

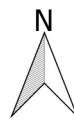
19/P/01460 - Land East Of Ash Railway Station & Foreman Road & South Of, Guildford Road, Ash



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Print Date: 16/12/2020



Not to Scale



GUILDFORD
BOROUGH

19/P/01460, Land East of Ash Railway Station & Forman Road & South of Guildford Road, Ash



Not to scale

App No: 19/P/01460
Appn Type: Full Application
Case Officer: Paul Sherman

8 Wk Deadline: 11/01/2021

Parish: Ash
Agent : Ms C Heeley
AECOM
Midpoint
Alencon Link
Basingstoke
RG21 7PP

Ward: Ash Wharf
Applicant: Mr M Miles
Guildford Borough Council
Millmead House
Millmead
Guildford
Surrey
GU2 4BB

Location: Land east of Ash Railway Station & Foreman Road & south of, Guildford Road, Ash, GU12

Proposal: Construction of a road bridge with associated footways and cycle path connecting Guildford Road / Ash Hill Road Roundabout to a new junction with Foreman Road over the North Downs Railway Line south of the existing Ash level crossing, in addition to associated junction improvements, landscaping mitigation, ecology management measures, flood mitigation measures, and drainage.

Executive Summary

Reason for referral

This application has been referred to the Planning Committee because more than 20 letters of objection have been received, contrary to the Officer's recommendation. In addition, the application has also been referred to the Planning Committee because the applicant is Guildford Borough Council.

Key information

This proposal is for the construction of a new road bridge, with associated pedestrian and cycle paths. The bridge is proposed in order that vehicles will bypass the existing railway crossing at Ash Station which will have resulting safety and highway capacity benefits. Following the construction of the bridge, the level crossing will be closed to vehicular traffic. The southern end of the new route would start on the eastern side of Foreman Road, opposite the entrance to Vyne Walk via a new roundabout. Via a new embankment, the route would then travel north-east where it would cross the railway line over a new bridge, approximately 220 metres to the east of the existing level crossing. Another embankment would be constructed on the northern side of the railway and the route then curves north-west. The northern access to the bridge would be provided by a new, enlarged roundabout at the junction of Guildford Road and Ash Hill Road. The northern section of the route would travel through a residential development site which has already gained planning permission and its design incorporates the bridge access.

The underside of the bridge itself would be 6.7 metres above the existing railway. The road would have a pedestrian and cycle path on both sides, with 1.8 metre high barriers on the outer edge. In addition to this, the northern end of Foreman Road would be remodelled at its junction with Guildford Road / Ash Church Road. The proposal also includes a range of mitigation measures. These include the construction of a number of retention ponds, flood compensation storage areas, extensive tree planting, landscaping and ecological improvements.

It is noted that this proposal is only for the new road bridge. A pedestrian / cycle footbridge crossing of the track is also still planned, however, a formal planning application has not yet been submitted. As will be set out below, this does not in any way weaken the proposal and Network Rail is supportive of this application, even without the inclusion of a footbridge.

While it is noted that the delivery of the proposal and its funding is not a matter for the Local Planning Authority, it is noted that the applicant has now agreed to a standard implementation period of three years. In addition, it is understood that the proposal will be financed through grant funding, as well as various s.106 contributions from local housing developments which have been secured through the planning process over recent years.

Summary of considerations and constraints

It is noted that the existing level crossing at Ash Station results in significant congestion in the area as the downtime for the barrier is extensive. This is likely to increase further as additional services are added to the Reading to Gatwick rail service. The crossing is also identified as one of the most dangerous crossings in the region. The congestion at the crossing is also a possible impediment to the delivery of the housing allocated for Ash and Tongham through the adopted Local Plan.

As part of the Local Plan examination, the importance of a new bridge crossing over the railway line became apparent. The Inspector agreed with the provision of the bridge and it was subsequently included within the requirements for site allocation A31. This application is the first step in delivering this bridge and vitally important infrastructure project.

As will be discussed in the report, the development does result in less than substantial harm to a number of nearby heritage assets. These include the Grade II* listed Ash Manor and Church of St Peter. The proposal would also result in increased noise and disruption to residents who live on or close to the new route. More moderate harm has been identified to the character of the area, ecology, flood risk and trees.

However, the proposal results in many benefits to the wider area which are significant and long lasting. These include improvements to highway safety from the removal of vehicular traffic over the crossing, reduction in traffic congestion, as well as economic, flooding and environmental benefits.

A full assessment of the harm resulting from the proposal, as well as the benefits will be set out in detail at the end of the report. However, in summary Officers are of the opinion that, on balance, the benefits of the proposal do outweigh the identified harms. As such, the balance tips towards approving the proposal.

RECOMMENDATION:

Approve, subject to the conditions set out below and the notification of the application in accordance with Regulation 30 of The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017, which includes the notification of the decision to the Secretary of State.

Approve - subject to the following condition(s) and reason(s) :-

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

Reason: To comply with Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by Section 51(1) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

2. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans:

Drawing Reference	Drawing Title	Drawing Revision
ASHB-ACM-AH-00-DR-CE-00001	Overall Key Plan	P07
ASHB-ACM-AH-00-DR-CE-00002	Overall Site Plan	P08
ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-00001	General Arrangement Sheet 1	P05
ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-00002	General Arrangement Sheet 2	P05
ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-00003	General Arrangement Sheet 3	P05
ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-00004	General Arrangement Sheet 4	P05
ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-00005	General Arrangement Sheet 5	P06
ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-00006	General Arrangement Sheet 6	P06
ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-00007	General Arrangement Sheet 7	P02
ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-00008	General Arrangement Sheet 8	P02
ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-06001	Levels and Contours Sheet 1	P04
ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-06002	Levels and Contours Sheet 2	P04

ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-06003	Levels and Contours Sheet 3	P04
ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-06004	Levels and Contours Sheet 4	P04
ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-06005	Levels and Contours Sheet 5	P05
ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-06006	Levels and Contours Sheet 6	P05
ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-06007	Levels and Contours Sheet 7	P02
ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-06008	Levels and Contours Sheet 8	P02
ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-10001	Longitudinal Section Key Plan	P08
ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-10002	Longitudinal Sections	P08
ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-20001	Cross-Section Plan	P06
ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-20002	Cross-Sections Sheet 1 of 5	P06
ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-20003	Cross-Sections Sheet 2 of 5	P06
ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-20004	Cross-Sections Sheet 3 of 5	P05
ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-20005	Cross-Sections Sheet 4 of 5	P06
ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-20006	Cross-Sections Sheet 5 of 5	P05
ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-20007	Typical Cross-Sections Sheet 1 of 2	P02
ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-20008	Typical Cross-Sections Sheet 2 of 2	P02
ASHB-ACM-XX-30-DR-LA-00001	Landscape General Arrangement Plan	P03
ASHB-AEC-XX-XX-SK-PA-00001	Ash Road Bridge Planning Application Boundary	
ASHB-AEC-XX-XX-SK-CE-00065	Ash Road Bridge Proposed Development	P04

Reason: To ensure that the development is carried out in accordance with the approved plans and in the interests of proper planning.

3. Before the commencement of the development hereby approved, a construction phasing plan shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The phasing plan shall include all phases of the development from site set-up and preparation to the clearance of the site and its restoration. The development shall only be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To ensure that the Local Planning Authority is aware of the various phases of the development and what they will involve. The subject matter of this pre-commencement condition is of sufficient importance to justify it needing to be complied with prior to the commencement of development.

4. The following package of measures shall be implemented prior to opening the road bridge hereby approved to public traffic (save for construction-related traffic) in accordance with details to be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority :-

i) the two bus stops on the northern side of the road bridge, the bus stop on Foreman Road and the bus stop on Ash Church Road, shall be provided with step free access through the use of raised height kerbing and adjusted footway levels. They shall also be provided with bus cages. The southbound bus stop on the road bridge shall be provided with a new flagpole and Ash Church Road will be provided with a replacement bus shelter. Foreman Road shall be provided with new bus shelters and real time passenger information displays.

ii) waiting restrictions shall be provided on the road bridge, Foreman Road and Ash Church Road

iii) a footway/cycleway shall be provided on the western side of the road bridge from the access roundabout with Guildford Road to the access roundabout with Foreman Road and then on the eastern side of Foreman Road to its junction with Ash Church Road.

iv) all informal crossing points, including the implementation of a pedestrian refuge.

v) a 30mph speed limit on Foreman Road shall be provided between the junction with Ash Church Road / Guildford Road and a point just south of The Croft.

vi) traffic calming measures shall be provided on Grange Road.

Reason: In order that the development should not prejudice highway safety nor cause inconvenience to other highway users.

5. Prior to commencement of the road bridge hereby approved a scheme detailing the proposed access arrangements, including the provision of a roundabout, with the amendments to the footways and improvements to pedestrian crossing points on Guildford Road, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

The development shall be constructed in accordance with these approved details and thereafter shall be permanently retained to the satisfaction of the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: In order that the development should not prejudice highway safety nor cause inconvenience to other highway users. The subject matter of this pre-commencement condition is of sufficient importance to justify it needing to be complied with prior to the commencement of development.

6. Prior to commencement of the road bridge hereby approved a scheme detailing the proposed access arrangements, including the provision of a roundabout, with the amendments to the footways and improvements to pedestrian crossing points on Foreman Road shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

The development shall be constructed in accordance with these approved details and thereafter shall be permanently retained to the satisfaction of the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: In order that the development should not prejudice highway safety nor cause inconvenience to other highway users. The subject matter of this pre-commencement condition is of sufficient importance to justify it needing to be complied with prior to the commencement of development.

7. The road bridge hereby approved shall not be opened to public traffic (save for construction-related traffic) unless and until the 7.3m width carriageway, footways, cycleways, highway improvements, drainage, signing, lighting and guarding have been implemented in accordance with a scheme to be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: In order that the development should not prejudice highway safety nor cause inconvenience to other highway users.

8. Prior to the road bridge hereby approved being opened to public traffic (save for construction-related traffic), such roads and junctions shall be provided with visibility zones in accordance with the following drawings: ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-02001, ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-02002, ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-02003, ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-02004, ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-02005, ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-02006, ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-02007 and ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-02008 or such other drawing(s) as are submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Once provided the visibility zones shall be kept permanently clear of any obstruction over 0.6m high.

Reason: In order that the development should not prejudice highway safety nor cause inconvenience to other highway users.

9. Before the commencement of each individual phase of the development (as agreed through condition three) a Construction Transport Management Plan (CTMP) for the relevant phase shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The CTMP shall include details of:
- a) parking for vehicles of site personnel, operatives and visitors
 - b) loading and unloading of plant and materials
 - c) storage of plant and materials
 - d) programme of works (including measures for traffic management)
 - e) provision of boundary hoarding behind any visibility zones
 - f) HGV deliveries and hours of operation
 - g) vehicle routing
 - h) measures to prevent the deposit of materials on the highway
 - i) before and after construction condition surveys of the highway and a commitment to fund the repair of any damage caused
 - j) on-site turning for construction vehicles

Each phase of the development shall only be carried out in accordance with the approved CTMP for that phase.

Reason: In order that the development should not prejudice highway safety nor cause inconvenience to other highway users. The subject matter of this pre-commencement condition is of sufficient importance to justify it needing to be complied with prior to the commencement of development of each phase of the development.

10. Prior to the road bridge hereby approved being opened to public traffic (save for construction-related traffic), a scheme detailing the closure of Ash level crossing to motorised vehicular traffic shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The scheme shall include details for the design of the measures to achieve closure of the Ash level crossing to motorised vehicular traffic and a proposed timetable for the implementation of the proposed works. The proposal shall only be carried out in accordance with the approved scheme. Access across the Ash level crossing shall remain open to non-motorised traffic unless and until an alternative suitable route has been made available in the form of a new footbridge on Guildford Road.

Reason: In order that the development should not prejudice highway safety nor cause inconvenience to other highway users.

11. Prior to the commencement of the development, full details of the design of the road bridge hereby approved and any other highway structures forming part of the development shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall only be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: In order that the development should not prejudice highway safety nor cause inconvenience to other highway users. The subject matter of this pre-commencement condition is of sufficient importance to justify it needing to be complied with prior to the commencement of development.

12. Prior to the first use of the road bridge hereby approved being opened to public traffic (save for construction-related traffic), a monitoring report shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The report shall include details of the timings and locations of traffic surveys, the trigger points for further traffic calming requirements and the proposed measures under Phase 2, equivalent to the measures shown in drawing number ASHB-ACM-AH-00DR-CE-00004). Once approved, the measures agreed within the report shall be implemented via a S278 agreement if the agreed trigger points are reached and upon the request of the County Highway Authority.

Reason: In order that the development should not prejudice highway safety nor cause inconvenience to other highway users.

13. Prior to the commencement of the road bridge hereby approved a scheme detailing the:

i) on-street parking bays on Guildford Road between the Ash level crossing and Ash Hill Road;

ii) the turning head on Guildford Road between the Ash level crossing and Ash Hill Road; and

iii) waiting restrictions on Guildford Road

shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall be constructed in accordance with this approved scheme and thereafter shall be permanently retained to the satisfaction of the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: In order that the development should not prejudice highway safety nor cause inconvenience to other highway users. The subject matter of this pre-commencement condition is of sufficient importance to justify it needing to be complied with prior to the commencement of development of each phase of the development

14. The development hereby permitted shall not commence (or, where it has been agreed that drainage may be phased pursuant to condition three, no development shall take place in any phase of the development) until details of the final design of the surface water drainage scheme (for that phase, where it has been agreed that drainage may be phased pursuant to condition three) have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The design must satisfy the SuDS Hierarchy and be compliant with the national Non-Statutory Technical Standards for SuDS, NPPF and Ministerial Statement on SuDS. The required drainage details shall include:

a) evidence that the proposed final detailed design solution will effectively manage the 1 in 30 & 1 in 100 (+40% allowance for climate change) storm events and during all stages of the development. Associated discharge rates and storage volumes shall be as per the values set out in the submitted documents unless otherwise agreed.

- b) detailed drainage design drawings and calculations to include: a finalised drainage layout detailing the location of drainage elements, pipe diameters, levels, and long and cross sections of each element including details of any flow restrictions and maintenance/risk reducing features (silt traps, inspection chambers etc.).
- c) a plan showing exceedance flows (i.e. during rainfall greater than design events or during blockage) and how property on and off site will be protected.
- d) details of drainage management responsibilities and maintenance regimes for the drainage system.
- e) details of how the drainage system will be protected during construction and how runoff (including any pollutants) from the development site will be managed before the drainage system is operational.

Reason: To ensure the design meets the national Non-Statutory Technical Standards for SuDS and the final drainage design does not increase flood risk on or off site. The subject matter of this pre-commencement condition is of sufficient importance to justify it needing to be complied with prior to the commencement of development.

15. Prior to the road bridge hereby approved being opened to public traffic (save for construction-related traffic), a verification report carried out by a qualified drainage engineer must be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. This must demonstrate that the drainage system has been constructed as per the agreed scheme (or detail any minor variations), provide the details of any management company and state the national grid reference of any key drainage elements (surface water attenuation devices/areas, flow restriction devices and outfalls).

Reason: To ensure the Drainage System is constructed to the National Non-Statutory Technical Standards for SuDS.

16. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the submitted flood risk assessment (ref (Appendix 11A: Flood Risk Assessment dated August 2019 by AECOM Infrastructure & Environment UK Limited) and the following mitigation measures it details:

- compensatory floodplain storage will be provided as set out within the FRA and in the locations shown in figures 3-8 and 5-2.
- a flood relief culvert as shown in Figure 5-2, will be provided and will be a minimum of 5 metres wide and 1.5 metres high. The culvert shall be sufficient to mitigate the effects of the new bridge embankment and ensure that there is no impedance of flood flows that would increase risk elsewhere.
- or as otherwise agreed in writing through condition 17.

These mitigation measures shall be fully implemented prior to the opening of the road bridge hereby approved for use by the public as a highway and subsequently in accordance with the scheme's timing/phasing arrangements. The measures detailed above shall be retained and maintained thereafter throughout the lifetime of the development.

Reason: To prevent flooding elsewhere by ensuring that compensatory storage of flood water is provided and floodwater conveyance is not impeded.

17. The development hereby permitted must not be commenced until such time as detailed designs of the flood relief culvert and flood compensation areas are submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Local Planning Authority. The approved scheme shall be fully implemented and subsequently maintained, in accordance with the scheme's timing/phasing arrangements, or within any other period as may subsequently be agreed, in writing, by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To prevent flooding elsewhere by ensuring that compensatory storage of flood water is provided and floodwater conveyance is not impeded. The subject matter of this pre-commencement condition is of sufficient importance to justify it needing to be complied with prior to the commencement of development.

18. Prior to the road bridge hereby approved being opened to public traffic (save for construction-related traffic), a scheme for the management of the road bridge during flood events shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall only be operated and used in accordance with the agreed details.

Reason: In order to ensure that traffic using the road bridge during flood events can be adequately protected.

19. No development shall take place until the applicant has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation which has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall only be carried out in accordance with the agreed details.

Reason: To allow adequate archaeological investigation before any archaeological remains are disturbed by the approved development. The subject matter of this pre-commencement condition is of sufficient importance to justify it needing to be complied with prior to the commencement of development.

20. No development shall take place in any phase of the development (as agreed through condition three) until a finalised Arboricultural Method Statement (detailing all aspects of construction and staging of works) and a finalised Tree Protection Plan, in accordance with British Standard 5837:2012. in respect of that phase has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development of each phase of the development shall be carried out in accordance with the agreed method statement for that phase and no equipment, machinery or materials shall be brought onto that phase for the purposes of the development until fencing has been erected on that phase in accordance with the Tree Protection Plan.

Within any area fenced in accordance with this condition, nothing shall be stored, placed or disposed of above or below ground, the ground level shall not be altered, no excavations shall be made, nor shall any fires be lit, without the prior written consent of the Local Planning Authority. The fencing shall be maintained in accordance with the approved details, until all equipment, machinery and surplus materials have been moved from that phase of the development. No development shall commence on any phase of the development until a site meeting has taken place with the site manager, the retained consulting arboriculturalist and the Local Planning Authority Tree Officer.

Reason: To protect the trees on site which are to be retained in the interests of the visual amenities of the locality. The subject matter of this pre commencement condition is of sufficient importance to justify it needing to be complied with prior to the commencement of development of any phase.

21. No development shall take place until full details, of both hard and soft landscape proposals, including a schedule of landscape maintenance for a minimum period of 15 years, have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The approved landscape scheme shall be implemented in accordance with the phasing plan approved by condition three prior to the road bridge hereby approved being open to public traffic (save for construction-related traffic) and thereafter retained.

Reason: To ensure the provision, establishment and maintenance of an appropriate landscape scheme in the interests of the visual amenities of the locality. The subject matter of this pre-commencement condition is of sufficient importance to justify it needing to be complied with prior to the commencement of development.

22. All planting, seeding or turfing approved by condition 21 shall be carried out in the first planting and seeding season following the road bridge hereby approved being opened to public traffic (save for construction-related traffic). Any trees or plants which, within a period of five years after planting, are removed, die or become seriously damaged or diseased in the opinion of the Local Planning Authority, shall be replaced in the next available planting sooner with others of similar size, species and number, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure the provision, establishment and maintenance of an appropriate landscape scheme in the interests of the visual amenities of the locality.

23. Before the commencement of each individual phase of the development (as agreed through condition three) a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) for the relevant phase shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Where appropriate to the phase, the CEMP shall include (but is not limited to) the following details:

- avoiding spread of Japanese knotweed;
- a review of construction programme and methodology to consider low noise/low vibration methods (including non-vibratory compaction plant where required);
- the optimal location of equipment on site to minimise noise disturbance;
- the provision of acoustic enclosures around static plant, where necessary;
- mitigation of dust and air quality during construction;
- mitigation of required lighting during construction;
- to control and manage surface water during construction;
- a construction phase flood management plan;
- mitigation of any impacts on ecology;
- education of workers on environmental matters, including ecological receptors within the EIA boundary and their sensitivity;
- specification of a procedure for pollution incidents, including make spill kits available
- protection of nesting birds through timing of vegetation clearance works or ecological survey to determine the absence of nesting birds prior to vegetation clearance; and
- mitigation of impacts on wild mammals by covering all deep holes and trenches overnight and/or the provision of planked escape routes for any trapped wildlife.

The development shall be carried out in strict accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To protect the amenity of surrounding residents and the surroundings in general. The subject matter of this pre-commencement condition is of sufficient importance to justify it needing to be complied with prior to the commencement of development of any phase.

24. Prior to the road bridge hereby approved being opened to public traffic (save for construction-related traffic), details of the proposed lighting shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The proposed lighting shall comply with the Bat Conservation Trust's document 'Bats and Lighting in the UK - Bats and The Built Environment Series' and the Institute of Lighting Professional's Guidance Note 08/18 Bats and Artificial Lighting in the UK (2018). The lighting shall also be designed so as to minimise and reduce the effects of light pollution from the bridge and its associated roads on surrounding residential properties. The lighting shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To limit the impact of light pollution from artificial light on protected species and surrounding residents.

25. Prior to commencement of the development (including any site clearance works) the following information shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority:

- a survey of the site and identified ponds as required in accordance with best practice survey guidelines, undertaken by a suitably qualified ecologist to confirm the continued absence of Great Crested Newts, the findings of the survey to be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority along with any impact avoidance or mitigation.
- an updated badger survey, undertaken by a suitably qualified ecologist, at an appropriate time of year, in accordance with the recommendations of the Ecology Report, the Environmental Statement and Environmental Statement Addendum.
- development activities such as site clearance shall take place outside of bird nesting season (March to August inclusive). If this is not possible and only small areas of dense vegetation are affected, the site should be inspected for active nests by a qualified ecologist immediately prior to clearance works. Any active nests must be left undisturbed with a buffer zone around them, until a qualified ecologist confirms the nest is no longer in use.

The development shall only be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: In order to protect the nature conservation and biodiversity value of the site and in line with National and European protected species legislation, the NPPF and BS 42020:2013 Biodiversity. Code of practice for planning and development. The subject matter of this pre-commencement condition is of sufficient importance to justify it needing to be complied with prior to the commencement of development.

26. Apart from the details that are agreed through condition 25, the development hereby approved shall be carried out in accordance with the mitigation measures detailed in the Ecology Report appendix 10-A of AECOM Environmental Statement Vol II.

Reason: To mitigate against the loss of existing biodiversity and nature habitats and protected species.

27. Prior to commencement of the development hereby approved a Landscape and Ecology Management Plan (LEMP) shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The LEMP shall include the following details:

- how biodiversity enhancements will be secured in perpetuity;
- preparation of a work schedule for how land will be managed in perpetuity, including ongoing monitoring and remedial measures;
- details of the body or organisation responsible for continued management;
- details of legal / funding mechanisms

In addition prior to the commencement of any phase of the development (as agreed through condition three) the following shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority in respect of that phase:

- details of bird boxes to be erected on suitable trees on site (as advised by suitably qualified ecologist);
- details of bat boxes to be erected on suitable trees on site (as advised by suitably qualified ecologist);
- details of logs piles to be created from some of the felled/dead wood on site to provide habitat for stag beetles and other invertebrates, reptiles and amphibians; and
- details of man-made 'refuges' for animals such as hedgehog, toad, ladybirds, bees etc.

The development shall only be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To secure net biodiversity gains. The subject matter of this pre-commencement condition is of sufficient importance to justify it needing to be complied with prior to the commencement of development.

28. Works related to the construction of the development hereby permitted, including works of demolition or preparation prior to building operations, shall not take place other than between the hours of 0800 and 1800 Mondays to Fridays and between 0800 and 1330 Saturdays and at no time on Sundays or Bank or National Holidays or as otherwise agreed with the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To protect the neighbours from noise and disturbance outside the permitted hours during the construction period so far as possible.

Informatives:

1. This statement is provided in accordance with Article 35(2) of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015. Guildford Borough Council seek to take a positive and proactive approach to development proposals. We work with applicants in a positive and proactive manner by:
 - Offering a pre application advice service
 - Where pre-application advice has been sought and that advice has been followed we will advise applicants/agents of any further issues arising during the course of the application
 - Where possible officers will seek minor amendments to overcome issues identified at an early stage in the application process

However, Guildford Borough Council will generally not engage in unnecessary negotiation for fundamentally unacceptable proposals or where significant changes to an application is required.

In this case pre-application advice was sought and provided which addressed initial issues, the application has been submitted in accordance with that advice, however, further issues were identified during the consultation stage of the application. Officers have worked with the applicant to overcome these issues and the proposal is now deemed to be acceptable.

2. Lead Local Flood Authority Informative:

As the proposed site works affect Ordinary Watercourses, Surrey County Council as the Lead Local Flood Authority should be contacted to obtain written Consent prior to the commencement of development. More details are available on the Surrey County Council website.

3. County Highway Authority Informatives:

1. The Highway Authority has no objection to the proposed development, subject to the above conditions but, if it is the applicant's intention to offer any of the roadworks included in the application for adoption as maintainable highways, permission under the Town and Country Planning Act should not be construed as approval to the highway engineering details necessary for inclusion in an Agreement under Section 38 of the Highways Act 1980. Further details about the post-planning adoption of roads may be obtained from the Transportation Development Planning Division of Surrey County Council.

2. All bridges, buildings or apparatus (with the exception of projecting signs) which project over or span the highway may be erected only with the formal approval of the Transportation Development Planning Division of Surrey County Council under Section 177 or 178 of the Highways Act 1980.

3. The permission hereby granted shall not be construed as authority to carry out any works on the highway or any works that may affect a drainage channel/culvert or water course.

The applicant is advised that a permit and, a Section 278 agreement must be obtained from the Highway Authority before any works are carried out on any footway, footpath, carriageway, verge or other land forming part of the highway. All works on the highway will require a permit and an application will need to be submitted to the County Council's Street Works Team up to 3 months in advance of the intended start date, depending on the scale of the works proposed and the classification of the road. Please see

<http://www.surreycc.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/road-permits-and-licences/the-traffic-management-permit-scheme>.

The applicant is also advised that Consent may be required under Section 23 of the Land Drainage Act 1991. Please see

www.surreycc.gov.uk/people-and-community/emergency-planning-and-community-safety/flooding-advice.

4. The developer is advised that Public Footpath 356 crosses the application site and it is an offence to obstruct or divert the route of a right of way unless carried out in complete accordance with appropriate legislation.

5. The developer is advised that as part of the detailed design of the highway works required by the above condition(s), the County Highway Authority may require necessary accommodation works to street lights, road signs, road markings, highway drainage, surface covers, street trees, highway verges, highway surfaces, surface edge restraints and any other street furniture/equipment.

6. Section 59 of the Highways Act permits the Highway Authority to charge developers for damage caused by excessive weight and movements of vehicles to and from a site. The Highway Authority will pass on the cost of any excess repairs compared to normal maintenance costs to the applicant/organisation responsible for the damage.

7. The scheme to implement waiting restrictions or other relevant works to regulate or restrict the operation of the highway shall first require a Traffic Regulation Order or Notice prior to use. The alteration of the Traffic Regulation Order or creation of a new Order or Notice is a separate statutory procedure which must be processed at the applicant's expense prior to any alterations being made. In the event that the implementation of waiting restrictions or other works requiring an Order or Notice is not successful due to unresolved objections the applicant shall submit an alternative scheme to the Local Planning Authority for its approval prior to first occupation of the development. Any alternative scheme or works shall be implemented prior to the occupation of any dwellings to the satisfaction of the Local Planning Authority.

8. The applicant is advised that any unauthorised development on or over highway land is an actionable unauthorised obstruction in the absence of a Stopping Up Order. Statutory undertakers retain their rights of access to their plant and to secure compensation for diversion of plant should they choose to divert.

9. The submitted details shall meet the Highway Authorities requirements for Technical Approval of structures, as based on the requirements set out in DMRB document CG 300. Further guidance on the approval process can be sought from the Highway Authority.

10. The developer is advised that the detail in the above conditions should be implemented in broad accordance with the following plans:

- bus stop improvements under condition 4 (i) - drawing number ASHB-AEC-XX-XX-SK-DR-00002
- waiting restrictions under condition 4 (ii) - drawing number ASHB-ACM-AH-00-DR-CE-00002
- on-street parking bays under condition 4 (iii) - drawing number ASHB-ACM-AH-00-DR-CE-00002
- provision of turning head under condition 4 (iv) - drawing number ASHB-ACM-AH-00-DR-CE-00002
- footway/cycleway under condition 4 (v) - drawing number ASHB-AM-AH-01-DR-CE-00001, ASHB-ACM-AH-00-DR-CE-00002, and ASHB-AM-AH-01-DR-CE-00006
- informal crossing points under condition 4 (vi) - drawing number ASHB-ACM-AH-00-DR-CE-00002
- 30mph speed limit under condition 4 (vii) - drawing number ASHB-AM-AH-00-DR-CE-00004
- traffic calming measures under condition 4 (viii) - drawing number ASHB-ACM-AH-00DR-CE-00004
- access arrangements to Guildford Road under condition 5 - drawing number ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-00006
- access arrangements to Foreman Road under condition 6 - drawing number ASHB-AM-AH-01-DR-CE-00002
- details under condition 7 - drawing number ASHB-ACM-AH-00-DR-CE-00002
- details under condition 8 - drawing number ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-02001, ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-02002, ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-02003, ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-02004, ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-02005, ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-02006, ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-02007 and ASHB-ACM-AH-01-DR-CE-02008
- details under condition 12 - drawing number ASHB-ACM-AH-00DR-CE-00004

4. Ecology

1. The applicant is advised that to ensure the site remains unsuitable for reptiles to repopulate the site at the current time and during the construction phase, the habitat should be maintained as follows:

- clearance of tall vegetation should be undertaken using a strimmer or brush cutter with all cuttings raked and removed the same day. Cutting will only be undertaken in a phased way which may either include:
 - cutting vegetation to a height of no less than 30mm, clearing no more than one third of the site in anyone day or;
 - cutting vegetation over three consecutive days to a height of no less than 150mm at the first cut, 75mm at the second cut and 30mm at the third cut
- following removal of tall vegetation using the methods outlined above, remaining vegetation will be maintained at a height of 30mm through regular mowing or strimming to discourage common reptiles from returning.

- ground clearance of any remaining low vegetation (if required) and any ground works will only be undertaken following the works outlined above.

Further, any trenches left overnight should be covered or provided with ramps to prevent common reptiles/amphibians from becoming trapped. Any building materials such as bricks, stone etc. will be stored on pallets to discourage reptiles from using them as shelter. Any demolition materials will be stored in skips or similar containers rather than in piles on ground.

Should any Reptiles be discovered during construction, which are likely to be affected by the development, the applicant will seek the advice of a suitably qualified and experienced ecologist and works will only proceed in accordance with the advice they provide.

2. Based on the applicant's advice that the surveys are still in date, and that on site habitats have not changed to such an extent that further survey work is required. The applicant is advised that they take on the inherent liability that should a European Protected Species be found during works then they will have to stop works and apply for an EPS licence, which may also require mitigation or compensation. The applicant is reminded that if protected species are identified, work will cease and the advice of a suitably qualified ecologist sought.

5. Countryside Access Officer - Surrey County Council informative:
Safe public access to public footpath no. 356 must be maintained at all times. If this is not possible whilst work is in progress then an official temporary closure order will be necessary. Notice, of not less than 6 weeks, must be given and the cost is to be borne by the applicant.
6. As regards the conditions of this approval, "road bridge" means the development hereby approved by this planning permission.

Officer's Report

Site description

The application site is 9.31 hectares of land to the east of Ash. The site is bound to the north by the A323 Guildford Road and to the west by Foreman Road. To the west and south of the application site are paddocks, however, beyond them is Harpers Road to the east and Ash Green Road to the south. The Reading to Gatwick rail line bisects the site, running in a north-west / south-east direction and Public Right of Way (PRoW) 356, crosses it from east to west. At the moment, the site is formed of paddocks, with no permanent built structures. The topography of the site to the south of the railway line is relatively flat; however immediately to the north of the railway line the land rises towards the A323 Guildford Road / Ash Hill Road roundabout. The site forms part of site allocation A31 which was allocated for housing and a new road and footbridge through the Local Plan: Strategy and Sites (LPSS). As a result of the allocation, the site also now forms part of the urban area of Ash and Tongham.

According to the Environment Agency flood risk maps the site is located within flood zone one which is land with an annual 0.1 percent probability of river flooding. However, it is very important to note that following detailed flood modelling undertaken by the applicant it has been found that part of the site is actually in flood zone 3b. This is the functional flood plain where water flows through and is stored during times of flood. This is mainly due to a small stream travelling through the site. This matter will be discussed in greater detail below. As such, the application site includes areas of all flood zones.

The land abutting the site includes paddocks to the south and east. These paddocks are currently free from permanent development, but also fall within the A31 allocation, so their character may change in the short to medium term. Abutting to the north is a residential development site which is currently being built out, having been approved by the Council in 2020. Abutting the north-western corner of the plot is a gypsy and traveller site which contains a number of pitches and ancillary buildings and land. In terms of the wider surrounding area to the west of the site is the urban area of Ash which includes a variety of commercial, social and residential uses. These include the dwellings on the western and northern sides of Foreman Road and Guildford Road which face towards the application site. To the east, Harpers Road contains a number of detached dwellings.

There are no listed buildings located within the application site, and it is not located within a conservation area. However, there are a number of heritage assets in the immediate vicinity of the site. These include the Ash Manor complex to the south of the site which includes a Grade II* listed building and a number of Grade II listed buildings and Ashe Grange to the south-west which is Grade II listed. The Church of St Peter to the west of the site is also Grade II* listed. There are a number of other designated and non-designated assets in the surroundings which will be discussed in greater detail in the report.

There are also a number of trees on and around the site which are protected by Tree Preservation Orders (TPO). These include trees along Foreman Road, Guildford Road (to the west of Ash station) and a number of others in the south-east corner of the site.

Proposal

Construction of a road bridge with associated footways and cycle path connecting Guildford Road / Ash Hill Road roundabout to a new junction with Foreman Road over the North Downs Railway Line south of the existing Ash level crossing, in addition to associated junction improvements, landscaping mitigation, ecology management measures, flood mitigation measures, and drainage.

As noted in the above description, this proposal is for the construction of a new road bridge, with associated pedestrian and cycle paths. The bridge is proposed in order that vehicles will bypass the existing railway crossing at Ash Station which will have resulting safety and highway capacity benefits. Following the construction of the bridge, the level crossing will be closed to vehicular traffic. Once a new pedestrian footbridge has been constructed, pedestrian access over the level crossing will also cease.

The southern end of the proposed new road bridge would start on the eastern side of Foreman Road, opposite the entrance to Vyne Walk. This would consist of the construction of a new roundabout which will have five arms: two serving north-south movements along Foreman Road, one serving Vyne Walk, one serving a potential development site also within allocation A31 and one serving the new route. Via a new embankment the route would then travel north-east where it would cross the railway line over a new bridge, approximately 220 metres to the south-east of the existing level crossing. Another embankment would be constructed on the northern side of the railway and the route then curves north-east. The northern access to the bridge would be provided by a new, enlarged roundabout at the junction of Guildford Road and Ash Hill Road. The northern section of the route would travel through a residential development site which has already gained planning permission and its design incorporates the bridge access.

The underside of the bridge itself would be approximately 6.7 metres above the existing railway. The embankment would be approximately eight metres high. The road would have a pedestrian and cycle path on both sides, with 1.8 metre high barriers on the outer edge.

Lighting columns would be installed on either side of the road. In addition to this, the northern end of Foreman Road would be remodelled at its junction with Guildford Road / Ash Church Road. The detailed specification of the proposal will be set out later in the report.

The proposal also includes a range of mitigation measures. These include the construction of a number of retention ponds, flood compensation storage areas, extensive tree planting, landscaping and ecological improvements.

It is noted that although this proposal does include a cycle/footway alongside the new road, it does not include a separate pedestrian footbridge and as such, for the time being pedestrians will still be able to pass over the level crossing. The benefits of, and requirements for the road bridge are not dependent on the delivery of a footbridge, however, it is expected that a separate application for this is likely to be submitted in due course.

Relevant planning history

The application site incorporates a number of other sites which have recently been the subject of planning applications.

Land south of Guildford Road, Ash:

The approved reserved matters application noted below has been designed to incorporate elements of the northern elements of the proposed scheme. This includes the new roundabout at the junction of Guildford Road and Ash Hill Road and the access from this roundabout to the northern end of the proposed bridge.

Reference:	Description:	Decision Summary:	Appeal:
16/P/01679	Outline application for up to 154 dwellings, access, parking, open space, landscaping and balancing pond.	Granted 01.05.2019	N/A
19/P/02197	Approval of reserved matters pursuant to outline planning permission 16/P/01679 for 154 units, including 54 affordable units with associated internal access, streets, car parking and landscaping. Matters to be considered: Appearance, Landscaping, Layout, Scale and the details of accesses within the site. (Amended plans received 05.03.2020 with revised landscaping, house design, street design, refuse collection strategy and parking).	Granted 29.07.2020	N/A

Land east of Foreman Road, Ash:

The application below was refused permission in 2015 and was not appealed. It has no impact on the bridge or its route and is noted for information only.

Reference:	Description:	Decision Summary:	Appeal:
14/P/01154	Proposed erection of 55 dwellings with associated access, car parking and open space.	Refused 07.09.2015	N/A

Consultations

Statutory consultees

County Highway Authority, Surrey County Council: The overall conclusion reached by the County Highway Authority (CHA) is that the road bridge would result in an improvement to surrounding junctions as trips are re-distributed from rural lanes to the new A323. The CHA note that the transport assessment provided with the planning application provided a thorough assessment of the impact of the proposal on the surrounding highway network and also looked at the impact on the junctions in future years, with committed development, if the road bridge was not implemented. The assessment also took into account the likely increase in downtime of the barriers at the level crossing which are proposed by Network Rail/Great Western Railway. It is anticipated that the provision of the road bridge will result in an improvement to journey time as vehicles will clearly not be hindered by the closure of the level crossing. The proposal includes the implementation of a new footway/cycleway on the road bridge and leading approach roads, the new bridge crossing, and informal pedestrian crossings, all of which connect existing and new residential dwellings to the new and the existing pedestrian and cycle route network. Bus stops will be re-located and provided with high quality infrastructure, including where necessary new shelters, poles, flags, lighting, timetables cases and real time passenger information. This view is subject to the imposition of a wide range of conditions and other measures including ensuring the stopping up of the highway to remove the existing highway rights and to prevent public usage by vehicular traffic at the level crossing on Guildford Road.

Environment Agency: No objections raised, subject to conditions. The Environment Agency (EA) confirm that the submitted Flood Risk Assessment and the associated modelling has been reviewed. They note that the site is shown to lie within Flood Zone 1 in accordance with our published flood map for planning. However, the detailed modelling carried out by the applicant has identified the site to lie within Flood Zone 3b – functional floodplain. The EA confirm that the modelling identifies both pre and post development flood risk scenarios and includes an assessment of climate change. The conditions recommended by the EA will be attached to any approval.

Lead Local Flood Authority, Surrey County Council: No objections raised, subject to standard conditions and informatives.

Natural England: Natural England does not consider that this application will result in an adverse effect on the integrity of Thursley, Ash, Pirbright and Chobham Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA) and therefore has no comments to make.

Historic England: A new road bridge in its presently proposed location would insert a major new piece of infrastructure into the landscape, which would have a negative impact on the rural setting of Ash Manor and Old Manor Cottage. Historic England go on to state that 'given the distance from the manor and the proposed mitigation measures, we do not consider the harm would be substantial. However, considering less-than-substantial harm as a spectrum, we consider the degree of harm caused to the highly graded asset and its associated complex of listed structures is in the upper half of this range. The Authority must weigh the harm to highly graded assets, giving great weight to this impact, and should not allow the scheme unless you are confident that public benefits of the proposals outweigh that harm, as required by paragraph 196 of the NPPF'.

Thames Water: No objections raised and the proposal does not impact on the Thames Water network.

County Archaeologist, Surrey County Council: No objections raised, subject to a condition. The County Archaeologist notes that the site has a moderate archaeological potential for the later prehistoric, Roman and Medieval periods and suggests that further archaeological works are required in order to properly assess the nature and extent of any archaeology that may be present. In the first instance this should comprise of a geophysical survey followed by an evaluation trial trenching exercise, which will aim to rapidly establish whether archaeological assets are present. The results of the evaluation will enable suitable mitigation measures to be developed. It is not necessary for the archaeological work to be undertaken in advance of any planning permission; but securing the archaeological work as a condition of any planning permission is an acceptable and proportionate response.

Network Rail: Network Rail (NR) recognises that this is a unique and one-off opportunity to work collaboratively to remove risk to both highway and rail users, as well as meeting the housing development plans required of GBC in their local plan. We are actively working together to progress the footbridge proposals and closure of the level crossing. Network Rail therefore supports the delivery of the road bridge scheme and the associated planning application, which, upon completion, will allow for Guildford Road (A323) to be closed to vehicles and construction of a footbridge to commence. Should for any reason, the road bridge, footbridge and level crossing project not be taken forward, NR's position remains that the proposed housing developments in Ash, alongside the long-anticipated and welcomed increase in train services on the North Downs Line by Great Western Railway, will introduce an increased safety risk to those using the level crossing that we should collectively seek to mitigate.

Internal consultees

Head of Environmental Health and Licensing: No objections raised subject to conditions to cover noise and air quality. Advises that DEFRA has published a strategic noise map to help transport authorities identify and prioritise relevant local action on noise. Any noise arising from major road sources lies with the Highway Authority to deal with. Light pollution from additional street lighting and vehicle headlights is not covered by the statutory nuisance provisions of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, however, no objections raised to the lighting associated with the proposal. On air pollution it is noted that the ES report addresses construction phase fugitive dust emissions and operational traffic emissions and explains that the potential air quality benefits from reduced congestion is a significant enhancement of the scheme. Traffic data from committed developments has been included in the modelling and assessment for the future baseline, therefore the cumulative impact has been addressed. A comprehensive Construction Environmental Management Plan to be the subject of a condition to include dust mitigation and noise.

Non-statutory consultees

Countryside Access Officer, Surrey County Council: No objections raised.

Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Officer: Although substantial works are involved in the proposed road bridge, as they will be a considerable distance from the Surrey Hills AONB there would be no impact upon its setting.

Surrey Wildlife Trust: No objections raised, subject to conditions. Following initial concerns raised by Surrey Wildlife Trust (SWT) the applicant has submitted additional information and clarification. SWT believe that the Local Planning Authority has adequate information to determine the application, subject to the recommended conditions.

Surrey Police: No objections raised.

Parish Council

Ash Parish Council: Note support in principle. However, the following concerns are noted:

- ensuring that Ash Manor Grade II* listed building is protected from works;
- adequate signage required to restrict heavy goods vehicles travelling from the Hogs Back through Ash Green;
- proactive mitigation required to avoid rat running, not just monitoring by SCC; and
- ensure adequate drainage to mitigate impact on local water table.

Amenity groups/Residents associations

Ash Green Residents Association (AGRA): Raise objection on the following grounds:

- concerns regarding increased traffic congestion;
- local traffic has not been adequately modelled [Officer Note: This has now been addressed by the County Highway Authority];
- concerns that an application for a footbridge has not yet been submitted [Officer Note: As acknowledged by Network Rail and the County Highway Authority, the current proposal is not predicated on the delivery of a footbridge at the same time];
- proposal is out of scale and proportion with its surroundings;
- adverse visual impact;
- adverse impact on the setting of neighbouring listed buildings;
- impact on flooding and groundwater [Officer Note: No objections have been raised by either the Environment Agency or the Lead Local Flood Authority];
- concerns regarding the financing of the project [Officer Note: This is not a material planning consideration] and
- it is claimed that at the October EGM of the Ash Green Residents Association which was attended by over 60 people only three residents voted in favour of the bridge. AGRA infer that this clearly shows that the vast majority object to it. [Officer Note: While the inference is that the majority of attendees were against the proposal, this is not evidenced in the submission. Therefore, caution should be used when deciding the weight to be attached to this comment. It is noted that extensive public consultation has been carried out for the planning application and all responses received are summarised below].

Third party comments

62 letters of representation have been received raising the following objections and concerns:

- the proposal is more to do with providing access to housing sites than solving the issues with the level crossing;
- the proposal does not address traffic flow changes in the surrounding area [Officer Note: This has now been addressed by the County Highway Authority];
- creation of new rat-runs and increased traffic coming through Ash as a bypass [Officer Note: This has now been addressed by the County Highway Authority];
- the footbridge may never be built [Officer Note: As acknowledged by Network Rail and the County Highway Authority, the current proposal is not predicated on the delivery of a footbridge at the same time. Pedestrian access across the level crossing would remain until such time that a footbridge has been approved and become operational];
- the environmental studies should take into account the housing which would follow from this proposal;
- increased traffic and congestion by taking vehicles which should be using A31;
- highway safety concerns;
- adverse impact on the Thames Basin Heaths SPA [Officer Note: Natural England have confirmed that they have no concerns regarding this element of the proposal];
- poor road layout;
- adverse impact on appearance of the area;
- flooding concerns [Officer Note: No objections have been raised by either the Environment Agency or the Lead Local Flood Authority];
- the implementation period should not be extended from three to five years as requested by the applicant. After the end of the three year period the applicant can seek an extension of time [Officer Note: The Local Planning Authority has recommended a three year permission. There are no provisions to extend the life of a permission. If the scheme is not implemented within the first three years, the only option open to the applicant would be to resubmit a fresh planning application];
- land take for water attenuation is excessive and unjustified;
- no plans for additional car parking at Ash Station [Officer Note: Additional car parking for Ash Station is not required to make this application acceptable in planning terms. It is also outside of the remit and control of the applicant];
- red line boundary includes land which includes a shared access to other properties [Officer Note: The applicant has served notice on the owners of all land within the red line boundary. This is a civil matter between the parties involved];
- concerns about the design of the proposed road/cycle/pedestrian layout
- adverse impact on Ash Manor and its listed buildings;
- impact on the foundations of properties in Ash Manor;
- increased pollution;
- impact on views to and from the AONB [Officer Note: No objections have been raised by the Surrey Hills AONB Officer];
- adverse impact on residential amenity from noise, light pollution etc;
- new route is not required;
- adverse impact on ecology and wildlife;
- increased risk of flooding to neighbouring properties;
- the flood mitigation is too large and could be achieved with a much smaller land take. The flood mitigation should be redesigned;
- a bridge should be provided directly above the level crossing [Officer Note: This would not be possible];

- inadequate consultation carried out by the applicant before submission of the application [Officer Note: This is a matter for the applicant and it does not impact on the Local Planning Authority's ability to determine the application. The Local Planning Authority has advertised the proposal in the local press, site notices have been erected and letters have been sent to some surrounding residents. The notification of the application is in accordance with planning legislation];
- the costs of the bridge have been under estimated / it is not value for money [Officer Note: This is not a material planning consideration]; and
- will cause disruption during construction.

14 letters of support have been received outlining the following positive comments:

- having an A road with a level crossing is no good, the application will resolve that and will allow traffic to flow;
- less traffic along schools in Shaw Field Road, people cause congestion avoiding the Guildford Road, this bridge will be for the benefit for all in Ash;
- lives will now be saved throughout the life of this bridge, as ambulances can now efficiently travel across the railway line and railway crossing accidents will be reduced
- will help to reduce levels of pollution; and
- result in less noise.

One letter has been received with a neutral view on the proposal. It was noted that more trees should be planted along the new route.

Planning policies

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF):

Chapter 2. Achieving sustainable development

Chapter 4. Decision-making

Chapter 6. Building a strong, competitive economy

Chapter 8. Promoting healthy and safe communities

Chapter 9. Promoting sustainable transport

Chapter 11. Make an efficient use of land

Chapter 12. Achieving well-designed places

Chapter 14. Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change

Chapter 15. Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

Chapter 16. Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

Planning Practice Guidance

Noise Policy Statement for England 2010

Manual for Streets and Design for Roads and Bridges

South East Plan 2009:

Policy NRM6 Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area

Guildford Borough Local Plan: Strategy and Sites 2015-2034:

The Guildford Borough Local Plan: Strategy and Sites 2015-2034 was adopted by the Council on 25 April 2019. The policies considered relevant to this proposal are set out below.

Policy S1 Presumption in favour of sustainable development
Policy S2 Planning for the borough - our spatial strategy
Policy P4 Flooding, flood risk and groundwater protection zones
Policy P5 Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area
Policy D1 Place shaping
Policy D2 Sustainable design, construction and energy
Policy D3 Historic environment
Policy ID1 Infrastructure and delivery
Policy ID3 Sustainable transport for new developments
Policy ID4 Green and blue infrastructure

Guildford Borough Local Plan 2003 (as saved by CLG Direction 24 September 2007):

Although the Council has now adopted the Guildford Borough Local Plan: Strategy and Sites 2015-2034 (LPSS), some policies of the saved Local Plan 2003 continue to be relevant to the assessment of planning applications and carry full weight. The extant policies which are relevant to this proposal are set out below.

Policy G1 General standards of development
Policy G5 Design code
Policy HE4 New development which affects the setting of a listed building
Policy NE4 Species protection

Supplementary planning documents:

Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area Avoidance Strategy SPD
Climate Change, Sustainable Design, Construction and Energy SPD
Planning Contributions SPD

Planning considerations

The main planning considerations in this case are:

- background and the principle of development
- EIA development
- impact on heritage assets
- landscape and visual impact on the surroundings
- impact on neighbouring amenity
- highway considerations
- impact on trees and vegetation
- impact on ecology
- impact on air quality
- the impact on flood risk and the proposed surface water drainage strategy
- heritage harm v public benefits balancing exercise
- final balancing exercise

Background and the principle of development

As part of the evidence base for the LPSS the issue of congestion and highway safety issues around Ash and in particular in the vicinity of the level crossing were highlighted in the Council's Infrastructure Delivery Plan (December 2017). Paragraph 2.85 stated that:

'In the west of the borough, incidents on the A331 Blackwater Valley Route and the A31 Hog's Back can cause rat-running on roads in Ash and Tongham, particularly on Oxenden Road and Manor Road. Both these roads are used to access the A331 and are congested at peak times, particularly the approaches to the A331 roundabout and the Greyhound roundabout respectively. The level crossing on the A323 Ash Church Road by Ash Station also experiences build up of traffic at peak times which results in traffic rat-running on inappropriate roads to avoid the crossing. Although the road carries significant volumes of traffic, this is considered to be limited by the presence of the level crossing, which is closed around eight times each hour, which can amount to up to 25 minutes each hour. The downtimes are predicted by Network Rail to increase significantly within the Local Plan period and is a current safety issue for them.'

From the Infrastructure Delivery Plan, one of the Local Road Network infrastructure requirements is noted as being the delivery of a 'new road bridge and footbridge scheme to enable level crossing closure on A323 Guildford Road adjacent to Ash railway station'. The scheme also forms part of the Guildford Borough Transport Strategy 2017.

As the LPSS progressed, the new road bridge was included as a fundamental component of allocation A31 (previously referred to as A29). This would assist in resolving the issues noted above with the existing level crossing, but would also help to facilitate the construction of the 1,750 dwellings due to be delivered as part of the allocation. The Inspector who examined the Local Plan noted the following about the allocation and the bridge scheme in his final report:

'This area is allocated for about 1,750 homes including some self-build and custom plots. The land is beyond the Green Belt and would amount to an extension to the urban area of Ash and Tongham. The key issue is the effect on the highway network.'

There are existing capacity issues arising from congestion at the A31/A331 junction, the A323/A331 junction and A323 Guildford Road. The Strategic Highway Assessment Report identified that Local Plan growth could exacerbate existing conditions around Ash and Tongham, and the aim of the Guildford Borough Transport Strategy is to accommodate the traffic impacts of this allocation through a number of infrastructure projects, to limit the amount of development-related traffic on unsuitable roads and bring traffic back onto the principal A roads. Policy A29 contains a requirement for the proposed road layout for these sites to provide connections between the various developments to maximise accessibility and help alleviate congestion on the A323 corridor.'

The level crossing at Ash on the A323 is closed for about 20 minutes in every hour and 127 times a day (on November 2016 figures). Network Rail identifies the crossing as being within the top 20% of crossings in terms of safety risk and has raised safety concerns regarding the impact of the scale of development from sites which are represented in Policy A29 on the operation of the level crossing at Ash railway station. Network Rail, Guildford Borough Council and Surrey County Council all consider that an alternative means of access over the railway for both vehicular and non-motorised users should be provided to facilitate further development in this area.'

The removal of the level crossing and the provision of a new bridge would considerably reduce delay and lessen rat-running by keeping traffic on the A323. Policy A29 contains a requirement to make land available and provide a new bridge for the A323 and associated footbridge.'

A preferred layout has been produced, designed and costed, and funding sources have been identified including Network Rail, Homes England and various development sites. On the basis of all the evidence, the provision of this bridge is necessary for the allocation to proceed and this aspect of the policy is sound'.

Following the Inspector's conclusions, the Local Plan has been adopted, with allocation A31 having the following two requirements (inter alia):

- 'land and provision of a new road bridge which will form part of the A323 Guildford Road, with an associated footbridge, to enable the closure of the level crossing on the A323 Guildford Road, adjacent to Ash railway station; [and]
- proposed road layout or layouts to provide connections between both the individual development sites within this site allocation and between Ash Lodge Drive and Foreman Road, providing a through road connection between Ash Lodge Drive and Foreman Road, in order to maximise access'.

The scheme is also one of the Local Road Network improvements set out in the LPSS's Infrastructure Schedule (Appendix 6).

Due to the complex nature of the development and the multiple land ownerships involved, Guildford Borough Council, along with its partners have sought to design a new road bridge over the railway line which would allow the closure of the level crossing at Ash Station to vehicular traffic. It is also noted that development sites which incorporate part of the bridge and its associated infrastructure have already been designed and laid out to take account of the proposal. It is acknowledged that the current proposal does not include a pedestrian footbridge, which it is acknowledged forms part of the overall package of works required through the allocation. It is noted that the Council and its partners, including Network Rail, are working on a scheme to deliver a footbridge, which is due to come forward in the short term. Notwithstanding this, Network Rail in their response to this application have formally stated their support for this element of the overall scheme (i.e. just the new road bridge). As such, although the two elements of the scheme are inextricably linked, the acceptability of the road bridge is not predicated on the delivery of a footbridge at the same time. Therefore, the partial delivery of the scheme is not a concern and is not considered to be in conflict with the requirements of the allocation. While the ultimate aim is the complete removal of the level crossing, its closure to vehicular traffic is still likely to bring benefits in terms of highway safety and reducing congestion on the local road network.

Given the comments of the Inspector and the requirements of allocation A31, together with the fact that the site is located within the urban area, the principle of this development has already been accepted. This must be given the necessary weight in the assessment.

Notwithstanding the above, it is fully acknowledged that the site is in a sensitive location, relatively close to existing and planned residential properties, a range of heritage assets (including Grade II* listed buildings), and has potential flooding, ecological, transport and amenity impacts. All of these issues, impacts and benefits will be considered in detail below and the final section of this report will weigh the issues together in order to offer a conclusion.

While the funding of the proposal is not a matter for the Local Planning Authority it is understood that funding will be secured through grants, as well as the use of s.106 contributions which have been secured for this project over the last number of years. The applicant has also now agreed to a standard implementation period of three years, as opposed to the longer period originally proposed. There is no need for need for a s106 obligation as part of this proposal as this is normally only needed to secure infrastructure. In this instance, the proposal is for the delivery of infrastructure itself.

EIA development

The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 determines whether there is a requirement for an EIA based on whether the development in question is EIA development, as defined by the 2017 Regs. The 2017 Regs set out where the development in question is development (other than 'exempt development') of a description mentioned in column 1 of the table in Schedule 2, it is only EIA development if the development is to be carried out in a 'sensitive area' or if the proposed development meets or exceeds the relevant size threshold specified in column 2 of the table in Schedule 2 and is likely to have significant effects on the environment by virtue of factors such as its nature, size and location.

The proposal comprises a new road and therefore is an Infrastructure Project and falls within category 10 (f) of Schedule 2. The applicant has concluded that the potential for likely significant environmental effects as a result of the proposed development cannot be entirely ruled out. On this basis the applicant has undertaken an EIA and has submitted an Environmental Statement as part of this planning application. The Planning Practice Guidance advises that when an applicant decides that an Environmental Impact Assessment will be required and submits an Environmental Statement with an application without having obtained a screening opinion, then for the purposes of the 2017 Regulations the application is classified as an EIA application and must be treated as such by the Local Planning Authority. The ES provides an important part of the environmental information that the Local Planning Authority must consider in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017, as amended when determining the planning application. It informs the decision maker of the likely significant environmental effects of the proposed development, both during construction and on completion, and identifies any measures to prevent, reduce or offset any significant effects on the environment, along with representations from consultation bodies and the public.

It should also be noted that the Environmental Statement sets out the various alternative routes that were considered by the applicant, as well as a 'do nothing' scenario. The applicant notes that 'the design approach has been iterative, whereby design options and the results of technical analysis have been interpreted and refinements have been made...This consideration of the alternatives has shown that the preferred option, which has been taken forward as the proposed development, is the best option in terms of minimising route length and land take and limiting departures from highway design standards. The proposed development would alleviate and reduce current congestion issues at the Ash station level crossing, increase the safety of users [and] mitigate against future housing development impacts..., as well as providing economic benefits to the surrounding area serviced by the proposed development'. Given the comments raised by the Inspector as part of the Local Plan hearing a 'do nothing' scenario has also not been considered as a feasible option.

The submitted Environmental Statement was independently reviewed by Nicholas Pearson Associates. This identified some potential areas for clarification in each of the specialist topic areas. The comments provided by Nicholas Pearson have been addressed by the applicant within the Environmental Statement Addendum (June 2020) and ES Errata. The ES Addendum also considers the environmental effects of a potential new footbridge in combination with the proposed development and covers the following topics: Landscape and Visual Impact; Air Quality; Noise and vibration; Water and Hydrology; Traffic and Transport; Cultural Heritage; Ecology and Biodiversity; Water and Hydrology; People and Communities; Geology and soils; and Residual Effects and Mitigation.

The Environmental Statement Addendum (June 2020) has also been independently reviewed by Nicholas Pearson Associates.

This acknowledges the ES Addendum now includes the scenario in which the footbridge is not progressed and has been appropriately considered in relation to the EIA Regs within each topic chapter. The ES Addendum also includes how the level crossing would be closed once the footbridge is installed. The ES Addendum provides further information regarding the lighting strategy and the potential impact on bats. It also includes a new section (Chapter 15 Geology and Soils) addressing why land contamination is scoped out of the ES and assesses the potential impacts on soil resources and agricultural land. Small typographical errors have also been corrected.

Following the submission of the additional information set out above, Nicholas Pearson have advised that the ES addendum has address the concerns covered in the ES review. The ES Addendum , Figures and Appendices and ES Errata provide sufficient information that when considered with the 2019 Ash Road Bridge ES constitutes an ES under the EIA Regulations. The environmental information contained in the ES has been considered in assessing the application and this report reflects that assessment.

Impact on heritage assets

Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 states that 'in considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the local planning authority or, as the case may be, the Secretary of State shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.'

It is one of the core principles of the NPPF that heritage assets should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance. Chapter 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework at paragraphs 189 - 199 sets out the framework for decision making in planning applications relating to heritage assets and this application takes account of the relevant considerations in these paragraphs. Paragraph 190 sets out that 'local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise any conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal'.

Paragraph 193 of the NPPF states that 'when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance'. Paragraph 194 goes on to note that 'any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification'.

In terms of heritage assets there is a complex of listed buildings to the south of the application site, which is known as Ash Manor. The most significant building within the complex, a Grade II* listed dwelling (which is now split into two properties known as Ash Manor and Old Manor Cottage) is the closest to the application site. The building is believed to have been occupied since the thirteenth century and part of a medieval moat survives, as well as medieval fabric within the house with subsequent later phases possibly from the sixteenth and mid seventeenth centuries. The boundary of the application site is located approximately 95 metres to the north of the Grade II* listed building. The physical infrastructure comprising the bridge and its approach at its closest point would be approximately 195 metres away.

To the south of this building (but within the complex), and consequently further away from the proposal, are two Grade II listed buildings which are divided into a number of dwellings known as Ash Manor Oast, The Oast House and Oak Barn. These are former farm and agricultural buildings which have been converted to residences but their former uses are easily read as is the relationship with the manor house.

Approximately 196 metres to the south-west of the application site, is another Grade II listed building named Ashe Grange. This property is separate from Ash Manor and is less exposed to the proposal given the significant amount of screening around its boundaries. In addition to these, there are a number of other heritage assets which may be impacted by the proposal. These are set out below:

- Church of St Peter – Grade II*
- Hartshorn – Grade II
- Memorial Chapel – Grade II
- Ashmead – Grade II
- The Old Rectory (No's 1,2 and 3) – Grade II
- York House – Grade II
- Engine Shed, Ash Station – locally listed
- Lion Brewery Public House – locally listed
- Woodberry – locally listed
- Ash Green Station – locally listed

It is noted that the Council's review of the Environmental Statement identified a number of concerns with regards to the impacts of the development on cultural heritage. This included the absence of any archaeological fieldwork and concerns regarding the assessment of the impacts on the Ash Manor complex, Ashe Grange and the Engine Shed. These issues were addressed through the Environmental Statement Addendum and the Council's consultants have advised that the information which has now been submitted is sufficient to be able to review the impacts on cultural heritage.

Given the number of assets that have the potential to be affected by this proposal to varying degrees, it is thought best to discuss and assess each asset in turn.

Ash Manor Complex:

Significance and setting

In terms of significance, Historic England (HE) have noted that 'Ash Manor and Old Manor Cottage is a single Grade II* listed building south of the application site. With likely thirteenth century origins and successive phases of development from the sixteenth, seventeenth and the mid-twentieth centuries, it is of high architectural and historical significance as a moated manor house. It sits in a complex of associated buildings, including a Grade II listed barn and oast house. The fields surrounding the manor are an important part of the setting of the listed building; the experience of the manor site in a rural landscape has sustained relatively well and make a real contribution to our understanding of its role and use'.

The site of Ash Manor is believed to have been occupied since the thirteenth century, originally owned by Chertsey Abbey. It became the property of the Crown following the dissolution of the monasteries, and was granted to Winchester College in the late 1540s. The college owned it for the next 400 years selling it into private ownership in 1925. The house was divided into two in 1945.

The current agricultural and open character of the setting of this group of listed buildings is one that has remained constant throughout the sites long history. It contributes to the significance of the group of buildings by illustrating the functional relationship between agricultural buildings and farmland, and the current openness of the surroundings helps us to read the historic importance of this group of buildings. A high status medieval building such as Ash Manor would not generally have been surrounded by other development, the moat suggests an element of defence which also indicates some degree of isolation.

In response to a previous applications in the surroundings, HE noted that 'the experience of The Manor and the understanding of its importance individually and as part of a group is enriched and informed by the current setting'. The listed farm buildings and Manor still have strong relationships with the surrounding fields both visual and practical with the horses stabled here using the paddocks. The rural character of the farmstead is very apparent from around the complex. Indeed, the current view to the north is over undeveloped agricultural land. As noted above, these views are important to the asset's significance in understanding the function of the building as a manor and farmstead with associated agricultural land.

Assessment of impact on setting and significance

As noted earlier, the main infrastructure proposals are located approximately 196 metres to the north of the rear elevation of the Grade II* listed building, although it is acknowledged that the red line boundary and areas around the bridge and access roads which are to be re-landscaped are much closer.

The southern end of the bridge and its approach road starts at Foreman Road and quickly runs into an embankment which takes the road over the railway line via the proposed bridge. The embankment at its highest point is approximately eight metres above existing ground level. It is acknowledged that the bridge and its associated infrastructure would be visible from the Ash Manor complex, particularly from the rear garden area of Ash Manor and Old Manor Cottage. In addition, at night, it is highly probable that the light emitted from the significant number of highway lighting columns, and possibly the lighting columns themselves would be evident and intrusive to the current night time setting of this heritage asset.

The application includes a comprehensive landscaping plan which will help to screen the physical infrastructure from the Ash Manor complex. However, the applicant acknowledges that this vegetative screening would take 15 years after completion of the proposed development to mature to a level where it would effectively screen the bridge's structure from view.

In addition, views from land northeast of the railway line and west of Orchard Farm will take in the proposed development to the west and Ash Manor and Old Manor Cottage to the southwest. The applicant notes that 15 years after completion of the proposed development, the planting on the bridge embankments will be sufficiently mature to screen the structure from view and to soften the effect. However, it is acknowledged that there will still be an impact on the asset as the bridge will be a prominent feature even with a cover of vegetation.

In terms of the impact on the complex as a whole it is noted that from the south the collection of buildings will still be read together and there will be some appreciation of the group as a whole. However, it is readily acknowledged that the groups wider connection with the surrounding agricultural land would be altered, as already set out above.

It should also be noted that upon operation, the bridge will result in increased traffic noise in the vicinity of the Ash Manor complex. While noise impacts may not result in any physical harm to the building, it can still detract from the current more tranquil, rural setting of the buildings.

The increased noise from the proposal would also result in a change to the setting of the complex, however, the impact in itself would not cause an erosion in one's ability to understand the significance of the asset. It is noted that mitigation for this noise impact has been considered in the form of a noise barrier however this was discounted on the grounds of additional environmental impacts being generated which included being intrusive on the setting of Ash Manor and Old Manor Cottage due to the need for it to be located close enough to the asset to be effective. It is noted that the applicant is of the opinion that the change in noise will not be so great as to cause an erosion in the ability to understand and appreciate the asset. Overall, Officers are of the opinion that increased noise from the proposal would have an adverse impact on Ash Manor. As such, it is a factor relevant to assessing the total level of harm to the designated heritage assets, and this will be taken into account below.

It is also noted that there will be harm caused to the group during the initial stages of construction, when compounds and site works are visible from the site. Whilst the impacts of the compound sites are of lesser concern in the long term, in the short term their impact upon this asset would be moderately significant due their proximity to the asset, and not just from a visual point of view. The activity and noise generated from these compounds would certainly alter the experience of this asset.

Historic England (HE) have been consulted on this application. In their first response they noted that: *'a new road bridge in its presently proposed location would insert a major new piece of infrastructure into the landscape, which would have a negative impact on the rural setting of Ash Manor and Old Manor Cottage. It would intercede into open fields currently only partly screened by trees, and would be experienced in some views from and towards the manor. Even if landscaping and planting were carefully employed with the aim of blending the road bridge into the landscape, the impact of noise, lighting, visible traffic and associated infrastructure, would mean it was always perceptible in the area close to the historic moated manor; the early stage impacts before planting matures would be even greater'*.

Regarding the level of harm, HE then go on to state that *'given the distance from the manor and the proposed mitigation measures, we do not consider the harm would be substantial. However, considering less-than-substantial harm as a spectrum, we consider the degree of harm caused to the highly graded asset and its associated complex of listed structures is in the upper half of this range. This harm must be given great weight in the planning balance as per the requirements of the NPPF'*. It is acknowledged that the applicant draws a similar conclusion in the submitted Environmental Statement.

It is noted that since HE's original response, the applicant has made slight amendments to the scheme and further discussion on the heritage harm has also been submitted. HE have reviewed this information and remain of the view already set out above.

It is noted that the Council's Conservation Officer has also reviewed the proposal. It has been noted that:

'the addition of what is a major piece of new road infrastructure so close to this highly significant heritage asset would undoubtedly have an impact upon its setting by virtue of its noticeable incongruous form within the given context.

It has been identified within the supporting Environmental Statement that the southern compound and southern bridge construction compound would be visible in views from this asset, during the duration of construction, and that the completed bridge would be permanently visible in this view throughout the year, with the impact being greatest during the winter months.

Whilst the impacts of the compound sites are of lesser concern in the long term, in the short term, it could be argued that their impact upon this asset would be significant and harmful, due their proximity to the asset, and not just from a visual point of view. The activity and noise generated from these compounds would certainly alter the experience of this historic moated manor house by undermining its current tranquil character and sense of privacy.

As regards the proposed bridge and the relief the road there does seem to be consensus that the construction of this infrastructure would permanently alter the asset's setting, through the disruption to views to the north. Not only would it introduce prominent incongruous engineered forms, by ways of a bridge and steep highway embanking, to this agricultural landscape, but the constant vehicular activity along it would also be perceptible and disruptive in outward views, thus resulting in a striking change on the present situation. Similarly, there is also a significant concern associated with the increase and frequency of noise attributed to this redirection of traffic.

In addition to the above, at night, it is highly probable that the light emitted from the significant number of highway lighting columns, and possibly the lighting columns themselves would be overtly evident and intrusive to the current night time setting of this heritage asset, which owing to its isolation experiences is currently likely to experience limited light intrusion.

It is acknowledged that the application does propose mitigation measures in the form of planting and screening in an attempt to best overcome the noted impacts. This includes the planting of a native woodland mix and retention of species rich grasses beneath the trees along the southern boundary of the proposed development and the planting of a native woodland mix and retention of species rich grasses in tandem with native hedge planting on the engineered embankments of the proposed bridge.

*It is worth noting the advice given by Historic England in their guidance document *The Setting of Heritage Assets: Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3 (Second Edition)* which cites that 'as screening can only mitigate negative impacts, rather than removing impacts or providing enhancement, it ought never to be regarded as a substitute for well-designed developments within the setting of heritage assets'. Whilst these measures are likely to have an effect in lessening the visual and noise concerns stated above it will take time for this to become fully established, further still, it will not completely eliminate these issues, it is only likely to soften them. Nevertheless, I would conclude that the screening measures proposed would not look forcibly out of place or contrived, given the existing rural context of the site, and that they do assist in lowering the overall harm...'*

As regards the specific impacts on Ash Manor Oast and The Oast House (both Grade II listed buildings) which are also within the complex the Council's Conservation Officer notes that to a large degree, the impact of the proposed development upon these assets will be very similar to that which has been discussed above for Ash Manor, given that this asset forms part of the same small complex. However, when giving consideration to their more southerly situation within the site, it does mean that some northward views through to the proposed development would be curtailed by the presence of the structure of Ash Manor. Further screening would also be afforded by the close belt of deciduous trees directly to the northeast of the property, meaning that during the winter months the construction compounds and the bridge would become visible. While the mitigation measures noted above are acknowledged, given all that has been discussed above the Council's Conservation Officer notes that owing to their more visually sheltered position within the site, in tandem with it the lower statutory grading, the degree of harm caused to these heritage assets, even when taking into account the mitigating measures, can be described as being towards the middle of the 'less than substantial harm' spectrum.

Regarding the Grade II listed Oak Barn, it is noted that this is in a fortunate situation and orientation within the complex and would be afforded a good degree of screening and protection from the proposed development. The protection is provided by virtue of the property being sat directly south of its neighbours, meaning that views through to the proposed development are prevented. Nevertheless, whilst the supporting Environmental Impact Assessment appears to conclude that there would be no changes to the asset's setting, due to its fortunate positioning within the complex, this is not agreed by the Council's Conservation Officer. It is noted that while there would be no physical changes to its setting, the way in which a heritage asset can be 'experienced' is not necessarily limited to the sense of sight. It is contended that the activity, noise and lights generated from the compounds and the road / bridge itself would have an altering impact upon this asset's setting. The Council's Conservation Officer is of the view that the harm to the Oak Barn would be 'less than substantial' and at the lower end of the spectrum.

From the above it is noted that the applicant, HE and the Council's Conservation Officer agree that the resultant harm to the setting of the Ash Manor complex would be less than substantial. While it is acknowledged that the applicant is attempting to mitigate the impact through landscaping and extensive planting, the proposal would always be perceptible, diminishing the association and connection of the complex to the surrounding agricultural fields.

While the NPPF is silent on the matter, the PPG (at paragraph 18) recognises that '*within each category of harm...the extent of the harm may vary and should be clearly articulated.*' An interpretation of where on the scale the harm to a particular asset lies can be helpful when weighing harm against the public benefit of the scheme. On this particular issue and as already noted above, HE have concluded that '*considering less-than-substantial harm as a spectrum, we consider the degree of harm caused to the highly graded asset and its associated complex of listed structures is in the upper half of this range*'. On the other hand, the applicant has taken the view that '*the less than substantial harm identified would be within the lower half of the spectrum (ranging from negligible to just below substantial) as the asset's significance would be only slightly diminished as a result of the proposed development*'.

Taking into account the comments provided by the Council's Conservation Officer, the Local Planning Authority has no reason to depart from HE's assessment that the impact of the proposal on Ash Manor, as a complex containing both Grade II* and II listed buildings, would be in the upper half of the less than substantial range.

Ashe Grange:

Significance and setting

This heritage asset is situated approximately 200 metres south of the proposed junction of the new road with Foreman Road and is sited approximately 400 metres southwest of the location of the proposed bridge.

This property can be briefly described as a two-storey square plan 'country house', constructed circa 1820's, in whitewashed brick and covered over by a shall hipped slate roof.

The listing description for this property is still of the old format, however its significance can be summarised as a fine example of late Georgian design, demonstrating attractive proportions and strong symmetry. It is noted as being illustrative of higher status classical Georgian architecture within the area, reflecting the historical importance of agriculture to the community. The use of a non-vernacular material, such as slate, within the construction palette indicates the prosperity of its occupants

The property which sits centrally within a large curtilage, is accessed via a sweeping private drive leading from Foreman Road. It is a relatively well contained property, benefiting from a considerable degree of privacy due to the natural screening surrounding its curtilage, including a small dense woodland to its north, a deciduous tree line to along the boundary to the northeast and by tree planting to the south.

Assessment of impact on setting and significance

As noted above, this statutory designated heritage asset is afforded a good degree of privacy and screening as a result of a dense woodland to its northern boundary, a deciduous tree belt along the field boundary to the northeast and east, and another tree belt along its southern boundary. Fortuitously, the screening to the north, northeast and east does provide the asset with some protection from the proposed development, in particular the dense woodland to the north of the asset does prohibit views through to the new roundabout intersection on Foreman Road. However, in the case of the north-eastern tree belt, there are gaps in which views of the southern compounds and the proposed bridge could be achieved. These conclusions are concurred in the supporting Environmental Statement.

Whilst the impacts of the construction compound sites are of lesser concern in the long term, in the short term their impact upon this asset would be moderately significant due their proximity to the asset, and not just from a visual point of view. The activity and noise generated from these compounds would certainly alter the experience of this historic country house.

In terms of the proposed railway bridge and associated road infrastructure, there is a consensus that the proposed infrastructure would permanently interrupt views of the surrounding rural landscape. Not only would it introduce prominent incongruous engineered forms, by way of a bridge and highway embanking, to this agricultural landscape, but the constant vehicular activity along it would also be perceptible and disruptive in outward views, thus resulting in a striking change on the present situation. Similarly, there is also a concern associated with the increase and frequency of noise attributed to this redirection of traffic. However, in the case of noise, the applicant notes that it will not be so great as to cause an erosion in the ability to understand and appreciate the asset.

In addition to the above, at night, it is highly probable that the light emitted from the significant number of highway lighting columns, and possibly the lighting columns themselves would be evident and intrusive to the current night time setting of this heritage asset, which owing to its isolation is currently likely to experience limited light intrusion.

As with Ash Manor, it is noted that the mitigation impacts proposed by the applicant would help to reduce the effects of the proposal. Whilst these measures are likely to have an effect in lessening the visual and noise concerns stated above it will take time for this to become fully established, further still, it will not completely eliminate these issues, it is only likely to soften them. Nevertheless, the Council's Conservation Officer has concluded that the screening measures proposed would not look forcibly out of place or contrived and would help to screen the development in the longer term. Given this and the screening which exists around the edge of Ashe Grange, the harm to its setting from the physical development has been reduced. However, there would also be harm arising from the additional noise and activity associated with the bridge. Taking everything into account it has been concluded that the harm caused to the setting of Ashe Grange would be less than substantial.

Church of St Peter:

Significance and setting

This asset is situated to the west of the application site on Ash Church Road. Whilst the structure itself lies approximately 30 metres from the boundary of the application site, it would be situated approximately 150 metres from the proposed road realignment at Ash Church Road and Foreman Road and approximately 400 metres from the location of the proposed bridge.

The property comprises a Grade II* listed Church whose origins dates back to at least the twelfth century and that has evolved over a number of centuries since. There is fabric evidence of a twelfth century south door and walls, thirteenth century chancel remains, a fifteenth century tower and a sixteenth century south porch, all of which were restored when the north aisle and the north chancel chapel were added.

The nave is built from a combination of roughly coursed flint and sandstone rubble with ashlar quoin dressings, whilst the coursed heath stone has been used in the construction of the tower and the north walls. A plain tiled roof covers the main body of the structure, whilst wooden shingle covers the broach spire.

Internally, there is fabric of significance including a seventeenth century wooden font with lead lined bowl, a monument to Reverend John Harris who died in 1759, which is located on the east wall of the old chancel and a monument dedicated to Judith Harris, who died in 1765, which is located on the north arcade of the Chancel.

The Church sits relatively centrally within its plot. Forming its immediate setting to all sides is the churchyard, which is typical in character (presence of headstones, including the Grade II listed Parker Chest Tomb and managed landscaping). Neighbouring the site to the west is a late Victorian cemetery with memorial chapel (Grade II) and housing of varying character encircles the site to the north, south and east.

Unimpeded views towards the body of the Church can be taken from the passing road to the south, whilst the Church tower and spire are readily visible from a much wider area, including from Foreman Road which reinforces the Church's importance to the surrounding community. The prominence of the spire aid in its legibility as a historic parish Church.

Assessment of impact on setting and significance

The Environmental Statement notes that the proposal may have an adverse impact on this listed building, particularly during construction when the various compounds will be operational. It is noted that Environmental Statement categorises the harm as being significant in EIA terms.

However, notwithstanding this, the Council's Conservation Officer notes that the significant views of the Church's spire will not be undermined with the introduction of the proposed bridge and the associated highway reconfiguration. It is also noted that the spire is likely to become more apparent in view when traversing across the proposed bridge due to its raised height. However, it is acknowledged that until the planting and screening has established, the bridge and its embankments would be visible alongside views of the Church from the site. As noted by the applicant this harm would be temporary, as after approximately 15 years, the screening would be of sufficient height and density that the embankment and most of the infrastructure would not be visible.

In terms of the flow and movement of traffic in front of the asset, the proposed infrastructure is likely to alleviate congestion and delays which are currently experienced along this stretch of road. Therefore, the Conservation Officer notes that there is the possibility that in this narrow respect, the Church and its setting would be improved slightly due to a reduction of noise and queuing traffic.

Taking everything into account it is noted that the proposal would result in some harm to the setting of this Grade II* listed building, particularly in the period during and immediately (circa 15 years) after construction. However, this will reduce as the screening establishes. It is also noted that the reduction in queuing traffic along the road close to the Church may result in some improvements to its setting. Overall, the harm is considered to be less than substantial and at the lower end of that scale.

Parker Chest Tomb:

Significance and setting

This asset is situated to the west of the application site, within the churchyard of St Peter's, close to the north west corner of the Church. Whilst the structure itself lies approximately 60 metres from the application site this heritage asset would be approximately 190 metres from the proposed road realignment at Ash Church Road and Foreman Road and approximately 420 metres from the location of the proposed bridge.

The structure is described as a chest tomb and is dedicated to Elizabeth Parker who died in 1797. It sits on a stepped brick plinth. The tomb itself is of stone construction comprising of a moulded stone base to the bottom of the tomb, decorative panelled sides and a lid with moulded edges.

Sitting within the shadows of the Church, the setting of this structure is constrained to the presence of the Church and the churchyard, which has a fairly identifiable and typical character – funerary monuments and structures and managed landscaping.

Assessment of impact on setting and significance

The Council's Conservation Officer notes that the distance to the proposed works, coupled with the screening provided by the Church and its diminutive scale leads to a conclusion that the impact of the proposed bridge and the associated highway reconfigurations upon the significance of this asset and its setting would be negligible.

Hartshorn:

Significance and setting

This asset is situated to the west of the application site and is located next to St Peter's Church. Whilst the structure itself lies approximately 52 metres from the boundary of the application site, this heritage asset is situated approximately 190 metres from the proposed road realignment at Ash Church Road and Foreman Road and approximately 420 metres from the location of the proposed bridge.

Originally constructed as a public inn during the seventeenth century it has since been converted to a residential dwelling. An external plaque records the property's restoration in 1904. This domestic scale, two storey linear structure fronts directly onto Ash Church Road and is built from brown brick with isolated instances of heath stone (west gable and a small central panel to the front elevation).

It is covered by a plain tiled pitched roof which appears to have been altered at its western end to a half-hip, that includes a small chimney stack.

With the exception of the main road to the south of the property and the neighbouring dwelling to its west, the setting of this property is essentially defined and characterised by the presence of St Peter's Church and its churchyard, to its east, and the Victorian cemetery, to the west. Despite fronting directly onto Ash Church Road, the domestic scale and the surrounding soft landscaping attributed to the neighbouring churchyard and cemetery has helped to restrain the prominence of the property within the streetscene, with it only being really noticeable once you are directly upon it. However, its relationship with the main road does enable an understanding of its former use as an inn.

Assessment of impact on setting and significance

The Council's Conservation Officer notes that the distance between the asset and the development, coupled with the screening provided by neighbouring buildings, leads to a conclusion that the impact of the proposed bridge and the associated highway reconfigurations upon the significance of this asset and its setting would be negligible.

Memorial Chapel:

Significance and setting

This asset is situated to the west of the application site and is located along the road from St Peter's Church. Whilst the structure itself lies approximately 120 metres from the boundary of the application site this heritage asset is situated approximately 250 metres from the proposed road realignment at Ash Church Road and Foreman Road and approximately 500 metres from the location of the proposed bridge.

The property was built as a cemetery chapel in 1889 by the Farnham firm of Tompsett and Kingham and latterly it has been used as a museum. It is built in the Gothic style using Bath stone rubble with ashlar dressings and is covered by a simple pitched tiled roof whose ridge runs from east to west that is framed by a stone kneelers. The structure is of a rectangular plan form with an arched entrance. It has a number of stained glass windows around its elevations.

The memorial chapel sits relatively centrally within its plot. Forming its immediate setting to all sides are the cemetery grounds which are formal in their character and landscaping and made legible by the punctuating funerary structures. Neighbouring the site to the east, providing a backdrop to its setting is St Peters Church. Located to the west of the site is the local primary school.

Assessment of impact on setting and significance

The Council's Conservation Officer notes that the distance between the asset and the development, coupled with the screening provided by the Church and its diminutive scale of leads to the conclusion that the impact of the proposed bridge and the associated highway reconfigurations upon the significance of this asset and its setting would be negligible.

Ashmead House:

Significance and setting

Situated on Grange Road, this Grade II listed asset is located to the south west of the application site and is approximately 210 metres from the boundary of the application site, and approximately 270 metres from the nearest element of proposed construction, which is the junction of the new road with Foreman Road. Its distance from the proposed bridge measures approximately 460 metres.

This property can be briefly described as a detached two storey dwelling, dating from the late seventeenth century, with eighteenth century alterations to its front and twentieth century extensions to the rear. It is a timber framed structure whose front elevation has been cladded over in whitewash brick. It is covered over bay a pitched plain tiled roof that is centrally punctuate by a single, small scaled flat roof dormer windows to the front, and a further three dormer windows to the rear.

Situated at what can be described as the eastern periphery of the village, this property is discreetly set back within a fairly generous linear plot surrounded by a sizable private mature garden. The road upon which it can be accessed from is tree lined which contributes to sense of enclosure at the point where this property is located. Residential development surrounds it to the north, south and west, all of which dates from nineteenth century, thus post-dating the property. The land opposite to the east is going through a transition of change. Originally open fields, the site has recently been approved for a new housing. Views through to the property from Grange Road are constrained as a consequence of a significant amount of mature deciduous landscaping along the front and side boundary lines and by neighbouring properties.

Assessment of impact on setting and significance

The Council's Conservation Officer notes that the distance between the asset and the development, coupled with the screening provided by the mature deciduous landscaping within its own grounds to the northern boundary, the mature screening to the east of Foreman Road and alongside the northern side of Grange Road leads to a conclusion that the impact of the proposed bridge and the associated highway reconfigurations upon the significance of this asset and its setting would be negligible. The approved development on the land directly to the north of the property has also had some bearing on this conclusion.

The Old Rectory (No's 1,2 and 3):

Significance and setting

Situated on Old Rectory Drive, this Grade II listed asset is located to the west of the application site and is approximately 200 metres from the boundary of the application site and the nearest element of proposed construction, which is the junction of the new road with Foreman Road. Its distance from the proposed bridge measures approximately 400 metres.

This property was the former rectory to St Peter's Church that has now been divided into three individual residential units. It is a detached two storey property that dates back to the sixteenth century but has undergone some alterations since, including the significant introduction of a classical Georgian frontage.

Once completely isolated in its position off Church Lane, it is fair to say that the property's original setting as single dwelling that is set within a substantial curtilage, has been lost as a result of actions such as its subdivision and the introduction and encroachment of a significant number of dwellings, both within the historic curtilage and beyond. The dwellings that have been introduced within its former curtilage (directly to the south) are all low profiled, single storey dwellings, each having its own modest curtilage and set out in an informal layout arrangement. Those to the north, which are a mix of single and two storey dwelling have a more consciously planned layout based around a modest cul-de-sac.

In its more immediate setting the property, the remaining garden, which is still fairly sizable, has been somewhat diluted due to external alterations, such as new access point, areas of hard standing and garaging that were required to facilitate its subdivision. As a consequence of all of the above it is noted that this asset has a suburban setting.

Assessment of impact on setting and significance

The Council's Conservation Officer notes that the distance between the asset and the development, coupled with the screening provided by neighbouring buildings and development leads to the conclusion that the impact of the proposed bridge and the associated highway reconfigurations upon the significance of this asset and its setting would be negligible.

York House:

Significance and setting

Situated on Harper's Road, this Grade II listed building is located to the east of the application site and is approximately 110 metres from the nearest point of the application's boundary, and approximately 260 metres from the proposed bridge.

This property can be briefly described as a detached, vernacular, two storey dwelling, that dates from the sixteenth century but with early nineteenth century extension to the eastern flank. It is of timber construction, but parts of the frame have been removed and rebuilt in brick.

Despite some nineteenth and early twentieth century development to the north on Harpers Lane the asset retains a rural setting which contributes to its significance.

Assessment of impact on setting and significance

The Council's Conservation Officer notes that due to the distance between the asset and the development, coupled with the screening provided by neighbouring buildings and vegetation leads to the conclusion that the impact of the proposed bridge and the associated highway reconfigurations upon the significance of this asset and its setting would be negligible.

Locally listed buildings:

As noted above, the proposal has the potential to impact on a number of locally listed buildings which include:

Engine Shed, Ash Station:

Significance and setting

This locally listed asset is situated to the north of the application site, directly opposite the location of the proposed road realignment at Ash Church Road and Foreman Road, and approximately 200 metres north west of the proposed bridge.

The building is a former engine shed which is now in use as offices and a workshop. The building dates from approximately 1849 with brick elevations and a corrugated roof.

This purpose-built railway shed, used to service locomotives, still sits alongside the railway infrastructure that it was once designed to serve, thus maintaining its context. Whilst many of the siding tracks have been removed over the years, in favour of hard standing that serves the current converted use of the building, it still retains much of its original railway setting. Residential development has slightly encroached upon its western boundary, but even with this presence it has had little impact in diminishing the understanding of its original context.

Assessment of impact on setting and significance

Whilst traffic movements over the proposed railway bridge would be apparent visually and audibly from this asset, once completed and in operation, this would not be any greater than the present situation, given that the A323 and the level crossing are directly to the south. Given that the purpose of the proposed new bridge and relief road is to alleviate congestion and delays experienced along this stretch of road and crossing point, therefore it could become quieter and less busy. It is noted that some road alignment works are proposed directly opposite the asset, but the impact from this upon the asset would be negligible. It is considered that any potential impacts would be offset by the reduced traffic. Most importantly, the asset's relationship with the railway line and station would be preserved.

Any impact from a new footbridge would need to be assessed at the time.

Lion Brewery Public House:

Significance and setting

This locally listed asset is situated to the east / north-east of the application site. It lies approximately 290 metres from the proposed new junction at Guildford Road and Ash Hill Road, and approximately 445 metres from the location of the proposed new bridge.

Constructed as a public house in the mid-nineteenth century it is a two storey double piled property of rendered brick construction. It was a free house until the turn of the twentieth century.

It is prominently positioned at the corner of Harpers Road and Guildford Road. It is surrounded by a significant amount of residential ribbon development (predominantly twentieth century) to the west and south. A tree belt of mature deciduous trees provides a significant degree of enclosure and screening to the south and southwest.

Assessment of impact on setting and significance

The distance coupled with the screening provided by neighbouring buildings and the southern tree belt leads to the conclusion that the impact of the proposed bridge and the associated highway reconfigurations upon the significance of this asset and its setting would be negligible.

Woodberry:

Significance and setting

This locally listed asset is situated to the south of the application site and is approximately 585 metres south east of the proposed new bridge. This property is a late nineteenth century house of white painted brick construction, which is covered by a pitched tiled roof.

The property is relatively secluded, and benefits from a considerable degree of privacy due to the natural screening surrounding its curtilage. It sits at the end of a narrow rural lane

Assessment of impact on setting and significance

The Council's Conservation Officer has noted that the distance between the asset and the development, coupled with the screening provided by the vegetation within its own grounds and by the row of neighbouring buildings to the south side of Ash Green Road leads to the conclusion that the impact of the proposed bridge and the associated highway reconfigurations upon the significance of this asset and its setting would be negligible.

Ash Green Station:

Significance and setting

This locally listed asset is situated to the south of the application and is approximately 650 metres south of the proposed new bridge. Ash Green Station is a former railway station that is now converted to residential use. It was opened in 1849 as Ash Green Halt by the London and South Western Railway company (L&SWR) as a stop between Guildford and Farnham on the now redundant Guildford to Alton line. The station closed to passengers in 1937, facilitating the properties conversion to residential use.

Although the tracks have been removed the line is still readable and this forms its main setting.

Assessment of impact on setting and significance

The Council's Conservation Officer notes that the distance between the asset and the proposed development coupled with a significant amount of screening in between, leads to the conclusion that the impact of the proposed bridge and the associated highway reconfigurations upon the significance of this asset and its setting would be negligible.

Archaeology:

Archaeological assets that may be affected by these works include the remains of the post-medieval railway station of Ash, the hypothesised location of the Winchester to London Roman road, previously unrecorded remains dating to the Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman, medieval, and post-medieval periods, as well as post-medieval and modern agricultural and urban landscapes.

The applicant notes that an access road leading from Harper's Road to the proposed development crosses the hypothesised location of the Winchester to London Roman road. This access would be in use during enabling works such as vegetation clearance and would only be subject to limited vehicle movement. No intrusive works are planned for this road, and therefore it is stated that the proposed development would result in no impact to this asset.

Construction activities also have the potential to impact previously unrecorded archaeological remains relating to the Bronze Age, Iron Age, and Roman period that are assessed to be of medium value, and previously unrecorded archaeological remains relating to the medieval and post-medieval periods considered to be of low value. Activities that would impact these potential assets include ground investigation works, topsoil stripping, localised open-cut trenching, piling, and excavation of drainage basins and attenuation ponds. These activities have the potential to result in the severe truncation and/or removal of previously unrecorded remains. It is noted that these activities would cause a high magnitude of impact on the archaeological resource. This would result in potentially significant impacts.

The construction of the proposed development would also result in changes to the post-medieval agricultural landscape and the post-medieval and modern urban landscape through changes to field boundaries and road alignments. The applicant notes that these changes would not alter our ability to understand or appreciate these landscapes considered to be common nationally and of low value.

Advance fieldwork has not been undertaken however, the applicant notes that given the low to moderate significance of both known and previously unrecorded archaeological remains within the site, it is considered that any mitigation through the design of the proposed development is not necessary. It is noted that this was agreed with the County Archaeologist at Surrey County Council and as such recording of previously unrecorded archaeological remains through a programme of field evaluation ahead of construction is deemed appropriate in this instance.

The proposed development site is large, well over the 0.4 hectare size which is recommended for archaeological assessment. The Environmental Statement produced for the application contains an archaeological chapter that is informed by a desk based assessment. The County Archaeologist has confirmed that all currently available sources including the Surrey Historic Environment Record in order to characterise the archaeological potential of the site have been consulted. The report concludes that the site has a moderate archaeological potential for the later prehistoric, Roman and Medieval periods and suggests that further archaeological works are required in order to properly assess the nature and extent of any archaeology that may be present. The County Archaeologist agrees with this conclusion and confirm that in the first instance this should comprise of a geophysical survey followed by an evaluation trial trenching exercise, which will aim to rapidly establish whether archaeological assets are present. The results of the evaluation will enable suitable mitigation measures to be developed. Given that the assessment does not suggest that remains of national importance will be present, the County Archaeologist does not consider that it is necessary for the archaeological work to be undertaken in advance of any planning permission and that securing the archaeological work as a condition of any planning permission is an acceptable and proportionate response. On this basis it is concluded that any archaeology which is on the site will be considered and protected in an appropriate manner.

Conclusion on impact on heritage assets:

It has been concluded above that the proposal would result in the following harms to surrounding heritage assets:

- Ash Manor complex (Grade II* and II) - less than substantial (at higher end of scale)
- Ash Grange (Grade II) - less than substantial
- St Peters Church (Grade II*) - less than substantial

Having reached the view that the proposal results in harm to surrounding heritage assets, it is re-emphasised that paragraph 193 of the NPPF states that 'when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This accords with the duty under section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance'. Paragraph 194 goes on to note that 'any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification'. It is noted that the harm identified includes two Grade II* listed buildings and the harm to these should be given greater weight again.

In a situation where less than substantial harm is identified, the NPPF at paragraph 196 states that 'this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use'. The applicant has set out a detailed case in this regard and notes that the proposal would result in a range of public benefits. These include transportation, social, environmental and economic matters. Whether these claimed public benefits outweigh the heritage harm, and the considerable weight and importance that must be afforded to it, will be assessed in the final section of this report.

In terms of the optimum viable use, it has already been noted that the applicant has tested alternative routes for the bridge, and it is the proposed scheme which is the most appropriate solution to solving the issues already identified above.

As regards the locally listed buildings it is noted that paragraph 197 of the NPPF states that 'the effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset'. The assessment above concludes that the proposal would not result in any material harm to the identified locally listed buildings. It is noted that the 'negligible harm' to the Engine Shed. However, this is considered to be off-set by the improvements which would result from the decrease in traffic and congestion.

Landscape and visual impact on the surroundings

Policy D1 (place shaping) of the LPSS states that as an over-arching principle, 'all new developments will be required to achieve high quality design that responds to distinctive local character (including landscape character) of the area in which it is set. Essential elements of place making include creating economically and socially successful new places with a clear identity that promote healthy living; they should be easy to navigate, provide natural security through layout and design with attractive, well enclosed, and overlooked streets, roads and spaces with clear thought given to the interrelationship of land use to external space'.

Specifically relating to Ash and Tongham the policy notes that 'in order to avoid piecemeal development and to protect and enhance the existing character of Ash and Tongham and Ash Green, proposals within the area will have particular regard to:

- (a) the relationship and connectivity with the existing urban area;
- (b) the relationship and connectivity between allocated sites in different ownerships;
- (c) the existing character of Ash & Tongham and Ash Green; and
- (d) the future urban edge and its relationship with the surrounding countryside at the allocated site's boundaries.

The site allocation which includes the proposed bridge (A31) has similar requirements such as (inter alia):

- development proposals in the vicinity of Ash Green to have recognition of the historic location of Ash Green village. The properties along Ash Green Road form part of Ash Green village. Proposals for the land west of this road must respect the historical context of this area by preventing the coalescence of Ash, Tongham and Ash Green. Any development as a whole will not be of a size and scale that would detract from the character of the rural landscape. This must include the provision of a green buffer that maintains separation between any proposed new development and the properties fronting onto Ash Green Road. This will also help soften the edges of the strategic development location and provide a transition between the built up area and the countryside beyond
- sensitive design at site boundaries that has regard to the transition from urban to rural
- sensitive design at site boundaries with the adjacent complex of listed buildings at Ash Manor. Views to and from this heritage asset, including their approach from White Lane, must be protected

A Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) has been submitted with the application. As regards the existing site it is noted that it is not covered by any landscape designations and consists of a simple landscape pattern of fields, hedgerows and trees, with those adjacent to Foreman Road covered by a Tree Preservation Order. It is noted that views of the application site are limited to close range locations and the application site is not readily visible from the wider landscape due to its low lying position within an undulating and well vegetated landscape. The main views are from close range locations including motorists on the A323 Guildford Road, recreational users on the public right of way and rail users who may get a fleeting glimpse of the site as they travel past. The application site is also visible from the Grade II* Listed Ash Manor, due to views beneath the mature tree canopies as well as from residential properties adjacent to Foreman Road and Harpers Road, due to their proximity to the application site.

It is noted that the LVIA concludes that the proposal would result in a number of cumulative adverse visual and landscape impacts during the construction phase and into the early period of the operation. At year one of operation, significant effects have been identified to five more localised views. These include (i) view east from Foreman Park; (ii) view east from the Thakeham Homes development (Vyne Walk); (iii) view south west from PRoW (footpath) number 356; (iv) view north-west from Harpers Road; and (v) the view north from Ash Manor. This is because the proposal will introduce views of the bridge, the construction and the associated infrastructure where at the moment the views are of mainly open paddocks, trees and vegetation. This will impact on views from the properties, but the harm will be evident from the streetscene and the surroundings in general.

Notwithstanding the above, it is noted that the applicant proposes a range of mitigation measures which will help to soften the appearance of the development in the landscape and screen views from vantage points around the area. This includes introducing a range of planting types and species (wet woodland, trees, marginal plants and reed beds), which are considered to aid in integrating the new road alignment, providing visual softening and increasing the vegetated land cover across the application site and providing additional opportunities for biodiversity; introducing shrub and understorey planting to screen views of the proposed development from Ash Manor; and implementing new hedge and tree planting along the realigned part of Foreman Road to reflect the existing vegetated character of these routes and provide softening of views of vehicles. In addition it must be noted that in the main, the bridge reaches its required height through the creation of embankments rather than retaining walls and other major engineering which may have a less natural appearance. While there is a short length of retaining wall around the railway line, this is certainly not the predominant feature. The use of the embankments allow the bridge to blend into the landscape in a more efficient way through the planting and landscaping which have been set out above.

It is noted that at year 15 of the operation, when the planting and vegetation has had the opportunity to mature, the main remaining adverse impact would be on the cumulative landscape effects on the Ash Fringe (the area adjacent to the northern part of the application site) which are considered to be moderate adverse (significant) and the cumulative visual effects on the public right of way which runs to the north of the site which are also considered to be moderate adverse (significant).

While the proposal will undoubtedly result in changes to the landscape and views in the area, this is an inevitable consequence of constructing a major new piece of infrastructure, which the new Local Plan has confirmed is necessary. In addition, it should also be borne in mind that it is not just the proposal which will have an impact on the surroundings. The bridge will be viewed against an effective extension to the urban area of Ash which will include housing to its the north, south and east. It is noted that a large number of these schemes are in the pipeline or have been approved or are in the process of being constructed. The proposal will be viewed in the context of this expansion and addition of permanent built form into the area. It could also be argued that due to the amount of screening and green drainage infrastructure that will be provided as part of the scheme, the proposal may in some ways help to alleviate and break up the built form associated with the section of the allocation. It is considered that the proposal meets with the requirements of the allocation by including a natural design along most of its route and being as sensitive as possible in areas which are visible from heritage assets including Ash Manor.

It is acknowledged that some of those objecting to the proposal have raised concerns about the impact of the development on the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The northern boundary of the AONB is approximately two kilometres from the application site. The AONB Officer at Surrey County Council was consulted on the proposal and raised no objections confirming that 'although substantial works are involved in the proposed road bridge, as they will be a considerable distance from the Surrey Hills AONB there would be no impact upon its setting'.

Taking all of the above into account, it is concluded that the development would result in harm to the character or appearance of the area. However, this needs to be balanced against the fact that the proposal forms an important part of allocation A31 and that some impact on the landscape and the surroundings is inevitable. It should also be noted that the applicant is proposing mitigation to reduce the impacts including additional planting and screening. The level of weight to be attributed to this harm will be discussed below.

Impact on neighbouring amenity

The proposed new road with bridge over the railway runs through land allocated under policy A31, which at this current time remains generally undeveloped. Therefore, in the majority of cases there is quite a large separation between existing properties and the new road and bridge.

A number of the existing properties near to the application site enjoy some outlook across the site which may be of some amenity value. However the change to these views alone is not considered to be harmful, particularly taking into account the A31 allocation which will change the nature of this land, incorporating it into the extended urban area.

The road would be elevated on an embankment which would gain height to ensure sufficient clearance for the bridge over the railway. The bridge over the railway would be the highest part of the proposed structure, and inclusive of the required barriers, stands approximately 9.5 metres above the land adjacent to the tracks at its highest point, and therefore will be visible from a number of the existing dwellings surrounding the site.

Due to the distances to neighbouring dwellings themselves, there will be no materially harmful impact in relation to massing or overshadowing from the road and bridge itself, or from the significant landscaping proposed on the banks either side. In addition, there would be no loss of privacy in relation to drivers of vehicles being elevated above the existing land due to the distance to neighbouring dwellings and proposed intervening screening from both the landscaping and road barriers.

The key issues in relation to impacts on neighbouring amenity from the proposed development are impacts relating to noise, vibration and impacts from light pollution.

The relevant point of paragraph 170 of the NPPF states that "planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by: e) preventing new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability..."

Paragraph 180 of the NPPF goes on to state: "planning policies and decisions should also ensure that new development is appropriate for its location taking into account the likely effects (including cumulative effects) of pollution on health, living conditions and the natural environment, as well as the potential sensitivity of the site or the wider area to impacts that could arise from the development. In doing so they should:

- a) mitigate and reduce to a minimum potential adverse impacts resulting from noise from new development – and avoid noise giving rise to significant adverse impacts on health and the quality of life;
- b) identify and protect tranquil areas which have remained relatively undisturbed by noise and are prized for their recreational and amenity value for this reason; and
- c) limit the impact of light pollution from artificial light on local amenity, intrinsically dark landscapes and nature conservation"

Noise and vibration:

The NPPG (Paragraph: 003 Reference ID: 30-003-20190722) makes it clear that the proposal must take account of the acoustic environment and consider:

- whether or not a significant adverse effect is occurring or likely to occur;
- whether or not an adverse effect is occurring or likely to occur; and
- whether or not a good standard of amenity can be achieved.

In line with the Explanatory note of the noise policy statement for England, this would include identifying whether the overall effect of the noise exposure (including the impact during the construction phase wherever applicable) is, or would be, above or below the significant observed adverse effect level and the lowest observed adverse effect level for the given situation.

The Council's Environmental Health Officer has reviewed the methodology and findings of Chapter 6 in the Environmental Statement, as well as Chapter 8 of the Environmental Statement Addendum relating to noise and vibration. The Environmental Health Officer has stated that the report is comprehensive, where the baseline conditions have been obtained from on site modelling taken from four agreed locations in the vicinity of the proposed development. Existing background noise in the vicinity of the proposed development is dominated by road traffic on Guildford Road with additional noise from the trains approaching and leaving Ash station.

Potentially affected noise and vibration sensitive receptors have been identified for the assessment by the consultant working on behalf of the applicant through a review of OS mapping, aerial photography and a site walkover survey, as well as being informed by the extent of the road traffic model for the local area. From the receptors identified, a representative set of receptors has been selected for noise modelling purposes, which are identified in the table below.

All of the receptors have a high sensitivity to noise and vibration.

R1	72 Guildford Road
R2	16 Ash Hill Road
R3	25 Guildford Road
R4	37 Guildford Road
R5	Ash Tree Flats
R6	7 Foreman Park
R7	Foreman Road Development
R8	14 Ash Road
R9	55 Ash Church Road
R10	Dean Close
R11	Traveller Site
R12	Grange Primary School
R13	98 Lime Crescent
R14	Hook House Grange Road
R15	Glenthorne Grange Road
R16	Ash Manor
R17	Oak Tree House
R18	The Coach House

Effects during construction

The main construction activities will be the set up of site compounds, earthworks, drainage installation, bridge construction, piling and road construction/surfacing. There would be a requirement to undertake works on evenings/weekends/nights, such as to tie the proposed development into existing roads and working on existing roads. The impact of the noise and vibration of these construction activities would vary, with some activities transitory, creating noise and vibration for a limited time, whilst other required activities would be confined to specific locations for longer periods.

As outlined in the submitted ES, the potentially worst affected residents by construction noise and vibration would be:

- residents in the vicinity of Guildford Road and Ash Hill Road roundabout at the northern end of the proposed development.
- residents on Foreman Park and Vyne Walk in proximity to the proposed roundabout at the southern end of the proposed development.
- residents on Foreman Road, Foreman Park, Ash Church Road and Guildford Road, and occupants of the 'White Rose' travellers site on the east side of Guildford Road, in proximity to the realigned Foreman Road and the new footbridge over the railway. These would also be worst-impacted by the works to construct the new road bridge over the railway, which would involve piling and may require night-time works.

In relation to the assessment of effects and significance, the ES has made the following conclusions. During the required night-time works it is considered possible that moderate or major impacts may occur at the closest residential properties, which are high sensitivity receptors, therefore resulting in either large or moderate (significant) adverse effects. Significant adverse effects from construction traffic are expected for properties on the northern end of Foreman Road. The major impact from construction traffic combined with the high sensitivity of receptors would result in a large (significant) adverse effect. Depending on the adopted piling method and the distance from nearby properties, vibration from piling activities may result in minor to moderate impacts in terms of human annoyance at high sensitive receptors, therefore resulting in moderate (significant) or slight (not significant) adverse effects.

Construction vibration is anticipated to result in slight (not significant) adverse effects in terms of potential for building damage (a negligible impact on a high sensitivity receptor). However, it is important to note that any such effects would be temporary and would not persist beyond the end of the construction period.

It has been proposed in the ES that a detailed Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) would deal with appropriate mitigation measures during the construction phase once detailed construction information is known. The Environmental Health Officer has agreed this is an acceptable way forward and a CEMP will be secured by condition.

Effects during operation

Noise:

The submitted ES details the daytime traffic noise levels at the selected receptors in the opening year (2021), and in the future transport assessment year (2034), with and without the proposed development.

Major increases in noise are expected at properties in the new Foreman Road development facing Foreman Road. These increases result from the traffic on Guildford Road, which currently uses the level crossing, being diverted on to the new road bridge and turning right at the proposed roundabout on Foreman Road to re-join the A323 south of the station. Similarly, moderate increases in traffic noise are expected at the existing properties in Foreman Park for the same reason. A major increase in noise is also expected at the traveller site to the east of Guildford Road, just north of the train line since this lies within 100 metres of the proposed development. Similarly, a moderate increase in road traffic noise is expected at the northern façade of Ash Manor to the south of the proposed development as a result of traffic on the southern section of the road bridge. This property is however over 200 metres from the proposed location of the road bridge and absolute noise levels at the façade remain low even with the road bridge in place. Residents on Dean Close may experience a minor increase in traffic noise from traffic using the proposed development, since the vehicles would be closer than those using the existing Guildford Road. Elsewhere in the study area changes in traffic noise are mostly negligible.

Conversely, major decreases in traffic noise are expected for properties to the west of Guildford Road between the station and the roundabout with Ash Hill Road. This section of Guildford Road would experience a large drop in traffic with the proposed development in place as through traffic uses the new Ash road bridge instead.

Given the high sensitivity of the selected receptors, the moderate and major changes in traffic noise level discussed above are likely to result in moderate and large (significant) adverse effects. Significant adverse effects are therefore likely to occur at properties in the vicinity of the northern end of Foreman Road (between the proposed roundabout and the A323), at the traveller site to the east of Guildford Road and at Ash Manor to the south of the proposed development. Conversely, large (significant) beneficial effects are likely to occur at properties close to Guildford Road, between the station and Ash Hill Road (R3 and R5) as a result of the major beneficial changes in traffic noise level at these locations.

Light pollution:

The NPPG (Paragraph: 001 Reference ID: 31-001-20191101) states that artificial lighting needs to be considered when a development may increase levels of lighting, or would be sensitive to prevailing levels of artificial lighting. Artificial light provides valuable benefits to society, including through extending opportunities for sport and recreation, and can be essential to a new development. However, for maximum benefit, it is important to get the right light, in the right place and for it to be used at the right time.

Road lighting design within the UK is governed by a set of recommendations, principally BS 5489 Code of Practice for the Design of Road Lighting. The guidance provides recommended lighting levels for a variety of situations, dependent on road classification, and a number of other factors such as typical speed of users, typical volumes of traffic flow, difficulty in manoeuvring.

The development is proposed to be illuminated through the use of lighting columns to provide appropriate lighting levels, compliant with current standards. Lighting columns will be provided to Surrey County Council's specification and located at the back of the footways. In total 15 lighting columns will be removed from Guildford Road and Foreman Road, with 40 new lighting columns providing the required illumination of the road bridge and areas of Guildford Road and Foreman Road which form part of the site.

Where, when and how much light that shines is principally governed by the above guidance, and the applicant has stated the proposed design uses a zero-degree uplift to minimise spill light. It is therefore concluded that the applicant has had regard to the requirements of the NPPF and NPPG in relation to light pollution. Final details of the lighting will be agreed at condition stage.

A neighbouring comment has raised concerns about the impact of vehicle lights travelling along the new road and bridge, due to their elevated height and any impacts this would have on neighbouring amenity. In this regard, the road bridge is in the main located some distance from neighbouring residential properties. Vehicle lights are designed to illuminate the road and at the highest point of the bridge over the railway line is a steel parapet at the back edge of the footway which will to a degree minimise light spillage. In addition, significant landscaping is proposed which will mitigate and limit any impact from vehicle lights. As this site is allocated in the Local Plan: Strategy and Sites for both housing and a bridge over the railway, it must be accepted that a more urban environment will be created, inclusive of a higher level of light pollution than the existing semi-rural situation. Any light spillage which does occur as a result of the proposal should be set in the context of the surroundings, which to the west is the urban area of Ash and Tongham. In this backdrop, the illumination from the bridge will not result in significant levels of additional light spillage or pollution.

As identified, the proposed bridge would result in some impact to the amenities of nearby residents, and in some cases this impact is identified as significant adverse effect (in relation to noise). Accordingly, the proposal has some conflict with saved policy G1(3) of the Guildford Local Plan 2003. The addition of a number of conditions would ensure the impacts are kept to a minimum, however the impacts on neighbouring residents that have been identified will need to be weighed in the balance.

Highway considerations

Policy A31 of the LPSS, which is the strategic site for the expansion of the Ash and Tongham urban area, contains a requirement under point nine for "Land and provision of a new road bridge which will form part of the A323 Guildford Road, with an associated footbridge, to enable the closure of the level crossing on the A323 Guildford Road, adjacent to Ash railway station".

Policy ID1: Infrastructure and Delivery also notes that Infrastructure necessary to support new development is to be provided or available when first needed to serve a developments occupants and users and/or to mitigate its otherwise adverse material impacts. Linked to policy ID1 is the Infrastructure Schedule at Appendix 6 of the Local Plan which sets out the key infrastructure requirements on which the delivery of the plan depends; this includes LRN19 which specifies the delivery of a "new road bridge and footbridge scheme to enable level crossing closure on A323 Guildford Road adjacent to Ash railway station".

As set out in the background section above, the development is required to overcome the issues identified at the level crossing, and to limit existing rat running that currently occurs on local rural roads when the level crossing is down. Whilst the proposal is a piece of infrastructure required by the LPSS, its impact must nevertheless be considered with reference to relevant local and national transport planning policy to consider and where possible mitigate any impacts.

Point 1 of policy ID3 of the LPSS states that new development will be required to contribute to the delivery of an integrated, accessible and safe transport system, maximising the use of the sustainable transport modes of walking, cycling and the use of public and community transport.

Paragraph 108 of the NPPF states that when assessing sites it should be ensured that:

- a) appropriate opportunities to promote sustainable transport modes can be - or have been - taken up, given the type of development and its location;
- b) safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all users; and
- c) any significant impacts from the development on the transport network (in terms of capacity and congestion), or on highway safety, can be cost effectively mitigated to an acceptable degree.

Paragraph 109 goes onto state the development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe.

Another relevant material consideration is the Office of Road and Rail Regulation Level Crossings Policy (2016). According to the Office of Rail and Road (ORR), level crossings are the single biggest source of railway catastrophic risk. In seeking to manage and control risk, the ORR advise that where practicable this should be achieved through the removal of level crossings, and that these should be replaced by bridges, underpasses or diversions.

The existing situation:

Within the submitted Transport Assessment (TA), the applicant has provided a detailed summary of the existing situation and current pressures at the level crossing which have led to the need for the scheme to come forward. The Ash level crossing is located immediately to the east of Ash Station on the A323. Accordingly, when trains pass through the station the level crossing is closed, causing delays to all users of the A323. Traffic surveys also show that traffic will commonly re-route along minor roads within the study area e.g. Grange Road, Foreman Road, Harper's Road and Wyke Lane to avoid queues and delay at the Ash level crossing.

Information provided by Network Rail identifies that a total of 166 trains per day pass through Ash Station and the level crossing predominantly over a 20 hour period (passenger trains), requiring the level crossing to be closed. 116 trains are stopping services, 38 are passenger trains which pass through the station without stopping and 12 are freight trains. Great Western Railway is proposing to increase the timetable on the railway line by an extra 36 trains per day, which will extend the number of closures and barrier downtime per hour in the future baseline.

Based on recent survey data (22nd to 28th November 2018) an average of 8,825 motor vehicles, 43 cyclists and 669 pedestrians pass through the crossing each day. Typically, the average closure period per hour (daily) is between 21 and 22 minutes, with this figure increasing during peak times and on weekdays. Average barrier closure times in the baseline and future baseline (based on an additional 36 trains per hour) are set out below:

- average daily closure time per hour:
 - baseline: 21 mins 38 secs
 - future Baseline: 26 mins 20 secs
- average weekday closure time per hour:
 - baseline: 22 mins 15 secs
 - future Baseline: 27 mins 5 secs

The high level of vehicle and pedestrian traffic, high frequency of train services and long barrier downtimes lead to deliberate misuse at the crossing with a mixture of both vehicular and pedestrian abuse with 28 near misses reported over the most recent five-year period. As a result, Ash level crossing ranks in the top 20% of crossings on the Wessex Route in terms of risk. It is classified as a high/medium risk level crossing by Network Rail.

With proposed increases to train frequency on the North Downs Line, the risk score for the crossing is likely to increase by 16% according to Network Rail. This will be further exacerbated by increases in vehicular and pedestrian traffic from background growth and planned development associated with the new Local Plan.

It is expected that the extended downtime or additional barrier closures per hour from the proposed increase in train frequencies would result in enhanced delay and journey times for all users, increased risk that station passengers will miss trains and additional rat-running by traffic travelling along the A323 to avoid delay at the Ash level crossing.

The proposed development:

The proposed development comprises construction of a 7.3 metre wide single-carriageway road with accompanying footways, cycleway and highway improvements, including all utilities, lighting, drainage, signing and guarding. The proposed road route will connect Guildford Road / Ash Hill Road Roundabout to a new junction with Foreman Road via a new bridge over the North Downs Railway Line south of the existing Ash level crossing and will include attendant highway works to Foreman Road (including widening, parking restrictions and an extension of the 30mph speed limit) to facilitate the diversion of the A323 Guildford Road along the new road. The details of the works in each location is summarised below.

A323 Ash Church Road / Foreman Road

- the A323 will be re-routed along Foreman Road, with the A323 Ash Church Road / Foreman Road junction replaced by a bend. The proposed bend conforms with the requirements of Manual for Streets 2 with the forward visibility sightline designed to accord with a 30mph speed limit.
- the replacement of the A323 Ash Church Road / Foreman Road junction with a bend (rather than a junction) allows for the free-flow of traffic along the A323 through this section, which is important in encouraging traffic to use this route (other than alternatives).
- the proposed design will maintain vehicular access to the North Downs Line for maintenance by Network Rail and the former goods yard to the west of Ash Station, currently occupied by Kendall Cars and other employment uses.
- double yellow lines will be extended along the A323 to a point just east of St Peter's Church to prevent the risk of parking and obstructions on an 'A' road.

- the existing bus stop on the northern side of the A323 will be relocated to the shared footway/cycleway on Foreman Road, with a shelter and raised kerb provided to enable its improvement, as this is not possible in its existing location. The westbound bus stop will be retained in its existing location.

Foreman Road

- to facilitate the proposed development, Foreman Road will be widened from 5.5m to 7.3m between A323 Guildford Road and Ellsworth Park
- a five-arm roundabout will be provided on Foreman Road at the location of Ellsworth Park with an inscribed circle diameter of 48m. The roundabout will provide access to the road bridge; facilitate access to 'Land east of Foreman Road' south of the proposed road bridge and further development to the south associated with policy A31, whilst maintaining access to Ellsworth Park and along Foreman Road.
- it is proposed that the 30mph speed limit on the A323 will be extended along Foreman Road to a point just south of Grange Road. Double yellow lining will also be maintained between the A323 Guildford Road and Ellsworth Park. The latter should ensure no parking occurs along this section of road, which coupled with highway widening will improve forward visibility along Foreman Road and visibility for those exiting the Foreman Park / Foreman Road junction. Visibility has been a safety concern for users of Foreman Road and Foreman Park, and now affects Ellsworth Park and Foreman Road.
- the amendments to Foreman Road will include a new shared 3m shared footway / cycleway on the eastern side of the carriageway. Furthermore, the new development to the west of Foreman Road bordering Grange Road includes for a footpath/cycleway through its development connecting into Ellsworth Park, and from here there is footpath access along Foreman Road to the station.
- double yellow lining will be present on both sides of the carriageway to protect against the risk of informal parking obstructing an 'A' Road. The provision of this feature will also safeguard visibility for vehicles turning to and from developments along this section of road, with visibility splays of 2.4m x 48m to be delivered for Foreman Park as part of the proposed development.

Ash road bridge

- Ash Road Bridge will connect Foreman Road and Vyne Walk to the A323 Guildford Road / Ash Hill Road roundabout. The horizontal alignment of the road bridge has been designed to cross over the railway line perpendicular to the tracks, which reduces the complexity of the bridge. The road bridge approaches are proposed as embankments. The earthworks that support the proposed highway have been designed to be 1:3 side slopes starting at the back of the verges.
- Network Rail has confirmed that the minimum clearance between the railway tracks and the underside of the road bridge (and also footbridge) should be 4.78m. The bridge height to soffit allows for the electrification of the line in the future if required. Both the deck and structure has been designed to accord with the classification of the A323 as a 'Heavy Load Route' by Highways England.
- a 3m shared cycleway/ footway and verge has been incorporated on the west side of the carriageway as well as a 2m footway and verge to the east.
- Vehicle Restraint Systems (VRS) have been incorporated on both sides for the entire length of the bridge, and a pedestrian guardrail is included at the back of the verge where appropriate.
- footpath 356 will be bisected by the new road at the base of the embankment, as the road passes through 'Land south of Guildford Road'.
- two new bus stops will be provided on the section of Ash road bridge south of the Guildford Road / Ash Hill Road roundabout. A raised kerb and flag pole will be provided for southbound buses, with a shelter and raised kerb provided for northbound buses.

These two stops would replace the two bus stops located between Guildford Road / Ash Hill Road roundabout and Ash Station.

Guildford Road / Ash Hill Road Roundabout

- in order to facilitate development to 'Land south of Guildford Road' in a manner that safeguards the route for the bridge, a commitment to delivery of a four arm roundabout is set out as part of the outline planning permission and S106 for the site. The design comprises the addition of a fourth arm to the south of the existing 3-arm roundabout, which will have an inscribed circle diameter of 28m. The design presented at the planning application stage by the applicant Copperwood Homes has been further developed to improve the geometric elements of the design.

Guildford Road (west of Guildford Road / Ash Hill Road Roundabout)

- with the diversion of the A323 along the route of the proposed development, the section of Guildford Road to the west of Guildford Road / Ash Hill Road roundabout will be downgraded and will become a low trafficked environment providing access to Ash Station and local residential areas only e.g. Chester Road. It is therefore proposed that once the works for the diversion of the A323 are complete and traffic is re-routed that a formal on street parking scheme will be implemented to accommodate for displaced parking from Foreman Road.

Changes to the transport network and impacts on journey times:

Private motor vehicles

Upon the opening of the road bridge, the A323 will be diverted along Foreman Road and across the road bridge with access across the level crossing removed for vehicles. There will be an increase in journey length in all cases but on the whole there will be a reduction in journey times on all routes as a result of the proposed development. The changes in journey time primarily reflect the removal of delay associated with waiting at the level crossing and illustrate the improvements in journey reliability likely to be afforded by the scheme.

Pedestrians and cyclists

Upon opening of the road bridge, two potential routes will be available for pedestrians and cyclists wishing to travel over the North Downs Line. These comprise either the Ash level crossing or across the new road bridge. For the former this will comprise either access over the level crossing (in the temporary case) or across a footbridge in the permanent case, but this would still be subject to a separate planning approval.

The proposed development will encompass a new 3m shared footway / cycleway over the North Downs Line. The results indicate that the road bridge is unlikely to form a realistic alternative for pedestrians currently using the level crossing route given the change in journey length and time. However, this may form a reasonable alternative for cyclists given the comparable journey times to the existing case and provision of an off-road shared facility.

Bus

The delivery of the proposed development is likely to lead to an increase in journey length of 477m eastbound and 513m eastbound for buses travelling along the A323 (such as the 520, 694 and KITE). This is offset however by the improvements in journey time reliability afforded, which is crucial for passenger transport services. Coupled with additional patronage generated by new residential development this will help to support the viability of existing or upgraded routes.

In the baseline, buses could be delayed on average by between three and four minutes whilst they wait for the level crossing to open. Through the delivery of the proposed development this impediment to service efficiency will be removed, where journey time savings could be in the order of 2 minutes 39 seconds eastbound and 1 minute 41 seconds westbound.

Rail

The existing level crossing can currently delay users of the station car park and those interchanging between platforms or seeking to access the opposite platform via the A323. The provision of the road bridge will provide the necessary conditions through the diversion of traffic to construct a footbridge and stop-up the level crossing thereby removing this delay.

Motor vehicle users travelling from west of the level crossing (Ash Church Road) and wishing to access Ash Station or vice versa will be required to divert along Foreman Road, over the bridge and then along Guildford Road towards Ash Station. They will therefore be subject to a longer diversion than general through traffic.

Assessment of effects and significance:

The ES and ES addendum submitted by the applicant summarises the likely significant environmental effects arising from construction and completion and operation of the proposed development. This summary only includes those effects that are moderate or major adverse or beneficial as they have the potential to create significant environmental effects and these are therefore considered further below.

Construction

No significant effects have been identified in relation to the construction period.

Operation

- *Traffic severance (A change in difficulty associated with crossing a link as a result of a variation in traffic flows)*

Severance is the perceived separation that can occur in a community due to new or improved roads or from changes in traffic flows. Non-motorised forms of transport, especially pedestrians, are typically those affected by severance. Cyclists and equestrians are less susceptible to severance because they can travel more quickly than people on foot.

A permanent moderate adverse (significant) effect in regards to traffic severance is expected as a result of the proposed development on Foreman Road between the A323 and Ellsworth Park and Ash road bridge. The effect should be viewed in the context that the proposed development would deliver wider long term operational beneficial effects from a traffic and transport perspective including journey time reliability and the reduction in risk at Ash level crossing.

The reduction in traffic flows on Guildford Road immediately to the east of the Ash level crossing would result in a permanent major beneficial (significant) effect along this link road.

- *Accidents and safety*

The rerouting of motor vehicle traffic away from the Ash level crossing is expected to have a permanent major beneficial (significant) effect in regards to safety.

Network Rail consider the crossing to be of high/medium risk and that the effects of new development and increased train frequencies would further exacerbate risk at this location with the crossing becoming prohibitively unsafe. On this basis the overall beneficial effect on accidents and safety is considered to be significant.

- *Public transport delay*

The diversion of the A323 and associated bus routes along the route of the proposed development and away from Ash level crossing would improve journey time reliability and therefore average journey time per vehicle. Based on the number of buses affected and the improvement in average journey times it is considered that the proposed development would have a permanent moderate beneficial (significant) effect for buses in regards to public transport delay.

A scenario in which the footbridge is not progressed has also been considered in the ES Addendum. Classification of effects in regard to severance, driver delay, driver stress, fear and intimidation and public transport delay are expected to be unchanged without the footbridge. However, at Ash level crossing accidents and road safety would be downgraded from major beneficial (significant) to minor beneficial (not significant) and vulnerable road user delay, amenity and ambience would be downgraded from moderate beneficial (significant) to minor beneficial (not significant) should the footbridge not be progressed.

Comments from consultees:

The County Highway Authority have stated that the Transport Assessment (TA) provided with the planning application provided a thorough assessment of the impact of the proposal on the surrounding highway network and also looked at the impact on the junctions in future years, with committed development, if the road bridge wasn't implemented. The assessment also took into account the likely increase in downtime of the barriers at the level crossing which are proposed by Network Rail/Great Western Railway. It is anticipated that the provision of the road bridge will result in an improvement to journey time as vehicles will clearly not be hindered by the closure of the level crossing. The proposal includes the implementation of a new footway/cycleway on the road bridge and leading approach roads and informal pedestrian crossings, all of which connect existing and new residential dwellings to the new and the existing pedestrian and cycle route network.

Surrey County Council have specifically responded to concerns raised within some of the objections about the modelling undertaken by the applicant to inform the TA, and provided the following comments on this:

"the TA assesses the impact of the proposed bridge on the local network and takes into account the developments allocated within Policy A31. The study area was agreed following discussions with our modelling team who had carried out a strategic level assessment of this area for the recent Local Plan. The findings of this assessment demonstrated that the proposed bridge would result in little re-routing except within the immediate vicinity of the level crossing. The increase of traffic on Guildford Road would mainly be from the allocated developments under Policy A31 and re-routing of vehicles from Harpers Road and Wyke's Lane.

Following comments received from concerned residents a further sensitivity test was carried out by our modelling team. The sensitivity test modelled trips with and without the road bridge and provided a comparison. As with the work for the Local Plan the results demonstrated that the proposed number of vehicles re-routing from the A31 or A331 to the A323 due to the road bridge are minimal. The main changes in flows are within the direct vicinity of the road bridge and this is due to vehicles re-routing from rural roads as the delay from the level crossing is removed.

An assessment of the wider strategic network is therefore not required as part of the planning application for the proposed bridge.

The TA sets out a thorough assessment of the impact of the proposed road bridge on the agreed study area. Table 4.1 and Table 4.2 of the Transport Assessment set out the change in journey distance and journey time with the opening of the road bridge for vehicles on the network. The assessment looks at the existing journey distance and journey time for the key origin and destinations, the distance increases for all journeys but the time is reduced due to the removal of the delay caused by waiting at the level crossing. The TA further assesses the impact of the road bridge on the surrounding junctions in section 6. It specifically looks at junction capacity from 6.3.3 - 6.3.26, where it demonstrated that from a capacity perspective all junctions will operate within capacity to allow for increased in traffic in 2034 if the road bridge is implemented. Chapter 7 of the TA provides a sensitivity test and assesses the impact of all remaining development allocated within the A31 allocation area of Guildford Local Plan. This assessment demonstrates that all junctions will operate within capacity in 2034.

Currently queuing occurs on Ash Hill Road, Ash Church Road, Guildford Road and Foreman Road as a result of the level crossing. There is to be an increase in the downtime of the level crossing, therefore queuing will be more frequent and potentially result in vehicles waiting twice at the level crossing due to the increased in the time it will be down. The closure of the level crossing to vehicles and implementation of a road bridge with two roundabouts should result in improved journey times. This will be further improved with the changes to the junction of Foreman Road and Ash Church Road being replaced by a bend which allows for free flow traffic at this point compared to the existing arrangement. Foreman Road will be further improved with the implementation of double yellow lines and carriageway widening, currently parts of the northern end of Foreman Road are single traffic due to on-street parking that occurs, the removal of this will improve traffic flow.

The implementation of the road bridge is to facilitate the closure of the level crossing to vehicles. The closure of the level crossing to vehicles will result in a safety improvement. It will also alleviate queuing and congestion that occurs when the level crossing is down. The road bridge should reduce the level of rat running that currently occurs on local rural roads which are unsuitable for large amounts of traffic. The road bridge is one part of the mitigation set out within the Guildford Local Plan for the Ash and Tongham area, there are other measures proposed to improve traffic flows and congestion in the local area".

Given the above comments from the County Highway Authority and the additional modelling which has been undertaken (following concerns raised by residents), the Local Planning Authority is satisfied that the proposal would not result in rat-running along existing residential roads or any significant increase in traffic volumes.

Surrey County Council have made it clear that the provision of the new road bridge is not conditional upon the new footbridge being constructed and becoming operational beforehand. If the new road bridge and associated works become operational prior to the construction of the new footbridge, it will be necessary for the level crossing to remain open to accommodate the movement of pedestrians and cyclists across the railway adjacent to the station. Once the footbridge is constructed, the proposed works will result in the closure of the level crossing. The closure of the level crossing in combination with the new footbridge across the railway adjacent to the Station will maintain and improve safety for pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles that currently use the crossing.

Network Rail also supports the delivery of the road bridge scheme and the associated planning application. They note that '*Network Rail recognises that this is a unique and one-off opportunity to work collaboratively to remove risk to both highway and rail users, as well as meet the housing development plans required of GBC in their local plan. We are actively working together to progress the footbridge proposals and closure of the level crossing. Network Rail therefore supports the delivery of the road bridge scheme and the associated planning application, which, upon completion, will allow for Guildford Road (A323) to be closed to vehicles and construction of a footbridge to commence.*

Subject to the addition of a number of conditions proposed by Surrey County Council, the overall conclusion is that the proposed application would result in an improvement to surrounding junctions as trips are re-distributed from rural lanes to the new A323. As identified there are a number of significant benefits resulting from the proposal and the application is therefore in line with the transport and highways requirements of both the LPSS and the NPPF.

Impact on trees and vegetation

Trees:

The site comprises rough pasture with trees to the southern part of the site denoting field boundaries. A significant wooded area is located immediately south of the proposed new road junction connecting Ash Road Bridge with Foreman Road. To the northern part of the site tree planting is dispersed across the site. The site is not located within a Conservation Area. However, within the site there are a number of trees protected by two Tree Preservation Orders - TPO 1 of 1969 and TPO 7 of 2017.

The Arboricultural Impact Assessment accompanying the application indicates that there are 110 trees within the development area. These are predominantly semi-mature to mature and in fair to good condition. Species present include English elm (*Ulmus minor* 'Atinia'), English oak (*Quercus robur*), silver birch (*Betula pendula*), white willow (*Salix alba*), common ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), goat willow (*Salix caprea*), monterey cypress (*Cupressus macrocarpa*) and holly (*Ilex aquifolium*).

The most significant trees are located in the south of the application site (T43 to T73). This area consists of mature oak and ash trees that vary in quality. These trees provide good landscape and amenity value and should be considered key landscape features.

The trees to the north of the railway (G1 to T38) mainly comprise semi mature birch and mature willow, they are generally of lower quality that provide low to moderate landscape and amenity value.

In order to facilitate the proposed development, twenty five individual trees will need to be removed. These twenty five trees have been assessed and include nine trees classed as moderate quality (Category B) and fifteen trees classed as low quality (Category C) and one tree classed as very low quality (Category U). In addition to these twenty five trees, the development requires the removal of part of one moderate quality (Category B) tree group, and the removal of one full tree group and part of four tree groups of low quality (Category C). The loss of these trees is necessary to achieve the required road alignment for the application site. In addition to this, the removal of T7 and T20 and the part removal of G8 is required to facilitate the proposed haul roads and construction compounds, however the final locations of these are yet to be finalised and therefore the removal of these trees is worst case scenario and it may be feasible to retain some of these trees.

A further nine trees (T58, T87, T93, T97, T101, T103, T107, T108 and T109), classed as very low quality (Category U) are also recommended for removal. These trees are arguably not suitable for long term retention and their removal is justified regardless of the proposed development.

The proposal also includes the removal of seven individual trees (T70, T71, T73, T74, T75, T79 and T83) and three tree groups that require part removal (G69, G72 and G76) that are currently protected by a Tree Preservation Order. Saved policy NE5 of the Guildford Borough Local Plan 2003 states that the removal of protected trees will only be acceptable where it is "in the interests of good arboricultural practice or the need for the development outweighs the amenity value of the protected trees". As noted above, the proposal is identified in policy A31 of the LPSS as a requirement to support the housing allocation. The need for the development, subject to securing tree protection measures and additional tree planting through condition, out-weighs the harm identified through the loss of amenity of the protected trees.

Of the trees protected by a TPO, three individual trees (T70, T73 and T79) and one tree group (G69) are classed as moderate quality (Category B). The remaining tree features are classed as low quality (Category C). The removal of these trees is unavoidable if the proposed development is to be achieved. The balance to be struck is the need for the development whilst ensuring the minimum removal of high quality trees and securing planting of appropriate replacement trees.

In addition four further individual trees (T64, T66, T68 and T80) are also protected by TPO that will require an incursion into their root protection areas (RPA). These incursions are acceptable and can be carefully managed as set out in section 5.5 of this Arboricultural Impact Assessment and section 7.10 of the Outline Arboricultural Method Statement to allow the retention of these trees.

The proposed removal of a significant number of trees, including those protected by Tree Preservation Order, can be mitigated with a high quality scheme of new tree planting and associated landscaping works. This is detailed in the Landscape General Arrangement Plan and represents an opportunity to enhance the quantity, quality and diversity of trees once the development is completed. It will be important that soil structure for areas of new tree planting is protected with fenced exclusion zones, or if necessary, the soil structure will be need to be ameliorated or replaced following the completion of construction works on site. A suitable landscaping condition is recommended to ensure tree planting is in accordance with the landscaping plans and that a suitable maintenance scheme is in place post construction.

The Council's Tree Officer has advised that the loss of some trees is unavoidable if the proposed development is to be achieved. The tree removals can be mitigated with a high quality scheme of new tree planting and associated landscaping works. This is detailed in the Landscape General arrangement plan and represents an opportunity to enhance the quantity, quality, and diversity of trees once the development is completed. Subject to conditions to secure an Arboricultural Method Statement and Tree Protection Plan no objection has been raised by the Council's Tree Officer.

Hedgerows:

In order to facilitate the development proposal, the removal of the current hedgerow and vegetation situated on the eastern side of Foreman Road in the location of the proposed road connection is unavoidable. The hedgerow mainly comprises of Elm 'suckers that originate from the remains of original tree stumps that have succumbed to the disease, Dutch elm disease. Also present are young Ash stems that all exhibit signs of the terminal disease *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus* (Ash dieback).

A TPO is present along the line of the hedge that originates from 1969 (TPO 1 of 1969). This was an Area Order affording protection to the Elm trees that were only present when the Order was made. Dutch elm disease swept the country, decimating the Elm population during the 1970s.

The Council's Tree Officer has advised that the removal of this hedgerow can be acceptably mitigated from an arboricultural point of view with new hedgerow planting. The submitted landscape plans indicate a native hedge to be planted incorporating individual tree specimens. Once established, this should be an improvement on the current hedgerow. A full landscaping scheme, to be conditioned, will subject to conforming with visibility zones ensure that appropriate replacement planting is secured along Foreman Road.

Impact on ecology

The NPPF at paragraph 170 requires development to minimise impacts on and provide net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures. Paragraph 175 requires "opportunities to incorporate biodiversity improvements in and around developments should be encouraged, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity".

A total of five statutory designated sites for nature conservation are located within a 2km radius of the proposed development. These include: Thames Basin Heaths SPA; Thursley, Ash, Pirbright and Chobham SAC; and Ash to Brookwood Heaths SSSI, all of which are located approximately 0.5km to the north of the application site; Basingstoke Canal SSSI, 0.9km to the north-west; and Lakeside Park LNR, 1km to the north west. Ancient and semi-natural woodland located approximately 165m to the east.

The existing site comprises semi-improved grassland, hedgerows, mature trees and water courses, a number of small to medium size paddocks for horse grazing are located within the application site. Ecological surveys were conducted within the application site in 2018 and 2019. These concluded: habitats present widespread; potential for protected species identified; ditch and lines of trees provide suitable habitat for commuting and foraging bats; potential for common nesting birds species, reptiles and badgers.

An ecological assessment of land south of Guildford Road (north of railway line and watercourse) identified suitable habitat for the presence of reptiles and badgers. Due to land access permissions, surveys were limited during key seasons, however, a sufficient level of survey detail has been submitted to enable an assessment to be made. The submission refers to further ecological surveys to be completed to support pre-construction activities and to confirm the presence of reptiles and badgers.

With regard to reptiles, under an adjoining site application (16/P/01679) reptile survey work undertaken in 2015 overlapped the northern part of the application site and extended further to the east towards Harper's Lane, which includes the northern section of the site, from Guildford Road to the rear of Parsons Cottages and extended to Aldbury Cottages to the east. To the south of this and east of the travellers site a reptile refugia area is identified within the EIA boundary. Surrey Wildlife Trust have advised that based on surveys undertaken in 2015 populations of slow worm and common lizard are assumed to be present within the north of the site. With regard to the translocation of reptiles the ES provided two scenarios, one dependent on the adjacent 'Copperwood' development (16/P/01679). Surrey Wildlife Trust in their response regarding reptiles raised queries regarding the translocation of known species.

Following the advice from the applicant that the translocation of slow worms has now been carried out under permission 16/P/01679 to Wkye Farm, the Copperwood Developments receptor site Surrey Wildlife Trust are satisfied with this approach and have advised the applicant to ensure the habitat remains unsuitable for reptiles to repopulate at the current time and during construction phase. This will be the subject of a condition.

Three ponds were surveyed for Great Crested Newts (GCN) within the 250m study area, two ponds within the 250m zone were scoped out of the GCN survey. The ponds surveyed confirmed the absence of Great Crested Newt. Further ponds were identified within the 500m study area, one was scoped out, the other pond 270m south of the application site was unable to be surveyed due to absence of access consent. The DAS considers if Great Crested Newt is found to be present appropriate mitigation could be adopted and due to distance would not be a constraint to development. Surrey Wildlife Trust have advised in accordance with best practice prior to commencement of works, including site clearance, a re-survey of the site and ponds is to be undertaken by a suitably qualified ecologist to confirm the continued absence of GCN. This will also be secured by condition.

The development provides positive opportunities for habitat creation through wet grassland, woodland planting, additional tree planting and native hedge planting. The proposed woodland planted embankments will create green infrastructure and wildlife corridors as shown on the submitted indicative landscape drawings. The attenuation basins and ponds proposed to address flooding and climate change will also provide habitat opportunity.

Bat survey work identified bat activity in proximity to proposed road junction on Foreman Road and alongside Foreman Road, within the southern part of the site, and the mid section north of the railway line, to the east towards Harpers Road. With flight routes transecting the site which would be disturbed through the construction and siting of the link road. No buildings are located within the application site. Surrey Wildlife Trust advised that the bat surveys undertaken were appropriate in scope and methodology, with the ecology report concluding that the site has low/moderate bat use. The trees on site, which are to be felled were assessed and these were considered to have negligible bat roost suitability.

The ES Review highlighted concerns regarding the effects of lighting on bats given the limited information regarding proposed lighting and how the importance of features was established. Lighting will be installed along the proposed new road bridge, and along the link road either side of the bridge, which together with car headlights will increase illumination within the site. The ES addendum addresses operational lighting stating this will be installed in accordance with guidelines with the use of lighting shields to mitigate against light spill illuminating adjacent features used by nocturnal species such as bats. The 'walked bat activity transect survey' drawings appended to the ecology report identify bat activity located immediately adjacent to woodland (a Habitat of Principal Importance) the proposed lighting should address lux levels of the woodland. It is recommended that the lighting proposals are informed by the Bat Conservation Trust's and the Institute of Lighting Professional's Guidance Note 08.18 Bats and Artificial Lighting in the UK (2018). This can be secured by condition.

With specific regard to badgers, further badger surveys will be undertaken prior to commencement of work, in accordance with the additional information submitted by the applicant. This to ensure that no setts have been introduced since the surveys have been carried out. This will be subject to a condition.

Finally, it is noted that Surrey Wildlife Trust did initially request further clarification on the date of the ecology surveys submitted with the application and whether or not they needed to be updated. The applicant has confirmed that their ecologists have visited the site over the months of June and September 2019 and February 2020 and state that the habitats on site are broadly similar to those recorded in 2018. As the habitats have not significantly changed it can be accepted that the suitability for species and therefore the impact assessments and recommendations within the ES Chapter would still be valid. The applicant has confirmed that the protected species surveys undertaken are still representative of the conditions on site and that no further surveys are required. Surrey Wildlife Trust have advised that the applicant has submitted a reasonable assessment in line with best practice guidelines. On this basis, the Local Planning Authority is satisfied that sufficient ecology information has been submitted to determine the application and that seeking additional survey work for badgers and GCN is acceptable in this instance as they are only required to confirm their continued absence from the site.

Biodiversity enhancements:

The proposed landscaping and planting identifies a mix of grasslands, from the mown pathway verges to species rich grass within the 'general grassland areas', and marsh/wet grassland mix to attenuation and pond areas. With regard to tree planting, species selection is based on the intention of providing a resilient tree species to reduce opportunity for disease and improve diversity. The planting scheme and specifications form part of the landscape plans submitted as part of the application. A plant schedule accompanies the application proposing a mix of native tree species (include hornbeam, birch, sweet chestnut, oak, rowan, white beam, willow, hawthorn and elm). Differentiating between the native woodland mix and a native wet woodland mix.

The proposed indicative landscaping scheme identifies amenity grass area verge and embankment plants within the northern corridor of the proposed road bridge and extending to areas within the southern part of the site to the south of the railway line. Within the mid section of the site, immediately north of the railway line within land identified as 'flood compensation' a mix of marsh and wetland grassland in addition to native tree planting suitable to wet condition.

Tree planting is also proposed on the east side embankment to the northern section of the bridge. Within the mid section of the proposed bridge development zone, directly to the north of the railway line a substantial amount of tree planting is proposed to either side of the road bridge embankment, and directly to the south of the railway line. In addition to tree planting within the flood compensation areas to the east and west of the embankment. To provide longer term screening of the maximum height sections of the proposed bridge. The proposed tree planting extends along the east and partly along the western side of Foreman Road towards the junction with Ash Church Road. Native hedge planting is proposed along the eastern section of Foreman Road between Ash Church Road and the new junction to the south and along side the new road (both sides) almost to the railway line, and along the western section in proximity to the rear gardens of Foreman Park.

Natural England in commenting on the application have advised that the proposed development is not likely to result in significant impacts on statutory designated nature conservation sites or landscapes but that it is for the Local Planning Authority to determine the impacts of the proposal against national and local natural environment policies.

Surrey Wildlife Trust have advised that the development should not only secure replacement biodiversity through the loss of trees, but that net gains in biodiversity in accordance with the NPPF and LPSS policy ID4 need to be achieved.

The submitted Design and Access Statement sets out the positive opportunities for the creation of a water-sensitive site, green corridors, biodiversity and habitat creation. The landscape design proposes surface water mitigation measures to include filter drains at the base of the created embankments and wet grassland to enhance the riparian character. The proposal includes tree planting along the embankments. These wooded corridors will provide green infrastructure and green corridors enabling connectivity and permeability between habitats for wildlife within and outside the site. Enhancements to habitat include both new woodland planting and additional planting to existing woodland areas along the southern site boundary. Native species hedge planting is proposed along the proposed roadside and attenuation basins. The proposal includes a diverse range of tree species planting to aid resilience to pests. This would need to be the subject of a condition. It is considered that the proposal would overall result in biodiversity improvements to the site as it presently stands.

The ES and ES Addendum state that subject to mitigation measures no significant adverse impacts on ecology and biodiversity would arise. It is appropriate for mitigation to be secured through conditions to include the submission of a Construction Environmental Management Plan, lighting strategy, reptile mitigation, further survey work and landscaping scheme. The proposal is therefore deemed to be acceptable in this regard.

Impact on air quality

Part of the Local Plan housing allocation (A31) requires the provision of a new road bridge and an associated footbridge. The proposal has been designed to mitigate the highway network impacts arising from the housing allocations with regard to congestion at the level crossing. The current congestion has a negative impact on air quality. The proposed road bridge will in reducing vehicle congestion have air quality benefits particularly around the Ash level crossing. Removal of the level crossing will reduce the stop start nature of traffic currently using the crossing. The combined impact of these factors will reduce exhaust emissions and improve pollutant concentrations close to the roadside.

Emissions of pollutants such as nitrogen dioxide (NO_x) varies with vehicle speed. Emissions from vehicles within a traffic queue at speeds of less than 5km/h lead to some of the highest levels of fuel consumption and consequently disproportionately high emissions. Through removing the level crossing and providing a freer traffic flow over the proposed bridge air quality around the level crossing would be improved.

The ES identified that the effects of local air quality would vary as a consequence of the road bridge. With 'moderate beneficial' around the Ash level crossing to 'moderate adverse' significance for NO₂ around the new roundabout connecting the proposal to Foreman Road, and not significant for particulate matter concentrations. The ES assessed the overall effect on local air quality as 'minor adverse' (not significant). The ES assessment methodology for air quality was informed through Local Authority air quality monitoring and project specific monitoring data. It identifies sensitive receptors for construction and operational phases. Future receptors have been identified based on committed developments within the immediate locality. Measures are identified to be incorporated within the CEMP primarily related to dust control. The review of the ES assessment, of effects during construction and operation phases, notes that the assessment identifies a range of beneficial and adverse effects in individual receptors. It also noted that the air quality assessment did not include a receptor at link F, (southern end of Foreman Road), highlighting the potential for significant impact, whilst noting this is not likely to alter the overall assessment of air quality effects. The review concluded that the overall effects are stated to be not significant as air quality objectives are not exceeded as a result of the proposed development.

Chapter 7 of the ES deals with air quality. It addresses the impact of construction phase fugitive dust emissions and also the effect of the operational traffic emissions. One criticism is that the diffusion tube survey was only undertaken for three months (July to September). Guidance advises that a diffusion tube survey should be undertaken for a minimum of 6 months covering both summer and winter months. In terms of accuracy, annualising three months data will not be as accurate. However, a sufficient level of detail has been submitted to enable an assessment of this issue.

In terms of the effect of dust during construction, an Air Quality Dust Risk Assessment has been undertaken in accordance with IAQM guidance. The assessment concludes that the potential risk to both human health and dust soiling is medium and high respectively. Appropriate mitigation is therefore required to minimise these impacts. Appendix 7-A makes some recommendations based on IAQM guidance and these can be incorporated into a comprehensive CEMP (the subject of a condition).

In terms of the impact on ambient air quality once the road and bridge are in place and operational, the report concludes that although there will be some changes in some areas, all area receptors will remain below the relevant Air Quality Objectives (for both NO₂ and PM₁₀).

The traffic data from all committed developments has been included in the modelling and assessment for the future baseline so therefore, the cumulative impact has been addressed.

The ES identifies one of the most significant enhancements of the scheme being the potential air quality benefits from the reduced congestion around the current crossing.

The Local Air Quality Management Regime requires the Local Planning Authority to monitor air quality within the borough/district and report any exceedances of national air quality objectives to DEFRA as part of the Annual Status Report. Environmental Health officers have advised that this process will adequately cover any issues relating to air quality, should they arise. As such, the proposal is deemed to be acceptable in this regard.

The impact on flood risk and the proposed surface water drainage strategy

Flood Risk:

The application site is shown to be in Flood Zone 1 on the Environment Agency's modelling maps, however this did not take into account any risk from the existing watercourse running across the application site (as ordinary watercourses are not usually associated with fluvial flood risk). The application has been submitted with a Flood Risk Assessment, and as part of this a detailed modelling exercise of this watercourse has been undertaken. This study has identified the Flood Zones for the site and shows that the proposed road bridge will cross all four flood zones, including Flood Zone 3b. In addition to this fluvial risk, a large part of the site is shown to be within an area known to suffer from surface water flooding, being within a surface water flooding area on the Environment Agency's modelling maps.

The Environment Agency has undertaken a review of this modelling work, and conclude it is sound by stating the Authority should consider submitting a flood map challenge to change the flood risk categorisation in this area.

Paragraph 157 of the NPPF states all plans should apply a sequential, risk-based approach to the location of development - taking into account the current and future impacts of climate change - so as to avoid, where possible, flood risk to people and property'.

Paragraph 158 states that 'the aim of the sequential test is to steer new development to areas with the lowest risk of flooding. Development should not be allocated or permitted if there are reasonably available sites appropriate for the proposed development in areas with a lower risk of flooding. If it is not possible for development to be located in zones with a lower risk of flooding (taking into account wider sustainable development objectives), the exception test may have to be applied. The need for the exception test will depend on the potential vulnerability of the site and of the development proposed, in line with the Flood Risk Vulnerability Classification set out in national planning guidance (paragraph 159). Paragraph 160 makes it clear that for the exception test to be passed it should be demonstrated that:

- a) the development would provide wider sustainability benefits to the community that outweigh the flood risk; and
- b) the development will be safe for its lifetime taking account of the vulnerability of its users, without increasing flood risk elsewhere, and, where possible, will reduce flood risk overall.

Policy P4 of the LPSS builds on this stating in point (2) of this policy that development in areas at medium or high risk of flooding, as identified on the latest Environment Agency flood risk maps and the Council's Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, including the 'developed' Flood Zone 3b (functional floodplain), will be permitted provided that:

- a) the vulnerability of the proposed use is appropriate for the level of flood risk on the site
- b) the proposal passes the sequential and exception test (where required) as outlined in the NPPF and Government guidance
- c) a site-specific flood risk assessment demonstrates that the development, including the access and egress, will be safe for its lifetime, taking into account climate change, without increasing flooding elsewhere, and where possible, will reduce flood risk overall
- d) the scheme incorporates flood protection, flood resilience and resistance measures appropriate to the character and biodiversity of the area and the specific requirements of the site
- e) when relevant, appropriate flood warning and evacuation plans are in place and approved and
- f) site drainage systems are appropriately designed, taking account of storm events and flood risk of up to 1 in 100 year chance with an appropriate allowance for climate change.

Point (4) goes on to say that with the exception of the provision of essential infrastructure, 'undeveloped' flood zone 3b will be safeguarded for flood management purposes.

Sequential and exception test

In relation to the sequential test, the applicant has pointed out that the preferred alignment for the road has been produced following an optioneering process which involved consideration of a number of alignments. Given the existing built up nature of the west of Ash, the possibility of an alternative crossing point to the west of the existing was discounted. A tunnelled option was rejected early in the process due to the cost, complexity, known local drainage issues, and long timescales for delivery. A combined bridge option was rejected due to non-compliance with highway design standards and because of the location of the existing traveller site. A longer alternative route was discounted for a number of reasons including greater impact on heritage assets, poor accessibility and the likelihood that users would not be encouraged to use the new bridge and instead continue to use existing 'rat-run' routes. Notably, all routes considered would need to cross the functional flood plain as any road which links Guildford Road and Foreman Road across the railway will also cross the small watercourse running through the application site. In view of this the LPA agrees that the road cannot be located on land at lower risk of flooding and the Sequential Test is considered to be passed.

The PPG classifies development types according to their vulnerability to flood risk and provides guidance on which developments are appropriate within each Flood Zone - the proposed road bridge would be classed as essential infrastructure. According to Table 3-1 and Table 3 of the PPG, "Essential Infrastructure" which is required to cross the area at risk of flooding is permitted in both Flood Zone 3a and 3b providing that the Exception Test is passed.

The exception test part a - does the development provide wider sustainability benefits to the community that outweigh the flood risk?

Policy A31 of the LPSS contains a requirement under point nine for "land and provision of a new road bridge which will form part of the A323 Guildford Road, with an associated footbridge, to enable the closure of the level crossing on the A323 Guildford Road, adjacent to Ash railway station". The development is required to overcome the issues identified at the level crossing, and to limit existing rat running that currently occurs on local rural roads when the level crossing is down. The bridge will address sustainability issues such as safety, congestion and impacts from proposed housing.

In addition, the provision of compensatory flood storage areas either side of the proposed bridge embankment, which will be secured by planning condition, will safeguard an important area of floodplain upstream of Ash from future development and enhance its floodwater storage function.

It is considered that part a of the exception test has been satisfactorily addressed.

The exception test part b - will the development be safe for its lifetime taking account of the vulnerability of its users, without increasing flood risk elsewhere, and, where possible, reduce flood risk overall?

The proposed development has a design life of 120 years (as agreed with Surrey County Council). Climate change allowances for fluvial flooding and rainfall intensity have been applied in line with current Environment Agency guidance. The design event has been taken as the 1% AEP fluvial flood event including an allowance of 70%.

The proposed road bridge will be elevated above the floodplain, rising from levels of 75mAOD at Guildford Road and 79mAOD at Foreman Road to 84mAOD over the railway (the level required to ensure sufficient clearance for the bridge over the railway line). This means that the carriageway itself will lie well above the floodplain in all flood events for most of its length. The only sections that will be at risk of flooding are at the proposed junctions with Guildford Road at the northern end and Foreman Road at the southern end of the proposed road, where the proposed road will need to match existing levels of the existing roads at the junctions.

The maximum flood depths at the Foreman Road junction are expected to be very low, at less than 10mm depth in the 1% AEP event (including a 70% allowance for climate change), and this is reflected in the "very low" flood hazard rating in this location. However, flood depths at the Guildford Road junction could reach 600mm during the peak of the flood event, resulting in a maximum flood hazard rating of "danger for most" over a small section of carriageway. The submitted FRA details the mitigation for road users as the provision of appropriate signage to warn of the risk of flooding and it may be necessary to briefly close this end of the road during extreme flood events and only allow access from Foreman Road. However, since Guildford Road in the existing case would also be flooded and closed during a flood event of this magnitude, this would not require significant additional management by the responsible parties.

The baseline fluvial flood model shows that, without mitigation and following the construction of the proposed development, there will be an increase in flood extent and an increase in maximum flood depths of up to 100mm downstream of the application site.

To meet the requirements of the NPPF a proposed development should not increase flood risk elsewhere. The applicant therefore proposes compensatory storage which would accommodate the design flood. In order to be effective the storage areas need to be located as near as possible to where the loss of flood storage is occurring, and needs to be linked so that the area of compensation floods from the same watercourse as the area of development previously flooded from.

In order to mitigate the effects of the road embankment the amount of storage available within the remaining floodplain needs to be increased through lowering land. Some storage can be provided within the existing floodplain by lowering land where current flood depths are shallow, making this land available for flooding during smaller events or at an earlier stage during larger events. However, some storage will need to be provided within areas of land which do not currently flood in order to compensate for reduced storage during the peak of larger flood events when flood levels are deepest and the land in the existing floodplain will already be entirely underwater.

In addition to the compensatory storage areas, it will be necessary to provide a dry flood relief culvert underneath the new road (Figure 5-2) to allow water to flow across the floodplain as per the current scenario. This ensures that the conveyance function of the floodplain is preserved as well as the storage function and also ensures that as much of the existing floodplain as possible is available following development.

The submitted FRA demonstrates that the above measures will be sufficient to mitigate the effects of the new bridge embankment on floodplain storage, ensuring there is no increase in flood risk upstream or downstream, and in fact flood levels around the Chester Road area to the north of the site are slightly reduced.

The Environment Agency has reviewed the submission and raise no objection subject to conditions securing the proposed flood risk mitigation. It can therefore be concluded that the proposal does meet the requirements of part b of the exception test.

Sustainable drainage:

Infiltration drainage methods are unlikely to be feasible due to the permeability of the existing land (infiltration tests have yet to be carried out). This means that runoff from the proposed road to the south of the railway line will need to be disposed of via discharge to watercourses, which is the next preferred option in the SuDS hierarchy. The proposed drainage system for the road will consist of 4 drainage ponds (dry detention basins), constructed dry ditches and gravel filter drains in which surface water runoff will be stored prior to discharge to the watercourse or its tributary at a controlled rate. The system is designed to include an allowance for climate change in line with the 2016 Environment Agency guidance and drainage rates shall be limited to greenfield runoff rates.

The Lead Local Flood Authority have assessed the submitted documents, and have raised no objections subject to conditions requiring the final design of the surface water drainage scheme to be submitted and approved in writing.

Assessment of effects and significance:

The ES and ES addendum submitted by the applicant summarises the likely significant environmental effects arising from construction and completion and operation of the proposed development. This summary only includes those effects that are moderate or major adverse or beneficial as they have the potential to create significant environmental effects and these are therefore considered further below.

Construction

- *Flood risk to workers*

There is a risk of flooding during construction for the people working on site, as the proposed development is partially located within Flood Zone 3b. Hence, the effect, prior to any mitigation, is considered to be major (significant). The current construction site layout scenarios show some of the proposed site compounds to be located within areas at risk of flooding to varying extents.

Where areas of the proposed construction compounds are shown to be located in areas at risk of flooding, flood risk mitigation measures including emergency plans that can be utilised during the construction of the proposed development will be included in the CEMP. The applicant has therefore proposed that the CEMP will include a Construction Phase Flood Management Plan. This will identify the potential flood risk to the construction workers during each phase based on the final construction site layout and make appropriate mitigation recommendations around flood warning and emergency procedures for evacuation. With this mitigation in place, which can be secured by condition, the effect is not considered to be significant.

- *Displaced flood storage*

There is a potential risk during construction of increasing flood risk to the surrounding area through the construction of the road embankment prior to the compensatory storage areas and dry flood relief culvert being completed. It is intended that the proposed road bridge, compensatory storage areas and dry relief culvert would be constructed during the middle stages of construction. The receptor of displaced flood storage during construction is flood risk to the surrounding area which has been classified as having a high importance. Should a flood event happen during construction there is a potential increase in flood risk to the area of housing downstream of the EIA boundary of 100- 200mm, which is considered to be a high impact. Overall, the classification of effect without further mitigation is assessed to be major adverse (significant).

To mitigate this impact, the applicant proposes that hydraulic modelling of the chosen construction phase scenario is carried out to determine a construction sequencing that does not increase flood risk to the surrounding areas. This will be documented in a Construction Phase Flood Management Plan which will inform the CEMP. The Construction Phase Flood Management Plan will also identify the areas of the construction compounds where it is necessary to implement additional flood risk mitigation measures. This could include not using areas predicted to flood to store or stockpile items which cannot be quickly moved on receipt of a flood warning. With this mitigation in place, which can be secured by condition, the effect is not considered to be significant.

- *Operation - users of the proposed development*

The flood risk previously identified at the junction of the new road and Guildford Road has the potential of reaching depths of 300-600mm in the extreme (0.1% AEP) flood event. The section of Guildford Road, where the proposed road will join, is already predicted to experience flooding in the baseline situation. The baseline flood risk to this section of Guildford Road is not changed by the proposed development, but there is a risk that the users of the proposed development may enter this flood water. As the proposed development has been classified as having a very high importance and it is considered that the impact is medium (as the impact is temporary), the overall classification of effect is considered as major adverse (significant) without the implementation of additional mitigation.

As recommended in the Flood Risk Assessment (FRA), appropriate signage should be provided to warn of the risk of flooding and it may be necessary to briefly close this end of the proposed road during extreme flood events and only allow access from Foreman Road. This would prevent users from entering the flood water. The mechanism for how the signage would be implemented will be considered at detailed design in liaison with the emergency planners, and could be an expansion of any existing flood warning systems that are already in place. When these additional mitigation measures are in place the impact magnitude is considered to reduce to very low and the resulting classification of effect is considered to be minor adverse (not significant).

Subject to the addition of a number of conditions proposed by both the EA and the LLFA, as well as the additional conditions securing the additional mitigation to avoid any significant environmental effects, the proposed application is acceptable on flood risk grounds. The application is therefore in line with the flood risk policy contained in both the LPSS and the NPPF.

Heritage harm v public benefits balancing exercise

As noted above, paragraph 193 of the NPPF states that 'when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance'. It should also be remembered that section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 states that 'in considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the local planning authority or, as the case may be, the Secretary of State shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.'

The report has concluded that the development and its associated works would result in less than substantial harm to a number of heritage assets, including those of the highest significance. This includes the harm caused to the setting and significance of the Ash Manor complex, the Church of St Peter and Ashe Grange.

It is noted that Historic England has commented that the harm to Ash Manor would be at the higher end of less than substantial. Historic England's remit on this occasion is limited to a consideration of the Grade II* listed building only. The Council's Conservation Office has a broader remit and considering all of the harms noted above, is of the opinion that cumulatively, the harm to each of the above heritage assets is less than substantial and at the upper end of the scale. It must also be emphasised that any harm to designated heritage assets must be given great weight and considerable importance in the assessment.

Paragraph 196 of the NPPF states that 'where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use'. Guidance in the form of the Historic Environment PPG does seek to explain the concept of 'public benefit' stating that 'public benefits may follow from many developments and could be anything that delivers economic, social or environmental objectives as described in the National Planning Policy Framework (paragraph 8). Public benefits should flow from the proposed development. They should be of a nature or scale to be of benefit to the public at large and not just be a private benefit. However, benefits do not always have to be visible or accessible to the public in order to be genuine public benefits, for example, works to a listed private dwelling which secure its future as a designated heritage asset could be a public benefit'. It is acknowledged that the proposal does result in a number of public benefits and these will be set out and discussed below:

Highway congestion improvements

As set out above, the proposal would result in the closure of the existing level crossing at Ash station to vehicular traffic. This would be secured through the proposed conditions. Instead of using the level crossing, vehicular traffic would use the proposed bridge which would provide bypass to the existing level crossing and therefore removing the delays caused by the existing level crossing.

It is noted that the level crossing currently closes around seven times each hour, or 125 times each day and periods of closure average between 20 and 25 minutes during peak highway network hours. Total (two-way) motor vehicle flows across the Ash level crossing on an average weekday are 9,472 and on an average day are 8,825; total pedestrian flows are 796 on an average weekday and 669 on an average day; and total cyclist flows are 44 on an average weekday and 43 on an average day. It should also be acknowledged that these figures and the level crossing down-time are likely to increase in the future with additional services planned on the route between Reading and Gatwick. Indeed, services have already increased to three times an hour (in each direction) on Saturdays.

The proposed development would also reduce future congestion impacts arising from the additional housing proposed in the site allocation A31 (and to a lesser extent A30).

The applicant's modelling suggests that by using the new route the average net saving in journey time per car would be 26 seconds, increasing to 48 seconds if the proposed rail enhancements are delivered. These values are greater in the AM and PM peak periods. The applicant has attempted to monetise these benefits and using Department for Transport's Transport Analysis Guidance. This notes that the savings in traffic congestion could generate £7.83 million of journey time benefits (at 2010 prices) or up to £15.23 million if enhancements in train frequencies and associated barrier downtimes are taken into account.

By providing an alternative route which crosses over the railway line, the proposal will reduce congestion and delay on the A323 and will help to improve journey reliability not only for private vehicles but for public transport (buses) and emergency vehicles.

Highway safety improvements

The existing level crossing has been classified by Network Rail as a high to medium risk. This is driven by the high frequency of the train service and high numbers of vehicular and pedestrian traffic. The applicant notes that with the proposed changes to rail frequencies on the Reading to Gatwick line, it is estimated by Network Rail that the safety risk score at Ash level crossing would increase by 16 per cent.

The diversion of vehicles away from the level crossing through the delivery of the proposed development will improve safety and reduce risk as it will remove an inherent conflict between vehicles and rail, as well as between motor vehicles and pedestrians and cyclists at the crossing. It will also remove vehicle queuing at both sides of the crossing which creates interaction effects with upstream junctions including the A323 Guildford Road / Ash Hill Road roundabout, that may result in drivers taking risks. For example, the applicant notes that some vehicles travelling north east bound on A323 Ash Church Road and wishing to turn right to Foreman Road were regularly travelling on the wrong side of the road to bypass queuing associated with Ash level crossing and the barrier being down.

It is acknowledged that some risks will remain until the pedestrian bridge is delivered and the crossing can be permanently closed. While this proposal does not deliver a pedestrian bridge, it is a vital first step as without the road bridge, that scheme will not proceed. As noted earlier in the report, work is continuing on proposals for a pedestrian bridge and there remains a commitment from Network Rail that it is delivered as soon as possible. Overall, it is considered that the development would improve highway safety in the surrounding area and particularly in the vicinity of the crossing and this must be seen as a public benefit of the proposal.

Reduction in possible rat-running

As noted above, in a do nothing scenario, vehicle queues at the level crossing are likely to increase in the future as a result of increased development coming forward in the area, as well as increased down-time of the barriers to accommodate additional train services.

Queuing at the crossing is likely to result in more drivers seeking alternative routes which avoid the crossing, but which use smaller, narrower roads such as Harpers Road, Ash Green Road or Wyke Lane. As an example, traffic from the approved developments to the south the crossing including at Ash Manor (18/P/02456), May and Juniper Cottage (18/P/02308), land east of White Lane (18/P/01950) would all likely use secondary routes to reach Guildford Road, instead of potentially waiting at the level crossing. As already noted above, the Inspector for the Local Plan acknowledged this issue and stated that *'the removal of the level crossing and the provision of a new bridge would considerably reduce delay and lessen rat-running by keeping traffic on the A323'*.

While it is acknowledged that residents have raised concerns about a possible increase in rat-running to access the bridge, this issue has been specifically assessed by the County Highway Authority and no objections have been raised.

Taking into account all of the above, it is likely that the proposal will reduce rat-running on some roads in the area, which are not appropriate for large volumes of traffic. Rat-running is a concern which has been raised by residents as part of the consultation process and is an issue which has highway safety implications and negative impacts on the rural setting of roads such as Harpers Road and Wyke Lane. Reducing rat-running on these routes is seen as a public benefit of the proposal.

Sustainable transport improvements

The proposed bridge includes a shared bicycle and footway which will eventually link into the various residential developments coming forward along the route of the scheme. It will also provide access to the public right of way which runs between Ash Station and Harpers Road. The provision of a safe and dedicated bicycle and footway, which avoids the level crossing, will help to improve and hopefully encourage more sustainable travel in the area on foot or by cycle.

Helping to deliver the allocated sites identified in the Local Plan

It is noted that in the Ash and Tongham area, allocated site A31 seeks to deliver approximately 1,750 homes. A large proportion of these dwellings have either been given planning permission, are under construction or have already been built. In addition, site A30 off White Lane, which has now been approved will deliver at total of 59 dwellings.

As already noted above, the Inspector's report on the Local Plan examination clearly stated that *'the removal of the level crossing and the provision of a new bridge would considerably reduce delay and lessen rat-running by keeping traffic on the A323. Policy A29 contains a requirement to make land available and provide a new bridge for the A323 and associated footbridge.'*

A preferred layout has been produced, designed and costed, and funding sources have been identified including Network Rail, Homes England and various development sites. On the basis of all the evidence, the provision of this bridge is necessary for the allocation to proceed and this aspect of the policy is sound'.

The proposal will help to mitigate the impacts of this level of development on the surrounding road network and will reduce rat-running on unsuitable roads. As such, the proposed bridge is a key piece of infrastructure to allow the continued implementation of allocation A31 and to help meet the identified housing need of the borough.

Environmental benefits

The report has noted that the existing site is of low environmental and ecological value. Along with the planned physical infrastructure, the proposal includes the provision of large areas of landscaping, tree planting and the creation of water mitigation measures such as filter drains and areas of wet grassland. The woodland planted embankments will act as green infrastructure and green corridors enabling connectivity and permeability between habitats for wildlife, within the site and to habitats outside of the site. These will include new woodland planting, bolstering of existing woodland blocks and belts along the southern site boundary, native species hedge planting along the proposed roadside and watercourses in the form of attenuation basins. The proposal will therefore offer new and improved habitats for wildlife and will result in a net gain in the biodiversity of the site.

A reduction in congestion and rat running will also have air quality benefits for local residents, particularly around the level crossing where there will be a reduction in queuing and idling traffic. The applicant notes that the 'removal of the level crossing will reduce the stop-start congestion nature of the traffic using the crossing. The combined impact of these factors will reduce exhaust emissions and improve pollutant concentrations close to the roadside. This is because emissions of pollutants such as nitrogen dioxide (NO_x) varies with vehicle speed, with higher levels typically emitted from vehicles travelling at speeds less than 20km/h or more than 70 km/h, with the optimal speeds in terms of lowest emissions at around 50-60 km/h. Emissions from vehicles within a traffic queue at speeds of less than 5km/h lead to some of the highest levels of fuel consumption and therefore disproportionately high emissions. In nose to tail traffic exhaust emissions are also four times more than free flow traffic. The longer time that vehicles spend within an area means there will be more vehicles and therefore more total emissions so removing the level crossing will conversely lead to a reduction in vehicles and emissions at this location'.

The reduction in pollution from stationary vehicles and the biodiversity benefits which the proposal brings are considered to be public benefits of the scheme.

Economic benefits

The economic benefits of a reduction in traffic congestion has already been set out above. The improved highways infrastructure will also help to support more efficient and easier access for residents and businesses within the borough.

The construction of the proposal would also result in the creation of jobs both directly through the construction process on site and indirectly in the supply of materials and services etc.

Flood risk reduction benefits

Although some harm arises from flooding, this is related to during the construction works and to the entrance to the bridge, which already suffers from flooding. The majority of this harm is temporary in nature and will be removed once the scheme is completed.

Once completed, the scheme will deliver significant flooding mitigation measures which include ponds and floodable areas which will take water in times of flood. This will have benefits to land and properties downstream of the proposal and will reduce flood risk in the immediate area. This is considered to be a public benefit of the scheme.

Heritage harm v public benefits balance:

Overall, the public benefits of the proposal are wide ranging and long lasting. Of particular note are the highway safety and capacity issues that the proposal resolves. The development will be a much safer alternative to the existing level crossing and is the first step to the possibility of permanently closing it once the pedestrian bridge has been delivered. The proposal will also help with the delivery of the allocated sites within the area and the provision of market and affordable housing, which are needed. The ecological and environmental benefits are also of particular note.

The impacts on the heritage assets, and in particular Ash Manor and the Church of St Peter which are both Grade II* listed buildings, are fully recognised and are given great weight and considerable importance. As noted above, paragraph 193 of the NPPF states that 'when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance'. Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 states that 'in considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the local planning authority or, as the case may be, the Secretary of State shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.' Although great weight and considerable importance has been afforded to the heritage harm, it is considered that the scale of the public benefits which could be gained from the proposal, which include significant safety benefits for road and rail are considered to be sufficient in this instance to outweigh the identified heritage harm.

Final balancing exercise

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires decisions to be taken in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. This requires a broad judgement regarding whether the development accords with the plan read as a whole. Paragraph 11 of the NPPF also states that 'plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development...For decision-taking this means...approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay'. This is itself an important material consideration. The proposed bridge forms part of the infrastructure requirements of the Local Plan. The delivery of the bridge also forms part of allocated site A31 and is important for helping to deliver the housing in this area. While the proposal does conflict with some policies within the plan, overall and taken as a whole, the proposal is considered to accord with the development plan. Therefore, the presumption is that the application should be approved without delay.

Notwithstanding this, it is noted that the harm identified above must be considered and balanced against the benefits of the proposal. As already set out above, paragraph 196 of the NPPF requires a balance of the heritage harm against the public benefits of the scheme. That balance has been carried out above, and the conclusion that has been reached is that the public benefits of the scheme do outweigh the heritage harm.

However, the other harms resulting from the proposal must also be assessed, together with the heritage harm, and these should also be balanced against the benefits of the proposal. This final balancing exercise will be carried out below.

In assessing the weight to be afforded to harms/ benefits, officers have applied a scale which attributes moderate, significant, or substantial weight to each identified harm/ benefit. Having attributed such weight, an overall judgement is then required regarding the balance of harm vs benefit.

As noted above, the less than substantial harm identified to designated heritage assets carries **substantial (great) weight** in the planning balance. Given the full analysis in relation to heritage harm above, that exercise is not here repeated, but other identified planning harms are considered below.

Other harm:

Impact on landscape and character of the area

It has been concluded above that the development would result in harm to the character or appearance of the area. In particular, this includes significant impacts on the following views (i) view east from Foreman Park; (ii) view east from the Thakeham Homes development (Vyne Walk); (iii) view south west from PRoW (footpath) number 356; (iv) view north-west from Harpers Road; and (v) the view north from Ash Manor. While this harm has been acknowledged, it needs to be balanced against the fact that the proposal forms an important part of allocation A31 and that some impact on the landscape and the surroundings is inevitable and would have been recognised at the point of the approval of the Local Plan. It should also be noted that the most harm would be caused during construction and in the early operational phase of the development. The applicant is proposing mitigation to reduce the impacts of the works which include additional planting and screening. This will help to soften the appearance of the infrastructure and will help it integrate into its surrounds in a more acceptable manner. Given all of this, on balance, **moderate weight** is afforded to this harm.

Impact on neighbouring amenity

During construction works the proposal is likely to result in a loss of amenity to some neighbouring properties from noise and possible vibration. However, these impacts will be of a temporary nature and will be reduced and controlled through conditions limiting construction hours and by approving a Construction Environmental Management Plan before works begin.

When the bridge becomes operational it is noted above that it is likely to result in additional noise and disturbance for residents along Foreman Road and in particular those of the recently completed development at Vyne Walk, Ash Manor and the traveller site. This will be due to the additional traffic passing down the northern end of Foreman Road to join the bridge via the new roundabout and traffic on the bridge itself. However, it is acknowledged that properties to the west of Guildford Road between the station and the roundabout with Ash Hill Road would experience an improvement in conditions and a reduction in traffic noise as this will no longer be on the route which crosses over the railway line. However, this does not overcome or offset the adverse impacts on the properties noted above. There would also be some light pollution from the lighting associated with the bridge, however, this will be strictly controlled by condition and it is considered that the use of modern lights which prevent wider spillage, the impacts will be mitigated to a large extent. Nevertheless, there will be some harm to amenity as a result of this aspect of the proposal.

However, it is again noted that the land on which the bridge is located forms part of allocated site A31 and the land to the east is part of the urban area, where there are already noise and light pollution from general day-to-day activity. Road noise and road lights are not uncommon features of urban environments. Notwithstanding this, the harm to the amenity of these properties must be acknowledged and it is afforded **significant weight** in the balance.

Loss of trees

It has been noted above that the proposal would result in the felling of a number of trees which are protected through Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs). The proposal includes the removal of seven individual trees (T70, T71, T73, T74, T75, T79 and T83) and three tree groups that require part removal (G69, G72 and G76) that are currently protected by a TPO. Of these three individual trees (T70, T73 and T79) and one tree group (G69) are classed as moderate quality (Category B). The remaining trees are classed as low quality (Category C). The removal of these trees is unavoidable if the proposed development is to be achieved. While the felling of protected trees is always regrettable, it is unavoidable if the development is to be delivered. It is also noted that further non-TPO trees as well as hedgerows would be removed. However, no objections have been raised by the Council's Tree Officer.

It should be noted that the proposal includes plans for extensive landscaping and planting both within the site and along the realigned Foreman Road. In time, this will help to offset the loss of the trees.

While some harm will result from the loss of the trees and hedgerow, given their condition, the lack of an alternative route for the bridge and the proposed planting scheme, **moderate weight is** afforded to this matter.

Loss of habitat

As set out above the proposal would result in the loss of existing habitat for wildlife, particularly reptiles and badgers. While this is the case, the applicant could successfully mitigate the impacts of the proposal through various means including the translocation of certain species. In addition, the scheme would involve significant biodiversity enhancements to the site as a whole including the provision of a mix of grasslands, from the mown pathway verges to species rich grass within the 'general grassland areas', and marsh/wet grassland mix to the attenuation and pond areas.

With the conditions recommended and taking into account the proposed biodiversity improvements, **moderate weight** is attached to this harm.

Increased flood risk

There is a risk of flooding during construction for the people working on site, as the proposed development is partially located within Flood Zone 3b. The current construction site layout scenarios show some of the proposed site compounds to be located within areas at risk of flooding to varying extents. Although this is the case, flood risk mitigation measures including emergency plans that can be utilised during the construction of the proposed development will be included in the CEMP. With this mitigation in place, which can be secured by condition, the effect is not considered to be significant.

There is a potential risk during construction of increasing flood risk to the surrounding area through the construction of the road embankment prior to the compensatory storage areas and dry flood relief culvert being completed. Should a flood event happen during construction there is a potential increase in flood risk to the area of housing downstream of the EIA boundary of 100- 200mm.

However, to mitigate this impact, the applicant proposes that hydraulic modelling of the chosen construction phase scenario is carried out to determine a construction sequencing that does not increase flood risk to the surrounding areas. This will be documented in a Construction Phase Flood Management Plan which will inform the CEMP. With this mitigation in place, which can be secured by condition, the effect is not considered to be significant.

The flood risk previously identified at the junction of the new road and Guildford Road has the potential of reaching depths of 300-600mm in the extreme (0.1% AEP) flood event. However, the section of Guildford Road, where the proposed road will join, is already predicted to experience flooding in the baseline situation. The baseline flood risk to this section of Guildford Road is not changed by the proposed development, but there is a risk that the users of the proposed development may enter this flood water. Appropriate signage should be provided to warn of the risk of flooding and it may be necessary to briefly close this end of the proposed road during extreme flood events and only allow access from Foreman Road. This would prevent users from entering the flood water and as such, this issue can be mitigated against.

As the flood risk is being mitigated through the application and the conditions, this harm is attributed **moderate weight** in the balance.

Benefits of the proposal:

The benefits of the scheme have already been set out above in the section entitled 'heritage harm v public benefits and balancing exercise'. They will not be set out again in detail, however, for ease of reference, the individual benefits resulting from the scheme will be summarised below and a level of weight attributed to them.

Highway congestion improvements

The proposal would result in the closure of the existing level crossing at Ash station to vehicular traffic. It is noted that the level crossing currently closes around seven times each hour, or 125 times each day and periods of closure average between 20 and 25 minutes during peak highway network hours. Total (two-way) motor vehicle flows across the Ash level crossing on an average weekday are 9,472 which is a significant number of movements through a junction which is often closed. It should also be acknowledged that these figures and the level crossing down-time are likely to increase in the future with additional services planned on the route between Reading and Gatwick. Indeed, services have already increased to three times an hour (in each direction) on Saturdays.

The result is that traffic can queue on both approaches to the crossing which can lead to long delays. Residents have also importantly raised concerns about the fact that emergency vehicles and buses can also get significantly delayed in the congestion and the closed crossing. The benefits of the proposal in this regard have also been acknowledged by the County Highway Authority. **Substantial weight** is afforded to this benefit.

Highway safety improvements

The existing level crossing has been classified by Network Rail as a high to medium risk. This is driven by the high frequency of the train service and high numbers of vehicular and pedestrian traffic. The applicant notes that with the proposed changes to rail frequencies on the Reading to Gatwick line, it is estimated by Network Rail that the safety risk score at Ash level crossing would increase by 16 per cent. There have been 28 near misses reported over the most recent five-year period and Ash level crossing ranks in the top 20 per cent of crossings on the Wessex Route in terms of risk.

The diversion of vehicles away from the level crossing through the delivery of the proposed development will improve safety and reduce risk as it will remove an inherent conflict between vehicles and rail, as well as between motor vehicles and pedestrians and cyclists at the crossing. However, it is acknowledged that this application will not result in the full closure of the crossing, as this is dependent on the footbridge being delivered.

Although the risk to safety resulting from the existence of the crossing has not been fully eliminated, it would be reduced to a large extent by removing the vehicle crossing. The safety improvements are acknowledged by both the County Highway Authority and Network Rail. Therefore, it is considered that **significant weight** should be afforded to this matter.

Flood risk reduction benefits

Although some harm arises from flooding, this is related to during the construction works and to the entrance to the bridge, which already suffers from flooding. The majority of this harm is temporary in nature and will be removed once the scheme is completed.

Once completed, the scheme will deliver significant flooding mitigation measures which include ponds and floodable areas which will take water in times of flood. This will have benefits to land and properties downstream of the proposal and will reduce flood risk in the immediate area. This is considered to be a benefit of the scheme which should be afforded **significant weight** in the balance.

Reduction in possible rat-running

In a do nothing scenario, vehicle queues at the level crossing are likely to increase in the future as a result of increased development coming forward in the area, as well as increased down-time of the barriers to accommodate additional train services. Queuing at the crossing is likely to result in more drivers seeking alternative routes which avoid the crossing, but which use smaller, narrower roads such as Harpers Road, Ash Green Road or Wyke Lane. The Inspector for the Local Plan acknowledged this issue and stated that *'the removal of the level crossing and the provision of a new bridge would considerably reduce delay and lessen rat-running by keeping traffic on the A323'*.

Rat-running is a concern which has been raised by residents as part of the consultation process and is an issue which has highway safety implications and negative impacts on the rural setting of roads such as Harpers Road and Wyke Lane. Reducing rat-running on these routes should be afforded **moderate weight** in the balance.

Sustainable transport improvements

The proposed bridge includes a shared bicycle and footway which will eventually link into the various residential developments coming forward along the route of the scheme. It will also provide access to the public right of way which runs between Ash Station and Harpers Road. The provision of a safe and dedicated bicycle and footway, which avoids the level crossing, will help to improve and hopefully encourage more sustainable travel in the area on foot or by cycle. However, it is noted that the new route would potentially be longer for cyclists and pedestrians, however, the links from and to the new development sites along its route would improve wider connectivity. **Moderate weight** is afforded to this benefit.

Helping to deliver the allocated sites identified in the Local Plan

It is noted that in the Ash and Tongham area, allocated site A31 seeks to deliver approximately 1,750 homes. A large proportion of these dwellings have either been given planning permission, are under construction or have already been built. In addition, site A30 off White Lane, which has now been approved will deliver at total of 59 dwellings. The proposal will help to mitigate the impacts of this level of development on the surrounding road network. As such, the proposed bridge is a key piece of infrastructure to help with the continued implementation of allocation A31 and to help meet the identified housing need of the borough. **Significant weight** is afforded to this benefit.

Wider environmental benefits

The proposal includes the provision of large areas of landscaping, tree planting and the creation of water mitigation measures such as filter drains and areas of wet grassland. The woodland planted embankments will act as green infrastructure and green corridors enabling connectivity and permeability between habitats for wildlife, within the site and to habitats outside of the site. These will include new woodland planting, bolstering of existing woodland blocks and belts along the southern site boundary, native species hedge planting along the proposed roadside and watercourses in the form of attenuation basins. The proposal will therefore offer new and improved habitats for wildlife and will result in a net gain in the biodiversity of the site.

A reduction in congestion and rat running will also have air quality benefits for local residents, particularly around the level crossing where there will be a reduction in queuing and idling traffic. The applicant notes that the 'removal of the level crossing will reduce the stop-start congestion nature of the traffic using the crossing. The combined impact of these factors will reduce exhaust emissions and improve pollutant concentrations close to the roadside. Emissions from vehicles within a traffic queue at speeds of less than 5km/h lead to some of the highest levels of fuel consumption and therefore disproportionately high emissions...!.

The reduction in pollution from stationary vehicles and the biodiversity benefits which the proposal brings should be afforded **significant weight** in the balance.

Economic benefits

The report sets out above that a reduction in traffic congestion could generate £7.83 million of journey time benefits (at 2010 prices) or up to £15.23 million if enhancements in train frequencies and associated barrier downtimes are taken into account. The improved highways infrastructure will also help to support more efficient and easier access for residents and businesses within the borough. This will have real benefits for the local economy.

The construction of the proposal would also result in the creation of jobs both directly through the construction process on site and indirectly in the supply of materials and services etc.

Moderate weight is afforded to the economic benefits of the proposal.

Harm v benefits balance:

The benefits of the proposal are wide ranging and long lasting. Of particular note are the highway safety and capacity issues that the proposal resolves. For vehicular traffic the development will be a much safer alternative to the existing level crossing and is the first step to the possibility of permanently closing it once the pedestrian bridge has been delivered. The bridge will also remove delays which are experienced by emergency vehicles and buses when there is congestion or when the crossing is closed.

The proposal will also assist with the delivery of the allocated sites within the area and the market and affordable housing which are needed. The ecological and environmental benefits are also of particular note.

The main harm resulting from the proposal is to the heritage assets. As noted above, this is outweighed by the public benefits of the proposal. The other harm is the impact of the proposal on the amenity of surrounding residents in terms of noise, disturbance, light pollution and a general reduction in their amenity. Harm has also been identified to the surrounding landscape, ecology, trees and flood risk. However, this harm is an inevitable consequence of the development and must have been recognised through the inclusion of the bridge in the Local Plan. Measures are also in place to reduce these harms in terms of additional planting, provision of new habitats etc.

Overall, it is considered that the benefits associated with the proposal do outweigh the identified harm, including harm to designated heritage assets. The proposal accords with the development plan read as a whole and other material considerations do not weigh against the grant of planning permission. As such, the proposal is deemed to be acceptable and is therefore recommended for approval.

Conclusion

This proposal is for the construction of a new road bridge, with associated pedestrian and cycle paths. The bridge is proposed in order that vehicles will bypass the existing railway crossing at Ash Station which will have resulting safety and highway capacity benefits. Following the construction of the bridge, the level crossing will be closed to vehicular traffic.

It is noted that the existing level crossing at Ash Station results in significant congestion in the area as the downtime for the barrier is extensive. This is likely to increase further as additional movements are added to the Reading to Gatwick rail service. The crossing is also earmarked as one of the most dangerous crossings in the region. The congestion at the crossing is also a possible impediment to the delivery of the housing allocated for Ash and Tongham through the Local Plan.

As part of the Local Plan examination, the importance of a new bridge crossing over the railway line became apparent. The Inspector agreed with the provision of the bridge and it was subsequently included within the requirements for site allocation A31. This application is the first step in delivering this bridge.

It is fully acknowledged that the proposal results in harm to a number of heritage assets in the area. There is also significant harm caused to the amenity of properties which are along the new route. More moderate harm has been identified to the character of the area, ecology, flood risk and trees.

However, as has been set out above, the proposal results in many benefits to the wider area which are significant and long lasting. These include improvements to highway safety from the removal of vehicular traffic over the crossing and a reduction in traffic congestion and improved access for emergency vehicles and buses etc. The proposal would also bring economic, flooding and environmental benefits.

As already discussed, Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires decisions to be taken in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. This requires a broad judgement regarding whether the development accords with the plan read as a whole. Paragraph 11 of the NPPF also states that 'plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development. For decision-taking this means approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay'. The balance which has been undertaken concludes that the benefits of the proposal do outweigh the identified harm and therefore, planning permission should be granted.