





# The Gilston Area

## Community Engagement Strategy

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01279 655261

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# Gilston Area Community Engagement Strategy

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# Gilston Area Community Engagement Strategy

## 1. Background

1.1 In order to help meet the challenging level of housing need in East Herts, the Council (EHDC) has committed through its District Plan, to support the delivery of 10,000 homes in the Gilston Area. As well as housing, a range of supporting infrastructure including community facilities, new schools, employment and retail floorspace, new sports and open spaces, parklands and strategic transport improvements including additional / enhanced crossings over the River Stort will be delivered. It is envisaged that the development of the Gilston Area will come forward as distinct and separate villages developed through Garden City principles.

1.2 The Gilston Area forms part of the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (HGGT), which was designated a Garden Town by the Ministry for Homes, Communities and Local Government in January 2017, and will include the development of 23,000 new homes across new neighbourhoods to the east, west, and south of Harlow, and the Gilston Area to the north. East Herts District Council is working with Harlow Council, Epping Forest District Council, Hertfordshire County Council, Essex County Council and Homes England to plan this growing community.

1.3 As well as working with other local authorities and statutory bodies, the Council is committed through its Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) and District Plan to ensuring that engagement with the local community at every stage of the planning process is undertaken through the production of a

Community Engagement Strategy for the Gilston Area. Policy GA1 of the District Plan states;

*“A community engagement strategy will be prepared, working with the two local parishes, which will include consideration of managing the effects on local residents, and opportunities for them to participate in the emerging new community.*

*Engagement with the local communities and other relevant stakeholders shall take place through the planning application process and through the development of village Masterplans.”*

1.4 As well as EHDC, the other Harlow and Gilston Garden Town authorities also recognise the value of community engagement and have collectively agreed to engage as “proactively as possible” with local stakeholders and the community across the garden town.

## **2. Value of community engagement in shaping the development of the Gilston Area**

2.1 The Gilston Area will be subject to significant growth over the coming decades. The Council and key stakeholders are committed to ensuring that growth comes forward in a positive way that will benefit both existing and emerging communities, and that the construction phases are managed appropriately to minimise disruption to the lives of local people. Policy GA1 of the District Plan states;

*“The delivery of the Gilston Area will include a mechanism for:*

- *Securing long term stewardship, protection and maintenance of the parkland, open spaces, play areas and community assets;*

- *Managing the construction process to address potential impacts on existing and future communities;*
- *Encouraging a successful and active community, including an innovative approach to create the conditions for local resident participation in the design and stewardship of their new communities.”*

2.3 Engagement, collaboration and co-operation with the community at every stage of the development will help to ensure that the values, needs and wants of local people are being reflected in what is planned and constructed around them. Meaningful and timely participation enables local people to have a real influence on the content of the policies and guidance that will be a material consideration in decision making when planning applications are considered. It provides a platform for local people to communicate their aspirations and inform what is secured at the planning application stage, and enables local people to influence how development is carried out by contributing to the content of technical documents required at the post planning stage, such as plans that deal with methods of construction and environmental management. It also enables local communities to play a central role in how new places are managed and looked after, such as areas of green space and parkland.

2.4 It is important that engagement is undertaken as two-way collaborative process that seeks to understand the views of the community, rather than it simply being a process where the community is told what is going to happen before it happens. Without proper communication and engagement local people may not buy into the final vision for the Gilston Area particularly if they do not feel their needs or concerns are listened to and addressed, or that they are not

seeing any tangible outcomes or promises made in the District Plan being realised.

### **3. Aims and objectives of the Gilston Area Community Engagement Strategy**

3.1 The planning system can be complex and this Community Engagement Strategy (CES), which has been produced with input from representatives of the local parishes, aims to address uncertainty by setting out how the various parties involved in the growth of the Gilston Area will undertake engagement, collaboration and co-operation with the community at various stages of the planning process. The further aims and objectives of this document are summarised below.

To be a live working document that is adaptable and can evolve over time as the new community in the Gilston Area grows.

To ensure that those looking to engage with the community recognise that it should be a two way collaborative process that seeks to understand the views of the community.

Ensure a consistent approach to engagement through the establishment of an Engagement Framework that clarifies;

- who should be engaged and when
- what methods should be used
- who is responsible.

Clarify the role of key groups involved in shaping the development of the Gilston Area.

## **Aims and objectives of the Gilston Area Community Engagement Strategy**

To bring together the engagement aims of other existing/emerging policy documents and guidance related to the Gilston Area and ensure that the agreed HGGT consultation principles are met.

Clarify the range of engagement methods available to ensure the widest audience is reached and the support that can be provided.

Help the community and key stakeholders better understand the planning system and the positive contribution they can make in shaping the development of the Gilston Area.

## 4. Guidance relevant to the Gilston Area Community Engagement Strategy

4.1 The emphasis on collaborative working with the community and key stakeholders to help shape and deliver development in the Gilston Area is reflected in a number of existing and emerging policy and guidance documents. These are set out and summarised below.

### 4.2 **East Herts District Council - Statement of Community Involvement -**

In 2019 the Council adopted a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) which explains how East Herts District Council will involve the community in plan-making and in the consideration of planning applications. The SCI aims to address uncertainty by setting out how the Council will engage with people at the various stages of the planning process. It also sets out agreed consultation principles specific to the Gilston Area which have been used to help inform this document. The SCI can be viewed here: <https://www.eastherts.gov.uk/planning-building/planning-policy/statement-community-involvement-sci>

4.3 **Harlow and Gilston Garden Town Vision -** The Garden Town Vision was produced on behalf of the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (HGGT) authorities and sets out a vision for the Garden Town and the principles which will inform its growth and management. The document states that in addition to cross boundary working, the HGGT authorities *“are committed to working with relevant organisations, service providers and community groups to ensure proposals are developed collaboratively and with thorough consideration of local priorities.”* The Garden Town vision can be viewed here: <https://www.eastherts.gov.uk/about-east-herts-0/improvement-projects-east-herts/harlow-and-gilston-garden-town>



4.4 **Emerging Gilston Area Neighbourhood Plan** - The emerging Gilston Area Neighbourhood Plan is being produced by the Gilston Neighbourhood Plan Group to influence the character and quality of development in the Gilston Area, setting out detailed policies to guide how a comprehensive and integrated development takes place, with a focus on early landscape masterplanning to provide the setting and framework for the creation of the villages. Once adopted it will form part the statutory Development Plan and will be a material consideration in planning decision making. The Neighbourhood Plan sets out the key role of the community in taking forward growth in the Gilston Area and includes policies that require local communities (existing and new) to be fully, meaningfully and collaboratively engaged with each stage of the development process.

## 5. Key community stakeholders

5.1 There are a number of groups and organisations local to Gilston with a particular knowledge of the area and/or represent specific local interests. These groups/organisations (as summarised below) will play an important role in informing how development comes forward in the area.

5.2 **Hunsdon, Eastwick & Gilston Neighbourhood Plan Group** – comprises representatives from the local parish councils of Hunsdon, Eastwick and Gilston and is made up of people living within the parishes. The group is responsible for the Neighbourhood Plan which is being produced to influence the character and quality of development in the Gilston Area, setting out detailed polices to guide how development should take place reflecting local community aspirations. It also acts as a body to advise and represent the Parish Councils and their

residents on the development of the Gilston Area as a whole, including in the preparation of planning policy documents and at planning application stages.

5.3 **Parish Councils** - from Hunsdon, Gilston, Eastwick, High Wych and Widford.

5.4 **Wider community stakeholders** – At various stages of the planning process, depending on the scale and complexity of the matter under consideration and the level of public interest, it will be necessary to engage more widely with local businesses, landowners and residents living in and around Gilston, Hunsdon, Eastwick, High Wych, Widford and Harlow. Engagement with other public bodies and interest groups local to the Gilston Area and the Stort Valley will also be required, such as the Stort Catchment Partnership and Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust.

5.5 This section of the strategy will be regularly reviewed and where necessary updated in order to ensure that it remains representative of the stakeholders; in particular it will be necessary to ensure future residents of the Gilston Area are given appropriate representation.

## **6. Other forums and bodies involved in the planning and decision making for the Gilston Area**

6.1 **The Gilston Area Steering Group (GASG)** – comprising representatives of the local authorities that make up the HGGT partnership, parish councils, neighbourhood plan groups and developers in the Gilston Area in accordance with the terms of engagement set up for the Steering Group. The group is a

forum for discussion but also plays a key role in the co-ordination of community engagement and in providing networks for disseminating information.

**6.2 The Harlow and Gilston Garden Town** - since being designated a Garden Town by the government in 2017, various governance and management arrangements have been established to help ensure collaborative working around the delivery of the HGGT (including the Gilston Area). These are summarised below together with the key stakeholders they involve.

**6.3 Garden Town Board** – comprising members and officers from each of the five authorities, for discussion of joint matters. Board members can consider and endorse technical studies, policy guidance and other emerging work relating to the Garden Town and can make recommendations back to their separate authorities. The Garden Town Board is not a decision-making body and will typically not engage separately with stakeholders or the community. It is represented in that respect by those individual authorities who remain the decision-makers in terms of their respective functions and duties.

**6.4 Garden Town officer groups** – comprising officers from each of the five authorities and other stakeholders where appropriate as a forum for joint-working, including preparing and sharing technical studies, policy guidance and other emerging work relating to the Garden Town. Documents may subsequently be considered by the Board and then for adoption or approval by the individual authorities, sometimes following public consultation depending on the nature of the document.

6.5 *Garden Town Quality Review Panel* – a design panel which can review any emerging work relating to the Garden Town, including development proposals from landowners / developers. The Panel provides an independent critique in relation to matters presented to it. Its recommendations and observations may then be considered by applicants or the local authorities.

6.6 *Garden Town Developer Forum* – comprising landowners, developers and promoters active in the Garden Town, for discussion and engagement in relation to planning policies, guidance, evidence and the sharing of information in respect of masterplans and planning applications.

6.7 **Statutory Bodies** – Planning legislation identifies statutory consultees that the Council must engage with at various stages of the planning process. These include environmental organisations such as Natural England, the Environment Agency and Historic England, and local services and infrastructure providers including the Highways Agency, Hertfordshire County Council and utilities companies. The level of engagement and scale of consultation will depend on the nature of the planning document being consulted upon. Further details on statutory consultees and when they should be engaged can be found in the Council’s Statement of Community Involvement.

## 7. How will engagement be undertaken?

7.1 Engagement related to the development of the Gilston Area will be an end to end process that starts from the earliest design stages through to development construction and delivery. There will be different forms and levels of engagement; for example sometimes it will simply be communicating

information, such as when a planning application has been submitted or when a new school is due to open; sometimes it will be a two way collaboration where the community is party to developing ideas and informing the direction of documents, such as the Strategic Landscape and Village Masterplans and their associated Design Codes; and in some cases it will be a formal consultation where there is a statutory requirement to consult the community, such as a public consultation on a planning application.

7.2 A **Community Engagement Framework** is provided in **Appendix 1** to this document which clarifies the level of public/community engagement expected at the various stages of the planning process and the relevant responsible party.

7.3 Typically it is envisaged that landowners/applicants and developers will lead engagements with stakeholders at a pre-application stage, with East Herts Council taking a lead on statutory and other consultations once applications have been formally submitted.

7.4 The detailed methods for engagement shall be co-ordinated beforehand at the earliest opportunity in discussion with the GASG having regard to the scale and complexity of the matter under consideration, the level of public interest and whether targeted approaches are required in order to reach those who wouldn't normally be engaged.

## **8. Resources and limitations**

8.1 Stakeholder engagement will be an essential element of the planning and delivery process for the Gilston Area, however it is recognised that there are resource implications and limitations to engagement that will need to be taken into consideration.

8.2 The Council operates a digital first approach to its communications but there is an appreciation that certain members of the community will have digital limitations. Where considered necessary parties looking to undertake engagement should seek to complement digital communications with alternative means of communication in order to engage with the widest possible audience.

8.3 The cost of producing communications and hosting events and activities will also be a factor when making decisions on methods of engagement. For example digital communications will require resource and regular commitment in order to perform well and the production of leaflets and holding exhibitions will also have a cost implication.

8.4 Generally where engagement takes place at a pre-application stage the landowners/applicants/developers will be expected to make the necessary arrangements to organise and resource this in discussion with wider representatives of the GASG. Where engagement takes place on an application after its formal submission, the Council will expect to take the lead but may need to identify additional resource from the applicant if a level of engagement is

agreed as necessary that would exceed the typical statutory process, again working with the other representatives of the GASG.

8.5 It is recognised that the Neighbourhood Plan Group and Parish Councillors contribute their time as representatives of the community on a voluntary basis including through attendance of the GASG meetings. The Council and landowners/ applicants/developers should seek to support the community representatives in their role. As a first principle this should be through sharing information in a manner that is more easily understood by the community at large but at times this may also be through the provision of additional support. Where community facilities are proposed to be used for engagement events the community will typically act positively in offering availability; in return those managing the events should support the community through respecting those facilities and agreeing appropriate costs for their hire.

8.6 The timing of engagement processes and consultations will need to be planned carefully to ensure enough notice is given, having regard to holiday periods when people may be less available or have less time to participate. It will also be important to avoid multiple engagements processes taking place simultaneously which can lead to the community being overburdened and less able to meaningfully communicate their views.

If a communication is required by a specific deadline, producing a leaflet or holding an event may take too long, in which case digital communication may then be the most suitable form of communication. Timing should not be used deliberately as an excuse to avoid more appropriate forms of engagement and

all parties are encouraged to share their communication plans with the GASG as early as possible.

8.7 Where appropriate the Council and community may offer to facilitate digital communication on behalf of other parties using their existing range of channels or support engagement events through helping to raise awareness. Where this occurs this should be treated as positive working in the spirit of collaboration but may not constitute an endorsement of the information itself.

8.8 It is recognised that the landowners/developers/applicants will wish to undertake their own engagement with stakeholders over and above what is required by this strategy. In addition the parishes and other community representatives, the County Councils and other groups and stakeholders may also wish to engage with the community on matters associated with the development of the Gilston Area. The Council and GASG should be informed of any intended engagements in advance of making arrangements to ensure these are co-ordinated and avoid competing with, or confusing other planned engagement in the Gilston Area or across the wider HGGT.

## **9. Methods available to assist engagement and communication**

9.1 The Council has a range of channels which will be used to share news and updates on how development in the Gilston Area is progressing and to invite people to participate in consultation events and engage in working up proposals, some of these methods are set out below.



9.2 A live **web based platform** is currently being developed by EHDC and the HGGT that will be updated on an ongoing basis to keep the public informed about the progress of development as it comes forward in the Gilston Area. It will include information on a range of topic areas, including housing, community facilities and transport infrastructure secured at the planning stages through to delivery. It will also include details of how the local community can participate in the planning and design of the Gilston Area and also matters associated with the delivery and construction phase post planning.

9.3 In addition it will act as a sign post to other useful information such as documents and plans associated with the development, the programme for construction and when certain actions will be taking place such as scheduled road closures. It will also provide useful contact details if residents have any questions or concerns relating to the development.

9.4 In time it will provide a platform to review outcomes and ensure developer accountability at the post construction stage by identifying a series of standards and targets that can be used to indicate and measure the quality of the new development as it comes forward.

9.5 Landowners - Gilston Park Estate, have a project website that will also be used to support engagement going forward (<https://gilstonparkestate.com/>).

9.6 **Social Media** platforms will be used to share updates and news such as the East Herts and Harlow and Gilston Garden Town Twitter accounts. Online Consultation Platforms may also be used which allow the public to share their

comments on a proposal in real-time and in a way which is open and accountable. Feedback from these social media platforms can be used to communicate any issues or views back to the Council, Developers and other interested parties.

9.7 **Face to face methods** of engagement and communication will be used where appropriate. These will include workshop events, seminars, roadshows and Q&A sessions at public meetings. Such events could take place in person, virtually or a combination of the two.

9.8 Landowners/applicants/developers will also have various means of communication and approaches to engagement that they may wish to use. This document recognises that there are many ways of engaging and supporting new ideas.

9.9 **Other media types** will be used to communicate what is happening at Gilston such as local newspapers, Link magazine, the planning bulletin, posters, leaflets and exhibitions etc.

## 10. Evaluation

10.1 It is important to learn from past experience and evaluate how effective a process of engagement has been. Evaluation will provide valuable feedback on matters such as the best methods for engaging with particular groups, or the most appropriate times or venues to encourage participation. It is expected that those leading on engagement events should feedback their findings to the GASG to help inform future engagement processes.

## Appendix 1: Community Engagement Framework for the Gilston Area

The purpose of this framework is to summarise and clarify the level of public/community engagement expected at the various stages of the planning process in accordance with the Council’s Statement of Community Involvement. In many cases the detailed methods for engagement will be agreed by the Gilston Area Steering Group (GASG) depending on the scale and complexity of the matter under consideration, as well as the level of public interest.

### 1. Policy and Guidance documents:

This section details the engagement and consultation requirements for the production of any policy/guidance documents directly linked to the implementation of District Plan Policy GA1. Note the production of policy/guidance documents that are applicable to the entire District or Garden Town will be subject to separate requirements which depending on their scope and nature may include engagement/consultation with the communities in and around Gilston.

Stage	Who from the community should be engaged ( <b>statutory</b> and non-statutory requirements)	Engagement/consultation opportunities	Responsible party
Preparation and evidence gathering	Depending on the content and scope of the document, early engagement may be undertaken with interested parties from the local community as agreed by the GASG.	Workshops with identified parties or sub-group(s) to the GASG.	Document author
Drafting	Continued engagement with parties identified by GASG will be undertaken throughout the production of the document.  For documents seeking adoption, a public	Workshops with identified parties or sub-groups to the GASG.  Consultation methods will need to be	Document author  Document author

	consultation on a final draft version (minimum 4 weeks consultation) is required. The author should take into account representations in completing the final version for adoption and publication.	proportionate but may include; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Public meetings and exhibitions/webinars</li> <li>- Website alerts</li> <li>- Individual letters or leaflets</li> <li>- Social Media, newsletters</li> <li>- Engagement with parish/town councils and other interested bodies</li> <li>- Ward Member briefings</li> </ul>	
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## 2. Major planning applications

This section details the engagement and consultation requirements applicable to the submission of major planning applications including Reserved Matters applications.

Stage	Who from the community should be engaged (statutory and non-statutory requirements)	Engagement/consultation opportunities	Responsible party
Pre-application Stage	Early engagement will be undertaken with interested parties from the local community as agreed by the GASG.	Methods will need to be proportionate but may include; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Public meetings, exhibitions, webinars</li> <li>- Website alerts</li> <li>- Leaflets</li> <li>- Social Media, newsletters</li> <li>- Engagement with parish/town councils and other interested</li> </ul>	Landowner/applicant

		<p>bodies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Workshops with identified parties or subgroups may be appropriate for particularly sensitive or significant development proposals.</li> </ul>	
Application Stage	<p>Statutory public consultation (minimum 21 days).</p> <p>Depending on the level of interest and feedback arising from the initial statutory consultation, it may be necessary to carry out non-statutory engagement with the community if amendments to the application are required, particularly those that may be sensitive or significant from the community's perspective. This should be undertaken prior to the formal submission of any amendments and further statutory re-consultation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Site Notices</li> <li>- Notifications to residents, local community groups and businesses</li> <li>- Website alerts</li> <li>- Press Notice in local paper</li> <li>- Parish council notification</li> <li>- Website/social media notifications</li> <li>- Ward Member notification</li> <li>- Further workshops with identified parties or subgroups, public exhibitions and/or Webinars may be required for particularly sensitive or significant development proposals.</li> <li>- Workshops with identified parties or subgroups and/or Webinars may be required.</li> </ul>	<p>EHDC</p> <p>Applicants</p>

### 3. Strategic Landscape and Village Masterplans and associated Design Codes

The Gilston Area Charter requires the applicants and Council to produce an Engagement Plan in consultation with the GASG prior to work commencing on any of the Gilston Area Masterplans. The Engagement Plan will include the establishment of a working group of community representatives to help inform the content of the masterplan from the earliest stages of production.

Stage	Who from the community should be engaged ( <b>statutory</b> and non-statutory requirements)	Engagement/consultation opportunities	Responsible party
Prior to any work commencing	A working group of community representatives shall be established in consultation with the GASG to help inform the production of the masterplan. Members of the working group shall represent a wide community demographic and include representatives from local interest groups, residents and local business owners as appropriate.		Landowner/applicant and EHDC
Drafting/production	Community Working Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Workshops</li> </ul>	Landowner/applicant supported by EHDC
Completion of draft (prior to formal submission)	Wider engagement will be undertaken once a draft masterplan has been produced. The extent of engagement to be agreed with the GASG in consultation with the Community Working Group.	Methods will need to be proportionate but may include; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Public meetings, exhibitions, Webinars</li> <li>- Ward Member briefings</li> <li>- Leaflets</li> <li>- Social Media</li> <li>- Engagement with parish/town</li> </ul>	Landowner/applicant supported by EHDC

		councils and other interested bodies	
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#### 4. Post Planning submissions (Approval of Details applications)

There is no statutory requirement for Local Planning Authorities to consult the community on planning applications seeking to discharge conditions. However, if the details to be discharged relate to an issue that would benefit from the expertise of a local group/body or would directly impact the lives of local people, for example details that concern local wildlife or how construction will be managed, the LPA may use its discretion through the wording of certain conditions to establish a requirement for engagement to be undertaken as the details are worked up prior to submission.

Stage	Who from the community should be engaged (statutory and non-statutory requirements)	Engagement/consultation opportunities	Responsible party
Pre-submission	The Council and applicants will determine which community representatives should be engaged depending on the scope and nature of the details being discharged and feedback from the consultation undertaken at the outline application stage when the conditions are drafted. It may also necessary to revisit who should be engaged in consultation with the GASG, as the community and any local interest groups	Methods will need to be proportionate and depend on the specific details being worked up but may include; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Workshops with identified parties or groups.</li> <li>- Public meetings/webinars</li> <li>- Ward Member liaison</li> <li>- Engagement with parish/town councils</li> </ul>	Landowner/applicant

	may change and evolve over the duration of the development.		
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## Appendix 2: Links to relevant supporting documents

1. East Herts District Council Statement of Community involvement

<https://www.eastherts.gov.uk/planning-building/planning-policy/statement-community-involvement-sci>

2. East Herts District Plan

<https://www.eastherts.gov.uk/planning-building/east-herts-district-plan/east-herts-district-plan-2018>

3. Gilston Area Steering Group Terms of Reference

[https://cdn-eastherts.onwebcurl.com/s3fs-public/documents/20180405\\_Steering\\_Group\\_Terms\\_of\\_Reference\\_v2.1\\_Agreed.pdf](https://cdn-eastherts.onwebcurl.com/s3fs-public/documents/20180405_Steering_Group_Terms_of_Reference_v2.1_Agreed.pdf)

4. Harlow and Gilston Garden Town website

<http://www.harlowandgilstongardentown.co.uk/>