

The University has been represented by three public speakers tonight and we've heard about its successes and its contributions to Guildford. We're all pleased the University is doing well, but don't be persuaded by its PR machine and its carefully orchestrated presentations to get it what it wants.

The Local Plan should outline what Guildford needs - how many houses and business premises we should plan for, and where these should go. These must be **objectively** assessed. That's planning law. And when you look at it objectively, the land the University wishes to develop is not suitable either in terms of its landscape or its infrastructure.

But it's not just about Blackwell Farm. The University, in its drive to develop this site, is dragging its feet over delivery of housing that it was given permission for 10 years ago - and this has consequences for the whole of Guildford. If the University agreed to build all these 3,000 student residences and 270 staff homes sooner rather than later, this would go a long way towards our 5-year housing supply; and there would be no need to build on the green belt anywhere in the borough (even with the current inflated housing figure). There would also be less risk of uncontrolled development.

I don't buy the argument that the University is working within a 20-year horizon. In the Manor Park Development Brief, it indicated that all the student and staff housing would be built by now. If the University desperately needs houses for staff, as it claims, then why is it waiting another 10 to 15 years to build them?

It's not because the University can't afford to build these homes. Its balance sheets show net current assets of around £200m. Besides, it would be easy for the University to finance these developments using PPP models. Student accommodation comes with an almost guaranteed return on investment. If it wasn't a viable proposition we wouldn't have had a developer seeking permission to build student housing at Walnut Tree Close - a developer who had to buy the land (rather than receive it as a gift from the people of Guildford).

The University will make a lot of money from developing Blackwell Farm, which it bought as a working farm, and so has everything to gain from pushing up the housing figure by delaying its house-building programme. Guildford's high housing figure, it argues, provides the exceptional circumstances required to move the green belt boundary again - but this doesn't just unlock Blackwell Farm for development, it unlocks green belt sites across the borough.

The University, more than any other institution, could help Guildford to retain its green belt, and, with it, the beautiful landscapes and characterful villages that attract top businesses here. It could build high-density student accommodation at Manor Park, releasing hundreds of two- and three-bedroom flats and houses in town - the very kind of housing Guildford needs. It could redevelop its vast acres of brownfield land. And it could help to give us our five-year housing figure. Sadly, this draft local plan (which I call on you to amend) appears to be more about what the University wants, than what the people of Guildford actually needs.