

East Herts Council Report

Executive

Date of meeting: Tuesday 13 February 2024

Report by: Councillor Ben Crystall – Leader of the Council

Report title: Harlow and Gilston Garden Town: Strategic Economic Framework

Ward(s) affected: Great Amwell and Stansteads; Hunsdon; Much Hadham; Sawbridgeworth;

Summary – the draft Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (HGGT) Strategic Economic Framework (SEF) outlines a ‘road map’ for economic growth within the Garden Town area over the next 20 years. It aims to achieve socio-economic ambitions, maintain a balanced community with equal jobs and workers, promote inclusive growth for existing residents, and enhance sustainability and liveability through the creation of neighbourhoods that offer employment as well as places to live. The framework encompasses the entire Garden Town area and aligns with adopted economic strategies already in place amongst the partners.

The SEF was presented to the HGGT Board meeting of 12 Sept 2023. The Board noted the findings in the report and resolved that it should be published following the agreement of all Garden Town partners to do so. This report seeks the endorsement of the SEF by East Herts Council, agreement to it forming the basis of the approach to economic development in the HGGT area and agreement to publication of the report.

RECOMMENDATIONS for Executive, that:

- a)** The findings of the HGGT Strategic Economic Framework, as set out in Appendix 1, be endorsed;
- b)** Subject to all authorities approving the HGGT Strategic Economic Framework, the Framework is supported and agreed and will form the basis of the approach to economic development in the Garden Town area.
- c)** It delegates to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Executive Member for Planning and Growth, to make any necessary, non-consequential and minor amendments and refer those amendments back to the HGGT Chair and Director.

1.0 Proposal(s)

- 1.1 It is proposed that the Council endorses the findings of the SEF and agrees to it forming the basis of the approach to economic development in the HGGT area. It is also proposed that the Council agrees to its publication of the SEF, subject to agreement by all HGGT partners.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 An important element of the Vision for the Garden Town is the delivery of jobs and economic development alongside the delivery of housing. Currently, for the Harlow area, data indicates that the level of in and out commuting to and from the town is roughly equal. This means that the number of people travelling into the town each day for work is roughly equal to the number who travel out for jobs elsewhere. The position of the Garden Town partners is that they wish that

equilibrium to be maintained whilst housing development takes place.

- 2.2 Maintaining that equilibrium requires significant job creation to take place alongside the delivery of housing. If that is achieved, it ensures that employment and other opportunities are made available to existing and new residents locally. Achieving the balance also has a significant impact in relation to travel patterns in the Garden Town. If more limited numbers of new jobs are created within the Garden Town area, this will result in a greater number of longer distance journeys being made to access job opportunities elsewhere.
- 2.3 Because of the scale of residential development, to maintain that equilibrium, approx. 23,000 new jobs are required to be created over the next 20+ years. This is considered to require a more robust approach to economic development in the HGGT area than has been delivered previously.
- 2.4 With that background in mind, the HGGT Board considered a proposal to develop the SEF for the Garden Town, at its Dec 2022 meeting. It agreed to proceed with the preparation of the Framework and Hardisty Jones Associates (HJA) were engaged to undertake the work. HJA have extensive experience and knowledge of the HGGT having built this up working in and around Harlow and the wider Functional Economic Market Area over the last 10 years. As indicated above, the SEF was submitted and approved by the Board at its meeting of 12 September 2023.

3.0 Content of the SEF

- 3.1 The framework considers the current economic baseline of the area, relevant employment sectors, land provisions and a range of key performance indicators. HJA engaged relevant

stakeholders during the development of the SEF and over 200 comments were received from 11 organisations.

- 3.2 The SEF aims to achieve a step change in employment growth and support balanced development. The framework identifies and focuses on six themes: *Attract* (inward investment), *Develop & Grow* (business & innovation support), *Accommodate* (employment sites & premises), *Enable* (skills & training), *Retain* (community wealth building), and *Drive* (coordination & capacity). The SEF identifies a number of priority sectors and potential gaps in job opportunities.
- 3.3 The SEF includes an economic road map for the Garden Town and comprises a top-down and bottom-up analysis. The top-down analysis indicates a need for 23,000 additional jobs over the next 20+ years to maintain a prosperous community due to the expected population growth from the planned new homes. Projected growth between 2023 and 2045 adds 45,000 residents to the area, requiring 23,000 jobs for a balanced labour market. This represents a 50% expansion of the areas current employment capacity. This growth surpasses historical trends, necessitating economic shifts and property market adjustments.
- 3.4 The bottom-up analysis identifies the potential for 18,000 - 20,000 jobs through large scale projects and policy-driven growth such as the existing Harlow Enterprise Zone and growth in the health sector. However, this still leaves a projected gap of around 3,000 - 5,000 jobs.
- 3.5 If the relocation of the UK Health Security Agency (HAS) to Harlow goes ahead as originally planned then there is no doubt

that it will be a significant contributor to job creation and growth.

- 3.6 Taking into account the above position, the economic growth challenge for the Garden Town is substantial, the SEF identifies the requirement for a concerted and coordinated effort to attract and grow businesses in a range of priority sectors that include health, life sciences, technology, arts, construction, transport, logistics, and green industries.
- 3.7 The forecast change in employment by sector suggests significant growth in the health and care sector, construction, education, accommodation and food services, professional services, public administration, business services, retail, and research and development (R&D). The sector mix aims to offer a wide range of employment opportunities across the wage and qualification spectrum.
- 3.8 Delivering 23,000 jobs will be a major challenge, considering historical growth in Harlow and the wider HGGT area falls significantly short of the required levels to meet this number. The framework emphasises the need for quick wins and flexible strategies to respond and adapt swiftly to potential changes such as the outcome of the UKHSA relocation decision.
- 3.9 Under each of the themes referred to above, the SEF sets out a range of actions that could be taken to support the economic generation requirements for the area. These will be subject to further assessment and refinement by officer teams and with expert input as required. Any actions will be the subject of further decisions as required. It is proposed that this area of

decision making will fall within the remit of the HGGT Joint Committee.

- 3.10 At this stage, it is recommended that the Council endorse the SEF and can be in agreement to it forming the basis of the drive to secure economic growth in the HGGT area. The SEF sets out an ambitious set of actions which, if they can be secured, will enable job roles and other opportunities in the Garden Town area to be maximised.

4.0 Options

- 4.1 The alternative to the recommendation proposed in this report is to not endorse the SEF or rely upon its proposed actions to secure economic growth in the Garden Town area. The implication of this approach is that East Herts would be working in isolation from the Garden Town partners in seeking to secure job roles and other opportunities for new residents of the area.
- 4.2 Whilst the ability of all the partners to resource work of this nature is going to be limited, a separate approach is likely to further minimise the potential to achieve substantial and positive outputs in respect of this matter. This alternative option is ***not recommended***.

5.0 Risks

- 5.1 Any risks of endorsing the SEF are considered to be minimal for the Council. The SEF sets out a 'road map' of potential further actions to achieve the positive outcomes desired. At this stage, no decisions are being made and there is no further commitment in relation to any actions and the timing of them.

6.0 Implications/Consultations

Community Safety

Yes – considered to be positive in that a balanced community of both places to live and places to work, jobs and other opportunities is considered to support the delivery of healthy and attractive place.

Data Protection

No

Equalities

No

Environmental Sustainability

Yes – in that one aspect of the aspiration of maintaining an equilibrium in relation to those living and working in the area is that the need for longer distance journeys to access job roles elsewhere is minimised. Environmental sustainability can be enhanced through progressive nature based industries.

Financial

Yes – potentially beneficial in that the creation of a varied range of job opportunities within the Garden Town area enables all existing and new residents to benefit from a range of employment and other opportunities. This has the potential to provide benefits to the local economy.

Health and Safety

No

Human Resources

No

Human Rights

No

Legal

No

Specific Wards

Yes – as set out above.

7.0 Background papers, appendices and other relevant material

7.1 The Strategic Economic Framework attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

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