Harlow and Gilston Quality Review Panel

Report of Formal Review Meeting: Garden Town Transport Strategy

Thursday 11 October 2018
Committee Room 1, Epping Forest District Council, 323 High Street, CM16 4BZ

Panel

Peter Maxwell (chair)
Peter Studdert
Richard Smith
Derek Griffiths
Vivienne Ramsey

Attendees

Alison Blom-Cooper	Epping Forest District Council
Ione Braddick	Epping Forest District Council
Lydia Grainger	Epping Forest District Council
Adam Halford	East Herts District Council
Sarah Pullin	Harlow & Gilston Garden Town
Vicky Forgione	Harlow District Council
Allison De Marco	Frame Projects
Adrian Harvey	Frame Projects

Apologies / report copied to

Roger Flowerday	Hertfordshire County Council Highways
Claire Hamilton	Garden Town Project Director
Deborah Denner	Frame Projects

1.   Project name and site address

Garden Town Transport Strategy

2.   Presenting team

David Sprunt   Essex County Council Highways

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, to secure the highest possible quality of development.

4.   Planning authority's views

The Transport Strategy is a key document for both the expansion of Harlow and the changing travel patterns in society at large. Rooted in the Garden Towns principles, it aims to secure a modal shift to healthy and sustainable travel within and between the new settlements and the wider area.

That modal shift aims for 50% of all journeys, and 60% within the new communities themselves, to be non-car in future. The hierarchy of modes envisaged within the strategy puts 'no travel' at the top and private car at the bottom, with walking, cycling and public transport between them. In achieving this ambition, the strategy recognises that alongside infrastructure investment, there needs to be considerable effort made in affecting behaviour change. Harlow already has extensive walking and cycling infrastructure but it is poorly used.

5. Quality Review Panel's views

Summary

The panel feels that the strategy is a good high-level statement of intent that is readable and ambitious. However, the panel is concerned that the strategy's core priorities are not reflected in the actions suggested. Furthermore, the panel feels that even a high-level document needs to include timelines, robust data and analysis on the problems being addressed, more nuanced targets and sub-targets, and clear indications of how priorities are to be translated into action. That will require greater clarity about aims, objectives and actions. In particular, the panel questions how developers and others can respond to the strategy, for example in creating masterplans. As the implementation plan develops, the panel hopes that these concerns will be reflected and resolved. Further details on the panel's views are provided below.

Ambition and deliverability

- The panel feels that the top-line aspirations of the strategy are commendable, and that many of the ideas within it are laudable.

- It suggests more precision – and recommends incorporating more analysis and detail to properly inform priorities, decisions and action. In particular, the absence of a timeline and proper baseline will make it particularly challenging to know if the strategy is successful.

- The panel suggests that the Transport Strategy must highlight what is happening now and also signpost what will be coming. Therefore, it wants to see more nuanced targets and sub-targets.

- This is particularly important given that the biggest amount of change will occur within the proposed new neighbourhoods surrounding the Harlow & Gilston Garden Town. The panel is interested to see how these are defined for each masterplan.

- The panel feels that a proper analysis of current travel patterns needs to be included in the strategy, describing the problem to be addressed by it and informing the solutions to it. This will be particularly important for developers responding to the strategy.

Public investment and priorities

- The panel feels that the strategies priorities are not reflecting in the actions identified. For example, given that making more journeys unnecessary sits at the top of the hierarchy of modes, there is little in the strategy to suggest that action will be prioritised on this, such as creating places appropriate for homeworking.

- It suggests more clearly drawing out key initiatives or 'high-profile carrots' that flesh out sustainable transport concepts into a few core tangible initiatives that can be emblematic of the broader strategy. This will support developer and housebuilder buy-in, with potential to leverage addition funding.

- These could include 'quick wins' previously suggested by the panel – such as enhancement to routes from Harlow Town Station to Harlow town centre or Public England access.

- The panel also refers to previous comments on the balance of funding between capital expenditure funding and behaviour change and the need to instil behaviour change early in the process.

- The panel also re-iterates the need to have the public transport alternative available at the beginning, if people are to make more sustainable transport choices.

Assumptions and modal shift ambitions

- The panel feels that the strategy does not clearly articulate how the overarching ambition of 60% sustainable or active travel will be achieved, nor within what timeframe.

- The panel feels that the strategy should focus as much on the types of journeys being made as on the mode used to undertake them. This would enable policy makers and developers to prioritise action. For example, the panel feels that getting through traffic out of the town could be one such priority.

- By understanding the types of journey being made, the strategy could focus on the easiest transitions to enable – for example, converting journeys made as part of the school run into walking and cycling trips has proven successful in other places.

- The panel is also concerned that the strategy does not fully address the likely impacts of Electric and Autonomous Vehicles on traffic and transport patterns; nor does it address traffic associated with deliveries and freight

Next steps

The panel offers its continuing advice and support in developing the Garden Town Transport Strategy, and in particular the development of the implementation plan that will sit below it.