

Gilston Area Workshop – 24th June 2017, Eastwick and Gilston Village Hall.

Attendees:

East Herts Council
Cllr Linda Haysey (LH) – Leader
Cllr Eric Buckmaster (EB) – District Councillor for Sawbridgeworth Ward/Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing
Cllr Bob Brunton (BB) – District Councillor for Hunsdon Ward
Liz Watts (LW) – Chief Executive
Kevin Steptoe (KS) – Head of Planning and Building Control
Ben Wood (BW) – Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy
Claire Sime (CS) – Planning Policy Manager
Paul Stevens (PS) – Landscape Officer
Jenny Pierce (JP) – Principal Planning Officer
Chris Butcher (CB) – Principal Planning Officer
Hertfordshire County Council
Jan Hayes Griffin (JHG) – Assistant Director Planning and Economy
John Rumble (JR) – Head of Environmental Resource Planning
Tony Bradford (TB) – Head of Countryside Management Service
Bethan Clemence (BC) – Health Improvement Lead, Planning and Place
Rachael Donovan (RD) – Natural, Historic & Built Environment Advisory Team Leader
Neighbourhood Plan Group/Parish Councils/Residents
Cllr Jill Buck (JB) – Vice Chairman, Widford PC
Cllr Bernadette Dunthorne (BD), Hunsdon PC
Cllr Bob Toll (BT), Chairman, Hunsdon PC
Cllr Lucille Beazley (LB) – Eastwick and Gilston PC
Christine Law (CL) – Clerk to Eastwick and Gilston Parish Council
Mike Newman (MN)
Sarah Bagnall (SB)
Janine Bryant (JBr)
Mary Smith (MS)
Lois Smith (LS)
Landowners/Site Promoters
Mary Parsons (MP) – Places for People
Bruce Fyfe (BF) - AECOM
Kirsten Lees (KL) – Grimshaw Architects
Danny Nagle (DN) – Grant Associates
Alison Hogan (AH) – Ecological Planning and Research
Other Organisations
Neale Hider (NH) – Environment Agency
Tim Hill (TH) – Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust

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 issues relating to green and blue infrastructure.
- 1.2 BT wanted to ensure that actions that are agreed within the community workshops are clearly identified. At present, there is concern amongst the Neighbourhood Plan Group and Parish Councils about how the workshops will help influence the development proposals. BT also re-iterated that the local community is wholly opposed to the principle of development in the Gilston Area, but that they are willing to engage in order to help ensure that the benefits arising from the scheme would be maximised, should it go ahead.
- 1.3 LW agreed that it is important that agreed actions are documented and followed up. MP suggested that she prepare an action list with 'traffic lights' in order to demonstrate where progress had been made.

ACTION: MP to draft Action List.

2. Green and Blue Infrastructure

- 2.1 DN provided an overview of what is meant by green and blue infrastructure. He mentioned that, in formulating the proposals for the Gilston Area, regard had been had to the Green Infrastructure Plans of East Herts and Harlow Councils. Both documents identified the importance of enhancing the environment of the Stort Valley, with potential to provide new opportunities for education and leisure activities.
- 2.2 DN noted that the local landscape is very rich with a series of ridgelines, woodland copses and river tributaries. Gilston Park lies at the heart of the site and forms an important part of its character. He also identified that there are three Scheduled Monuments that comprise two medieval moated sites and a former deer park enclosure. There are also a number of listed buildings, both within the site area and immediately adjacent. Latterly, Hunsdon Airfield was established and is well preserved.
- 2.3 AH provided a summary of ecological features. Surveys of local ecology had been undertaken some years ago and had been updated. There is a network of ancient woodland and grasslands as well as watercourse and hedgerows of varying quality and age. There are also a number of County Wildlife Sites. Surveys have been undertaken covering a number of protected species including newts, reptiles, bats and badgers.

- 2.4 DN summarised the constraints and opportunities that exist on the site. The overarching principle is to use existing agricultural land for development, while maintaining more sensitive landscapes. The topography of the site fits with this approach. A landscape vision has been prepared that involves the creation of a series of major parklands as well as more local parks and other green spaces. This has the potential of creating a chain of green spaces that run from the Stort Valley to Gilston Park, and northwards to a new Woodland Park.
- 2.5 DN confirmed that existing 'holloways' and tracks would be retained and enhanced wherever possible. Sustainable drainage will also form part of the landscape character with natural swales and ditches supplemented by more formal channels in the urban areas.
- 2.6 AH noted the importance of protecting existing assets. For instance, areas of ancient woodland and County Wildlife Sites will have a minimum of 20 metre managed buffers from new development. A balance needs to be reached between maintaining and enhancing biodiversity and providing access for people. DN suggested that there is potential to introduce planting ahead of development in areas such as Cock Robin Lane. There is also potential to link this work to local training opportunities. DN confirmed that existing public rights of way would be maintained and integrated into the street and green space structure.
- 2.7 DN stated that there would be approximately 40 hectares of sports provision within the development, including playing fields in each village and larger, more formal facilities at Gilston Park and within Village 7. Play areas of varying sizes will also be provided across the site.

3. Breakout Groups Session 1

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

Public Rights of Way

- Need to engage with HCC Public Rights of Way team
- A strategic view on the rights of way network is required. The current role is recreational only and thought should be given to how to open that up to encourage sustainable travel such as cycling.
- It is important to ensure that existing and new residents are aware that opportunities exist for walking and cycling in order to try to influence their behaviour and encourage them to use the network.

Landscape and Open Space

- Managing the landscape effectively is key
- Governance structures for managing these areas should be established from day one.
- There are particular opportunities within the Stort Valley, in particular to introduce new lammas, pasture and wetlands.
- Lighting is very important as well as noise. Particular consideration should be given to how floodlighting is used on sports pitches.

Flooding

- Concern over future management of SuDs and drainage.
- There are inherent flooding problems already in various locations, particularly Hunsdon. Locals are keen to see these issues addressed.
- The Environment Agency would be interested in proposals to enhance Fiddlers Brook and also the weir wall of Gilston Lake as it currently affects the flow of water downstream.

Ecology

- Concern about long term management of space for wildlife in the longer term
- Woodland and wildlife management require specialist skills and knowledge. A mechanism for raising funds to achieve this would be required.
- Woodland and wildlife areas are part of a wider ecology which links to the Stort Valley. Development should be designed around areas that contain specific species that are thriving such as bats.

4 Parklands

4.1 DN provided an overview of the proposals for four key parkland areas.

Stort Valley

4.2 There will be elements of designed access and footpaths as well as cycle routes. However, it is vital that there are areas where there is no public access to ensure protection for habitats of migratory species. There is potential to link with other work being undertaken by the Wildlife Trust.

4.3 Given the land ownership of Places for People in this area, there is potential to manage land more effectively – for instance by moving cattle from the Stort Valley to other areas within the Gilston Area such as the plateau area.

Gilston Park

- 4.4 London parks have been used as a reference point for this parkland area in terms of it being a country park with areas of open access. The existing Lime Avenue would be enhanced and link to this park. The top of the site is fairly level and is therefore appropriate for sports pitches. Consideration is being given as to how to integrate St. Mary's Church into the development.

Woodland Park

- 4.5 This would involve the creation of areas of woodland pasture. There is also potential to encourage outdoor pursuits such as horse riding and mountain biking as well as adventure play facilities.

Airfield Park

- 4.6 There is potential for community supported agriculture while retaining runway strips. Consideration will be given to re-creating copses although Historic England wish to make sure that the site remains open in nature. Access will be improved and heritage trails could be introduced that explain the history of the airfield, while linking with other heritage assets.

5 Breakout Groups Session 2

- 5.1 Concept plans for different areas of the Gilston Area site had been produced. The attendees studied these plans and provided feedback.

Aerial diagram showing Stort Crossings:

- Provide a drawing that shows Terlings Park (missing from aerial)
- Terlings Park has 1 road in/1 road out system which creates congestion. Has this been factored into modelling?
- Concerns about congestion created by the proposed 3 roundabouts for the Eastern Crossing (traffic route from N-E connecting to A414.)
- Concerns about noise from Eastern Crossing
- Can the proposals provide a better strategy for road speeds and improved safety. Currently 60mph drops to 30mph at very tight corner at Plume of Feathers. The speed indicators don't work and are obsolete
- The turning left out of Eastwick is very dangerous with fast moving traffic on inside lane with slow traffic on outside lane as traffic indicates right to Harlow. Official speed limit is at Hunsdon is 50 then 70 on A414.
- Potential Air Quality issues on A414 with new traffic

- Pedestrianised crossings (5th Avenue) will create congestion. Could a pedestrianised footbridge or subway be considered as alternatives?
- If alternatives not viable, what mitigation for air pollution (NOX, PH10, etc) can/should be designed-in from outset as part of road infrastructure works?
- Lighting requires careful consultation. Currently no night-time lighting/ impact on local area from possible light pollution
- Consider local roads beyond site in terms of access and volumes of new traffic.

Gilston Park

- More wildflower meadow needed to soften edges
- Are the blocks of flats too regimented?
- Potential for habitat/user conflicts

Gilston Park North

- Buffer between double crescent of houses and existing residences too narrow
- Concern the proposed crescent will inhibit natural, current movement of wildlife
- If proposed crescent happens the design development is critical
- How will the open spaces be managed? Different users and demands – formal pitch layout v's dog walker and informal kickabout
- More space needed around church – setting is important (note image discussed is previous layout, others are being considered)
- Additional churchyard space needed for expansion
- Facilities with running water + toilets for joint use of sports players, ramblers, cyclists, church users and village members
- Presentation of types of buildings on plan – look incongruous to local architecture and historic nature of villages.

Hunsdon Airfield Community Agriculture Park

- Have all existing RAF features been captured? – or are they not considered of archaeological importance? (some appear missing to south of Hunsdon)
- Consideration required for how to maintain 17th century barns / conflict with recycling centre related to noise and dust.

- Future (and current) decision making policy: Will local communities still have a say? How will the airfield be managed?
- Legal governance on how airfield site is to be managed needs clarification - Timing, funding – linked to property ownership as opposed to Lump Sum.

6 Consultation programme

- 6.1 MP confirmed that there would be further workshops covering infrastructure and housing mix. Dates are being looked at for these. Two bus tours have also been arranged: Cambourne and Trumpington Meadows in Cambridgeshire on 14th July and Chilmington in Kent on 23rd September.
- 6.2 A consultation will also take place on the Concept Framework document. East Herts will hold a formal consultation period where comments are invited on the document. To support that process, the landowners will hold a series of workshops, exhibitions and seminars.
- 6.3 MP also identified that work had commenced on an outline planning application to support the District Plan Examination process. This work will take some of the principles identified within the Concept Framework and establish how they can be reflected in practice as part of the development. A series of engagement events will be held in July and August to support this process, including an exhibition at the Manor of Groves, drop in events and other sessions across East Herts. More detailed discussions will also be required with the relevant organisations on particular issues such as location and delivery of schools.
- 6.4 BD commented that it is unlikely that there would be much response from the community in July and August due to holidays. MP stated that the formal period for commenting on the Concept Framework would take place in July/August, but that other engagements events will continue beyond that. Consultation on village masterplans will commence in November. It is important to ensure that consultation isn't perceived as a tick box exercise.
- 6.5 BD stated that some, mainly older, residents don't use electronic communications. It was agreed that other forms of communication would be utilised such as parish noticeboards and post.

ACTION: MP to draft consultation programme for Concept Framework and engagement on planning application. East Herts to identify period and process for formal comments for Concept Framework. Community to provide suggestions about specific groups to consult with and suitable locations/times etc.

- 6.6 LW indicated that a new Gilston webpage had been set up on the East Herts website which aims to provide updates as and when required (post meeting note – the webpage is: <https://www.eastherts.gov.uk/gilston>). JBr noted some concerns with some of the content and LW asked if she could contact EH Comms team with detail.
- 6.7 NH commented that consideration should be given to how Harlow Council is involved as there are cross boundary issues. MP agreed and stated that there are clear links including the Stort Valley and transport issues. LW stated that these issues will be considered through the ongoing Garden Town work which represents a good forum for joint working. Two pieces of work have recently been commissioned in relation to the Garden Town. This involves project management duties as well as undertaking some visioning and design work. Further pieces of work will shortly commence on delivering sustainable transport corridors and healthy towns initiatives.
- 6.8 TH stated that the Wildlife Trust is keen to encourage wildlife education in schools. In particular there is potential to include habitats within school grounds that can be used for education purposes. He said that it is also important to consider providing habitats for sensitive wildlife such as Skylarks.
- 6.9 BT asked for the latest timetable for the District Plan Examination. CS stated that the Hearing sessions are expected in October although the timetable will not be confirmed until August. Further work on housing need is currently being undertaken in order to inform the Examination process.
- 6.10 JB stated that consideration needs to be given to current infrastructure deficits in existing villages. MP acknowledged that it is important to consider how the development relates to existing villages.
- 6.11 LH identified the importance of involving young people as much as possible. MN said that the Hunsdon School Council could get involved in the consultation process in order to give their views.
- 6.12 LW thanked all who had attended the workshop and advised that information about dates for future workshops and events would be made available in due course.

CLOSE.

Post meeting note: A question was raised during the workshop regarding properties in Terlings Park and other locations having Essex postcodes. Following the meeting the Land Charges Manager at East Herts Council has responded as follows: 'Although the Terlings Park estate is in the village of Gilston (which is Hertfordshire), the nearest sorting office for Gilston is Harlow (which is in Essex), so all their post comes via Harlow Sorting Office. This is a very common scenario, as the postcodes are set up by the Royal Mail for their own business

purposes, and often don't bear any resemblance to the physical location of properties. For example, all of the villages around Bishop's Stortford are Hertfordshire postal, although they are physically located within Essex – it's the same problem but the opposite way around'.