

**REPORT TO:** CABINET

**DATE:** 17 JUNE 2021

**TITLE:** HARLOW AND GILSTON GARDEN TOWN:  
SUSTAINABILITY GUIDANCE

**PORTFOLIO HOLDER:** COUNCILLOR MICHAEL HARDWARE,  
PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR STRATEGIC  
GROWTH

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**This is a Key Decision**  
**It is on the Forward Plan as Decision Number I012705**  
**Call In procedures may apply**  
**This decision will affect all Wards.**

**RECOMMENDED that:**

- A** Cabinet approves the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town Sustainability Guidance and Checklist (March 2021), as set out in Appendix A to the report, as a material consideration in the planning process for the preparation of masterplans, pre-application advice, assessing planning applications and any other development management purpose for all major residential development proposals (of 10 or greater dwellings); applications for change of use resulting in a major residential development; and Council-led housing.

**REASON FOR DECISION**

- A** To ensure that the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town Sustainability Guidance and Checklist is afforded suitable planning weight by approving it as a material consideration in the planning process. This will ensure that all qualifying developments will be required to demonstrate how they shall contribute to meeting the Council's sustainability ambitions. These sustainability ambitions are as established through the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town Vision and Design Guide (approved by the Council on 6 December 2018), the policies of the Harlow Local Development Plan (Adopted December 2020) and the Harlow District Council declaration of Climate Emergency (11 July 2019).
- B** To ensure that development in the Harlow area, as a part of the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town, is considered against the same sustainability ambitions and guidance as the new garden communities. Recognising similar resolutions from Epping Forest District Council (11 March 2021) and East Herts District

Council (29 April 2021) in respect to the guidance and checklist for the new garden communities on the edge of Harlow.

## **BACKGROUND**

1. Harlow Council, working with East Herts and Epping Forest District Councils and Essex and Hertfordshire County Councils (the 'HGGT Authority partners') has committed to the principle of growth in and around Harlow through the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town ('HGGT') in consideration of the Garden City Principles.
2. The HGGT Authority partners have set out a Vision for this growth (the 'Vision'):
  - a) "The pioneering New Town of Gibberd and Kao will grow into a Garden Town of enterprise, health and sculpture at the heart of the UK Innovation Corridor. Harlow and Gilston will be a joyful place to live with sociable streets and green spaces; high quality homes connected to fibre optic broadband; local centres accessible by walking and cycling; and innovative, affordable public transport. It will set the agenda for sustainable living. It will be adaptable, healthy, sustainable and innovative."
3. The HGGT Sustainability Guidance and Checklist (the 'Guidance and Checklist') has been prepared on behalf of the HGGT Authority partners to provide practical and technical guidance on how relevant sustainability indicators and policies (environmental, social and economic) in the HGGT Vision and HGGT Authority partner's Local Plans will be applied to new developments in the Garden Town.
4. 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 residential developments (10 homes and above).
5. 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.
6. The Guidance and Checklist has been prepared in-house by the HGGT team, with input from all HGGT Authority partners and external expertise where appropriate.
7. The Garden Town seeks to set the agenda for sustainable living through ensuring growth that will be net carbon neutral by 2030, and building strong and integrated communities across new and existing places.

8. The Guidance and Checklist relates directly to the principles and indicators within the HGGT Vision, other HGGT guidance and the HGGT Authority partner Local Planning Authorities' adopted and emerging Local Plan policies.
9. There has been extensive input from officers from all HGGT Authority partners into the 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.
10. 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:
  - a) HGGT Sustainability Guidance and Checklist available for viewing on HGGT website, with links to this from partner authority websites.
  - b) Overview of the document via accessible pre-recorded video available for viewing on HGGT website.
  - c) Digital questionnaire / survey available for viewing and completing on HGGT website.
  - d) Five staffed online webinars and Q&A sessions for particular stakeholder groups (e.g. Local residents and Community Groups, Developers, Members, Youth Councils, Partner Officers).
  - e) Social Media awareness campaign (via HGGT and partner authorities).
  - f) Notification of consultation via LPA Planning Policy databases and statutory consultees.
11. 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.
12. A schedule of the representations received is set out in Appendix B to the report. The comments received in response can be broadly categorized into the following themes:
  - a) 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).

- b) Comments around the ambition of the guidance in context of the upcoming government Future Homes Standards (expected release in 2022).
  - c) Clarification on the degree of flexibility allowed by the guidance checklist questions.
  - d) Clarification on whether Sustainability Guidance documents have been factored into Viability Assessments.
  - e) 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.
13. Key updates and changes to the Guidance and Checklist to respond to the above comments include:
- a) 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.
  - b) 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.
  - c) A new 'Digital Sustainability' page included in the Environmental Sustainability' section of the document.
  - d) Revision of the 'Job Creation' section; and additional questions in the Socio-Economic checklist related to this.
  - e) Further consolidation from the 'Healthy Towns Framework' within the Socio-Economic section, including the questions asked in this section.
  - f) Stronger post-covid pandemic narrative incorporated into the Socio-Economic section of the Guidance.
  - g) General updates made to address comments on specific themes, including an Air Quality Checklist incorporated, and updated glossary terms.

## **ISSUES/PROPOSALS**

14. The purpose of this report is to enable consideration of the final version of the Guidance and Checklist and approve this as a material planning consideration for the preparation of masterplans, pre-application advice, assessing planning applications and any other development management purpose. The finalised document is set out in Appendix A to the report.

15. With the amendments set out above following the consultation on the Guidance and Checklist it is now considered that a robust final document has been produced and one which can be approved.
16. Once approved, 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.
17. Following agreement to approve as a material consideration, Harlow as a Local Planning Authority, would expect to see the Guidance and Checklist referenced in future planning applications and officer reports that will come before the Development Management Committee.
18. The Checklist itself is for the applicant to complete and submit to the Council, in so doing it will take them through the standards and good practice set out and referenced within the Guidance ensuring that these are in the forefront of thinking from the very earliest stage of shaping new development proposals.
19. Where applicants have positively engaged with the Council as projects are shaped this might manifest in reported changes to the scheme or, for example, planning conditions that specifically seek to secure commitments made around Sustainability. Applications for planning permission will continue to be determined in accordance with the Harlow Development Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

### **Environment and Planning (Includes Sustainability)**

As set out in the report.

**Author: Andrew Bramidge, Head of Environment and Planning**

### **Finance (Includes ICT, and Property and Facilities)**

None specific.

**Author: Simon Freeman, Head of Finance and Deputy to the Chief Executive**

### **Housing**

As contained in the report.

**Author: Andrew Murray, Head of Housing**

### **Community Wellbeing (Includes Equalities and Social Inclusion)**

As contained within the report.

**Author: Jane Greer, Head of Community Wellbeing**

### **Governance (Includes HR)**

As set out in the report.

**Author: Simon Hill, Head of Governance**

## **Appendices**

Appendix A – HGGT Sustainability Guidance and Checklist

Appendix B – Summary of consultation responses

## **Background Papers**

[HDC Approval of the HGGT Vision and Design Guide \(6 December 2018\)](#)

[Harlow Local Development Plan \(December 2020\)](#)

[HDC Climate Emergency Declaration \(11 July 2019\)](#)

The Town and Country Planning Association's (TCPA) Garden City Principles

<https://www.tcpa.org.uk/garden-city-principles>

## **Glossary of terms/abbreviations used**

HGGT – Harlow and Gilston Garden Town

UKGBC – UK Green Building Council