

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE – 11 DECEMBER 2018

REPORT BY LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

HARLOW AND GILSTON GARDEN TOWN – VISION AND DESIGN GUIDE

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

Purpose/Summary of Report

- This report presents the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town Vision, together with its supporting Design Guide and requests that they are agreed as material planning considerations.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EXECUTIVE: To recommend to Council that:

(A)	the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town Vision, as set out in Essential Reference Paper 'B' to this report, and its supporting Design Guide, as set out in Essential Reference Paper 'C', to this report, be agreed as material planning considerations for the preparation of masterplans, the preparation of the Gilston Area Charter, pre-application advice, assessing planning applications and any other development management purposes;
(B)	the Head of Planning and Building Control, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, be authorised to agree any minor amendments following consideration of the Vision and Design Guide documents by the Garden Town local planning authorities; and
(C)	the final Vision and Design Guide documents be taken to

the Garden Town Member Board on the 4 February 2019 for endorsement.

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Members will recall that an update on the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town was provided in September 2017 (see Background Papers). Since this time work has commenced on a number of different workstreams. This report is focussed specifically on the visioning and design work which Allies and Morrison were commissioned to undertake, working with the Councils¹ across the Garden Town.
- 1.2 This work is now complete and two documents have been produced – the Harlow and Gilston Town Vision, attached at **Essential Reference Paper 'B'**, and its supporting Design Guide, attached at **Essential Reference Paper 'C'**.
- 1.3 This reports details the purpose of the two documents; sets out the consultation that has been undertaken on the emerging vision and design principles; and details how the documents will inform planning decisions in the future.
- 1.4 Both documents are being considered by the three Garden Town local planning authorities (East Herts, Epping Forest and Harlow Councils) at their respective Executive/Council meetings in December 2018. Should any suggested changes to either document arise out of these meeting then delegated authority is sought for the Head of Planning and Building Control, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to agree these amendments.

¹ East Herts Council, Epping Forest District Council, Harlow Council, Essex County Council and Hertfordshire County Council

1.5 The final version of the Vision and Design Guide documents will be taken to the Garden Town Member Board on the 4 February 2019 for endorsement.

2.0 Report

2.1 Allies and Morrison were commissioned to support the Councils in developing a Vision and design principles for the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town in June 2017. The brief required the development of a compelling vision and set of high-level principles for the Garden Town showing how new growth will complement and enhance its location and contribute to the regeneration of Harlow Town Centre as a key regional centre in order to seize this once in a generation opportunity.

2.2 The aim of the Vision was to develop a strategic narrative to:

- Identify the potential of the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town;
- Illustrate the economic, environmental, social and cultural connections of the Garden Town;
- Consider the Garden Town's unique growth potential and what barriers may exist to that potential which the Garden Town must seek to address;
- Consider opportunities for enhancing green infrastructure and creating integrated, inclusive, healthy communities;
- Consider the economic and employment role of potential new growth; and
- Consider delivering a step-change in sustainable transport.

2.3 The design element of the work required the development of a set of principles that establish clear parameters for future masterplanning and consideration of planning applications across the Garden Town that will ensure a consistent high quality approach to growth.

- 2.4 From the outset of the project it was expected that the vision and design principles would be informed by ongoing stakeholder engagement. As such a number of workshops were held between September and December 2017, and a workshop with the Garden Town Member Board² was held in February 2018. These workshops helped inform the emerging vision and design principles and in May 2018 a draft version of the Vision was considered by the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town Quality Review Panel.
- 2.5 The Quality Review Panel provides impartial and objective advice from a range of experienced practitioners. The Panel commended the draft Vision as setting a positive tone, with high aspirations underpinned by a depth of thinking, but emphasised the importance of giving it formal weight in the planning process, stating that this will be fundamental to its successful implementation.
- 2.6 The Panel also emphasised the importance of celebrating what is already special about Harlow and the local area, stating that the document would further benefit from greater emphasis around the core message of the Garden Town as a landscaped network of integrated neighbourhoods and villages. The Panel suggested other aspects of the Spatial Vision that could be further refined including around: the character and quality of the centres, including Harlow Town Centre; village centre hierarchy, self-sufficiency and identity; employment clusters and innovation; fostering change through early small-scale interventions; and sustainable transport, including connections between the Gilston Area and Harlow Town Centre.
- 2.7 The Panel supported the proposed approach of developing key principles and indicators around the four key themes of:

² The Garden Town Member Board comprises representatives from East Herts Council, Epping Forest District Council, Harlow Council, Essex County Council and Hertfordshire County Council.

Placemaking and Homes; Landscape and Green infrastructure; Sustainable Movement; and Economy and Regeneration.

- 2.8 A copy of the Design Review Panel's full report is attached for information at **Essential Reference Paper 'D'** and the comments are addressed in more detail later in this report.
- 2.9 Following the Design Review Panel, the Garden Town Member Board agreed that consultation should be undertaken on the Vision including the design principles.
- 2.10 Consultation was undertaken during the first two weeks of July 2018 and included:
- A two-week static exhibition (2 July – 13 July) in the Harlow Civic Centre reception and one staffed evening drop-in event in the Water Gardens (9 July)
 - A two-week static exhibition (2 July – 13 July) at Epping Forest District Council Civic Offices and one staffed evening drop-in event (5 July)
 - One staffed evening drop in event at Gilston and Eastwick Village Hall (12 July)
 - Consultation materials and feedback forms were available online for 4 weeks on all three Council's websites

The draft Vision and design principles were also shared with the site promoters of the strategic sites in the Garden Town at one-to-one meetings held in June/July 2018.

- 2.11 A joint press release was issued and used to advertise the events, through each of the Councils websites, social media and print. All exhibition material was also published on the Councils respective websites and a short questionnaire was produced and made available both in hard-copy and on-line.
- 2.12 A total of 97 visitors were recorded as attending the staffed public exhibitions; no count was made in relation to the static

exhibitions. In total 58 respondents provided comments which were received either at the exhibitions, through the on-line questionnaire or by email and post.

- 2.13 To support the Vision, a Design Guide has also been prepared. The draft version of the Design Guide was considered by the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town Quality Review Panel in July 2018. The Panel considered that the Design Guide, when read in conjunction with the Vision, showed promise as a clear prospectus, the key audience for which is intended to be developers and landowners aiming to bring forward development within the Garden Town. The Panel raised some questions around the status and purpose of the document, again setting out the importance of giving it formal weight in the planning process. A copy of the Quality Review Panel's full report is attached for information at **Essential Reference Paper 'E'**.
- 2.14 A final draft version of the Design Guide was taken to the Quality Review Panel for a Chair's Review in October 2018. The review focused on the set of design quality questions included in the Design Guide, which applicants will be asked to demonstrate answers to, through their proposals. These questions will be used by officers and the Quality Review Panel when reviewing proposals, to ensure that proposals meet the expectations of quality within the Garden Town. The Panel emphasised the need for clarity on the purpose and use of the Design Guide and design quality questions, and focused on the wording of the questions to ensure that the onus for demonstration of quality and breadth was with the applicant. A copy of the Chair's Review report is attached for information at **Essential Reference Paper 'F'**.
- 2.15 Following the consultation events, site promoter engagement, and taking into account the recommendations of the Quality Review Panel, Allies and Morrison were tasked with summarising the main points raised. A table setting out the comments is attached for information at **Essential Reference**

Paper 'G'. A number of amendments have been made to both the Vision and the Design Guide, as detailed in the table.

- 2.16 The final Vision and its supporting Design Guide were considered by the Garden Town Member Board on the 12 November 2018 and it was agreed that, in light of the specific advice provided by the Quality Review Panel, each local planning authority (East Herts Council, Epping Forest District Council and Harlow Council) should give formal weight to the documents in the planning process.
- 2.17 As such, the final Spatial Vision and Design Guide documents are attached at **Essential Reference Papers 'B' and 'C'** and it is recommended that these are agreed as a material planning considerations³ when assessing site specific master plans, the emerging Gilston Area Charter, pre-application proposals, planning applications and for any other Development Management purposes. This will ensure that development proposals will achieve garden town ambitions, and that clear parameters are established for future masterplanning and consideration of planning applications across the Garden Town.
- 3.0 Implications/Consultations
- 3.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper 'A'**.

Background Papers

District Planning Executive Panel – 21 September 2017:

<http://democracy.eastherts.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=151&MId=3236&Ver=4&J=3>

³ A material planning consideration is a matter that should be taken into account in deciding a planning application or on an appeal against a planning decision.

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