



# MERROW RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

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## Local Plan Issues for Merrow

*As you know from our previous articles, the Guildford Borough Council draft Local Plan is again out for Public Consultation at the time of writing this article, although will be closed by the time this article is published. The Merrow Residents' Association (MRA) has been very heavily involved with the Guildford Residents Association (GRA) in detailed assessment and comment on the proposals in the plan.*

MRA, along with other local Residents' Associations, have contributed funds to commission a report via GRA to objectively assess the GL Hearn Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) report. It has been worthwhile as this suggests an annual housing need figure of 510 as against 693 in the Hearn report.

### **MRA has made the following comments and objections to the draft Local Plan:-**

One of the main issues has been our disagreement on the housing need figures in the SHMA. This report was commented on and challenged by many in the last Local Plan Consultation but the figures have not been changed. The objectively assessed housing need number (OAN) is far too high, as it does not reflect the fact that Guildford is a University town and students will move into the town and move out again at the completion of their studies. The demands of the University and their students should be absorbed by the University and not by the whole Borough. The University should be required to build sufficient student accommodation for their students. The recommended figure of 60% of students having their own accommodation on campus in the draft Local Plan is too low and should be raised. This in turn would release accommodation onto the open housing market. The University currently has planning permission to build housing for 2,120 students but appears unwilling to use these permissions.

The calculation of the OAN has also failed to take into account that the forecast population and actual population in the census in Guildford are

significantly different. This is one more failing in the SHMA.

**Policy P1 - Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty:** We are generally content with this policy as it follows the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) but we have commented that views into and out of the Surrey Hills are also important.

**Policy P2 - Green Belt:** The draft Local Plan goes against the explicit provisions of the NPPF. We have said that if GBC persists in removing large chunks of land from the Green Belt, it must explain why it is proposing to do so in the reasoned justification of this Policy.

The Green Belt is intended to prevent urban sprawl and to safeguard the countryside from encroachment, but the green ribbon along the A3 at the entrance to Guildford will have been destroyed by the developments at Wisley, Garlick's Arch and Gosden Hill Farm, and we really would have continuous development from the M25 down the A3 into Guildford. We take the view that this is totally unacceptable.

**Policy S2:** We are concerned not only at the high housing target that appears in Policy S2, but also at the way that the numbers have been presented in both the draft Local Plan and also in the Land Availability Assessment. The figures in these documents contradict each other.

We have also objected to the way that the housing target has been inflated to a figure that is significantly in excess of the OAN.

**Constraints:** The housing target of 693 does not reflect the fact that there are real constraints in the borough, that we are a gap town and that constraints should be applied to the overall housing target, as well as on a site by site basis in accordance with the NPPF and National Planning Guidance (NPG). This is a real and serious failure in this draft plan. In particular the Green Belt is a real and valid constraint and has not been given sufficient weight.

We conclude that the draft Local Plan does not follow the NPPF, the NPG nor the advice of Ministers in the Department of London and is unsound in this respect.

**Master Plan for the Town Centre:** It is unsound for this Local Plan to go forward when we do not have a town centre master plan. Too much retail space has been identified in the town centre when the amount of retail space required, as in all other town centres, will diminish over time. Some of this land should be used for housing and not for retail.

**Policy H2 - Affordable Homes:** We fully understand and support the comment from many of our residents that affordability is critical to allow our youngsters to get a foot on the ownership ladder. The Local Plan must require a proportion of two bedroom houses, as well as a realistic proportion of one and two bedroom apartments.

**Policy 13 - The Sustainable Movement Corridor:** This corridor has absolutely no relevance to Merrow and is a very expensive aspirational proposal at nearly £100m. We do not believe that a case has yet been made for this corridor and is likely to cause gridlock in Burpham if the new Park and Ride is built and Gosden Hill Farm is developed.

**Policy A25 - Gosden Hill Farm:** The proposals in the draft Local Plan for a large housing development at Gosden Hill Farm are bound to have a serious impact on Merrow and are incomplete and premature. The Executive Committee have spent a great deal of time considering these proposals with Associations in Burpham and Clandon, and are agreed that this development should not be in the Local Plan at all as it constitutes a key area of the Green Belt around Guildford.

If it were to be retained - against our wishes - we have submitted the following comments:-

There must be a four-way junction with the A3 on the Gosden Hill Farm site, which must be in place before the first house is finished. Unless such a junction is in place, the development should not take place.

The proposed rail station at Merrow is also an aspiration and has been for decades. The draft Local Plan is devoid of any detail nor is it clear as to where the main buildings would be erected. We could assume that they would be on the Merrow Depot site. The traffic implications with a new station at the Merrow Depot would be serious. The roads and junctions cannot carry the additional traffic. Whatever the GBC thoughts are on potential plans for the station, very careful consideration needs to be given to access and parking. We would suggest that separate access and parking on the Gosden Hill estate, and access from there via a footbridge, would ease congestion at the bridge junction, leaving the lane only for access by the businesses, staff and for disabled passengers. The other alternative would be to site the station itself on the Gosden Hill estate side of the railway line.

This proposed development is touched upon in the Burpham Neighbourhood Plan which has now been adopted and which covers part of the Gosden Hill Farm site. We have stated that the Common land adjacent to Merrow Lane must continue to be protected.

**Land at Garlick's Arch, at the intersection between the Clandon to Ripley road and the A3 has now been put forward for development, together with two new slip roads onto the A3. We have objected to the inclusion of the land as it is prone to flooding and to the slip roads as they are unnecessary if a four way junction at Gosden Hill Farm is built.**

This has been another long update but we felt it is very important for you all to know what we have been doing for the last months. The Local Plan is an important issue and will affect us all.

With good wishes from the Merrow Residents' Association Committee.

*Sarah*

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