

*NAG asked all the candidates seeking election on May 4<sup>th</sup> to represent Normandy and Pirbright Ward on Guildford Borough Council to respond to the document produced by the Guildford Residents Association (GRA): "Calling for a Green and Distinctive Guildford". These are their comments, in the order in which we have received them.*

A. Simon Schofield: Labour Party Candidate

Key Pledges: Labour's key pledges for Normandy and Pirbright are built around listening to the community, defending the character of the villages, rebuilding public services and putting environmental considerations at the heart of decision making. With this in mind, we fully support the principle of a green and distinctive Guildford as outlined in your document heading. In terms of detailed points:

*Inappropriate North Street Development:*

We agree that the current proposals for the North Street development are inappropriate in terms of the proposed height and the heavy focus on executive apartments. We would prefer plans more suitable for the setting with a lower profile, more views of the river and architecture sympathetic to its historic surroundings. We would need to work within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) but worry that reopening the Guildford Local Plan might be used to stop much-needed homes for the 2000 households on the social housing waiting list. We agree with your comments on building height, density and bulk.

*Service Infrastructure:*

We agree that service infrastructure should be built at the same time as developments and the whole purpose of the Community Infrastructure Levy and Section 106 Agreements is to allow this to happen. The council is prone to pass back money to the government because of its inertia. Labour has strong concerns about Surrey County Council (SCC) passing significant liabilities to Guildford Borough Council (GBC) which will cause borough council levies to rise.

*AONB Extension:*

Labour fully supports the extension of the AONB and are pleased that the Hog's Back proposals will extend to the borders of Flexford and Normandy. We also note the benefits that this would bring in terms of planning decisions.

*Social Housing and Affordable Homes:*

We are a strong proponent of social and community housing being one of the methods to introduce affordable housing for rent and have reacted with dismay at the number of occasions where affordable homes have not been provided as part of development plans. It has become routine for developers to argue their way out of commitments, and they use the allocated space to build more luxury homes. We are driving our own children out of the area because they can't find or afford starter homes.

*Community Breakdown and Rebuilding Trust:*

We cannot emphasise enough the importance of rebuilding trust in the consultation process. The council needs to rethink consultations to make them more authentic, honest and responsive. They are widely seen as token exercises. Moreover tackling the climate emergency has to be fundamental to all decision-making and policy which is why Labour pledges to invest in green industries, build new homes with solar or other renewable energy solutions built in, install insulation in social housing and transport infrastructure including EV

buses and electrical charging points.

B. David Bilbé and Keith Witham, Conservative Party Candidates

Firstly the article raises very important issues which must be addressed in full or significant part regardless of who is elected.

1. Tall buildings will change the character of Guildford and should be avoided. There should be a limit on height which maintains the skyline of existing buildings and properties. The general proposed limit of 3-4 stories with occasional increase to 6 makes sense. The recent proposal for North Street was inappropriate and is consistent with the trend to place more power into the hands of developers chasing large profits and reducing affordable units. The proposal for North Street was ugly, out of character and dated before it was built. We do not want tower block like we now see in Woking and we need to maintain tasteful and characterful development not those demanded by developers and supported by weak leadership at GBC.

2. Joined up development is essential. We have seen an explosion of development in Ash and towards the West of the borough without the required investment in infrastructure - roads, sewers, electricity supply, services etc. Again the power is in the hands of the developers who can throw in tempting morsels of infrastructure but without the real investment to make a development viable and environmentally acceptable. Highways England need to embrace the need for A3 improvements, A31 junction investment, and a general resurfacing and widening of roads. We need better and more frequent bus services, cycle tracks on new roads and improved rail services generally. Ash Road railway bridge is now escalating in cost because of delays in moving the project forward and is long overdue to help residents coming into Guildford from the West. There should be NO large development without the submission of a parallel and implementable plan for infrastructure and services. We should also talk with other councils to join together a wider strategy because infrastructure issues do not stop at the boundary of Guildford and there will be consequential knock on effects to everything we do in the Borough.

3. The River Wey is a valuable asset and should be enhanced in every way it can be. Totally agree with the proposals to open up a green pathway and encourage as much walking and use of the river as possible. Promoting the river with information about moorings, improved family and play facilities for children and promotional literature for walks would help.

4. This cannot be underestimated. Efforts to extend the AONB towards Normandy from the Hog's Back continue. Just look at Wanborough Fields and ask whether what is going on there is an enhanced view. It is an ugly scar on the landscape and little has been done to protect that despite there being a restriction on subdivision and sale of the land. It is a disgrace. We need to care for our animals, encourage bat boxes and foraging areas on developments, cut ambient light and ensure that we protect wildlife. All planning applications should include a section on what the applicant will do to improve wildlife development - however significant or small.

5. Affordable homes are important to Guildford and the country as a whole. What we need to ensure is that there is a balance and that certain categories of home do not dominate development. We have that on Walnut Tree Close which is now almost exclusively student accommodation, North Street and Debenhams have unacceptable low proposals for affordable units. Traveller development continues to be ignored in the green belt in Ash and in Normandy. Palm Nurseries has many more than the 6 approved traveller pitches and Green Lane East has again paused enforcement for 3 years despite unlawful development.

At the same time extensions for growing families are often refused. At the heart of development should be character, good planning and development standards and balance of the right mix of housing for the neighbourhood in question. Too much is done and then allowed through weak enforcement standards.

6. Councillors are elected first and foremost to represent their community not to know better than everyone else. There definitely needs to be a more forceful way of bringing the views of residents into decision-making. Too much happens when it is too late and after the event. Much more weight needs to be afforded to parish councils and resident associations. Too many times planning committee members come to meetings with prepared speeches which shows that they have little intention of listening to the debate before decision. These views should be incorporated prominently into a council recommendation and reports. People who live in villages and wards have the best view of what is appropriate. It has been shown that more weight can be afforded when there is a neighbourhood plan. This is a significant undertaking for and ward but when done can reflect forcibly the views of residents in planning and other matters. GBC could do a lot more to encourage this with those village which do not have a plan.

Overall the common sense views of GRA should be endorsed.

C. Jane Hill, Independent

*Stop tall blocky buildings ruining character and views in Guildford.*

Having lived all my life in and around Guildford including the villages, the plans for such buildings are in my opinion completely removed from the historical nature of this beautiful area including the town centre. We must not allow the plans for such building to proceed, or we will fast become the new Woking. No views, no character, no history.

*No development without infrastructure.*

Unfortunately, this practice seems not only to be accepted but also encouraged by many planning groups. Whilst there is a definite need for more housing, this is accompanied by the need to update, renew, or install further infrastructure. For many years I have been personally frustrated by the total disregard to this within planning applications and/or the complete dismissal of insisting on certain clauses being contained within planning application grants. This needs to change with the required infrastructure being at the heart of all future planning applications.

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

There is a tributary which runs from Pirbright into the River Wey; this too is polluted and blocked with debris. If we do not maintain and manager our waterways, then we should expect more flooding as we are causing it. In many areas around Guildford there are natural gullies, which themselves are blocked, therefore leaving nowhere for flood water to drain. Over the years we have taken away natural soak-aways and replaced them with concrete pathways, driveways and even housing. I am in favour of what a green corridor along each bank of the River Wey would achieve. Hedging and the right kind of shrubs/trees would not only serve to soak up any excess rainwater and flood water, but it would also increase wildlife diversity in the area and provide a far better outlook than that at present.

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

I am in complete agreement with extending this AONB and protecting views to and from the Downs in planning decisions. I would also like to see all the Guildford villages given similar status as each has its own character and ruralness – that's how they should stay.

*Housing to meet needs, not coffers.*

I am totally in agreement.

*Repair the breakdown in communication with the community.*

Again, I am in complete agreement.

Final comment:

Guildford's Local Plan is flawed in many areas and in my opinion needs a complete re-think.

If successfully elected to represent Pirbright and Normandy, I will serve the residents to the best of my ability and do my utmost to uphold their wishes and views as their representative at GBC.

D. Geoff Doven and Gina Redpath, Residents for Guildford and Villages

We have received the document "Calling for a Green and Distinctive Guildford" a document that in principle and as a candidate for the R4GV Group we fully agree with.

*Stop tall blocky buildings ruining character and views in Guildford.*

The North Street development, a scheme which was refused by Guildford's Planning Committee in January this year, has been a big focus of the local election which takes place on 4th May. We would still like to see progress on North Street and feel it is important to correct some misrepresentations to enable those interested to see who is championing the best for Guildford.

Guildford's much delayed Local Plan was forced through by the Tories just before the 2019 election. The Local Plan dictates the opportunities, and constraints, of any scheme. It was because of the failure those running the Council at the time that the railway station proposal was approved on appeal and we now have the 11-story 'Great Wall of Guildford' being built.

R4GV had tried to change the draft Local Plan before the election but were blocked by the Tories and the Lib Dems. After the 2019 election R4GV also tried to add a height policy but this was blocked by the Lib Dems. Consequently the Tories' Local Plan - which has the approval of the Secretary of State - allows over-development and provides no height controls. This is what governs any North Street scheme not R4GV, it is however what R4GV inherited as a result of the 2019 election.

*No development without infrastructure.*

A statement we fully Support. Over four years of preparation the North Street development by R4GV which the Lib Dems and Tories voted against had included: 475 brownfield homes in a very sustainable location, Pedestrianisation of the entire lower half of North Street, Improved market area, A new medical centre, 1.6 acres of public realm, including 3 new squares, £4.5mn upgrade to the bus station.

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

The North Street development by R4GV had addressed all issues regarding the River Wey as well as including new pedestrian walkways along the river behind what was Debenhams.

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

We fully support the restoration of the Green Belt and the extension of the AONB.

*Housing to meet needs, not coffers.*

We fully support the housing issue.

*Repair the breakdown in communication with the community.*

We are not aware of any breakdown but fully support total communication.

In addition to the above we fully support the endeavours of the NAG.

E. Ken Howard, Liberal Democrats

Guildford Liberal Democrats, and all of our candidates, feel strongly about protection of the Green Belt and the issues you have raised. We absolutely support the need for infrastructure to be included along with relevant development plans and in addition those development plans need to include the much-needed affordable housing which is why we support the requirement in the Local Plan for 40% affordable housing to be included within significant developments. It is hugely important to us that the people who work hard to keep Guildford going can afford to live in the town they serve. This makes sense more so when taking environmental issues into consideration – less congestion, improved air quality, closer communities etc.

The North Street saga in Guildford town centre has shown there is the need for a heights policy in Guildford. Tall buildings are not necessarily “bad”, but it is important both to preserve key views of local landmarks, and also to understand the acceptable scale of building in the town centre. The Liberal Democrats would review a heights policy in the next council term, seeking public consultation as to what scale is appropriate.

Regarding the River Wey pollution you will note the number of times we have called out the government for giving water companies the continued right to dump raw sewage into our rivers – this is wrong and must stop.

*We hope you have found it useful to have these comments and that they will help to inform your choices on 4<sup>th</sup> May!*