

# This is just the beginning...

## Where we live

The Borough of Guildford is a great place to live and work: an historic market town rich in heritage, with university, research park, high tech and service industries, all surrounded by the wonderful countryside of the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It is one of the safest parts of Surrey, which is itself the safest county in England.

Yet none of these assets can be taken for granted, nor can it be assumed that success and wealth are spread evenly across the borough. It is clear that there are areas of poverty and disadvantage that are thrown into sharper relief by both the general affluence around them and the high cost of living. And it is important that policies enhance Guildford's assets and do not damage them.

Working in isolation, local authorities, agencies and voluntary organisations can only tackle issues piecemeal, often creating gaps or overlaps in public services.

But draw them together into a partnership based on communication and cooperation, implementing policies agreed under a jointly established Community Plan backed by public consultation, and the Borough of Guildford can enjoy an holistic approach which responds to and balances the needs of every sector, from very young children to older people, from individuals to businesses, from rural hamlet to town centre.

## The Community Plan

This first Community Plan is both a stock-take of what is happening now and a look ahead to how the partner agencies hope to improve services over the next few years. It also includes information gleaned from 12 public meetings, from the Citizens' Panel, a Residents' Survey, Business Consultation, *About Guildford* and the *Surrey Advertiser's* 'Building a Better Guildford' campaign. Over 800 people took part in the public meetings, and some 250 voluntary and community organisations have been involved.

It incorporates input from Guildford Borough Council, Surrey County Council, Surrey Police, Guildford and Waverley Primary Care Trust, (working in partnership with Woking Area Primary Care Trust, which covers Ash, Ash Vale, Tongham and Pirbright), parish councils, the business community, faith groups, the voluntary sector and hundreds of other local interest groups. The research showed how artificial are the demarcations between areas such as culture and health, transport and environment or health and environment. They all impact on each other. And it revealed how services such as education play an extraordinarily wide and varied role throughout the community, from vocational and leisure learning through to vital public health education.

This comprehensive consultation won the praise of the national Improvement and Development Agency which commented in its recent review of Guildford Borough Council: "You have made an excellent start on your community planning process. It has been very well thought through." Special mention was made of the innovative means of consultation such as the *Surrey Advertiser* campaign.

This Community Plan gives the Local Strategic Partnership - the collective body that will be monitoring and overseeing its implementation - something to work with, a framework that can be developed, because the challenges facing Guildford will inevitably change. While the action plans need flexibility to adapt and respond, this represents an agreed starting point.

## Putting the Community Plan into practice

The work really starts now. The Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) had its inaugural meeting in February 2003 and it is still finalising its membership. It currently comprises representatives from Guildford Borough Council (GBC), Surrey County Council (SCC), Surrey Police, Guildford and Waverley Primary Care Trust (PCT), Guildford Community Learning Partnership, Guildford Association of Voluntary Services, Guildford Business Forum, Guildford Youth Council, Guildford Environment Forum and a representative of Faiths but it is important that all sectors of the community feel they have representation.

The Local Strategic Partnership will incorporate an Executive and a Community Advisory Forum. The Executive will oversee the work of the specific Action Groups that are being set up to tackle the task of producing programmes, targets and timetables for projects and initiatives within the nine areas (as shown on page 12 of the Community Plan). The public will be able to feed into these Action Groups and there is scope for more formal consultation as necessary. All the partners are keen for the whole community to become involved and play an ongoing role in the development of the plan.

This is a working manual for the development of the borough community which will be continuously updated and monitored. Regular progress reports will go to the Community Advisory Forum and it will be able to influence the future direction of the plan. New issues, new targets can all be absorbed as the partnerships start working together.

This is just the beginning.

## A snapshot of Guildford

Although the public perception of Guildford's economy is that overheating is the serious threat, the business community knows that with the global downturn of economic growth, Guildford is actually feeling the chill. Its concern is that people should understand the links between unemployment and deprivation and that a strong economy feeds money into the community. Businesses in Guildford pay almost £60 million in business rates every year which is used by Government to help fund council spending.

Business supports the arts and sport and many of the cultural events in Guildford would not go ahead without its help. This is mutually beneficial because Guildford's role as regional centre for leisure and culture impacts on economic development. It is also important for everything from quality of life to crime prevention, social inclusion, healthy living and lifelong learning.

Ensuring that these benefits are accessible to all, regardless of disadvantage or vulnerability, is a guiding principle driving the Community Plan. It embraces diversity and equality of opportunity, involvement, rural issues, accessibility and community facilities.

Our consumer society is also the throwaway society, and rubbish, pollution, litter and the maintenance of roads, pavements and parks are serious concerns. Recycling is a high priority and the public is aware of the importance of promoting a way of life that is sustainable for future generations.

A clean environment, good housing, safety, leisure activities and the arts all contribute to the mental and physical health of the community: they complement the work of the National Health Service. Guildford and Waverley and Woking Area Primary Care Trust are focusing on improving access to health services and moving to a more patient centred approach so that people have choices.

Guildford has a serious shortage of affordable housing and this affects the ability of services and businesses to recruit staff. People are living longer, property prices are high and young people cannot find suitable housing in the villages where they grew up. While average household incomes are 37 per cent above the national average, house prices can be 127 per cent higher. Working in partnership Guildford has achieved a success story here, with a £65million investment programme resulting in hundreds of new affordable homes both in the town and in the rural villages.

The borough is also being smothered by traffic. Surrey has the highest car ownership and most congested roads outside London and any attempt to meet the demand for car travel is incompatible with the principle of sustainable development. Alternative modes of transport are being promoted, though there is much more to be done.

## The issues

The issues have been broadly grouped into nine themes, though many of them overlap: Business and the Economy; Community Well-being; Culture and Leisure; Disadvantaged and Vulnerable People; Environment and Sustainability; Health; Housing; Public Safety and Traffic and Transport. Education is a common thread running through almost all of them and has not been given a separate heading but the opportunity is there in this first Community Plan for new themes to be added or existing themes merged.



## A partnership



The organisations initially responsible for setting up the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). The LSP now has a broad membership of borough-wide organisations.