

Agenda Item 08

HARLOW AND GILSTON GARDEN TOWN

Report to: HARLOW AND GILSTON GARDEN TOWN BOARD

Title: HGGT Green Infrastructure Framework

Date: 7th February 2023

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Enclosures: Appendix 1 - HGGT GI Framework – Part One: Context
Appendix 2 - HGGT GI Framework – Part Two: Vision, Principles & Strategic Opportunities
Appendix 3 - HGGT GI Framework

Please find at <https://hgg.co.uk/feb-board-2023!HGGTFeb2023!>

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

- 1.1 This report seeks the HGGT Board's approval for the HGGT Green Infrastructure (GI) Framework as an HGGT technical document. The HGGT GI Framework's purpose is to provide consistency across the HGGT partnership's approach to GI design and delivery. HGGT appointed LUC as consultants in January 2022 to deliver the GI Framework.
- 1.2 Part One of the Framework brings together all existing GI work across the Garden Town area as delivered by the Council partners in the form of an easily accessible evidence base document. It collates, summarises and signposts all relevant work by partners, external trusts, bodies and organisations and combines it with the latest legislation and best practices. It forms one common starting point for anyone working with or trying to understand GI in the Garden Town area.
- 1.3 Part Two then sets out a vision for GI in the Garden Town and the principles for its delivery. It highlights a set of GI Strategic Opportunities that the HGGT GI and Stewardship Workstream can then identify in and deliver through future action plans. It identifies and prioritises the highest value opportunities HGGT can then work with developers/landowners and or other third parties to deliver and with stewardship bodies to manage.

1.4 Whilst containing an element of future visioning, the HGGT Board is being asked to approve the GI Framework as a technical document that will provide the background to and inform future policy work. The HGGT GI Framework is advisory, it is not intended to be applied as material consideration for Planning purposes.

1.5 The HGGT GI Framework helps to deliver healthy growth through Green Infrastructure, as set out in the HGGT Vision and further informed by the HGGT Design Guide, HGGT Transport Strategy, HGGT Stewardship Charter and HGGT Sustainability Guide & Checklist amongst other documents.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

2.1 That the HGGT Green Infrastructure Framework is agreed by the HGGT Board as an HGGT technical document and submitted to the relevant portfolio holders/Senior Officers of Essex CC, Herts CC, East Herts DC, Epping Forest DC and Harlow DC for noting by each of the partner Councils.

2.2 That the HGGT Partners consider the inclusion of the development of Action Plans, in line with Strategic Opportunities as set out in chapters 10 and 11 of the Framework, in the programme of work for the HGGT Partners in forthcoming years.

2.3 To note that the HGGT Green Infrastructure Framework document will be reviewed every five years co-ordinated by the HGGT Partnership.

3. Introduction

3.1. The Garden Town initiative shapes the transformational urban growth in and around Harlow that will be delivered by 2033. In support of this, the Green Infrastructure (GI) Framework sets out the background and the steps required to shape the network of GI that forms an integral part of that growth. Connecting across the Garden Town and to the wider landscape, GI is an essential component of healthy, thriving communities, ecosystems and economy, and therefore underpins sustainable living within the Garden Town. On approval by the HGGT Board, the GI Framework would be endorsed as a technical document forming part of the evidence base in the Planning process. The document would not be endorsed to have material planning weight in its own right.

3.2. The five partner Councils are at different stages of the plan making process, each with GI Strategies of varying scope and age. This Framework sets out a common understanding of the value of, and vision for, a cohesive network of GI assets across the Garden Town. It is intended to help ensure development meets the GI principles within the 2018 HGGT Vision. It will provide a 'one-stop-shop' for officers across the Garden Town and developers to review policy expectations for GI across the five Council partners that make up the HGGT area.

- 3.3. Current and emerging legislation and policy shape not only the requirements and targets for the GI network to deliver but also the parallel obligations of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS), and wider Environmental Net Gains. Co-ordinated planning and delivery of these through the network of GI will optimise funding and stewardship collaborations and ensure the protection of GI in the long-term.
- 3.4. The Framework delivers strategic functions whilst reflecting local need and character. It collates existing plans, strategies and initiatives to identify strategic GI opportunities. The opportunities will be taken forward as Action Plans led by the HGGT GI & Stewardship Working Group, through engagement with landowners/promoters, other third parties and stewardship bodies.
- 3.5. Part One details the context of currently proposed growth, legislation and policy, and existing GI strategies across the Garden Town area. Baseline analysis of 'local need and character' includes the landscape context to which the Framework and any new growth must respond, as well as the 'triple challenge' of nature recovery, climate change mitigation and health and wellbeing.
- 3.6. Part Two sets out a vision and principles to guide development growth that responds to local context as well as upholding the Gibberd new town vision. The strategic GI opportunities flow from the needs and opportunities identified in Part One. These will enable planners and delivery partners to focus finer grain initiatives and projects toward positive strategic outcomes. It is anticipated that the strategic opportunities will underpin engagement between the partner Councils, land owners/developers and stewardship bodies through the development of Action Plans to both realise GI opportunities as well as forming the basis of the long term dynamic management of land and neighbourhoods.
- 3.7. The Action Plans will prescribe the timeframe, funding, actions and responsibilities to deliver each strategic opportunity and will be informed by consultation with all relevant stakeholders.
- 3.8. The GI Framework has been developed through consultation with technical specialists within the partner Councils and with external bodies that lead the planning and delivery of GI assets in the region. Stakeholder contributions have informed all parts of the study process, including involvement of the HGGT Quality Review Panel and the HGGT Board. It should be noted that the GI Framework has not been subject to public consultation. As this is not a material policy document, public consultation is not required.

4. GI Framework Aims

4.1. The aims of this GI Framework are to:

- 4.1.1. Provide a framework and lay the ground for a future coherent vision for HGGT, which brings together and builds on the GI strategies independently progressed by the five partner Councils, variously dated 2011 through to 2022.
- 4.1.2. Respond to the proposed growth areas and infrastructure of the Garden Town.
- 4.1.3. Reflect legal and Planning requirements, both current and emerging.
- 4.1.4. Serve as an evidence base that constructively informs future land planning and management, signposting relevant workstreams within the HGGT project such as the Sustainable Transport Corridors.

- 4.1.5. Provide an overarching strategic framework to inform (as a technical document) landscape-led master planning.
- 4.1.6. Support engagement with landowners and stewardship bodies to enable successful delivery of long term dynamic land management.
- 4.2. The Framework has a 15-year lifespan. There will be a regular review conducted at a minimum of every five years to reflect the review cycles of the design codes and the Local Plans of the HGGT LPA's. Additional review may be undertaken in response of emerging legislation and policy, such as Biodiversity Net Gain and Local Nature Recovery Strategies to ensure the GI Framework remains most fit for purpose.

5. GI Framework Approach

- 5.1. The GI Framework was developed through an iterative process of data gathering, analysis alongside officer and technical stakeholder consultation to inform each stage of work and ensure current priorities and the trajectory of existing or emerging initiatives are included and enhanced. All contributing specialists are listed in Appendix 3.
- 5.2. A desk review of existing information and policies were undertaken to gain a full understanding of the planning and delivery of GI completed to date across the area, the landscape context and the nature and condition of existing GI assets. The pressures on, and opportunities for GI were considered in terms of nature recovery, climate change mitigation and resident health and wellbeing. Together these are referred to as the 'triple challenge'.
- 5.3. The following key documents were assessed:
 - 5.3.1. GI strategies for each of the five partner Councils, variously dated / adopted between 2011 and 2022.
 - 5.3.2. Principal Local Plan policies requiring consideration of, or adherence to, relevant strategy or strategies.
 - 5.3.3. Current and emerging legislation and policy requirements which can be met through GI, including mechanisms, such as BNG, that also present funding opportunities to enable delivery.
 - 5.3.4. Key plans, strategies and supporting documentation regarding components of the triple challenge - examples include ecological assets, flood risk, access networks, historic assets, planning and socio economics; see Appendix 2 - Part Two: Vision, Principles & Strategic Opportunities.
 - 5.3.5. Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) of Plans across the five partner Councils to ensure the GI Framework is aligned with the HRA decision-making process
 - 5.3.6. Emerging Council led growth plans for the Garden Town area.
- 5.4. Field visits were conducted by LUC in April 2022 to help inform analysis of the character, quality and functioning of the network. Visits focused on the proposed areas of growth, the Stort Valley and the key GI assets.

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5.5. Information from the desk review, site visits and consultation were brought together in analysis to develop the GI Framework.

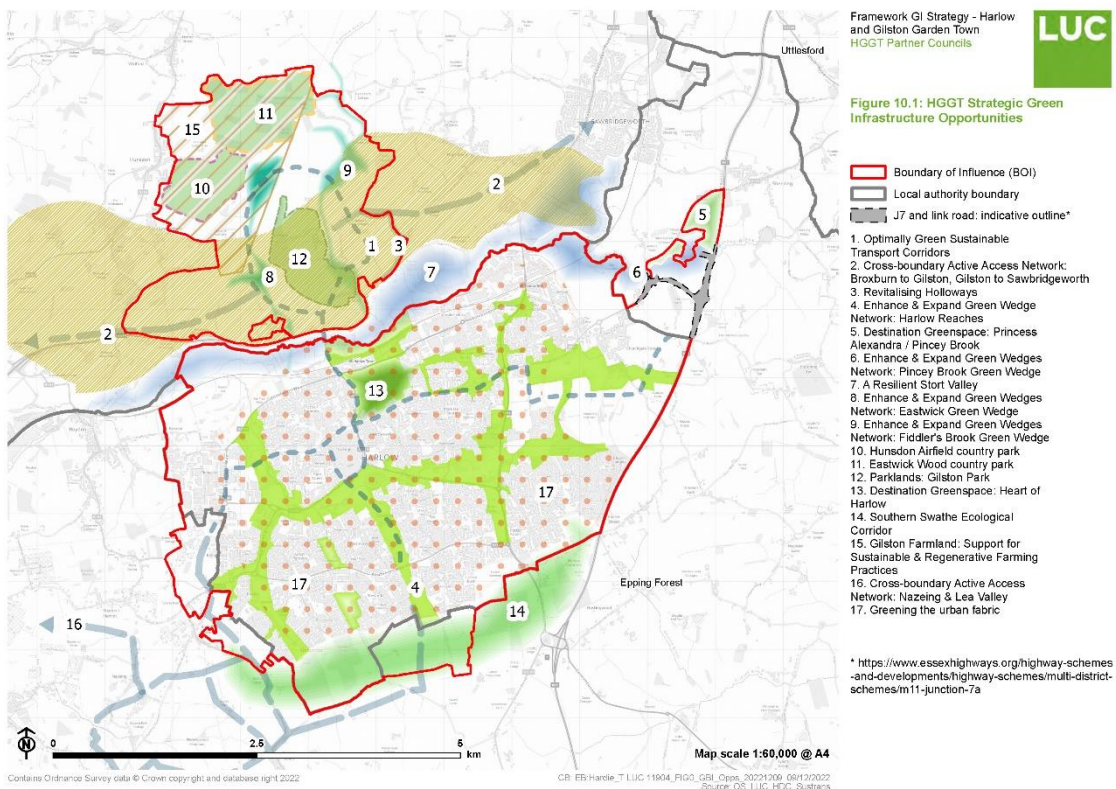
6. Consultation/QRP

- 6.1 Targeted consultation was held with officers from across the five Council partners and technical specialists at an early stage to:
- 6.2 Agree the sites to be considered as 'critical threshold sites', the associated buffers and mitigation measures for each.
- 6.3 Ascertain existing information on the future Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) which will be required under the 2021 Environment Act.
- 6.4 Two technical stakeholder workshops were held. The first to ensure the baseline information being collected was complete and correct, the second to present potential strategic opportunities and test their suitability.
- 6.5 Following completion of the workshops and analysis to that time, the HGGT Quality Review Panel (QRP) provided feedback and recommendations on the process, resources and technical contributions underpinning the emerging GI Framework.
- 6.6 A presentation to the HGGT Developer Forum was made in November 2022 to introduce the GI Framework as an evidence base.



7. Strategic Opportunities

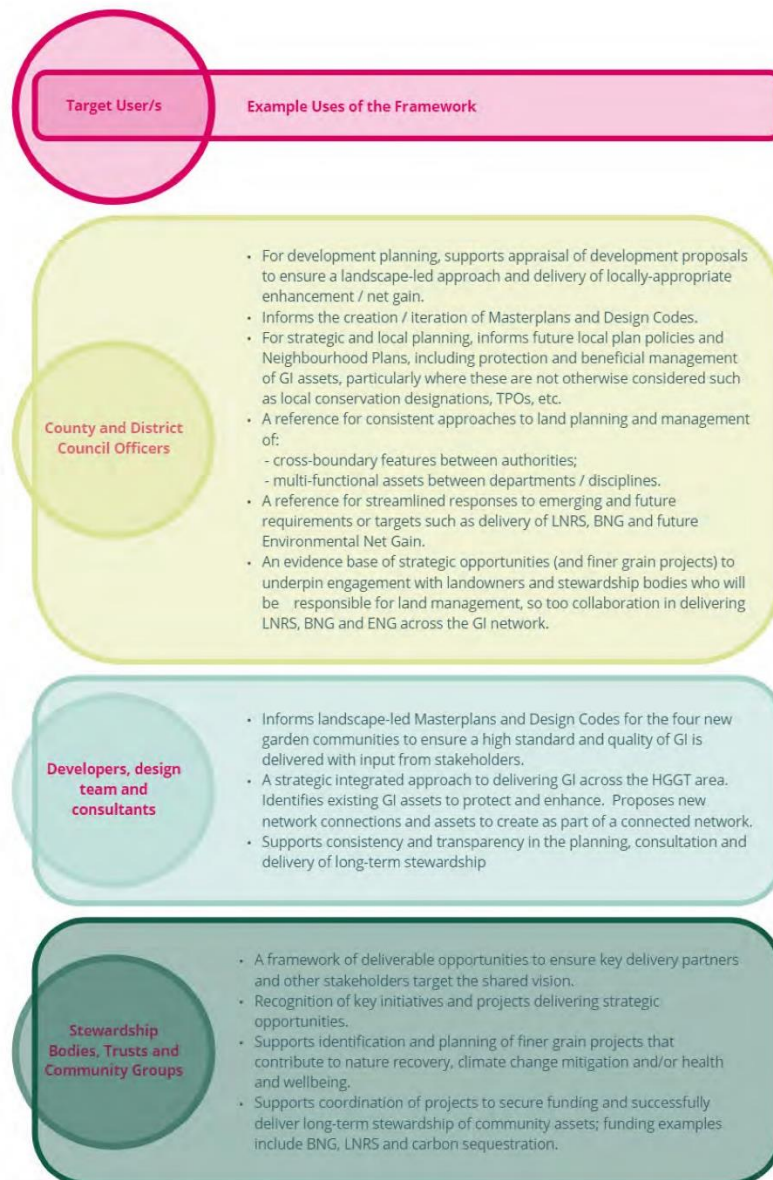
- 7.1. The strategic GI opportunities flow from the needs and opportunities identified in the baseline analysis of Part One as set out in Appendix 1. These enable Planners and delivery partners to focus finer grain initiatives and projects toward strategic gains within the overarching vision and principles of the Garden Town Vision. Each opportunity is summarised in a proforma to inform future Action Plans which will subsequently detail their delivery.
- 7.2. The map below illustrates the 17 strategic GI opportunities identified in the GI Framework. Part Two as set out in Appendix 2, provides concise descriptions of each opportunity identified. Potential delivery partners, initiatives and projects are listed to ensure these are cross-referenced as the future Actions Plans progress.
- 7.3. GI opportunities will need to be prioritised for implementation. The Quality of Life Community Feedback report contains clear feedback from the public around the importance of maintaining green spaces, reserving/ protecting the River Stort and responses on Nature. This report, alongside other engagement, could help guide the prioritisation selection process.



8. Outcomes and next steps

- 8.1. The HGGT Board as set out in Recommendation 2.1 is asked to agree the Framework as a technical document forming part of the HGGT partners evidence base. It will subsequently be submitted to the relevant portfolio holders/Senior Officers of Essex CC, Herts CC, East Herts DC, Epping Forest DC; and Harlow DC for their endorsement on the same basis.
- 8.2. Following agreement from the HGGT Board, it is intended that the GI Framework will be published, promoted and be publicly accessible in spring 2023.
- 8.3. The chart below identifies the target groups that are relevant to the GI Framework and describes the GI Frameworks uses and or applications relevant to each group.

Inset 2.2: Target audience for the Framework and examples of its use



8.4. The GI Framework will be reviewed a minimum of every five years, co-ordinated by the HGGT partnership, to reflect the review cycles of the design codes and the Local Plans of the HGGT district councils.

8.5. Once agreed, the HGGT GI and Stewardship workstream will be able to implement Action Plans, as suggested, that address the Strategic Opportunities.

HGGT Vision Assurance

1. What principles of the HGGT Vision does this seek to achieve?

The HGGT GI Framework seeks to support the achievement of the following HGGT Vision Principles:

- Landscape and Green Infrastructure
 - Enhancing the Green Belt and expanding the Green Wedge network
 - Landscape-led masterplanning
 - Biodiversity, climate resilience and food security
 - Using technology in energy generation and conservation
- Placemaking and homes
 - Responsive and distinctive design
 - Healthy, safe and connected neighbourhoods and villages
 - Maximising visibility and appreciation of our heritage
- Sustainable Movement:
 - Revitalising the cycle and walking network
 - Changing the character of roads to streets
 - Integrated transport: a viable and preferred alternative to cars
 - Anticipating change and future proofing infrastructure
- Economy and regeneration
 - A vibrant and resilient Town Centre for all the Garden Town

2. What steps have been taken to ensure the HGGT Vision is embedded into the project?

The HGGT GI Framework has undergone numerous reviews by HGGT Partner Officers to ensure the Vision is embedded. The Vision was one of the core documents that formed the baseline evidence that guided the project.