

**Guildford Greenbelt Group (GGG)**  
**Press announcement Wednesday 21 January 2015**  
**Embargoed until Friday 23 January 2015**

**GUILDFORD GREENBELT GROUP (GGG) LEADER SUSAN PARKER  
CHOSEN TO STAND FOR GUILDFORD IN GENERAL ELECTION**

**Guildford Greenbelt Group is pleased to announce that it has selected Susan Parker to stand as its prospective parliamentary candidate for the constituency of Guildford.**

GGG stands for protection of our Greenbelt and the countryside, for respect for our environment, and for working in harmony with nature on a sustainable basis, while also being financially and economically realistic, socially responsible and fiscally conservative.

Susan has led GGG since its formation in 2013. GGG has raised issues and objections to the proposed local plan in Guildford, seeking to get a better and more workable local plan, for more than a year.

GGG has a local focus. Guildford Borough Council and Waverley Borough Council have been very enthusiastic proponents for the plans to build over the greenbelt and countryside within the boroughs. The local plan was introduced by the then lead councillor for planning who noted: *“There are some areas of the green belt which are not very nice and maybe we could roll back the boundaries”* .

Despite apparent consultation, and supposed reconsideration, in practice the plans for large-scale development are rolling on regardless. Developers have put forward proposals for Cranleigh, for Effingham, for Wisley and for the Hog’s Back. Brownfield areas have not been properly considered for development but are being allocated for commercial development instead, pushing housing into green fields. This will result in drastic or catastrophic change, and a huge increase in urban sprawl, which is hugely unsustainable. This is why GGG candidates will be standing for local councils. GGG is seeking to participate in local decision-making to reflect the views of local people. We represent genuine Localism.

However, it is also clear that the problems within the planning system are not just local. Part of the problem lies within the current coalition government, which is seeking to build its way out of recession on the countryside that we all value. There is no other genuine strategy for economic growth. What is disconcerting is that this view of the “need” to build on the countryside seems to be shared by most of the larger parties, without much foundation.

While housing is a national need, it is not at all clear that the only sane option for housing provision at an affordable level is erosion of our countryside. There are options such as brownfield development, targeting “buy to leave” housing to reduce the impact of this, and utilisation of empty homes. Experts have confirmed that the brownfield land available in our larger cities is a huge resource, which offers a better, more sustainable way of providing housing, leaving most countryside available for food provision, fresh air, carbon capture, leisure, flood defence and environmental protection. Current need for housing is not being properly provided by commercial development, and the mechanisms within the NPPF for ensuring provision of much needed housing are very limited and inadequate.

GGG feels that no other political party is prepared to stand up for the countryside and the environment, certainly no party with a fiscally conservative, economically responsible slant. It is interesting that candidates for most other political parties are now asserting their interest in protecting the Greenbelt – but all other political parties have been remarkably silent about this over the last eighteen months through the Local Plan process.

Most of the values that GGG cares about are traditional “conservative” values, but these seem to have been abandoned by the current administration, which does not seem to share any of our concerns. Conservative politicians, both local and national, are now claiming that they will protect the Greenbelt, but it is under their administration that our countryside is being threatened. Unless those in a position of power are reminded that the voters care about traditional Conservative values, the administration is unlikely to change its values or its policies. As a result, GGG has decided to express local concerns by putting forward a prospective parliamentary candidate.

Jules Cranwell, committee member of Guildford Greenbelt Group, commented: *“This strategy has been determined following a detailed analysis of the track record of incumbents with regard to the greenbelt. The policy of the incumbent of the national Guildford seat, Anne Milton, has been one of sitting firmly on the fence, with regard to greenbelt matters, apart from very recent pronouncements, in the build-up to the May election.”*

*In terms of the borough strategy, we hope to contest all seats where support for the greenbelt has been lacking, where the incumbents have been too sympathetic to developers, and those where the incumbents have been found to have acted without integrity or probity.”*

Michael Bruton of GGG and East Horsley comments: *“Last Saturday Mole Valley Conservatives delivered leaflets here in East Horsley*

*proclaiming their passion for Green Belt protection. I recall that all three of the Horsley and Clandon Councillors voted for the initial 'Issues and Options' paper which proposed the rolling back of the Green Belt and the removal of most of GBC's villages from the Green Belt ? They helped to give birth to this monstrous process. If my Councillors feel as strongly as they claim to do now, about Green Belt protection they could abandon the Conservative whip and sit as Independents for the remainder of their tenure ? After all, I understand that two of the Horsley and Clandon Councillors are standing down anyway.*

*Has the unpopularity of Tory-led Guildford Council on the matter combined with the approach of Elections in May, encouraged Mrs Milton's and Conservative Councillors' sudden passion for Green Belt protection?. Or has the formation of the Guildford Greenbelt Group and its decision to stand in these elections made other Parties suddenly discover the virtues of the Green Belt/Countryside and its protection? Voters will remember that in May 2011, Guildford Conservative Councillors campaigned and were elected on the basis of 'Green Belt Protection'. They took me in in 2011 with that promise which turned out to be worthless. I will not be 'taken in' again in 2015."*

Susan Parker said:

*"The planning system is broken. We need real localism, for local people, so that communities can choose the development that really meets their needs, and not suffer plans imposed centrally or by inspectors on behalf of government. Localism as it is offered at present is just so much spin.*

*"We have repeatedly challenged the Government to change its policy and to respect our concerns, but we have not been heard. We feel it is time that the Government – and the next Government, whoever that may be - start to listen. That is why I am standing as a parliamentary candidate. Until parliamentary seats are threatened, government policy (or that of the opposition) will not change. We are challenging an entrenched system that discriminates against local people. "*

Enquiries:

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Notes to editors:

## **1. Background to Guildford Greenbelt Group**

**Guildford Greenbelt Group formed more than a year ago in the borough of Guildford in response to the Local Plan. Members and supporters across the borough came together because the Greenbelt and countryside within the borough are subject to a major assault by the local council, under the National Planning Policy Framework.**

**More than 13000 homes are proposed for the borough of Guildford in the period to 2031, an increase of approximately a quarter compared to current housing. Almost three quarters of this increase is proposed to be sited on the Greenbelt or countryside. Target sites include the pretty hamlet of Ockham (2100 homes), the village of West Horsley on the edge of the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (700 homes), and Blackwell Farm on the nationally important Hog's Back, a famous landmark which is actually within the Surrey Hills AONB itself (more than 3000 homes).**

GGG spent a year using the formal processes of writing to councillors, participating in discussions and meetings, addressing Guildford Borough Council, preparing research, submitting detailed responses to consultation, including written responses to the draft Local Plan which ran to some 500 pages, and participating in the parliamentary select committee considering the operations of the National Planning Policy Framework. Our founder members initially came together during the Issues and Options consultation during the autumn of 2013, and worked closely together at that stage.

It has become clear that Guildford Borough Council is unwilling to listen to the population of Guildford. No matter how engaged in the consultation process the people have been (and there were more than 7000 participants generating thousands of responses), there has been minimal change from the council on all issues raised. Responses which look positive are, on closer investigation, almost always a matter of spin. It is clear that the proposals to defer the next draft of the local plan until after the next election are a matter of kicking the issue into the long grass.

The members of GGG determined that the consultation process did not permit proper participation in local decision-making and the concept of "localism" was a fiction. It was therefore decided that the only way to participate in local decision-making was to seek election as councillors, and local representatives could be helped to do this by GGG forming a political party to offer coordination, administration and support. This will enable the voters of Guildford to express their views and to determine their own future.

Since formation as a political party, it has become clear that voters in Waverley are also interested in GGG. Some have indicated that they may choose to use the umbrella of GGG's organisation to stand as local councillors too, perhaps with a different political description. Waverley is facing many of the same problems as Guildford, with less protection from Greenbelt, and the village of Cranleigh is particularly targeted with huge and disproportionate housing plans. While one of these has recently been refused, there are still thousands of homes proposed for a village which is in the process of being turned into a town.

Further information on GGG is available on the GGG facebook page  
<https://www.facebook.com/Guildfordgreenbelt>

Or on its website:

GGG website <http://guildfordgreenbeltgroup.co.uk>

GGG public meeting open to all members of the public, will be held as follows:

28 January 2015 -Fairlands Community Hall -7pm

## 2. Information on Susan Parker

Susan Parker has lived and worked in the borough of Guildford since moving here in early 1998.

She is a Chartered Accountant, married with two adult children who are currently at university.

After studying English at Oxford University, she qualified as an accountant, then spent some years working in Mergers & Acquisitions for HSBC Investment Bank (then called Samuel Montagu) in the City. She worked on a number of different and challenging projects before choosing to leave in order to look after her young children.

While being a mum at home, she set up her own accountancy practice for which she still works, is Chairman (and founder) of her local residents' association, was a local representative on an ICAEW committee, as well as participating in committees associated with her children's education.

She has been a committee member of CPRE Guildford for many years and has long had an interest in planning and the protection of the countryside and the environment. She feels that under the National Planning Policy Framework the traditional processes of consultation and debate on planning matters have now broken down. It is no longer sufficient to make a reasoned case for objection on the basis on logic, full information and fairness, within the context of a properly administered planning system. Now, argument seems unlikely to influence an outcome which often seems to be decided behind closed doors. Planning decisions are made at a local level, but are influenced by shadowy groups not necessarily subject to the process of planning inspection and appeal.

As one of the principal founders of Guildford Greenbelt Group, Susan has led the campaigning group, which has now formed a related political party, since its formation. She has helped to frame the debate in the context of the local plan over the last year, and has spoken at the council on a number of occasions, which are available on council webcasts.

During the course of the year, it has become evident that consultation - as operated in the context of the planning system - is heavily biased against communities and in favour of developers, and that has informed the decision to stand in order to influence the political process.