

Executive

Date of Meeting: 30 March 2021

Report by: Leader of the Council

Report title: Harlow and Gilston Garden Town: Sustainability Guidance and Checklist, final document for endorsement

Ward(s) affected: Hunsdon

Summary

The draft Harlow and Gilston Garden Town Sustainability Guidance and Checklist was agreed for consultation in October 2020. The consultation exercise has now been concluded. The draft document has been updated as a result and this report now recommends that the finalised document be endorsed.

RECOMMENDATION FOR EXECUTIVE to recommend to Council:

- (a) that the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town Sustainability Guidance and Checklist be endorsed as material for development management purposes.**

1.0 Proposal(s)

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to enable consideration of the final version of the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (HGGT) Sustainability Guidance and Checklist and to recommend to Council that it be endorsed as material in relation to planning decisions. Throughout this report the document is referred to as the 'Guidance and Checklist'. The finalised document is attached as **Appendix 1**.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The Guidance and Checklist document provides practical and technical guidance on how relevant sustainability indicators

and policies (environmental, social, and economic) in the HGGT Vision, HGGT draft Transport Strategy and Garden Town partner authorities' Local Plans will be applied to new strategic developments in the Garden Town.

- 2.2 The Guidance and Checklist is to be used by applicants and partner authority officers when preparing and discussing masterplans, pre-application proposals, planning applications and the discharge of conditions applications. This will ensure coordinated and integrated consideration of sustainability principles and targets at an early stage across the Garden Town. The Guidance and Checklist is to be applied to major developments (10 homes and above).
- 2.3 The final version of the document was presented to the Garden Town Board at its meeting of 15 March 2021, with the recommendation that the three District Council partners be invited to endorse the document as material for planning purposes. That recommendation was agreed by the Board.
- 2.4 Once endorsed, the Guidance and Checklist will become a material planning consideration in the assessment of planning applications for developments coming forward within the Garden Town. It will inform pre-application discussions and assist decision-makers in sustainability matters. The document will also be utilised by HGGT Quality Review Panel reviews to help form the basis of environmental and socio-economic sustainability discussions.

3.0 Preparation and consultation

- 3.1 The Guidance and Checklist has been prepared in-house by the HGGT team, with input from all partner authorities¹ and external expertise where appropriate.
- 3.2 The Garden Town seeks to set the agenda for sustainable living through ensuring growth that will be net carbon neutral

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

by 2030, and building strong and integrated communities across new and existing places.

- 3.3 The Guidance and Checklist relates directly to the principles and indicators within the HGGT Vision, draft HGGT Transport Strategy and the Garden Town Local Planning Authorities adopted and emerging Local Plan policies and SPDs. In particular, the Guidance and Checklist will support the Sustainability SPD which has been adopted by East Herts Council. The Guidance and Checklist will have the status of guidance – and therefore attract less weight in decision making than the SPD. However it addresses in a more fine grained way, the matters that need to be considered and solutions crafted to ensure that sustainability is achieved in developments coming forward.
- 3.4 There has been extensive input from officers from all partner authorities into the draft Guidance and Checklist. It has also been subject to assessment by the HGGT Quality Review Panel and through topic focussed workshops (developers, members, local groups, charities and organisations). Expert advice has also been commissioned from the UK Green Building Council (UKGBC), through the facilitation of two Sustainability Workshops, to review and discuss the draft Guidance and Checklist with over 30 experts in Sustainability in attendance.
- 3.5 The Guidance and Checklist was published for a six-week period of public consultation between October and December 2020. Given the restrictions on face to face engagement, consultation focused on reaching a broad audience primarily through digital channels, non-digital means were also available to ensure maximum accessibility for those less familiar with digital channels. The consultation included:
 - HGGT Sustainability Guidance and Checklist available for viewing on HGGT website, with links to this from partner authority websites.

- Overview of the document via accessible pre-recorded video available for viewing on HGGT website.

- Digital questionnaire / survey available for viewing and completing on HGGT website.

- 5 Staffed online webinars and Q&A sessions for particular stakeholder groups (e.g. Local residents and Community Groups, Developers, Members, Youth Councils, Partner Officers).

- Social Media awareness campaign (via HGGT and partner authorities).

- Notification of consultation via LPA Planning Policy databases and statutory consultees.

3.6 Non digital engagement included the distribution of hard copy consultation packs, on request, leaflet/ poster information to provide summary with link/ QR Code to online document and provision of hard copy of questionnaire/ survey.

3.7 A schedule of the representations received is attached at **Appendix 2**. The comments received in response can be broadly categorized into the following themes:

- Issues around the structure of checklist questions in relation to different stages of planning applications (i.e. requirements at Outline Planning vs Full / Reserved Matters).

- Comments around the ambition of the guidance in context of the upcoming government Future Homes Standards (expected release in 2022).

- Clarification on the degree of flexibility allowed by the guidance checklist questions.

- Clarification on whether Sustainability Guidance documents have been factored into Viability Assessments.

- Detailed comments relating to specific themes and checklist questions; including additional emphasis placed on Digital sustainability and a more integrated thread of the impacts of covid-19 pandemic in the Socio-Economic section of the guidance

3.8 Key updates and changes to the Guidance and Checklist to respond to the above comments include:

- Restructuring of Guidance checklists to split questions in to two categories: those that apply to Outline applications and those that apply to Full / Reserved Matters planning applications.

- Further information provided in the Introduction chapter on role and purpose of the Guidance documents as material considerations in the assessment of planning applications in context of the Future Homes Standard, and degree of flexibility allowed by checklist questions.

- A new 'Digital Sustainability' page included in the 'Environmental Sustainability' section of the document

- Revision of the 'Job Creation' section; and additional questions in the Socio-Economic checklist related to this.

- Further consolidation from the 'Healthy Towns Framework' within the Socio-Economic section, including the questions asked in this section.

- Stronger post-covid pandemic narrative incorporated into the Socio-Economic section of the Guidance.

- General updates made to address comments on specific themes, including an Air Quality Checklist incorporated, and updated glossary terms.

3.9 With the above amendments it is now considered that a robust final document has been produced and one which can be endorsed.

4.0 Options

4.1 The feasible alternative options in this matter include either proceeding with the endorsement of the Guidance and Checklist or not.

4.2 Given that a range of amendments have been made to the document to take on board the comments received during the consultation, there is little risk in proceeding. Not proceeding would make all work to date abortive in the absence of any clear reason to do so.

5.0 Risks

5.1 Risks of proceeding to endorsement are considered to be minimal.

6.0 Implications/Consultations

6.1 As set out below.

Community Safety

No

Data Protection

No

Equalities

Yes – the Guidance and Checklist has been subject to Equalities

Impact Assessment

Environmental Sustainability

Yes – the document focusses on measures to be taken, through planning decisions, to address sustainability issues.

Financial

Yes – no direct implications however any costs associated with the implementation and use of the document are contained within the budgets of the planning service.

Health and Safety

No

Human Resources

No

Human Rights

No

Legal

No

Specific Wards

Yes – the document is specifically related to the HGGT area within the Hunsdon ward.

7.0 Background papers, appendices and other relevant material

7.1 Appendix 1 – Final HGGT Sustainability Guidance and Checklist

7.2 Appendix 2 – Summary of consultation responses.

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