



Harlow and Gilston Quality Review Panel

Report of Workshop Review Meeting: Draft Harlow and Gilston Garden Town Stewardship Charter

Friday 28 April 2023
Via video conference

Panel

Peter Maxwell (chair)
Hanna Afolabi
Roland Karthaus

Attendees

Ione Braddick	Epping Forest District Council / Harlow and Gilston Garden Town
Naisha Polaine	Harlow and Gilston Garden Town
Rosalind Peebles	Epping Forest District Council
Lucy Block	Frame Projects
Roxanne Salburg	Frame Projects

Apologies / report copied to

Deborah Denner Frame Projects

Confidentiality

This is a pre-application review, and therefore confidential. As public organisations Harlow Council, East Hertfordshire District Council and Epping Forest District Council are subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOI) and Environmental Information Regulations (EIR), and in the case of an FOI/EIR request may be obliged to release project information submitted for review.

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1. Project name and site address

Harlow and Gilston Garden Town Stewardship Charter

2. Presenting team

Christopher Downes	Essex County Council
Kevin Steptoe	East Herts District Council
Molly Stroyman	East Herts District Council

3. Planning authority briefing

The HGGT Stewardship Charter is being prepared by the five Partner Authorities to ensure that a consistent, well considered, and effective approach to stewardship is established for each of the Garden Town sites. The Charter has been informed by a variety of discussion and engagement held over the past 12-months and builds upon the principles and objectives prepared by the Partner Authorities as part of the Gilston Area applications.

The intention is for the Charter to be endorsed by the three local planning authorities (Epping Forest District Council, Harlow District Council, and East Herts District Council). While the document is not intended to be a formal Supplementary Planning Document, the Charter will be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications related to the Garden Town's strategic sites.

The Charter sets out six principles that the HGGT Partners will be expected to achieve in relation to each of the new communities coming forward. The team have engaged with Members in July 2022 and the Developers' Forum in February 2023. Further targeted engagement with neighbourhood groups will be carried out after local elections in May 2023.

Officers would welcome feedback on the general content and form of the draft Charter. The panel is also invited to advise on whether it feels that the document fulfils the role expected of it in relation to the principles and objectives prepared by the Partner Authorities. General comments regarding the readability of the Charter are also sought, alongside responses to the key questions set out below:

- Whether the rationale and purpose of the Charter is sufficiently described?
- Are the proposed principles comprehensive enough in their scope?
- Does the Charter strike the right balance between detail and brevity?
- Would additional information on stewardship requirements and expectations be useful for interested stakeholders?



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5. Quality Review Panel's views

Summary

The panel welcomes the presentation and is pleased to see this piece of work coming forward. It notes that it would have been useful to have the Charter in place prior to approval of the Gilston Village outline planning applications. However, the panel recognises that the document will address retrospective issues, as well as be forward thinking for areas of the Garden Town which are less developed.

The panel agrees that the 'charter' terminology is the right choice for this document and that it sets the right expectations; giving sufficient weight as something that all parties are expected to sign up to. The principles included seem appropriate, and the panel feels that the Charter strikes the right balance between detail and brevity. However, it suggests that further clarification of the requirements and expectations for different stakeholder groups would be beneficial. Testing different scenarios would help inform the guidance and ensure that worst case situations are anticipated.

The formation of an umbrella body overseeing the whole of the Garden Town seems sensible, and will offer support to individual stewardship bodies, as well as providing a common thread and level of ambition. However, the panel feels that expectations and responsibility for differing parties need to be clarified. As costs will be passed onto local residents and businesses, the panel suggests that clear communication will be crucial to ensure that the community have a sense of control over spending decisions, as well as avoiding duplication with Council tax and business rates for example. The panel feels that a clear fallback position or strategy for negotiations should also be in place, should stewardship measures fail.

Rationale and purpose

- The panel welcomes the development of the Stewardship Charter and feels that it provides a fantastic opportunity to embed community ownership measures within the newly planned Garden Town neighbourhoods.
- The rationale and purpose are well-developed, and the panel feels that the proposed vision for how the Stewardship Charter will be implemented is clear. Setting defined expectations of what needs to be demonstrated through the design, planning and delivery stages will be important and should be included in the document.
- The length of the document feels appropriate, and the panel suggests that there is sufficient detail and content. It cautions making this any longer as it could be off-putting to users.
- The use of the term 'charter' is appropriate and sets the right expectations. However, stronger wording should be used when establishing the principles to follow. For instance, using 'consider' could allow for interpretation and not be direct enough.



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- Building on other strategies, as well as referencing the Quality of Life monitoring, helps place the Charter within the wider vision for the Garden Town
- Given that this document is coming forward midway through the planning process for key areas of the Garden Town, the Charter should reflect on lessons learnt. The Gilston Villages will provide a perfect opportunity to test stewardship at scale and inform the development of the document.
- Scenario testing the Charter and its principles will help manage risks and support the Garden Town in getting the right outcomes. Working back from these potential scenarios will also help establish stewardship priorities and understand the scope for negotiations with developers.

Masterplanning

- The panel feels that there needs to be a proactive approach to stewardship embedded in the masterplanning process for the Garden Town. The Charter could do more to allow and enable these kinds of opportunities.
- A potential outcome of stewardship could be joining up elements of the built environment. For example, opportunities for community-operated power or different models for utility provision could be considered. However, focussing too closely on current standards, technologies and design approaches which could quickly become out of date.

Governance

- The panel would like to see further consideration of how the Charter will be enforced, along with the mechanisms for this, such as planning conditions or Section 106 agreements. The document could be clearer about these gateways.
- The panel agrees that a strategic view should be taken across the Garden Town, to address what assets are best to be controlled at this level and how to provide economies of scale for their operation and maintenance.
- Establishing an umbrella organisation seems crucial to achieving some uniformity of service, control and governance of the various stewardship bodies across the Garden Town. The panel feels that this will ensure high standards, compatibility, and consistency of approach to stewardship.
- However, there could be tension between stewardship bodies and the umbrella group, as the latter could be seen as less representative than the individual groups in each area. The terms of reference will need to be managed carefully to clarify roles and responsibilities.



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- The panel feels that it is currently difficult to assess viability of stewardship at scale. For example, it questions whether Latton Priory could perform as a single stewardship model, given that community assets in this location may not be sufficient to support the extent of upkeep expected.
- As the key threshold for establishing a stewardship body may be linked to the quantum and tenure of homes, as well as key assets, the panel feels that governance measures will need to be adaptive to changing scenarios.

Financial sustainability

- The financial sustainability of the Charter will likely depend on business planning arrangements. Further thought should be given to how relationships with development partners will develop over time, particularly in terms of responsibility and risk management.
- The panel recognises that there is a need to focus on ensuring income to service stewardship, but it would like to see further information on how this works alongside partnerships with developers. For example, if stewardship-owned assets are given priority locations, this could affect the viability of operator-owned commercial units and have an impact on investment returns.
- The type and number of assets that will be controlled by the stewardship bodies should also be considered. This will affect potential costs and risks, which could be significant if only the principal infrastructure and highways are retained by the Council. The panel suggests that sensitivity analysis should be done to determine the optimum mix.
- As the stewardship model may be reliant on all homes being built to gain financial returns, the team should consider how financial support will be provided during the delivery and build out of the Garden Town. Reference was given to the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park and its [Fixed Estate Charge](#) as an example, where the Greater London Authority underwrites part of the maintenance and management of the park, this until critical mass is reached.
- Arrangements for how and what services are billed should be presented with clarity. The panel feels that there is a risk that a stewardship levy could be seen as duplication, particularly if there are also ground rents, council tax, and other fees to consider. Clear communication will be vital to manage expectations, demonstrate decision-making, and address accountability.
- There will also be a need for ongoing clear communication, as people leave and new people arrive into the area. Particularly, to make sure stewardship duties and the associated costs are well understood prior to new people becoming residents.



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Stakeholders and users

- The panel would like to see a clearer breakdown of stakeholders and user groups that will be affected by stewardship arrangements across the Garden Town. It suggests that the Charter should clarify responsibilities and risks for each group, to understand how stewardship principles will affect the new communities that live and work here.
- The term 'community' should also be clarified, to understand how this might look within different areas of the Garden Town and over time, as developers step out of the frame during the course of the project.
- The panel appreciates that there is work to be done to improve the perception of community influence and agency across the Garden Town. Understanding how communities are embedded in the new places created, as well as how they can be involved with cultural events, community assets and wider societal benefits, should be clarified.
- The panel feels that the section of the Charter which relates to community communication is currently too specific and risks becoming out of date quickly. Rather than describing physical or digital engagement methods, the panel suggests clarifying objectives for how the interests of local residents, businesses, stakeholders and HGGT will be represented.
- The panel also suggests strengthening the wording used around inclusion. As the approach to stewardship relies on good representation across the various communities in the Garden Town, the team will need to be proactive and identify likely barriers for inclusion.

Evaluation and monitoring

- The panel welcomes the attention given to monitoring, but would like to see more emphasis on evaluation. It suggests considering the use of impact-based modelling, to identify lessons from the process and to drive up standards.
- The team could refer to the Human Learning Systems framework, developed by Toby Lowe, which may be relevant to the Charter.
- A fallback position should be considered, in case stewardship arrangements fail. Clarity about what organisation would act as the ombudsman or negotiator in this circumstance would be helpful and worth addressing considering in relation to the financial support that may be needed in the some term. This body should provide a clear process for the residents and businesses involved, should stewardship principles not be met or under-perform. While this will likely sit outside the Charter, the panel feels that this should be addressed alongside its development.



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Next steps

- The panel appreciates the tight deadline for the consultation and engagement on this document, but it would welcome the opportunity to see the Charter again at consultation stage, if helpful.

