

The Normandy Action Group (NAG) Annual General Meeting 12 November 2025 Chair's Report

Governance and Finance

1. At the 2024 AGM the following were re-elected as Steering Committee members: Mike Aaronson (Chair), Dina Ahmed, Les Asher, Mike Dean, Paul Hart (Treasurer), Nick Norton, and Martin Sweeting. A new Steering Committee will be elected at this meeting, and we have appealed for new members to complement the work of the existing team.
2. At the AGM in 2024 we resolved to seek grant funding to allow us to continue to provide a free information service to local residents by means of our website and regular emailed newsletters. Applications were duly made to Normandy Parish Council and Surrey County Council, and we were grateful to receive £150 from each of these bodies. Events during the year have caused us to appeal to our followers for limited additional funds; this matter will be covered by the Treasurer's report and item 6 on the agenda.

External Context

3. Not long after our last AGM the Government published, by executive action, its updated version of the National Planning Policy Framework ([NPPF](#)). Along with doubling the housing targets set for Guildford Borough Council (GBC), this included a definition of 'Grey Belt' that was far more draconian than the version that had previously been circulated for public consultation. It meant that any parcel of Green Belt land that was not preventing neighbouring towns from joining up (NB, towns, not villages) stood a good chance of being considered as Grey Belt, thereby making it much easier for developers to obtain planning permission. There are caveats, but the bar has been set deliberately low. In July we published [an article](#) on our website explaining this in greater detail.
4. Predictably, and as we had anticipated, this encouraged volume house builder Taylor Wimpey (TW) to resurrect its previously rejected [plan](#) to fill in the entire green space lying between Normandy and Flexford with, we now know, up to 950 dwellings. This would amount to an urban-style development in a countryside setting, radically changing the size, look, and feel of our village. It constitutes a major threat to our way of life in Normandy, and now dominates our activities as an association. A further threat is posed by a proposal for 200 houses to be built in the Green Belt at [Shortlands Farm](#), near the boundary with Ash; a previous [application](#) for 300 homes on this site was refused.
5. Meanwhile, the Government has introduced a [Planning and Infrastructure Bill](#) which, critics fear, will weaken the decision-making powers of local authorities, and also remove a number of important environmental protections. Its passage through Parliament has been difficult and has not yet completed (unlike the case with the NPPF changes, MPs have to approve the Bill before it can become law). The Government has also stepped up its rhetoric in support of its commitment to build 1.5 million new homes during this Parliament, with the new Secretary of State Steve Reed adopting the slogan "[Build, Baby, Build](#)" and saying "we are backing the builders all the way".
6. In parallel, Surrey has been part of a pilot scheme to abolish county and district/borough councils and replace them with unitary authorities, with the future prospect of a Strategic Mayoral Authority above them to provide overall direction. Following public consultation the Government has [decided](#) on two unitary authorities: East and West Surrey. Elections to the new, for the time being shadow, authorities will take place in May 2026, and run in parallel with the existing bodies until the latter are dissolved at the end of March 2027. While this is designed to maximise efficiencies, there are also understandable concerns that it will take decision-making further away from local communities.

7. The review by Natural England of the boundaries of the Surrey Hills National Landscape continues at its glacial pace. The results of a second public consultation were published in June this year, but the proposals have to go back to the Natural England Board and then, after a final period when objections can be lodged, require final approval by the Secretary of State – when this will happen is anyone's guess. Meanwhile GBC [approved](#) the University of Surrey's plans to install a solar farm on an area that had previously been a candidate for inclusion in the expanded National Landscape, and although this decision has successfully been challenged on grounds of process (by Compton Parish Council), a revised proposal will no doubt resurface in due course.

Activities

8. This year, in response to the TW proposal, we have significantly stepped up our activities. We have issued more frequent newsletters, and distributed to every household in Normandy flyers aimed at recruiting new subscribers, with the result that our mailing list has more than doubled in size. In September we held three seminars to help residents understand the planning system better. We convened an 'Experts Group' to help us respond to TW's EIA Scoping Request, and we submitted an 8-page critique of the latter to GBC. We conducted an online survey that showed the extent of opposition to the emerging TW proposals. Throughout we have tried to support the Parish Council which, as a statutory consultee, has the task of representing the views of the village to GBC. We are members of NPC's Planning Development Working Group, which we hope will reconvene once the PC has the results of its survey of all households in the village.
9. From the 2024 AGM up to 27 June, we circulated to our followers 5 'Planning Matters' email newsletters. By then our subscriber numbers stood at 256. Between 27 June and 7 November, we circulated a further 11 newsletters, and our subscriber numbers now stand at 582. This total of 16 newsletters is a major increase on last year, when we issued 7. All sign-ups, and the maintenance of our list, have continued to conform to the NAG Email and Data Protection Policy as required by the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA).
10. We have also written 3 articles for '[The Villager](#)' magazine and we continue to use our [website](#) as a means of keeping our followers informed of local, regional, and national planning matters. The 6 substantive articles that we have published on it since the last AGM have attracted on average 1,335 'hits' each (the equivalent figure for last year was 1,124). In addition, our newsletters (which we upload when the following one is circulated to those on our mailing list, i.e. #2 goes up when #3 is circulated) have attracted an average of 455 hits (last year it was a surprisingly high 1580). The 8 posts giving details of individual planning applications have received an average of 306 'hits' (last year it was 256).
11. In our newsletters we have attempted to highlight the most significant local planning applications and the wider policy issues they raise. We always encourage people to visit the website of Normandy Parish Council and in particular its [Planning Committee](#), which considers all applications in Normandy. On our website we have [a guide](#) showing how to set up automatic notification from GBC of planning applications of one's own choice; it is not a complicated process.
12. Our three planning seminars in the Village Hall in September were attended by over 130 people in total, and generated good questions and discussion. We have put on our website [here](#) a version of the presentation we gave. Our survey of those on our mailing list, also in September, attracted 336 responses; we summarised the results in an article on our website [here](#).

Impact

13. This has been a frustrating year, as we have first anticipated, and then experienced, the manoeuvres from TW, incorporating so-called 'public consultation events', which turn out to be little more than PR exercises. Nor do we yet have many concrete details of what they propose, beyond overall numbers, vague undertakings, and pretty artist's drawings. An outline application is expected before the end of the year, but this will not be the end of the story, and the struggle to resist a development that we have characterised as disproportionate, opportunistic, and inappropriate, will be long and drawn-out.
14. At this stage, therefore, we can only measure impact in terms of the more than doubling of subscribers on our mailing list, with the resulting increased awareness within the community of what lies on the horizon, and increased understanding among residents as to the grounds on which they might oppose it.

Wider Engagement

15. We have continued to engage as best we can with GBC, who are in the unenviable position of trying to draw up a new Local Plan in the context, described above, of a doubling of their housing target, their imminent dissolution, and developers (not just in Normandy) piling on the pressure.
16. We have continued our membership of the Guildford Residents Association ([GRA](#)), paying a modest subscription of £15 per year. The meetings are always informative, and help to establish solidarity among residents' groups from across the Borough, despite the inevitable tension between the interests of the urban and rural areas. In the former the priority is to preserve the character of the historic townscape. In the villages it is the protection of the Green Belt. An additional current issue for the GRA is the establishment of a Guildford Town Council as Guildford Borough disappears.
17. We also continue to engage with the now well-established [Community Planning Alliance](#) (CPA), who have recently published a compelling [critique](#) of the harm that is arising from the introduction of the 'Grey Belt' concept.

Looking Ahead

18. The coming year will be dominated by action to stave off the TW proposal, alongside other bids for development in the Green Belt in Normandy such as Shortlands Farm. We shall continue to do our best to keep residents informed, and to equip them to make their views known in response to any eventual planning applications.
19. Citizens who care about both the countryside and the sustainable development of affordable housing must make their voices heard, and help to show that these two aims do not have to be at odds with each other. We in NAG will continue to try to facilitate that as best we can.

Acknowledgements

20. I would like to thank my fellow Steering Committee members for their support during the year, and also the many of our followers who have offered help in one way or another, especially those who have distributed leaflets around the village, and those who have joined our 'Experts Group' to give advice on the technicalities of the planning system.

Mike Aaronson
9 November 2025