long term vision in which the sustainable vitality of the town and its enterprise is ensured for the next 30 years and beyond. GVG is independent, and has no affiliations or vested interests.
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