

GVG UPDATE

April 2017



Your Support Keeps Us Going

Thanks for all your support over the past weeks.

We've received many approving comments following our two public presentations on 1 February & 15 March. Nearly 600 people attended altogether (and over 10,000 people have watched the fly through on-line). Over half completed our exit questionnaire.

You Like Our Plan, Our New Crossing, Our New Route

Over three quarters supported most or all of our Plan. Over 90% were in favour of our East/West crossing. Just as heartening, the same number were in favour of the new route for traffic around the town centre.

Our route creates a large pedestrian friendly area at the bottom of the town by the river. This is the big win for the town. It can only be delivered by the new crossing. That is the key element of our Plan.

You can see the Plan on our website. Do watch the exciting flythrough <https://youtu.be/SExTozSKB-A>

The Town Centre Is For People Not Traffic

Let's be clear. We have not set out to cure Guildford's traffic issues. We are not proposing new roads as a response to traffic volumes. We firmly believe this should not be the sole dominating measure for decision making, as some do. Our principal aim has been to give the centre of town back to people.

Priority For Pedestrians

Pedestrians should have priority and great spaces. That is what our Plan delivers, and more. Look at the reinvigorated riverside, the traffic-free routes to the rail station from the shopping centres, the public squares, the boulevards, the covered market place, the new housing and the new transport hub around the station. You have got to look at our Plan from the point of view of the pedestrian and cyclist.

Our Plan May Alleviate Congestion

It just so happens that we think our new crossing and routing of traffic might alleviate some of the worst gyratory congestion we currently experience. We have to accept that, in the short to medium term, traffic volumes through Guildford will increase.

GVG supports modal shift, ie better use of public transport, park & ride, cycleways and more. In fact, we believe that our Plan accommodates the Council's Sustainable Movement Corridor in the town centre more effectively than presently planned. Another reason for the Council to take our Plan seriously.

When Will The Council Take Us Seriously?

And therein lies the problem for GVG. How do we get the Council to study these ideas seriously? We have

spent the last five years working up these thoughts and ideas. With the talent round the GVG table, we should be taken seriously. We are a group of predominantly long term Guildford residents committed to seeing a better town centre.

We have no vested interests. People have questioned our motives. That is understandable, given the level of detail we have produced and commissioned. But that should not be surprising given the backgrounds of our steering group members. Most, if not all, bring serious and very relevant credentials to the table and the debate. You can read their biographies on our website.

We Have Sought Your Opinion From The Start

Right from the outset we have sought the views of residents and visitors to the town centre. We have held public meetings to discuss the key issues. We have called for and received feedback. We have spoken with the principal residents' associations. All these channels have remained open. We have communicated with people via newsletters like this, TV, local press and radio, social media, email and our website. Your thoughts, ideas and hopes were encapsulated in our October 2013 publication 'Guildford on the Way', also to be found on our website.

We Are Not Elected

The principal rebuff we receive is that we're not elected. That is true. We have considered seeking election, more than once. However, notwithstanding its complexity, we are a single issue group. We are concerned only with the town centre.

We very much respect the work our Councillors do in so many other areas of public policy. We remain focused on the town centre, and do not stray from our collective area of expertise.

We Are Voters

But we are voters, as well as council tax payers. So we feel quite entitled to ask questions of those we elected, however unwelcome the questions may be. We are further encouraged by the feedback and level of support for our ideas from the recent public meetings where we launched our Plan.

The town centre, the beating heart of any town, is the standard by which Guildford is judged on countless matters by visitors, shoppers, employers and its residents. In so many aspects our centre is woeful.

County Council May Election Manifestos

The County Council elections are in May. It will be interesting to hear what each candidate has to say about, for example, infrastructure issues. What will be their platform? How much will their manifestos have to

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say about roads, especially in and around the county town? Will they address these issues from the perspective of people, and their concerns about traffic pollution and accidents?

Infrastructure Costs Can Pay

GVG accepts it has to be realistic about how much funding is available for infrastructure. We have recognised that in setting out our Plan. We have undertaken a build cost analysis appropriate for this stage of our Plan. It is a suitably comprehensive costing.

The core central area envisages development to the tune of £1bn. Of that sum, around £200mill is the infrastructure build cost – the new crossing, the new link from it to a new Farnham Road Bridge and the realigned Town Bridge. That is the sum to be found. The rest can be self-financing, ie we expect the £800mill build cost can be met by sales, lettings and rentals.

£200mill Infrastructure Investment Reasonable

GVG maintains that, for a town that makes an annual contribution to the national economy of around £4bn, £200mill should be a reasonable amount of public investment for the town in order to help meet a goal of substantially increasing Guildford's economic contribution. The argument must ring true with central government; it's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity cost.

We think the amount is transformational. Our Plan creates new investment, business, jobs, training opportunities and more community facilities, including leisure, arts, and health provision. The £200mill is also a measure of the lack of infrastructure investment over the past 30 years in the centre of Guildford.

Our Plan vs Piecemeal

There's a lack of cohesive development. Too much has been piecemeal. For example, the Council has recently granted itself consent for development on Guildford Park Road without much evidence of a joined-up plan and the bigger picture. And now the Council is calling for expressions of interest from developers for 20 town centre sites.

Where's the overall plan? Where's the approved Planning Development scheme? There's nothing in the draft Local Plan. GVG has been accused by certain councillors of causing town centre blight with its Plan. Surely 20 hotchpotch schemes is the bigger blight? Do all councillors endorse this 20-site marketing exercise?

People Have Choices And Vote With Their Feet

The bottom line is important and the Council can point to its good financial record. However in the final analysis, the longer term, it is people who matter. If

people think other nearby towns provide a better, more welcoming environment, they will vote with their feet.

People are starting to notice other towns pushing ahead and making a difference. In the online age, people can easily scout out the best deals, whether it be shopping, eating, arts or other attractions.

The competition for your footfall and pound has never been as fierce. Business is no different, it will go where it can best operate and where its staff feel happiest.

How Do We Get On Better With The Council?

So, what next? Well, so far you've given us your ideas about what you'd like to see in the town centre and we've passed all our ideas on to the Council.

What we would like now is your ideas about how we could get on better with the Council. If our Plan is to have any traction, it has to be studied properly by the Council and its officers. A closed mind approach is inappropriate. We have had more rejections of our requests to collaborate for more years than we can count.

Collaboration Is Key

We try many ways to connect but it is fair to say we're still to be persuaded of any real recognition by the Council leadership of the benefits of collaboration or the need to debate the right plan for the town. Such discussion should be Localism in action. Is the real problem just that it's not their plan? It can be - very easily; and who cares whose plan it is anyway?

Ask Your Councillor & Candidates Key Questions

Our new East/West crossing is crucial. Please ask your councillor if they support it and let us know. So many factors make a new crossing feasible right now. If nothing happens the opportunity will disappear, quite possibly for another 100 years.

If any of them come knocking on your door over the next four weeks, please quiz them to see if they believe in localism and a plan for real change in our town centre. If you support open debate and having a comprehensive Plan for the town centre, with a real intention to deliver, please say so to your councillor and the candidates.

Visit Our New Website

We've revamped our website. The address is still the same: www.guildfordvisiongroup.com

Do visit it; You can see our Plan there. If you have particular views about what we're doing and what we're saying, please let us know. We value your feedback.

Email us at: action@guildfordvisiongroup.com