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Opinion: Getting a Balance Between Old and New Is Worth Striving For

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By Gavin Morgan

founder of the Guildford Heritage Forum

The recently published article [Guildford Should Not look like a Postcard from the 1900s](#), set me thinking.

The irony in this statement is that parts of Guildford do look like an old postcard. That's the point.

Opinion

People come to live here because it is an attractive historic town. The High Street, Quarry Street and Castle Grounds are beautiful, a real asset to the town drawing shoppers and visitors to a destination that is truly unique.

Away from the High Street there are residential conservation areas which also retain historic character. They are rightly protected.

But elsewhere there is no danger of Guildford being stuck in the past. The public areas away from the High Street are very modern.



A picture postcard view of North Street in the 1900s.

The grand Victorian buildings that once lined North Street vanished a long time ago.



The *Surrey Advertiser* building in Martyr Road pictured at the time of the newspaper's centenary. The Art Deco offices and print works opened in 1937.



The Odeon cinema in Epsom Road.

There is also nothing left to recall the iconic styles of the 1930s. The frontages of the *Surrey Advertiser* offices and the Odeon cinema could have made fine contributions to the townscape but both have gone.



The Ladymead cafe and houses where the retail park is today.

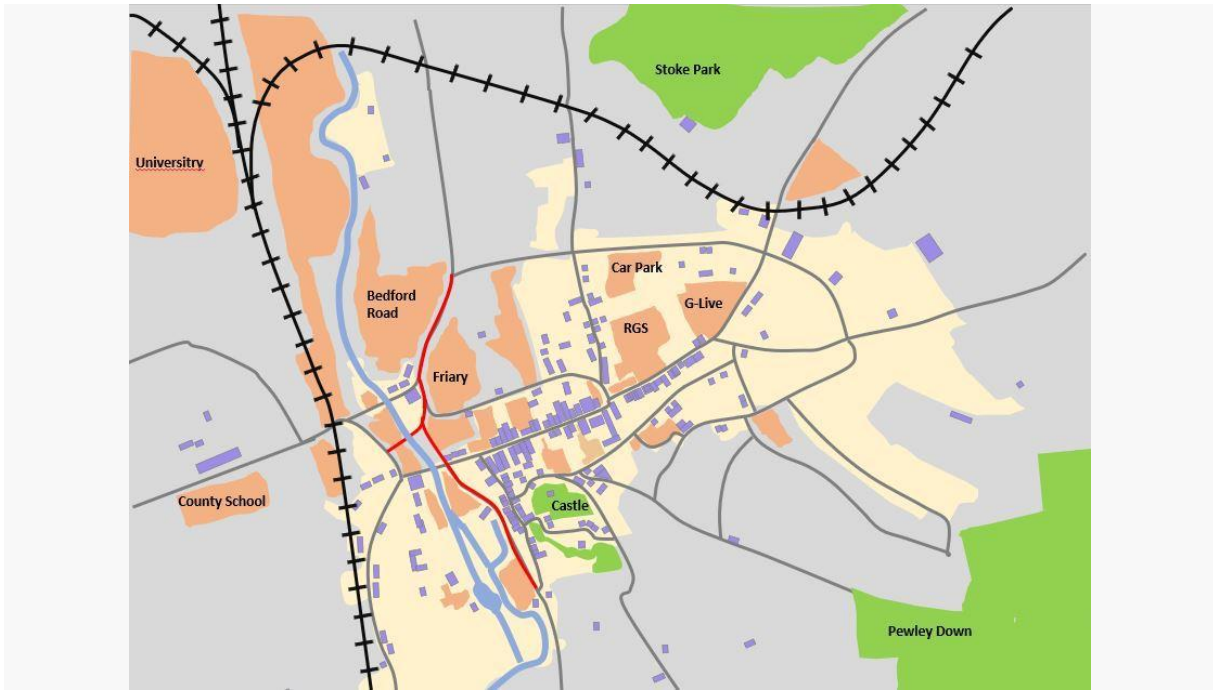
Ladymead, an entire development between the wars, has nothing original left.

We can't keep everything nor should we. Indeed, a lot of the old buildings in the town were beyond repair as [David Rose pointed out previously in an excellent article](#). Guildford has certainly weeded out a lot of tired old buildings.



Guildford cattle market. Photo by Ron Jenkins, courtesy of David Rose.

The law courts and Bedford Road once had gas holders and a cattle market. The river was lined by warehouses and the Friary centre was a brewery.



Areas cut out by 20th-century developments. Click on image to enlarge in a new window.

The sketch map here shows the areas cut out by 20th-century developments creating opportunities for change and renewal. But there is always a danger we don't get things right.

The gyratory system cut the High Street off from the river. The Bedford Road car park area is not people friendly.



The Friary centre under construction.

The Friary shopping centre has done the economy proud but developers promised the town a public square with lighting and fountains. What we got was an atrium with an escalator that the BBC used as a futuristic prison in the popular 1980s sci-fi series *Blakes 7*.



More modern buildings in an attempt by the council in the 1980s to force developers to build in sympathy with the town's unique character.

There have been attempts to retain the character of the town centre. Look around and you will see some large red-brick buildings with gabled roofs. I am told this was an attempt by the council in the 1980s to force developers to build in sympathy with the town's unique character.

Today a new dimension in change is hitting Guildford – height. I worry that we are not protecting Guildford enough.

Why can't there be height guidelines, particularly in conservation areas? Why can't we expect developers to contribute to the unique character of the town rather than give us big standard blocks? We are selling our town's future to them. The price should be high.

As we face new developments it is right that we debate the pros and cons. It is important that we get some perspective.

Guildford Museum could play an important role in helping us all appreciate how the town has evolved, what makes it special and unique.

For me, the amazing thing about Guildford is that it is a vibrant modern town close to London with an important university and yet retains the character of a county town.

Getting the balance between the old and new will always be a challenge but we must all strive to get it right.

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