



20+ Residents Associations and Parish Councils

Calling for a Green and Distinctive Guildford

May 2023 Local Election: GRA Asks

Stop tall blocky buildings ruining character and views in Guildford.

Urgently agree limits to **ensure building height, density and bulk are appropriate for setting** – often 3 to 4 storeys in centre, up to 6 in a few selected places. Currently, various Councillors and officers support tower blocks, even 14 storeys! If developers know Guildford has height limits, they will stop paying inflated prices for sites and more sensitive buildings will be viable.

No development without infrastructure.

Due to congestion, big developments in Guildford were conditional on A3 improvements, access routes and sustainable links. Where promised transport measures have stalled, **put development on hold too!** No more being played! Developers ask to build a few hundred homes **without** essential infrastructure, saying they need to raise money for transport improvements “later”. Then instead of investing in infrastructure in phase two, they can sell the rest of the site to another developer who renegotiates and we never get our vital services.

River Wey to be cleaned up with a green pathway along each bank.

Stop pollution that all-too-often turns the Wey into an open sewer, **provide a flood scheme** that avoids blocking off the river behind high walls, and set back buildings to **create a green corridor** along each bank.

Take better care of wildlife and natural beauty of the Surrey Hills.

Enhance the distinctive character of this nationally important landscape. It underpins our economy and quality of life. Help nature to recover on the downs and **support extension of the AONB** so it connects with our river corridors and heathland. **Protect views** to and from the downs in planning decisions.

Housing to meet needs, not coffers.

No more allowing developers to wriggle out of providing affordable homes! **Build and retain a protected stock of truly affordable homes to rent. Stop excessive use of scarce town centre sites for student blocks**, at the expense of a balanced mix of community needs. Limit how much of any street can be converted to student houses.

Repair the breakdown in communication with the community.

Consultation has become meaningless. If we comment, we are often ignored. Virtual consultations are too restrictive and manipulated. They stop people being able to share ideas. Small wonder disillusionment sets in. **It's time to reconnect.** Residents Associations and Parish Councils can help by promoting awareness and dialogue. They can also assist with securing the changes we all need to make to **tackle the climate and nature emergencies.**

Notes:

Our asks were agreed at a members' meeting of Guildford Residents Association. GRA, which is strictly apolitical, will welcome meetings with candidates to discuss these asks. We hope they will be acted upon by all parties. RAs are invited to use these asks in any hustings they are organising. We have focused on actions that are within the gift of our Councillors.

Stop tall, blocky buildings spoiling character and views in Guildford.

A major reason Guildford lost so much Green Belt to big development sites in its Local Plan is because so many of our Councillors supported this!

Now we are in danger of cramming our town with tower blocks too! Recently, our Council refused to include a height policy in the Local Plan and officers approved a 9 storey building without even taking the decision to the planning committee!

*It's not too late for candidates to rescue things. 7 to 14 storey blocks are **not** inevitable. Farnham has successfully said no to high rise. A Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), backed up by design codes and a master plan, could establish height limits so new development is sensitive to Guildford's special character. Our Councillors have the tools. Do they have the will?*

No development without infrastructure.

We focus on transport infrastructure because this was a condition for the big sites. We were promised A3 improvements, link roads, new railway stations and a sustainable movement corridor. Without these, major expansion would have unacceptable impacts and should be put on hold. Other infrastructure is crucial to support expansion including medical services, sewers and schools. Utility companies are required to provide water, waste services and power, but can they?

River Wey to be cleaned up with a green pathway along each bank.

Clean: *The number of times raw sewage pours into the River Wey is shameful. This pollutes the environment, including water abstracted for drinking, and harms wildlife.*

Green: *Reconnecting with the river should mean opening up green amenity pathways along each bank, not lining its banks with even more tall buildings!*

Flood resilient: *A much needed flood scheme should not hide the river behind walls but slow the flow and provide space to store water upstream and in water meadows.*

Take better care of wildlife and natural beauty of the Surrey Hills.

Include our heathlands, woodland and water meadows in the AONB and give more than lip service to protecting the views into and out of the Surrey Hills that make Guildford special.

Housing to meet needs, not coffers.

Is it time for a focus on building homes for affordable rent? In the Local Plan we were told that to get 4 'affordable' homes, we need to allow a developer to build 10, so the extra 6 cross subsidize the 4. In practice, too many developers are building the 10 without 4 of them being affordable. Inflated housing need figures in the Local Plan, used to justify expansion of Guildford into the Green Belt, have proved to be wrong, just as GRA advised, and we are failing to meet real housing needs. In addition, too much student housing is on land needed for the wider community rather than on university land.

Repair the breakdown in communication with the community.

*Residents Associations can play a vital role in restoring true dialogue with the community, supporting a green, distinctive and vibrant Guildford. Recently Councillors have even discussed how to give **less** weight to residents' views in the planning process. This is deeply troubling!*