

**Harlow and Gilston Quality Review Panel**

**Report of Formal Review Meeting: Gilston Area Neighbourhood Plan**

**Thursday 20 February 2020**

Committee Room 2a, Harlow Civic Centre, Essex, CM20 1WG

**Panel**

Peter Maxwell (chair)  
Tony Burton  
Roland Karthaus  
Vivienne Ramsey

**Attendees**

Adam Halford	East Herts District Council
George Pavey	East Herts District Council
Karen Page	East Herts District Council
Emma Mumby	East Herts District Council
Annesta Lee	East Herts District Council
Peter Wright	Harlow District Council
Ione Braddick	Epping Forest District Council
Allison De Marco	Frame Projects
Sarah Thwaites	Frame Projects

**Apologies / report copied to**

Claire Hamilton	Harlow and Gilston Garden Town
Alison Blom-Cooper	Epping Forest District Council
Deborah Denner	Frame Projects

**Confidentiality**

This is a review of a policy document in draft format, and therefore confidential. As a public organisation East Hertfordshire District Council is subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOI) and Environmental Information Regulations (EIR), and in the case of an FOI/EIR request may be obliged to release project information submitted for review.

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## 1. Project name

Gilston Area Neighbourhood Plan

## 2. Presenting team

Anthony Bickmore	Hunsdon Eastwick and Gilston Neighbourhood Plan Group
Frank O'Shea	Hunsdon Eastwick and Gilston Neighbourhood Plan Group and Vice Chair of Hunsdon Parish Council
Janine Bryant	Hunsdon Eastwick and Gilston Neighbourhood Plan Group and Vice Chair of Eastwick and Gilston Parish Council
Martina Juvara	Urban Silence
Joanna Chambers	Urban Silence
Adam Halford	East Herts District Council
George Pavey	East Herts District Council

## 3. Aims of the Quality Review Panel meeting

The Quality Review Panel provides impartial and objective advice from a diverse range of highly experienced practitioners. This report draws together the panel's advice and is not intended to be a minute of the proceedings. It is intended that the panel's advice may assist project and development management teams in making design improvements where appropriate and in addition may support decision-making, in order to secure the highest possible quality of development.

## 4. Background

The Gilston Area Neighbourhood Plan is being led by the Hunsdon Eastwick and Gilston Neighbourhood Plan Group. It seeks to deal with an area almost wholly covered by large, highly complex development proposals. It covers the entirety of Gilston Parish, Eastwick Parish and part of Hunsdon Parish, which is allocated for the delivery of 10,000 homes in seven distinct villages under Policy GA1 in the East Hertfordshire District Plan. It also includes the existing villages of Gilston, Eastwick and Hunsdon.

Work on the Neighbourhood Plan began in Spring 2019. People living in the area are concerned about the impacts of the development proposed under Policy GA1 on their communities and would like to influence the character and quality of new development. It aims to ensure development respects the character and integrity of existing settlements; minimises impact on the landscape, local heritage and existing communities; and upholds the essential quality of life and rural character of the area.

The panel is asked to comment on: whether policies provide enough clarity; the balance between the needs of existing and future residents; the strength and clarity of key policies; whether the Plan supports the delivery of Garden City principles; and integration and delivery of necessary infrastructure.



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## 4. Quality Review Panel's views

### *Summary*

The Quality Review Panel applauds the laudable work already undertaken on developing the draft Gilston Area Neighbourhood Plan (GANP). It is impressed by the scope of the document and commends the work and depth of thinking undertaken in such a short time. **It thinks that, with refinement, the GANP has potential to be a formidable document.** It would benefit from further work to highlight priorities, and strongly recommends the Hunsdon Eastwick and Gilston Neighbourhood Plan Group incorporates elements from existing guidance and framework documents that it wants to ensure have weight. In particular, the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town Sustainability Guidance (checklist); Sustainable Transport Corridors Strategy and Healthy Garden Town Framework will all be critical in ensuring the successful delivery of the Garden Town. The panel recommends a robust approach to parking standards and continues to recommend the need to set high sustainability standards. **It commends how the GANP clearly describes its aspirations to create a 'Village Character', but thinks further work is required to further analyse and articulate the essence of a typical Hertfordshire village – so it can be successfully applied in a contemporary context.** It recommends **further work to define both housing typology, but also critically morphology and urban form.** The panel highlights that it will be critical to sense check or test some of the assumptions of the GANP with the strategic requirements for the site – to ensure the GANP is sufficiently robust. The GANP will need to answer the question of whether the desired housing and urban form can deliver the capacity needed and create sustainable development, in terms of the quadruple bottom line – social, economic, environmental and purpose. The panel stresses the importance of a landscape masterplan being in place first to create a unique and special place – knitting existing and new communities together. The panel wants to see the landscape masterplan as soon as possible. The panel is also keen to ensure communities across the Garden Town share information about how each is progressing – and recommends the Garden Town team provides support. Further details on the panel's views are provided below.

### **Gilston Area Neighbourhood Plan (GANP)**

#### *Approach and priorities*

- The panel supports the approach and broad scope of the draft GANP – it thinks it is successful in articulating the key objectives of the Hunsdon Eastwick and Gilston Neighbourhood Plan Group ('the Group'). However, it recommends that, with so many objectives, that the document would benefit from further work to highlight priorities.
- It acknowledges the complexity and challenges of the task – highlighting how unusual it is for a Neighbourhood Plan to attempt to grapple with this level of complexity.



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- The GANP, once complete, will form part of the development plan, alongside the East Herts District Council Local Plan and other development plan documents. It will have greater weight influencing this key strategic Garden Town site than the suite of current guidance documents, including the Gilston Area Concept Framework and the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town guidance, vision and strategy documents.
- Therefore, the panel recommends that the Group incorporates any elements from existing guidance and framework documents that it wants to ensure have weight. For example, key elements of the Gilston Area Concept Framework.
- It supports the group's desire to move at pace, and highlights the importance of submitting the GANP, and getting it adopted – to provide it with the status it needs to have influence. The panel advises that the Plan, once made, can be reviewed in time.

## *Garden City principles and metrics*

- The panel has been asked to comment on whether the Garden City principles are well supported by the GANP policies. It has also been asked to comment on whether they are sufficiently robust to deliver timely infrastructure.
- The panel points to the admirable suite of guidance work being commissioned by the Garden Town team. Particularly pertinent work includes: the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town Healthy Garden Town Framework; the Sustainability Guidance (checklist); and the Sustainable Transport Corridors Strategy.
- The panel recommends the GANP reference key Harlow and Gilston Garden Town documents, particularly those championing sustainability and sustainable transport. Successful delivery of the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town project will rely on embedding the vision and principles contained in these documents within Garden Town schemes.
- The panel welcomes the draft GANP's references to the Garden Town's ambitious modal shift target for new neighbourhoods and villages, a target of 60 per cent. The panel stresses that this a metric of critical significance, and that delivering on this target will require concerted and collective effort. It will be important to work with others, including the Garden Town project team and Local Planning Authority, to collectively champion and safeguard the vision and key metrics.
- It advises that the Group challenges developers to demonstrate how they are responding to the criteria and metrics included in these documents. It also recommends considering how developers can be incentivised to deliver on these targets.



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- The panel very strongly encourages teams and communities across the Garden Town to share information about how each is progressing. Although each has a very different context, the panel is keen to ensure lessons are shared across the process. It thinks the Garden Town project team could provide enabling and convening support (see below).

## *Sustainable transport and sustainability*

- It will be critical to ensure sustainable transport modes are available from the start. This will require a combination of robust policy and development management tools – supporting sustainable modes, such as **buses**, while discouraging private car use.
- The panel continues to recommend a robust approach to parking standards, setting ambitious restrictions on maximum parking spaces. **The panel recommends this be married with sophisticated legal mechanisms to secure bus improvements.**
- The panel questions the balance between connectivity and the open character of place – noting that connectivity should be a fundamental characteristic, with the form and layout designed to encourage pedestrian movement. It wonders whether sensitively sited and designed cycle and pedestrian routes could help address concerns about impacts of these on the open character of the area.
- The panel cautions that electric vehicles should not be considered to be low carbon, or counted as part of the 60 per cent modal shift. Electric vehicles will not reduce congestion.
- The panel also continues to emphasise the need to set high sustainability standards, including ambitious BREEAM targets and setting standards for housing – for example, a minimum Home Quality Mark.

## *Village character, including modern interpretation*

- The panel has been asked to comment on whether the concept of ‘Village Character’ is clear and achievable. While the panel commends **the clarity of the GANP in describing its aspirations to create a ‘Village Character’, it thinks it will be important to ensure the essence of a typical Hertfordshire village is further analysed and articulated – so it can be successfully applied in a contemporary context.**
- The panel highlights that successful reinterpretation of the character of a Hertfordshire village will **depend on acknowledging the difference and contradiction between 18<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> century precedents and the parameters of the new Gilston Villages.** For example, the capacity of the Gilston Area, as set out within East Hertfordshire District Plan Policy GA1, means that new village populations will potentially be up to three times larger than those of existing settlements.



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- The GANP seeks 18<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> urban form, with predominant private-car travel, alongside 21<sup>st</sup> century modal shift. While the panel strongly supports maximising sustainable transport, these two aspirations are not currently aligned.
- It thinks this tension can be addressed by working to develop a vision of the modern interpretation of a Hertfordshire village – and stresses the importance of not duplicating what already exists.
- It thinks this question should be strongly posed to developer and applicant teams – asking them to explore the fundamental principles that define ‘Village Character’ in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.
- The panel recommends that rigorous analysis be undertaken that goes beyond height and density considerations. It recommends further work to define both housing typology, but also critically the morphology and urban form of a Hertfordshire village, which can then be interpreted and applied in a contemporary context.
- It may be helpful to look at relevant precedents, and to consider what has been successful and what lessons can be learnt and applied here. For example, Poundbury has a similar density to that proposed, and so has Northstowe with very different outcomes.

### *Challenges and testing*

- The panel understands the challenges of reconciling the strategic proposition for such a large and complex site with the Group’s vision. The panel also acknowledges the additional difficulties posed by differing boundaries and potential densities.
- It is, however, very important to sense-check or test some of the assumptions of the GANP with the strategic requirements for the site – to ensure the GANP is sufficiently robust. The GANP will need to answer the question of whether the desired housing and urban form can deliver the capacity needed. Also, whether this density can deliver economic and social activity, rather than creating new dormitory villages.
- The panel strongly recommends undertaking work to demonstrate how the housing capacity set out within the East Hertfordshire District Plan Policy GA1 could be delivered using the desired urban form.
- This question should be addressed, even if undertaken as a high-level exercise. The panel thinks the work within the ‘trade-offs’ section of the presentation provides a good starting point.



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- To ensure its robustness, the panel highlights the need for testing to include uses which appear to be missing from the current GANP. For example, it notes the provision of a serviced site for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople is included in policy GA1 of the adopted District Plan – but this appears to be omitted from the draft GANP.

## *Village masterplans*

- The panel recommends that the GANP sets requirements for future village masterplans – describing their expected scope.
- It suggests referring to transport micro-hubs within the GANP, and also setting these as a village masterplan requirement.

## **Gilston: Cross-cutting themes**

- The panel offers comments to the Group on critical cross-cutting themes that apply to both the GANP and emerging Gilston Area proposals.

## *Landscape masterplan and biodiversity*

- A landscape masterplan will be a critical element in creating a unique and special place here, knitting existing and new communities together.
- The panel recommends that the Group asks that the landscape masterplan be reviewed by an independent landscape specialist, with experience of delivering large and complex landscape masterplans. It would be advantageous if they were retained as ‘masterplan guardian’ to monitor and evaluate progress through the delivery phase against the original vision.
- The panel advises the Group that significant investment will be required from the developer to achieve the desired landscape character quickly, including mature trees from ‘day one’. It suggests a strategy for mature tree planting may be an approach that would help to achieve the desired character.
- It advises refinements to ensure all elements of infrastructure and built elements positively enhance biodiversity.

## *Managing change*

- It will be important that GANP standards and expectations are capable of adapting, as targets and expectations shift over the long-term. The panel advises this thinking should go beyond policy, and also consider how shifting targets can be captured within Section 106 clauses.
- The panel highlights the importance of design codes and parameter plans. It will be critical to be clear about the character sought, to ensure a special place is created.



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## Harlow and Gilston Garden Town team

- The panel strongly recommends that the Garden Town team provides enabling and convening support to local communities and applicant teams, so they can share knowledge and experience across each of the strategic sites. For example, the LPA and Garden Town team could convene charrettes to bring these groups together.
- The Group would benefit from Garden Town team support in its testing of urban form and morphologies.

### *Next steps*

The panel considers it important that it reviews the landscape masterplan as soon as possible, as well as Gilston applications as they come forward.

