

Harlow and Gilston Garden Town Quality Review Panel

Report of Chair's Review: Harlow and Gilston Healthy Garden Town Framework

Friday 3 May 2019

Frame Projects, 44-48 Wharf Road, London, N1 7UX

Panel

Peter Maxwell (chair)
Roland Karthaus

Attendees

Julia Thrift	Town and Country Planning Association
Kevin Steptoe	HGGT / East Herts District Council
Tara Gbolade	HGGT / Epping Forest District Council
Ione Braddick	HGGT / Epping Forest District Council (dial-in)
Allison De Marco	Frame Projects
Sarah Thwaites	Frame Projects

Apologies / copied into

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 strategic framework document in draft format, and therefore confidential. As public organisations Harlow District Council, East Hertfordshire District Council and Epping Forrest District Council are 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

Harlow and Gilston Healthy Garden Town Framework

2. 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.

3. Background

The Town and Country Planning Association were asked to undertake an analysis of existing health policies, including their strengths and weaknesses – it suggested a framework be developed – specifically for the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town. Public Health England has identified that healthcare makes a broad contribution of about 10% to health outcomes – with a wider range of determinants influencing health. The built environment has a significant impact on health outcomes, with planners, architects, designers all having influence. The Marmot Review, an independent review to propose evidence-based strategies for reducing health inequalities in England, articulated this almost ten years ago – identifying the need to focus on supporting those who are unhealthy to have healthy lives.

The Harlow and Gilston Healthy Garden Town Framework ('the Framework') covers the wide range of issues that have an impact on health and sets out who should be involved and what should be considered at each stage, from master-planning onwards. It seeks to respond to today's health problems, many of which are avoidable and life-style related.

The panel is asked to comment on how much weight the Framework should be given, as well as thoughts on ensuring the successfully implementation of its 'indicators / considerations'.



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4. Quality Review Panel's views

Summary

The Quality Review Panel enthusiastically welcomes work undertaken on the Harlow and Gilston Healthy Garden Town Framework. It thinks it is an exemplar of holistic thinking, demonstrating how the Garden Town should be treated as an interconnected place – where the needs of both existing and future communities are considered. Whilst strongly supporting the overarching approach, it recommends the following refinements as well as urgent work to evolve a governance approach and project plan. The panel thinks it will be critical to ensure political buy in – and recommends identifying executive and officer level champions. There is also scope to more explicitly describe who has responsibility for specific tools, including the role developers and landowners should play. It would be helpful to refine the language used, as well as defining priorities, to be clear about those ‘indicators / considerations’ that are fundamental to the Framework, against those that are preferred. As work develops across the suite of strategic Garden Town documents the panel highlights the risk of dispersing requirements too broadly – and recommends considering whether these can be consolidated. Further details on the panel’s views are provided below.

Approach

- The panel offers its warm support as work progresses on the Harlow and Gilston Healthy Garden Town Framework (‘the Framework’). It particularly applauds the holistic approach underpinning this work.
- It commends the Framework as an exemplar of how Harlow and Gilston Garden Town should be treated as an interconnected place, rather than a series of urban extensions.
- The panel likes the way that the Framework considers the needs of existing and future communities – and the role the Garden Town project can play in cohesively bringing these communities together.

Governance and project plan

- Political buy in will be critical. The panel strongly supports prioritising work to evolve a governance approach and project plan for implementing the Framework. It will be important to accelerate these workstreams given the advanced stage of many of the Garden Town’s strategic sites.
- The panel strongly recommends the Garden Town team identify champions to promote the Framework, both at executive and officer level. There are risks that without a champion to defend the Framework’s laudable ambitions, its objectives may be eroded by deliverability and viability arguments.



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Responsibilities and education

- It will be important that developers, landowners and planners are able to pick up the document and clearly understand what is expected of them. The panel supports further work on the matrix set out at page 20, to ensure the Framework is clear about who has responsibility for specific tools – at differing phases.
- There will be value in considering the role advocacy and education can play. The panel thinks it will be particularly important to consider how the Framework's objectives are communicated to developers and landowners – as well as providing them with support in taking forward its objectives on their sites.

Enforcement and relationship with other Garden Town documents

- The panel recommends being clear about the Framework's weight – and defining upfront who will have responsibility for monitoring its implementation.
- As work develops across the suite of strategic Garden Town documents, the panel recommends considering how dispersed objectives and requirements can be readily understood, applied and enforced on specific sites.

Healthy new towns

- The panel suggests engaging with the ten Healthy New Towns, such as Ebbsfleet Garden City, to see how the 10 healthy new town principles are being translated and delivered.

Healthy Garden Town Framework – the 'nine elements'

Overall priorities and tone

- It will be important to articulate priorities, defining those 'indicators / considerations' that are fundamental to the Framework, against those that are preferred. It also recommends considering the timeframes for realising the objectives proposed – and identifying 'quick wins'.
- The panel supports the positive and constructive tone of the document and understands the Framework has been carefully worded. However, it recommends looking to strengthen language where necessary to ensure the nine elements are sufficiently robust.
- There is a risk that without greater precision, including measurable indicators, that the document will be too widely open to interpretation – and its efficacy diluted. For example, instead of suggesting that outcomes be 'supported' or 'enabled', the document could say 'ensured'.



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Plan ahead collectively (1)

- It will be important to articulate how collective action specifically applies for each development / strategic site. For example, by clarifying expectations on individual landowners.

People and communities (3)

- The panel strongly supports including community engagement and co-creation within the Framework's nine elements. It points to successful examples, such as LB Newham's work at Customs House where the community has been embedded in developing masterplans with developers and authorities.
- It suggests further thinking be undertaken to clarify how the specific indicators and considerations will apply to key Garden Town sites with already lengthy pre-application histories, such as Gilston.
- While the panel understands the Garden Town team have commissioned work on community stewardship models it recommends accelerating work to establish legacy stewardship organisation/s.

Compact neighborhoods (4)

- While density should not be a specific indicator, considerations such as: land use efficiency; proximity of amenities / public transport nodes from homes will also encourage people to be physically active by walking or cycling, rather than driving.
- The panel recommends considering additional indicators that encourage the densities required for compact neighbourhoods.
- The panel likes the references to cultural and civic uses activating outdoor spaces through activities such as markets, festivals and events – encouraging interaction. It thinks this will help design teams, providing specific activities, when testing spaces. It also supports indicators enabling dispersed play spaces i.e. 'play on the way'.

Active travel (5)

- The panel thinks the Framework can play an important role discouraging unhealthy, car-based, travel behaviours – it will be critical to use a full range of tools to secure the 'active travel' outcomes described in the Framework.
- The panel understands the challenges of pursuing maximum parking standards. It recommends considering a full range of levels for enabling ambitious modal shift targets, including management and design.
- The panel also welcomes references made to supporting infrastructure for active travel, such as benches and toilets. It highlights the need to urgently understand the likely stewardship organisations that will maintain these.



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Healthy eating and food (6)

- The panel supports indicators to ensure kitchens are large enough – and highlights the need for functional kitchen layouts that consider circulation and zones for specific tasks i.e. cooking, preparation and storage (6.3).

Homes and buildings (7)

- The panel suggests exploring whether the government's 'nationally described space standards' could be exceeded and supports being clear about what standard is set. It highlights the role flexible well-planned homes play in promoting community cohesion by reducing population churn.
- It points to the approach taken by the London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC), as promoter, in championing the delivery of exemplar homes and neighbourhoods. The 'LLDC Design Quality Policy' encourages minimum space standards be exceeded. The panel also recommends looking at the Design Quality Policy's guidance on liveability.
- It will be critical to be clear about the standards and metrics in respect of energy efficiency and other sustainability indicators. For example, general requirements such as 'buildings to be energy efficient' may not be specific or measurable enough to have impact (5.2).

Next steps

- The panel would welcome commenting on project plan and governance work at an appropriate point in the future.

