

**Gilston Area Workshop (Governance) – 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017, Eastwick and Gilston Village Hall.**

**Attendees:**

<b>Facilitator</b>
Jon Rowland (JR)
<b>East Herts Council</b>
Cllr Linda Haysey (LH) – Leader
Cllr Bob Brunton (BB) – District Councillor for Hunsdon Ward
Liz Watts (LW) – Chief Executive
Kevin Steptoe (KS) – Head of Planning & Building Control
Alison Stuart (AS) – Head of Democratic & Legal Support Services
Claire Sime (CS) – Planning Policy Manager
Taryna Surtees (TS) – Communications and Digital Media Manager
Chris Butcher (CB) – Principal Planning Officer
<b>Hertfordshire County Council</b>
Jan Hayes-Griffin (JHG) – Assistant Director Planning and Economy
<b>Neighbourhood Plan Group</b>
Anthony Bickmore (AB) - Chairman
Cllr Bernadette Dunthorne (BD)
Cllr Mark Orson (MO)
Mike Newman (MN)
Martyn Reid (MR)
<b>Landowners/Site Promoters</b>
Mary Parsons (MP) – Places for People
Chris Lovegrove (CL) – City & Provincial Properties
Hugh Cave (HC) – City & Provincial Properties
Tom Dobson (TD) – Quod
Andy Hunt (AH) – Quod
Stephen Ashworth (SA) - Dentons

**1. Introduction: What are the recognised principles for good governance and what do we want from this exercise?**

1.1 JR opened the meeting and provided a general introduction to governance, including the need to adhere to various principles such as transparency and equality.

**2. The wider governance picture**

2.1 LW gave a presentation on the wider governance picture with regards to the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town. LW mentioned that the Garden Town initiative involved development in Harlow and Epping Forest, as well as the Gilston Area within East Herts. The three authorities had been awarded some funding by Government to advance these development proposals. However, the three authorities would also be able to

access other funding streams such as the Government's Housing Infrastructure Fund which will see £2.3 billion invested in infrastructure across the country.

- 2.2 In terms of governance, the Co-operation for Sustainable Development Board (the Co-op Board), comprising East Herts, Harlow, Epping Forest and Uttlesford District Councils, Essex and Hertfordshire County Councils and other bodies such as Highways England, was established in 2015 in order to support the preparation of respective local plans.
- 2.3 LW noted that work on the Garden Town initiative is at an early stage. However, early priorities include:
- Appointing a Programme Director;
  - Preparing a Community Engagement Strategy, taking account of the fact that different developments in the wider area had been subject to various levels of community involvement and are at different stages;
  - Preparation of a Design Charter including visioning work – this will establish the need for high quality design;
  - Work on the proposals to deliver sustainable transport corridors, running north to south and east to west through Harlow; and
  - Work on the potential to re-locate Princess Alexandra Hospital to a site to the north of Harlow, or to the east in proximity to the new Junction 7a of the M11. A Strategic Outline Case for Government funding is currently being prepared.
- 2.4 MO asked how much influence the local community would be able to have in relation to the Garden Town. LW re-iterated that work on the Garden Town was at an early stage, but that undertaking visioning work in partnership with local communities would be important. LW stated that the work shouldn't just be about informing local people, but actively involving them. MO stated that he didn't believe there would be any engagement with local communities. JR suggested that local groups could start to think about their priorities and aspirations, including how governance could work from their perspective.
- 2.5 MR noted that there was no mention of Hunsdon in the title for the Garden Town and stated that the community would not wish for Hunsdon to become part of Harlow. LW said that there were no plans to change administrative boundaries. However, one of the purposes of the Garden Town work will be to consider infrastructure provision across boundaries. LW noted that there is no Government guidance on governance structures for Garden Towns.
- 2.6 MR also asked for further information about Princess Alexandra Hospital. MP stated that all potential development sites on the periphery of Harlow had been considered by independent consultants. MP indicated that there may be potential to provide a

hospital close to the second crossing of the River Stort. While consideration of this issue is at an early stage, MP confirmed that Places for People is committed to supporting the process as required. The Gilston Area will also provide new health facilities and it would therefore be useful to have discussions with the local community in order to help establish the type of facilities that should be provided.

### **3. What do we mean by governance?**

3.1 MP gave a presentation on what governance means from the perspective of the landowners. She advised that there are three different phases of governance:

- Scheme evolution and determination of a planning application;
- Development phase; and
- Post development/long term governance of different assets including utilities, the public realm, green and blue infrastructure and housing.

3.2 MP noted that each of these governance phases would need to be considered as work on the development proposals progresses.

### **4. Community views**

4.1 AB provided the view of the Neighbourhood Plan Group. He re-iterated that the Gilston Area proposal is not supported locally, however the community is willing to engage in a constructive manner, despite the support now being given by East Herts for the removal of the long established Green Belt policy here.

4.2 AB stated that, in the view of the Neighbourhood Plan Group, the landowners and Council had performed very poorly in relation to four key governance issues:

- Land value capture – the landowners have stated that the uplift in land value as a result of removing the Green Belt and allocating the site for development will help provide a significant level of infrastructure. However, the community is concerned that there is no written commitment to ensure that the stated infrastructure schemes will actually be provided. This concern was raised in January and it appears to the local community that no progress has been made.
- The planning process – consideration needs to be given to how the Garden Town proposal relates to the Gilston Area development, and how the money secured from Government should be spent. There is also uncertainty about how the planning application process would be governed. AB raised a concern that he had circulated a note on a potential governance structure but had received no feedback from either the landowners or the Council. The fact that the Council had secured funding from Government as part of the Garden Town bid was noted.

- Community land trust – a better level of community engagement to establish the process of transferring land and assets is required. There is concern over timing as, at present, it would appear that the trust would only come in to existence once development is complete.
- Governance of seven villages – there is currently no clarity on how the seven villages would be governed, and there is concern amongst the local community about becoming part of ‘Greater Harlow’.

4.3 AB stressed that the local community requires resources in order to engage properly on these issues.

4.4 MP stated that there had never been a reluctance from Places for People to engage with the local community. However, no engagement had occurred in recent times as the Council had been very clear that this should take place through the District Plan process. In relation to some of the points raised by AB, MP stated that the uplift in land values will fund an investment of £500 million in new infrastructure. It is the intention of the landowners to make a legal commitment to this effect by the time of the District Plan Examination Hearings which are currently expected to take place in September/October 2017. MP also noted that, in relation to the transfer of land, this process would happen at the end of the development phase. However, the establishment of governance principles and agreements can commence now.

## **5 Case Studies – lessons learnt**

5.1 MP presented a number of case studies to explain how governance could work. Examples included Letchworth Garden City where assets had been transferred to the community. Income secured from these assets was then invested in local facilities including schools and health centres. Places for People were also developing a site in Milton Keynes known as ‘Brooklands’. In that instance, Places for People managed the built areas, while an organisation known as the Milton Keynes Parks Trust managed 5,000 acres of parkland.

5.2 MP also gave examples of where governance arrangements had worked less well. For instance, new residents of the Olympic Park development were required to pay a charge which funded the ongoing management of the park. However, this structure is perhaps unfair as the Olympic Park could be considered to be an ‘international park’, and therefore funding should come from other sources and not just local residents.

5.3 TD provided a further example of governance based on a development in Kent. In this structure, residents paid a fee to a Neighbourhood Association, which in turn, provided funding to a Village Association which was responsible for the upkeep of settlement wide parklands. The governance structure was sustainable in the long term and helped facilitate the maintenance of various assets. However, the village commercial centre sat

outside of the governance structure and, as a result, was considered to be less successful as retail units were franchised out.

- 5.4 MP confirmed that Places for People was committed to a transfer of land and other assets to the community. Sources of funding for their upkeep would likely come from a residents charge, as well as profits arising from neighbourhood centres and possibly housing.

## **6 Possible vision for the long term governance of the Gilston Area**

- 6.1 TD stated that Places for People's Governance note that was submitted to the Council in December as part of the District Plan consultation established a potential approach to governance. TD re-iterated the importance of having a governance structure for all aspects of the development. Consideration would need to be given with regards to involving all stakeholders in the governance process including landowners/developers, residents (both current and future), the Councils and service providers. The way in which the governance of the Garden Town fits in with that of the Gilston Area was also important.
- 6.2 TD advised that there could be a governance structure for site wide assets such as the parklands and separate structures for each of the seven villages, including neighbourhood centres. Detailed issues would need to be considered in due course including the maintenance of agriculture on part of the site and how the leases would work.
- 6.3 MR asked what City and Provincial Property's (CPP) position was on governance. HC advised that Places for People spoke on behalf of CPP, and therefore that both landowners were speaking with 'one voice'.
- 6.4 JHG commented that this was the start of a long process. She suggested that it could be helpful to prepare a timeline in order to identify what will happen leading up to submission of a planning application and beyond, and the various milestones with regards to when key decisions need to be made. JHG considered that this could help reassure the community. There was a general consensus in the room that this would be a helpful approach.
- 6.5 MN asked about the Garden Town and how that fitted in with the site specific proposals for the Gilston Area. MP stated that the vision for the Garden Town was more about the function of Harlow as a town and how strategic infrastructure can be provided to support growth. MP indicated that the Concept Framework is not a full masterplan and that further work will be required in co-operation with the local community.

## **7 How can we secure these commitments through the planning process?**

- 7.1 SA indicated that securing these commitments was a four stage process. Firstly, it is important to get the right planning policy framework in place. For the Gilston Area, this means ensuring that the wording contained within the District Plan provided a strong framework for future governance. SA stated that in his view, the District Plan could say more about governance and that this will be a topic for discussion at the Examination Hearings. Secondly, the planning requirements tied to the site allocation must be clearly established. The third aspect is the planning application and the obligations that are agreed through that process. The fourth and final facet is that of monitoring delivery of development and enforcement.
- 7.2 AB enquired how the agreement between the landowners and the Council gets agreed. SA stated that this would be addressed through legal agreements to be prepared prior to the Examination Hearings. AB re-iterated the need for funding so that the community could receive professional support. MP made a commitment to provide resources to the local community to engage with the planning process, but that it would be important to ensure that any consultant that was selected to represent the community has the necessary skills and experience.

## **8 Breakout Groups**

- 8.1 The attendees broke out into four breakout groups in order to discuss the governance of different topic areas. The feedback from each group was as follows:

### Group 1: Strategic Infrastructure

- i) The Gilston Area should have a Programme Director in the same way that one would be recruited for the Garden Town. A Shadow Board could be established comprising representatives from the Council and the local community in order to scrutinise the landowner's proposals.
- ii) There is a need to deliver sustainable transport measures including an adequate bus service that has the potential to be self-funding.
- iii) With regards to governance of the planning process, an urban development corporation would not be supported as it would remove local control.

### Group 2: Community Infrastructure

- i) New infrastructure must be provided and should not be avoided.
- ii) Local communities should have a say in what gets provided and should not be disenfranchised.
- iii) Services should be provided early on wherever possible. Consideration must be given to service providers such as the NHS when establishing governance structures.

- iv) The benefits of the approach taken at Letchworth should be considered, particularly income from assets helping to fund education and health facilities.
- v) Existing community needs should be considered, not just those of the new residents.

#### Group 3: Green and Blue Infrastructure

- i) Control and funding should be kept within the site boundary and not considered as part of the wider Garden Town proposals. Other developments in the Garden Town should not influence the proposals for the Gilston Area.
- ii) Consideration should be given to devolving management of such infrastructure to the local level.
- iii) Places for People's land ownership in the Stort Valley should be considered in the context of the wider area in conjunction with the relevant organisations

#### Group 4: Housing

- i) Consideration needs to be given to provision of self-build homes, lifetime homes and the way in which support and care services can be provided.
- ii) The impact of transport issues should be considered e.g. provision of car clubs.
- iii) Issues such as right to buy should be considered and how that could affect affordable homes in future. Look beyond just affordable housing in order to understand how different housing types and tenures can be provided for all sectors of society.
- iv) Potential to provide community owned housing that provides affordable homes in perpetuity.
- v) Homes should be flexible to allow working from home
- vi) The accessibility of neighbourhood centres to homes should be considered through masterplanning.

### **9. Conclusions and Next Steps**

- 5.1 The next workshop had been agreed for 6<sup>th</sup> May. Items on the agenda should include consideration of what constitutes a 'village' in the Gilston Area, what infrastructure will be provided and how the proposals relate to the Garden Town concept.

#### Actions

- 5.2 The following actions were agreed during the workshop:

- That the landowners, in conjunction with Council, set out a timescale of further work to be completed prior to the Examination Hearings and beyond.
- That the landowners and Council provide feedback to AB's governance note.
- That the landowners progress plans to provide the local community with professional support.

- That the Council, in conjunction with the landowners, prepare a draft schedule of future topic based meetings involving the wider community and other organisations as appropriate.

CLOSE.