

Gilston Area Workshop – 6th May 2017, Eastwick and Gilston Village Hall.

Attendees:

East Herts Council
Cllr Linda Haysey (LH) – Leader
Cllr Bob Brunton (BB) – District Councillor for Hunsdon Ward
Cllr Ian Devonshire (ID) – District Councillor for Much Hadham Ward
Liz Watts (LW) – Chief Executive
Claire Sime (CS) – Planning Policy Manager
Taryna Surtees (TS) – Communications and Digital Media Manager
Tim Hagyard (TH) – Development Management Team Manager
Ciaran MacCullagh (CM) – Assistant Conservation Officer
Paul Stevens (PS) – Landscape Officer
Chris Butcher (CB) – Principal Planning Officer
Neighbourhood Plan Group
Anthony Bickmore (AB) - Chairman
Cllr Bernadette Dunthorne (BD)
Cllr Bob Toll (BT)
Mike Newman (MN)
Sarah Bagnall (SB)
Landowners/Site Promoters
Mary Parsons (MP) – Places for People
Chris Lovegrove (CL) – City & Provincial Properties
Hugh Cave (HC) – City & Provincial Properties
Phil Murphy (PM) – Quod
Adina Bisek (AB) – Grimshaw Architects
Danny Nagle (DN) – Grant Associates
Cody Gaynor (CG) – Figure Ground Architects

1. Introduction

- 1.1 LW welcomed everyone to the workshop. MP gave an overview of the agenda and outlined the purpose of the workshop which was to discuss some of the design related issues presented within Concept Framework document.

2. Concept Framework

- 2.1 PM introduced the Concept Framework. He noted that the landowners had submitted a large amount of information to the Council over a number of years. The draft Concept Framework, the content of which had been agreed between the landowners and the Council, sought to present the information in a more manageable format. PM advised that the document identifies the principles of development in the Gilston Area and establishes the basis for the delivery of high quality development.

- 2.2 At present, the document forms part of the technical evidence base that support the District Plan. It refines and adds greater detail to Policy GA1 of the Plan (the policy that concerns the Gilston Area). PM noted that the document contained some elements of masterplanning but confirmed that this was illustrative only and further work would be required to establish what the development would look like – this work would need to be undertaken in consultation with the local community. The Concept Framework will also inform this masterplanning work. It was confirmed that the wider local community would have the opportunity to contribute to the final version of the document and that the details of this were currently being considered.
- 2.3 AB stated that the vision contained within the Concept Framework was based on five principles:
- Collective cohesion and individual character;
 - Openness and accessibility to all;
 - Supporting healthy and sustainable lifestyles;
 - Harmony with nature; and
 - Enabling prosperity and supporting innovation.
- 2.4 AB indicated that there were a series of development objectives:
- 10,000 dwellings arranged in 7 distinct villages;
 - Enhancements to the historic Gilston Park;
 - Range of housing types, densities and tenures across the villages.
 - An appropriate range of social infrastructure to support each village;
 - Sustainable water management;
 - Major publicly accessible parklands, as well as hard and soft landscaping;
 - Mitigation of traffic impact and promotion of sustainable modes of transport;
 - Pedestrian, cycle and green linkages connecting the site internally and to wider destinations/facilities;
 - High quality design and distinctive character responding to the local landscape and character;
 - Assist East Herts local housing needs and support economic regeneration of Harlow; and
 - Integrating heritage, ecological and landscape assets where possible.
- 2.5 AB 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. If the development was to proceed, the community would want to ensure that it would be of high quality design. AB stated that the community had not been engaged in the preparation of the Concept Framework to date and that there was concern about the

concept of 'villages'. The language used in the Concept Framework document seemed to describe a network of urban neighbourhoods separated by green space. AB referred to the way that Harlow was of a similar design and that the green spaces the separated neighbourhoods within the town were not utilised in a successful way and were often the focus of anti-social behaviour.

2.6 BT stated that the Concept Framework seemed to present the Gilston Area as a large urban development to the north of Harlow rather than villages. When considered alongside other proposed developments around Harlow there would be a considerable strain on infrastructure.

3. Baseline Evidence Summary

3.1 AB and DN gave a short presentation on the baseline information that had informed the Concept Framework including topography and landscape character. AB noted that the area had a strong and varied topography which was characterised by the Stort Valley and its tributaries. DN stated that the topography of the area provided four distinct landscape types:

- A Woodland Glade on the northern part of the site.
- The Plateau towards the centre of the site, including Hunsdon Airfield.
- The Eastwick Slopes on the southern part of the site.
- The Stort Valley.

3.2 BT noted that the Airfield used to be a wooded landscape prior to the War before being artificially cleared. AB stated that restoring the Airfield to its previous use should be considered. PM indicated that feedback received during previous community engagement work suggested that there were different opinions as to whether the Airfield should be maintained or not. DN stated that there was an interest in the potential to extend existing woodland and re-coppicing in order to complement the wetland areas of the Stort Valley.

3.3 The historic landscape was a key consideration, particularly the need to preserve and manage ancient woodlands and historic hedgerows. DN also referred to the ecology of the site and the need to provide suitable buffers to those areas of ecological value. The Concept Framework also identified the need to preserve the setting of archaeological and heritage assets within the context of the overall development. In particular, the setting of Gilston Park had been considered as it was a key landscape feature. AB stated that the existing settlements had also been considered, including the need to have suitable buffers between Eastwick and Gilston villages and new development, complementing the function of Harlow and encouraging the regeneration of the town, and ensuring landscape gaps between the development and the villages of High Wych

and Hunsdon. Other constraints were identified including areas at risk from river and surface water flooding.

- 3.4 MP stated that Harlow has an artificial relationship with its green spaces in that development turns its back to them. The approach to the Gilston Area would be to ensure that development integrates with green spaces in a much more effective way. AB indicated that this issue would need to be developed further.
- 3.5 PS stated that, in his view, the description of the development was promising but that this wasn't reflected in the plans that had been displayed on the walls of the venue. For instance, the plans didn't clearly show the topography of the site.
- 3.6 AB spoke briefly about connectivity, including the proposal to provide four access points into the development.

4. Breakout Groups Session 1 – Review of Baseline Constraints

- 4.1 The attendees split into four breakout groups covering different topic areas. The comments provided were as follows:

Ecology and Natural Habitats

- Awareness of local areas that flood – some small pockets of localised flooding across the site
- A414 flooding needs full review
- Full understanding needed of ditching/natural drainage
- Is the airfield listed?
- Ensure up to date surveys undertaken to identify protected species
- Grading of agricultural land to be confirmed
- Relationship with 'green areas'
 - a. Direction and facing
 - b. Integration
 - c. Avoid hard lines facing away
- Eastwick – early wins
 - a. Improve roadway
 - b. Memorial

c. Village centre

d. Kitchen garden area – neglect

- Neglected woodland – improve now
- Planting early – invest now – benefits to community
- Cockrobin Lane – improve now
- Quarry – What’s happening?
- Stort Valley – important for many reasons, including buffer between villages and Harlow
- Use of ecology and buffers to properly separate development is important
- Crescent design not reflective of the area/countryside
- Foot path/network to be clearly identified
- Existing rights of way + historic rights of way to be identified and enhanced
- Digital broadband requested to the villages
- Bus connection/cycle track to be considered

Historic Plan

- Model Farming movement to be recognised
- Gilston Park detail to be carefully considered
- Eastwick War memorial needs identification
- Gilston War memorial
- Enhance spaces around war memorials
- Hunsdon House/Brick House – concerns about these
- Gilston + Eastwick
 - a. St Mary Church – stained glass
 - b. Concerned about maintenance
- Hunsdon House
 - a. Ancient church grade 1

b. Listed church (near)

- Concern about the 10,000 homes, not a village
- Concern about the illustrations – don't capture the topography - too flat
- Brick House listed?
- Eastwick church – listed?
- Lime trees to be worked on in Gilston Park
- Need for separation between village 7 and Hunsdon
- Concern about current planning applications in the local villages

Existing Utilities

- Impact of agriculture on flooding and run off
- Ensure flooding fully captured
- Water capacity – aquifer issues to be considered
- Sewerage capacity concern – reassurance sought
- Broadband update – early win for local community? Giga clear currently in Hunsdon?
- Mobile signal not good in some parts of the existing villages
- Flight paths to be fully considered
- Existing Pond at Drury Lane – concerns about capacity constraints

Landscape

- Positive that character of sunken lanes will be maintained
- Importance of planting for screening wider views
- Introduction of ponds to Airfield area for flood storage
- Need management plan for woodland that could start now
- Need to be clearer about how development fits into the wider landscape

- Village churches to be considered as part of the design and not just built around. Could form part of community hubs with other uses
- Consider need to extend or provide new cemetery space

5 Spatial Framework

- 5.1 AB provided an overview of how the landscape and topography of the area had informed the plan for the delivery of seven villages. She indicated that the proposal involved developing 32% of the overall site area, with the remaining 68% being used for open space, parklands and agriculture. The issue of density had been considered through the Concept Framework. There was potential for higher densities in parts of the development that were within walking distance of the train station, and along bus routes. There was an aim to ensure that every new home would be within 300 metres of a bus stop. SB said that the delivery of a sustainable transport network was important. In particular, the train operators should be consulted to ensure that services can meet demand.
- 5.2 AB set out why the development was referred to as a network of seven villages. She stated that, in general terms, landscape played an important role in the character of villages and that they often grew organically around a village green or market square. These principles were reflected within the Gilston Area proposals. In addition, each of the seven villages would contain different services and facilities to support vibrant communities. AB briefly identified how the boundaries for each of the seven villages had developed, largely based on landscape constraints.

6 Breakout Groups Session 2

- 6.1 Concept plans for each of the seven villages had been produced. The attendees studied these plans and provided feedback.
- a) **Overall Masterplan**
- Is the geometry proposed suitable for the location?
- b) **Village 1**
- What makes one village different from the others? Narrative needs to be clearer
 - Need to better understand contours/topography
 - Noticeable change in grain + pattern compared to existing villages
 - Pedestrian and cycle connection to Gilston (from Harlow) to be more clearly identified

c) **Village 2**

- Concern about separate distances
- Local road pressures – how will new development effect flows and impact on character of the existing villages?
- Concern about the visual impression of the internal village typology shown

d) **Village 3**

- Clarity requested on vehicular and pedestrian routes and where they connect to
- Public footpath through Gilston Park House?

e) **Village 4**

- Front Gardens/Parking – will parking occur on landscaped front gardens? How prevented from happening?
- Concern about Church parking/events

f) **Village 7**

- Provide right walking/cycling routes to each village
- Buses from existing villages lacking – how can it be improved?
- Desire to ensure clear bus network with routes to key local destinations
- Car parking around the station
- Need small buses to fit through the villages
- Concern about traffic into the village especially for secondary school
- Harlow doesn't offer the best retail offer – where will people shop
- Too built up near the road
- Concern about traffic through church lane, etc to Bishops Stortford
- Connectivity to each village to be confirmed
- Social housing should not be 'right to buy'
- Ground rent needs to be clear from the beginning
- Bishop's Stortford's nicer environment – more traffic will head there
- Lack of restaurants in Harlow

- Cafes in the villages?

7 Next Steps

7.1 PM stated that consideration would need to be given to the principles that should be extracted from the Concept Framework and reflected in more detailed work. The next steps would be as follows:

- Community engagement on Concept Framework
- Submission of outline planning application
- Submission of detailed planning applications for Stort Crossings
- Creation of village masterplans
- Submission of reserved matters planning applications for individual plots.

7.2 PM then presented a timeline for the above tasks. MP stated that the best way of demonstrating to the Inspector for the District Plan Examination that the site is deliverable would be to submit an outline planning application. MP indicated that legal agreements (Section 106 agreements) would not have to be in place by the time of the Examination but that the landowners wanted to achieve this in order to demonstrate their commitment to delivering infrastructure in a timely manner. In response to a question from MN, PM confirmed that they would expect a decision on the planning application for Phase 1 of the development by August 2018.

7.3 LW made some closing remarks. The next workshop would be held on 24th June and would cover infrastructure issues. In addition, a coach trip to visit new developments within South Cambridgeshire had been arranged and members of the Neighbourhood Plan Group were encouraged to attend.

CLOSE.