

19th March 2014

The Editor
The Surrey Advertiser
Stoke Mill
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Dear Sir,

Guildford Vision Group (GVG) welcomes the recent appointment of specialist Master Planners, Allies & Morrison (A&M), to look at a 20-year plan for Guildford. The need of a master plan is long and desperately overdue and comes as GVG reaches its second anniversary.

There are key projects at advanced stages of preparation and sites in the process of being sold, each of which will place major obstructions or burdens on Guildford's ability to resolve longstanding traffic and infrastructure issues. The Local Plan is expected to be issued in draft in the next month or so. I do not think it too strong to say, that without a Town Centre Master Plan, Guildford's entire future prosperity and character is at risk.

The previous Executive set us down a path of poorly planned piecemeal development, with no infrastructure investment to deal with the last 50 years of growth nor, bizarrely, any new such plans to deal with the next 50 years. Piecemeal development, site by site, will never bring the collective infrastructure funding benefits available from a master planned approach – and it prevents people – the taxpayers and voters – recognising the broad sweep of possibilities a planned approach can promote.

Furthermore, the piecemeal approach means Guildford Borough Council (GBC) may already have missed an important boat, losing out on much needed funding from the regional purse-holder, the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Enterprise M3. The current round of funding will go to neighbouring boroughs that already had 'shovel-ready' projects.

So, whilst GBC is to be congratulated on its decision to appoint a multi-disciplined consultancy comprising leading planners, traffic consultants, designers and spatial planners, we really do need to be reassured that A&M's work, and the potential for the delivery of radical solutions, will in no way be inhibited or restricted by the detail of the remit they have been given.

GVG will examine closely the precise terms and scope of A&M's brief to ensure it has the capacity to produce some innovative joined-up thinking.

The first tangible evidence from A&M's early work may be ready to show the inspector at the Local Plan inquiry. It remains to be seen whether there will be enough detail to enable well planned brownfield development in the town centre and urban surroundings to reduce the pressure on our Green Belt in the context of the Local Plan.



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We dearly need some visionary thinking from experts like A&M as to how the town will absorb the collective impact of the massive expected developments at Friary & North Street, Waitrose, Guildford Station, the Cathedral, the University, Guildford Park Car Park as well as the weight of additional traffic and numbers of people anticipated in the Local Plan (wherever homes for them may be found).

As for detail, at the very least GVG has been calling for a Master Plan to pedestrianise Bridge Street, open up the riverside and provide major pedestrian access within the town centre, along with stunning boulevards to the station, cathedral and university. There needs to be another road bridge crossing the railway to supplement Farnham Road Bridge. We have to push heavy through traffic from the very centre of town in an imaginative manner. This will give the space back to people, residents and visitors alike, who want to enjoy all the attractions of Guildford – its shopping, heritage, arts, public spaces and river setting.

So please let A&M have a broad enough brief to produce a stunning Master Plan for Guildford. Guildford needs good growth, delivered in a planned, purposeful and productive process that engages the public yet leaves us with a successful integrated transportation hub. We need walkways, cycle ways, parking and public transport to be considered holistically for the first time.

British society no longer produces the outstanding City fathers of the past; those who planned for the great cities of Edinburgh or Bath, knowing they were putting down the foundations for future generations to reap the benefit. This process, through good leadership, COULD just achieve that for Guildford now and GVG stands ready to help shape a brilliant future for our town.

Yours faithfully,

Julian Lyon
for Vision for Guildford Limited