

Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (HGGT) - Stakeholder Objectives Refresh – final report

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Introduction

Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (HGGT) commissioned an independent piece of stakeholder research into the **value of the HGGT partnership** in summer 2021. The work was commissioned to inform a discussion amongst partners about potential changes to HGGT's governance arrangements.

This report sets out the **findings from that research**.

This stakeholder research was commissioned alongside a more technical piece of research examining the legal implications of a change to governance arrangements.

Context

HGGT brings together **five local authorities** to deliver one of the **largest growth initiatives in the UK**. The five authorities are Essex and Hertfordshire County Councils and the districts of Harlow, East Hertfordshire, and Epping Forest.

Those five partners have developed an **ambitious vision** for HGGT:

“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.”

The vision establishes the four characteristics of the place as being adaptable, healthy, sustainable, and innovative.

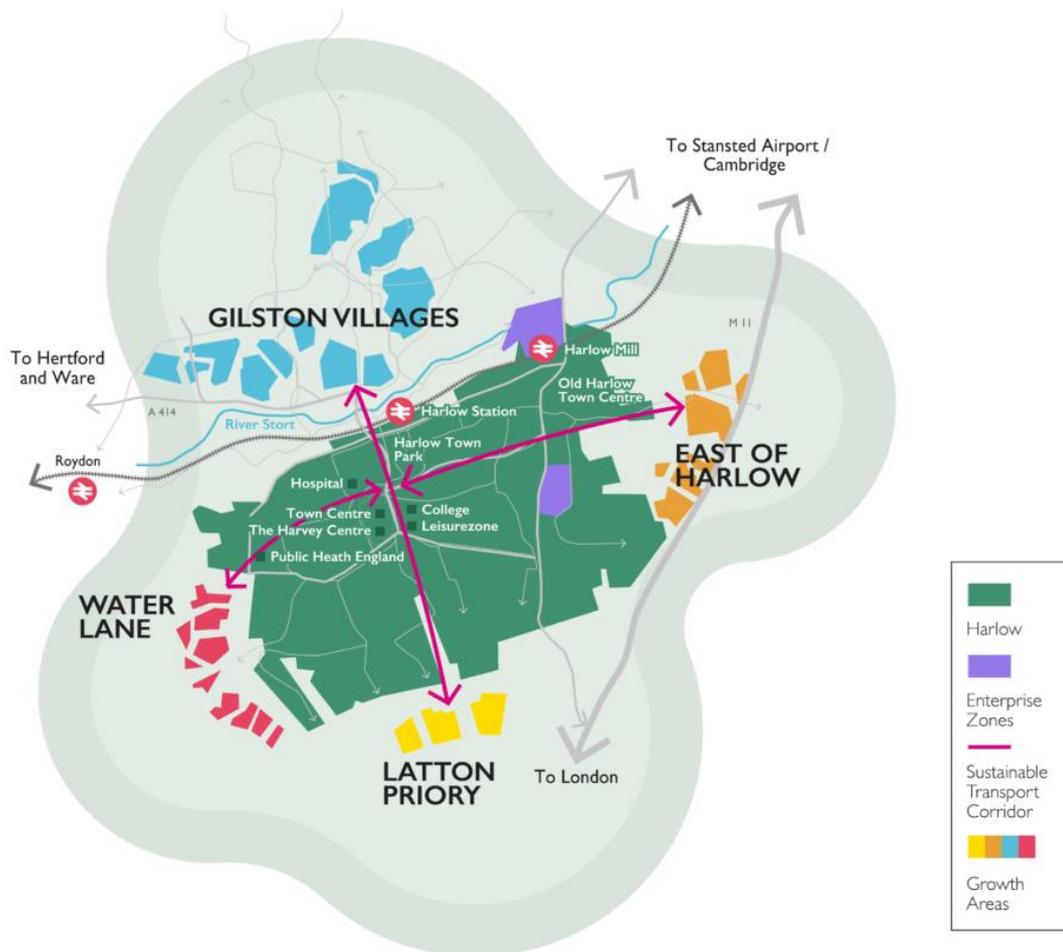
To realise that vision, the **most significant developments** within the HGGT geography are:

- 10,000 homes across seven new mixed use villages to the north of Harlow in the Gilston Area.
- 3,350 homes in a new mixed use neighbourhood to the east at East of Harlow.
- 1,050 homes in a new mixed use neighbourhood to the south at Latton Priory.
- 2,100 homes across a new mixed use neighbourhood to the west at Water Lane.
- Between 1,700 and 2,400 new homes through regeneration of the town centre.
- Harlow Enterprise Zone comprising the 50,000sqm Harlow Science Park; 32,000sqm data centre, 20,000sqm business space at KAO Park, and up to 80,000sqm regeneration of the Templefields employment area.

To connect these sites, partners aim to create **Sustainable Transport Corridors and an attractive public transport, walking and cycling network** that connects the new garden communities and existing neighbourhoods with the town centre, employment areas and major rail and road transport interchanges.

The vision also anticipates the delivery of **community and cultural infrastructure**, which includes the new Princess Alexandra regional hospital, and the **growth of the local economy**, enabling businesses to start up and scale up alongside a thriving and vibrant Harlow town centre. The arrival of Public Health England will place Harlow at the centre of global medical research.

Image 1: HGGT major developments¹



HGGT was awarded Garden Town status in 2017. The vision was published in late 2018. To date, partners' focus has been on developing supporting strategies and plans and working toward the determination of planning applications.

Governance

HGGT was established under the **'duty to co-operate' arrangements between the five partner authorities** and was built on the principle of partnership and consensus to reach a common agreement.

There is no overarching written agreement defining roles and responsibilities. The HGGT Partnership is an **informal delivery partnership** with no legal status or defined powers. Statutory responsibilities currently remain with the authorities including around plan-making and decision-making through the Local Planning Authorities.

The **HGGT Board** has elected members from all five authorities and an independent chair. It has no formal powers or delegations, serving instead to enable the Partners to agree and come to a

¹ <https://hggd.co.uk/>

consensus. It is also used as a means of information sharing. Board meetings take place approximately seven to eight times a year.

For formal decisions to be made, the HGGT Board makes recommendations to the respective Partner authorities. For example the Board will recommend that the partner authorities formally endorse an HGGT document as a material planning consideration.

As set out in the findings below, this current Board arrangements contribute to the Garden Town's low level of visibility amidst the wider public and concerns about a lack of transparency and accountability with regard to delivery commitments.

Delivery

Epping Forest District Council is the accountable body for the Garden Town partnership. Responsibilities associated with this include finance, procurement and HR.

A recent audit highlighted the **need for a more equitable distribution of delivery and funding risk / reward** and the formalisation of the roles, responsibilities and resources required between all parties.

The primary source of funding for the administration of the partnership is Government Garden Towns Capacity Funding together with funding provided by each of the District Councils. This includes funding for joint consultant support. All five partner authorities contribute in-kind resources.

This funding pays for a small team of Officers employed directly to work for the HGGT partnership (as accountable body, EFDC is the employing authority) and a number of officers working 'in kind' in the partner authorities.

Purpose of the review

As the HGGT moves from visioning and planning to delivery phase, partners agree that there is a **need to reassess the nature of the governance arrangements** in order to clarify the overarching defining roles and responsibilities.

To that end, HGGT commissioned an independent consultant in summer 2021 to undertake a focused piece of research into the current and future governance arrangements.

The **core question** for this assignment was: **what must be done by the five local authorities together** that cannot be achieved by one local authority alone, in order to deliver sustainable growth in accordance with the HGGT vision?

The answers to this question and related questions about HGGT's achievements and future challenges will be used to:

1. **Inform** members and chief officers of the **key deliverables of the HGGT** as a partnership and its potential, in order to develop options for **appropriate governance and organisational structures**.
2. **Build the work programme** under the HGGT Director and potentially across the wider partnership where appropriate – so that resources are identified and deployed in the right place to deliver the right enabling support at the right time.

Method

The research took the form of:

- A **guided tour** of the Garden Town area with a member of the HGGT core team.
- Ten **semi-structured interviews**, lasting 45 to 60 minutes, with 20 officers across the five partner authorities.
- A **group interview** with the HGGT core team.
- A **90-minute workshop** with the majority of interviewees to reflect on the emerging messages and develop the options.
- **Meetings of the Project Steering Group**, which was made up of colleagues from HGGT and lead officers from the five authorities.

The topic guide used for the interviews is provided at Annex A.

The vision

The first thing explored with partners was the **HGGT vision**. In particular, we explored **which elements were most important** to get right because they enabled the rest of vision to be implemented and / or because they **mattered most to local residents and their elected representatives**.

A general theme that emerged from discussion was that **all partners are proud of the scale of ambition set out in the vision**. All five authorities **want HGGT to set the standard** for what is possible as a garden town, as opposed to following a template set by others or simply delivering something ‘good enough’.

And while partners stated that all elements of the vision were important, **three elements were repeatedly cited as essential to get right**. These were:

- **The regeneration of Harlow to the benefit of existing and new communities.** All partners were clear that the benefits of growth had to be felt by existing communities and new residents. This means a number of things: improved infrastructure and facilities in and around the current town; seamless integration of new and existing infrastructure; and dialogue and engagement with existing residents so that they can see and benefit from the opportunities offered by growth.
- **Transport and infrastructure integration.** Connected to the revival of Harlow, partners stressed that new infrastructure had to be connected and complementary to what is already there. This should help mitigate the risk of new developments becoming “satellites” or “suburbs” of Harlow. Partners stressed this point in relation to transport and the delivery of the Sustainable Transport Corridors; see ‘Challenges’ below.
- **Long-term stewardship.** The importance of sustained, sophisticated place shaping was a theme of many discussions. This tallies with the desire for HGGT to be exemplar of how to create great places. However, many of those same partners felt unclear about what precisely stewardship meant. The all-encompassing nature of term led many to call for more discussion leading to clarity about what it means in practice for the HGGT area.

There was one suggestion to **Covid-proof the vision**. There may be assumptions in the strategy about commuting, working from home, the purpose of town centres and other major issues which may now be out-date or at least in need of review. Without opening up the entire vision for

discussion, a short and focused piece of work could update those elements in light of likely post-Covid developments, while providing assurance that other aspects remain relevant.

“We want to be an exemplar or what a garden town can be, not following someone else’s model.”

“Harlow ‘new town’ is seventy years old now. The Garden Town has to facilitate the regeneration of Harlow.”

“[Key things?] The stewardship model and ongoing ownership. Gilston can achieve this because it had a critical mass of homes. How does it work in relation to [the other developments?]”

Achievements

From exploring the vision on paper, we discussed partners’ achievements in practice.

Partners could point with justified pride to **what they have achieved since the inception** of the Garden Town. Significant steps forward include:

- **Establishing the original vision.** In line with the general sense of pride in the vision, partners felt that it contained the diverse expertise of different partners. For the knowledge and expertise of the transport authorities shaped the ambitious goals in relation to modal shift. The vision was also the product of partners challenging one another to be ambitious and aim to be the best.
- **Developing key documents.** Sitting underneath the vision, partners have developed a suite of supporting plans and strategies that will guide implementation of the vision such as Infrastructure Delivery Plan Partners have also invested in important processes such as the Quality Review Panel.
- **Housing Investment Grant.** On a more practical level, partners worked intensively and collaboratively to develop the Housing Investment Grant proposal and attracted £171m from central government.
- **Working toward determination of planning applications for Gilston.** All partners have put significant effort in advancing plans for the Gilston despite, as we explore below, the sometimes slow-moving nature of decision making processes.

While these achievements are a source of pride, the first quote in the box below captures a point heard several times. The achievements noted so far all relate to planning and preparation rather than direct implementation. The challenge for partners is **how to take this cooperation to the next stage.**

“A lot of the good partnership working has been on the planning, not the delivery.”

“We’ve made a good start, the documents are in place, now we need to transition to delivery.”

Role of the partnership

In light of those achievements, we explored the **core question** for this assignment: **what must be done by the five local authorities together** that cannot be achieved by one local authority alone, in order to deliver sustainable growth in accordance with the HGGT vision?

Points are illustrated with anonymous quotes. These are taken from individual conversations but reflect points that were made more generally throughout the research.

Research participants were **positive about the role of the partnership to date**. They described an approach to joint working that was marked by a **shared desire to achieve** things together and **good, collaborative relationships** between individuals and authorities.

Inevitably, there are differences of emphasis and opinion, sometimes divergent political priorities, and different ways of working across the five authorities. There was a general sense, however, these differences are not insurmountable and partners at a corporate and political level are keen to make progress together on shared objectives.

In relation to the core question, research participants identified **four things than can only be achieved by working together**:

- **The delivery of major, integrated cross-boundary infrastructure.** Delivering significant levels of new physical and social infrastructure in an integrated way demands close collaboration between all five authorities.
- **Local visibility.** Partners have been so far focused on the vision, the supporting plans, and related internal processes. As part of the shift to delivery, there is a need to communicate to existing residents what the Garden Town means for them, especially on issues like modal shift. There is much better done through a shared Garden Town brand and the various channels and extended reach of all partners working together.
- **Generating ‘clout’ and attracting funding.** The partnership is far better equipped than individual authorities to raise the national profile of the Garden Town in a way that attracts funders, developers, households, employers and others. Similarly, the partners working together are better positioned to attract funding as a result of: the combined ‘heft’ of all five authorities and their leaders; pooled experience and expertise; and the ability to put more money on the table during negotiations.
- **Dealing with the ‘too difficult’ issues.** There are several items which no one partner alone can resolve but which require attention and resolution if the Garden Town vision is to be realised. These problems often relate to resources and, often for that reason, are politically sensitive. They include housing nominations across authority boundaries, the allocation of green infrastructure, the nature and distribution of employment land, and housing waste and recycling provision. Only by working together, with the Garden Town Team facilitating discussion and acting as an honest broker, can these issues be resolved.

“It’s only as a partnership] that we can look beyond individual developments and see the vision as a whole and knit together a huge amount of investment and effort.”

“We need to start having conversations, sometimes difficult conversations, with councillors, with community reps, with individuals”.

“We need to put the Garden Town on the map, make the case for it, shout about it.”

Fitness for the future

Following discussion about the current value of the partnership, we explored **the fitness for purpose of the partnership** in relation to forthcoming challenges. To recap the point made in the introduction, HGGT is about to make a **major and lasting shift** from visioning and planning to delivery on the ground. What has worked so far in terms of cooperation on planning may not be fit for purpose in relation to the task of implementation.

There was a **universal view** amongst partners that the current governance and delivery arrangements were **not fit for purpose for the future**. They will not enable partners to realise the collective ambition laid out in the vision.

This is for **four connected reasons**:

- **Cumbersome procedures.** The need to ratify all recommendations through each council's decision-making process was described as "slow" and "cumbersome". While ensuring transparency and accountability, most research participants called for a more "agile" way of working.
- **Unclear ownership of decisions and responsibilities.** In part because decisions have to be ratified as described above, partners complained that ownership of decisions was often opaque. Interviewees tended to pose questions about accountability to which they felt nobody had an answer: If a decision has been agreed by all five partners, does that mean all partners are equal owners? How does that work when one partner is holding all the financial risk or signing the contract? If we are all responsible for everything, is anyone responsible for anything in particular?
- **Tendency to park difficult issues.** The phrase "too difficult pile" was used in a number of conversations. This reflects a tendency for the most challenging issues, such as delivery of sustainable transport corridors, or the most contentious, such as housing allocations across boundaries, to be put one side. As HGGT moves further into the implementation phase, these issues can no longer be put aside and must be addressed and resolved.
- **Lack of a single voice.** As HGGT moves from planning to delivery, it is essential that it can articulate the vision to funders and negotiate with a clear and consistent voice with delivery partners. At the moment, research participants argued, delivery partners such as developers could get a different response from different authorities, and even from different parts of the same authority. As one participant put it, it is the developers who are currently "setting the tone". The vision is more likely to be achieved if developers and others have a single negotiating point.

"It seems every authority has to agree everything. We need fewer people making decisions, then some people making that happen."

"It takes a lot of effort to get things through. We need quicker decisions."

"There is a lot of repetition and process to get agreement for a paper to be written or for it to get approved."

"There are layers of bureaucracy – everything takes eight months longer than we think. We're not quite geared up."

"The set-up is quite cumbersome. You have all these Lilliputian strings holding people down."

"In general, we've tended to park problems in the 'too difficult to deal with' pile."

"The criticism is that things have been left in the 'too difficult' pile."

"There has been more partnership working this year – the HIG, planning applications – but we're still dealing with five moving parts, and the people in the room are only empowered to do so much."

Challenges

These faults with the current system are manifested in the **main challenges facing HGGT**.

- **Achieving modal shift.** Partners took pride in the scale of the ambition of achieving significant modal shift levels amongst new and existing residents. They also recognised this would be **very difficult to achieve**, requiring major investment in new infrastructure across the Garden Town as well as methods to encourage behaviour change. Delivering behaviour change would be especially difficult amongst older, existing residents who are more likely to be wedded to using their car. HGGT's low visibility and lack of a single voice means it is ill equipped to instigate those conversations. The fact that all partners are acutely aware of the need to deliver modal shift, while lacking a clear sense of how this will be achieved, reflects the **lack of ownership and confusion over responsibility** described above.
- **Sustainable transport corridors.** Key to achieving modal shift will be the successful delivery of sustainable transport corridors integrated with cycling and walking 'super greenways', interchange hubs, and other associated infrastructure. The scale, cost and complexity of delivering the STCs on time, in the right way, and within budget was often cited as a major challenge. As one participant put, "it all has to work, for any of it to work". While Essex is the lead delivery body and contract holder for the corridors, successful delivery has to be a shared endeavour.
- **Provision of employment land and job opportunities.** Some partners were concerned that existing plans were too focused on the delivery of housing, and did not pay equivalent or sufficient attention to providing sufficient good quality employment land. This filtered through into a concern that there is a lack of clarity about what types of jobs would be available to new and existing residents in future. For some participants, this reflected the origins of the HGGT idea; the original notion had "come from the planning authorities" and was thus developed primarily as a house-building programme with economic development a second-order priority.
- **Realising the regeneration of Harlow.** As much as partners identified this is a priority, as set out above, they also noted how difficult it is in practice to regenerate a town at the same time as building 26,000 new homes. This will seriously all test partners' delivery capacity and creates the risk of the new developments ending up in competition for residents and resources with the current town.
- **Sticking to the vision.** The challenges identified so far have been specific elements of the vision for the Garden Town. An over-arching challenge is the need to stick to the ambitious goals set out in the vision. In the face of **developers looking to negotiate more modest short-term deliverables**, uncertainty over **funding from central government**, and other factors which might combine to convince partners to settle for good or even just good enough rather than great.

"The USP of our Garden Town is the scale of modal shift to sustainable travel. If we're going to grow, we have to achieve that as all the other alternatives are negative."

“Yes, you need high-quality homes and high-quality, integrated transport, but all that needs to help people into high-value jobs, and those jobs need to be created or attracted by the Garden Town.”

“Stewardship, the legacy. Look at Harlow. It was a new town, but it wasn’t maintained regularly or refreshed.”

Further issues which partners cited less regularly include:

- **Engaging and exciting residents** about the Garden Town. HGGT has not yet undertaken extensive and regular community engagement, in part due to Covid-related restrictions on events and public gatherings. With those restrictions easing and Garden Town developments becoming more visible, 2021 would be a good time to initiate a programme of engagement with the wider community. In some cases, that engagement needs to be a prelude to conversations about direct impacts on households, especially in relation to travel choices.
- **Integrating health and wellbeing** into the physical and social fabric of the Garden Town. This means adequate provision of direct services and incentives and measures to encourage healthy choices and lifestyles. This agenda is particularly relevant post-Covid, with opportunities to help households sustain healthier lifestyle such as the rise in cycling and walking to work.
- **Developing a coherent cultural offer.** Several interviewees were keen that the cultural aspect of the HGGT vision should not be lost. They were particularly keen that there should be a cultural offer across the entire Garden Town geography, instead of focusing narrowly on Harlow town centre.

Objectives for a new approach

Before getting into the options for the future, it is worth establishing the **objectives for a new approach to governance**. These can be summarised under seven headings:

- **Move quickly.** There is a shared desire across the HGGT partnership to move quickly, if a change is to be made. Previous discussions about governance reform have tended to peter out. With new leadership at HGGT, new political leadership in Harlow after the May elections, and a shared desire to translate plans into action, partners want to move quickly.
- **Consider all options.** Feedback from council leaders is that all potential options for the future of HGGT should be considered, including those which involve pooling risk, resources and sovereignty, such as a Development Corporation.
- **Explore the scope for innovation.** Central government has indicated directly to the HGGT team that they Ministers are open to innovative models of delivery. This means there is scope to flex existing models of delivery and come up with a tailored model that reflects the particular opportunities and challenges in Harlow and Gilston.
- **Go beyond tweaks.** A very clear from message from partners was that any proposed change need to be a significant improvement on what already exists. As reflected in the quotes below, amendments on the margins will not be sufficient.
- **Simplify.** Given the criticism of the cumbersome nature of the existing arrangements, it is imperative that any new approach must remove bureaucracy and strip back process. Interviewees stressed the importance of speed, simplicity, agility, and fleetness of foot.

- **Ensure accountability.** While partners are willing to countenance some sharing of resources, risk, and sovereignty, there must be a rigorous approach to accountability and risk management.
- **Clearly demarcate roles.** Any new governance arrangement would continue to operate alongside the five local authorities. It is vital that its functions do not replicate their responsibilities and that powers are clearly demarcated. For example, the planning powers of a new Joint Committee would be focused on Garden Town developments, leaving non-Garden Town planning matters to each partners' existing committees under the provision of their Local Plans.

"[If there is change], it needs to be more than a tweaked version of what we have now."

"[We need] more than tinkering and re-presenting the current arrangements – we need to look more fundamentally."

"We need something that will help us stick to the overall vision, not just the delivery of schemes."

"Yes, we're open to a conversation. People are aware of the limits of the current model and want something more streamlined. We all support the Garden Town. We all want good decisions."

Governance options – consideration and recommendations

Guided by these objectives, and drawing on previous partnership discussions, the research identified **three governance options for the future.**

As highlighted in the introduction, HGGT commissioned a more technical piece of research into governance options, in parallel with this assignment. Conducted by the law firm Weightmans, that piece of research examined the same broad options that are reviewed here. It is also worth noting that while the options are considered in isolation, it is possible if not preferable to think about an evolutionary or phased approach. This could mean moving to one arrangement in the short term before potentially transitioning to another set-up in future.

There is a limit to this approach, in that constantly changing governance arrangements, would become a distraction and a drain. Nonetheless, as the context changes and new opportunities and challenges arise, it is helpful to think about governance and delivery constantly evolving.

Options

The first option is moving to a Duty to Cooperate Plus model. Essentially, this is an augmented version of the current arrangements. It would involve:

- Granting some level of decision-making power to the Board.
- A stronger role for the HGGT team in monitoring delivery.
- Direct oversight of contracts signed by partner authorities on behalf of HGGT, such as the Housing Investment Grant.

This is the **minimalist option** in terms of the scale of change.

The second option is the creation of a new Joint Planning Committee with delegated powers. Its powers could include:

- Consideration and determination of development planning applications relating to the Garden Town.
- Greater control over transport planning decisions through the powers of the Highways Act.

Under this approach, the Board could evolve into more of an advisory group / sounding board that is also used as the mechanism for broader stakeholder and community engagement.

The third options is the creation of a new Development Corporation. This would involve the formation of an entirely new and legally constituted organisation. It would have a majority independent Board, with an expectation that this would involve strong private sector involvement.

It could have a range of functions, including:

- Planning functions, both plan making, planning consent and development management
- Setting a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Strategic Infrastructure Tariff (SIT).
- Negotiation and management of Section 106.
- Compulsory purchase powers.

The Development Corporation is a flexible model so the precise combination would be agreed locally before being signed off by the Secretary of State.

Under this approach, the current Board would be superseded by the new Corporation board.

Some partners highlighted a **potential hybrid or twin-track approach**. This would involve:

- A dedicated delivery vehicle for Harlow, taking the form of a Development Corporation or something approaching the status and powers of a Development Corporation.
- The duty to cooperate plus model or a Planning Committee for the rest of the garden town.

There is also the prospect of **local government re-organisation** creating further options in future. However, that is beyond the immediate scope of this research.

Consideration

Table 1: Challenges and options sets out the five high-level challenges identified by partners through this research and explores how far each governance could help address each issue.

Duty to Cooperate Plus would not satisfy the need for a new way of working to be a significant improvement on what already exists. It is likely to be, and be seen as, **no more than a “tweaked version”** of the extant set-up. This prospect would not satisfy partners’ ambitions.

As set out in Table 1, this option would have a **generally negligible impact** on HGGT’s ability to tackle the most significant challenges. A renewed commitment to joint working would be positive, but the lack of any fundamental reforms to decision making or delivery capability means any change would be minor.

The consensus view from partners was that the Duty to Cooperate Plus approach should be removed as an option.

A **Joint Planning Committee** would satisfy most partners’ demand for **more significant change**. Assuming all partners are committed to its success and it has sufficient scope and delegated powers,

this option would **speed up planning decisions and the delivery of major infrastructure**, including large-scale transport infrastructure.

As sitting members of the committee, local councillors would have a clear and direct role in taking decisions. This would satisfy the need for **accountability and transparency**.

The **delivery capacity of this option could be enhanced further** by creating an executive secretariat-type function with responsibility for day-to-day management of contracts and delivery responsibilities.

Compared to the current way of working, a Joint Planning Committee could allow for a greater focus on the challenges of creating job opportunities and regenerating Harlow. However, Joint Planning Committees are not designed primarily to deliver economic development.

The view from partners was that a Joint Planning Committee would be a worthwhile option if it had sufficient delegated powers and delivery capacity to deliver at speed and at scale.

A **Development Corporation** would enable partners, if they are fully supportive, to go further and faster than a Joint Committee. It would:

- Enable a **much sharper focus on economic development**.
- Facilitate active **private sector representation** and engagement.
- Offer a **single voice and negotiating point** for residents and partners.
- With the right leadership, deliver greater **clout and visibility**.

The government is in favour of new development corporations and at the end of 2019 launched a consultation of reforms to make it easier for local authorities to establish new corporations without the need for the Secretary of State to lay a statutory instrument in parliament. The government also proposed a new £10 million development fund to support “local areas with ambitious regeneration and development proposals” to come forward with proposals.²

However, even with simplified legislation and good will from all five authorities, the **process for establishing a development corporation could be onerous and time-consuming**. It could absorb partners’ effort and consume bandwidth at a crucial time in HGGT’s shift from visioning and planning to implementation.

Table 1: Challenges and options

Key

✓ – Positive impact on tackling the challenge.

? – Some / uncertain impact.

✗ - Zero / negligible impact.

	Duty to Cooperate Plus	Joint Planning Committee	Development Corporation
Modal shift	✗ Unlikely to increase focus on this	✓ A Joint Committee with sufficient powers	✓ A Development Corporation would

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/development-corporation-reform-technical-consultation>

	challenge or the capacity to address it.	would enable more efficient and integrated delivery.	enable a integrated and focused delivery, and a single interface with partners and the community
Sustainable transport	✘ As above.	✓ As above.	✓ As above.
Employment land and jobs	✘ As above.	? Potential for greater focus, but a Joint Committee is not primarily an economic development body.	✓ Scope for much sharper focus on economic development and access to private sector expertise.
Regenerating Harlow	? Some scope for increased cooperation leading to a greater focus on existing residents.	? As above.	✓ This model was designed as a vehicle to drive urban regeneration.
Sticking to the vision	✓ Increased cooperation would reinforce the importance of partners' original ambition.	✓ A Joint Committee would send a strong signal that partners are committed to the vision.	✓ The objectives of the vision could be written into the Corporation's Terms of Reference.

Recommendations

Partners should look to **establish a Joint Planning Committee with extensive delegated powers** to consider and determine planning applications; plan for the delivery of the Sustainable Transport Corridor and related infrastructure; and monitor the delivery of major contracts.

The Weightmans research also considered the creation of a Joint Planning Committee. It noted that this approach would deliver “[g]reater prominence of HGGT and Vision, effective coordination and enhanced expertise.”³ However, it concludes that a Joint Planning Committee is **not the right approach “at this time”**, given the “challenges likely in agreeing the makeup” of the committee.

The Weightmans report recommends instead the formation of a **joint committee without delegated planning powers**. This may be the most effective short-term solution and could be delivered within “6-12 months (relative to the Partners['] commitment of time and resources).”

The formation of such a committee could be a first step toward a Joint Planning Committee further down the line. This would tally with the evolutionary or phased approach described above.

³ HGGT Governance Options Review 9 July 2021

Partners should continue to **engage government in a conversation about local innovation**. This would mean HGGT putting forward proposals to further **develop the powers and functions of a Joint Committee**, especially with regard to economic development.

Whichever option is adopted, the purpose of the Board should be reviewed in more detail. In particular, there should be further consideration of how to address the perceived issues about the lack of visibility and transparency. One potential solution is for the Board to **become a sounding board for the private, voluntary and community sectors**, as well as other relevant groups and interests. Its primary function should be to oversee a programme of outreach, communication and engagement with the local community.

The HGGT core team should **operate as an executive secretariat to the Joint Committee** with an agreed annual work plan. It should be resourced adequately to deliver that work programme.

Partners should **monitor the government's emerging proposals on development corporations**. The formation of a development corporation could be seen as a logical step in the near future, if partners have exhausted the possibilities of the Joint Committee model.

The HGGT team

The HGGT Team should play a **strategic role in driving delivery** This would mean the team focuses on:

- **Acting as the guardian of the vision.** More than any other role, partners were eager that the core team should ensure partners are committed to the ambition set out in the vision. This would be particularly important during negotiations when the pressure to settle for 'good enough' rather than great is at its strongest.
- **Holding partners to account.** An important way in which the team can guard the vision is by holding to account partners who are tasked with delivering elements of it. This would mean: agreeing clear deadlines, milestones and quality standards; providing ongoing monitoring; and moving quickly to identify and address delays and blockages. Several partners described this as the team acting as an intelligent client to the five authorities other and delivery partners.
- **Developing an overall delivery plan.** The task of holding partners to account would be made easier and more effective if all partners were working to an agreed and over-arching delivery plan. This does not currently exist. An immediate practical step for the team would be to develop a comprehensive and integrated plan. Some partners were keen that such a plan should clearly establish the "core" or "fundamentals". These are the essential pieces of infrastructure which are prerequisite to the rest and must be prioritised, such as the STCs.
- **Tackling the most complex problems.** As set out above, the tendency to leave the most challenging issues on the 'too difficult pile' is one of the flaws with the current set-up. In its new role, the team should work with partners to identify those problems and then broker discussions to explicitly address and resolve or mitigate them.

Another potential role for the team is lead negotiations with developers, funders and others key stakeholders. This would address the concern raised by partners about the absence of a single voice and contact point for the outside world. However, this would need careful consideration in light of the governance option which is adopted. The delegation of negotiating powers would need careful consideration and agreement between partners.

“Let’s get the core sorted – the sites agreed, the planning permission granted. Then work out from there. Without the core, it all falls flat.”

“The [team’s] role could be to hold everyone to account in terms of the overall vision and delivery commitments.”

“The Garden Town Team needs to police what is happening – make sure there are clear commitments, that partners are delivering on those, that they are securing contributions.”

“[HGGT] needs decide the standard, scope and cost of the [Sustainable Transport Corridor]. The Garden Town team should be the client.”

“The Team needs to take responsibility for delivering a programme. They need to set out the plan.”

“In future, the Team can help partners to resolve issues and make decisions more pacy.”

Annex 1 - HGGT stakeholder interview questions

Name(s):

Role(s):

Date:

Thank you for making time for this call and helping with the research.

As a reminder, the purpose of the research is to get a clearer sense of the value of the current partnership, setting out what partners can do and achieve collectively that they cannot deliver in isolation.

The findings will be used to:

- a) Develop options for appropriate governance and organisational structures
- b) Build the work programme under the HGGT Director and potentially across the wider partnership where appropriate

Over the next weeks I'm speaking to all the key stakeholders in order to produce draft findings by early June. We're also looking to arrange a workshop in late June to look at some of the emerging findings together. With the final findings delivered in July.

I'd like to cover a few areas today:

- The vision for the Garden City
- Barriers and concerns
- Governance and delivery

I'll use what you tell me but I won't quote or attribute views to individuals so please feel free to speak openly.

Do you have any questions before we start?

Vision

- 1. There is a vision in place for the Garden Town. For your authority, what do you consider to be the key elements of that vision?**

- 2. [If not covered by 1] What would a mission statement look like i.e. what needs to happen for those elements to be realised?**

Progress and barriers

3. What are your concerns and what are the biggest barriers in terms of the successful delivery of the Garden Town? Probe: are there any elements of the vision that are at greatest risk of not being delivered?

4. What can we do to get over those concerns [if not already covered]?

Governance and delivery

5. In terms of what needs to be delivered to achieve the vision, what can only be achieved by all partners working together, as opposed to delivery by a single authority – what is the core value of the partnership?

6. At the moment, that work between the authorities takes the form of voluntary cooperation under the duty. To what extent is that approach fit for purpose as we move from planning the Garden Town to actually delivering it?

7. What is your view on the possibility of moving to a more formalised governance arrangement with delegated responsibilities for decision-making? Probe: what might that look like / what shouldn't it look like?

8. On the officer side, what is your view on the current organisation of responsibilities / arrangements? Probe: including those that are centrally resourced, those 'in kind' lead officers and those engaged more widely?

Next steps

As I mentioned earlier, the initial output is to produce emerging findings in early June ahead of final findings in July.

Thanks again for your time.