

Press Announcement

Formation of Guildford Greenbelt Guardians

We are pleased to announce that 18 groups from Guildford's towns and villages have united to form an organisation in defence of the borough's Green Belt. These include parish councils, residents' associations and campaigning groups.

We are not comfortable with allocating significant amounts of green field land as potential development areas when there are surface car parks, unused brownfield sites and empty homes that GBC has not taken into account, and where possible housing densities could be reasonably increased. We believe that Green Belt status should mean that land is protected; we believe that there should be no development in the AONB; and we believe that all green fields matter, whether they are AONB, Green Belt, agricultural land (which is important for feeding our country) or just important local open spaces. We do not want to keep deserted building lots, or contaminated land, or land-greedy surface level car parks as they are, in order to build on green fields. While there is brownfield land, we should leave the green fields alone.

Our members include:

- Ash Green Residents' Association
- Beechcroft Drive Residents' Association
- Bookham and Effingham Together - Hands off the Green Belt
- Burrows Cross Area Residents' Association
- Jacobswell Residents' Association
- Keep the Horsleys in the Green Belt
- Normandy Action Group
- Ockham and Hatchford Residents' Association
- Ockham Parish Council
- Poyle Road Campaign Group (Tongham)
- Ripley Parish Council
- Save Hog's Back
- Save Shere, Gomshall and Abinger
- Shalford Conservation Society
- Residents of Wood Street Village
- The Ripley Society
- Westborough, Broadacres & District Residents Association
- Wisley Airfield Action Group

A number of other groups are going through formal procedures to join us and we expect our numbers to increase rapidly.

We would welcome as further members any other residents' associations, parish councils or campaigning groups who may wish to join us.

We believe

- Brownfield land should be used for building before any green fields
- Housing numbers must reflect real local need, not developers' wishes
- Existing legal protection for the Green Belt and the AONB should stand
- Green fields matter - they are not just building land
- The Metropolitan Green Belt is for the benefit of all

Criticism of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment

We feel the need to launch GGG now because we have particular concerns about the Strategic Housing Market Assessment which is currently being produced and which will form part of the evidence base of the Local Plan. These concerns include the following:

- No local people are being consulted
- The remit involves only housebuilders and local councils in consultation
- There appears to be a desire to inflate real local need to reflect developers' demands

We do not believe that the proposed remit of the SHMA is fit for purpose and we wish to express this view to councillors in a formal letter.

Tim Harrold, Chairman CPRE Surrey Guildford District, made the following statement of support:

“The formation of the Guildford Greenbelt Guardians reflects the strength of feeling amongst large numbers of residents who believe that the countryside is under threat from the evolving Local Plan.

CPRE understands this concern and recognizes that the credibility of some of the technical evidence so far published by the GBC has been questioned by many villages, residents' associations, and environmental groups.

It is not surprising therefore that residents are worried about how the Strategic Housing Market Assessment will be prepared and what role community stakeholders are likely to play in this process.

CPRE supports all those who are committed to protecting the Metropolitan Green Belt, the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and of Great Landscape Value, and the agricultural countryside and extensive woodland in Guildford that is under threat.

It is time to say “no” to further development if it means destroying our Surrey countryside heritage which we all value so highly.”

Save Hog's Back commented on why they have joined GGG:

“GBC has underestimated the value that Guildford residents place on the borough's open countryside and picturesque villages. We care just as much about our neighbours' green spaces as we do about our own back yard and we will fight to protect these as long as we know that there are more appropriate sites to meet Guildford's housing needs.”

Helen Jefferies, the Wisley Airfield Action Group chair, and deputy chair of Ockham Parish Council, said today:

"Specific threats to our green belt hang like a sword of Damocles over towns and villages across the borough, so we fully support a united campaign to protect our children's heritage."

Enquiries:

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