

Guildford Green Belt Group (GGG)

Housing Solutions: Brownfield or Greenfield?

There can be little question that Britain needs more homes, and that affordable and social housing must be a major part of new dwellings built. This is particularly acute in the south east, with the demand for housing being driven largely by London. Guildford is not immune to this, and so there is considerable debate about what would be an appropriate housing target for Guildford. Irrespective of what this is, Guildford Borough Council has adopted the position that much of this target will have to be built in the Green Belt or countryside within the borough. In addition, GBC have identified large swathes of Green Belt land that they think should be released for commercial and industrial purposes. So is the answer to all of Guildford's problems really to be found in the borough's green fields?

GGG say that this is not the case; that the key to the housing problem and the supply of future sites for employment is recycling. Not the recycling of household possessions, but the recycling of land – land that has been used being reused; but more efficiently. Using green fields to solve today's problems is simply not sustainable; we have to use our resources more efficiently, and one of our most important resources is land. So we should use new, innovative designs to ensure that we maximise the efficiency of land use. Without doing this, we will not prepare our town or its residents for future success. Land recycling and use efficiency are key differences between Guildford Borough Council and Guildford Green Belt Group.

Efficiency of land use – what does this mean?

This is a very simple concept. We have to do more to recycle land, and when it is available for development, to use it more efficiently. Good design and high construction standards are key. The picture below shows an example of what this means.



This new development is close to the River Wey and Power Close. It is a mixed development of light commercial and residential. However, a great deal of the ground area is given to car parking. Efficient land use would ensure that car parking was provided underneath buildings, whether for residents or employees. Given that this development is about 1 mile from Guildford station, this is an area that could have been considered for residential use only, with

commercial premises provided in some of the under-occupied industrial parks in and around Guildford. This development is a mix of 2, 3 and 4 storey buildings, with the commercial buildings primarily being 2 storeys. This makes no sense at all. Where site factors (such as topography, perspective relative to other buildings, etc) permit, building height should be the maximum possible, though some leeway should be given so that the design can encompass differing roof levels. In terms of efficient land use, zoning should be important, so that sites within walking distance from important infrastructure elements, such as the railway station, the town centre, hospitals, parks, etc should be primarily used to provide homes. This would help to reduce the traffic load in the city centre. Commercial uses (other than retail) could be confined to sites alongside major roads and within commercial and industrial parks - to minimise traffic entering the town centre. Park and ride car parks absorb huge land areas, there is no reason why multi-level car parks could not be provided, with the remainder of the area currently under tarmac being used to provide mini malls, devoted to e-tailing "click and collect" collection points, so that people only interested in collecting pre-ordered goods do not have to enter the centre of the town.

What is Brownfield? What is Greenfield?

The term brownfield applies to land that has previously been used – for housing, by industry or for commercial premises. There are numerous issues that may present obstacles to the recycling of these brownfield sites, but for the sake of future generations, surely it is better to find ways to overcome these obstacles, rather than simply identifying new green field sites for development? One of the dangers in using new green field sites is that some already built areas will become rundown and derelict. Equally, it is important to plan for the changing pattern of retail shopping, to embrace the changes that shopping on line will bring. Our cities and town centres have yet to reflect these changes. In Guildford, we have a once in a century opportunity to build a town centre fit for the new century; looking forward, not based on the past. Unfortunately, based on current GBC policies, this opportunity is likely to be lost, with their single minded pursuit of “rolling back the Green Belt”, to the detriment of the future of the town and its environs.

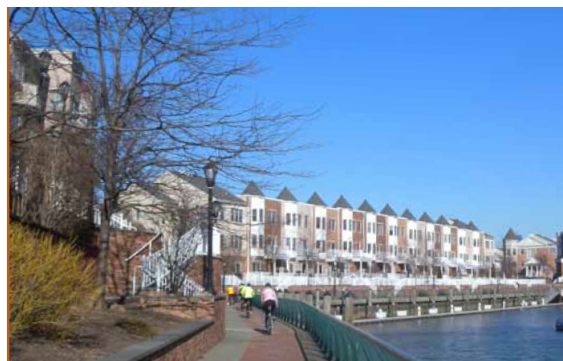
One of the brownfield areas that has great potential for residential redevelopment is the area approximately centred on Walnut Tree Close. As this area is close to the railway station and town centre it should be redeveloped a key residential area, with pedestrian and cycle paths within a green corridor, alongside both river banks. There are parts of this area; including car parks alongside the railway station, within Walnut Tree Close and Woodbridge Meadows that are ripe for redevelopment. On the other side of the river, there are disused buildings (owned by the council). We think that the Wey Navigations, the green spaces, the Cricket club and the existing Victorian terraces are all precious and should not be touched.



These redundant sites, and others, could easily provide large numbers of new homes, in a beautiful riverside setting. Compare these sites, as well as the picture of the disused building below, with a riverside development which could result from a planned and phased large scale redevelopment of this area. This is just one site of several that would lessen or even eliminate the need to build on green field sites within the borough.



or



If you would like to learn more about [Guildford Green Belt Group](http://guildfordgreenbeltgroup.co.uk/home/4581459298), visit our website - <http://guildfordgreenbeltgroup.co.uk/home/4581459298>

If you want to ensure that Guildford moves forward whilst ensuring future generations do not suffer from decisions that will be made over the next few years, then join our “land recycling first” campaign – details on the website.