

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

DISTRICT PLANNING EXECUTIVE PANEL – 24 MAY 2016

REPORT BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

THE GILSTON AREA AND THE GOVERNMENT'S 'LOCALLY LED GARDEN VILLAGES, TOWNS AND CITIES' PROSPECTUS

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

Purpose/Summary of Report

- This report presents information relating to the Government's recently published prospectus on garden villages, town and cities and seeks support for the preparation and submission of an expression of interest in relation to the Gilston Area.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DISTRICT PLANNING EXECUTIVE PANEL: That Council, via the Executive, be advised that:

(A)	the content of the Government's prospectus on 'Locally Led Garden Villages, Towns and Cities be noted; and
(B)	the preparation and submission of an expression of interest for Government support in relation to the Gilston Area, either as a garden village or a garden town, be supported.

1.0 Background

1.1 In March 2016, the Government published a prospectus entitled 'Locally Led Garden Villages, Town and Cities'. The document represents the Government's latest initiative to significantly increase the level of house building across the country. It invites local planning authorities to submit bids for technical and financial support in order to help facilitate the delivery of strategic sized developments within their administrative areas.

2.0 Report

2.1 The prospectus, which can be found in **Essential Reference**

Paper B, invites expressions of interest for two different scales of development:

- Garden Towns and Cities (over 10,000 homes); and
- Garden Villages (between 1,500 and 10,000 homes)

2.2 The Government has been supporting the delivery of garden towns and cities of over 10,000 dwellings for some time, perhaps most notably at Ebbsfleet in Kent. At present, the support package for garden towns and cities is a rolling programme and, as such, there is no deadline for the submission of expressions of interest. However, the prospectus also extends Government support to new garden villages of between 1,500 and 10,000 dwellings. These developments are expected to be new discrete settlements and not an extension of an existing town or village. Expressions of interest for garden villages must be submitted by 31 July 2016.

2.4 The prospectus identifies that, following the submission of an expression of interest, successful schemes will be eligible for a tailored package of Government support which may include the following:

- Direct funding for technical evidence and skilled staff
- Support from the Homes and Communities Agency, including through the Advisory Team for Large Applications (ATLAS)
- Brokerage to overcome barriers to delivery
- Access to government housing funding schemes and other sources of government funding
- Greater planning freedoms to resist speculative residential planning applications, and continued protection of the Green Belt.
- Provision of a delivery vehicle in order to implement the development

2.5 As Members will be aware, the Gilston Area was identified within the Preferred Options version of the District Plan in 2014 as a 'Broad Location for Growth' for the delivery of 5,000 to 10,000 new homes along with supporting infrastructure such as schools, roads and healthcare facilities.

2.6 Since undertaking the Preferred Options consultation, the Council has continued to gather a significant amount of technical evidence. In particular, a number of key studies were presented to Panel on the 22 October 2015. These included the Strategic Housing Market

Assessment (SHMA) and the Delivery Study which, in part, assessed whether development in the Gilston Area is financially viable and deliverable within the plan period.

- 2.7 The SHMA confirmed that the District's objectively assessed housing need is for nearly 15,000 new homes during the period to 2031. Meanwhile, the Delivery Study concluded that development within the Gilston Area is financially viable, and that a scheme of 10,000 dwellings has the potential to become 'developable' subject to the successful resolution of certain key issues.
- 2.8 Given the evidence that is now in place, Officers consider that the Gilston Area should be identified as a location for 10,000 new homes, to be delivered in this plan period and beyond, within the forthcoming 'Publication' stage of the District Plan. The prospectus on garden villages, towns and cities provides an opportunity for the Council to secure support from the Government in order to help facilitate the delivery of new development in this location. It is therefore proposed that an expression of interest be submitted to the Government in the near future.
- 2.9 There are two options open to the Council in this regard. The first is to apply for support for a garden village development. In isolation, the Gilston Area can be regarded as a new development, distinct from nearby Harlow and therefore eligible for garden village status.
- 2.10 The second option is to work in partnership with both Harlow and Epping Forest District Councils in order to submit an expression of interest for a garden town. Being a development of 10,000 homes, the Gilston Area in itself would not qualify for garden town status. However, given that the development would be in close proximity to Harlow, and the fact that further development around the town maybe proposed by our neighbouring authorities, a joint garden town bid covering the wider Harlow area may be appropriate.
- 2.11 Whichever option is pursued, development at Gilston will provide a range of new homes, schools, facilities and services for the benefit of East Herts residents, as well as supporting the regeneration of Harlow.
- 2.12 Given that Government support for garden villages and towns is tailored to site specific circumstances, it is not yet known what level of support would be received. However, a successful bid would likely provide funding and expertise which would help progress development of the Gilston Area from the plan making stage

towards implementation. In addition, it is also likely that the submission of an expression of interest would raise the profile of development in this location and could encourage the Government to provide solutions to existing known barriers to development in the wider sub-region, most notably the provision of a new Junction 7a on the M11.

2.13 Should Members be supportive of submitting an expression of interest, further discussions will be required, both as a Council and with our neighbouring authorities, in order to decide whether a bid for garden village or garden town support would be the most appropriate course of action.

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

None

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